



History of the Quilt

QGA General Meeting

February 25, 2021

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First Discovery of Quilting

- No one really knows!
- 5,500 years old (35th century BC)
- An ivory carving
- Featuring the king/Pharaoh of the Egyptian 1st Dynasty
- Wearing a mantle/cloak that appears to be quilted
- Found in the Temple of Osiris at Abydos in 1903
- Is currently in the collection of the British Museum





First Known/Surviving Quilt

- The legend of Tristan and Isolde was a favored narrative in the Middle Ages
- Quilted linen coverlet in 14 scenes
- Contains lively scenes of battles, ships and castles

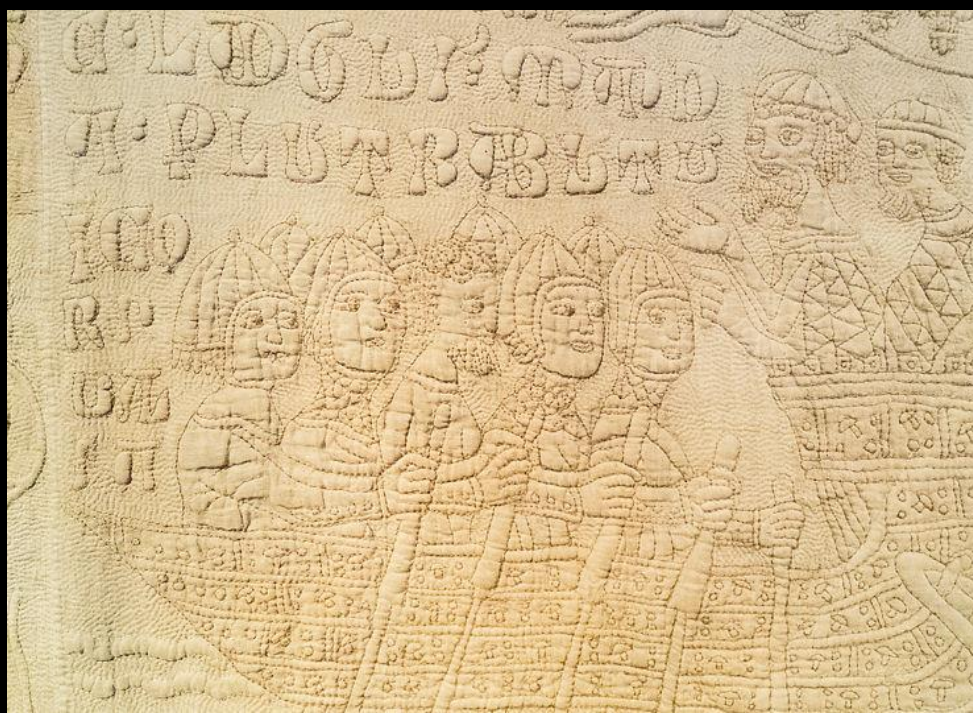
Place of Origin: Sicily

Date: ca. 1360 - 1400

Used as: Bedcovering

Material & Technique: Linen quilted and padded with cotton wadding with outlines in brown and white linen thread

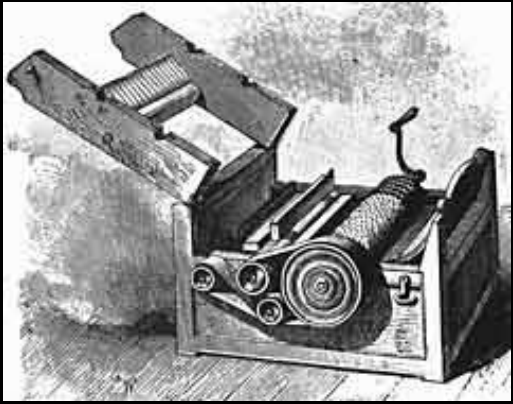
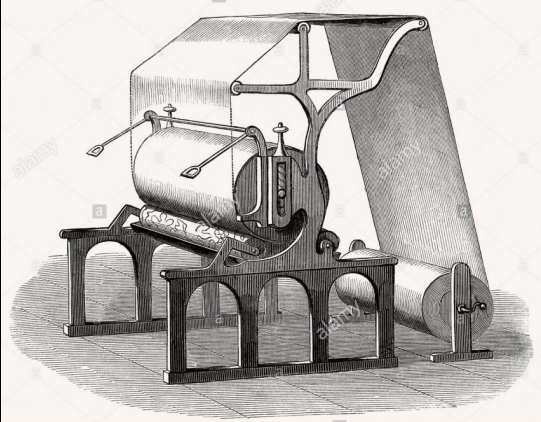
Current Location: Victoria and Albert Museum, London



US History Timeline

1861 - 1877

Civil War & Reconstruction



1600s - 1763

Colonial Settlement

1763 - 1783

American Revolution

1783 - 1815

New Nation

1815 - 1880

National Expansion & Reform

Colonial Settlement (1600s-1763)

Colonial Women – Quilters or Not?

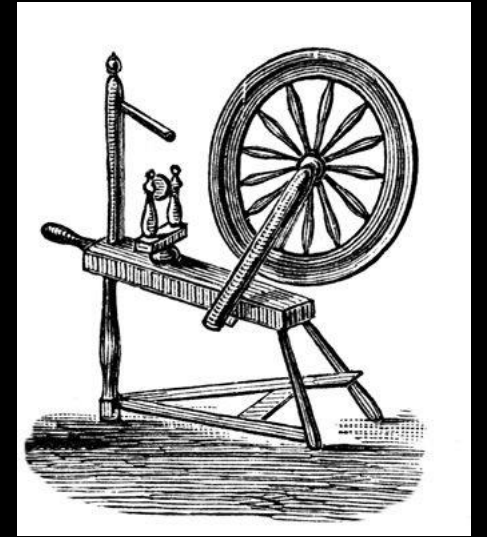
- Americans tend to idealize the life of early colonists but in truth it was a hard and unforgiving life
- Quilting for these colonial women was a rare pastime

Colonial Quilting MYTH!

- Quilts of any kind were rare in New England in the 1600s and early 1700s

Spinning Patriotic Sentiment

- It all started with Britain's attempt to protect one of their biggest industries, textiles. Colonists imported most of their textiles from Britain, and wool production in the colonies was discouraged since Britain saw America as a supplier of raw materials for England's factories. England could then sell the manufactured goods to the colonies at a handsome profit.
- But early Americans had other ideas. By the end of the 1600s, America was exporting wool, which outraged England and led to the Wool Act of 1699, prohibiting the colonies from exporting wool, wool yarn, and wool cloth.
- The passage of the Wool Act lit the fires of resentment in the colonies and many people resisted by making cloth from flax and hemp—and producing their own essential clothing instead of buying British imports.
- The homespun clothing movement really gained steam when the Daughters of Liberty turned to their spinning wheels. This group of patriotic women organized mass spinning “bees” in town squares, churches, and private homes. Once the war started, they gathered to spin and sew uniforms for the Continental Army.



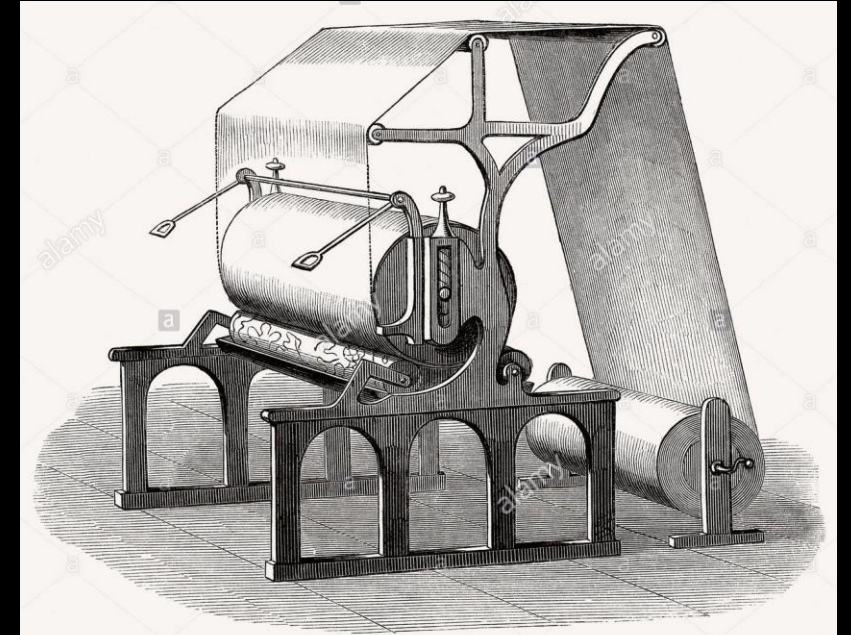
American Revolution (1763-1783)

1782: Roller Printing

- First used to make patterned fabric in England
- Can produce in 4 minutes same amount of fabric it would take 6 hours to do by hand

1783: Adoption of National Symbol

- The eagle is adopted as a national symbol and becomes incorporated in many quilts



New Nation (1783-1815)

1785: Patriotic Prints

- Made for the American market are introduced

1793: Cotton Gin Invented

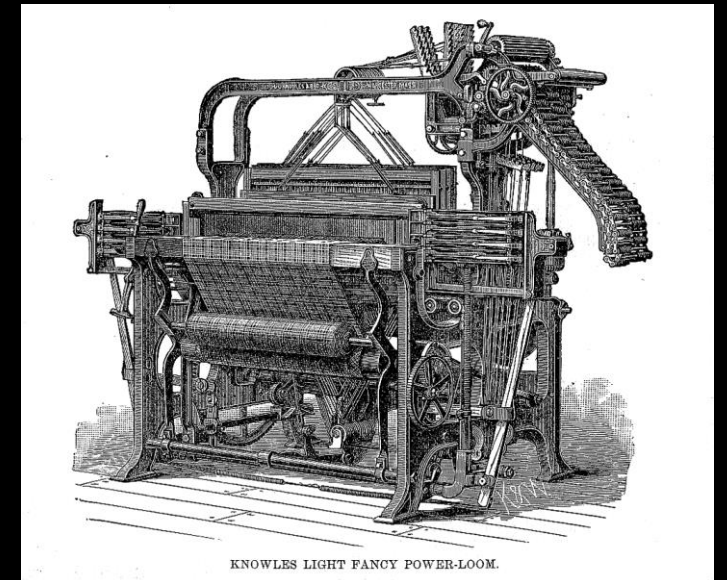
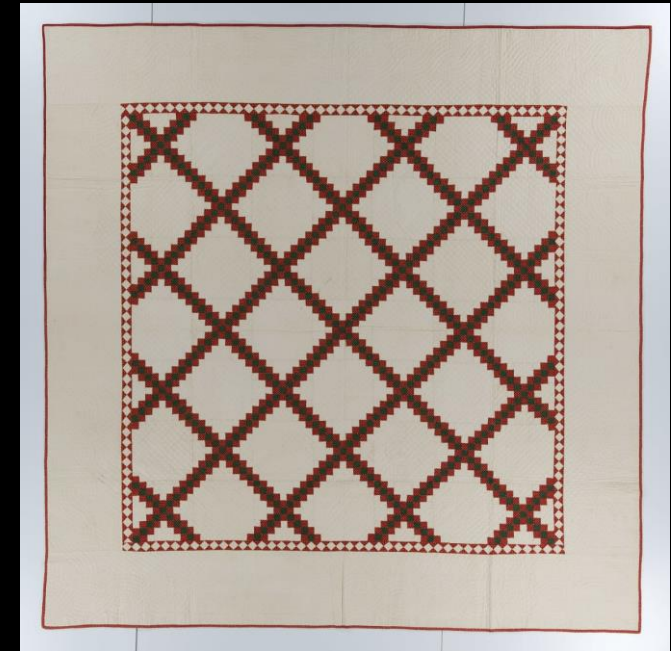
- Leads to rise of cotton industry and mills in the northeast

1806: First Block Pattern

- Irish Chain pattern
- Made be first use of block pattern as an overall design

1814: The Power Loom

- Installed in Waltham, MA
- First American factory production of cloth and thread begins



National Expansion & Reform (1815-1880)

Pioneer Quilts: A Comfort Through Hardship

MYTH: Pioneer women pieced and quilted on their long journey west. No - they did not!

Unexpected and Sometimes Tragic Ways Quilts Were Used!

- Targets for arrows
- Burial quilts
- Left along the trail

It wasn't until there was widespread production of affordable textiles around **1840** that more women found time and plentiful fabric for quilt making



Civil War & Reconstruction (1861-1877)

Union and Confederate women rallied to the war effort when the Civil War broke out in 1861. Patriotic fervor abounded with both sides certain the war would be short and decisive.

Great Fairs for the Northern Cause

- Great fairs were held in the North and quilts were among the more expensive items made and donated.

Gunboat Quilts for the South

- Southern women did what they could to help buy desperately needed gunboats. Excitement was high as communities competed to raise money for this urgent cause. Beautiful "Gunboat Quilts" were made. Some of these displayed elaborate medallion style floral arrangements cut from printed fabric. The motifs were cut out and appliquéd to solid fabric. This method is called broderie perse and requires very fine sewing skills. Through fairs, raffles and donations southern women raised enough money to pay for three of these ironclad gunboats

Few Quilts Survived

- As you can imagine these quilts got a great deal of wear and probably did not seem worth saving after the war. Many completely wore out. Many soldiers were buried in their quilts you can understand why these quilts are extremely rare today.



US History Timeline



1876 - 1900

Rise of Industrial America

1900 - 1929

Progressive Era to New Era

1929 - 1945

Great Depression &
World War II

1945 - 1968

Post War

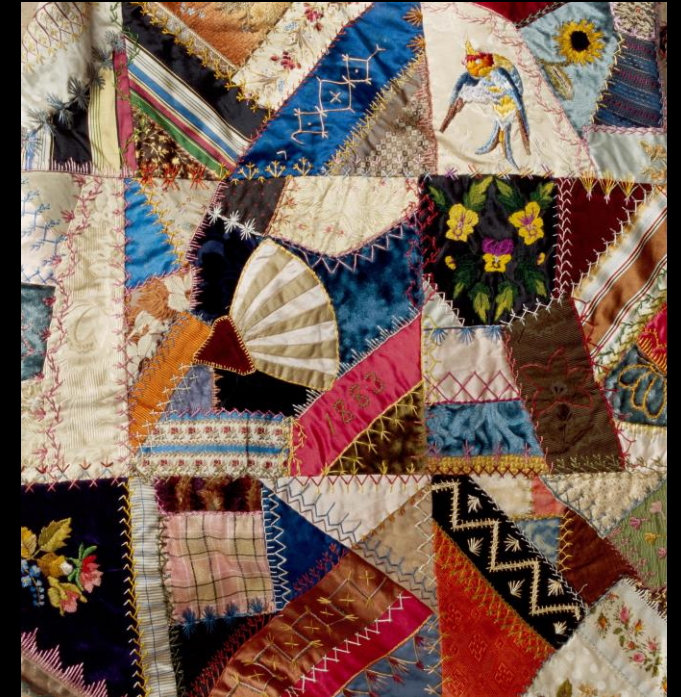
Rise of Industrial America (1876-1900)

Crazy Quilts

- When we think of quilting at the turn of the century the first thing that comes to mind is the Victorian Crazy Quilt
- Although originally Crazy Quilts were made by upper class women with the money for expensive materials before long other women got in on the fad and found ways to make their own Crazy Quilts
- Women soon adapted the Crazy Quilts to be used for such fabrics as flannels, denims and other cottons
- These quilts did not always have the decorative stitching and instead were often simply pieced

Return to Traditional Quilting

- During late 1800s and into the 1900s the Arts and Craft Movement in America inspired people to go back to the old ways of bygone days
- Although traditional quilts were made all through the Victorian era as the Arts and Crafts movement gained prominence there was a resurgence of quilters making traditional patterns all by hand



Progressive Era to New Era (1900-1929)

Friendship Album Quilting

- Quilting had long served not only as an artistic outlet for women, but also a social one
- The scale of the work lent itself to collaboration—especially during the quilting phase
- Group projects, specifically in the form of “signature” quilts—whereby participants inked or stitched their names onto the quilt top—saw a particular growth in popularity
- Often the finished bedcoverings served as gifts for departing friends, mementos of camaraderie, or raffle prizes

Novelty Quilts

- The age of advertising had arrived, and some companies sought to reach female consumers’ pocketbooks through their scrap baskets
- Tobacco companies gave away collectible flannel swatches with the purchase of plug tobacco to encourage customer loyalty
- Piecing these inserts together and stitching them into quilts became a popular and useful way to display a collection
- One North Carolina woman used “Flags of the World” and “Indian Blankets” themed inserts that the American Tobacco Company (which originated in Durham) produced circa 1915 to create a center-medallion style quilt.



Great Depression & World War II (1929-1945)

Quilt Business of All Sizes Thrived

- Depression era quilts were not always made for private use. Quilting was also a way of earning money. Both country and city dwellers did piecework for pay. Quilting businesses ranged from cottage industries to modern firms that designed and produced quilts.
- A common element was that women did the work, often at home. One woman may have pieced a quilt, another quilted it, and yet another might have sewn on the binding. Much of this work was done by hand as the consumers' interest in history and the old ways of doing things made hand pieced and quilted items more valuable.



Depression Era Brought About Changes in Quilting

- Quilts were a natural part of the need to go back to basics during the depression era. Yet it was a time of innovation as well. Family and community were less likely to be the source for quilt patterns as women turned to the current magazines for inspiration.
- Traditional patterns were modernized and fresh new possibilities were introduced including lovely natural floral applique designs and scenes made of tiny fabric squares based on cross stitch.

World War II Brought Focus from Past to the Present



Post War (1945-1968)

Quilts for War Torn Europe

- The results of World War II were devastating to Europe
- People from both sides of the conflict were left destitute
- Attempts to get needed food and bedding to these people was thwarted by restrictions on what could be shipped to various regions
- To a family living in a room with no heat and blown out windows warmth was desperately needed
- Quilters were urged to make wool quilts for these people
- The wool quilts made for war-torn Europe were often tied, as they were too heavy and thick for quilting

Out of Fashion

- During, and after the war, quilting wasn't very popular
- Once the war was over, society began to slowly become affluent again, women wanted to show off this affluence by buying "products" of all kinds to show off
- Everything from kitchen products, clothing, and home decor - which included store bought bedding with matching curtains, bed skirt and lace pillows
- This fall away from quilting lasted into the late 1950's



US History Timeline



1960s - 1970s

Bicentennial Quilts &
America's Quilt Revival



1980s

America's Quilt Revival & Bicentennial Quilts (1960s – 1970s)

The 1960s showed a gradual increase in people wanting to learn quilting

By 1970s a few quilting guilds had formed

Popular womens magazines began to include more articles about quilting projects

Interest in quilting was on the rise!

Whitney Museum Show (1971)

- THE SUMMER OF 1971, visitors to the Whitney Museum of American Art discovered something new, in a way: quilts, some a century old. Each was hung like a painting, all the better to appreciate the intricate interplay of geometry, pattern, and color in every piece.
- Until then, quilts had more or less been lumped into the general category of American folk art, along with carousel horses and tavern signs. With the opening of [*Abstract Design in American Quilts*](#), they were recognized as aesthetic achievements.
- The critical and popular response was so enthusiastic, the Whitney extended the show's run by two months

Bicentennial Quilts (1976)

America's 200th birthday inspired quilts made to honor the occasion and inspired more to become quilters



1980s

The American Quilt Study Group began serious research on quilt history



Cutting mats and rotary cutters began being available



References

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<https://americanquiltstudygroup.org/>

<https://www.timetoast.com/timelines/history-of-quilting-d7f81212-c6c7-4ce1-9e1e-06a70191ac00>