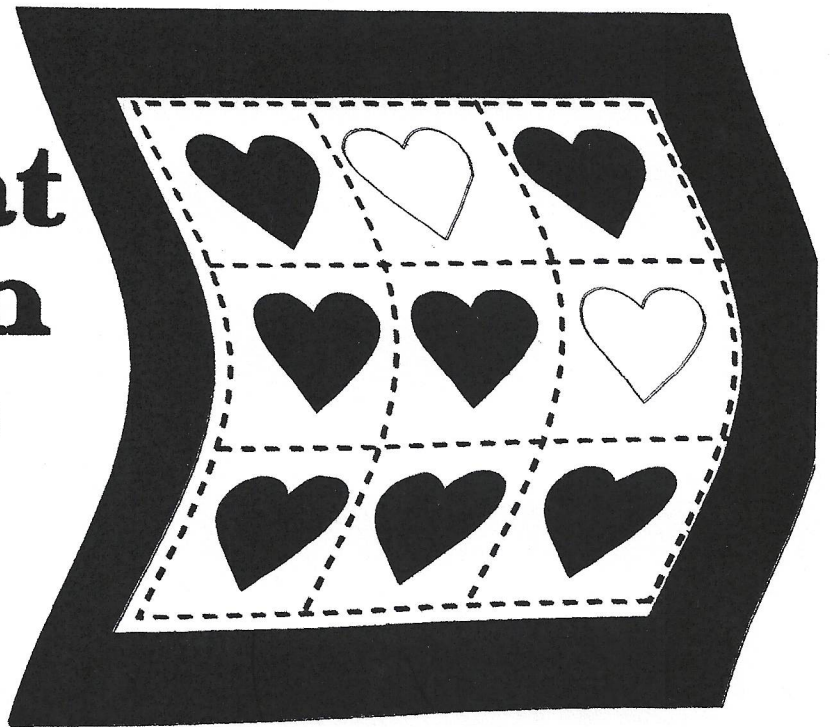


The Great American Coverup



Some History of Quilts And Quilting Methods past and Present

An Oregon FCE Lesson



Prepared by
Edgel Sudul

fce
Oregon Association For
Family & Community Education

The History and Evolution of Quilts

Purpose of this lesson: We may think of quilts as being an American craft from the time of the Revolution but they have a longer history and many changes have been made since the first quilts in ancient history.

Materials Needed: Lesson with activities 1 & 2. Glue, scissors, old quilt magazines, catalogues and block samples if you have them.

Activity # 1

A brief History: Quilts were found in Egypt at the time of the Pharaoh's. Not many fabric items from this period have survived but many paintings as well as sculptures and writings have given historians a glimpse of this artistry. A carved ivory figure of a Pharaoh of Egyptian's first Dynasty is wearing a supposedly quilted mantel, c3400 BC.

Most of the quilting of this period was used as clothing, not bedding as we see now. Although in recent years more quilting is used on clothes such as jackets and vests.

When the Children of Israel left Egypt we are told in the first two books of the Bible, they took the "Spoils of Egypt." They took clothing, jewels and artwork. This is apparent in the creation of the golden calf and the following celebration. Did you ever watch the movie "The Ten Commandments" and wonder where slaves got all that silk organza they were flinging around as they danced?

The next place we find quilts is in the Holy Land. Some of these were brought back to Europe by the Crusaders. They were used at first for window and door coverings to keep out the cold in winter and heat in summer. Quilting was also used inside mail armor as padding to prevent chaffing. Their enemy, the Muslims wore a tightly quilted vest as part of their armor.

Then Europe had a couple very cold winters (Colder than anyone could remember) and quilts found their way to the beds.

From Europe the quilt made its way to America with the immigrants.

Quilts were a mainstay of the household goods in the covered wagons as the Pioneers came west. Women would stitch and exchange patterns as they walked the Oregon Trail. And, yes, they walked. Many may think they rode in the wagons but only the driver, very young, infirmed and the elderly rode in the wagons. Many of the quilts that started with them on the trail were used for shrouds when loved ones died along the trail.

One very interesting use of quilts were by the Underground Railway as the slaves and ones helping them escape would hang quilts of certain patterns on the fence to inform runaways where and when to go for assistance.

What is a quilt? A quilt is a fabric sandwich of a patterned top, a batting and a back held together by stitching.

There are several methods to do the top. Some are:

-- **Whole cloth** which is a piece of fabric the size of top you want.

This can be printed or solid with the actual quilting becoming the design.

--**Applique** is a design either hand stitched or by machine on another block of fabric

--**Pieced** is different fabrics sewn either by hand or machine to produce a pleasing design.

Paper pieced is a design on a piece of paper which is numbered as to which fabric to add to complete the design. This is best stitched by machine. The paper is removed when the design is completed.

Although in the olden days the paper was left in to help add warmth to the quilt – it rattles though.

How do you quilt? There are several methods to do this so we will look at a few:

Tying: A quilt “purist” will get very upset if you call this quilting. It is a comforter. But knots are stitches so you can argue this point. You use a top, batting and back and if anyone want’s to argue that tying is not a hand stitch; they will have to prove it. (Old quilters would say this method is the “height of laziness.” In the past when they were quilting though, they didn’t have the bonded batting available today

which doesn't have to be stitched so closely.) Some modern quilters break the rules by tying the main portion and machine quilting the borders.

Hand quilting: This is done with the components in a frame or hoop using a small needle (and hopefully a thimble) and a specially treated thread made for hand quilting. A running stitch goes through all three parts to be held together. The smaller the stitch the better but if you can't make small stitches, at least keep them a constant length.

Machine quilting: This is done with either your home machine or you can find someone with the newer long arm machine to do it for you. Baste the components together so they don't shift. Either do the stitch in the ditch, the stipple stitch or shadow stitch. They are all attractive so use the one that fits your design.

What fabric do you use? The most popular fabric used in quilts is cotton calico but don't put limits on your creations. The "purist" will stick to the cottons but you can break the rules and use blends. Some fabrics that have always been shunned as unsuitable for quilts such as laces and other thin fabrics. But these can be backed with an iron on interfacing and they work very nicely in some quilts. It depends on your design. Flannels have become very popular in quilts. Wool plaids also have become popular and good for very cold climates. Some decorator fabric works well. Just don't use the heavy weaves or upholstery. Silks, satins, taffetas and velvets have always been used in Crazy Quilts

Do you prewash the fabric? Ask ten quilters this question and they will be split evenly in their answers. It depends on the finished look you want. If you wash the fabric, it will not shrink when you wash it later and you will have a smooth quilt. If you choose not to wash it you will get a wrinkled look when washed later to give it the antique look. Tip: Never hang a quilt to dry. Lay it flat.

Where do you find patterns? There are books by the hundreds. Some are for beginners others for the more advanced. These books are in fabric stores, quilt shops and if you like to play on the Internet you will find a few there also. And for you computer users, there are quilt programs with patterns available. Two of these are Electric Quilt and Animal Kingdom CD-ROM that is paper pieced animals. Friends or other quilters exchange some patterns. There are some patterns in

envelopes like clothing patterns. Some that are passed down from ancestors are on brown bags and newsprint. This is the way the Pioneers shared their patterns.

Battings: The most commonly used battings are cotton and polyester. These come in many weights. The thinner ones are best when hand quilting. They are measured in ounces –2 oz to 8 oz. Other battings available are wool and silk. Silk batting is expensive but good in clothing as it is light in weight and more flexible.

You must first decide if you are going to do applique, pieced or wholecloth to get started.

How do you choose the fabric and colors? It sounds like a contradiction to say use contrast and harmony. If you are using three different fabrics, you will want three sizes of designs. One should have a large print, the next a medium print and the third either small print or solid color. Of course, these rules can be broken. Some can be of close to the same size and still work together. The color should harmonize –that is unless you are doing a pattern with brights that need the contrast. If you know a quilter who has published a book that has quilts you really like, study their use of color or get a color wheel. Consider, if you are making a pattern that uses one fabric for a flower, the second for a leaf, check to see if there is a green in the flower you can match for the leaves.

This may not have answered all your questions, it has given you options. Don't let anyone tell you, "You have to do it this way." Some of us like lots of color and uses the pattern as a "pattern", not a "bible." So find your style and don't let anyone say it is wrong.

There is only one rule to stick by religiously and that is never to sew some blocks by hand and others by machine in the same quilt. They just won't fit together.

Activity #2

Evolution of Equipment: Scissors have been around for centuries. A few years ago another piece of equipment was invented that speeded up the cutting of quilt pieces. That was the rotary cutter. It is used

with a ruler and cutting mat. What used to take weeks to cut pattern pieces can now be done in one day. The long arm-quilting machine is another time saver that has only been out a few years. They are still quite expensive for most home sewers. Computer programs let you choose colors on your computer to get the look you want. Straight pins with an arrow to point the direction you sew are another new invention. These are just a few. Go to your favorite fabric or quilt shop to find others.

References:

Quilts of the Oregon Trail by Mary Bywater Cross
Quilts: From ancient Egypt to American Shore
The History of the Patchwork Quilt by Schnuppe von Qwinner
The Holy Bible: Genesis 15:13 &14 and Exodus 12:35& 36
My own experience of 65+ years of sewing & quilting
Quilting & Patchwork; A Sunset Book
Hidden In Plain View

History of Quilts Lesson

Activity #1

1. _____ Have you made a quilt?
2. _____ When did you make your last quilt?
3. _____ Do you have a handmade quilt made by others?
4. _____ Do you know who made that quilt?
5. _____ Where do you think quilting originated?
6. _____ When do you think the first quilt was made?
7. _____ What fabrics would you use in a quilt?
8. _____ Are you a "Purist" when you make quilts?
9. _____ What is your latest quilting tool purchase?
10. _____ What is your favorite quilting method?

History of Quilts Lesson Activity #2

From the old magazines and Catalogues, find and paste a Picture of each quilt block.

Cathedral Window

Nine Patch

Crazy Quilt

Applique

Paper Pieced

Flying Geese

Spools

Log Cabin

Double Wedding Ring

Drunkards Path
