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A mirror to show thy friends to thee: Delaware Valley signature quilts, 1840–1855

Nicoll, Jessica Fleming, M.A.
University of Delaware (Winterthur Program), 1989

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A MIRROR TO SHOW THY FRIENDS TO THEE:

DELAWARE VALLEY SIGNATURE QUILTS, 1840-1855

by

Jessica Fleming Nicoll

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Early
American Culture

May, 1989

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DELAWARE VALLEY SIGNATURE QUILTS, 1840-1855

by
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Signature quilts first appeared in the Delaware Valley in 1841 and sustained their popularity through the mid-1850s. This study is an examination of forty quilts composed of blocks signed by their contributors. The communities represented on these quilts have been reconstructed by tracing individuals through family genealogies, church records, censuses, and newspapers. The composite of these individual histories provides a picture of the type of people who made signature quilts, of the relationships they valued, and of the events they singled out as significant.
THE ORIGINS AND MEANINGS OF SIGNATURE QUILTS

Introduction

Signature quilts first appeared in the Delaware Valley in the early 1840s and enjoyed enormous popularity until the mid-1850s. This study is an examination of a group of forty examples of such quilts made between 1841 and 1855. The quilts are drawn from numerous public and private collections in the Middle Atlantic states and range, in design and craftsmanship, from the average to the extraordinary. The goal of this study was not to isolate unusual quilts, but to locate as many signature quilts as possible and, by comparing their design, authorship, and history of use, to come to an understanding of their roles as symbolic artifacts.

The term "signature quilt" describes any quilt composed of signed blocks. In the 1840s this encompassed two types of quilts—the friendship quilt and the album quilt. A friendship quilt is composed of blocks all worked in the same design (fig. 1). An
album quilt is an assemblage of different pieced and appliqued patterns (fig. 2). These definitions distinguish friendship quilts and album quilts on the basis of formal composition; however, in spite of their aesthetic differences, both types of quilts were made under similar circumstances for similar reasons.

Signature quilts were commemorative artifacts. Many were made by individuals, either for themselves or as a gift for a family member or friend. Many others were made by a group of people for presentation to a member of their community. These quilts were frequently made for special occasions, such as births, marriages, and retirements, but just as often the only circumstance that a signature quilt celebrated was the friendship that linked the individuals represented on it. This last feature is shared by the signature quilts made throughout the United States in the nineteenth century. Whether it was a friendship quilt or an album quilt, individually or communally made, every signature quilt served to preserve the memory of relationships that had once existed.

Because people who participated in the making of a signature quilt symbolically stayed together it is possible today to reconstruct the communities
Figure 1. Album Patch Friendship Quilt, 1843-1844, Mercer Museum, no. 15.
Figure 2. Album Quilt, 1853, Chester County Historical Society, no. 37.
represented on these quilts by tracing individuals through family genealogies, church records, censuses, and newspaper notices. The composite of these individual histories provides a picture of the type of people who made signature quilts, of the relationships they valued, and of the events they singled out as significant.

The Origins of Signature Quilts

In 1844, Sarah Fisher Jackson of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, became engaged to Richard Roberts Green. In anticipation of their marriage, friends and family of the couple made them a friendship quilt (fig. 3). The various makers contributed a total of sixty-one blocks, all pieced in the Variable Star pattern, but each composed of different plain and printed cottons. The blocks were joined with crisp, new, brown chintz sashing, edged with triangles of beige cotton calico, and backed with blue-and-gold glazed, printed cotton. The names of the engaged couple were written on the two center blocks. The other quilt blocks were inscribed with the names of the donors, including thirty-four family members and nineteen of the witnesses to Sarah and Richard's wedding on March 15, 1848.¹
Figure 3. Ohio Star Friendship Quilt, 1844-48, Mercer Museum, no. 20.
The people who conceived of and collaborated on this friendship quilt were participating in a needlework fad that was rapidly gaining popularity throughout the United States. Signature quilts first began to appear in profusion in the early 1840s, beginning in the Middle Atlantic states, where they peaked in popularity between 1841 and 1846. By mid-decade the fad had begun to spread north to New England, south to Virginia, and west to Ohio.

Friendship quilts from all of these areas followed a common formula. Like the Jackson-Green quilt, they were usually made up of a combination of old and new fabrics. Certain block designs were preferred for friendship quilts, particularly Album Patch, Chimney Sweep, and Snowflake, all of which had a square center patch to receive a signature. Album quilts were varied in design, but they, too, often incorporated favored stylized floral applique patterns, such as Oak Leaf and Reel and Rose of Sharon. Regional variations in signature quilts are subtle, usually taking the form of a preferred palette or the predominant use of one block design over all others.

Signature quilts were a fad that was part of the nineteenth-century romanticization and
sentimentalization of friendship. In their form and uses they were much like the autograph albums that were so popular in the 1830s and 1840s (fig. 4). Such albums were keepsakes, used to collect the signatures of friends along with poetic inscriptions and drawings. The rage for autograph collecting was fueled by the commercial availability of decorative leather albums and by the frequent publication, in periodicals like *Godey's Lady's Book*, of verses and dedications for albums.² For example:

Friendship's like the cobler's tie
It binds two soles in unity.
But love is like the cobler's awl
It pierces through the sole and all.³

or:

When I am dead and in my grave
When all my bones are rotten
When this you see remember me
That I may not be forgotten.⁴

The makers of signature quilts showed an obvious familiarity with the vocabulary of autograph albums. Many, like Mary Jane Pancoast of Mullica Hill, New Jersey, who started both an autograph album and a friendship quilt (fig. 5) in the early 1840s, participated in both fads.
Figure 4. Autograph Albums, c. 1840-1880, Joseph Downs Manuscript Collection, Winterthur Museum and Gardens.
Figure 5. Album Patch Friendship Quilt, 1841-1852, Harrison Township Historical Society, no. 3.
Signing the Quilts

The blocks of a signature quilt were like the pages of an autograph album. Each was inscribed with a person's name, often accompanied by drawn embellishments or a commemorative inscription. Unlike an autograph album, the names on a quilt were often written only by one or two people with particularly clear or ornamental handwriting. Writing on cloth with a pen and ink required skill, as demonstrated by the stiffness and bleeding of signatures on quilts where each block is signed in a different hand. Those more practiced in the art of writing on cloth were able to inscribe names legibly and to add decorative flourishes and drawings learned from penmanship practice books. The assistance of an expert scribe was not always appreciated. On a quilt from Bucks County (fig. 6) made in 1845, all of the names were written in black ink in a distinctive wiry script, but Richard and Mary Mattison signed their blocks in vivid blue ink beneath the names written for them by proxy.

The practice of writing on cloth did not begin with signature quilts. One precedent was the centuries-old convention of marking linens with the owner's name or initials and an inventory number. It
Figure 6. Snow Flake Friendship Quilt, 1845, Mercer Museum, no. 21.
was traditional to mark linens with embroidery, using cross-stitch. While this method continued well into the nineteenth century (some of the signatures on quilts are embroidered), by the mid-eighteenth century the alternative of marking linens in ink had been suggested in housekeeping manuals that included recipes for permanent ink. Metal dies for linen marking were first manufactured in the eighteenth century. In 1771, the New York Gazette advertised stamps with:

- cut gentlemen and ladies names, with numbers for numbering linens, and books, wherewith they give either red or black ink which will not wash out and may be used by any person without trouble or inconvenience.

Three years later, Benjamin Bucktrout of Williamsburg advertised in the Virginia Gazette that he sold "Sets of Types for Marking of Linen." Stamps similar to these were used in the 1840s to facilitate the process of writing names on signature quilts (fig. 7). These stamps were cast metal dies that characteristically had a decorative relief frame that surrounded a rectangular slot that held type. The use of type made it possible for different names to be inserted into the die. It is not unusual to find names printed on quilts with letters that were inverted or transposed (fig. 8).
Figure 7. Metal Stamp for marking, c. 1840, Chester County Historical Society.
Figure 8. Detail of stamped name, "Elizabeth Davis," on Album Patch Friendship Quilt (fig. 3), 1841-52, Harrison Township Historical Society, no. 3.
Tin stencils were another tool used to aid in the marking of linens, calling cards, books, and signature quilts (fig. 9). The stencils had names pierced in neat block letters, often written on a slight S-curve and framed by simple designs, such as floral sprays. Dense, indelible ink was dabbed through the stencil using a small, short bristle brush. The stencil created an inscription that easily could be mistaken for hand-lettering, particularly on the textured surface of cloth (fig. 10).

Transmission of the Idea

Stencils, stamps, inscriptions copied from magazines, and drawings copied from books are all part of the vocabulary of the signature quilt. The formulaic nature of these quilts is obvious, but the source for that formula is less so. The idea for a signature quilt is clearly indebted to autograph albums, but who first thought of creating an autograph album in cloth and how did the idea spread so quickly? The sudden appearance of signature quilts in 1841 suggests that there may have been a printed source. Perhaps the idea was first promulgated through a commercial pattern. Designs for piecing could be purchased in the mid-nineteenth century at bazaars and
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Figure 9. Tin Stencil Plate, c. 1840, Chester County Historical Society.
Figure 10. Detail of stencilled name, "Sarah J. Snyder," on quilt block, c. 1850, Harrison Township Historical Society.
fairs. For example, Phoebe George Bradford of Wilmington, Delaware, noted in her diary on December 17, 1835, "I bought...a pattern card for patchwork" at a church fair. A review of contemporary periodicals offers no evidence that they were the source for signature quilts. The first reference to an album quilt in a ladies' magazine appeared in the February 1857 issue of Godey's Lady's Book. Actual instructions for making a signature quilt were published in that periodical in 1864. These delayed references suggest that the concept of a signature quilt originated among quilters and was gradually absorbed into the arena of popular crafts.

The idea for signature quilts was disseminated through communities, families, and organized groups. Three friendship quilts surviving from Cantwell's Bridge, Delaware, from the early 1840s are nearly identical and share a few names in common. Similarly, three quilts from southern New Jersey (nos. 3, 4, and 5) are composed of Album Patch blocks and bear some of the same signatures. In both instances, the makers of the quilts lived in the same region and had the added bond of shared religious affiliation, for they were all members of the Religious Society of Friends.
Signature quilts were particularly popular among the members of church congregations, but they were also made by many other organizations. In this study alone there are quilts made by such diverse groups as the Female Jefferson Total Abstinence Society (no. 6), the Female Society of Philadelphia for the Relief and Employment of the Poor (no. 18), and students of the Oxford Female Seminary (fig. 11). Signature quilts were seized upon by such groups as a way to record their existence. Through them the fad was strengthened and passed on to others.

The Meanings of Signature Quilts

The phenomenon of the signature quilt has all the hallmarks of a fad, with its rapid rise in popularity, its reliance on set formulas, and its limited duration; however, the modish nature of these quilts did not preclude them from serving a serious purpose in answering real social needs. Friendship quilts and album quilts were used to mediate experience by marking major, potentially disruptive, life transitions. The two occasions most commonly marked by these quilts were marriages and departures from a community. Both events involved, to varying degrees, the separation of individuals from people who had
Figure 11. Oxford Female Seminary Album Quilt, 1846, Chester County Historical Society, no. 26.
provided them with a network of support. Signature quilts were made to commemorate events, but at the same time they preserved for the honored individual the memory of communities of which they had once been a part. For example, a friendship quilt was made in 1846 (no. 13) for, and possibly by, Margaret Ann Fenton prior to her marriage to Stephen Dran and her subsequent move with him to New York. The quilt was signed by the bride's friends and family from Buckingham, Pennsylvania, and so became a physical representation of the community that had raised her and would, over distance, continue to sustain her.

Similarly, in 1844, members of the Female Society of Philadelphia for the Relief and Employment of the Poor collaborated on a magnificent album quilt (no. 18) that was presented to Ann Burns at the time of her retirement as matron of the House of Industry after forty years of service. Two years later, students at the Oxford Female Seminary in Oxford, Pennsylvania, made an album quilt (fig.11) as a farewell present for their principal and teacher, the Reverend James Grier Ralston. Both of these quilts were tokens of appreciation made cooperatively as collective expressions of gratitude. All three quilts eased
transitions by giving the recipient a small piece of the community they were leaving to carry with them.

Many other signature quilts were made to counteract disruption by reinforcing familial and communal ties threatened by an increasingly mobile society. Inscriptions on Pennsylvania quilts by people in Ohio and New York speak of separations that were bridged through the quilts. Memorial inscriptions recalling deceased family members were not uncommon on signature quilts. One such block on a wedding quilt (no. 7) made for Samuel Hancock in 1842 is inscribed:

A TRIBUTE TO THE
MEMORY OF MY BROTHER
EDWARD P. HANCOCK
Who in a land of strangers,
Far distant from Relative or friends
Departed this life 8 mo 24th 1839
In Charleston, S.C.
Aged 29 years 11 mos 12 days
There is a calm for those who weep
A rest for weary pilgrims feet
They softly lie and sweetly sleep
Now in the ground

A quilt (no. 34) made in 1850-51 in Berks County, Pennsylvania, has a memorial inscription for "Ellen B. Brimfield/ Aged 77 years," who died before the quilt was completed. Her death was recorded on the quilt with a verse from Longfellow's "A Psalm of Life":

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Art is long, and time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

Signature quilts brought together in one place people who were separated by distance and death. The purpose of the quilts was to keep memory alive, giving comfort to their owners, who could see in them family and friends both near and far.

The desire for solace and the need to recapitulate the past were the motivations for the creation of an extremely unusual friendship quilt top that was begun in 1842 by Eliza Naudain Corbit of Cantwell's Bridge, Delaware (no. 10). Mrs. Corbit was the wife of Daniel Corbit and in the course of her eleven year marriage she bore five children. During the last two years of her life Mrs. Corbit was afflicted with a "lingering illness." As an invalid, she pieced eighty-one blocks for a friendship quilt. The blocks, made of green calico and white cotton, were distributed among Mrs. Corbit's friends and relations to be inscribed before they were joined with brown glazed cotton sashing. Nine of the blocks were sent to Galena, Illinois, to receive the signatures of Mrs. Corbit's sister and her family. Eliza Naudain Corbit was symbolically gathering around her the people
closest to her while she prepared for death. The center block was inscribed with a lengthy verse about the approach of death and readiness for it (see checklist). Mrs. Corbit died in 1844 before the top was quilted.

Signature Quilts and The Quaker Community

The Corbit quilt was inspired by unique circumstances but it shares much in common with the other quilts in this study. Perhaps the most significant concurrence is the fact that this quilt top, like twenty others included here, was made and signed by Quakers (see checklist). The popularity of this quilt form within the Quaker community suggests that, in the Delaware Valley, members of the Religious Society of Friends found the idea of memory quilts particularly compelling. The fad for signature quilts was picked up by Quakers and adapted to serve their needs and ideology. Examined as a group, the twenty-one Quaker-made quilts exhibit stylistic and organizational preferences that were both shaped by and expressive of Quaker beliefs.
Beliefs of the Religious Society of Friends

The Religious Society of Friends was established in England in the mid-seventeenth century by George Fox. Fox's followers became known as Quakers because he bid them "Tremble at the Word of the Lord." Quaker missionaries first came to the American colonies in 1656, establishing Meetings for Worship in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Maryland. Friends began to settle in the Delaware Valley in the 1670s, becoming firmly established there with William Penn's selection of that area for his "Holy Experiment," begun in 1681.

The Religious Society of Friends believed that an Inner Light, God's spirit, lay within every person and through that Light religious truth was known. Quakerism rejected mediating forms of worship, such as the use of ritual or scripture to shape and interpret religious experience, and relied instead on the direct apprehension of God. Although the emphasis was on introspection and individual revelation, Friends worshipped silently together, believing that God's presence could be felt more immediately in a group. A strong sense of community was fostered by the practice of group worship. This unity was reinforced by the
Quaker belief that all people were equal since they all possessed the Inner Light. Consequently, no social or economic hierarchies were recognized within the Society of Friends, nor was one sex presumed to be superior to the other.  

In his book, *Friends for 300 Years*, historian Howard Brinton identifies what he believes are the four basic testimonies of Quakerism: simplicity, equality, peace, and community. By adhering to these tenets, Friends hoped to avoid all behavior that contradicted the dictates of Christian love or blocked the direct experience of the Truth. These testimonies manifested themselves in the physical environment as well as in Quaker behavior. Ideally, material possessions sustained a sense of equality and community by avoiding excesses of worth or quantity.  

Plainness of speech and dress was advocated by the Society of Friends as a means of expressing equality and avoiding worldly concerns that could obstruct the Light. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Quaker quilts were plain in that they were made of muted, solid-colored fabrics; however, the quilts were usually constructed of costly silks. Quaker silk quilts, like signature quilts, were
frequently associated with weddings, either made in anticipation of one or made of scraps of wedding dresses. Consequently, their survival may be attributed to their largely decorative and commemorative functions. They cannot be assumed to be representative of all early Quaker quilts. The fact remains that most known Quaker quilts made before 1825 are silk, representing a significant display of wealth even as they avoid flamboyance of color of design.

Historians have long been aware of the discrepancy between the material plainness advocated by the founders of the Society of Friends and that practiced, or not practiced, by members of the Society. Quaker furnishings frequently incorporated fine and costly materials, signifying wealth and a certain social rank, into a style that embodied Quaker ideology or distinguished Quaker artifacts from all others. Quaker silk quilts, although not economically modest, are unmistakably Quaker, with a distinctive palette of greens and beiges, a precision of workmanship, and a spare and elegant unity of design.

Values Reflected in Quaker Signature Quilts

Quaker quilts made after the first quarter of the nineteenth century were usually made of calicoes,
showing little adherence to the century-old admonition to "be Careful about Making, Buying, or Wearing . . . Striped, or Flower'd Stuff, or other useless & Superfluous Things". Delaware Valley Quaker signature quilts cannot be described as plain, made as they are of brightly colored printed cottons. Many of them retain the traditional Quaker color scheme of olive green and beige, but as many are worked in a kaleidoscopic array of calicoes. Quaker quiltmakers tended to choose the simpler patchwork patterns, like the Album Patch or star variations, rather than the more elaborate pieced and appliqued designs found on non-Quaker quilts. Also, the majority of Quaker signature quilts—eighteen out of the twenty-one in this study—are composed of blocks worked in the same design. The sameness of the blocks lends a unity to the quilts that is in sharp contrast to the riotous exuberance of album quilts.

Equality and Community

Quaker values manifested themselves in signature quilts more symbolically than aesthetically. The use of identical blocks not only gave the quilts a formal coherence, but presented an image of a unified community. On the quilts, the purpose of which was to
preserve the memory of specific people and relationships, individuality was not emphasized but was presented as an incremental part of a whole. Thus, the Quaker testimonies of equality and community were affirmed by these signature quilts which were composed, like the Quaker community, of discrete but equal units. Community was extremely important to Friends in experiencing and sustaining the Inner Light and in providing a network of support in the face of a morally corrupt and worldly society. The friendship quilt reinforced the Quaker community, first by bringing friends and family together for the cooperative production of the quilt, and then by providing a lasting record of that group.

Family

Ideologically, Quaker friendship quilts presented an image of a unified and cohesive society while functionally, they are records of significant social relationships. The Quakers were a recording people, taking detailed minutes at their Meetings, and keeping copious family genealogies and histories. Signature quilts accommodated this penchant for record-keeping. Quaker-made quilts record much larger groups of people than other quilts and present a more
complete community picture by including the names of men, women, and children. The communities that these quilts describe are composed predominantly of family members. On all but one of the twenty-one Quaker quilts, and that one was made by a female relief organization (no. 18), roughly two-thirds of the signers were related to the recipient. This familial emphasis is unusual for signature quilts in general, but is in keeping with the values and structure of the Quaker community.

In her essay "The Quaker Connection," Nancy Tomes analyzed the visitation patterns of Quaker women in late-eighteenth-century Philadelphia. She found that because Friends practiced endogamy (marriage within the Society), kinship did not threaten religious solidarity but served to reinforce it. Tomes was struck by the wide range of kin interacting in the same social arena. Similarly, a great variety of relatives are represented on Quaker signature quilts, including grandparents, great aunts and great uncles, aunts and uncles, first and second cousins, nieces and nephews, as well as parents and siblings.

Another student of Quaker history, Barry Levy, has described the Quaker family as the critical social
unit in perpetuating the Religious Society of Friends. The Quaker home environment was one of peace and love in which children could be nurtured and reared as the new generation of Quaker faithful. Consequently, marriage took on the importance of a sacred ritual, for that event meant the creation of new families and the sustenance of faith. Although marriage was the critical event in Quaker life, other transitions, such as birth, puberty, and migration were also recognized as important to the life of family and community. Events that were recognized through rituals like baptism and confirmation in other religions were met with secular observance among Friends. The gathering of family and friends to celebrate a marriage, birth, or retirement, or the making of commemorative artifacts like signature quilts to mark such events, were ways of mediating those experiences, distinguishing them as significant and imbuing them with specific meaning and memories.

The value placed on the family by Quakers is made explicit in one of the most unusual quilts in this study (fig. 12). This unquilted top, bearing dates of 1842 and 1843, was made to mark the occasion of the birth of a daughter, Sarah, to Caroline and Caspar Wistar Pennock after seven years of childless marriage.
Figure 12. Pennock Album Quilt, 1842-43, Chester County Historical Society, no. 8.
Caspar Pennock, a descendant of a prominent Chester County Quaker family, spent his adult life working in Philadelphia as a physician. He was disowned as a Quaker for marrying Caroline Morris, whose father had been disowned in 1795 for "joining in measures of a warlike nature." Carbon and Caspar were married out of Meeting on December 17, 1833. Although Caspar Pennock was no longer a practicing Quaker, his family was, and it was they who made the quilt for Sarah Wistar Pennock, born on January 5, 1840. The resulting quilt top is in essence a family icon. It records an extensive family network and is emblazoned with drawings that illustrate the Pennock history. The center block of the quilt top bears a beautifully drawn picture of Primitive Hall, the original family homestead in West Marlborough Township, built in 1738 by Joseph Pennock (fig. 13). Beneath this is a drawing of the family coat-of-arms, and the uppermost block is inscribed with the genealogies of Caroline Morris and Caspar Wistar Pennock, written on the pages of a book. This book is signed "C. W. Pennock/ To His/ Daughter/ 1842," his gift to her being a visual record of the family into which she had been born.

Another example of a Quaker signature quilt as an expression familial loyalty is one made for Sarah
Figure 13. Detail of center block of Pennock Album Quilt (fig. 12), showing drawing of Primitive Hall (West Marlborough, Pennsylvania), 1842-1843, Chester County Historical Society, no. 8.
Mitchell Gawthrop in the mid-1850s (fig. 14). Sarah's parents, Daniel and Elizabeth Gawthrop, died in 1837 when she was seven years old. Sarah and her orphaned brother and sisters (aged one, three, and five) were taken in by grandparents and great aunts and uncles in southern Chester County, Pennsylvania, and New Castle County, Delaware. Roughly fifteen years later, Sarah's family gathered to make a friendship quilt for her as she reached adulthood. The quilt survives today, in the care of Sarah's great-granddaughter, as testimony to the strength and importance of the extended Quaker family.

Social Forces Affecting the Quaker Community

The first half of the nineteenth century was a time of social upheaval both within and without the Society of Friends. As the social order became increasingly frenetic and segmented, the informal networks that had held people together were weakening and so needed to be formalized. Signature quilts were a way to reify community, that is, to represent it as a material thing, thereby strengthening networks of social support by depicting them as a tangible reality.

The Orthodox-Hicksite Separation of 1827 splintered the Religious Society of Friends, rupturing
Figure 14. Cross and Crown Friendship Quilt, c. 1854, Private Collection, no. 40.
a fellowship that had been based on unity. Broadly stated, the separation was brought about by the evolution of two sects of Quakers with incompatible interpretations of the nature of Quakerism. The Orthodox, who tended to be an urban economic elite, advocated a formal religion that emphasized belief rather than behavior. They sought to alter the behavioral code to give themselves more freedom to participate in worldly affairs, suggesting that material success was an indication of spiritual progress. These changes were untenable for Hicksites, the followers of Elias Hicks who remained faithful to the basic testimonies of Quakerism, so they separated from the Orthodox in 1827.

Seventy percent of the Quakers in the Delaware Valley joined the Hicksite sect. The majority of the Hicksite members were farmers and craftsmen living outside of Philadelphia. Consequently, at the time of the separation, the Hicksites were more economically threatened than the Orthodox, feeling the impact of the decline in hand labor and the rise of industrial specialization. During the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Hicksites were the more mobile of the two sects as they migrated to the city in search of employment.
Of the Quaker quilts in this study, all except one (no. 18) were made by Hicksites. The popularity of these quilts among Hicksites is understandable, for they affirmed the traditional values adhered to by the Hicksite sect. Direct reference to the Orthodox-Hicksite separation is made in an inscription on the Eliza Naudain Corbit quilt (no. 10):

The sects divide and subdivide again
Like rivers seeking still the main
The nice distinction lies but in the name
For virtue truth and goodness are the same.

Signature quilts also served the Hicksites by helping to sustain networks that were threatened as people uprooted themselves in search of employment and personal opportunity. Thus, the quilts speak of the disruption they symbolically attempted to impede.

The tension within the Quaker community between urban and rural life, and prosperity and simplicity, was manifested in Quaker signature quilts. The three Quaker album quilts (nos. 7, 8, and 18) in this study are the only Quaker quilts made by or for people living in Philadelphia. As album quilts, they are naturally more flamboyant than friendship quilts, and these three incorporate more expensive fabrics than any of the other Quaker quilts. Each of these quilts is
expressive of the fact that they were made by or for people living in an urban area where ostentatious display was a way of signifying social position.

A case in point is the quilt made for Samuel P. Hancock in 1843 as a wedding present. Hancock was a Quaker, born and raised in New Jersey, who moved to Philadelphia where he became a successful lumber merchant and much later, city comptroller. His bride, Charlotte Gillingham, was the sister of Hancock's cousin's husband, Samuel Gillingham, a man with whom Hancock did business. Hancock's wedding quilt is composed of a vibrant array of pieced and appliqued blocks, incorporating cotton and silk, rich embroidery, and fine drawing. Of the seventy-five signatures, sixty-two belong to Samuel's relatives, most of whom were still living in southern New Jersey.

This quilt is strikingly idiosyncratic when compared to another Quaker quilt (fig. 5) that bears eighteen of the same family names, including Samuel Hancock's (fig. 15). This quilt was made in 1841 for Mary Jane Pancoast, Samuel's cousin, and was signed by her family and friends from Mullica Hill, New Jersey. It is a typical Quaker friendship quilt, with all the blocks pieced in the simple Album Patch pattern. Based
Figure 15. Detail of the signature of Samuel P. Hancock on Album Patch Friendship Quilt (fig. 3), 1841-52, Harrison Township Historical Society, no. 3.
on the visual evidence, it is hard to believe that the same people were involved in the production of two such different quilts, yet both quilts represent the same family network. The quilts formally acknowledge the different social positions of the two recipients, one a prominent Philadelphia businessman, the other a young country woman.

Summary

The Quaker album quilts expressed through their opulence different values than friendship quilts, but like their more modest counterparts they served to strengthen the Quaker community. The Quaker quilts in this study illustrate how one group in the Delaware Valley fixed upon signature quilts as a way of countering the disruptive forces that were weakening their networks of social interdependence. All signature quilts, Quaker and non-Quaker alike, served this purpose to some extent. They recorded and perpetuated the bonds of friendship and fidelity that held people together. As Elizabeth A. Hays of Burlington, New Jersey, wrote on a quilt (no. 1) in 1841:

Friendship's purposes preserved
May this forever be
And as a mirror it will serve
To show thy friends to thee.
These quilts were mirrors, or maps of particular segments of society. They combined, in a more or less harmonious whole, numerous squares representing the various individuals in a social network. The women who pieced them, the friends and relatives whose names they bear, and the individuals for whom they were made all participated in a single community, and one such community is reflected in every signature quilt.
NOTES


3. Inscription on quilt no. 1.


12. Two of these quilts are nos. 9 and 10. The third is in a private collection and was not included in this study.

13. Interview with Mrs. D. Meredith Reese (great granddaughter of Eliza Naudain Corbit), 11 December 1985, Wilmington, Delaware.


15. Wilson, Philadelphia Quakers, pp. 4-9.


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APPENDIX

Checklist of Quilts

The following list of the quilts used in this study is arranged chronologically. Each entry lists the type of quilt and the pattern used, the maker and recipient if known, place of origin, date, number of signatures (and primary family names), materials, size in inches (height preceding width), number of quilting stitches per inch, and the quilt's location. "Album quilt" refers to quilts composed of many different blocks, and "friendship quilt" describes quilts made of blocks all worked in the same design.

1. Sawtooth Friendship Quilt
Philadelphia and southern New Jersey
1841
29 signatures (Hammell, Hays, Fenton, Kelley)
Cotton; 118" X 107.25"
8 stitches/inch
Private Collection

2. Reel Variation Friendship Quilt (fig. 16)
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
1841-1843
34 signatures (Bussiere, Hood, Whartenby)
Cotton; 105" X 123"
6-7 stitches/inch
Chester County Historical Society
Figure 16. Reel Variation Friendship Quilt, 1841-43, Chester County Historical Society, no. 2.
3. Album Patch Friendship Quilt (Quaker) (figs. 5, 8, 15)

Made for, and possibly by, Mary Jane Pancoast
Mullica Hill, New Jersey
1841-1852
49 signatures (Pancoast, Griscom, Bradway, Hancock)
Cotton; 95" X 95"
7 stitches/inch
Harrisonville Township Historical Society

This quilt shares eighteen signatures in common with
no. 7, five with no. 4, and five with no. 5. Many of
the blocks bear pen and ink drawings as well as
signatures, some of which resemble the rough, scratchy
drawings that appear on no. 4.

4. Album Patch Friendship Quilt (Quaker)

Woodstown, New Jersey
1842
32 signatures (Davis, Engle, Pancoast)
Cotton; 111" X 100"
5-8 stitches/inch
Salem County Historical Society

The white cotton backing of this quilt is stamped "30
YDS/ WARRANTED SEA ISLAND." Sea Island cotton was a
long fiber cotton (with fibers averaging two inches in
length) grown on the islands off the coast of the
Carolinas. The cotton was silky fine but very strong,
resulting in cloth renowned for its superior quality.

5. Album Patch Friendship Quilt (Quaker)

Harrison Township, New Jersey
1842-43
85 signatures (Gaunt, Coles, Kirby, Horner)
Cotton; 108" X 120"
7-8 stitches/inch
Private Collection

There is strong evidence that this quilt was
collaboratively made by a large group of people. The
top is composed of eighty-one blocks and four
additional blocks are sewn onto the back of the quilt,
an oversight in planning that would not have been made
by one person. None of the blocks is pieced from the

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same fabrics except those contributed by husband and wife (four in all).

6. **Album Patch Friendship Quilt**

Made by the Female Jefferson Total Abstinence Society
Presented to the daughters of the Reverend Thomas P. and Anna Hunt
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
1842
62 signatures
Cotton; 94" X 97"
7 stitches/inch
The Atwater Kent Museum (77.160)

7. **Wedding Album Quilt (Quaker)**

Possibly made by Charlotte Gillingham
Made for Samuel Padgett Hancock
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey
1842-43
75 signatures (Pancoast, Hancock, Bradway, Gillingham)
Cotton chintz, satin, brocade, and chiffon silk; 97" X 127"
Philadelphia Museum of Art (45.35.1)

This quilt was made as a gift for Samuel P. Hancock in anticipation of his marriage to Charlotte Gillingham in 1843. The use of the same fabrics throughout and a consistently eccentric sense of design and craftsmanship suggest that this is the work of only one person. The quilt bears signatures mainly from Hancock's family in Salem, New Jersey. Eighteen of the same names appear on the friendship quilt of Hancock's cousin, Mary Jane Pancoast (no. 3). Most of the inscriptions include a name, date, and location, and some of them are memorials, such as:

In Memory of My Sister
Beulah P. Ogden
Who departed this life
7mo 4th 1828
Her memory is the shrine
Of pleasant thoughts soft
As the scent of flowers.
8. Album Quilt Top (Quaker) (figs. 12, 13)

Probably made by Isabelle Pennock Lukens
Made for Sarah Wistar Pennock
Philadelphia and Chester County, Pennsylvania
1842-43
23 signatures (Pennock, Lukens)
Cotton, silk, and paper; 66" X 66"
Chester County Historical Society (133)

Twenty-two of the twenty-five blocks of this quilt top were elaborately pieced using the English method. This involved basting fabric around paper templates and then whip stitching the pieces together. The quilt top still retains its paper templates. One block is worked in a traditional Quaker design with beige, green, and plum silks (it is unsigned). Many of the blocks bear detailed drawings, including a sketch of Primitive Hall, the family homestead, a drawing of the Pennock coat of arms, and a transcription of the family genealogy. The unusual complexity of the piecing and the uniform skillfulness of the drawings indicates that this is the work of one person, probably Isabelle Pennock Lukens, the family artist, who signed many of the blocks.

9. Snow Flake or Mountain Peak Friendship Quilt (Quaker) (fig. 17)

Cantwell's Bridge (Odessa), Delaware
1842-43
30 signatures (Cowgill, Frazer, Lovering)
Cotton; 90" X 83"
8 stitches/inch
Historic Houses of Odessa, Delaware (71.1365)

10. Snow Flake or Mountain Peak Friendship Quilt Top (Quaker)

Made by Eliza Naudain Corbit (1810-1844)
Cantwell's Bridge (Odessa), Delaware
1842-44
81 signatures (Eddowes, Naudain, Hayes, Cowgill, Corbit, Brinton, Frazer)
Cotton; 102" X 102"
Historic Houses of Odessa, Delaware (71.1317)

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This top was made by Eliza Corbit during the last two years of her life, which were spent as an invalid. The center block is inscribed with a verse about preparing for death:

Thus far the Lord hath me on,
Thus far his power prolongs my days,
And every evening shall make known
Some fresh memorial of his grace.

Much of my time has run to waste,
And I perhaps am near my home,
But he forgives my follies past,
And gives me strength for days to come.

I lay my body down to sleep,
Peace is the pillow for my head,
While well-appointed angels keep,
Their watchful stations round my bed.

Thus when the night of death shall come,
My flesh shall rest beneath the ground
And wait thy voice to touch my tomb
With sweet salvation in the sound.

11. Evening Star Wedding Friendship Quilt (Quaker) (fig. 18)
Made for Sarah Brock and Josiah Hart (m. November 24, 1842)
Doylestown, Pennsylvania
1842-1850
72 signatures (Brock, Watson, Jones, Taylor, Hart)
Cotton; 107" X 124"
6-12 stitches/inch
Mercer Museum (82.10.1)

12. Friendship Quilt, Quaker
Chester County, Pennsylvania
1843
49 signatures (Baldwin, Davis, Sharpless, Way)
Cotton; 96" X 101"
5 stitches/inch
Chester County Historical Society (40)
Figure 17. Detail of Snow Flake Friendship Quilt, 1842-1843, Historic Houses of Odessa, Delaware, no. 9.

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Figure 18. Detail of Evening Star Friendship Quilt, 1842-1850, Mercer Museum, no. 11.
13. Nine Patch Friendship Quilt (Quaker)

Made for, and possibly by, Margaret Ann Fenton
Buckingham, Pennsylvania
1843
81 signatures (Fenton, Michener, Marple, Snyder)
Cotton; 105" X 105"
7 stitches/inch
Mercer Museum (26439)

14. Album Patch Friendship Quilt

Made for A. Branin
Southern New Jersey
1843-44
58 signatures (Branin, Chew, Gibb)
Cotton; 106" X 106"
7-10 stitches/inch
Private Collection

15. Album Patch Friendship Quilt (Quaker) (fig. 1)

Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
1843-44
30 signatures (Hutcherson, Lukens, Michener,
Kenderdine, Walton, Shoemaker)
Cotton; 102.5" X 111.5"
6-9 stitches/inch
Mercer Museum (26698)

16. Album Patch Friendship Quilt (Quaker)

Woodstown, New Jersey
1843-45
36 signatures (Taylor, Sheppard, Slim)
Cotton; 86" X 85"
6 stitches/inch
Private Collection

17. Nine Patch Variation Wedding Friendship Quilt
(Quaker)

Made for Susan Michener and Eli Engle (m. 1846)
Bucks County, Pennsylvania
1843-46
49 signatures (Michener, Rowland, Engle, Norton)
Cotton; 108" X 108"
Mercer Museum (82.08.01)

18. Album Quilt (Quaker)
Made by members of The Female Society of Philadelphia for the Relief and Employment of the Poor
Made for Ann Burns
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 1844
76 signatures
Cotton; 108" X 108"
Arch Street Meeting House

The Female Society for the Relief and Employment of the Distressed was formed by a group of Quaker women in 1793 to aid victims of the yellow fever epidemic. A House of Industry was opened in 1798, providing employment for needy women. This quilt was made for the matron of the House of Industry at the time of her retirement after forty years of service.

19. Evening Star Friendship Quilt (Quaker)
Made for Mattie Fell
Bucks County, Pennsylvania 1844-1847
42 signatures (Fell, Smith, Parry)
Cotton; 54" X 86"
7 stitches/inch
Mercer Museum (69.37)

20. Ohio Star Wedding Friendship Quilt, (Quaker) (fig. 3)
Made for Sarah Fisher Jackson and Richard Roberts Green (m. March 15, 1848)
Bucks County, Pennsylvania 1844-48
61 signatures (Jackson, Foulke, King, Green)
Cotton; 97.5" X 110"
5-9 stitches/inch
Mercer Museum (75.22.01)
21. Snow Flake or Mountain Peak Friendship Quilt  
(Quaker) (fig. 21)
Bucks County, Pennsylvania  
1845  
85 signatures (Phillips, Mattison, Davison, Ely)  
Cotton; 106" X 103"  
8-10 stitches/inch  
Mercer Museum (84.02.01)

22. Wedding Album Quilt
Made for Martha Iliff and Jacob Krewson (m. 1845)  
Bucks and Montgomery Counties, Pennsylvania  
1845-47  
47 signatures (Wetherill, Iliff, Krewson, Suplee)  
Cotton; 103" X 97"  
6-7 stitches/inch  
Mercer Museum (64.28)

23. Cock's Comb Friendship Quilt Top
Talleyville, Delaware  
c. 1845-55  
4 signatures (Tally)  
Cotton; 87" X 87"  
Private Collection  
This unfinished quilt top has thirty-six blocks appliqued with eighteen different red calicoes.

24. Album Patch Friendship Quilt
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and New Castle County, Delaware  
c. 1845-1855  
36 signatures (Rittenhouse, Lott, Belles, Hoff)  
Cotton; 85" X 85"  
7-8 stitches/inch  
Private Collection

25. Appliqued Fleur-de-lis Friendship Quilt  
(Quaker)
Chester County, Pennsylvania and Cecil County, Maryland
26. **Album Quilt (fig. 11)**

Made by the students and teachers of the Oxford Female Seminary
Made for the Reverend and Mrs. James Grier Ralston
Oxford, Pennsylvania
1846
36 signatures
Cotton; 100" X 100"
10 stitches/inch
Chester County Historical Society (1985.17)

The Oxford Female Seminary was founded in 1837 for the purpose of training young women to be teachers. An 1841 school brochure listed required courses, among them, reading, plain and ornamental penmanship, English grammar, composition, general history, algebra, botany, Biblical, Grecian, and Roman antiquities, intellectual and moral philosophy, rhetoric, and logic. This quilt was made as a farewell present for the seminary's departing principal and teacher, the Reverend James Grier Ralston.

27. **Album Patch Friendship Quilt**

Dover and New Castle, Delaware
1846
53 signatures (Janvier, Johns)
Cotton; 101" X 107"
Historical Society of Delaware (1985.23)

28. **Album Quilt**

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
1846-47
52 signatures (Wattson, Ricketts, Butcher, Rhees, Shewell)
Cotton; 96" X 105"
8-10 stitches/inch
Philadelphia Museum of Art (82.134.1)

Most of the blocks of this quilt are inscribed with passages of scripture, poems, and memorials. Many of the messages have a morbid tone, such as, "Rest neath this quilt and rest in heaven," and "We bloom today, die tomorrow."

29. Album Quilt
Made by Milcah C. Pyle
Made for Sophia Pyle
Delaware County, Pennsylvania
1848
37 signatures (Pyle, Hurford, Offner)
Cotton; 98" X 102"
8-9 stitches/inch
Private Collection

30. Album Patch Friendship Quilt
Chester County, Pennsylvania
1848
42 signatures (Wells, Pennypacker, Hiem)
Cotton; 88.5" X 106.5"
7 stitches/inch
Chester County Historical Society (57)

31. Appliqued Fleur-de-lis Friendship Quilt Top
Southern New Jersey
1848-1858
36 signatures (Dare, Bailey, Boon)
Cotton; 85" X 85"
Salem County Historical Society

32. Reel Friendship Quilt (fig. 19)
Made for William W. and Emza Jackson
Chester County, Pennsylvania
1850
49 signatures (Livezey, Jackson, Speakman)

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Cotton; 83" X 83"
8 stitches/inch
Chester County Historical Society (1981.15)

The center block of this quilt is worked in the Oak Leaf pattern and is inscribed "William Jackson/ Emza Jackson/ September 30th 1850," followed by a verse. The surrounding blocks are appliqued with diverse red calicoes in the reel pattern. The blocks on the left side of the quilt are signed by men and those to the right are signed by women. Pairs of blocks contributed by couples are worked in identical calicoes.

33. Album Patch Friendship Quilt

Chester County, Pennsylvania
c. 1850
49 signatures (Baldwin, Jefferis)
Cotton; 90" X 103"
7 stitches/inch
Chester County Historical Society (37)

34. Ohio Star Friendship Quilt (Quaker)

Probably made by Martha Lee
Made for Elizabeth Moore
Stonersville, Berks County, Pennsylvania
1850-51
36 signatures (Lee)
Cotton, silk, linen; 96" X 96"
8 stitches/inch
National Society of the Daughters of the Revolution Museum (84.11)

35. Chimney Sweep Friendship Quilt

Southeastern Pennsylvania
c. 1850-60
42 signatures (Laubach, Cressman, Gearhard)
Cotton; 103" X 103"
7 stitches/inch
Mercer Museum (73.41)

36. Chimney Sweep Variation Friendship Quilt

Southeastern Pennsylvania
Figure 19. Detail of Reel Friendship Quilt, 1850, Chester County Historical Society, no. 32.
c. 1850-1860
16 signatures
Cotton; 87" X 97"
5-7 stitches/inch
Historic Houses of Odessa, Delaware (85.47)

37. Album Quilt (fig. 2)

Christiana, Delaware
1853
25 signatures (Bush)
Cotton; 93" X 101"
10 stitches/inch
Chester County Historical Society (58)

38. Album Quilt

Chester County, Pennsylvania and New Castle County, Delaware
1853
30 signatures (Heald, Lemmon, Moore)
Cotton; 97" X 97"
5-7 stitches/inch
Private Collection

39. Brunswick Star Friendship Quilt (Quaker) (fig. 39)

Made by Hannah Warner Forwood
Made for Sallie A. Forwood
Kennett Square, Pennsylvania
1854
82 signatures (Forwood, Warner, Hanway, Heyburn)
Cotton; 91" X 91"
8 stitches/inch
Chester County Historical Society (36)

The center block of this quilt is inscribed "Sallie Annie Forwood/ Kennett Square/ November 22nd 1854."
The adjoining block was signed by Sallie's fiance, Issacher Edwin Hoopes. The couple was married in Philadelphia on December 5, 1855.
Figure 20. Brunswick Star Friendship Quilt, 1854, Chester County Historical Society, no. 39.
40. Cross and Crown Friendship Quilt (Quaker)  
(fig. 14)

Made for Sarah Mitchell Gawthrop  
Southern Chester County, Pennsylvania  
c. 1854  
27 signatures (Gawthrop, Mitchell, Huey)  
Cotton; 100" X 86"  
7 stitches/inch  
Private Collection