

# PIONEER ART: Quilts

By Alice Baker

Although the pioneer woman never looked upon her creative ability in making quilts as an art, never-the-less there was that quality to a greater or lesser degree. The standard of merit was limited by the need of the family, but given a relatively free hand as to materials and a fragment of time, she often created beautiful quilts.

There were numerous patterns for quilts, among them the relatively simple ones: Four Block, Nine Block, Necktie, and Wild Goose Chase. More complex patterns included: Wind Mill, Bear's Paw, King's Crown, Irish Chain, Double Irish Chain, Double Wedding Ring, Dresden Plate, Grand Mother's Flower Garden, Sun Burst, and Drunkard's Path.

The artistry of the quilt was shown by the color combinations of blocks and the accuracy with which they were made, contrast in dark and light shades making the design effective.

Making a quilt was an extended project requiring sometimes weeks, a winter, or even years. But it was a pastime which fitted admirably into the housewife's program of many and varied duties. While she waited for food to cook, or for a husband's or child's return, she could cut out or fashion a block.

Quilting was reserved as a summer job, especially when log houses comprised the home. Oftentimes it was the quilting which gave the quilt its sanction of artistry. It also gave permanence to the quilt and some of these old quilts past the century mark in age are existent because the owners, appreciative of the hours that the stitching took and also its beauty, used these bed covers sparingly.

Quilting was a very specialized form of needlework. The quilter must use a needle very little more than one inch in length and she must make stitches no longer than one-sixteenth of that measure. If she worked for profit, she charged by the number of 100-yard spools (2, 3, 5,) she sewed into the quilt.

One of the most renowned quilts in existence today is that owned by Mrs. Lila O. Burton of Eagle. Its pattern is that of the Double Irish Chain made of 16,500 half-inch blocks. There are three colors, red, white and figured with a light blue flower.

This quilt was made by Sarah and Margaret Parsons probably in the 1870's before the present owner was born. Out of gratitude for the many farm products which the Drapers, Lila's mother and father, gave to them, they decided to repay in some way and so they made this quilt, never dreaming how permanent a memorial of kindness their cover would make.

This quilt was always cherished by Mrs. Draper and now more than ever by her daughter. In 1933 at the World's Fair, at the request of Rob't Ripley, Mrs. Burton consented to exhibit it; but she specified that it must be insured and placed under glass while being shown.

Mrs. Burton keeps the quilt wrapped in tissue paper; and only on special occasions does she display it on her four-poster bed. At her death she has willed it to the State Historical Society at Madison, Wis. There it will delight the many handcraft experts and charm women, who know the hours of patient stitching it required, for years to come. § § §