

THE ROMANCE OF QUILT NAMES

By PAUL G. BREWSTER

Some fifteen years ago I spent nearly the whole of one summer in the collecting of folklore—songs, tales, riddles, games, cures, fiddle tunes, and anything else I could find—in Southern Indiana. Now a collector soon learns that in order to obtain the best results from his prospective informants he must be able to converse intelligently with them about the things in which they are interested. If the informant is a man, the conversation is likely to turn to such matters as fox or coon hunting, crop prospects, or that perennial topic, the weather (the collector will do well to avoid the dangerous subjects of religion and politics unless reasonably sure of his ground). Should the informant be a woman, the quickest and the surest way to win her confidence and her co-operation is to praise her cooking, to compliment her on her children, or to express an admiration for her quilts. In many instances the last-named method is not the least effective. It goes without saying, of course, that the ability to distinguish between pieced and patch quilts and to talk understandingly of the *Wedding Ring*, *Double Irish Chain*, *All Around the World*, and other patterns will do more to establish *rapport* and to elicit the coveted information than will just a "What a lovely quilt!"

Lovely is not too strong a word. The sight of a line of quilts of brilliant hues and various designs hanging in the sunshine, their rich colors almost as bright today as they were twenty-five, fifty, or even a hundred years ago, is one long to be remembered. And a closer inspection leaves one marvelling at the intricacy of the design, the tasteful matching of colors, and, above all, the tiny even stitches of the quilting.

But if the quilts themselves are fascinating, the names given the designs by their creators are no less so. Here one finds, for example, patterns the names of which call the roll of stirring events in American history, others which express a yearning for new scenes or perhaps a nostalgia for the old ones, and still others whose names reveal a keen

appreciation of the beauties of nature or of the humbler objects associated with everyday living. Nor are the grotesque and the humorous lacking.

Among the most interesting, perhaps, are the names which carry us back in imagination to epoch-making incidents in history or to the turbulent political struggles of an earlier day. *Old Tippecanoe*, for instance, commemorates William Henry Harrison, ninth president, who gained the nickname by his victory over Tecumseh and the Prophet at Tippecanoe in 1811. When he ran for the presidency in 1840, the slogan of his party was "Tippecanoe and Tyler, too." *Harrison's Quilt* gets its name from him also, and it is probable that the widely known *Log Cabin* pattern goes back to the same source. During the course of the bitterly contested campaign, Harrison's political opponents attempted to belittle him by picturing him as a man who lived in a log cabin and drank hard cider. His supporters took up the challenge, and log cabins on floats (and perhaps hard cider as well) played a prominent part in sweeping the Whigs into power. *Coxey's Camp* recalls the fruitless march on Washington of Jacob Selcher Coxey and his "army" on Easter morning, March 24, 1894. *Oklahoma Boomer* was inspired by the events attending the opening of the Indian Territory to white settlers in 1889, and *Kansas Troubles* brings to mind the dark days when, torn by internal strife over the question of slavery, the state was appropriately termed "Bleeding Kansas." *Hobson's Kiss* commemorates handsome, dashing young Richard Hobson, hero of the Battle of Manila, whom all the young ladies of the time idolized and whom they almost fought to kiss at every public appearance he dared to make. Other names reminiscent of our early history are *Charter Oak*, *The Philippines*, *President's Quilt*, *Star-Spangled Banner*, *Star of Texas*, and *Union*. That the patient quilters were aware also of the political issues of the day and that they had their own ideas on these is evidenced by such names as *Lincoln's Platform*, *Whig Rose*, *Confederate Rose*, *Democrat Rose*, and *Radical Rose*.

Quilt patterns with names deriving from those of relatives or friends, many of them long ago deceased, include *Aunt Eliza's Star Quilt*, *Aunt Sukey's Patch*, *Fanny's Fan*, *Grandmother's Choice*, *Grandmother's Dream*, *Grandmother's Own*, *Mollie's Fancy*, *Mother's Fancy*, *Mrs. Morgan's Choice*,

Sarah's Favorite, Sister's Choice, and Widower's Choice. Who were Aunt Eliza and Aunt Sukey? Who was Mrs. Morgan? No one knows, but their names survive in those of the quilt patterns they created and will live on long after they have become undecipherable on the stones marking their graves.

Representatives of the exotic and unusual names encountered are *Alpine Rose, Arabic Lattice, Enigma, Fleur de Lis, Grecian Design, Greek Cross, Greek Square, Mexican Rose, Persian Palm Lily, Pyrotechnics, Roman Cross, Roman Stripe, Royal Japanese Vase, Venetian Design, and Vestibule.*

So-called "friendship quilts" were very common. Sometimes the blocks were pieced by various friends and relatives and then sent to the person or persons doing the quilting; sometimes each one desiring to help took a hand in the quilting at whatever time was convenient. The resulting quilt was thus the product of real neighborliness and friendly co-operation. Typical names were *Album, Autograph Quilt, Block Album, New Album, Sashed Album, Memory Blocks, Memory Circle,* or simply *Friendship Quilt.* In the case of the *Autograph Quilt,* as the name suggests, each worker stitched her name on the blocks she contributed.

As one might expect, patterns named for flowers are particularly numerous. We find, for example, *Chrysanthemums, Cleveland Lilies, Carolina Lily, Daisies, Iris, Jonquils, Lily of the Valley, Morning Glory, Poppy, Poinsettia, Sunflower, Wind-blown Tulips, and Cockscomb.* The rose leads in popularity: *Ashland Rose, California Rose, Harvest Rose, Prairie Rose, Wild Rose, Rose of Dixie, Rose of St. Louis, Rose of the Carolinas,* and the famous *Rose of Le Moyne.*

Among the patterns reflecting the strong religious spirit of the time are *The Cross, Cross and Crown, Circuit Rider, Devil's Claws, Ecclesiastical, Forbidden Fruit Tree, Garden of Eden, Solomon's Crown, Star of Bethlehem, Tree of Paradise,* and *Village Church.* Others which may belong here are *Jacob's Ladder, Job's Coffin, Job's Tears,* and *Solomon's Temple.* However, the first two may owe their origin to either a real or a fancied resemblance to the string figures known by these names, and *Job's Tears* may have derived from a plant so named. It is possible that *Solomon's Temple* belongs with pattern names derived from the fraternal orders.

Many names show the influence of games and square dances. Belonging to this group are *Eight Hands Around,*

Hands All Around, Leap Frog, Puss-in-the-Corner, Right and Left, Shoo Fly, Swing in the Centre, Tick-Tack-Toe, and Twist and Turn.

The influence of fraternal orders is apparent in the *Compass* pattern and in the *Odd Fellows Chain*.

Humorous and grotesque names abound—*All Tangled Up, Goose Tracks, Drunkard's Trail, Old Maid's Puzzle, Bachelor's Puzzle, Pickle Dish, Cake Stand, Broken Dish, Toad in the Puddle, Bear's Paws, Crazy Ann, Duck and Ducklings, Goose in the Pond, Hen and Chickens, Swarm of Bees, Wild Goose Chase, Monkey Wrench, Churn Dash, Turkey Pen, Bouncing Betty, Blind Man's Fancy, Hairpin Catcher, and Catch Me If You Can.* Here we find, too, *Hearts and Gizzards, Crow's Foot, Robbing Peter to Pay Paul, and Fly Foot.* The first of these may have been suggested by the following little jingle:

Love is a little thing shaped like a lizard;
It wraps its tail around your heart and pulls it through your
gizzard.

Crow's Foot, like *Jacob's Ladder* and *Job's Coffin*, may have had its origin in the name of a string figure, and *Robbing Peter to Pay Paul* is unquestionably from the identically phrased folk expression. The *Fly Foot* pattern, in which the swastika is prominent, owes its odd name to an incorrect reading on the part of some early quilter. The word is actually *fylfot*, another name for the swastika symbol.

And finally, since thrift was a cardinal virtue with the oldtime quilter, it is not surprising to run across names like *Economy, Odds and Ends, Old Scrap Patchwork, and Old Nancy Save-all.*

Truly a cross section of early America—its religious faith, its intense nationalism (and sectionalism), its spirit of cooperation and neighborliness, its simple diversions, and its sense of humor. May these and kindred virtues of our forebears play an ever greater role in the larger pattern which we call the American way of life!

Henderson State Teachers College Arkadelphia, Arkansas

BOOK REVIEWS

Lincoln Collector: The Story of the Oliver R. Barrett Lincoln Collection, Carl Sandburg. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950. \$7.50.

"What is it collectors do when they collect? . . . What is the difference between the mere hobbyist and the truly impassioned collector?" With these words, Carl Sandburg opens the foreword to one of the most impressive records of collectomania to be published since the great age of antiquarianism, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Even for a person who is willing to argue the relative merits of Abraham Lincoln and, say, Franklin Pierce as politicians and presidents or who feels that Sandburg's "Fog" is a far more significant work than his *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years* this book has much to offer. If nothing else (and it does a great deal else) it offers to the self-trained folklorist an answer to the questions posed above. The *Lincoln Collector* shows the results which may be obtained when an overwhelming passion for the collecting of all of the items related to any particular person, place, or thing is accompanied by a disciplined mind.

Oliver R. Barrett began to collect the materials recorded and examined in this book—autograph letters, speech manuscripts, newspaper clippings, magazine articles, and such material objects as Lincoln's watch-chain, pocket knife, and spectacles—as early as 1886 and continued it all his life. As a result, the *Lincoln Collector* is more than simply an examination of Lincolniana by one of the world's most informed Lincoln scholars, it is a record of America and American life in the years when America was more fully alive and more conscious of itself than it has ever been before or since. In the author's own words again, the book presents "Lincoln in a series of different frames, revealing the people, the times, the speech and lingo, of the generation who knew Lincoln and that he knew."

Particularly to the folklorist I recommend this book, for I have seen no other on any subject which so perfectly indicates what can be and what should be done with a mass of

collected materials, albeit to do it as well as is done here one must be what Carl Sandburg is, a poet, a scholar, and a man.

W. E. R.

Pecos Bill: Texas Cowpuncher, Harold W. Felton. Illustrated by Aldren A. Watson. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949. \$2.50.

To remark that this book is a handsome, well-illustrated volume is to state the obvious, for all books published by Alfred A. Knopf are that. It is also, however, a highly readable volume though its humor is sometimes labored and though one is always too conscious of the fact that though tales of Pecos Bill may still be told around prairie campfires to the tune of crackling embers and lowing cattle they are never told in quite the same manner as Harold W. Felton retells them here.

Pecos Bill: Texas Cowpuncher is a tall tale biography, a compilation of the various tales about Bill brought together and reworked as a straightforward, connected narrative. It is a very disturbing book, for it is impossible to tell how much of it is folktale and how much of it is Harold W. Felton who says in the Introduction:

This is a faithful account of the life of Pecos Bill. Truth is a biographer's first consideration. Accurate reporting of his findings is scarcely less important. I have reported the facts as they are. In so doing I have followed the generally accepted practice, and have 'truthened' them up a little. If there is a lie to be found in this book, in the nature of things, it is almost bound to be one of the truest lies ever told.

That quotation exemplifies the principal faults to be found with the book: the labored humor and the "truthening"—a violation of the basic principle of all folklorists: what is, is, and must be left so. Were this book primarily designed for popular consumption, such a point would not be worth bringing up; but the inclusion of a very complete and usable bibliography at the end of the volume belies this assumption, though nothing else in the volume does.

In short, *Pecos Bill* is an entertaining book for a summer's afternoon reading while sipping from a frosted glass, but though it contains a bit of scholarly apparatus, it is little more than that.

W. E. R.

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Membership in the Hoosier Folklore Society is two dollars a calendar year. This is open to individuals, schools, and libraries anywhere in the United States. Members receive HOOSIER FOLKLORE, a quarterly for the publication of folklore of Indiana and neighboring states. Single copies may be purchased for fifty cents each.

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STANDARD ABBREVIATIONS OF TITLES REFERRED TO IN NOTES AND ARTICLES

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| CFQ | —CALIFORNIA FOLKLORE QUARTERLY |
| HF | —HOOSIER FOLKLORE |
| HF B | —HOOSIER FOLKLORE BULLETIN |
| JAFL | —JOURNAL OF AMERICAN FOLKLORE |
| MAFS | —MEMOIRS OF THE AMERICAN FOLKLORE SOCIETY |
| NYFQ | —NEW YORK FOLKLORE QUARTERLY |
| SFQ | —SOUTHERN FOLKLORE QUARTERLY |
| WF | —WESTERN FOLKLORE QUARTERLY |
| Type Index | —Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, THE TYPES OF THE FOLK-TALE, Helsinki, 1928. |
| Motif Index | —Stith Thompson, MOTIF-INDEX OF FOLK-LITERATURE, Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Studies, 1932-36. |
| The Folktale | —Stith Thompson, THE FOLKTALE, New York, The Dryden Press, 1947. |