FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

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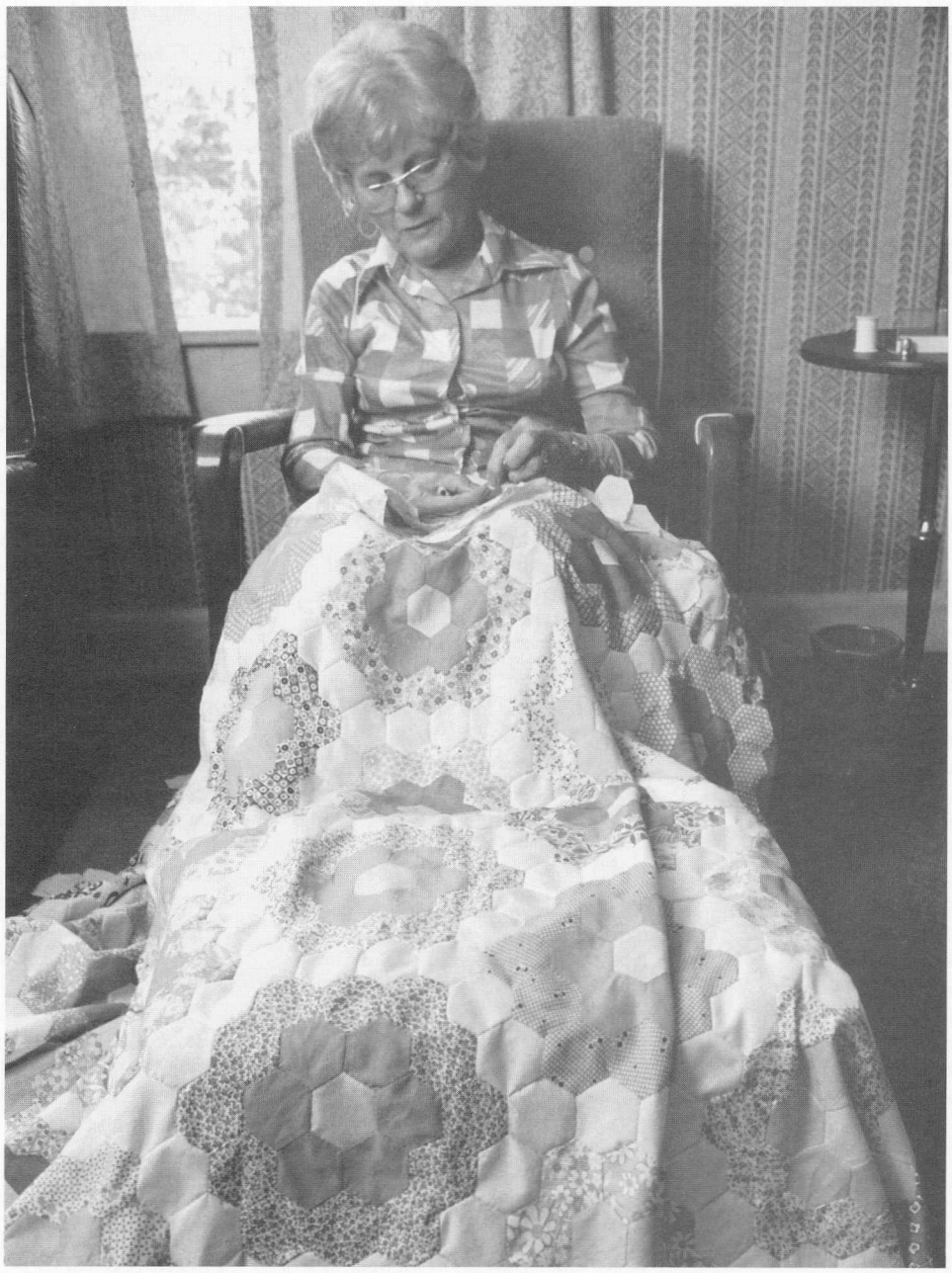

American Folklife Center • The Library of Congress

The American Folklife Center was created in 1976 by the U.S. Congress to "preserve and present American folklife" through programs of research, documentation, archival preservation, reference service, live performance, exhibition, publication, and training. The Center incorporates the Archive of Folk Culture, which was established in the Music Division of the Library of Congress in 1928 and is now one of the largest collections of ethnographic material from the United States and around the world.

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American Folklife Center publications (including *Folklife Center News*), a calendar of events, collection guides, general information, and connections to a selection of other Internet services related to folklife are available on the Internet.

LC Web is available through the World Wide Web service (**http://lcweb.loc.gov/**). The Center's home page can be accessed from the Library's main menu. The direct URL for the Center's home page is: **http://lcweb.loc.gov/folklife/**

Folkline, an information service providing timely information on the field of folklore and folklife, including training and professional opportunities and news items of national interest, is available through the above Internet server. For telephone service, call the Folklife Reading Room: 202 707–5510.

EDITOR'S NOTES

The International Clothesline

In Robert Frost's poem "The Investment," a man planting potatoes stops to listen to the music of a piano being played in a house nearby. The music and the new paint on the old house seem out of place in their workaday setting, and the narrator speculates on whether a couple living in the house might have either come into some money or simply indulged in an extravagance. As the piano music floats out over the quotidian landscape, the narrator muses on the possibility of a determination "not to sink under being man and wife, But get some color and music out of life."

The same insistence on (or perhaps discovery of) "color and music" in everyday life is evident in the interviews that are part of the American Folklife

(Continued on page 15)

Cover: Crystal Cruise piecing a Flower Garden quilt, Vesta, Virginia, September 6, 1978. Blue Ridge Parkway Folklife Project Collection.

Blue Ridge Quiltmaking in the Late Twentieth Century

Carrie Severt displays her wheel and eight-pointed star quilts on the porch of her Alleghany County, Virginia, farmhouse. Photo by Geraldine Johnson

By Laurel Horton

On August 24, 1978, folklorist Geraldine Johnson was driving down a two-lane road in the North Carolina mountains when she spied quilts hanging on the porch of an old house. She immediately turned around, pulled into the driveway, and knocked at the back door.

Johnson wasn't a tourist or an antique dealer looking for quilts to buy. She was one of a team of researchers involved in the Blue Ridge Parkway Folklife Project, an undertaking of the American Folklife Center in cooperation with the National Park Service to identify and document practitioners of traditional customs in the communities of North Carolina and Virginia along a section of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Of the twenty-one folklorists, photographers, Park Service employees, and interns involved in the fieldwork for this project, Gerri Johnson was one of only three women. She had conducted earlier research on rag-rug weavers in western Maryland and was particularly interested in documenting women's crafts for the Blue Ridge project. Arriving in the area, Johnson and her colleagues began their work by contacting local people in order to identify potential subjects to be interviewed. Johnson was on the way to an appointment when the sight of quilts hanging on a porch changed her plans.

Quilting bee, Poplar Springs Quilters, Surry County, North Carolina, September 19, 1978. Photo by Lyntha Eiler

Perhaps if Carrie Severt had not been airing her quilts on that particular day, Johnson would have driven past with only a glance at the handsome old farmhouse. Quilts are generally kept in the private parts of a house, in bedrooms and closets. They are rarely available for public display, and passersby have no way of knowing which houses on a rural road might be treasure troves of quilts. Most of the quiltmakers Johnson met were those whose names had been provided to her by relatives, friends, and craft shop managers. It wasn't her usual practice to walk up to a house unannounced, but she considered this opportunity too good to pass up.

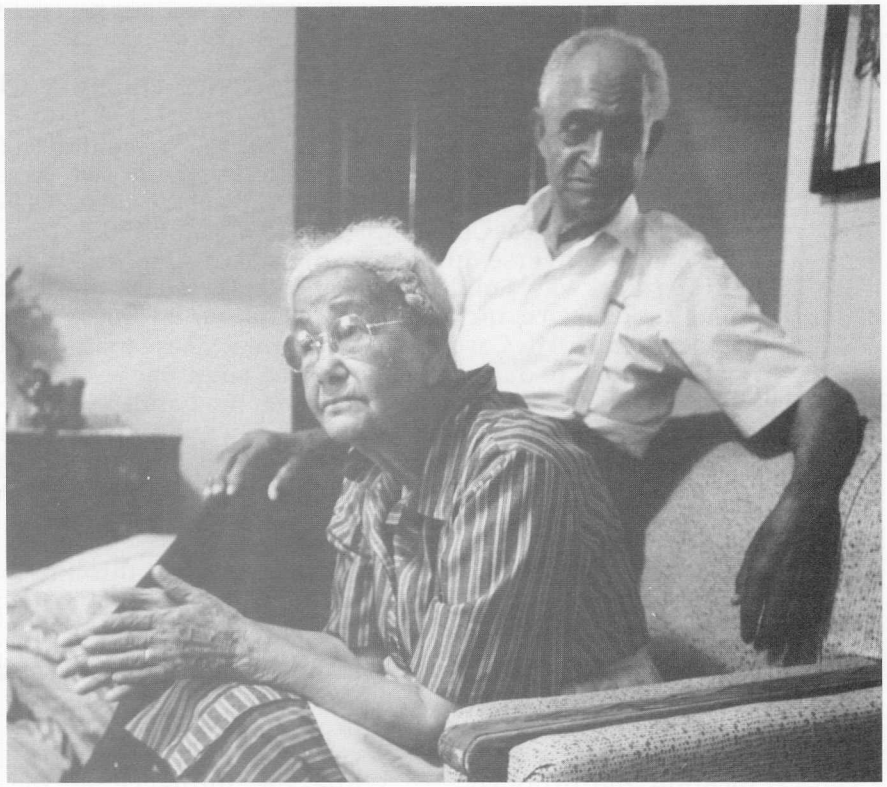
Of all the women that Gerri Johnson interviewed during the two months of the project, Carrie Severt most closely matched the folklorist's vision of a traditional quiltmaker. She made her quilts from leftover fabrics, combining them in old, familiar patterns to make serviceable yet attractive quilts that she then gave away to her children and grandchildren.

In the 1970s, many folklorists were seeking "authenticity." Concerned that changes in technology and lifestyle threatened the existence of many aspects of traditional culture, they concentrated their documentation efforts on those people who seemed least influenced by modern events. Since that time, more and more folklorists have broadened their fields of study, looking at the ways traditions have changed and adapted rather than seeking only the "purest" examples of continuity. In 1978, however, this team of folklorists was looking for "authentic" mountain culture, and the resulting documents—photographs, audio recordings, fieldnotes, and published articles—provide a window through which to view the not-too-distant past.

Much of the project's significance results from historical and demographic circumstances. The majority of the subjects interviewed were elderly and had grown up in the area before World War II. This group formed a living link between the agrarian, farm-based, pre-war local economy and the post-war period of accelerated development and change. The Blue Ridge Parkway Folklife Project documented the lives of residents who still practiced traditions learned from their parents but who generally had little expectation that their children and grandchildren would continue them.

Although Johnson was looking for a particular kind of authentic "mountain quilter," what she actually found and documented was a much more complex range of quiltmaking activities that reflected both local, rural traditions and the influence of a national quilt revival. Rather than identifying a homogenous quiltmaking culture, she discovered that each woman's experience was unique. Taken together, the interviews and photographs demonstrate a wide variety of motivations,

Crystal Cruise (foreground), with the Meadows of Dan Quilters, putting filling on the backing for a quilt, Meadows of Dan Baptist Church, Patrick County, Virginia. Photo by Lyntha Eiler



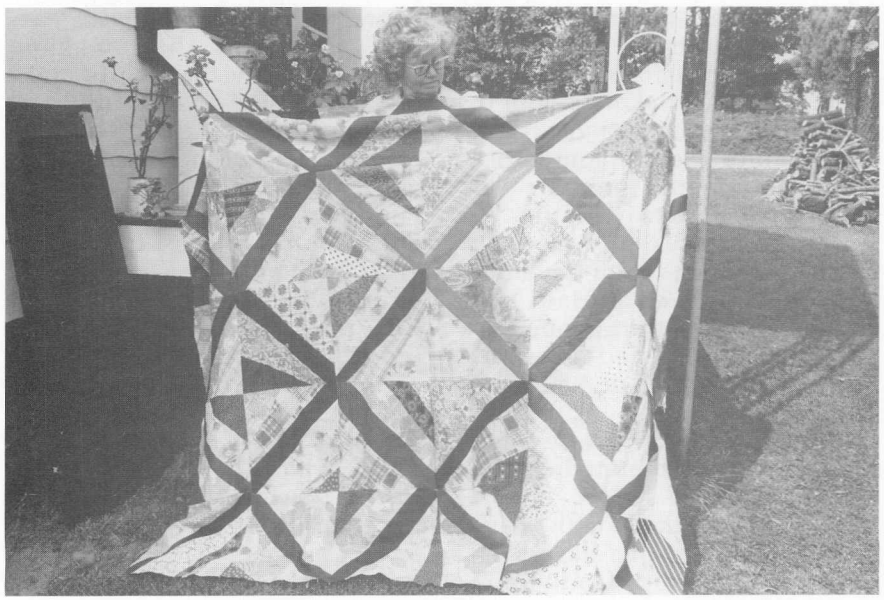
Mamie and Leonard Bryan, in their home near Sparta, North Carolina, September 10, 1978. Mamie learned to make quilts from her mother-in-law Alice Goans Bryan, pieced her quilts by hand, and used remnants from the clothing she sewed for her family (and sometimes from the recycled parts of used clothing). For quilt linings she purchased a plain woven cloth product manufactured in cotton mills in the nearby Piedmont region and sold in local stores. She also used the cotton sacks from animal feed, a popular free source of fabric for thrifty families during the 1930s and 1940s. And she purchased Diamond brand dyes to color the plain white fabrics for her quilt linings. Photo by Lyntha Eiler

styles, and processes influencing the ways quilts were made and used in 1978 in this section of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Quiltmaking was an integral part of American rural life during the early twentieth century. After quiltmaking declined in popularity during the 1950s and 1960s, there was a national revival of interest in it during the 1970s that led many women to take it up as a hobby. These new quilters often lacked any family connection with quilts. Instead of modeling their creations upon existing family quilts, they turned to books and magazines for examples.

Gerri Johnson was aware of the national quilt revival, and she worried that it would undermine the older, family-based traditions in the area she was studying. Johnson looked for women who had learned to make quilts at home from relatives or friends (rather than by taking classes) and who selected old, familiar, local patterns instead of new ones from books and magazines. She looked for women who made quilts to use as bedcovers rather than for decoration or as wall hangings. She was interested in women who gave quilts as gifts to family members rather than those who sold them to strangers. And she wanted to meet mountain natives who considered quiltmaking a part of their everyday lives.

The "quilting bee" that brings women together to work on a quilt is such a cherished activity in the popular mind that some writers consider it a metaphor for democracy. Quilting in groups has a long and varied history in the United States, but the romantic image sometimes overshadows the reality of the activity. During the twentieth century, most group quilting has taken place in churches to raise money for capital expenditures or for foreign or domestic missions. Johnson documented two group-quilting activities, but she noted that one of these



Cotton string quilt made by Zelda Vass of Hillsville, Virginia, and held by Gertrude Vass, also of Hillsville, September 28, 1978. Photo by Geraldine Johnson

Quilts and Quiltmakers Featured in New Online Presentation

Quilts and Quiltmaking in America, a new online presentation from the Library of Congress's National Digital Library, showcases materials from two American Folklife Center collections, the Blue Ridge Parkway Folklife Project Collection (1978) and the Lands' End All-American Quilt Contest Collection (1992, 1994, and 1996). Together these collections provide a glimpse at the diverse quilting traditions in America. The quilt documentation from the Blue Ridge Parkway Folklife Project, conducted by the Center in cooperation with the National Park Service, includes photographs and recorded interviews with six quiltmakers in Appalachian North Carolina and Virginia. These materials document quilts and quilting within the context of daily life and reflect a range of backgrounds, motivations, and aesthetic sensibilities. The materials presented from the Lands' End All-American Quilt Contest Collection include images of approximately 180 winning quilts from across the United States. The collection represents a wide range of quiltmaking, from highly traditional to innovative, and the quilts pictured exhibit excellent design and technical skill in a variety of styles and materials.

Quilts and Quiltmaking in America can be reached through the American Folklife Center's Home Page at *http://lcweb.loc.gov/folklife/*. Click on "other collections available online."

groups rarely met. Instead, its members set the quilt up in a central location and dropped in to quilt when they could. By 1978, the busy lives of many in the region, even those past retirement age, made it difficult to coordinate a group activity.

For many Americans, the Appalachian region has become stereotypically associated with poverty. Indeed, the "boom and bust" economic cycles associated with extractive industries, principally coal mining and logging, along with the difficulties of operating small farms, have contributed to a chronically depressed economy. However, as Gerri Johnson found, the region includes a wide range of economic circumstances, from great poverty to great wealth. Because the rugged terrain and natural beauty of the region have attracted large numbers of tourists since the end of the nineteenth century, early economic development efforts often involved encouraging or teaching local residents to make crafts to sell to tourists. These early efforts were so successful that, even today, there is a widespread belief that craft items made in the mountains are better or more "authentic" than identical items made in other parts of the country.

While the influence of the tourist industry on the production of mountain crafts dates back to the early twentieth century, programs created by the federal government's "War on Poverty" spurred the formation of additional craft cooperatives during the late 1960s and 1970s. Johnson visited a number of craft shops scattered along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Some of these, she felt, did an excellent job of marketing the work of local crafters, while others sold work that was neither local nor traditional.

Since 1978, the market for handmade quilts has undergone a radical transformation. As American quiltmakers began to charge higher prices for their work, enterprising companies responded to the popular demand for inexpensive quilts by importing copies of American traditional quilts from developing countries such as Haiti and China. Competition from imported quilts has had a serious impact on the sales of American hand-crafted quilts.

Much has changed since Johnson interviewed mountain quiltmakers in 1978. Most of the women she talked with have died, and their quilts have been distributed among family and friends. The national quiltmaking revival has had a widespread influence, as younger women have taken up the craft with enthusiasm. Quilters of all ages have formed clubs and guilds, attend classes to learn new techniques, and buy new fabric to make quilts that are primarily decorative. Local and regional exhibitions display both historic and contemporary quilts.

As the collective memory of older quiltmakers fades, new quilters create memories of their own. What links the generations, however, is a profound respect for the traditions of the past. Younger quilters typically express a fascination with earlier quilts and their makers. They often say that while making a quilt they feel connected spiritually to a long line of creative and resourceful women. Although the lives of these younger women are very different from the lives of those who grew up in the Blue Ridge Mountains in the early twentieth century, they share a recognition of the creative spirit and an appreciation of a shared tradition.

Laurel Horton is a folklorist, writer, and editor who has made a speciality of quilts and quilting traditions. She lives in Seneca, South Carolina.

"If Quilts Could Talk": Voices from the Late-Twentieth Century

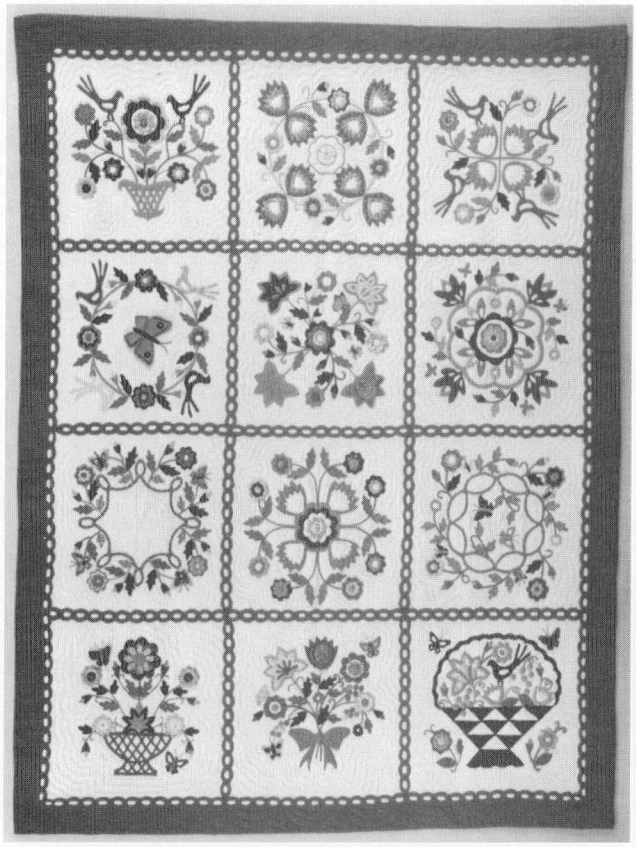
A 1996 children's quilt, "Wild in the Garden," submitted to the Lands' End "All-American Quilt Contest" by Arbor Montessori School, Decatur, Georgia. The inspiration for the quilt was the natural wooded setting of the school gardens and images from American folk art. Parents and children worked on this quilt together.

By Laurel Horton

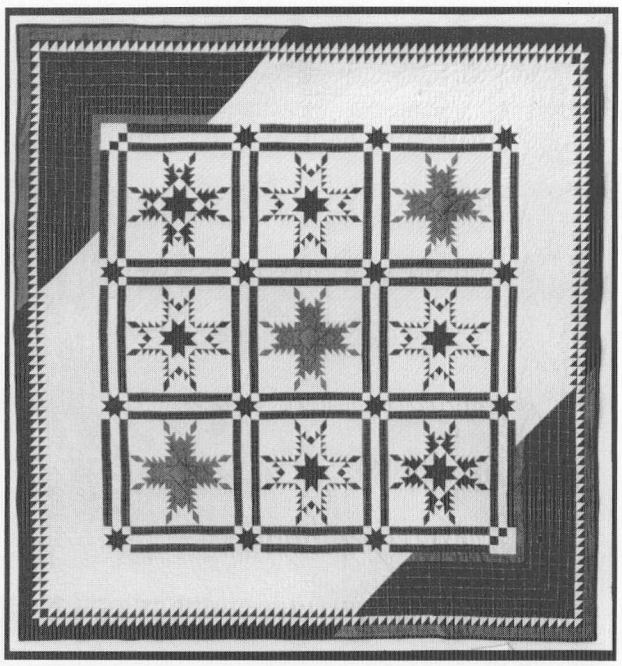
Quilts and quiltmaking are often used as metaphors for a sense of community, and one romantic image of quiltmaking includes a number of women sitting together around a quilt frame sharing a communal experience. But there is another aspect of quiltmaking that figures as part of its history in America—and that is one of competition.

During the nineteenth century, state and local agricultural fairs regularly included competitive categories for quilts and other needlework. There was a strong feeling that displaying and awarding prizes to the most beautifully designed and well-constructed quilts would encourage women to improve their skills. In the twentieth century, the wide circulation of women's magazines invited entries in national quilt competitions. The most notable of these was the Century of Progress Quilt Contest sponsored by Sears, Roebuck and Company as part of the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago. The first prize of $1,200 must have been a powerful incentive during the lean years of the Great Depression, as the contest attracted nearly twenty-five thousand entries from all over the country.

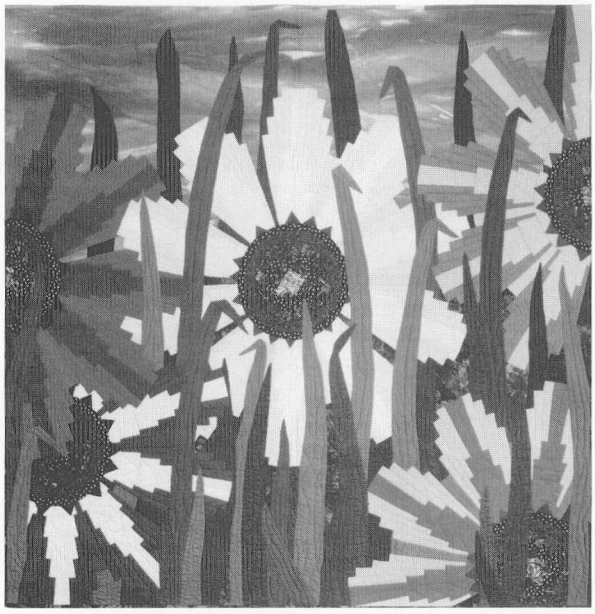
In 1992, the Coming Home Division of Lands' End Direct Merchants teamed up with *Good Housekeeping* magazine to sponsor an "All-American Quilt Contest." From the entries received, judges selected both a first prize winner from each state and a national winner. The contest was repeated



The 1992 state contest winner from New York, submitted by Frances Dunn of New York.



The 1992 third place national winner, "Firewheels, Fiddleheads, and Fairies," submitted by Brenda Keehr of Alaska.



The 1996 Judges Choice winner, "A Garden in the Storm," submitted by Sara Ann McLeonard of Florida.

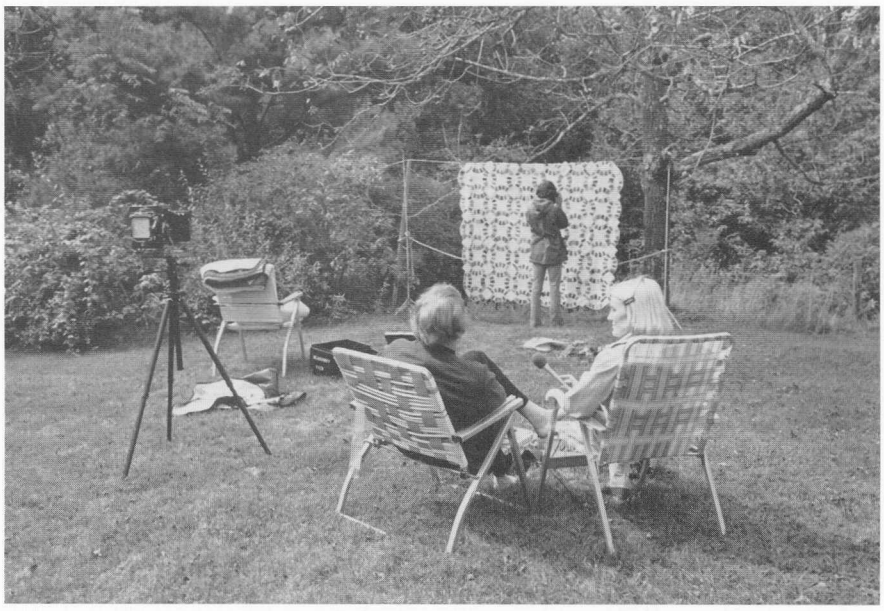
The 1994 Judges Choice winner, "Standing in Line at the Marshall Fields 13-Hour Sale," submitted by Ruth Reynolds of Illinois.

in 1994 and 1996, under the theme "If Quilts Could Talk." The 1994 winners were invited to submit short essays about their quilts, and in 1996 all entrants were invited to do the same. Many quiltmakers took the opportunity to share the stories of their quilts, and whilea collection of prize-winners may not represent the full range of American quilts, their stories, motivations, and meanings connect them with hundreds of thousands of other quilts that decorate beds, comfort children, document weddings and birthdays, and give pleasure to the makers and their loved ones.

One might suppose that the winners of national quilt contests would all be experienced, even professional, quilt artists, and indeed, the state winners include a number of people who earn income from quilt-related enterprises. However, a surprising number of winners had been quilting only a short time when they entered the contest. Some had done other kinds of sewing and needlework, and they found quiltmaking a natural extension of their skills.

In an age of quilt classes, instruction books, and videos, one might assume that there are few opportunities for learning to make quilts "the old-fashioned way," from members of the family. Surprisingly, however, a number of winning quilters responded that they had indeed learned from mothers, grandmothers, or friends. Others learned from church groups making quilts for charity. The majority described themselves as "self-taught," and in a very real sense, this description could be applied to every quilter. Whether one is watching a video, reading from a book, or listening to words of instruction, the learning process is similar: each quilter must learn to perform the necessary techniques and then practice them until they become familiar.

There are ongoing debates among quilters about whether quilts should be considered "art" or "craft." A quilt, like any other individually made object, represents both aesthetic and technical considerations. Some quilts are made to serve as bedcovers, while others are designed to be hung on walls. To function well as a bedcover, a quilt must be made in an appropriate size, shape, and proportion; its weight and thickness should provide the necessary warmth; and it should not be embellished with sharp objects that might cause injury. A quilt for a wall has different requirements. Its visual interest is paramount, and it must hang straight. Since walls come in all sizes, there is more possibility for variety in the size and shape of wall quilts. These categories are not entirely separate, of course, as many quilts can serve either function.



Geraldine Johnson (right) interviews Lura Stanley in her backyard, while Terry Eiler photographs quilts, Laurel Fork, Virginia, September 1978. Photo by Lyntha Eiler

As many quilt-lovers know, certain quilt patterns have names. "Wild Goose Chase," "Drunkard's Path," and "Log Cabin" are recognized by quilters and non-quilters alike, and these traditional patterns frequently inspire original variations. Many quiltmakers, however, bestow specific titles on their special quilts, whether the quilts use traditional patterns or represent original designs. These titles often reflect the maker's inspiration or indicate the quilt's intended purpose.

Quiltmakers in the late twentieth century have a bewildering array of fabrics from which to choose. Many purists insist upon 100 percent cotton material, while others look for particular colors, textures, or patterns, ignoring the fiber content. Although quiltmakers of this era typically buy new fabric especially for their quilts, a number of state winners indicated that they had challenged themselves to use only those fabrics already in their collections. Experienced quiltmakers often admit to accumulating large fabric collections to provide an extensive "palette" from which to choose.

The 1994 and 1996 contest theme, "If Quilts Could Talk," inspired some entrants to make quilts specifically for the contest. Others realized that quilts they were already working on, or had recently finished, fit the theme. However, as a number of entrants pointed out, "every quilt has a story to tell," suggesting that the theme was not considered a limitation. The narratives about the winning quilts display a remarkable range of motivations and influences. Some

depict very personal stories, such as recovery from illness or the loss of a loved one. Others make political statements about local, national, or international events and concerns.

Quilts frequently celebrate birthdays, graduations, weddings, anniversaries, and retirements, and a number of the winning entries commemorate such events. These quilts include visual reminders of the intended recipients' lives and interests such as pictorial images, actual items of clothing, or symbols of personal significance. With some quilts, the story is easily "read" by the viewer. With others, the meaning may not be apparent without the accompanying narrative. Without knowing the story, all we see is a pretty quilt.

Nature, in its many manifestations, proves a frequent inspiration to quilters. Some express their connection to the natural world by choosing or adapting traditional floral quilt patterns, while others describe the attempt to "paint" with fabric. For some, nature is as near as the backyard or a favorite walking trail; others are moved to interpret a vista from a vacation or a childhood memory. Contest winners described the challenges of recreating in fabric the emotional qualities evoked by the beauty and power of natural landscapes.

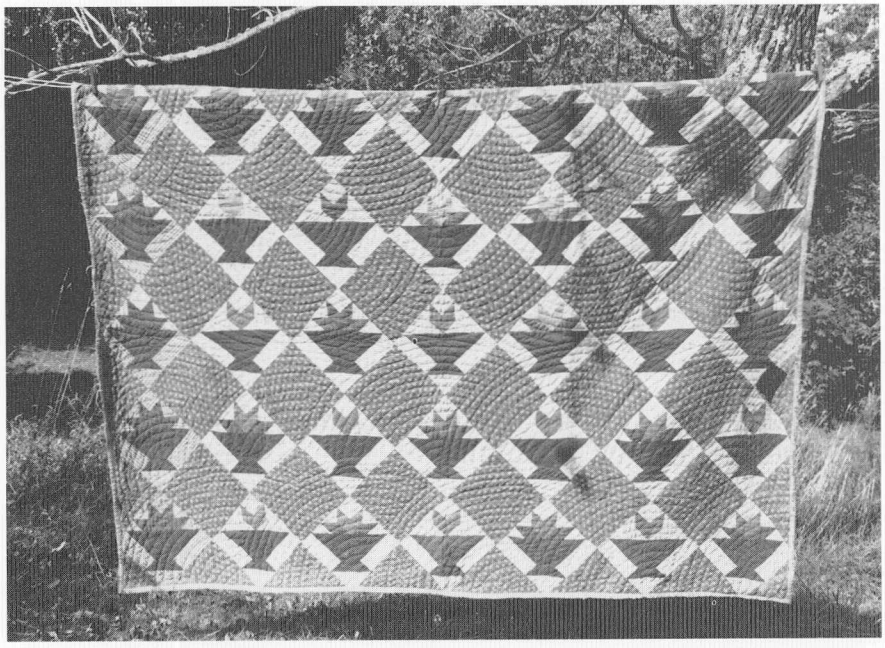
Many quilters find that fabric is an effective medium through which to explore and express the spiritual dimensions of their lives. The process of creating a quilt is, for many, a rich and profound experience. Some quilters feel a deep sense of union with their own ancestors, with generations of past quiltmakers, or with the creation of the universe.

When the winners were asked their primary reason for entering the contest, many responded that friends and relatives had urged them to do so. Others saw this as an appropriate way to share a suitable quilt and its story. The state winners reported a wide range of experience in entering quilt competitions. A large number regularly enter—and win prizes—in national and regional contests. Some quilters indicated that they enter a few shows every year. Yet, a surprising number of the winners revealed that they had rarely or never entered a quilt contest before. For many of these, the contest theme and the urging of friends were important factors in their decision to enter this contest.

Quilters who regularly show their quilts through contests, shows, and magazines found that being a winner in this particular contest did not change their lives or the way they look at their work as quiltmakers. Others, however, reported that being a winner meant that their families, friends, and communities took their work more seriously and that being recognized as "experts" has boosted their self-esteem and allowed them to think of themselves as artists. Another group responded that they continue to make quilts because they enjoy the process. The recognition is nice, they say, but less important than the feeling of personal satisfaction.

Although this group of prize-winning quilts does not represent a true cross-section of the work of American quiltmakers, the quiltmakers' responses indicate the wide range of experiences that influence how quilts are envisioned and brought into being. Each quilt is the result of a unique process of inspiration and construction, and each has a story to tell.

Taken together, the Blue Ridge Parkway Folklife Project Collection and the Lands' End All-American Quilt Project Collection provide opportunities to examine particular quilts within the larger individual and cultural contexts in which they were created and used. The Blue Ridge interviews were conducted in a limited geographic area over a period of two months with a small number of women identified by the researchers as traditional quiltmakers—that is, those for whom quiltmaking was an integral part of their lives in a rural economy. Their stories include learning to make quilts from older relatives, using remnants from home sewing, and recreating patterns passed down from earlier generations. These interviews, recorded in 1978, document an important transition in quiltmaking history: the early influences of its late-twentieth-century revival. At the time of the Blue Ridge interviews, quiltmaking was practiced primarily as an individual or local activity by older



Flower Basket quilt made by Lura Stanley. Photo by Geraldine Johnson, September 29, 1978

women, and there were as yet few indications of growing general popularity.

By the 1990s quiltmakers were well aware of their participation in a national movement. Young women and some men, many from urban and professional backgrounds, took up quilting as a leisure activity. Books and magazines provided a wealth of new patterns and techniques, manufacturers designed fabrics especially for quilters, and the Lands' End contest was only one of many opportunities for individual quiltmakers to participate in national exhibitions and events.

It would be tempting to look at these two collections as a contrast between the last remaining examples of an old, traditional style of quiltmaking and the contemporary style of the revival movement. However, the narratives of the quiltmakers suggest that in many ways the experiences of the two groups of quiltmakers have been remarkably similar. It is the similarities, rather than the differences, that truly define the enduring appeal both of the quilts and of the quiltmaking process.

Traditional quilts exist largely in a private sphere, inside the home, within families. The Blue Ridge quiltmakers generally did not participate in public activities. However, there have always been exceptions. Some of the traditional quilters entered their work at local fairs, and others exhibited their work for sale at local craft shops. Carrie Severt came to the attention of the research team because she aired her quilts on her porch; and Lura Stanley, proud of how pretty her quilts looked hung outside to be photographed, imagined displaying them on a clothesline for sale at prices "out of reason."

By entering a contest, the Lands' End contest participants signaled their willingness to share their quilts with a public audience. The accompanying narratives indicate that some of the quilts were actually made specifically to be entered in contests.

Sabe and Donna Choate stand in front of Mrs. Choate's quilts, Alleghany County, North Carolina, September 25, 1978. Photo by Geraldine Johnson

Other quilts were made as gifts for family or otherwise intended for private use. The majority of both groups of quiltmakers expressed similar interests in making quilts for loved ones and for personal satisfaction.

The Blue Ridge quilters who were interviewed had all grown up in the early twentieth century and had survived the Great Depression of the 1930s. They remembered an era in which making quilts from available fabric was a necessary survival tactic. Those who were still actively making quilts at the time of the interview no longer needed the quilts for warmth, but they continued the activity because they enjoyed it.

The winners of the Lands' End contests ranged from young mothers to women in their eighties. Many of the older women recalled growing up during the Depression, making quilts out of necessity, and learning to quilt from family and friends. Although younger quilters have never needed to make quilts to keep warm, many of them expressed a form of solidarity with earlier generations of quilters by striving to make a quilt from materials on hand rather than from newly purchased fabrics.

The fabrics, and the ways they are put together, represent the most obvious differences between the Blue Ridge quilts and the contest winners. Just as with clothing, there are changing fashions in fabrics, and one of the best ways to determine when a particular quilt was made is to identify the period in which its fabrics were manufactured. The quilts made by the Blue Ridge quiltmakers reflect the limited selection of woven cotton fabrics and the popularity of synthetics available during the 1970s, while the Lands' End contest quilts exhibit the range and variety of commercial goods available at the end of the century. Interestingly, however, some Blue Ridge quilters expanded their palette by using commercial dyes to color plain fabric, especially for linings; and a number of their later counterparts reported dyeing their own fabrics to obtain colors and textures not otherwise available.

Perhaps the most striking differences between the two groups of quilts are in the ways the fabrics have been combined to form designs. The Blue Ridge

quilts are either pieced without patterns, using strips and rectangles, or are constructed according to traditional pieced and appliqué patterns, most of which date back to quilt revivals of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The Lands' End contest winners reflect a broad spectrum of design styles and construction techniques developed and popularized during the late-twentieth century. Non-symmetrical designs, detailed pictorial images, and the use of computer-generated or photo-transfer images co-exist with new interpretations of traditional design elements. At the same time, however, the winning quilts include a large percentage of traditional patterns, and many of the quiltmakers reported selecting patterns and fabrics in order to make quilts that resembled those of earlier generations.

Although the two groups of quilts display visible differences in their materials and techniques, they result from a common process of design and implementation. Each quiltmaker, whether working with limited materials and influences or having access to abundant resources, experiences the same sequence of steps in creating a quilt.

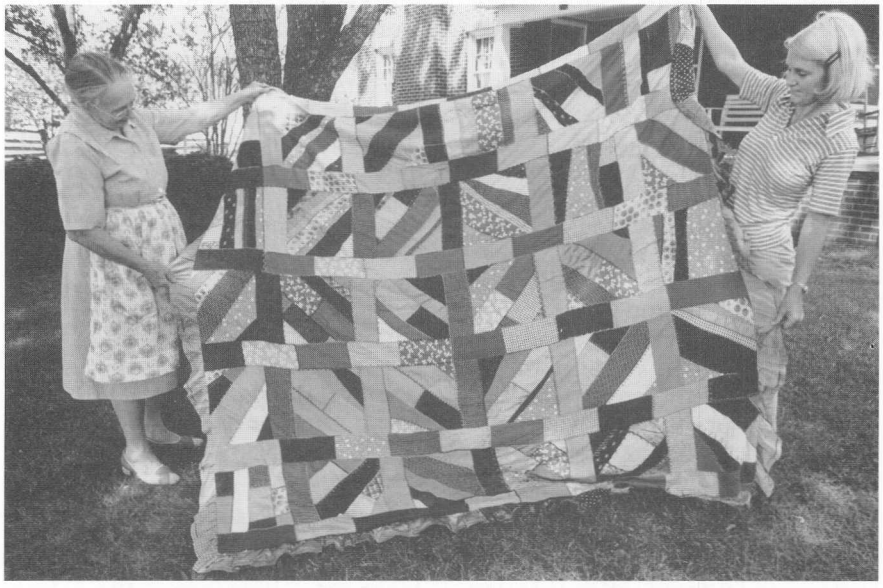
At the beginning of the process, there is always a moment when the idea forms to make a particular quilt. For some, the moment may result from the desire to make a quilt as a gift for an event, such as a wedding, birthday, or anniversary. For others, inspiration might come from the desire to recreate in fabric an emotion associated with the experience of beauty in the natural world. The impetus might result from a desire to use a particular piece of fabric or to explore an unusual color combination; or from seeing existing quilts in the family closet, in a museum display, or in a book.

Once the decision has been made, there may be a period of incubation, in which the original idea is refined, materials collected, and preparations made. When the time is right, the quiltmaker enters the implementation phase, applying tools to fabric. Historically, this often meant creating a template from paper or cardboard, tracing the shape onto fabric, and cutting the fabric with scissors. Contemporary quiltmakers have a number of additional tools and techniques, including rotary cutters, freezer paper, and glue-sticks. During the process of cutting and sewing, the quiltmaker may realize the need to modify or adapt the design. There is a give-and-take between the maker and the emerging quilt, and for many quiltmakers, this is the part of the process that provides the greatest satisfaction.

At some point during construction, the quilt develops a life of its own. Not only does it have a physical weight, or "body," but the quiltmaker may feel that it expresses its own "personality" as well. As the quilter's abstract idea materializes into a quilt, the quilter may feel a sense of separation or detachment, even wonder, that she has created a physical and emotional presence where nothing existed before. It is no surprise that quilters often use metaphors of giving birth when speaking of their quilts.

The quiltmaking process is not complete with the finishing stitches, however, for the quilt must fulfill its purpose. Whether the quilt is intended to cover a bed, decorate a wall, serve as a gift, compete in a contest, or rest in a closet as evidence of personal achievement, the movement away from its maker is enacted both physically and emotionally each time a new quilt's purpose is achieved.

The quilts made in the Blue Ridge mountains and photographed in 1978 may on the surface appear quite different from those selected as winners of contests during the 1990s. The stories that describe the materials, patterns, and techniques employed may at first sound worlds apart. However, the quiltmakers themselves, if they could engage in conversation, would recognize that in the common activity of making quilts, they share a common language.



Alma Hemmings (left) and Geraldine Johnson hold a crazy quilt from about 1948, at Mrs. Hemmings's home in Dobson, Surry County, North Carolina, September 19, 1978. Photo by Lyntha Eiler

Laurel Horton is a folklorist, writer, and editor who has made a specialty of quilts and quilting traditions. She lives in Seneca, South Carolina.

"No Other Job More Important" Peggy Bulger Becomes New Director of American Folklife Center

By James Hardin

Margaret Anne (Peggy) Bulger, senior program officer with the Southern Arts Federation in Atlanta, has been appointed director of the American Folklife Center, succeeding Alan Jabbour, who is retiring after thirty years of federal service. She assumed her new duties on July 6. In making the announcement, Winston Tabb, Associate Librarian for Library Services, said that her "broad range of experience in folklife and public folklife administration, covering a period exceeding two decades, uniquely suits Dr. Bulger for the role of director of the American Folklife Center."

Peggy Bulger's career in folklore began after she had received a B.A. in fine arts, when she visited Cooperstown, New York, to investigate museum studies at the Cooperstown Graduate Programs of the State University of New York. In a descriptive brochure of the institution she learned of a second Cooperstown program, in folklore and folklife, and this discovery of the field changed the course of her life.

The folklore program at Cooperstown stressed material culture, and, when a professor there told her of a new program at Western Kentucky University that offered more coverage of music, she decided to leave her home state of New York, dulcimer in hand, for what was to become the beginning of a long southern journey.

She received an M.A. in folklore from Western Kentucky in 1975, at the same time working as coordinator of the Traditional Folklife Project at the Appalachian Museum, which is affiliated with Berea College. In 1976, she accepted a position as folk arts coordinator and state folklorist for the state of Florida, a position that developed into the Bureau of Florida Folklife Programs. She helped to build the bureau from what was essentially a one-person office concerned with the management of the state folk festival to a twelve-person operation responsible for a variety of projects and programs throughout the state. In 1989, she moved to the Southern Arts Federation, based in Atlanta, as regional folk arts program coordinator and then senior program officer. During this period, she took a leave of absence to complete a Ph.D. in folklore and folklife from the University of Pennsylvania, which she received in 1992.

Peggy A. Bulger. Photo by Keiko Guest

Of her many assignments at the several institutions, the ones that Peggy Bulger has liked best involved fieldwork. "Fieldwork is the cornerstone of the work we do," she said, since it puts folklorists directly in touch with people and their ways of life. Then she added, "the most fun things are also often the hardest." The Musical Roots of the South tours Bulger coordinated for the Southern Arts Federation were especially rewarding, she said, traveling all over the South, identifying artists, and helping them to become better known through performances in several states. "It was wonderful to work with people so intensely."

Bulger looks forward to working with the Center staff, the Center's board, and Library management to chart a new course for the Center. "The thing needed most [at the outset] is an assessment of where we are," she said. "What good things have been done? What are the national needs? What can we do for the whole field of folklore? Then the staff, board, and Library can craft a vision. Maybe that vision will include fieldwork—maybe other things. Certainly, we must protect and promote our collections." The Center is charged by its enabling legislation to protect its collections, but Bulger believes that preservation is an issue for many archives around the coun-

try, and that the Center must take a leadership role in this crucial area of activity.

Center board chair William Kinney has said that the American Folklife Center should become *the* center for folklife in the country, and Bulger agrees. The Center and the Archive are known to a relatively small circle, she said, but there are many others who need to know about the resources here. "The National Digital Library Project will help. So many people can use it to access the collections. *Folklife Center News* is a good vehicle, and we might think about increasing the mailing list." She noted that "folklife has a high profile in Washington now, with folklorists Bill Ferris [as chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities] and Bill Ivey [as chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts]. And we have an expanded board of trustees, which is composed of a fantastic body of people to advise us."

Peggy Bulger is admirably suited to help the Center in creating coalitions with other people and organizations for accomplishing its national mission. In her position at the Southern Arts Federation, she created an extensive network of folklorists working in the South and raised significant funds from public and private sources to support the federation's endeavors. In addition, she is currently president-elect of the American Folklore Society, the principal professional association of American folklorists. There are other groups, such as the Mid-Atlantic Arts Federation, the New York Folklore Society, and the Western Folklife Center, and "we need better ways of communicating with these groups," she said, "and a way of coordinating that will help people accomplish their goals."

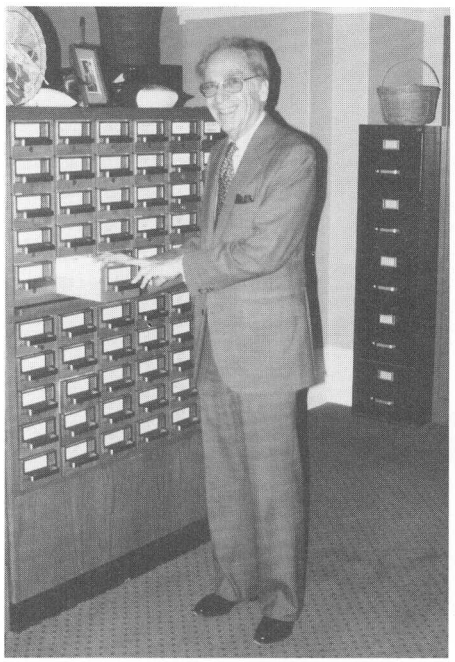
Local Legacies, which is a folklife project of the Library of Congress's Bicentennial Program cosponsored by the American Folklife Center (see *Folklife Center News*, spring 1999), will also help. Bulger believes the project "will put folklorists out in the field in touch with their members of Congress in a positive way. Some projects may be the beginning of strong partnerships."

As the second director of the American Folklife Center, Bulger hopes to build on the good work of the past twenty-three years: "The United States is a nation blessed with a diversity of culture and human creativity. There is a growing awareness concerning the essential role played by folk heritage, folk culture, and folk arts in our nation. A healthy America demands a respect for, and pride in, the variety of cultures and traditions that comprise our national profile. The American Folklife Center is a center for the people, ensuring that these cultural resources are preserved and celebrated throughout the years to come. I can think of no other job that is more important."

Center Board of Trustees Assembles for June Meeting

The Board of Trustees of the American Folklife Center met at the Library of Congress on June 18. Members in attendance (left to right) were: Richard Kurin, Tom Rankin (back row), Jane Beck, Norma Cantú, Mario Moreno (back row), Kay Shelemay, Ellen McCulloch-Lovell, Jo Radner, Alan Jabbour, John Roberts, Peggy Bulger, Dan Sheehy, Wilsonia Cherry, Mickey Hart, Judith McCulloh, James Hoy, and William Kinney. Photo by James Hardin

Former Marine Recalls Library of Congress Assignment



Robert Bloch returned to the Library of Congress after forty-six years to see copies of the work he did here in 1953 as a young Marine staff sergeant. In a joint program created by the Library and the U.S. Marine Corps, the Library furnished wire recording equipment to World War II combat correspondents in the South Pacific, who upon their return to the United States deposited these field recordings in the Library. Bloch's one-of-a-kind job was to catalog over two thousand recordings and transcriptions made by the correspondents, who documented such activities as generals briefing their troops moments before invasion, actual battle sounds from the midst of combat, servicemen's personal messages for loved ones back home (this portion of the collection now resides in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division), and songs of Samoan marines (copies of which reside in the Archive of Folk Culture). Mr. Bloch is pictured here in the Folklife Reading Room. Photo by Ann Hoog and caption by Jennifer Cutting

EDITOR'S NOTES *from page 2*

Center's Blue Ridge Parkway Folklife Project. Several of the quiltmakers interviewed by folklorist Gerri Johnson were themselves surprised by the beauty of the things they had made. Quilting tends to be a private, indoor activity, but a folklorist's desire to photograph the quilts she was investigating brought many beautiful examples out into the light of day to hang on clotheslines in front and back yards. The practical and everyday requirement to produce bed coverings for cold winter nights had resulted in items of arresting beauty, and their makers were thrilled and proud to see them on display.

I am sorry that *Folklife Center News* is able to show the lovely quilts pictured in this issue only in black and white. But those who have Internet access can see them in color via the National Digital Library's new online offering "Quilts and Quiltmaking in America." Thanks to the digitization and Internet presentation of selected images from the Blue Ridge Parkway Folklife Project and the Lands' End All-American Quilt Contest Collection, many of the quilts documented by the Center are spread upon an international clothesline for all to view.

Department of Corrections

William Sittig, chief of the Library's Science and Technology Division, noticed our failure to provide a full identification for Coal River in Mary Hufford's article "Seining for Hellgrammites on Coal River" (Folklife Center News, spring 1999). It is located in Raleigh County, in southern West Virginia.

And Raymond Kaplan writes from Jerusalem, Israel, to point out that our spring editor's note has British troops burning the Capitol Building in August 1914, when, of course, it was August 1814.

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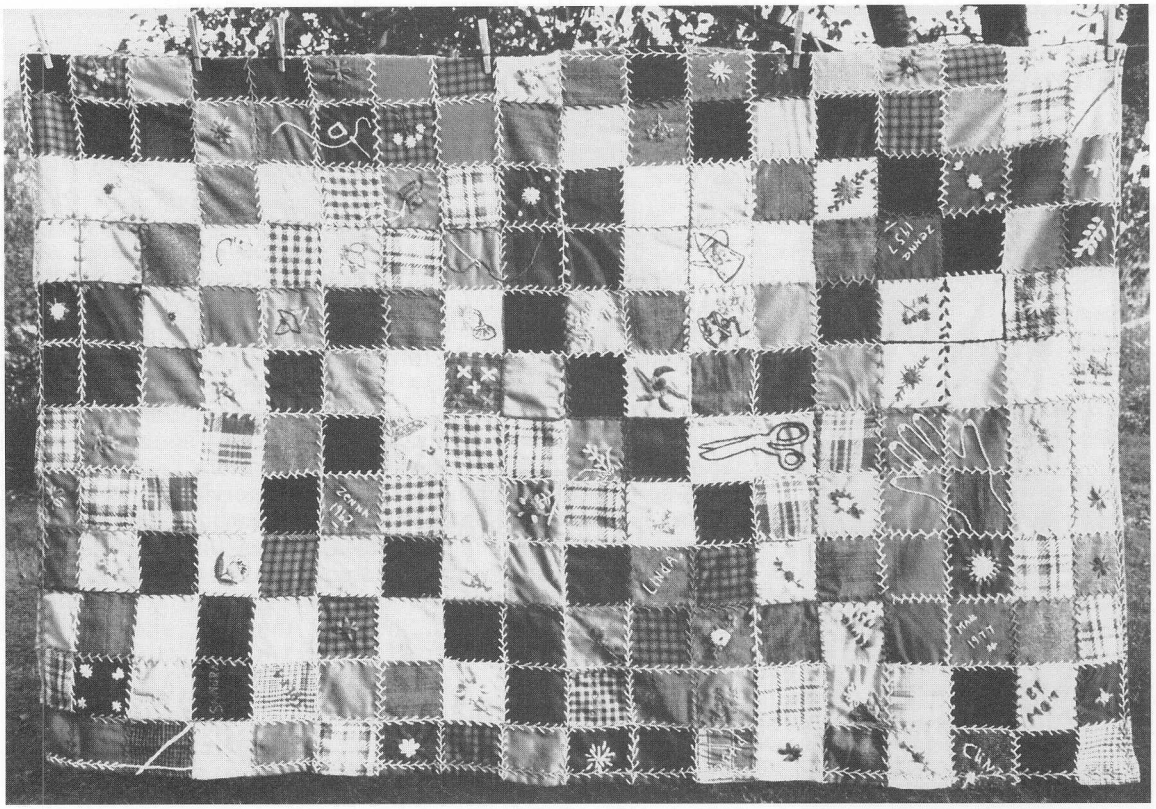

Crazy Quilt made by Zenna Todd, Alleghany County, North Carolina. Photographs of this and many other quilts in the American Folklife Center's collections are now available online through the National Digital Library. From the Blue Ridge Parkway Folklife Project. Photo by Geraldine Johnson, September 27, 1978

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