

BY PEACHAM HANDS

150 Years of Quilts with Stories

Welcome to our 2015 exhibit of Peacham quilts. The quilts presented here are part of a much larger collection held by PHA, but these quilts on display uniquely demonstrate that “every quilt has a story to tell.”

Quilted bedcovers came to New England with our earliest settlers, and had origins in England and Holland. Unlike the quilts we think of today, early quilts were not pieced fabrics, but rather large “whole cloth” quilts that were stitched together in layers. Early quilts were a rarity owned by only the wealthiest families. It was not until the mid-eighteenth century that pieced and appliqued quilts became common. By the twentieth century, pieced quilts were part of everyday life, regardless of whether you were rich or poor, young or old.

We often associate memories with the quilts handed down in our families. Quilts have warmed us, brought us comfort, reminded us of loved ones, and have shown us how beauty can be made from recycled scraps of fabric.

We invite you to join us as we explore the stories and artistry found in these special quilts.

Quilts have been numbered for a self-guided tour.



This quilt was designed and hand stitched by Arlene Rhoda Jennison when she was 8-12 years of age.

PEACHAM HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
PEACHAM, VERMONT

1. Redwork Embroidered Quilt, made by Arlene Jennison Swasey, circa 1908-1910

Cotton fabrics and muslin, hand stitched and hand quilted. Owned by PHA.



Arlene Jennison Swasey

This quilt was designed and hand stitched by Arlene Rhoda Jennison when she was 8-12 years of age.

Arlene was born May 28, 1900 in Peacham. In 1906, when Arlene was just 6 years old, her father Harvey Jennison died while pruning apple trees in their orchard. Arlene was one of 4 daughters left fatherless by this tragedy.

The whimsical designs in this quilt include both popular commercial patterns available in ladies needlecraft magazines, as well as hand drawn images from Arlene's daily life. All have been stitched in "turkey red", commonly called red work. The original pencil outlines or tracings are still visible under the red stitching, and the quilt is in mint condition. There are 49 squares bordered by red cotton.

Arlene later recalled making this quilt in her memoir. "Mother had us girls make blocks for a quilt. Some were outlined in red on unbleached cotton. Others were four small blocks sewed together over and over. When I was married Mother had finished the two I had made for me. She also gave me two others that she had made. We had to do our sewing before going out to play." — *The Gibson Family Album* by Lorna Field Quimby, 2008.

Arlene went on to graduate from Peacham Academy in June 1913, and later became a teacher. She married Tracy Swasey in 1922.

2. "Thrifty Quilt", made by Mary Stevenson Craig, circa 1950

Presented to Dick and Lorna Quimby of Peacham as a wedding gift. Machine stitched cotton and hand tied. On loan to PHA from Lorna Field Quimby.



Mary Stevenson Craig

This thrifty quilt was created by Marion Stevenson Craig and presented to Lorna and Dick Quimby in 1953. Marion was widowed with 11 children, 2 of whom died. Her youngest child was just 4 years of age when her husband passed. She

did not have a profession, and chose not to remarry, making her economic situation quite difficult. She did midwifery and assisted with practical nursing, which required her oldest daughter to manage the household while she was away. Her family still remembers how she created a close-knit family that took care of one another.

Marion's quilt was created by using a variety of vivid fabric scraps, pieced together to make a variation of the old "kaleidoscope" pattern. Unlike carefully designed and pieced quilts, a "thrifty quilt" utilized fabrics from the scrap bag, often pieces from family clothing and everyday items. The backing was attached to the quilt top by tying knots at regular intervals. Thrifty quilts were made for everyday use, and were sometimes used in layers for extra warmth on cold winter nights. The vivid colors and strong pattern shown here create a dynamic graphic design in uplifting color, very popular in the years following the depression-era. This quilt was likely created from a homemade pattern, not from a purchased design found in women's magazines or a newspaper.

3. "Grandmother's Flower Garden", made by Marion Thorn or Carrie Thorn, circa 1930

This quilt was found in the Thorne house in 1983. Walter Thorn (father of Marion and husband of Carrie), served as Peacham Town Clerk. Machine stitched calico cottons, muslin back, hand tied with button thread. On loan to PHA from Karen Lewis and Lynn Bonfield, current owners of the Thorn house.



Marion Thorn

The bright multi-colored design found in this quilt was created by piecing together hundreds of hexagon-shaped fabric swatches into a stylized floral motif. From 1925 to 1935 this quilt design was the single most popular American quilt pattern and was often featured in needlecraft magazines and newspapers. It was also known as "Flower Garden" and the "French Rose Garden." The quilt could be made from scrap fabrics, since the hexagon pieces were all small. However, the shape of the design and the amount of fabric cutting required made for a challenging quilt pattern.

The quilt displayed here was made by Marion Thorn (b. 1897) and/or her mother, Carrie Bell Dubois Thorn, (b. 1868) in Peacham. Both women were experienced sewers, as reflected in the beauty and the quality of this quilt.

4. "Street Light Electrification Quilt", late 1920s

Cotton, Machine stitched and machine quilted. Owned by PHA.



Walter Thorn

Although this quilt was made in a simple design of light yellow and white, it has an unusual pattern with a special provenance. The quilt was donated to PHA in the spring of 2015 by Jean Dedham, and originally came from her mother, Eloise Miller. Inside the folded quilt was a small note stating that the names on this quilt list everyone who made a donation to purchase street lights for East Peacham.

The quilt was likely designed in light yellow and white to reference "light" or "street lights." There are 20 panels, each with 20 signatures. The names of all 400 donors were hand written by Walter Thorne, Peacham Town Clerk, but we do not know who stitched the names or assembled the quilt. This quilt exemplifies how a clever design and an historic event can be combined into a commemorative work of art.

20th century signature quilts were unlike earlier 19th c. versions. These quilts were used to raise money by having each person pay a small fee (usually 10 cents during the depression) to have their name placed on the quilt. One person was usually chosen for his/her handwriting, and would inscribe all the signatures, and then it was embroidered and assembled. Once completed, the finished quilt may have been auctioned off to raise additional funds.

5. Peacham Bi-Centennial Quilt, initially created in 1976 and completed in 1998

49 squares, cotton and cotton/polyester blends, machine quilted. Owned by PHA.



Peacham Congregational Church

This is another example of a 20th century signature quilt, with a bright patriotic color scheme. The quilt was originally created as a commemorative quilt top (no backing) for the 1976 American Bi-Centennial celebration, and contains signatures of local residents. Following its inaugural display at the Historic House, it was folded for storage and subsequently disappeared. It was finally found in the 1990s in an old battered trunk

in the back "Industries Room", here at the Historical House. Lorna Quimby and Dorothy Glasser combined efforts to complete the quilt, and added the backing. It was then quilted by members of the "Tuesday Quilting Group," part of the Peacham Church Fellowship. The names of the women who did the quilting are listed on the back.

This is a modern version of the old 19th c. form of signature, friendship or album quilt.

6. "Mystery Quilt", unknown provenance, likely late 19th century from Peacham, VT

42 panels, hand stitched with embroidered initials.



This quilt has been named by PHA as the "Mystery Quilt", since we do not currently have the history or information about who donated it. We are hopeful that one of you visiting this year will be able to tell us more.

This quilt is made up of 42 panels, with embroidered initials on many of the squares. It was hand stitched in a traditional 19th century pattern named "Ohio Star." This pattern was popular as New Englanders migrated westward.

A list of full names corresponding to the initials was attached to the back of the quilt. These names matching the stitched initials create a record that can be checked for vital statistics. The names with researched dates are as follows:

Agnes Sanborn Blair, (b. Sept. 1872, m. June 1902)
Clara (Whitehill) Bailey, (b. circa 1838-40, m. 1860s)
Mary Blair MacKay, (b. 1903, m. 1930), signed prior to her marriage
Elizabeth Ferguson Gracey, (m. 1868)
Hannah Wesson Martin, (b. 1830, m. Dec. 1840)
Francis Hand Varnum, (b.1837, m. 1862)
Helen Ruth (Graham Holmes) Chase, (b.1838, d. 1927)
Elizabeth Blake, (b. 1870, unmarried)
Eliza (Wright) Esden, (b. 1839, d. 1925)
Chloe Trepphina (Tryphena) (English) Adams, (b.1847, d. 1921)
Addie (Blake) Craig, (b.1845, d. 1924)
Sarah A. Harriman, (b.1863, m. June 1892 to Walter Blanchard), d. 1937), signed prior to her marriage
Eliza Jane (Welch) Renfrew (b.1843, d. 1910)

These dates are significant, as they allow us to play detective and date the quilt. Women who signed using their maiden names allow us to date the quilt prior

to their marriages. The earliest wedding date that meets this criterion is June 8, 1892, Sarah Harriman's wedding date. The latest date the quilt could have been made corresponds to the date of death among its signers. This date is July 9, 1910, the day that Eliza Renfrew passed. We also have a birth date of 1903 for Mary MacKay. If we estimate that she was at least 5 or 6 years of age when she signed, that would push our earliest date of design to c. 1898.

So it is likely that this quilt was made between 1898 and 1910. Genealogical records do not show a family connection between the signers. The signers also resided in several local communities, both in and around Peacham. Perhaps they were all members of a local church or organization.

If you can assist us with additional information, please let one of our docents know.

7. "Album Quilt" or "Blanchard Quilt", mid-19th century

Found in New York and donated to PHA. Owned by PHA



Sarah Blanchard

An album or signature quilt is sometimes called a friendship quilt due to the signatures of friends and family on each quilt block. Early album quilts between 1840 and 1860 often featured elaborate indelible ink signatures, and occasionally a short verse or poem was added.

By the time of the Civil War, quilt inscriptions had been shortened to generally include only the autograph and a woman's hometown and/or date. By the 20th century, album quilts had embroidered signatures, as seen in quilt numbers 4 and 5 of our exhibit.

Some album quilts were assembled using blocks created by each individual signatory. Others were stitched by a single woman, and she collected the signatures on her premade blocks. These quilts are particularly poignant, as the signatures were often made for a woman going west as part of the pioneer movement. The album quilt was a reminder of the cherished bonds of friends and family, and warmed the lonely nights on an isolated homestead.

This album quilt was donated by a woman in New York, although that does not necessarily indicate that the quilt ended up there. It was well used, as indicated by the areas of wear and deterioration. Red and green fabrics often deteriorated due to their unstable dyes, and some indelible inks also weakened cotton fabric.

Similar to the previous quilt, we can date this quilt from the names listed in the blocks. Some women signed as unmarried women, others as "Mrs.", indicating their married status. By reviewing their marriage dates, we can estimate that this quilt was made between November 30, 1843 and September 9, 1848. The women who signed this quilt are linked to the Blanchard family, and some of them married into the Hooker, Norris, Wheeler, Pollard and Bruce families. We are missing some names due to damaged quilt blocks.

How interesting it would be to know the full story and travels of this quilt!

8. "Album Quilt" Blocks, never used, mid-19th century

27 hand stitched blocks, some with stenciled signatures, and others with hand written indelible ink signatures. Owned by PHA

These quilt blocks provide us with the method used to assemble the "Blanchard Quilt." These blocks were donated to PHA separately from the quilt, and were handed down through the Craig-McBride-Graves family. A connection to the Blanchard quilt is likely due to the similar design of the blocks, the fabric and colors selected, having been made during the same time period, and matching dimensions.

Note the vivid colors in the fabric swatches, and the clarity of the signatures. It appears that the blocks were made by one person who then requested signatures to be added to her work. The fabrics used were likely from a dry goods store here in Peacham or from a nearby community.

These quilt blocks help us to imagine how the Blanchard quilt looked when first made.

SUSAN CHANDLER

Vice President, Peacham Historical Association