

Panels & Posters

Panel Presentations

Saturday Afternoon

Antique Quilts and High-Fashion: The Ralph Lauren Fall/Winter 1982 Collection

Colleen Pokorny

How does repurposing a quilt for high-fashion change its cultural meaning? This research examines this question through an analysis of the Ralph Lauren Fall/Winter 1982 collection. The collection featured garments such as sweaters, vests, and skirts made with repurposed quilts from the late 1800s. A sweater from this collection with antique quilt panels is examined through a material culture methodology based on Prown and Mida and Kim. Analysis of the quilt panel's construction, fabric, and design confirm the late 1800s dating. McCormick's research on the cutter quilt fad provides context on the collection. Lastly, an interview with the sweater's donor and the researcher's expertise in quilting add depth and additional perspectives to the analysis.

This research highlights the dualities of garments using repurposed quilts and illuminates how the viewer's cultural affinity impacts their interpretation. Lauren and his customers, such as the donor, felt the use of antique quilts added authenticity, allowing customers to wear American heritage literally. In some ways, Lauren mirrors quilters of the 1800s, using discarded fabrics and repurposing them into something new. However, some quilters saw this collection as a devaluation of their cultural heritage, severing the link between quilter and quilt. Lauren's repurposing of antique quilts created concern in the quilt scholar community that unique patterns and construction techniques would be lost. The questions brought forth by this research are critical to today's quilt scholars as quilts continue to appear on runways and be repurposed into other forms of dress.

Silent No Longer: The Story of a Tennessee Woman and Her Whitework Quilt

Suzanne McDowell

The year 2020 was a period of major political events in the United States of America. One event forecasted to be celebrated nationally was the one hundred year anniversary of women's suffrage. The nineteenth amendment's ratification in 1920, after years of struggle and opposition, guaranteed all American women the right to vote.

Thinking about this momentous event drove my research of a closer examination of a Tennessee quilt. Residing in the collection of the McMinn County Living Heritage Museum in Athens, TN lives a striking whitework quilt. (Museum Accession: 1985.016.001) In an era when women had no 'voting' voice, the quilt abounds with political and personal symbolism of the pre-Civil War era. Signed 'Susan M Smith' and dated '1860,' my previous research had primarily focused on identifying the quilt maker herself. However, finding Ms. Smith and uncovering her personal story led to a fuller interpretation of the political and personal symbolism stitched on the quilt.

With a renewed focus on the tradition of Southern whitework quilts, led by Laurel Horton and others, my presentation aims to add to the topic of Southern whitework and to the importance of persistence in finding and revealing a hitherto silent woman ... whose voice and vote now speaks.

Who Made the Scenes of American Life Quilt?

Claire McKarns

Oral history identified the maker of this famous folk-art quilt as a "Mrs. Cecil White". The quilt was purchased in Hartford, Connecticut before 1978 and was likely made in that community. It passed through many hands before ending up in the Museum of Fine Arts Boston in 2018. Their book published in 2020 names Mary Sweenor White as the probable maker. Following the 2020 AQSG Study Centers, participants identified a new Mrs. White as the possible maker and have now brought into question Mary Sweenor White as the probable maker. Controversy surrounds this quilt of community life, as to whether it was made by a Caucasian person or a Black person. These issues can be debated by studying the blocks in the quilt and comparing the lives of these two possible makers. Genealogical information is available on both.

1963 LA County Nursing Class Memorialized Through a Graduation Quilt

Sandra Thlick and Lisa Thlick-Khatchadourian

Of the many quilts that I have bought, sold and collected over the last 40 years, this quilt means the most. It isn't colorful, not in great condition, but if the house was on fire this is the quilt I would save. A white, LA County nursing cap sits in the center of each block with a black-embroidered name for each graduate of the 1963 Class of LA County Hospital School of Nursing. Along with 73 others, this was my graduating class. This quilt was designed by my friend and fellow graduate, Karen Hollcraft. Preliminary research has found no other quilt like this in two pertinent collections, AQSG and the Museum of Nursing History in Philadelphia. In the foreword from, *What's in a Name? Inscribed Quilts*, Patricia Cox Crews hopes that [her] "approach to discovery will inspire others to delve into the names inscribed on their heirloom quilts." With further research and through discussions with others at the poster session, I hope to do the same for the Nursing Cap Quilt of 1963. At the poster session I will present the history of the quilt, similarities and differences to inscribed, friendship and commemorative quilts and some of the stories of the graduates collected from interviews and biographies. I hope to establish that the Nursing Cap quilt of 1963 is truly one-of-a-kind and worthy of preservation.

Plushwork

Kim Baird

The use of yarn flowers (and other shapes) decorating wool quilts is not familiar to many quilters. It has aroused more interest in recent years, and is sometimes referred to as Amish or Mennonite. Plushwork, as shown in the illustration, is stitched with yarn to a background fabric. A template maintains the shape. The laid stitch is used, typically in three layers of varying color. After stitching, all layers are cut and the template removed. Where did this singular technique originate? My search for printed sources to answer this question has yielded similar techniques, but not the ultimate source. Further research is required. This poster presentation will include styles and variations found in my research. The technique itself is defined and illustrated. It also explains the correct nomenclature and shares examples from Europe and North America. A comparison with similar embroidery techniques suggests a theory for their possible origin. Contacts made at the Poster Session could lead to clues for further research.

The "Robinson Crusoe Quilt"

Anne Hardister

A flowering tree medallion quilt in the collection of the Valentine Museum in Richmond, VA presents some interesting questions. The quilt, sometimes called the "Robinson Crusoe Quilt" because of a Robinson Crusoe copperplate-printed figure in the center medallion, is an excellent example of combined chintz applique and calico piecing. It was pictured in two publications in the 1990s, and is thought to have originated in the Hill family of Virginia, in the first quarter of the 19th c. Newly available genealogical data may shed new light on the date. A well-known diary of 1797 by a Hill family member also provides some clues about the Hill family, though probably not the quiltmaker. With two applique borders and other applied chintz figures, numerous flowers and birds appear as evidence of at least two chintz fabrics available to the relatively wealthy quilter in rural Virginia, pre-1840.

In this session I'll share my observations and detailed photographs and invite Seminar participants to share their insights. The Robinson Crusoe quilt presents several directions for discussion and further research.

Green To "Dye" For!

Jodi Bratch

Red, white, and green quilts were all the rage in the mid-nineteenth century. But what about that green fabric color? Is it THE "poison green" or "arsenic green" referenced in our quilt history books? Last year, I had the opportunity to take part in a casual experiment to find out if the deadly combination of arsenic (As) and copper (Cu) chemical elements could be detected in popular green fabrics used in quilts during the mid 1800s. The search was narrowed down to arsenic and copper because arsenic is known to be poisonous and copper is almost never found in fabrics without arsenic present. A museum in Indiana allowed twenty-six quilts in their collection to be tested for arsenic and copper levels using a portable x-ray fluorescence (PXRF) machine.

The aim of my poster is to present the findings of what green fabrics were found to have traces of arsenic and copper. The poster presentation will include photos of contaminated green fabrics alerting those interested in determining if a printed green antique fabric found in quilts is potentially harmful to handle. Of the twenty-six quilts used in the experiment, twenty-two had arsenic and copper elements present.

The Threads of Embroidery: Finding Their Place In Time

Meta Van Nostran

Nineteenth and early twentieth century needlework threads can inform and support investigations to help determine a time period for early embroidered, undated quilts and other textiles. The threads that were used to study the threads of Redwork quilts for the 2021 Uncoverings paper, "The Threads of Redwork Outline Embroideries," will be displayed. Participants can inspect the variations in luster, color, size, and twist strength, that distinguish the transformation of threads produced in the 1800s, 1900 – 1920, and after 1920, as discussed in the research paper. Supporting content will review how the Industrial Revolution had an impact on the production and marketing of needlework threads at the turn of the century. Discussion will center on ideas and questions for further study of cotton embroidery threads. Are there observations of embroidered quilts after 1920 that should be explored? Directing further research is the question: Who were the major thread manufacturers of the early twentieth century, what did they contribute toward the heirloom quality of embroidered textiles, and how can we recognize that quality?

"cut & sew" Lithograph Prints and Their Use In Quilts In The Late 1800s/Early 1900

Kathy Metelica Cray

I have been researching animals/dolls/storybooks and their use in quilts in the late 1800s/early 1900 for the past two years. These panels are also known as "Playthings by the Yard". My research involves information pertaining to the mills that produced these panels, the process of promoting and advertising of these textiles, and the design and printing process of these panels. The mills involved in my research include Arnold Print Works in North Adams, MA, the Cocheco Mills in Dover, NH, and Art Fabric Mills in New York, NY.

At this time I have found 4 quilts that actually used these cut & sew characters in the construction of early quilts. My personal collection includes two of these quilts, several actual cut & sew panels as well as constructed dolls from 1892 through 1930. This has given me the opportunity to examine these textiles up close and personal and to understand the printing process in their production.

I have many articles and advertisements pertaining to the sale and marketing of these dolls and the reasoning of why mills chose to produce these panels during a textile boom. I am also researching the actual designers of these printed characters and their connections to the above stated textile mills.

I have been working with the staff at North Adams Historical Society where Arnold Print Works (now known as MOCA – Massachusetts of Contemporary Art) was located. I have also done some work with Gloria Nixon, author of *Rag Darlings*.

I am excited to share my photos and research that I have put together so far at a poster session at the AQSG Poster Session in August 2021 in Virginia. I hope this will lead to finding other quilts and textiles to compliment and expand my research, a viable and knowledgeable mentor and, hopefully, be accepted to present a future paper for *Uncoverings*.