

Hand Down Quilt Stories Along With Heirloom Quilts

Life histories are intertwined among a quilt's snips of pink prom formals, blue Cub Scout uniforms, yellow baby bibs, and white satin wedding dresses. But most quilters exclude a written record about themselves or their quilts for future generations.

"If every quilt owner's secret wish were answered, every quilt would be signed and dated," Sue Drew says. The Montgomery, Ala., resident has seen many nameless quilts during her 12 years in the quilt repair and restoration business.

Sounding like an old-fashioned schoolmarm, Drew admonishes quilters and quilt owners to record pertinent information about their treasures.

During the past few years, the quilt art world has spent countless hours researching historically significant quilts and quilt makers. Their findings are recorded in such books as the *Social Fabric: South Carolina Traditional Quilts; Kentucky Quilts: 1800-1900, the Kentucky Quilt Project; and First Flowerings, Early Virginia Quilts*.

Today's quilt scholars have to pore over old newspapers, agricultural journals, financial records, and other ancient documents to shed some light on the origins of yesterday's quilts. Despite their efforts, however, some quilters of these works of art will remain forever anonymous.

To document your quilt, you will need a typewriter or permanent marking pen and a piece of muslin. Only manual or ribbon-type electric typewriters will work.

Type or print the information onto the piece of cloth and run a warm iron over your words to prevent smearing. Be careful—mistakes can't be erased.

Next, applique the material to the back of the quilt, making sure the



Purchased quilts as well as family pieces should be documented.

stitches don't go through to the front.

In addition to an increase in their historical value, quilts with biographical information are worth twice as much money.

The most vital points to include are the name and location of the quilt maker and when the quilt was completed. In the past, quilters would embroider or quilt their names for others to discover. Drew doesn't recommend either method because their difficulty would probably limit what you would include.

If you own a purchased quilt or a family piece that you don't know anything about, include such points of interest as where, when, and from whom you acquired it; from where the previous owner thinks that it came; and, if purchased, how much you paid for it.

In her own documentations, Drew shares slices of her life. For a quilt that she made for her son several years ago, she wrote, "Dennis said I made 'stuff' for everyone else. Why didn't I make a quilt for him? So I did. Some of his old clothes were used, including the button closing front of a shirt and an actual pocket from a pair of his brown jeans. I machine-embroidered, 'I love you, Dennis' on one patch after asking his permission first. He asked why I asked him and I said, '14-year-old

boys are strange and I didn't know if you'd want it there.'"

Conveying part of your personality in the message should be one of your goals. Drew gives an example of a quilt record she loved: "The quilter said something like, 'I completed this quilt on such and such a date. I hate sewing. I hated every stitch I've put into this. I will never do another one again.'"

It is also a good idea to prepare written forms with the same type of information, accompanied by color photographs of the quilt.

Other facts to document are length and width, the colors, the occasion for which it was made, awards it may have won, specific circumstances under which it was made, and descriptions of the binding, handstitching, and fabrics.

Drew implores quilt owners not to depend on the faulty memories of family members to ensure a quilt's heritage.

"I worked on one wall hanging for months—while traveling, in front of the TV, just everywhere, right under their noses," she says. "When it was finished, I hung it on the wall. The first thing they said was, 'Oh, that's really neat. Where did that come from?'"

By NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON