

Museum News: History in a quilt square

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Sanderson had a very active quilting community through the years. At least two quilting groups were in operation at various times, and maybe more.

The art of quilting is believed to have originated in ancient Egypt. Through the ages it was reserved for ladies of means, as quilting materials were expensive. In colonial times, cloth was scarce and at a premium and many women had to spin and weave to make the cloth, and then assemble it into quilts.

By the time of the Civil War, money from quilting was raised for the war effort and to provide blankets for the soldiers of both sides. These types of quilts were plain with not much decoration.

After the War, appliqué quilts, which had been around since Colonial Times, became popular. Cutting designs from printed cloths available from India was an inexpensive way to produce very colorful quilts.

Out in the wilds of West Texas quilting was a necessity. Materials were expensive and leftover scraps of cloth and discarded clothing was saved to create quilting masterpieces. My own grandmother had a large quilting frame suspended from the ceiling of her living room and was continually working on quilt projects. Quilting was very popular in Sanderson, as well.

Fast forward to 2007...the Terrell County Memorial Museum received a box of quilt squares from a granddaughter of Mrs. Bustin Canon, a longtime ranching family in Terrell County. But this was not an ordinary quilt.

The squares contained the embroidered names of some 240 individuals, businesses in Terrell County and virtues. Mrs. Canon's granddaughter explained that this had been a quilting project of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church South back in the 1930s to raise money. The squares had been completed, but the blanket was never assembled.

The eight-point star "signature" quilt was a traditional Maltese cross design, created from red, white and blue cloth in a pleasing arrangement. Each point had a name or one of the eight virtues embroidered onto it: faith, hope, charity, love, mercy, peace, kindness and purity, and was done by machine or by hand. For whatever reason, the quilt was never assembled.

As of 2007, of the thirty Sanderson and Dryden Methodists listed on the quilt, only three remained in the area, the late Bill Goldwire, Doris Tollett and Mary Nell Hinkle. Quilting in Sanderson had become a lost art, but Alpine still had a quilting group, the Busy Bee Quilters. In the spring of 2008 the box of squares was taken to Alpine and their quilting group assembled the squares, some 80 years late. The finished quilt came back to Sanderson in time for the



The late Bill Goldwire, Doris Tollett and Mary Nell Hinkle holding the finished star signature quilt at First United Methodist Church in Sanderson. The quilt took 80 years to complete.

Old-Timers Reunion at the 4th of July celebration that year. After the festivities, it was placed in a quilt bag and stored on a quilt rack in the living room of the Museum for the next seven years.

In 2010, I became the curator of the Museum and it was one of the first treasures I admired. But, I left it in the bag and felt I was protecting it by doing so.

Quilts, however, were meant to be seen and enjoyed. In 2015 the historic commission members decided to clean the museum and change some of the displays. On the bed in the bedroom was a tattered chenille bedspread that was gradually disintegrating. My wife insisted that we take that spread off and put the star quilt on the bed. Against my better judgment I agreed, and she was right...the quilt was magnificent; the colors still vibrant even after 80 years.

But, I was worried that Mary Nell Hinkle might not like having the quilt displayed like that. She came to the museum about once a month and I dreaded her seeing the quilt "exposed to the elements."

The day of her visit finally arrived and I swallowed hard, hoping that she would not be too upset. She came in the front door and noticed immediately that the quilt was not in its accustomed place on the rack. She glanced into the bedroom and saw the magnificent red, white and blue quilt shimmering in the afternoon sunlight. She uttered a breathless "OOHH!" and I thought now I'm in for it! But she followed with, "You finally put the quilt out on the bed. Now you can see it as it was intended and you can read the names. Wonderful!" She almost cried...so did I!

A museum can be a dry, lifeless thing, or it can be a feely-touchy, hands-on experience, a celebration of history. When you walk into that bedroom, our star quilt practically jumps in the air in celebration..."Here am I, come look and touch your history!"