

“Crazy Quilt”

Circa 1900

This striking “Crazy Quilt” was created circa 1900 by May McDonough. Measuring 58 x 64 inches, it is of the typical and traditional “Crazy Quilt” style. It is pieced together with a featherstitch where stitch patterns are unique and different from their neighboring stitch patterns. Ms. McDonough won a blue ribbon at a local competition with this piece of art.

Crazy quilts were popular from the late 1800s through the early 1900s. They featured irregular shaped pieces of fabric sewn to a foundation fabric and then outlined with embroidery stitches. The most elaborate crazy quilts were made of silk satins and velvets and heavily embroidered with images of flowers and animals.

Crazy quilting does not actually refer to a specific kind of quilting (the needlework which binds two or more layers of fabric together), but a specific kind of patchwork lacking repeating motifs and with the seams and patches heavily embellished.

The featherstitch and its countless variations create feathery straight or undulating lines and fall in the category of looped stitches. The featherstitch is actually a variation of the blanket stitch, but it alternates from one side to the other.

The history of the featherstitch is long and impressive, dating from the mid-eighteenth century when Welsh and English peasants used it to decorate their smocked work garments. Late- nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century samplers featuring dressmaking and fabric repair processes often contained featherstitches as decorative line patterns or in the actual hemstitching.

On Loan from the Fort Smith Museum of History
FSMH Textile Collection No. 1284
Donor: Lizzie Meyer

Silk “Puff” Quilt

Victorian Era 1876-1914

This silk “Puff” Quilt or “Biscuit” quilt was pieced and hand stitched by Mrs. Z. A. “Aunt Rose” Woods of Fort Smith. It is intricately designed with individual 1 ½ x 1 ½ inch squares of multi-colored silk fabrics stuffed with cotton to make the “puff”. Quilt measures 75 ½ x 70 inches.

The donor makes note of her grandparent’s residence on Free Ferry Road in Fort Smith as part of her history about the quilt.

The Biscuit pattern, also known as a “puff quilt,” was one of the most popular quilts of the American Victorian Era, 1876-1914. They were most commonly made of satin and velvet and were considered a sign of social position and affluence. Due to the fabrics used, they were not very practical and were often used more as bed covers or decorative pieces. For this reason, many of these beautiful creations have survived in good condition.

This technique was also quite the fashion for sofa pillows. “Puff” or biscuit quilts, especially those made of silk, tend to be from the golden age of silk show quilts, 1880-1900. They were considered quite elegant at one time.

The 1970s saw a resurgence of the “Puff” quilt when recycling and getting back to the earth was in vogue. It was only natural that women reused nylons to stuff the pillows that made up a biscuit quilt.

On loan from the Fort Smith Museum of History
FSMH Textile Collection No. 1994-7-1

Donor: Louanna Green, Granddaughter of Mr. and Mrs. Z. A. Woods.

“Classified” Quilt

Circa 1920s

Lovingly crafted by Bessie Rutz in the 1920s for members of the First Methodist Church in Fort Smith, this “Classified” quilt is a blue and white cotton fabric with white squares embroidered with a Daisy pattern, the petals in yellow and the names in blue. Blue binding surrounds the entire quilt.

Noted in the history of the quilt, “In the 1920s, members of the First Methodist Church in Fort Smith, sold squares to local merchants for advertising purposes. Many church members sold space, but the design and sewing were completed by Bessie Rutz. The quilt was publically displayed so that the advertisers could see their names on the quilt and others could see their support of the church.” When the quilt had served its original purpose, it was given to Mrs. Rutz in recognition of the many hours she spent in making the quilt.

According to the donor notes, “Mrs. Bessie Roberts Rutz was born in 1887 on a farm near Van Buren, Ark. In 1906, she married Leonidas Randolph Johnson, who died in 1907, leaving her with a small baby son, Leonidas, Jr. Bessie Johnson taught school and in 1908 met and married Peter Moses Rutz. Peter was close with his stepson and gave him his name.

In 1931, Mr. and Mrs. Rutz moved to Washington D. C. to care for their granddaughter. They returned to Fort Smith often. Mr. Rutz died in Washington in 1970, Mrs. Rutz in 1973. Mrs. Rutz was an accomplished needlewomen, family historian, and booklover. She helped design and make costumes for one of Washington’s best known ballet schools.”

On loan from the Fort Smith Museum of History

FSMH Textile Collection No. 1985-2-2

Donor: Marilyn Rutz Peterson

Family Heirloom Quilt

Circa 1870s

This fragile heirloom quilt was pieced and quilted circa 1874 when the later Mrs. R. L. Kelton was 14 years old. Mrs. Kelton was the wife of R. L. Kelton who was an organist for forty years at Trinity Episcopal Church in Van Buren. The quilt was passed down through the family until it was donated to the Fort Smith Museum of History when it was known as the Old Commissary Museum.

The quilt is cotton and measures 66 x 76 inches.

On loan from the Fort Smith Museum of History
FSMH Textile Collection NO. 1417
Donor: Mrs. Will Reynolds

Woven Native American Trade Blanket

Circa 1880-1900

Trade blankets were small blankets similar to a shawl, modern throw blanket, or lap blanket. Whether woven by a Native American or mass-produced by American woolen mills on a Jacquard loom, the blanket is a constant of Native American life and it is inextricably tied to the tradition of trade in the Southwest. To this day, the rituals tied to blankets are part of Indian life from birth to death: blankets are given to celebrate births, marriages, christenings. The Native Americans use blankets to pay off debts, to show gratitude, or to indicate status. Blankets have been used as temporary shelter, as curtains or awnings, for warmth and for adornment. Native Americans cradle their babies in blankets, they dance in blankets, and when they die, often they are buried in their blankets.

The blanket has *always* been an integral part of Native American life. Historically, Indian people wore blankets made from woven plant fibers, animal hides and fur and eventually from fabric woven by hand from wool or cotton. Long before the advent of white settlers, Native Americans traded blankets in exchange for other goods; therefore, to accept commercially made blankets such as Pendleton Trade Blankets from Europeans in trade for beaver pelts was a natural transition.

The pre-World War II blankets were light, warm, inexpensive and easy to replace . . . and were therefore really *used*. As a result, few have survived in good condition.

The blanket is a symbol of warmth and friendship. The action a wrapping someone in a blanket is a statement of kindness and a demonstration of honor. In Native American traditions, a blanket is used to create and seal relationships.

On loan from the Fort Smith Museum of History
FSMH Textile Collection: Woven Native American Trade Blanket