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From Useful Craft to Works of Art: The Transformation of Quilting in the United States from the Nineteenth Century, 1893-1933

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From Useful Craft to Works of Art: The Transformation of Quilting in the United States from the
Nineteenth Century, 1893-1933

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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Master Candidate, **Victoria Crozier**, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the master thesis for the M.A. during this **Spring Semester 2018**.

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Abstract

Quilting in the United States transitioned from a useful home craft to an art form from the late 1800s to the mid-1900s in response to industrialization. Before industrialization, quilting was seen as a primarily women's craft and because of that was not given respect as an art form. During industrialization the American people had a nostalgia for times past because of fast paced growth, and therefore quilting and other home crafts started to become more prevalent. This nostalgia led to the start of the Arts and Crafts Movement in the United States that brought home crafts such as crochet, needlework, and quilting to the forefront. A major paradox of industrialization was that businesses started to see a possibility for profit and started promoting and manufacturing new quilting technologies and supplies to market to American women. So quilting became more popular because of a nostalgia for simpler times without the quick advancements of new technologies but without the big businesses creating the new technologies to make quilting cheaper and easier, then quilting would not have been as prominent. Singer Sewing Machine did this in the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 where no quilts were displayed but new sewing machines and fabrics were both major exhibits at the fair. In the forty years that followed the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 popularity in quilting started to grow. This was due to the advent of mail order catalogs and fabrics being available for very cheap due to industrialization providing the factories to create it and the ability to ship all around the United States. Quilting was finally recognized as an art during the Chicago World's Fair of 1933 because of the Sears Centennial Quilt Competition. It was the largest quilt competition ever held with over 25,000 women submitting quilts. The large prizes offered and the mass coverage that the contest had in the press made the American people appreciate and see quilting as an art. Because of the major influence of the Sears Centennial Quilt Competition, folk arts became

accepted. That led to the creation of Folk Art Museums around the world and now quilts and other home crafts are on display in art museums and accepted as part of the folk art world.

Keywords: Quilting, Industrialization, Home Crafts, Folk Art

Introduction

Alma Irene Hull Cummings started to design a quilt in Scotch Ridge, Iowa in 1933 to be entered into the largest quilt competition ever held. The quilt contained beautiful appliqué flower motifs on a simple white background pieced together with brightly colored cotton thread. A simple farmer's wife was able to create such a beautiful and vibrant quilt. Cummings lived on her family's farm in central Iowa from the late 1800s until her death in 1977, and in her lifetime she created several hundred quilts that she lovingly gave to friends and family. She was a voracious quilter who also sold her beautiful quilts as extra income, and according to a family story she entered the Iowa State Fair and won so many times that the judges asked her to stop entering.¹ The immense number of quilts created by Cummings are a perfect example of how cheaper materials manufactured during industrialization helped to make quilting a popular and even lucrative pastime for women. In the early 1800s, a hand sewn appliquéd quilt was rare and valuable and would be considered an exceptional family heirloom. As industrial development continued into the 1900s more and more quilts, such as Cummings' works, were created from affordable fabrics and cloths due to the industrialization.

What is little understood, though, is why the tradition of quilting survived through the age of industrialization when it was no longer required for people to create blankets by hand. It had become far easier and cheaper to have machines do the quilting. Historians have looked at the history of quilting and how it was transformed when fabrics such as cottons became more readily accessible to the masses of the United States.² To understand how quilting was able to transition

¹ Merikay Waldvogel, and Barbara Brackman, *Patchwork Souvenirs of the 1933 Worlds Fair* (Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press, 1993), 30.

² See, for example: Roderick Kiracofe and Mary Elizabeth Johnson, *The American Quilt: A History of Cloth and Comfort 1750-1950*. (Clarkson N. Potter, 2004). International Quilt Study Center & Museum, *American Quilts in the Industrial Age, 1760-1870: The International Quilt Study Center and Museum Collections*. (Lincoln, NE: 2018). Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of the American Myth* (New

from useful trade to an art form that was supported by big businesses historians need to understand the paradoxes that industrialization created in the quilting world. The most prominent paradox was that people quilted more because of a nostalgia for the past, but modern quilting was dependent on modern industrial technologies. So it is important to see how the change in the market transformed quilting from a useful trade to an art form.

The most visible representation of quilts being appreciated as art is the start of quilts being displayed in museums and art exhibits. The American Folk Art Museum in New York City did not get its start until 1961, but the first recorded quilt on display at a museum was in the early 1890s. The National Museum of American History displayed three quilts that formed the beginnings of The National Quilt Collection in the 1890s for example.³ The collection only started to grow once younger generations in the 1900s and later began to recognize the craftsmanship and historical importance of protecting the quilts thanks to the rise of the Arts and Crafts Movement. The transition from homemade necessity to folk art is an important transition in the history of American quilting and can shed light on the significant moment of industrial change in the United States and on the transformation of women's work. Looking at quilting can help show the transition of women's work during industrialization because quilting was seen as female work. The changes in quilting being needed in the home to being easily produced in factories parallels how working class women's work also transitioned from only being in the home to being needed to earn money outside of the home. It also parallels upper and middle class women's role change because before industrialization they were mainly homemakers and their role was in the home, but industrialization also brought an advent to women being more visible

York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2002).T.J Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

³ National Museum of American History "About the National Quilt Collection".
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/gsearch/quilts>.

in public life. To be able to understand the transition of quilts into folk art this paper will focus on the original descriptions of the quilts by the National Quilt Collection that explain the historical significance of the quilts, who created them, and the families that donated the quilts; varies newspaper and magazine articles depicting quilting through the 1930s; and an analysis of the quilts and other handmade objects that were on display at the Chicago World's Fairs in 1893 and 1933. The origins of the quilts can shed light on the reason quilts came to be considered works of art.

Before industrialization, most women quilted or participated in needlework. Women of all statuses had to quilt, but it was the women that received no formal education due to poor economic circumstances or having been born into working class families that used quilting to showcase the skills they were able to learn. Women who lacked the resources to either attend school or send their children to school would create quilts that would be teaching aides. The quilts could show the letters of the alphabet, or create images as a way to show specific tales to teach morals. Many of the quilts, in the words of historian Carol Edelson, "had complicated geometric designs and required patches of exact size so that they would match perfectly."⁴ With the start of the Industrial Revolution fabrics and other quilting supplies became far cheaper and more accessible through large department stores and even the start of catalog orders. This meant that fine fabrics and other specialty items to create more decorative quilts were available to anyone that could get a quilting or women's magazine.

The first chapter explores quilting at the advent of the industrial age in the United States. It was in the early 1800s that quilting was used to showcase talent or to explore various quilting techniques such as applique or intricate needlework being incorporated into a quilt. The new

⁴ Carol Edelson. "Quilting: A History." *Off Our Backs* 3, no. 8 (1973): 13-14.

techniques started to become popular because many white Americans from varying social classes were becoming nostalgic for the past due to the increasing modernization in the United States. Immense modernization was spreading throughout the country, which was helping to improve American life, but because there was so much change so quickly it brought a rise in longing for a simpler time when things did not move so fast. Of course people were looking at the past through rose-colored lenses and missed a time that never truly existed. Nevertheless this started making things such as quilting circles and charity quilting bees very popular throughout the country. The nostalgia for the past also contributed to the start of the Arts and Crafts Movement, which brought emphasis to crafts that were not seen as artwork before, such as quilting.⁵ This was the rise of the quilting market and made selling quilting supplies a profitable industry. Once big businesses started to see that quilting to earn them profit a market for quilting supplies started to grow exponentially. The beginning of buying supplies through magazines was in the middle to late 1800s partly due to the rise in quilting, women wanting the most modern supplies and most fashionable quilting patterns available, and because both mass production and an improved communication and transportation network that allowed for mail order supplies which lowered the cost of supplies.⁶ In the late nineteenth century, as quilting becoming more popularized in the United States, Chicago held their first World's Fair to showcase a modern American city. Though quilting was not officially featured the Chicago World's Fair, it played a significant role in American quilting, which is explored in the second chapter.

⁵ Sarah Morrell. *Album Quilt*. American Folk Art Museum, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, United States. In *Folk Art Museum Collection*, 1843.

⁶ Elizabeth V Warren, "Quilts and Embroidery, 20th Century." In *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 23: Folk Art*, edited by Carol Crown and Cheryl Rivers (University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 173. http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.shu.edu/stable/10.5149/9781469607993_crown.45.

Creating the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 was incredibly difficult at every turn. There was no part of the planning that went smoothly, it took far too long to decide where in Chicago the fair would be built, and there were major disasters throughout the process. Yet somehow through all the problems and politics the Chicago World's Fair opened and it ended up being a great success. One of the important buildings at the Chicago World's Fair was the Women's Building that featured inventions, innovations, and creations that women had an important role in producing.⁷ Quilting was not featured there because the women on the planning committee did not think it was important enough and was seen as menial work versus innovations in science that women were involved in.⁸ Even though quilting was not represented, there were numerous important works that featured quilting throughout the entire fair. There were displays of handmade fabrics, curtains, furniture, and many other crafts that were in fact quilted. Singer Sewing Machines were an important investor in the Fair and had advertisements throughout and a major display in one of the buildings as well.⁹ It was because Singer Sewing Machines was such an important investor in the Chicago World's Fair that personal quilt machines became far more popular and affordable over the next 40 years. So even though quilting was not technically one of the displays of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, the fair still showcased American quilting by starting to display quilted works and helping to jumpstart new quilting technology in the personal quilt machines. The significance of the first Chicago World's Fair was in businesses starting to market new quilting technologies and supplies. It was the advertisements and businesses at the First Chicago World's Fair that made quilting significant enough to be

⁷ Erik Larson, *The Devil in the White City; Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that Changed America* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2004).

⁸ Jeanne Madeline Weimann, *The Fair Women: The Story of the Womans Building, Worlds Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893*(Chicago, IL: Academy Chicago, 1981).

⁹ Fernald Fredrick, "Household Arts at the World's Fair," *The Literary News* (New York, NY), October 1893.

prominent in the second Chicago World's Fair. It was only a mere forty years later that the largest quilt show in American history was held at the second Chicago World's Fair.

The final chapter focuses on how the largest quilt competition came to take place, and how that show affected American quilting in the modern age. Chicago decided it was ready to let the world in again to show once more the advances made in America only forty years after the first successful World's Fair. The second fair was to honor Chicago's one-hundredth birthday and to show one hundred years of progress.¹⁰ Quilting had become exceedingly more popular since the last World's Fair because of the many companies relying on the sales of quilting supplies. Sears was one of the largest companies with one of the most significant amount of quilting supplies for sale. Because of this, Sears, with the approval of the Fair Committee, decided to hold the Sears National Quilt Contest that offered thousands of dollars in prizes. The competition had a few simple rules and encouraged women to design quilts with the theme "A Century of Progress" to match the World's Fair. Over 25,000 women submitted quilts for the competition, with only the top winners having their quilts on display at the fair. The competition showed the amazing talent that American women had in quilting. There was an incredible amount of variety in the quilts that were submitted; some were made from pre-made patterns but some were original works that the artists designed and created themselves.¹¹ The quilting patterns and new design combinations that were created because of this fair helped to influence quilters in the modern age. Without the enormous influence and acclamation of the Sears National Quilt Competition at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933, American quilting would not be what it is today. Quilting in the United States saw significant changes from the early 1800s to the

¹⁰ Merikay Waldvogel, and Barbara Brackman. *Patchwork souvenirs of the 1933 Worlds Fair*. Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press, 1993.

¹¹ Waldvogel and Brackman, *Patchwork souvenirs of the 1933 Worlds Fair*.

1900s because of industrialization. The creation of a quilting market due to the rise of appreciation of arts and crafts was what made quilting an art form and kept it alive and popular in the modern age.

Chapter One: The Rise of Quilting in the Nineteenth Century

Quilting started off with humble beginnings in America: it was strictly a need-based craft. Quilts were made to be used for bedding and to cover windows or doors that were not well covered or insulated to help keep heat in the home instead of escaping out. During the early eighteenth century, American women had little time to focus on creating artistic and creative quilts. Though there was a market to buy quilts or handcrafted lace coverlets, most American colonists did not spend money on such imports. If money was scarce, families would use scraps of fabric to piece together quilts to help keep them warm. Quilting was seen as strictly women's work and creating a quilt took take a woman months or even years depending on the design. Early quilts usually consisted of small scrap pieces of fabrics and old clothing which were usually made out of either wool or linen. Women would incorporate old quilts that were falling apart into newer quilts by adding them to the middle to add extra warmth.¹² Of course, as more advancements and wealth started to come to America, quilting started to spread from the poor families to the middle class and wealthy families and started to become a leisure activity for women from wealthier families that could afford to take time for themselves. Wealthy families were able to either import or afford to buy blankets and quilts for warmth.

The spread of quilting from poor families to wealthier families was seen from the late eighteenth century into the nineteenth century. Many middle and upper class women had few options for employment outside of teaching, nursing, or charitable social work and therefore enjoyed leisure activities in the home. One of the most predominant activities was quilting and needlework, a craft studied by women in all walks of life. Elizabeth Stone wrote in her book *The Art of Needle-Work, from the Earliest Ages; Including Some Notices of the Ancient Historical*

¹²“History of Quilts”, Quilting in America, <https://www.quilting-in-america.com/History-of-Quilts.html>.

Tapestries, published in 1842, that “If there is one mechanical art of more universal application than all others, and, therefore, of more universal interest, it is that which is practiced with the needle. From the stateliest denizen of the proudest palace, to the humblest dweller in the poorest cottage, all more or less ply the busy needle.”¹³ Although there was a large divide between the quilts and needlework created by upper class women and those created by working class women, Stone portrayed needlework as an activity that united women of all classes.

Upper and middle class women had the time and money to be able to create beautiful and very intricate quilts that could be displayed prominently in the home but rarely used. Working class women did not have that luxury, and all the quilts made by them were used regularly and therefore fewer have survived in good condition to the present time. Even with this loss, the elaborate quilts that have survived give great insight into the importance and abundance of quilting in the lives of American women. Some important examples from the National Quilt Collection show the immense work put into creating the quilts and show how important it was as an activity in the lives of the women. Looking at the quilts held in the National Quilt Collection paired with advertisements and patterns produced in women’s magazines during the nineteenth century show how interest in quilting was growing because of the number of quilts from the time and evolving fashions and styles that quilting went through.

Women’s roles in particular changed greatly during industrialization. Upper class women’s role changed with industrialization through the creation of the cult of domesticity and the ideology of separate spheres. The cult of domesticity was a value system that emphasized new ideas of woman's role within society. The perfect women lived up to four main virtues: piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness. Upper class society also believed in the idea of

¹³ Elizabeth Stone and Mary Margaret Stanley Egerton Wilton, *The Art of Needle-Work, from the Earliest Ages; Including Some Notices of the Ancient Historical Tapestries* (London: H. Colburn, 1842), Preface.

separate spheres. The male sphere was at work earning a living and supporting their family, but a women's sphere was in the home. Women were expected to make the home a haven for the men to come home to escape the harsh outside world. Interestingly, women were able to become more involved in society because of the cult of domesticity. Women justified their presence and involvement in society by saying that they were exerting their virtues into society to make it better.¹⁴ This actually allowed women upper class women to have a new kind of freedom in their lives. Working-class women also became more visible in society because they were encouraged to seek work outside of the home. They were encouraged to do so because they were able to obtain more money by working at a factory than creating clothing or other goods at home. Of course many of the women ended up working as garment workers in factories versus doing similar jobs in their home. This did not necessarily stop women from going home and continue to quilt at home. Garment workers still needed to mend their family's clothes and quilting was engrained in many of the women's lives that some continued to do so as a hobby or sold hand quilted goods while working in a factory as well. So it was not just middle and upper class women that were partaking in quilting as a hobby.

Important trends that quilting went through in the 1800s included things such as crazy quilts and the advent of block quilting. Crazy quilts were bright and vibrant quilts that were made of many different odd shaped fabric pieces. They started to become popular because of the easy production of many types of fabric due to the rise of industrialization in the early nineteenth century. Most households now were able to afford fabrics in a variety of colors and patterns. This encouraged women to piece together quilts with no discernable pattern, but would group different fabrics of varying sizes together and then embroider extra designs along the borders.

¹⁴ Barbara Welter. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 151-74.

This fashion was encouraged by women's magazines and they even offered tips and some design ideas for crazy quilts.¹⁵ The amount of work that was put into the crazy quilts was the catalyst for the creation of quilts for being hung on the wall or created as only a throw blanket to be seen and not used.¹⁶ Some prime examples of crazy quilts are a part of the National Quilt Collection such as the Copp Family's Framed Center Pieced Quilt¹⁷, and Taunay Family's Framed Center Quilt Top.¹⁸ Both works are elaborately pieced and each piece of fabric was selected and cut meticulously. The Taunay Family's quilt features "elongated hexagons around a center square printed with a chinoiserie design. The hexagonal pieces are joined by minute overcast stitches sewn with linen thread"¹⁹ while the Copp Family's quilt features a more common design with "a succession of borders framing a center panel of pieced work."²⁰ Many of these elaborate quilts could take years to complete, but that opened up a market for a new way of quilting that was simpler and would help save time, block quilting.

Block quilting is creating a quilt by one block pattern at a time, a technique that is still popular and the most common method. Women could buy quilt patterns that showed how to create elaborate quilts by putting together simple blocks. Many patterns were offered free in the women's magazines which added to the popularity of the new method of block quilting.²¹ Women were able to create an array of crazy quilts with new block patterns that had become popularized in magazines. An example of such a quilt in the National Quilt Collection is a Pieced

¹⁵ Dulcie Weir, "The Career of a Crazy Quilt," *Godey's Lady's Book*, July 1884, 77.

¹⁶ Lena Rivers, "Chat with our Neighbors on Home Topics," *Godey's Lady's Book*, September 1888, 33.

¹⁷ *Copp Family's Framed Center Pieced Quilt*, 1790 - 1810, National Quilt Collection, National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center, Washington DC, in *The National Museum of American History*.

¹⁸ *Taunay Family's Framed Center Quilt Top*, 1800-1815, National Quilt Collection, National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center, Washington DC, in *The National Museum of American History*.

¹⁹ National Quilt Collection, *1800-1815 Taunay Family's Framed Center Quilt Top* Description.

²⁰ National Quilt Collection, *1790-1810 Copp Family's Framed Center Pieced Quilt* Description.

²¹ "Three Summer Quilts." *Godey's Lady's Book*, July 1864. Accessible Archives.

Quilt from the early nineteenth century that has a 17-inch center block and appliqued with various array of shapes including floral, geometric, and heart shaped designs. Around the center design are five pieced borders.²² The new emphasis on elaborate quilting started the tradition of quilting groups, or a Quilting Bee.

A Quilting Bee was a group of women who would meet to socialize, compare their latest works, and quilt the same works together.²³ During Quilting Bees the women maintained a lively discussion and would discuss everything from their current projects, to their families, and what the news around town was. Quilting Bees were a way for women to socialize. Plummer T. Pettway, a working class woman and a member of a large quilting circle from the early 1800s until her death, described their quilting parties by saying “Talk about talk! I don’t know what all we don’t talk about! Oh, that’s fun.”²⁴ Quilting bees and parties became popular for groups of women of all classes. The first quilting bees were started by women mimicking the life style of women from the colonial era. Interestingly, quilting bees were not a common practice in the 1700s. It was not until the 1800s that quilting bees became a more common occurrence. Working class women focused more on creating quilts that would be used every day use as described by Plummer T Pettway: “Quilting keeps you warm. I don’t quilt for pretty – quilt them to cover up with.”²⁵ This was a distinctly different attitude from what more affluent women in America were accomplishing in their Quilting Bees. The groups that came from more wealthy lifestyles would create far more elaborate quilts that had embroidery, applique, and patchwork patterns. The groups would hold charity events in order to raise money for causes they believed in by holding

²² *1800 - 1850 Pieced Quilt*, 1800 - 1850, National Quilt Collection, National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center, Washington DC, in *National Museum of American History*.

²³ Carol Edelson, "Quilting: A History." *Off Our Backs* 3, no. 8 (1973): 13-14.

²⁴ Maude Southwell Wahlman, "Pettway, Plummer T." In *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 23: Folk Art*, edited by Carol Crown and Cheryl Rivers (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 380.

²⁵ Maude Southwell Wahlman, "Pettway, Plummer T." In *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 23: Folk Art*, 380.

small quilting competitions and dinners. The large more influential groups would even be recorded in local newspapers and women's quilting magazines. For example, the *Vincennes Gazette* in February 1861 reported on "The Quilt Party and Supper, given by the ladies of the Episcopal Church" to describe the event and its major success.²⁶ Another fun way that women participated in quilting groups was dressing up in colonial garb and reenacting what they believed a quilt bee would have been like for the early settlers in America.²⁷ The women played at being in colonial America, but of course their reenactments of quilting circles from the 1700s were not very similar to what would have historically happened. The women would be creating quilts with patterns that were not popular during the colonial times. They would be using modern day fabrics with many different bright colors and patterns that did not exist until much later in history. Quilting bees did encouraged an interesting type of quilting which was adding onto older quilts created by other family members or friends. Examples of quilts that multiple generations of women worked on can be found in the National Quilt Collection, a perfect example of a quilt is one created by Mary Jessop.

The quilt that Mary Jessop made contains appliquéd motifs on a simple white background pieced together with linen thread.²⁸ What is more interesting about the quilt top besides the dedication she put into creating it is that "the corners, with chintz motifs printed about 1830 and sewn with cotton thread, were added later."²⁹ The quilt was started by Mary Jessop at the end of the eighteenth century was later added to and finished by female family members in the mid nineteenth century. Such activities show the new importance put on quilts as family heirlooms. A

²⁶ "The Quilt Party and Supper." *Vincennes Gazette*, February 9, 1861. Accessible Archives.

²⁷ "The Quilting Bee?" World Quilts: The American Story.
<http://worldquilts.quiltstudy.org/americanstory/creativity/quiltingbee>.

²⁸ Mary Jessop, "1800 - 1850 Mary Jessop's Appliqued Quilt Top", National Museum of American History.

²⁹ National Museum of American History. "1800 - 1850 Mary Jessop's Appliqued Quilt Top Description".

quilt that was once used for warmth was later added to and became an important piece of art to the family, and it was in a way a family tradition that helped bring older and younger generations together. To the families that had these heirlooms they saw them as artwork which was a step towards people seeing all quilts as art and not just treasured family quilts.

Women's magazines helped along the increasing interest in quilting and embroidery in the nineteenth century. To capitalize on that market, magazines started to include an abundance of quilting, embroidery, applique, and patchwork patterns with every issue. A prime example of such a magazine was the popular *Godey's Lady's Book*, which was published throughout the nineteenth century. In most issues one or two patterns were provided for women to use either individually or as a quilting group. Some patterns included were instructions for crochet star, crochet leaf³⁰, and summer quilts.³¹ The magazine had more than quilting and embroidery, it provided articles on information from fashion, to sheet music. Even though it started off as a simple magazine it eventually "matured into an important literary magazine containing extensive book reviews and works by Harriet Beecher Stowe, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and many other celebrated nineteenth century authors who regularly furnished the magazine with essays, poetry and short stories."³² It was a reputable magazine that was circulated to over 100,000 people.³³ It was the first major magazine with quilting patterns of the time, but it was not the last. Once others saw how well *Godey's Lady's Book* sold, many others followed in their footsteps and produced quilt patterns of their own. Many of the publications would hire needlework editors "specifically to find designs that would

³⁰ "Crochet Star for Quilt, Crochet Leaf for Quilt." *Godey's Lady's Book*, August 1868, 168.

³¹ "Three Summer Quilts." *Godey's Lady's Book*, July 1864, 79.

³² "The Complete Godey's Lady's Book - 1830-1896." Accessible Archives Inc. <http://www.accessible-archives.com/collections/godeys-ladys-book/#>.

³³ "The Complete Godey's Lady's Book - 1830-1896." Accessible Archives Inc.

appeal to their women readers.”³⁴ The popularity of the quilt patterns in magazines brought about another business: mail order quilt patterns and designs.

It was not until the late nineteenth century that the first mail order business was started, but the industry still exists today and is flourishing. The first company to offer mail in orders was the Ladies’ Art Company, which was founded in 1889.³⁵ The company flourished well into the twentieth century and offered a wide range of services “including printed patterns, stamped quilt tops, complete kits, and even finished quilts.”³⁶ It was due to businesses being able to find ways to make a profit on quilting during the age of industrialization that helping quilting thrive into modern times and be seen as more than just a hobby. Industrialization provided the mass production of the materials needed for quilting, and new transportation technologies allowed these materials to be shipped to customers across the country at much cheaper rates than ever before. However, it was the arts and crafts revival movement that helped to make quilting into a reputable art form.

Another important step in quilting becoming an art in the United States was the arts and crafts movement, which was started in England and spread through Europe and North America. The movement focused on reviving the decorative hand crafted arts.³⁷ In the United States the emphasis was on craftsman styles of furniture, architecture, and decorative arts such as needle work.³⁸ Though there was not a specific emphasis for quilting, the movement still aided quilting to be elevated to an art form. An important reason for the revival of hand crafts came from a dwindling of art during industrialization. Art had started to fade because many new machines

³⁴ Elizabeth V Warren, "Quilts and Embroidery, 20th Century," in *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 23: Folk Art*, edited by Carol Crown and Cheryl Rivers (University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 173.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Rosalind P. Blakesley, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Phaidon, 2011).

³⁸ Eileen Boris, *Art and labor: Ruskin, Morris, and the craftsman ideal in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

were able to produce products much faster than a craftsman could. Furniture and quilts could be produced in a quarter of the time for half of the price, so it had started to take its toll on the art world. John Ruskin was a leading figure during the arts and crafts revival and he described it best when he said “Life without industry is guilt; industry without art is brutality.”³⁹ This quote gets to the heart of the Arts and Craft Movement because it sums up the belief that humans need art because without the creation of art and beautiful things, then men are nothing more than brutes scrambling to survive and obtain more wealth. Art helps show people the beauty of the world and the importance of creation to enjoy things in life and not just to create things to be sold. Ruskin was an artist and an important art critic of the age. He was greatly respected by his peers and his opinion held great weight within the art community. Ruskin was greatly respected and had influence due to the arts and crafts movement because it had gained immense momentum. His opinion was important enough that his suggestions helped to shape the Arts building in The Centennial International Exhibition of 1876, which was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.⁴⁰ The Centennial International Exhibition was one of the first major displays of handcrafted works by women. The exhibit included “wood-carvings, furniture-making, and ceramics; fancy articles, clothing, woven goods...”⁴¹ It was an important part of the fight for women’s equality because it showed women’s creations as equally as important to men’s creations. It also showed the influence that the arts and crafts movement was having on America and its views on what was considered art.

³⁹ John Ruskin, Boris, Eileen, *Art and labor: Ruskin, Morris, and the craftsman ideal in America.*

Ruskin's dislike for industrialization's dampening of the arts in the United States was supported by many of his peers, and through this they started the arts and crafts movement around 1860⁴². The Arts and Crafts Movement did prioritize male artists over female artists even though women outnumbered the men in the Arts and Crafts Movement.⁴³ The reason the women artists were undervalued even though they were encouraged to take up the arts was because "women were considered executants of the designs created by men, rather than talented creators themselves."⁴⁴ Even with the large bias against women's works, it was this movement that laid the groundwork for the rise in quilting being considered an art. Dianne Ayres describes this moment best in the book *American Arts and Crafts Textiles*: "While quilt work was at an ebb in its popularity during the Arts and Crafts period, the movement fostered achievements that brought about the popular revival of quilting for decades to follow."⁴⁵ She also explains how at this time that the members of the arts and crafts movement were becoming selective in what was seen as art and what was seen as a house hold item; they "were not always comfortable with the quality and design of the typical household cloth and textile production."⁴⁶ Better and more artistic quality was becoming expected of crafts and that shows a major change in attitude. The middle to late nineteenth century is where the shift from home production to art is seen for needlework and other handcrafts, and quilting followed soon after with the start of more competitive quilting groups and shows.

Once the Arts and Crafts Movement was widespread in the United States, competitive quilt shows could be found in almost every state thanks to the movement's influence. The layout

⁴² "Arts and Crafts Movement," The Design Museum, January 8 2018, <https://designmuseum.org/design/arts-and-crafts-movement>.

⁴³ Maria R, "Arts and Crafts Movement - When Women United in Creativity", Widewalls, <https://www.widewalls.ch/arts-and-crafts-movement-women-artists/>.

⁴⁴ Maria R, "Arts and Crafts Movement - When Women United in Creativity".

⁴⁵ Dianne Ayres, *American Arts and Crafts Textiles* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 194.

⁴⁶ Ayres, *American Arts and Crafts Textiles*, 8.

and judgments of the quilts has not altered much from the early days of quilt shows. Ribbons were handed out to the best quilts; prizes are awarded; the quilts were out on display for the public to see; every quilt on display was created with hours of hard work; and many of the patterns were very similar if not the same. Quilting competitions showed just how far quilting had come since the start of the industrial age. The work that was put into each piece was now being recognized as a craft and a form of art and not just a hobby for women to do together as they gossiped. Of course a certain level of skill was expected of the pieces. The artists were devoted to creating the best works they could and have them displayed for the public to see, and hopefully win a prize. Even men were starting to become a part of quilting and needlework.⁴⁷

Quilting was always viewed as a woman's craft. They were in charge of mending clothing, creating needle point, and making blankets for the home. Once quilting became prominent through the nineteenth century, and quilt competitions started to arise that offered cash prizes to the winners, men started to become more interested in quilting as an art and not just a craft. A *New York Times* article from 1885 describing a quilt show opening up states "Some gentlemen have sent in specimens of their skill in what is usually considered strictly a ladies' accomplishment, and they will contest the gentler sex on their own ground for a share of the 800 special prizes."⁴⁸ It was not a small fee either: winning in a competition could be rather lucrative for the winners because there were "Gold and silver medals and cash prizes, amounting in all to \$3,000," and admission was charged to everyone wishing to view the displays.⁴⁹ Even though men quilting was rare, it was not unheard of at the time. One of the earliest and most famous male quilters was Joe Hedley, who lived from 1750-1826 and was well known in

⁴⁷ "A Crazy Quilt Show," *The New York Times*, November 6, 1885, 8.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

England for his very inventive and creative quilt designs.⁵⁰ The author Florence Peto in 1939 wrote a book that profiled seven famous male quilters and noted that “Men have shown a disposition to be inventive in their quilt creations.”⁵¹ Male quilters were seen as more craftsman and artists for participating in quilting. This reflects the same ideas as the Arts and Crafts Movement were many of the leading figures were men and it was not until later on that women did gain the respect as artists for their crafts. The few men who did quilt at this time learned to do so backwards. Men were more likely to come up with an idea for a quilt design and then learn the skills to make it happen afterwards, but women typically were taught the basics of quilting and come up with creative designs once they had the skills mastered.⁵² Another prominent difference between male quilters and female quilters was that the men were from working class families or from poor backgrounds and would get into quilting due to one of two main reasons. The first reason was men would create quilts to enter into competitions that offered money and prizes, and the second was due to long periods of confinement such as prison or the army where they needed to fill large portions of time but were unable to do typical male activities.⁵³

Because the increase of interest in entering quilt shows from both men and women, the shows were treated like true art displays with protections in place to make sure the hand crafted arts were not touched or ruined by the attendees. For example, a show set up in New York City in 1885 was described as:

All around the walls of the hall runs a row of booths, arranged like those at a fair. In front of them runs a substantial polished brass railing to prevent people from pushing in among the costly and delicate pieces of needlework. Each booth has its walls and ceiling

⁵⁰ Julian Jefferson, “Quilting,” *MarGorsson Classic Contemporary Craft*, <http://margorsson.com/Quilting/>.

⁵¹ Florence Peto, *Historic Quilts* (New York: The American Historical Company, Inc., 1939), 115–136.

⁵² Jean Burks and Joe Cunningham, *Man-Made Quilts: Civil War to the Present* (Shelburne, Vermont: Shelburne Museum, 2012), 1, 10-26.

⁵³ Burks and Cunningham, *Man-Made Quilts: Civil War to the Present*.

composed of crazy quilts and robes, while similar articles hang in graceful folds between the booths. On the floors of the booths are rich rugs, and upon these rest sofa pillows. Pincushions, work baskets, screens, chairs, and, in short, all kinds of articles which admit of ornamentation with fancy needlework.⁵⁴

Hand-made crafts being displayed in such a way that it resembles that of an art gallery was a new phenomenon in the quilting world. Some quilts were even becoming famous and considered an honor to have displayed. For example “a famous autograph quilt, which has been exhibited in a number of places and has been regarded as a great curiosity.”⁵⁵ The quilt was created by Mrs. Emma F. Wright who sent pieces of silk fabric to different important people across the world, including Queen Victoria, and received the fabric back with their signatures. She pieced the quilt together and sent it to be displayed at numerous shows and competitions. It was such an important work that it was described by saying “this bit of bed covering is valued at \$3,000. A glass case has been built for it, and it will be seen in all its glory.”⁵⁶

Such high praise for works of hand quilted art was becoming more and more common toward the late nineteenth century. Quilting was originally only seen as a woman’s leisure activity for the more affluent and a normal household chore for the families that were not. With the rise of industrialization and access to much cheaper fabrics at a reasonable price, more people were given access to fabrics and threads of all colors and patterns. This rise in the access to a variety of fabrics led to quilting trends that focused on crazy quilts, or quilts made from pieces of all shapes and sizes with intricate applique and needlework throughout the quilts. Women’s magazines saw an opportunity and seized it by publishing free quilt patterns which led to the popularization of block quilting and mail-order businesses offering patterns and materials

⁵⁴ "Exhibiting Crazy Work," *The New York Times*, November 18, 1885, 8.

⁵⁵ "Exhibiting Crazy Work," *The New York Times*, 8.

⁵⁶ "Exhibiting Crazy Work," *The New York Times*, 8.

through magazines. Quilting groups and quilting bees became a major trend for women to gather, socialize, and work on crafts. This soon created groups that would do quilt shows and competitions as a way to raise money for charity, and start to gain respect in the art world. The Arts and Crafts Movement of the late 1800s helped to push forward needle works and other crafts that women did, and soon afterwards quilting followed and gain respect as an art if true craftsmanship was put into in. Competitive quilting was soon on the rise in the late 1800s to early 1900s because quilters were encouraged by large prizes for the winners and having the public be able to see their hard work on display as if it were in an art gallery. This transformation in attitude over time is what started to bring quilting into the art world, and the next step from there was new technologies and big businesses advertising and pushing for quilting technologies and supplies be sold to the public and displays in World's Fairs from the late nineteenth century through the twentieth century and the creation of folk art museums in the United States.

Chapter Two: The Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893

One of the most innovative art exhibits held was in the Woman's Building at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. Unfortunately the Woman's Panel, which decided what to show, decided not to display as many sewing pieces because they believed too many sewing exhibits would be boring for fair attendees. Even though quilting was not very prominent at the Chicago World's Fair, it was still important for quilt history because of large displays by companies such as Singer Sewing machine which made new quilting technologies more popular and available to the masses because of the fair. The Woman's Building is also important to discuss because only women were involved in the conceptualized, designed, and running of the building. The purpose of the building was to show the important works of women across the globe, but with a focus on the United States. A large part of the building was devoted to the arts, specifically home crafts such as painting and needlework. Sadly no quilts were displayed in the Women's Building but there are many accounts of quilts known to be at the fair or sent there but little evidence exists to prove they were in fact displayed. The collection of art displayed at the Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 was meant to highlight the important arts of the time. Quilting was not given the honor of an exhibit as an art during the fair because of the prejudice that the Woman's Panel held for it. Even though quilting was left out of the Woman's Building at the Chicago World's Fair, it is still important to discussing the fair because of the growth in the quilting market that stemmed from the fair that helped to make quilting more prominent in the United States and therefore closer to being recognized as art.

It is accepted by quilting historians that quilting was a major activity for women, specifically middle class white women during the middle to late 1800s. One of the most important facts supporting this argument is the abundance of quilts that have survived from this

time period. More are found or rediscovered every year. An important resource that focuses on discovering quilts that were able to be displayed at the 1893 fair, even if the works were not listed as quilts but as blankets or throws, is the American Quilts Study Group which is led in part by a leading quilting historian, Xenia Cord.⁵⁷ The group's focus on rediscovering quilts that have been lost in time has helped shed light on much of the history of quilting in America. The American Quilts Study Group's comparison of the way quilts were treated in the 1893 World's Fair and the 1933 World's Fair is a significant addition to American quilting history. Though the two are forty years apart, the two World's Fairs helped quilting to evolve to modern day as an important form of art.

The Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 is one of history's most spectacular events. The fair showcased the progress that humans had made through industrialization and invention. It showed the emphasis that people placed in art, education, manufacturing, and crafts.⁵⁸ The fair was an incredible sight, and came only shortly after the Philadelphia World's Fair. The reason for this is because Americans "felt that it had only scratched the surface in documenting and displaying the truly phenomenal accomplishments of their young nation."⁵⁹ The Nation felt that an even grander fair would better display the technological advancements that the world had made with special attention paid to technological advancements made in the United States. From there the idea for the World's Fair in Chicago grew. It was a long arduous process for the selection of which city should hold the fair, and once Chicago was chosen it took even more time to select a spot within the city to start construction.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ "American Quilt Study Group," American Quilt Study Group, <https://americanquiltstudygroup.org/governance/>.

⁵⁸ Norman Bolotin and Christine Laing, *The World's Columbian Exposition: The Chicago World's Fair of 1893* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

⁵⁹ Bolotin and Laing, *The World's Columbian Exposition*, 1.

⁶⁰ Erik Larson, *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that Changed America* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2004), 5.

Once a suitable location was selected, the design for the fair hit the ground running. For the first time women had a managerial role in planning for the fair and were fully in charge of the Women's Building. The Board of Lady Managers was in charge of making sure that the Women's Building embodied the achievements of women and to avoid having the public saying to not go into the Women's Building because there was nothing interesting in there.⁶¹ To avoid such attitude the committee spent an immense amount of time planning out the incredible exhibits that were all created and imagined by women. Bertha Potter Palmer, the Director of the Board of Lady Managers, was so concerned about having the Women's Building be viewed as mundane that she made her views known in a letter by stating "But we want to keep this exhibit very choice. We must keep the standard up to the highest point. No sentimental sympathy for women should cause us to admit second-rate things into this gallery."⁶² Due to her fear Bertha Potter Palmer advocated to keep quilting out because she thought it would be perceived as dull due to its strong association of everyday women's work. This attitude shows the prejudice that the Board of Lady Managers had toward quilting and things seen as women's work. The upper class women that made up the board saw men's work as more meaningful. Because of this they displayed works of art that were more traditional because men dominated in the traditional arts. However, multiple critics were not fans of the choices the committee made. For example, Fernald Fredrick, a popular critic and journalist, spoke out against the Director of the Board of Lady Managers choice to not include quilts in a review of the Women's Building in his article *Household Arts at the World's Fair in 1893*:

It might have been expected that under the direction of the Board of Lady Managers some systematic representation of this important occupation [quilting] would be found.

⁶¹ Jeanne Madeline Weimann, *The Fair Women: The Story of the Womans Building, Worlds Columbian Exposition, Chicago 1893* (Chicago, IL: Academy Chicago, 1981), 279.

⁶² *Ibid*, 280.

But no; the women of America have preferred to be represented by their books, their paintings, their societies for inducing other people to become wiser and better by their work as hospital nurses, by paper lampshades and indescribable things...by anything in fact that is either pretty on the one hand or mannish on the other, and is remote from everyday affairs.⁶³

Frederick was not alone in his criticism. Potter Palmer was later criticized specifically for not including more arts involved in women's everyday lives. It is this issue that has caused there to be a much smaller quilt and needlework display than many had expected, and contributes to the lack of primary picture sources of the works that were displayed. Both judges and attendees, however, received the few examples of quilting that were shown throughout the fair very well.⁶⁴ This shows that the American people were starting to recognize quilting as something beautiful to look at, and could hold up to the same scrutiny that other arts such as painting received. Even with the lack of photographic images of most of the crafts, the reviews of the displays help historians to understand what was on display and the impact that the display had on the attendees. One article published in a design magazine described the needlework in the Women's Building as "so artistic in conception and design, and so exquisitely executed, as to rank as excellent."⁶⁵ An important review of the Women's Building and the works displayed inside came from *The National Exposition Souvenir* book that stated "It is here shown that women, among all the primitive peoples, were the originators of most of the industrial arts, and that it was not until these became lucrative that they were appropriated by men, and women pushed aside."⁶⁶

⁶³ Fernald Fredrick, "Household Arts at the World's Fair," *The Literary News* (New York, NY), October 1893.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth V. Warren, "Quilts and Embroidery, 20th Century." In *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 23: Folk Art*, edited by CROWN CAROL and RIVERS CHERYL, 172-75. University of North Carolina Press, 2013.

⁶⁵ S.A. Brock Putnam, "Embroideries in the World's Fair," *The Decorator and Furnisher* 23, no. 4 (January 1894), 137.

⁶⁶ Lydia Hoyt Farmer, ed., *The National Exposition Souvenir: What America Owes to Women* (Chicago, Illinois: Charles Wells Moulton, 1893).

Though this does show an example of men pushing women aside for their own gain, the more important aspect is that it shows how quilting was becoming a lucrative business.

With the increased popularity of needlework and quilting, a large industry was starting to arise. Many women's magazines had already started taking advantage of the popularity of needlework and quilting by starting to sell patterns through the mail, but there were other avenues that opened up and that was made clear during the Columbian Exposition. Intricate decorative pieces of furniture and tapestries were being made popular because of the Arts and Crafts movement, and the increase in popularity of needlework. Displays such as Siamese Embroideries that were featured in magazines such as *The Decorator and Furnisher* in 1893 describe the popularity of such pieces by explaining "attributable in a great degree the interest which attaches to Oriental needlework. It is all more or less rudely handsome; much of it is elegant because of the materials which enter into it, but the elegance is of rude description to Western eyes and it is all charmingly curious."⁶⁷ It was the popularity of materials used that made the pieces far more elegant. Embroidery threads and nicer fabrics was becoming an important part of the sewing world, and that helped to create a market for high end quilting materials. Not in the Women's Building but in other exhibits at the Columbian Exposition there were even displays of the high end materials that were becoming available such as "Brilliant upholstery silks in deep blue, yellow, pink and other strong tints" and "printed upon silks, velvets, laces and cottons, such large flowers as roses and chrysanthemums, six inches or so across."⁶⁸ Such elaborate fabrics were not available to most households until mass

⁶⁷ S.A. Brock Putnam, "Siamese Embroideries at the Columbian Exposition," *The Decorator and Furnisher* 23, no. 3 (December 1893), 97.

⁶⁸ Hester M. Poole, "Draperies at the Columbian Exposition," *The Decorator and Furnisher* 23, no. 1 (October 1893), 17.

industrialization and modernization, and the Columbian Exposition was the perfect place to showcase the new fabrics that could be made more cheaply than ever before.

Since the point of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 was to showcase the modernization and industrialization of the United States to the whole world, there was no better place to display the new and improved sewing machines on sale for women to use in their homes. Singer Sewing Machine Company handed out pamphlets asking whether "the history of the entire world could furnish an instance in which any single house...has had a growth so stupendous within an equal amount of time."⁶⁹ The leading sewing machine manufacturer was Singer Manufacturing Company, which advertised intensely at the World's Columbian Exposition. The tagline they used was "Costumes of All Nations" and they had numerous different pamphlets and cards that showed people from different countries around the world wearing native attire to their countries and using a Singer sewing machine.⁷⁰ This was a smart way to show that Singer Sewing Machines were favored around the world, while also going well with the Chicago World's Fair theme. These advertisements and the amount of which have survived to today shows how immense the advertisements were during the Exposition. Sewing was becoming a lucrative business and it was worth spending a lot of money on advertisements in the nineteenth century. Even though quilting and needlework were seen as women's hobbies, businessmen recognized the large growth and capitalized on it. It was men who created the factories that produced the cheaper and more elaborate fabrics used by women, and Singer Manufacturing Company was founded by two men, Isaac Merritt Singer with New York

⁶⁹ Judith G. Coffin, "Selling the Sewing Machine: Credit, Advertising, and Republican Modernity, 1870–1900," in *In The Politics of Women's Work: The Paris Garment Trades, 1750-1915* (Princeton University Press, 1996), 74.

⁷⁰ *Singer Manufacturing Company*, 1893, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington DC, in *Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2005681977/>.

lawyer Edward Clark.⁷¹ Men were not bothered with hand crafts until there was profit to be had, and the increase in production and sales can be fully credited to women sewing and embroidering.

The World's Columbian Exposition was an important event in the history of quilting, even though there are few pictures documenting the quilting and needlework that was on display. The Exposition highlighted the advancements in technology that made creating fabrics and thread far cheaper and more accessible. Manufacturers were also able to display the multitude of different patterns, textures, and colors that were able to be newly designed and produced. Though sewing machines had been around before the Exposition, Singer Manufacturing Company was able to prove that mass advertisement helped the industry and made new home sewing machines far more popular at the turn of the twentieth century.

Advancements in technology were not the only important factors that made the World's Columbian Exposition so important to the history of quilting. The Women's Building and the works displayed throughout the Exposition helped to show quilting, sewing, and other needlework in a new light as artistic pieces and not just a hobby. The Women's Building was fully designed and run by a board of women who had full control over the displays within. Unfortunately the fair committee decided not to display as many sewing pieces because of a fear of alienating the attendees by making it seem too dull, but the ones that were displayed were given high praise by multiple reviewers and helped to show quilting and sewing as a form of art that could be scrutinized using the same standards that more traditional works of art, such as painting, were held to. The World's Columbian Exposition paved the way for one of the most important moments in quilting history that came during the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago.

⁷¹ "Singer Sewing Machine," National Museum of American History.
http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_1460396.

Chapter Three: Quilting from 1893 to the Modern Age

In 1933 Aurora See Dyer was president of the Cook County Women's Christian Temperance Union. She was a loving mother and wife and well respected in her community. Aurora was a regular American women working hard to get her family through a tough economic time in the United States. When Sears announced a quilt contest to be held at the Chicago World's fair in only four months she was determined to succeed and earn money for her family. The Temperance Union even planned a booth to be displayed at the World's fair. Her entire family anticipated the grand opening of the fair with enthusiasm. Aurora worked so hard on her quilt that had an unusual color combination and a modern design that her son even joked that "we never got dinner that spring" because of her devotion to finishing the quilt.⁷² Aurora See Dyer was just like thousands of women across the United States: hardworking and determined to win at the largest quilt show to ever be held, the Sears Quilt Contest at the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago. The two World's Fairs in Chicago were separated by forty years, and quilting continued to grow in popularity in those intervening years and by the mid-1900s museums such as the American Folk Art Museum and the National Museum of American History started to display more quilts and became far more popular. Before the second Chicago World's Fair different trends started to emerge due to the change in the economy, and some merging of different quilting cultures. Through the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century more variety of quilt patterns became available, and quilting kits became popular as well. Then as more people were running into hard times during the Depression, the use of feedbag fabric became a popular way to create quilts using fabric that has already been purchased which shows that even though quilting was not as necessary as it used to be, people were still willing to find

⁷² Waldvogel, and Barbara Brackman, *Patchwork souvenirs of the 1933 Worlds Fair*, xiv.

ways during hard times to keep quilting. Finally, the immigration of the Amish westward brought many of their traditional patterns and designs that were integrated into the main stream quilting communities, and many of those patterns were considered traditional designs and were in many of the Sears Quilt Contest entries.⁷³ These changes were integral steps toward the 1933 World's Fair that was the highlight of quilting and its artistry. Quilting had been gaining respect in the art world since the late 1800s and it finally became fully accepted as a form of art in the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago where one of the most prestigious quilt shows was held.

Quilt patterns and quilt kits continued to steadily grow in popularity in the early twentieth century. A quilt kit is a package that can be bought that includes a pattern along with all the fabric needed to make that specific quilt, they have been referred to as "paint by number quilts."⁷⁴ The kits came in a few different varieties in the early twentieth century. The options were "pre-cut pieces to stitch into blocks, basted applique blocks, printed cross stitched blocks, or as finished quilts"⁷⁵ that would then be hand quilted to the backing. One of the pioneers for such quilt kit designs was Anne Champe Orr. She began her career for *Southern Woman's Magazine* as the needlework columnist and created "a variety of cross-stitched embroidery designs as well as tatting, filet crochet, and knitting patterns."⁷⁶ She eventually went over to work for *Good Housekeeping*. Through her work she became very well-known and eventually started her own business called Anne Orr Studio that "marketed her needlework designs, quilt kits, pre-stamped fabric and basted tops, iron-on transfers, and pattern books."⁷⁷ She was so

⁷³ "Amish Quilts," Quilting in America, <https://www.quilting-in-america.com/Amish-Quilts.html>.

⁷⁴ "The History of 20th Century Kit Quilts." America's Quilting History. http://www.womenfolk.com/quilt_pattern_history/kit-quilts.htm.

⁷⁵ "The History of 20th Century Kit Quilts." America's Quilting History.

⁷⁶ Elizabeth V. Warren, "Quilts and Embroidery, 20th Century," ed. Carol Crown and Cheryl Rivers, in *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 23: Folk Art* (University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 174.

⁷⁷ Warren, "Quilts and Embroidery, 20th Century", 174.

popular that she was asked to judge the Springfield Massachusetts First National Quilt Contest in 1932⁷⁸, and again at the Chicago's World's Fair in 1933.⁷⁹

Feed sackcloth started to increase in popularity during the Depression as well. The price of cotton had dropped so dramatically that farm products began using cotton sacks as ways to transport their food goods instead of barrels. Many women, rural and urban, took the sacks and created different household items out of them such as clothing, toys, tablecloths, and all other types of household needs.⁸⁰ Eventually patterns would be placed on the bags, but at first only labels for the products were on the bags and women used them in quilting anyway as seen in a quilt made by Mrs. Ben Harrison with Acme Feed Sacks that shows multiple bags displaying the logo on the quilt.⁸¹ Soon the feed sack manufactures caught on and started creating the feed sacks with removable labels and printing the sacks first in colors and then with patterns to entice women to buy that product for the pattern on the sack.⁸² The new colorful cotton bags were used to make dresses and other clothing items such as a feed sack dress found in the collection of the National Museum of American History.⁸³ There were even special contests held for products created from feed sacks as "a way for women to show off their skills, and manufacturers to show off their designs. Women frequently sold their surplus bags to others as a way of picking up cash to aid in running the home."⁸⁴ Creating quilts and other products from feed sacks was popular

⁷⁸ Merikay Waldvoege, "Anne Orr 1980 Inductee", *The Quilters Hall of Fame*, <https://quiltershalloffame.net/anne-orr/>.

⁷⁹ Anne Orr, "Quilt Making In Old And New Designs," *Good Housekeeping*, January 1933.

⁸⁰ Kris Driessen, "Feedsacks and Feedbags," *Quilt History*, <http://www.quilthistory.com/feedsacks.htm>.

⁸¹ Mrs. Ben Harrison, *Quilt Lining Made of Acme Fee Sacks*, 1945, Bee Spring, Edmonson County, Kentucky, in *Kentucky Quilts and Their Makers* (University Press of Kentucky, 1976), 23.

⁸² *Feedsack Dress Description*, National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center, Washington DC, http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_1105750.

⁸³ Dorothy Overall, *Feedsack Dress*, 1959, National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center, Washington DC, http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_1105750.

⁸⁴ *Feedsack Dress Description*, National Museum of American History.

from the early 1900s through the Great Depression and into the 1940s when cotton sacks were not being produced at the same rate as before. Even though women were not able to afford the quality fabrics they were used to during the Depression, they still kept quilting using any materials they could. The patterns on the feed sacks became popularized during this time period and the designs were very present in the Sears Quilt Contest. To this day feed sack designs are popular among many quilters.⁸⁵

Another important influence during the early twentieth century was the adaptation of more traditional Amish quilting. The Amish are a very conservative religious group who separate themselves from what they refer to as the “English” world, or modern society. The Amish first came to America to escape religious persecution in the mid-1700s, and brought with them customs that have helped to influence the quilting world.⁸⁶ The Amish are known for the variety in the quilting patterns, and their ability to make incredible works using only plain fabric with no pattern and colors that are dull and not vibrant. The Amish interpretation of Christianity leads them to reject materialism and modern conventions. The fabric used for their quilting fits with these ideals.⁸⁷

Even though the Amish wanted to be separated and not participate in the outside world they still played an important part in industrialization and mass consumer culture during the nineteenth and twentieth century by using factory produced fabric, and creating patterns that were commercially produced. American women viewed quilting, specifically Amish quilts, as objects from a simpler time, especially in an age of immense industrialization where society was changing at a far more rapid pace than ever before. The traditional Amish quilts played into the

⁸⁵ “Feed Sack Fabric by the Yard”. Farmhouse Wares. <https://farmhousewares.com/feedsackfabricbytheyard.aspx>.

⁸⁶ Janice Tauer Wass, "Amish and 'English' Quilts," The Quilt Index, 2011, <http://www.quiltindex.org/essay.php?kid=3-98-21>.

⁸⁷ Wass, "Amish and 'English' Quilts," The Quilt Index.

nostalgia that American women were feeling during industrialization. The Amish women viewed their traditional quilts in a similar way: they were a way for the families and community to stay connected to their past through the quilts left to them by older generations. The Amish quilts stayed consistent with the themes of their beliefs such as “practices of self-denial, thrift, conformity, and obedience to family and church.”⁸⁸ In order to help support the family and community Amish women would create quilt tops with the elaborate patterns they preferred and would sell them to ‘English’ people as a way to bring money in for their families. The quilt tops became very popular and created a market for women who wanted to make their own Amish inspired quilts, and therefore quilt patterns and designs were soon being sold as well. The Amish focused heavily on piecing and quilting and only seldom used embroidery or applique in their quilting. Their quilt patterns usually consisted of elaborate geometric designs and repeating a block throughout. They also focus on medallion style quilts⁸⁹ like a Center Diamond pattern⁹⁰ or Sunshine and Shadow pattern.⁹¹ The patterns that the Amish made popular were seen as more traditional quilt patterns which was what the Judges at the Sears Quilt Contest saw as true quilting.

The traditional patterns used by the Amish were very influential in the quilting community and many of the patterns were seen in quilts presented at the 1933 World’s Fair in Chicago. The steady growth and adaptation of quilting that occurred in the forty years between the 1893 and 1933 World’s Fairs in Chicago was the final part where quilting grew from a niche

⁸⁸ "Historical Amish Quiltmaking," World Quilts, <http://worldquilts.quiltstudy.org/amishstory/historic>.

⁸⁹ "Historical Amish Quiltmaking," World Quilts.

⁹⁰ *Amish "Hanging Diamond" Quilt, 1900-1925*, National Quilt Collection, National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center, Washington DC, in *The National Museum of American History*, http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_556194.

⁹¹ *Heptagonal "Sunburst" Quilt, 1830-1850*, National Quilt Collection, National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center, Washington DC, in *The National Museum of American History*, http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_556237.

hobby to a respected part of the art world. Quilting was able to start being commercialized through the advertisements and exhibitions at the 1893 World's Fair and by 1933 there was a mass market for quilt products such as sewing machines, fabrics, patterns, and other items used for quilting.

The largest quilt show ever held at the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago offered thousands of dollars in prizes, so people from all over the country were eager to enter. This show was one of the most important moments in American quilting history. The World's Fair quilt show set into motion the future path that quilting would take. It was the final step in what made quilting a respected art and helped continue quilting into modern times, and furthered the economic and technological advances of quilting in the modern age.

The importance and magnitude of the 1933 World's Fair cannot be overstated. Even though it happened only 40 years from the first World's Fair in Chicago the two fairs were very different. The 1933 World's Fair was to show technological innovations in honor of Chicago's centennial.⁹² The committee to plan the Chicago Centennial World's Fair had hoped to "plan a celebration surpassing even the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893"⁹³ according to a *New York Times* article published in 1926. The Fair was to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Chicago with the theme "Century of Progress" to highlight all the technological advances in the past 100 years.⁹⁴ Such an extravagant fair ended up being the perfect location for "the biggest and most widespread quilt contest ever held"⁹⁵ because quilting had been transformed by technological advances. The planning committee for the quilt contest were part of the business world and

⁹² "EXPO 1933 Chicago," Bureau International des Expositions, <http://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/1933-chicago>.

⁹³ "Committee To Plan Chicago Centennial," *New York Times*, May 12, 1926,

⁹⁴ "Quilts and the 1933 Chicago World's Fair." A Century of Progress: Quilts and the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. http://www.womenfolk.com/quilt_notes/century_progress.htm.

⁹⁵ "Quilts and the 1933 Chicago World's Fair." A Century of Progress: Quilts and the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. http://www.womenfolk.com/quilt_notes/century_progress.htm.

viewed the advancements of quilting as a great thing, but the judges that were chosen were part of the Arts and Crafts Movement and pushed back tremendously against the advancements in quilting. This is another example of a paradox created by industrialization and created issues in the judging of the quilts. With such an expansive and important quilt show there was an immense amount of planning and of course drama involved such as the requirements to have a quilt submitted, adherence to a theme, and the issue with personal taste and interest when it came time for the judges to award the winners. To understand how the largest quilt show took place at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933, it is important to look at how the fair itself came to be.

In the first 30 years that had passed since the first Chicago World's Fair the city had seen very prosperous times. The population grew exponentially and so did the economy through the 1920s. Women's roles had altered as well in this time period due to the work women had done during World War I. After the war there was a 25 percent increase in the number of women in the work force, and because women had stepped up and help their country when they were needed most it helped to persuade the government to allow women the right to vote.⁹⁶ Because of such a prosperous and modernizing time, Chicago was ready to be on the world stage again to show off its amount of advancements. 1933 was also the year of Chicago's Centennial and that became the theme of the fair.

Quilting had also exponentially grown in the forty years between the fairs. Ordering quilting supplies through catalogs had become so lucrative that most major department stores and woman's magazines offered mail ordering. One of the largest operations was Sears. Sears was aware of how successful the last fair was and knew the best thing to do would be to get involved in the new fair. Since its quilting and fabric was such an important asset to the

⁹⁶ Dan Bryan. "Working and Voting -- Women in the 1920s." American History USA. <https://www.americanhistoryusa.com/working-voting-women-1920s/>.

company, it wanted to host a quilting competition. Luckily, “The Century of Progress Managers viewed contests as a means to increase fair attendance in the midst of the Great Depression”⁹⁷ and therefore allowed Sears to host a contest when the Sears Executives asked for official sanction in the fall of 1932. J.H. White, the Sear’s divisional sales manager of Domestic and Bedspreads, spoke on behalf of Sears stating “We believe this contest will provide a tremendous amount of publicity for the fair and ourselves...and greatly add to the value and the prestige of us both.”⁹⁸ Ed Ross Bartley, director of the fair’s Department of Promotion stated that since “the exposition has from time to time received inquiries as to whether any showing of quilts was to be made and in view of the fact that these inquires and constantly coming in”⁹⁹ they granted Sears the official sponsor of the Century of Progress Quilt Contest.

In the very next issue Sears put in a front-page ad in their catalog advertising, “Do you quilt?” and offered over \$7,500 in prize money for the winners.¹⁰⁰ The rules of the Century of Progress Quilt Contest were few and very simple; each contestant could enter only one quilt. The quilts had to be bed sized and had to be the work of the contestant, and the work could not have been previously exhibited. A note at them bottom stated that the quilts should be recently made because the contest was not about displaying antique works.¹⁰¹ The way the competition was set up was that people had to have their quilts entered by May 15, 1933 and the quilts were judged in a series of heats. The first heat was at a local level and winners of those would get five to ten

⁹⁷ Merikay Waldvogel and Barbara Brackman. *Patchwork Souvenirs of the 1933 Worlds Fair*. Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press, 1993, 33.

⁹⁸ J.H. White, letter to Ross Bartley, October 12, 1932. A Century of Progress, Special Collections, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle Library.

⁹⁹ Letter from Bartley to White, November 14, 1932. A Century of Progress, Special Collections, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle Library.

¹⁰⁰ Waldvogel and Brackman. *Patchwork souvenirs of the 1933 Worlds Fair*, 34.

¹⁰¹ Mary Fons. "The Quilt Scout: Scandal! The Century of Progress Quilt Contest." Quilts, Inc. <https://www.quilts.com/quiltscout/the-quilt-scout-scandal!-the-century-of-progress-quilt-contest.html>.

dollars. As the quilts progressed through ten regional semifinal rounds, the quilters could win up to two hundred dollars. The top three quilts from each regional semifinal were selected and exhibited at the fair. The thirty best quilts were judged at the fair and the grand prizewinner would be selected to win \$1,000 in prize money. There was also a \$200 bonus for the top quilt that was an “original design commemorating the Century of Progress Exposition.”¹⁰²

The deadline gave quilters only four months to create and finish their pieces so that they could be submitted on time. This meant that many women submitted works that they had previously finished, but there were still many people who created a new work from scratch in four months to be submitted to the competition. Sears announced, “25,000 women had spent 5,625,000 hours to make the quilts entered in the contest.”¹⁰³ At the moment there is no definitive proof if any male quilters entered the Sears Quilt Competition. It may be to lack of records and a bias of assuming only women would enter that it is unknown. To this day, over eighty years later, the Sears Century of Progress Quilt Competition remains the largest quilt competition ever held.¹⁰⁴

The variety and style of the quilts entered told an interesting story as well. The quilters ranged from someone who had never quilted a day in her life to old veteran quilters. Many of the quilters believed that an original design scheme would help them win, and to stick with the theme would be best because they could get the \$200 bonus. Women such as Lois Hobgood Crowell, who had never tried to quilt anything, “decided she was capable of making a prize winner the first time she tried.”¹⁰⁵ Of course the judges could tell she was no expert quilter but Lois Hobgood Cromwell still felt like a winner because she was praised for her color choices.

¹⁰² *Sears Century of Progress Quilt Contest*. Sears Circular, in collection of H.M. Carpenter, 1932.

¹⁰³ Waldvogel and Brackman. *Patchwork souvenirs of the 1933 Worlds Fair*, 36.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 38.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*.

She explained this by saying “when I got my judges’ rating form back on that quilt, I saw that I lost everything on the quilting, it being my first quilt. But I got 100 percent on design and color, and that’s what won it for me.”¹⁰⁶ Interestingly enough, some entries were not of original design or color scheme at all, but made from premade quilt kits. The contest rules stating nothing against entering a quilt made from a prearranged quilt kit, and some women happily took advantage of the loophole. Quilt kits had grown in popularity through the 1920s, and it was part of this commercialization that made quilting popular. This approach was successful for some such as Lillie Belle Shaffer Carpenter, who won her regional first prize for \$200 for a quilt made from a kit that had sewing lines stamped on the fabric and even die-cut fabric included.¹⁰⁷ It is unclear if people at the time either did not know or did not care that quilts being entered were made from kits. Sears made many quilt kits and did encourage the women entering to use their materials. The women who used the kits clearly liked the patterns and must have believed that it still counted as art even though it was a kit. It is definitely a clear example of how big businesses had a large influence on the quilting world because even though it was not an original piece of art the regional judges of the Sears Quilt Contest clearly believed it deserved to win.

What was even more intriguing was the quilts that the judges at the fair chose for the top three prizes. The rules for the contest wanted to emphasize a more modern and original time, yet the quilts that were selected all followed traditional patterns that were incredibly well quilted. It was clear that the judges had a bias for “expert stitching above color, design, and creativity, the last characteristic seeming to have ranked lowest on their scale. Three of the five quilts honored were made from commercial patterns of kits.”¹⁰⁸ This judging bias was not missed by the

¹⁰⁶ Lois Hobgood Crowell, Telephone Interview with Barbara Brackman, November 20, 1982.

¹⁰⁷ L.W. Thompson, letter to Mrs. Virgil Carpenter, June 12, 1933.

¹⁰⁸ Waldvogel and Brackman. *Patchwork souvenirs of the 1933 Worlds Fair*, 42.

contestants and caused a major scandal. The biases that the judges displayed helps to show what characteristics made quilts artwork. The elaborate quilting and traditional patterns that were preferred by the judges shows that experts in the quilting world stayed with the ideals of the Arts and Crafts Movement that designs and skills from previous eras were seen as works of art while newer flashier designs were not seen as on par with artwork standards in quilting. This sentiment of preferring old-fashioned or pre-industrial patterns stays true to the Arts and Crafts Movement because the movement was based on keeping traditions alive in a world where new technologies and industrialization is taking over every aspect of life. This shows the paradox that industrialization had on quilting. The top prize quilts did show old era quilting, but they were made from modern day quilt kits that were only popular because of industrialization and businesses pushing the sales.

One of the judges had even been overheard stating “she would not give three minutes of her time to the Century of Progress designs.”¹⁰⁹ The problem was that Sears had set up the rules to encourage new and innovative designs that evocated the Century of Progress theme, but then they chose four judges with opinions that differed from the contest’s organizers. The judges favored traditional quilting style so much that the \$200 bonus for the best Century of Progress Commemorative Quilt was never even awarded. Sue Roberts, a judge and contest coordinator, described the commemorative quilts in a letter stating “They are very decorative, and as commemorative quilts, unusual and striking, but I still prefer the more orthodox variety...”¹¹⁰, the judges did not even acknowledge that the quilts were made from modern day quilt kits. Not

¹⁰⁹ Ida M. Stow, Letter to Sears, Roebuck and Company, June 6, 1933. Quoted in *Quilters' Journal* (July 1985), 13.

¹¹⁰ Sue Roberts, Letter to William Rush Dunton Jr. May 9, 1934. The William Rush Dunton Jr. Papers, The Baltimore Museum of Art.

surprisingly the grand prize winning quilt was a perfect example of the more orthodox quilting method.

Margaret Caden's grand prize winning quilt was a traditional Diamond Star and rather plain even though the stitching was incredibly intricate and precise. The color palette was in a pale gray-green and had intricate stuffed quilting that may have been a large influence on the judges which Sue Roberts stating when discussing the quilt by saying "A detail picture is really better than one of the entire quilt for it shows the stuffed quilting, which is really the outstanding feature of it."¹¹¹ The judges were not the only ones with a bias toward traditional quilting. Louise Fowler Roote described the quilt in her quilting column for *Cappers's Weekly* by saying:

It was the handsomest piece of needlework imaginable. Swathed in cellophane, it hung suspended full length in the display room of Seats and Roebuck's exposition along with dozens of other gorgeous specimens, and on it proudly fluttered the prize ribbon...it was really the remarkable padded quilting which made this quilt exquisite.¹¹²

This bias truly upset many of the contestants but the scandal became worse when it came to light that Margaret Caden did not create the quilt herself but oversaw her seamstresses to produce the grand prize winning quilt. A resident of the same town as Margaret Caden told a local reporter that "Margaret Caden did not know which end of a needle to thread."¹¹³

Caden hired the help of three seamstresses to create the Star of the Bluegrass quilt that won. There was Mattie Clark Black who "told her daughter-in-law how she stuffed featherlike leaf designs into green strips and squares on commission from Margaret Caden"¹¹⁴ which was one of the main features that helped the quilt to win. There was also the professional quilter Ida

¹¹¹ Roberts, Letter to William Rush Dunton Jr.

¹¹² Louise Fowler Roote, "This Quilt Won the Thousand Dollar Prize", *Capper's Weekly* (May 26, 1934).

¹¹³ Fons. "The Quilt Scout: Scandal! The Century of Progress Quilt Contest."

¹¹⁴ Helen Black, Interviewed by Merikay Waldvogel and Barbara Brackman October 4, 1984.

Atchison Rhorer who was in charge of “piecing the top, using a pattern and fabric given to her by Margaret Caden.” Ida also received “borders, squares, and sashing embellished with padded feathers, which she pieced among the stars.”¹¹⁵ The final participants in creating the prize winning quilt were Ruth Price Stewart, her mother, and sister. They were the ones who added the crosshatch quilting that can be seen behind the stuffed work.¹¹⁶ The only quilting that Margaret Caden did was to stitch on the label stating she created the quilt herself. Ida Rhorer and Mattie Black even kept evidence of their work on the quilt by holding onto a spare block, scraps from the stars and boarder pieces and a few extra stuffed leaves.¹¹⁷ Sadly, the deception was known only in Lexington Kentucky for many years, as the Sears Company did not find out and see the evidence of the deception until many years later when it was far too late for anything to be done. This story shows how modern day industrialization and business practices were central to the Sears Quilt Competition and the quilting world as a whole. Old fashioned designs were praised but the methods to obtain that style came from modern means.

Even though the quilt show was riddled with deception and scandal it was still very influential for the quilting world. The quilt contest was so successful that when Chicago reopened parts of the fair in 1934 Sears was beseeched to redo the highly successful contest. Sue Roberts, who was the Sears, Roebuck and Company home advisor and organizer of the 1933 quilt contest, wrote a letter to William R. Dunton saying:

We have has just a deluge of inquiries about a quilt display this year. It seems that any number of visitors came up primarily to see such an exhibit, having heard so much about the one last year. So great has been their disappointment that we are

¹¹⁵ Louise Eddleman, Interviewed by Merikay Waldvogel and Barbara Brackman ,June 27, 1989 interview.

¹¹⁶ Ruth Stewart, Interviewed by Merikay Waldvogel and Barbara Brackman February 10, 1992 interview.

¹¹⁷ Waldvogel and Brackman. *Patchwork souvenirs of the 1933 Worlds Fair*, 59.

endeavoring to collect the first regional winners in an effort to give them something in that line.¹¹⁸

The exhibit of the previous year's winners was so anticipated that Sue Roberts explained "the exhibit wasn't half in place before the people began flocking in from all parts of the grounds."¹¹⁹ Sears was correct that sponsoring a quilt contest would be an incredible marketing tool to increase their profitability in their fabrics department, it ended up being far more of a success than even Sears could have imagined. It even led the way for other quilt supply companies to make a large profit. Companies started to produce patterns for quilt makers to make exact replicas of the prize winning quilts. Two pattern booklets were sold that featured the fair winners, and Sears even published its own pattern book titled *Sears Century of Progress in Quilt Making* and it states in the introduction "quilts once again had secured their place in the fine arts because of the quilt revival of the 1920s and 1930s" they also encouraged everyone to "MAKE A QUILT!!!"¹²⁰ The booklet included tips on quilting, supplies that were available to order through the store, and instructions for eleven of the prize-winning quilts with designs for matching pillows as well.¹²¹ Dozens of other companies used the fair as a way to advertise their products, such as The Stearns & Foster Co. batting department which advertised that winning quilts used their batting because of the higher quality,¹²² an unofficial pamphlet of quilts was offered by Aunt Martha's Studios through several national magazines,¹²³ and there was even a World's Fair block sold under the names of Laura Wheeler and Alice Brooks with a note stating:

¹¹⁸ Sue Roberts, letter to William Rush Dunton Jr., July 27, 1934. The William Rush Dunton Jr., Papers, The Baltimore Museum of Art.

¹¹⁹ Sue Roberts, letter to William Rush Dunton Jr., September 11, 1934. The William Rush Dunton Jr., Papers, The Baltimore Museum of Art.

¹²⁰ *Sears Century of Progress in Quilt Making* (Chicago: Sears, Roebuck Company, 1934).

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² F.J. Hooker, letter to Mrs. Ralph M. Matthews, October 14, 1933, in collection of Lucille and Phin Kinnaman.

¹²³ Waldvogel and Brackman. *Patchwork souvenirs of the 1933 Worlds Fair*, 101.

The old-time patchwork quilt was an heirloom. It was not alone an economy; it was the needlewoman's interpretation of the things in her daily life and of the events of her time. Given such an occasion as the Fair at Chicago, she would have made a quilt to commemorate such an outstanding event. So, we today, following the spirit of the needlewoman of old, offer the World's Fair – a quilt, which in generations to come, will call to mind the remarkable exposition we now are having at Chicago. Like the designs of old, it too has meaning. Diversity of pattern – first you see one design, then it shifts to another – characterizes the variety of interests center at the Exposition.¹²⁴

Such high praise for the quilts from the exposition by women who are held in high regard in the art and design world shows how influential and important quilting had become. Sears had heightened interest in quilts and quilt making by sponsoring the contest. It sparked interest at a time when the American people were suffering and was able to introduce a wide range of people to a new art form. Offering a prize was able to encourage woman that never would otherwise thought to create a quilt interested in it. The Chicago World's Fair and the Sears Quilt Contest were able to encourage quilting to grow.

The Sears Quilt Contest may not be known by most Americans today or even all the quilters in the United States, but the influence it has had on modern day quilting is significant. The fair kept interest in quilting alive and brought in an entire generation of young women that was not interested before the fair. Interest in quilting is passed down from mother to daughter or grandmother to grandchildren usually, but Sears was able to spread interest exponentially in 1933. People today, including myself, are quilters because of this quilt competition. I learned from my mother who was taught by her grandmother, and she only quilted because she entered a

¹²⁴ Laura Wheeler, World's Fair pattern no. 507, in quilt pattern collection of Merikay Waldvogel.

quilt into the Sears Quilt Contest.¹²⁵ There are patterns that were created and then marketed after the World's Fair that are used in quilting competitions today, including the pattern of the prize winning quilt the Star of the Bluegrass.¹²⁶ The Contest also helped to start interest in the development of Folk Art Museums and the growth of the National Quilt Collection. Florence Dibell Barrlett was a wealthy woman from Chicago who lived from 1881-1954. She was a very generous woman who supported many causes, but she largely championed traditional folk arts from around the world. Florence Dibell Barrlett lived through two World's Fairs and was inspired by the craftsmanship of the displays. She saw folk arts as an important bond that the world could share and even stated that "the art of the craftsman is a bond between the peoples of the world."¹²⁷ Throughout her life she donated to many charities and raised money for the arts, but her longest living legacy is the creation of the International Folk Art Museum. It was a lifelong dream for her to start a museum to honor folk art and that dream was realized in May 1954 just eight months before her death.¹²⁸ It was the first official museum that was founded to honor folk arts alone. The museum was inspired by the creations at both Chicago World's Fair and was the final step in folk arts, which included quilts, to be part of the art world. Less than ten years later the American Folk Art Museum was founded in New York City in 1961. The American Folk Art Museum is dedicated to showcasing and understanding art by self-taught artists by exhibiting "compelling portraits and dazzling quilts to powerful works by living self-taught artists in a variety of mediums."¹²⁹ The creation of folk art museums around the world

¹²⁵ Marisa Crozier, Interviewed by Victoria Crozier at Montville NJ, August 10, 2016.

¹²⁶ Star of the Bluegrass. 1950. From Waldvogel Archival Collection, Sears Quilt Contest 1933 Chicago World's Fair. Published in *The Quilt Index*, <http://www.quiltindex.org/basicdisplay.php?kid=5B-9D-1D>.

¹²⁷ "Our Founder, Our Story". Museum of International Folk Art. <http://www.internationalfolkart.org/about/our-history/>.

¹²⁸ "Our Founder, Our Story". Museum of International Folk Art.

¹²⁹ "About Us: The American Folk Art Museum". The American Folk Art Museum. <https://folkartmuseum.org/about/>.

were inspired by the Chicago World's Fair's and the Sears Quilt Contest. It was the direct influence of these fairs that quilts were finally given permanent homes on display in art museums and given the full respect of the art world.

Conclusion

Quilting is not as popular as it once was in the United States, but that does not mean it is not still a thriving art form. Quilting has always been present in the United States, from colonial era America through modern times, but it was over the course of a many years that quilting earned the respect that it deserved in the art world. The industrial revolution helped to change the way that fabrics were created and sold to the public, which gave more opportunities for women of many classes to be able to make more intricate quilts. The Industrial Revolution also led into a strong economic period for the United States that encouraged people to buy more and created a quilting supplies market. Mail ordering started to boom and more magazines were offering free patterns or precut packets to make quilts. This encouraged more groups of women to want to quilt and from there quilt shows and exhibits started to pop up in the United States.

Unfortunately the committee organizing the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 decided against showing quilts in the women's building because they did not think it would be spectacular enough to be exhibited as a major contribution that women created. This bias against women's crafts and arts is a bias that was able to change over time as quilting was supported by big business and earned respect in the art community. Even though quilting was not given its own exhibit, there were actually multiple examples of quilts throughout the fair in displays showing fabrics, furniture, and other house furnishings. Also at the 1893 World's Fair was Singer Sewing Machines that displayed the latest advancement in home quilting technology. So quilting was actually present at the first Chicago World's Fair even if it was not advertised.

From there the Arts and Crafts Movement started to encourage seeing handy crafts such as crochet, knitting, needlepoint, and quilting as a form of art. This also helped to increase the already thriving quilting market, and large corporations such as Sears started to make large

profits in quilt supplies. Because of this Sears sponsored the Centennial Quilt Competition that over 25,000 women participated in. The quilt competition was the final step that made Americans recognize quilting as art. The large first prize winnings encouraged thousands of women to start quilting and eventually pass down the skills to their families, and there and quilters today that may not have quilted without the Sears Centennial Quilt Competition. In the end quilting became an art form in the United States because of the Industrial revolution and large businesses. Industrialization was the first step towards Americans recognizing all forms of home crafts as real art. This was because industrialization was able to produce blankets and quilts far cheaper, so women kept the tradition of quilting alive and were able to take quilting to more creative places due to the abundance of affordable materials. The Industrial Revolution did not kill craftsmanship: it actually helped to preserve the talents to present day. In the United States today there are numerous quilting guilds, communities, forums, classes, and of course quilt contests. The internet has been able to bring quilters from across the country together. A prime example of such activity is The Modern Quilt Guild that started from a “thriving online community of modern quilters and their desire to start meeting in person.”¹³⁰ The modern day quilters have started new trends and movements within the quilting community that draw upon classic designs but bring a new modern feel to them. Brighter colors and more daring designs can be seen throughout quilt stores and quilt shows across the country. Today quilts are hung throughout museums for their historical value and artistic beauty. the National Quilt Collection to date has over 500 quilts ranging from the past 250 years. The goal of the collection is to show that:

¹³⁰ "The Modern Quilt Guild: How We Started." The Modern Quilt Guild. <https://www.themodernquiltguild.com/content/about-mqg>.

Quilts are not the domain of a specific race or class, but can be a part of anyone's heritage and treasured as such. Whether of rich or humble fabrics, large in size or small, expertly crafted or not, well-worn or pristine, quilts in the National Quilt Collection provide a textile narrative that contributes to America's complex and diverse history. The variety and scope of the collection provides a rich resource for researchers, artists, quilt-makers and others.¹³¹

The American Folk Art Museum and The National Quilt Collection show the complex history of American quilting, and how the rise of industrialization was the reason that quilting was able to become a recognized art form. It was the modernization and economic value that stores such as Sears were able to capitalize on that brought quilting from obscurity to an asset to American history.

¹³¹ "National Quilt Collection: Introduction." American History: National Quilt Collection. <http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/object-groups/national-quilt-collection>.

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