

QUILTING ART HISTORY IN AMERICA

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***Annotation:** In this article, the authors provide extensive information on the history and developmental stages of the art of American quilting. At the same time, important ideas about the importance of quilting art were noted.*

***Key words:** folk art, quilting, quilting history, quilting styles, handicrafts.*

It is worth recalling the following opinion of the Eastern scholar Abu Nasr al-Farabi, who lived and worked in the tenth century, on the pursuit of a profession: "What is invented or created is really good and useful if it is in accordance with one's own will and the will of another, or if it is suspected that it is in accordance with the will of others.[7,8]" Folk handicrafts are the spiritual, material and cultural heritage of each nation, including the people in America, which can serve as a field of origin, formation, historical development, expression of national values. Quilting is a form of folk art. The term "quilt" comes from the Latin *culcita*, meaning a stuffed sack. The word has come to have 2 meanings. It is used as noun, meaning the 3-layer stitched bedcovering. It is also used as a verb, meaning the act of stitching through the 3 layers to hold them together. A quilt is a cloth sandwich, with a top, which is usually the decorated part, a back, and a filler in the middle. Under the general term of *patchwork* are of 3 different types of quilts: (1) the plain or whole cloth quilt, (2) appliqué quilts, and (3) pieced or patchwork quilts.[9]

The art of quilting is very popular among peoples of the nations in the world. From the remnants of fabric, artists create new compositions with a variety of mosaic patterns using the necessary patterns. In ancient times, one side of a reed, the back, was made of a piece of cloth, and the front was made of a piece of cloth.

Quilting can be the make ornaments by connecting them into small pieces; an ornament made in this way is also called a quilting piece. Items and ornaments are made from small pieces of fabric of different colors and shapes. If we look at the history of the art of quilting, the roots of these quilting methods can be traced back to the East. In Egypt, for example, in the suburban villages of Cairo, artifacts made 3,000 years ago have been found. In 1924 archaeologists discovered a quilted floor covering in Mongolia, estimated to date between 100 BC and 200 AD. Quilting has been practiced in many parts of the world. Later, in middle-income families, houses were decorated and household items were made, and it gradually spread to all nations around the world and became an applied art. In today's time when the most advanced technologies provide us with the best decorative products, the art of quilt still stands out in a modern country like America. Today's development of quilting in America is certainly important to indicate the relation to the American quilt traditions that have formed over hundred years. It is no exaggeration to say that the history of American quilting tells us not only about the history of this type of art but also about the inner feelings of women in those times through their hobbies.

According to Robert Bishop's and Jacqueline M. Atkins's *Folk Art in American Life* [6,48], quilting "became known in Europe during the Crusades, when it was learned that the Turks wore several thicknesses of fabric quilted together under their armor. In northern Europe, where the climate is often harsh...this technique offered warmth as well as protection, and it was rapidly extended to bedcovers and various forms of clothing." Although small fragments of patchwork have been found in tomb excavations in Asia and the Middle East, the earliest existing quilts may be two large 14th-century whole cloth (i.e., entire, not pieced) Sicilian pieces whose white work surfaces are heavily embellished with trapunto, also known as corded or stuffed quilting. The history of quilts began long before European settlers arrived in the New World. With the arrival of the English and Dutch settlers in North America, quilting took on a new life and flourished. A particularly popular style of quilt in the early days of quilting (through the early 1800s), was

the Medallion quilt, which was made in a style that had actually been brought to America from Europe by the colonists. This type of quilt - a central motif surrounded by multiple borders -- offered endless design possibilities for quilters, who could use patchwork, appliqué, embroidery, either alone or in combination. A variation of the utility quilt was the plain "**tufted**" *quilt* that is tied through in enough places to keep the filling from shifting and bunching. While a tufted quilt has no stitching holding the layers together, it does have the typical three layers seen in traditional quilts. Another variation of the quilt is the "**summer**" *quilt*, which does not have the middle filling, so is useful as a bedcover during the warmer months. The summer quilt does have the traditional stitching holding the two layers together. Members of rural communities frequently joined together to help their neighbors with big projects, such as barn building or finishing quilts. The quilting bee was a social event that allowed the finishing of several quilts in a single day instead of weeks or months. Janneken Smucker in her article "Paradoxical objects: quilts in American culture" indicated that the quilting bee – remembered with nostalgia in the 1840s, imagined in art throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century's, and reenacted by those longing for simpler times – suggests the importance of community to quilt making. The bee, frolic, or simply "quilting," as such gatherings were known, was a socially productive event in which female friends and relatives joined to sit around a quilting frame and hand stitch the layers of a quilt together – a laborious process requiring countless hours when undertaken alone [3, 5-6]. Naturally, early quilters did not limit themselves to designing only quilts of a single type or method. They used their imagination and ingenuity to combine patchwork, appliqué, and embroidery in endless combinations. One early variation was the Medallion quilt, a relatively simple design with dramatic impact, that was particularly popular through the early 1800s.

During the 1800s in many parts of the country there was a custom that a young girl make a baker's dozen of quilt tops before she became engaged. This collection consisted of 12 utility quilts, undoubtedly pieced, and 1 masterpiece quilt, which was either a pieced or applique quilt, for her bridal bed. After her

engagement, she would take final steps to turn her tops into finished quilts. Another custom was for mothers to make several quilts for each of her children to have when they left home to start life as adults. A variation of this custom continues to this day as quilters continue to make heirloom quilts for their children or grandchildren. In the mid 1800s the introduction of the sewing machine somewhat altered the dependence on hand-sewing. Long before electricity became common, quilters could power a sewing machine with a foot treadle or hand crank. The invention of a separate quilting attachment for the sewing machine by Henry Davis of Chicago did not seem to be widely used; hand quilting remained the favored method for nearly a century.

When the United States entered World War 1 in 1917, quilt making became more important than ever. The U.S. government urged citizens to “Make Quilts – Save the Blankets for our Boys over There.” Quilts were made for fundraising and awareness building. The government took all the wool produced for commercial use in 1918 and instituted “heatless Mondays.” Following the war interest in quilting as an art was renewed. People simply did not have the money to buy blankets during the Great Depression, so women had to rely on their own expertise and resources to keep their families warm. During those tough years, frugal quilters were known to save bits and pieces of material from clothing and other blankets, use material from feed sacks, and "make do." Quilting was used to raise funds for the Red Cross during World War II. The "signature quilt" was especially well-liked. Company owners, shop owners, and community members will pay a small charge to have their names embroidered on quilt blocks in a signature quilt. The blocks were sewn together and quilted, and the finished quilt was raffled off with all proceeds going to the Red Cross. These quilts are now fascinating community records. In the late twentieth century friends gathered to quilt memorials to loved ones as part of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, a grassroots project established in 1987, which now has 48,000 individual panels honoring those who have died of HIV and AIDS[5]. Indeed, various groups have used quilts to symbolically unite community members. In the nineteenth century, churches made

quilts to send with ministers when they left for another parish. Linda Otto Lipsett also highlighted the positive attitude of people towards quilting that loved ones signed names to Friendship Quilts to give to those moving west or getting married. Amish mothers made quilts as “gifts from home,” presented to children when they left home to start their own families. Native American tribal members have presented Star quilts as gifts of honor. In these instances, the utility of quilts has rested in their symbolic function [4.129-135].

Through the 1950s and 1960s, there was less general interest in quilting than at any other time in American history. To many, the quilt was associated with lean times and “making do” – quilt making was viewed as dated and old-fashioned. It was primarily older quilters, those who had always quilted, who kept the art of quilt making alive during this time. Then in the 1970s and 1980s, the granddaughters of these older women began to revive interest in quilt making. The back-to-the-land movement, prompted by the anti-materialism of the late 1960s, generated a desire among many young people to learn hand skills that had been neglected in the postwar rush toward an automated society. A milestone in American history, the Bicentennial celebration of 1976, was also a turning point in the history of quilts in America. The quilt became popular as a means of expressing national pride and achievement, and a powerful reminder of our past. Quilt making in the early 2000s is still done as it was in the previous century, but now more for leisure than need. Some quilters perform the art in its traditional form for recreational purposes or because it reflects an emotionally meaningful tradition. Others also discovered an imaginative medium in quilt making that they can exploit to their own ends, resulting in new styles and techniques. The history of America can be seen in the history of quilts: in the rich heritage left us by those thrifty, self-sufficient women who helped settle this land, in the families whose history is sewn into quilts one patch at a time, and in the legacy of the quilting arts passed on to children and grandchildren so they may carry them forward to the future. According to a survey from 2014, there are 16.4 million quilters in the United States, with a \$3.76 billion quilt industry[2].

Eleanor Levie admitted in her article “*American Quilting*” that as globalization facilitated foreign trade and American-style quilting travelled back across the Atlantic, as well as to Asia, Latin America, and other places, the American quilt became less distinctly American [1.107]. As a conclusion we can say that quilts “visualize specific segments of history in tangible, textured ways,” revealing important historical knowledge about their makers. Quilt historian Jude Anne Breneman says that the quilt history is a window into the lives of the ordinary women of our past [9].

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