

June 2007

From Martha Trescott: What I am particularly wondering is whether other countries than the U. S. have any extensive history of **quiltmaking**. If, in fact, as some have suggested, American quilts are integrally tied to slavery (and, of course, cotton) maybe not. Maybe quilts are mostly an American innovation? It is what I've always understood, but is that the case?

From Gail Cooper: Here is the citation for quilts and the underground railroad. There has been challenges to the authors's claims. *Hidden in Plain View : A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* by Jacqueline Tobin, Raymond Dobard (Anchor Books, 2000).

From Christine Ehrick: You might look at the material on Chilean arpilleras. It's not exactly quilt making, in that these are wall hangings rather than bedding, but the technique is similar. I would recommend Marjorie Agosin *Tapestries of Hope: The Arpillera Movement in Chile, 1974-1994*.

From Irina Aristarkhova: I am not a specialist on quiltmaking, but can contribute a couple of small things in response to your question about this practice in other countries:

1) One Russian source claims that in ancient Rome slave-owners, when giving new clothes to slaves, used to take back their old clothes to make quilts, to make sure that slaves would not 'accumulate' anything. This is a rough quotation from the following web-site titled "Slavery in Ancient Rome":

http://school76.yar.ru/menu/work/history/drim_1s.htm

2) From my personal experience - this has been a common practice in Russia for a long time, and I personally grew up with a tradition of making and seeing quilts. My grandmother made it, my mother made it (a long time ago), plus I made it for my dolls (also a long time ago:). Not very sure what the situation is here, in the US, but I've seen quilts (both for commercial and personal use) in various parts of Europe, plus in some parts of Asia. Unfortunately, I cannot provide exact references or factual material, but if I find out more in my upcoming trip to Moscow, I will write back later this summer.

From Arwen Mohun:

I just saw the new quilt exhibition at Winterthur. They had several extraordinary examples of 17th and 18th century quilts made by commercial quiltmaking workshops in Europe (particularly Marseille). Zillions of tiny, tiny stitches--far more labor intensive than the already labor-intensive quilts by American quiltmakers displayed in earlier parts of the exhibit. I had the realization that at least some of the quilts made by American middle class women in the late 18th and early 19th century were homemade replications of the white-work quilts they'd seen as imports. The exhibition is worth a visit if you're in the Wilmington, DE area.

From Barbara Reeves:

Today I found myself in the Women's Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery on one of the last days of the "Faces of the Fallen" exhibit, over 1300 [out of 3500...] artist-commissioned, uniform-sized portraits of those killed in our current wars. politics aside, it was a very moving collection, and also interesting because of the great variety of artistic styles on display.

But my point is to report on a quilt on display in an adjacent room, made by the women of the USNS Comfort, one of the two largest navy hospital ships, that was deployed to the persian gulf from january to june 2003 to treat casualties of operation Iraqi freedom. The quilt is 11.5x12 feet. displayed under it was an information board with what is apparently a unique book of photographs and descriptions of the process of designing and making it.

Subsequently I found a poster of the quilt in the gift shop, which you can see here: [http://www.womensmemorialstore.com/4D.acgi\\$DetailPICT.6.501.11](http://www.womensmemorialstore.com/4D.acgi$DetailPICT.6.501.11) Because they were on sale for \$1, I bought three and will be pleased to mail them to whoever is in need of a large reproduction. As you can see from the link, you can also order the poster from the shop itself.

The Women's Memorial is also a research center, although there seem to be few quilts: <http://www.womensmemorial.org/H&C/Collections/collections.html>

From Rachel Maines: Yes, there have been times and places when/where men made quilts: when armor was quilted, men were often the quilters; also, if you look under subject heading "Quilts" in WorldCat, you will find a reference to male professional quilters in Britain in 1720.