



## *Clio Visualizing History's Quilts as Visual History*

# “Send out an old quilt”: Quilts as Homespun War Memorials

By Jennifer Reeder

### Introduction

Carefully stitched flour sacks, calicos, ginghams, muslins, silks, and velvets—intricate circles, blocks, and figures—indelible political, military, social, and religious messages—all embedded within textile treasures, all visualizing particular segments of history in tangible, textured ways.

Quilts reveal cultural, economic, social, and gender history. Often created for ceremonial purposes—weddings, babies, friendship, coming-of-age, departure, death—these textile pieces capture relationships from family and local community, as well as recording events, political and social sentiments, and commemoration with unique female participation. Carefully preserved and passed down through families, then often on to historical societies and museums, these fabric scraps carry with them stories, memories, and historical detail in their patterns.

Traditionally a distinctly female activity, quilting often demonstrates a propensity for the Victorian age's feminized Cult of Domesticity. Acting from a moral injunction to create beauty for the home, these women utilized social trends in their patterns and designs. Quilt historian Suzanne Yabsley comments: “A quilt is at once simple and complex. Nothing could be more basic than a warm cover. However, the significance of the quilt to its maker carries it far beyond its function into the realms of artistic expression, personal statement, social interaction, and emotional commitment.”<sup>1</sup>

Popular quilt patterns attest to rhetorical and social values. According to Van E. Hillard, “As cultural forms, quilts readily lend themselves to rhetorical scrutiny. . . . As rhetorical forms, many quilts transform and enrich our notions of the agents, actions, purposes, and scenes of art production and individual creativity, . . . providing a vehicle for subverting dominant ideologies; quilted texts enacted alternate readings of the world.”<sup>2</sup> Floral motifs, landscape designs, medallion quilts, album quilts, freedom quilts, crazy quilts, patterns such as the Log Cabin, Drunkard's Step, Rose-of-Sharon, Rail Fence, Courthouse Steps, Trip Around the World, and countless others with numerous variations demonstrate underlying ambitions, hopes, aspirations, morals, and current circumstantial sentiment.

Quilts disclose valuable historical information about several diverse communities of creators. Church groups stitched quilts for benevolent and missionary efforts. Slave quilts divulge details about a seemingly silent segment of nineteenth-century population; Underground Railroad quilts delivered textile messages to a non-literate people, and particular patterns, colors, and fabrics indicate African and African-American cultural propensity.<sup>3</sup> Pioneer trail quilts, most often transported for utilitarian purposes, also contained sentimental messages as women and their families left friends, neighbors,

and kin to start new lives on the frontier. Quilts from geographical regions showcase local materials, patterns, and techniques, documenting visual change over time.<sup>4</sup>

Fabric seemed an inherently natural mode of female expression as nineteenth-century women were expected to provide warmth and nurture for their families and communities. Stitched within such orthodox domestic traditions, however, were additional messages. Political sentiment flowed from women's needles as they gathered and quilted in support of suffrage, temperance, military campaigns and war relief, and political parties. Women who couldn't vote signed their quilt blocks with pride. Quilts became banners, flags, and fabric petitions, displaying strong political voices.<sup>5</sup> Groups used quilts to raise money as well as to raise visible public support. Fairs, festivals, and bazaars displayed and sold quilts, while later museums exhibited them as precious pieces of the past. Textile remnants reveal as much as written text found in journals, newspapers, correspondence, and memoirs.

Quilt patterns, fabrics, and methods indicate valuable mechanical and economic historical details. The finished product reveals economic class. Slaves pieced work for their white mistresses; underpaid girls worked in textile mills; Victorian ladies of leisure pieced together crazy quilts of rich velvets, indicating a quilting transformation from necessity to décor. And in between were women stitching for their families and communities, providing warmth, beauty, and sentiment. All contributed to a textile social stratification.

The mid-nineteenth century idea of quilts proved an important American sentiment. Homespun and homegrown artifacts came to represent symbols of Jeffersonian ideals of a sturdy, self-reliant, agricultural population as a source of democratic values.<sup>6</sup> As the Industrial Revolution mechanized factory-produced blankets, the nostalgic charm of homemade quilts withered. Patchwork came to be viewed as backwards and un-modern.

Later in the twentieth century, however, a resurgence in old fashioned quilts surfaced. As Americans celebrated the bicentennial of the country, they turned to the past to refashion traditional values. Museums started to display quilts, and material culture historians viewed textiles as embodying important social, cultural, and material assets. Amish quilts sold as a marketable cultural commodity, and quilting circles and specialty shops materialized. Scholars began to examine quilts and their makers in earnest, discovering valuable academic contribution from scraps of fabric.

Between the stitches, the fabric, and the batting, quilts can reveal valuable details about their makers, time periods, and uses. As pieces of visual history, careful study of quilts demonstrates fragments otherwise lost to oblivion.

## Quilts as Homespun War Memorials

In 1855, Dr. Sylvester B. Prentiss purchased a quilt at a charity raffle in Lawrence, Kansas. It was no ordinary quilt: family lore states that the wool circles backing the ties were remnants of Revolutionary War uniforms. Boston women of the New England Emigrant Aid Society created the tied comforter to

raise money to feed New England settlers in the Kansas territory. The group competed with other such charitable and political groups to campaign for the territory's status as a free state, and the quilt demonstrated visual and tactile efforts to instill Revolutionary ideals of liberty and heritage. Prentiss later cut this unique national treasure into segments for each of his children to remember their national legacy and pass it on to their descendants even further removed from the Revolution.<sup>7</sup>

The Prentiss family Revolutionary War quilt reveals several insights about visual history, memory, and material culture. The tangible connection to a larger national cause influenced the creation and the purchase of the quilt; value lay in its material connection to the past and its effort to connect to and influence the present and future. Verifying whether or not the wool circles actually came from soldiers' uniforms over seventy-five years old proved less important to the purchaser. Rather, the value came from its story—and the ability to pass the fabric and its memory on to future witnesses who would vote and perhaps participate in further efforts to maintain the valiant cause of the Union.<sup>8</sup>

Quilts proliferated especially during the Civil War, based on utilitarian need and traditional heritage; additionally, commemorative quilts followed during World War II as a nostalgic return to the past. Between the patchwork pieces are memories of national and regional patriotism, family stories, values, war experiences, and witnesses of sacrifice and mourning, celebration and triumph. These quilts illustrate the connection between the violence of war and the family and home front. Close examination of commemorative textiles reveals history and memory intertwined in material culture, with highly selective stories, political sentiments, and visual marks of hardship and trauma. The fabrics, patterns, colors, and stitches connect relationships, events, and causes, privileging certain war experiences and leaving out others. Although quilts cannot tell the whole story of war, they express significant war-time sentiment and capture unwritten memories. Analysis of historiography linking quilts to history and memory and careful consideration of memories of utility, family and local community, strategic designs, and provenance illustrate the memory of this textile connection between war and the home front.

## Analyzing Quilts

Like the Prentiss family, other families and museums proudly preserve and display their quilts as evidence of connection to war. While mid-nineteenth century America saw great technological and mechanical strides, traditional homespun and fine needlework occurred apace in homes across the country. Quilts proliferated for utilitarian reasons (although factories began to provide wool blankets at nominal costs), as well as for means to express design, creativity, and memory. Beyond mere utility, according to historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, a nostalgic curiosity and value in homespun aroused interest in traditional forms and the messages attached to them.

Nineteenth-century Americans understood that objects tell stories. They wrote their stories in speeches, memoirs, and poems, and on scraps of paper that they pinned, pasted, or sewed to the things they saved. These were stories about patriotism, family pride, and household industry.

—Laurel Thatcher Ulrich<sup>9</sup>

Ulrich describes how quilts and other items of material culture are imbedded with the rich texture of local history, a valuable field of cultural production and presentation.<sup>10</sup> Quilts, according to Peter S. Hawkins, represent Americana at its most pure. “As our quintessential folk art, the patchwork quilt is linked to nineteenth-century sewing bees and a nostalgia for a past sense of community. Perhaps the only thing like it in our national mythology is that other needlework of fabric, color, and pattern that Betsy Ross turned into America’s most revered symbol, the American flag.”<sup>11</sup> Thus memory intertwines with history to illustrate a unique window of culture blending utility and sentiment.

Traditionally a female craft, quilt-making reveals much about gender roles and women’s participation in society and culture. Ann Douglas theorizes that the nineteenth-century saw the “feminization of American culture,” a surprising reaction and contradiction to the violence of war.<sup>12</sup> Women sentimentalized the world around them, thus feeling a sense of participation and control. Quilting allowed them to literally stitch together scraps into meaningful and useful pieces. While nineteenth-century American cultural, economic, and political gender roles generally placed women at the home front and men in combat and military leadership, women actively participated in many important war activities. Quilts situate women’s experience with the raw violence of war and the destruction on home and family. Winter defines observers of war as having growing significance. They are, he writes, “storytellers of a special kind. They are individuals with a terrible tale to tell, people whose very lives are defined by that story.”<sup>13</sup> Quilts illustrate the woman’s witness of the war in unique, tangible ways. Quilt historians Pat Ferrero, Elaine Hedges, and Julie Silber describe how quilts act as conduits to these memories. “Through their quilts women became, in fact, not only witnesses to but active agents in important historical change.”<sup>14</sup>

Many quilt makers consciously chose specific items to depict in pictorial quilts. Elsley analyzes quilts as texts. The quilt is not just a bed cover, but it can be a political manifesto: “It speaks its maker’s desires and beliefs, hopes and fears” through its images, colors, patterns, and pieces.<sup>15</sup> As well, families consciously chose which stories to tell with their quilts as they were handed down from generation to generation, evident in the current existence of stories. Both quilt makers and quilt keepers act as agents in determining which memories are preserved. According to historian Michael Kammen, people are highly selective about their perceptions of the past. Selective versions of the past mobilize to serve particular partisan purposes in the present. Moreover, he writes, “Wars have played a fundamental role in stimulating, defining, justifying, periodizing, and eventually filtering American memories and traditions.”<sup>16</sup> Thus quilts commemorating war illustrate deliberate beliefs and attempts to memorialize national loyalties for families and future generations.

The preservation of these quilts reveals a nostalgic turn to the past. Quilt historians Cheryl B. Torsney and Judy Elsley have traced the popular interest in quilts. “Quilts in the twentieth century have not become dead cultural artifacts of the past. Rather, as political as well as aesthetic statements, they have taken on lives as texts to be positioned, read, and restitched (or reinscribed).”<sup>17</sup> Quilts passed down through the generations of families and preserved in museums and historical societies.

Quilts have served as “modes of collective remembrance,” as described by historian Jay Winter.<sup>18</sup> Fragments of fabric with special designs trigger specific memories and link individuals to historical events. Daryl M. Hafter writes about quilts as windows into customs, human relationships, and individual awareness accompanying events from the past.<sup>19</sup> For example, wedding and baby quilts explicitly celebrate relationships and family events. Historian John Bodnar writes about the power of vernacular culture—the memory of ordinary people with diverse experiences to participate in a larger whole. Modes of vernacular culture such as quilts can spark discussion about contradiction between loyalty to family and loyalty to nation, revealing the consciousness of people involved in national events such as war.<sup>20</sup>

Quilts commemorating war and personal experience with war, both in direct combat and at the home front, reveal these contradictions between nation and family, as well as illustrate individual experience with war and ordinary reaction and memory of that experience. Commemorative war quilts, then, witness gendered, social, political, and cultural memories of war.

## Family and Utilitarian Quilts

Quilts provide a view of distinct female war efforts. According to quilt historian Barbara Brackman, women had little to offer during the Civil War but their sons and husbands and their domestic skills as they maintained the home front. “Needlework, chief among their skills, became the war work that most occupied women in the Union and the Confederacy.”<sup>21</sup> Women sent quilts with their loved ones to warm them and to remind them of home. These quilts, according to quilt historian Catherine A. Cerny, extended the physicality of the family.<sup>22</sup> For example, Elizabeth Skiles Ward packed her wedding quilt, an intricate tulip appliqué, for her husband, Major Lemuel Ward of Garysburg, North Carolina. The Confederate officer spread the quilt on the ground each night, when his thoughts must have returned home as the quilt reminded him of a faithful wife.<sup>23</sup> Quilt historian Lynn A. Bonfield writes about letters from Vermont soldiers requesting quilts. Hazen B. Hooker wrote to his parents, “Perhaps you could send one that has shielded me from the cold in days past.” His request was not only for warmth, but for familiarity. Bonfield realizes that “the memories a quilt evoked comforted the boys as much as did the warmth from the extra layers a quilt provided.”<sup>24</sup> Quilts, then, commemorated home while on the front lines, then remembered war as the fabric remnants and their stories passed on to future generations.

Sometimes the quilt’s primary utilitarian purpose memorializes war beyond the warmth and cover necessary at the battlefield. Commemorative value appears in recounting its utility. One family quilt commemorates the Civil War in an especially poignant manner, without flags, battles, or symbols. A

summer log cabin quilt was sent with young soldier Asbury Hargrove to the front line, who died in battle in Knoxville, Tennessee. A family slave retrieved Hargrove's body, immediately recognizing him wrapped in the quilt made by his mother. He brought the body home for burial.<sup>25</sup> The quilt, with its story, ragged and torn, survived for later generations as a mark of grief and pride in contributing to the Confederate cause. According to quilt historian Gail Andrews Trechsel, quilts often serve as tangible modes of mourning and remembering. As a temporary or final covering for the body, the quilt acts as a shroud or coffin. In this case, the quilt then becomes a physical connection to or memory of the dead, potentially acting as both healing force and memorial.<sup>26</sup>

Quilts also serve as memorials of hardship. Serving in very utilitarian ways to warm and cover soldiers, quilts often came to bear the marks of their service. These marks, then, became their own war memorials, like the remains of bullet holes from the Civil War in the Tennessee state capitol. The Baugh family's Lone Star quilt, for example, still shows the bloodstain of soldier James Elem Baugh from his wounds at the Battle of the Wilderness in 1864.<sup>27</sup> When the Pope family heard a battle was coming to their area in northwest Arkansas in March 1862, they buried valuables in a quilt to save them from Union soldiers. Many family members died in the Battle of Pea Ridge, and the quilt continues to bear stains from its buried battle scars. While the spots probably could have been easily cleaned, their remnant testifies to the hardship of that war moment.<sup>28</sup>

Other quilts prove value in stories of assistance to soldiers. A beautiful Rose Tree quilt, marred by a carefully-patched hole in its center as a testament to war deprivation. The story goes that a Southern soldier traveling home on foot, suffering from cold, stole the quilt as it hung over a clothesline outside a Virginia home. After cutting the hole to fit the quilt as a poncho, he made his way to Knoxville, Tennessee, where exhausted and penniless, he was charged with public vagrancy. Constable John R. Nelson, a Confederate sympathizer, pitied the young soldier and offered to buy the quilt, thus providing the soldier with money and saving him from time in the local jail. While the hole has been carefully repaired, its trace is still visible, and its story memorializes efforts to participate in the war.<sup>29</sup>

An appliquéd Irish Chain quilt carries with it the story of its benefactor. John George Bauer, a soldier in the 5th Iowa Union Cavalry, was wounded in northwest Tennessee. Insisting that his arm not be amputated, Bauer remained in the area to recuperate. With the assistance of a kind local woman, Mary Benson Lockridge, he recovered sufficiently to return to his unit. Lockridge draped her Irish Chain quilt over the soldier's shoulders to hide his Union blue uniform, enabling him to slip past Confederate guards to safety. The quilt remained in his family as a textile testament of kindness rarely experienced in harsh war.<sup>30</sup>

Barbara Broyles of Rhea County, Tennessee, loaned several quilts to Confederate soldiers stationed nearby. Unfortunately, when soldiers returned one white cotton stuffed work quilt, they returned it covered in typhus germs, and both Barbara and her husband died within four days. The quilt survived, and the family continues to tell the story of the sacrifice of their parents due to their Confederate compassion.<sup>31</sup> These quilts bear heroic stories, often mythic in nature. Authenticity may remain questionable—would a family really want to preserve such germs? However, for these families, their

stories prove more valuable than the truth, commemorating values of hardship and participation. Holes, stains, wounds, disease—the absence of color and fabric—witness war and its memory in stark visual and tangible ways.

## Women's Community Quilts

While certainly a testament to home and family, quilts also bear witness to women's work outside the home. In the North, women mobilized publicly to assist in providing for soldiers' needs, forming Soldiers' Aid Societies and working under the auspices of the United States Sanitary Commission and its competitor, the Christian Commission, distributing an estimated 250,000 quilts to the front and hospitals from 1861 to 1865.<sup>32</sup> Few of these simple utilitarian quilts exist today, probably due to their essential hardy use and non-specialized construction. The Daughters of the American Revolution boasts one in its collection; its fancy work belies little actual field use, though its strong political theme expresses publicly its Union support.

Southern women gathered to quilt, though under different social circumstances. Some formed Soldiers' Aid Societies, though without the central organization of a Sanitary or Christian Commission. Other efforts occurred. Quilt historian Brydning Henley describes the work of Alabama women to raise money for the purchase of a gunboat for the Confederacy, with similar efforts occurring in Louisiana, South Carolina, Georgia, and Virginia. The Women's Gunboat Fund in Alabama produced quilts to be sold at a community raffle. The family story associated with Martha Hatter Bullock's "Alabama Gunboat" quilt states that it was sold and resold several times as each purchaser returned the quilt in order to maximize profit.<sup>33</sup> While the monetary goal to obtain a gunboat was not realized, the women's participation in the cause bolstered their loyalty and was proudly recorded in family and community lore as wartime memory through a quilt.

Other women gathered locally to deal with war and to commemorate what they and their loved ones experienced. Several memorial quilts illustrate this phenomenon. Friendship quilts became popular between 1840 and the outbreak of the Civil War, a period of radical change and industrialization.<sup>34</sup> One friendship quilt, constructed by the women of Portland, Maine, demonstrates their Unionist loyalties with red, white, and blue stars and Union flag. Inscriptions penned on many blocks reveal the makers' political and social feelings, ranging from the witty to the bloodthirsty. One in particular reads, "While our fingers guide the needles, our thoughts are intense (tents)," indicating sympathies with loved ones on the battlefield and efforts to support and sustain as well as to communicate distinct Union sentiments.<sup>35</sup> The quilt illustrates both the community effort and overt political ideals, a memory passed down through the town's generations.

## Quilt Designs

Beyond the communal process of quilting, stories about quilts and their designs commemorate war and women's experiences with war in overt ways. Quilts allowed women to record war and battle with political perspectives. According to Ferrero, Hedges, and Silber, "from being expressions of

women's private lives, testaments to domestic allegiance, quilts had also become in the course of the century political emblems and acts that helped women to expand their world and thus to negotiate their transition into modern times."<sup>36</sup> Susan Robb depicted Confederate battle glory in her intricate appliqué quilt. Careful stitches illustrate ranked soldiers marching under two versions of the Confederate flag. The image of a stork overpowering an eagle is reminiscent of an emblem on Constitutional currency and represents the power of the South early in the War.<sup>37</sup>

Quilts also commemorate war protest. Betty Wood created quilts to communicate her disapproval of the war in Iraq. In an effort to place names and faces with otherwise nameless and faceless classified casualties, Wood illustrated photographs and I.D.s surrounded by American flags depicting coffins.<sup>38</sup> Political messages in quilts both honored and protested war.

Political quilts often listed achievements. Mrs. Alfred Van Fleet of Illinois created a commemorative quilt one year following the Civil War. The quilt became a sort of honor roll to record her husband's name, military rank, and the battles in which he fought between 1863 and 1864, stitched in a white strip of the American flag design. The litany of forty-seven battles in Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Maryland became her own badge of courage as she sustained him and held the home and family together in his absence. Her effort to remember her husband's achievements and to stitch them indelibly in the fabric of her quilt demonstrates her own participation.<sup>39</sup>

Elizabeth Holmes's patriotic quilt illustrates similar political sentiments, inscribing her name in public allegiance to the support of Lincoln and Grant dated four years after Lincoln's assassination and certainly well before she could cast her own vote.<sup>40</sup> Holmes fashioned her political memory through her quilt. Twenty years after the Civil War, Mary Morgan coordinated the efforts of the Women's Relief Corps in 1883 to make a quilt with one embroidered square for each corps of the Union Army (Appendix, 16). The quilt was probably made for a fundraiser for surviving veterans, with scattered GAR initials referring to the Grand Army of the Republic.<sup>41</sup> The creation of unique insignias for each corps reflects their iconographic memory as well as present needs to remember at the time of the quilt's creation.

Roll call quilts were also popular during World War II.<sup>42</sup> Women in Newport, Texas, made a quilt commemorating the soldiers from their local community. Names, ranks, and locations are carefully stitched into the blocks. Mrs. Earl E. Schaeffer sewed a "Gold Star Mothers" quilt featuring the names of soldiers from Ohio who died during World War II. These quilts serve as local memorials in national causes. This type of roll call or honor roll quilt is similar to war memorials listing the names of the dead. According to Marita Sturken, the physical memorial of names invites viewers to touch and see. Discussing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, she writes, "Although these names are now marked within an official history, that history cannot contain the ever-widening circles that expand outward from each."<sup>43</sup> These quilts act as textile forms of the stone memorials, recording names, battles, and war in a softer, more domestic manner.

## Quilt Creation

The ability to create a quilt in times of hardship proves the valiant efforts of people during war. One wounded Civil War soldier created an intricate appliquéd quilt while he recuperated. Woven into his fabric are figures of soldiers on foot and horseback, surrounded by doves and oak leaves.<sup>44</sup> The symbolism of peace and strength is clear; also appropriate for discussion is the value of the very act of quilt creation in times of struggle.

A World War II mother quilted a commemorative patriotic quilt in 1944-1945, as the family story goes, to ward off the loneliness and concern she felt while her three sons fought in Europe.<sup>45</sup> Quilt scholar Janet Berlo comments that the act of quilting provides a different sort of cover: people “come to quilt making looking for a respite from one set of challenges by embracing a very different set—involving color, pattern, sensuality, skill, and order, in an ever-changing mixture.”<sup>46</sup> She writes that quilting often became a pastime for women to deal with their difficult situations. The act of cutting fabric into scraps, then repositioning them allowed for creative reconfiguring and dealing with uncontrollable events associated with war.

Sometimes the act of creating something of beauty from scraps in a very non-utilitarian way allowed women to feel a sense of control in their lives. The Alabama Gunboat quilt by Martha Hatter Bullock, for example, demonstrates incredible skill and fine craftsmanship in its crosshatch diagonal lines and its double clamshell stitches. Highly-detailed appliqués of flowers, strawberries, and a basket illustrate unusual skill even for fine chintz appliqué quilts of the time. The chocolate brown silk fabric in the center and the blue taffeta border reveal refined tastes in materials rare for that time and place.<sup>47</sup> According to Brackman, “During wartime women might feel guilty about the expense and frivolity of fancy work, but making beautiful and creative items to be donated to a fair was a patriotic duty.”<sup>48</sup> This gentele refinement demonstrates the ability of these women to transcend their day-to-day struggles and maintain their Southern pride and capabilities. The quilt then becomes a testament to their memory.

## Quilt Preservation

Quilt preservation and transmission provides valuable information as vernacular modes of memory. The collection of quilts associated with war examines provenance and family stories—all aspects of memory. The collection of these particular items proves modern interest. Michael Kammen poses the question: “We must ask *what* they collected, and then the more complicated question *why* (complicated because the answers are so diverse and combined in various patterns), and finally inquire about the cultural consequences and legacies of their activities and criteria as collectors: consequences for the museums and other institutions, for the dominant configuration of social values, and for human relationships.”<sup>49</sup> The actual provenance of a commemorative quilt proves agency in the historical remembering process.

Families preserved their quilts—along with their stories about the quilts—to link their connection to the war, their allegiances to their causes, and their witnesses of participation, hardship, and national loyalty. Cerny comments that generally stories of quilt creation or meaning are handed down orally, based on personal reminiscences and brief anecdotes.<sup>50</sup> For example, Martha Bullock's Alabama Gunboat quilt was sold several times to raise money. Family lore states that a wealthy Texan purchased the quilt and returned it to the family. Martha decided she would honor her own mother by passing the quilt and its story down to her daughters.<sup>51</sup>

Generally, provenance records indicate that women passed the quilts they made on to their daughters. The matrilineal line illustrates what Ulrich terms “the core of female inheritance.”<sup>52</sup> Others found interest in these nostalgic old quilts associated with what Kammen terms a “sheer love of country: old-fashioned patriotism that often verged upon chest-thumping chauvinism.”<sup>53</sup> Ulrich echoes Kammen with her study of material culture and its value. “For a people caught in the march of mechanization, antique tools and scraps of old fabric evoked a world that seemed simpler and more authentic than the one they knew.”<sup>54</sup> The quilts and their stories testify to a heroic past, testaments of endurance, of sacrifice, of struggle, and of enduring beliefs.

A resurging interest in quilts to commemorate war occurred with World War II. The New England Quilt Museum presented an exhibition of quilts associated with the War in 2005. Made in a time where the utility of the quilt was no longer necessary, these quilts hearken back to Civil War quilts. Like the war quilts from nearly a century earlier, these quilts illustrate loyalty to the Allied cause, family connection to the War, and local community roll calls. One popular quilt pattern celebrates the wonders of modern naval technology with a quilted design of Navy insignia and anchors. The wrapper states: “Today when we are constantly reminded of the importance of Aviation by the hum of motors overhead, it seems only fitting that we honor the men and women who are flying those planes. Thousands of our young people are learning to fly and think nothing but ‘wings.’ So, these quilts are designed as a keepsake from these days of progress.”<sup>55</sup> Kammen notes that in an age of anxiety, Americans often shift to tradition. Concerns about national security and swift social change can produce a profound sense of historical discontinuity.<sup>56</sup> After 9/11, several significant quilt exhibits have displayed at the Pentagon, evidence of the nostalgic tradition to commemorate through quilts.<sup>57</sup>

A renewed interest in Civil War-era quilts has emerged. Barbara Brackman has published two books with stories and patterns of Civil War quilts. She encourages readers to “forge a personal link to the women of the Civil War by copying the quilts of the day.” Reproduction quilts, she believes, stretch myth and memory into present-day lived history.<sup>58</sup> Websites showcase contemporary designs of Civil War quilt patterns, drawing upon popular themes and symbols passed down through war memories. Some make suggestions for finding appropriate colors and homespun fabrics.<sup>59</sup> The Antiques Roadshow has highlighted commemorative Civil War quilts selling for thousands of dollars.<sup>60</sup> It is not just the memory of individual experience with war, but the traditional domestic forms of memory that prove powerful to the present day.

When Dr. Prentiss purchased his Revolutionary War quilt at the Kansas raffle in 1855, he participated in the making of historical memory. The ideology of freedom and liberty permeated the fabric in such a palpable way that he cut the quilt into sections for his descendants, hoping to pass on to them the support of the Union and democracy. War quilts from the Civil War and World War II eras illustrate the construction of historical memory. The witnesses of participation on the battlefield and at the home front reveal the personal experiences of war. Lists of names and battles, political images of national and sectional loyalty, marks of hardship, holes and faded colors testify of participation. Stories passed down through posterity mingle with fabric, to tell, to touch, to cover, and to remember.

## Notes

- [1] Suzanne Yabsley. *Texas Quilts, Texas Women*. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1984), xiii.
- [2] Van E. Hillard, "Census, Consensus, and the Commodification of Form: The NAMES Project Quilt." In *Quilt Culture Tracing the Pattern*, ed. Cheryl B. Torsney and Judy Elsley (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 112, 118.
- [3] See Jacqueline Tobin. *Hidden in Plain View: The Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* (New York: Doubleday, 1999); Marsha Macdowell, ed. *African American Quilting in Michigan* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1994).
- [4] See, for example: Yabsley, *Texas Quilts*; Ruth Haislip Roberson, ed. *North Carolina Quilts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Joyce D. Hammond, *T'ifaifai and Quilts of Polynesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986); Carolyn O. Davis, *Hopi Quilting: Stitched Traditions from Ancient Community* (Tucson: Sanpete Publications, 1997); Robert Charles Bishop, *A Gallery of Amish Quilts: Design Diversity from a Plain People* (New York: Dutton, 1976); Kae Covington. *Gathered in Time: Utah Quilts and Their Makers, Settlement to 1950* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1997).
- [5] Elaine Hedges. *Hearts and Hands: The Influence of Women and Quilts on American Society* (San Francisco: Quilt Digest Press, 1987), 66, 85.
- [6] Hedges, 63.
- [7] Barbara Brackman, *Quilts from the Civil War: Nine Projects, Historic Notes, Diary Entries* (Lafayette, CA: C&T Publishing, 1997), 8.
- [8] Today two fragments of the quilt belong to the Kansas State Historical Society. See Kansas State Historical Society, New England Emigrant Aid Company Quilt.
- [9] Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Knopf, 2001), 6.
- [10] Ulrich, 39-40.
- [11] Peter S. Hawkins. "Naming Names: The Art of Memory and the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt," *Critical Inquiry* 19:4 (Summer 1993): 757.
- [12] Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Noonday Press/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998). See also Gail Andrews Trechsel, "Mourning Quilts in America," *Uncoverings* (1989): 140.
- [13] Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 238-39.

- [14] Pat Ferrero, Elaine Hedges, and Julie Silber, *Hearts and Hands: The Influence of Women and Quilts on American Society* (San Francisco: The Quilt Digest Press, 1987), 11.
- [15] Judy Elsley, *Quilts as Text(iles): The Semiotics of Quilting* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 1.
- [16] Michael Kammen. *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 10, 13.
- [17] Cheryl B. Torsney and Judy Elsley, eds. *Quilt Culture: Tracing the Pattern* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 2.
- [18] Winter, 2.
- [19] Daryl M. Hafter, "Toward a Social History of Needlework Artists," *Woman's Art Journal* 2:2 (Autumn 1981-Winter 1982): 25.
- [20] John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 14, 7, 8, 13.
- [21] Although perhaps limited in her view, Brackman certainly exposes the public needlework in which women participated. Brackman, *Quilts of the Civil War*, 50.
- [22] Catherine A. Cerny, "Quilt Ownership and Sentimental Attachments: The Structure of Memory," *Uncoverings* 18 (1997): 110.
- [23] Brackman, 51.
- [24] "If you had seen us a few days ago, where we lay on the ground you would have thought it was rather hard, but it is all over now we enjoy the present, forget the past, hope for the future. I want you Marm to send out an old quilt one that is not worth much. If we stay here all winter it will be worth every thing to us. Luch says tell his mother send him one of the same kind. Luch and I tent together and if we can have two quilts we can sleep warm, perhaps you can send one that has shielded me from the cold in days past." 5 September 1863, Peacham Historical Society. Cited in Lynn A. Bonfield, "Quilts for Civil War Soldiers from Peacham, Vermont," *Uncoverings* 22 (2001): 49.
- [25] Brackman, *Quilts of the Civil War*, 110. Also featured in Anita Zaleski Weinraub, ed. *Georgia Quilts: Piecing Together a History* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 78-81.
- [26] Trechsel, 140, 146, 150, 152.
- [27] Weinraub, 80-81.
- [28] Brackman, 94.
- [29] Bets Ramsey and Merikay Waldvogel, *Southern Quilts: Surviving Relics of the Civil War* (Nashville: Routledge Hill Press, 1998), 50-53.
- [30] Ramsey and Waldvogel, *Southern Quilts*, 63-66.
- [31] Ramsey and Waldvogel, 47-49. It is strange that such a beautiful, pristine white quilt would be sent for the use of soldiers, or why the quilt bearing typhus germs would not have been destroyed. Regardless of the authenticity of this quilt, its stories serve a powerful purpose in the memory of the Civil War.
- [32] Brackman, 51-56. See also Bonfield, 37.
- [33] Bryding Adams Henley, "Alabama Gunboat Quilts," *Alabama Heritage* 8 (Spring 1988): 11-15. See also Patricia Cummings, "Gunboat Quilts: Fundraisers for the Confederacy," *The Citizen's Companion* (June/July 2007): 25-28; and Brackman, *Quilts from the Civil War*, 66-68.

[34] See Ferrero, Hedges, and Silber, 20.

[35] This quilt was featured in Ferrero, Hedges and Silber, *Hearts and Hands*, 75. This quilt effort was probably orchestrated by Cornelia Dow, whose husband, Neal, was a brigadier general in the Union army. At the time the quilt was completed, he had just been released from Libby Prison in Richmond, Virginia, in exchange for a Confederate general.

[36] Ferrero, Hedges, and Silber, 11.

[37] Ramsey and Waldvogel, 19-22.

[38] See Mark Lipinski's [blog](#), 30 September 2007.

[39] Ferrero, Hedges, and Silver, 78.

[40] Ferrero, Hedges, and Silver, 10. T

[41] See [Antiques Roadshow online](#).

[42] See *World War II Quilts*, exhibition, curated by Sue Reich, New England Quilt Museum, 2005. CD Rom.

[43] Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 58-59.

[44] Patsy and Myron Orlofsky. *Quilts in America* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), 164.

[45] Weinraub, 139.

[46] Janet Catherine Berlo, *Quilting Lessons: Notes from the Scrap Bag of a Writer and Quilter* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 4-5.

[47] Henley, 17.

[48] Brackman, *Quilts of the Civil War*, 68.

[49] Kammen, 315.

[50] Cerny, 95.

[51] Henley, 14.

[52] Ulrich, 415.

[53] Kammen, 322.

[54] Ulrich, 6.

[55] Exhibition label, New England Quilt Museum.

[56] Kammen, 537.

[57] Many 9/11 quilt websites exist: [911 Memorial Quilts](#); [World Trade Center Quilt](#); [Pentagon quilts](#); more [Pentagon quilts](#); and [Defend America](#).

[58] Barbara Brackman, *Civil War Women: Their Quilts, Their Roles, Activities for Re-Enactors* (Lafayette, CA: C&T Publishing, 2000), 4-5. See also Brackman, *Quilts from the Civil War*, and Rosemary Young, *The Civil War Diary Quilt* (Iola, WI: KP Books, 2005).

[59] See [Terry Thompson](#) and [Quilting 101](#).

[60] See [Antiques Roadshow](#).