



SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

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LEADER TRAINING GUIDE

QUILT AND FABRIC HISTORY FOR SCFCL

A quilt is a bedcover made of two pieces of fabric with some kind of filler between. Simply speaking, the function of a quilt is to provide warmth. Its filler, or batting, may be wool, cotton, or synthetic fibers. The quilt top is the area of creativity and it can be constructed in many different ways. The quilt backing, or bottom layer, is generally one piece or several pieces sewn together with purely functional intent. Uniformly spaced stitches hold the three layers together. Top, batting and backing—these are the raw elements of a quilt.

A quilt is more than fabric, batting and stitches. It is a rare and wonderful creation of the soul which expresses our personal statements, our likes and dislikes, feelings, thoughts and loves. It is a bridge that encourages friendships. It supports our need for recognition as we display it proudly to the applause of its admirers. And it links us with those who have stitched before and those who will follow, as it gives a wordless but meaningful description of who we are and what we feel. A quilt is all these----and more: it is the embodiment of love.

Quilts today are classified into several types ----there are still quilts that are made for very utilitarian purposes---that is for “cover”, specifically for warmth. Many quilters quilt for their families to share their love and they intend the quilts to be used and loved and there are quilters who quilt for their pets—making sure “pooch” has a warm bed. Wonderful old traditional quilt patterns are still reproduced in new fabrics today and they are generally referred to as “traditional “ quilts. Many of the old patterns have been. Many of these quilts are made from scraps that may or may not coordinate in color. Resurrected and new twists on the old designs are also seen. An upsurge of Art quilts is also very prevalent today. These quilts are original designs from the quilters soul – many perhaps from a photo and many inspired by thoughts and feelings that an object has invoked. Wearable art is also seen as a quilt form and can be made into vests, jackets, coats and the like.

Large quilt shows are held all over the world---Australia, England, France---and in the United States in major cities such as Houston and Chicago. These are generally referred to as International Quilt Shows as there are entries from Japan, Virgin Islands, and distant locations. Many vendors attend these shows—2000 to 3000---because there are many attendees from all over the world—80,000 to 100,000---who may not have access to good fabrics and good threads, patterns and ideas. This industry has become a \$17 billion

yearly business according to a recent trade report—of course this includes the new technology sewing and quilting machines and computers that go with the trade.

Many of you will remember the wonderful fabrics of the Roaring Twenties as well as the quilt patterns that were available. There has been quite a resurgence of the 20's and 30's era in what is called "reproduction fabrics". Here is a little history on the "Softer Side of Hard Times" taken from the book *Quilt Revival* by Nancy Mahoney::

In the middle of the Roaring Twenties, as the United States celebrated its 150th birthday, a wave of nostalgia swept the nation. Quilts gained newfound popularity as emblems of a vanishing past. The happenstance of the Great Depression with the national quilt revival of the 1930's provided many with a creative way to "make something of nothing". In the midst of such uncertainty, the quilts stitched with bright, cheery fabrics warmed bodies and minds.

During the Great Depression when money was scarce, quilting became an outlet for self-expression. Although family and friends continued as sources for quilt patterns, women turned more and more frequently to current magazines and booklets for inspiration. Women also created new interpretations of traditional quilt designs by looking at photos from magazines. And some of the most striking designs were made for quilt competitions.

A Century of Progress International Exposition in Chicago in 1933 included a national Quilt contest sponsored by Sears, Roebuck and Company, with a grand prize of \$1000—a generous sum during the height of the Depression. That same year, the Mountain Mist quilt batting company held a three-day quilt exhibit in Detroit. Quilts exhibited at county Fairs also met with increasing enthusiasm.

These quilt shows and many others touched off a demand for quilt patterns. Women began writing to magazines and newspapers for help in finding patterns. Publications, primarily in rural areas, responded to these requests and began printing pictures of quilt blocks accompanied by brief descriptions. Old patterns were often renamed, resulting in multiple names for the same block.

The *Kansas City Star*, the *San Antonio Light*, the *Houston Post* and the *Journal* in Portland, Oregon are just a few of the many newspapers that printed quilt block patterns. By 1934 approximately 400 newspapers featured articles on quilting with the quilt article being the most popular Sunday feature. Many newspapers published syndicated columns under names such as Aunt Martha, Alice Brooks, or Laura Wheeler. Most newspapers printed one quilt pattern a week for at least ten years—a total of 520 quilt patterns! They published old patterns, variations of old patterns, original patterns and variations of original patterns. While some of these patterns were almost unworkable, others provided inspiring new designs, including appliqué and animal motifs. The illustrations commonly showed the blocks made from the combination of many prints with solid colors. The Double Wedding Ring pattern was possibly the most well liked of the period. Other popular patterns included Dresden Plate, Sunbonnet Sue, and Grandmother's Flower Garden.

Enthusiastic quilters often clipped the patterns from the newspapers and pasted them in notebooks or composition books. Readers who wanted full-size patterns sent 10 cents or maybe 15 cents to the local paper, which forwarded the request to a syndicate office. In

return, the quilter received a block chart, carefully drawn pattern pieces, directions for the quilt, yardage charts and illustrations of the quilt.

In the 1930's , women wanted quilts in what were considered modern pastels and cheerful color schemes. Specific colors are seen in almost every quilt from the '30s. Most of the quilts from this period were scrap-bag style; quilters combined all kinds of colors and prints ,pulling them together with white or other solid colors.

Since the mid-1990's , fabric manufacturers have reproduced prints from the '30s due to their ever-increasing popularity.

Old notebooks are continually being found with these old patterns. Should you be so fortunate, they are quite collectable.

Much information is available regarding quilts and their history. Local libraries now feature very good resources and of course the internet has information as close as a click. Quilt shops have replaced many of the old fabric shops and they carry books with ideas galore. More information is available to us than ever before. Some interesting web sites include::

www.quiltuniversity.com

www.quiltersofsc.org

www.quiltshops.com

www.AQSquilt.com

www.thequiltercommunity.com

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