The Kentucky Quilt Project Records
1980-1997

Accession #1999-083
39 Linear Feet

Prepared by

Katherine Burger Johnson - Project Director
Ruth Spangler - Project Assistant

The University of Louisville Archives and Records Center
June 2000

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The Kentucky Quilt Project (KQP) 1980 to 1997

This collection includes the records of The Kentucky Quilt Project (KQP) from its inception in 1980 until 1997 (the bulk of the records date from 1980 to 1983 and 1991 to 1994). The records provide information on and documentation of quilts; Quilt Days; local, national, and international quilt exhibitions; traveling exhibitions; three books; one scholarly monograph; six issues of a scholarly biannual quilt journal; the quilt index; and general office files.

Three major projects are encompassed in the Kentucky Quilt Project records: 1) a 1983 exhibit called “Kentucky Quilts 1800-1900,” 2) a set of six exhibits in 1991 and 1992 called “Louisville Celebrates the American Quilt” including a four-conference weekend dedicated to quilt scholarship, and 3) the Quilt Journal published from 1992 to 1995. KQP also joined forces with other state quilt documentation projects to establish a national quilt index. In addition, KQP was associated with other quilt documentation activity locally, nationally, and internationally.

The first major exhibit, “Kentucky Quilts 1800-1900,” was held in Louisville, Kentucky, at the Louisville Museum of History and Science, from February 5 to March 31, 1983, following a dozen Quilt Days held throughout Kentucky. (See the listing below under Quilt Days for “Kentucky Quilts 1800-1900.”) Quilt Days were designed and held with the goal of finding fine and unique examples of antique quilts as well as quilts with intact provenance, including known makers and histories. They were scheduled in the months preceding the exhibit from July 1981 to March 1982, with one additional Quilt Day held during the exhibit on February 5, 1983. Documentation includes slides, snapshots, Polaroid prints, and written documentation of about 1,000 quilts as well as several videotapes. The Quilt Day concept was later picked up by other states as they began to document historic quilts as well. Collected information was used to develop the exhibit and served as the basis for the exhibit catalog, later published as Kentucky Quilts 1800 – 1900. This book, by Jonathan Holstein and John Finley, was published by KQP and sold during the Louisville exhibit, and at the following national and international traveling quilt exhibit sites. At the close of the Louisville exhibit, twenty quilts went on tour to Ireland and within the United States with the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibits Service (SITES) between July 1983 and May 1985.

During the relatively quiet period between the 1983 “Kentucky Quilts, 1800-1900” and the 1991 to 1992 shows of “Kentucky Celebrates the American Quilt,” The Kentucky Quilt Project sponsored or supported four exhibits including two in Louisville, one in Texas, and one in Australia.
They were:

“Quilt Festival ‘84” and “Quilt Market” exhibit, October 27 - November 4, 1984, Houston, Texas.
“Virginia Ivey Quilt” exhibit, the J.B. Speed Art Museum, 1985, Louisville, Kentucky.

The second major KQP exhibit, “Louisville Celebrates the American Quilt,” included six separate quilt exhibits in Louisville venues, the first beginning November 22, 1991, and the last finishing May 3, 1992. Each of the six exhibitions had a unique theme, ranging from an exhibit of Amish quilts at the J.B. Speed Art Museum to an exhibit at the Kentucky Art and Craft Gallery of art objects based on quilt designs. All exhibits were open during most of February and March 1992. Exhibits were:


The *Quilt Journal* was initiated during the development of the "Louisville Celebrates the American Quilt" exhibits. The first issue was distributed in November 1992 and publication continued during the exhibits and through the first issue of 1995. Dedicated to the publishing of quilt scholarship, The Kentucky Quilt Project published four volumes of the *Quilt Journal* with two volumes of two issues each and two volumes of one issue each.

The Kentucky Quilt Project was one of the initiators of the "Quilt Index Needs Assessment for the Library of Congress" presented in 1992, and "The International Quilt Index Needs Assessment Preliminary Proposal, December 1992."
Scope and Content

The Kentucky Quilt Project donated its organizational records from 1980 to 1997 to the University of Louisville Archives in August 1999. Included in this thirty-nine linear foot collection are slides and other photographic documentation of Kentucky quilts. In addition to this donation, the KQP supplied the funding which made processing of this collection possible.

During the period these records cover, the KQP was located at several different sites and some files were removed for storage. At times, several people kept files of similar records; thus files at first glance sometimes appear to be duplicates. Files in this collection were not inter-filed but rather grouped by topic, usually by quilt exhibits. The records were kept in their original order, thus the inventory is done as an intellectual listing rather than a box and folder list.

"The major projects undertaken by KQP are represented by six series in this collection. Series I covers office files which do not naturally fall into the individual exhibits or other activity. Series II, III, and IV contain information about the exhibits and quilt activity of KQP. Series V contains material pertaining to the Quilt Journal published by KQP. Series VI deals with the KQP effort to develop a national quilt index.

Of these six series, number IV, "Louisville Celebrates the American Quilt," is by far the largest with twenty-six of the thirty-nine linear feet of this collection. Series II, "Kentucky Quilts 1800-1900," is also comparatively large with six-and-a-half linear feet. The smallest, series VI, Quilt Index, is comprised of only .2 linear feet in several scattered folders in three boxes.

Each series is divided into the following categories in this order: literary production, organizational papers, legal documents, correspondence, financial documents, photographic material, printed material, and miscellaneous.

Reviews of Kentucky Quilt Project books and exhibits as well as announcements of exhibits, articles, and catalogs can be found in the clipping files that are arranged chronologically. Most are also in the two scrapbooks which compile information about the two major exhibits "Kentucky Quilts 1800-1900" and "Louisville Celebrates the American Quilt."
Series Description

3.5 linear feet, boxes 1-9, 20, 21, 24, 33

The general office files cover material including personnel information, membership, legal documents, general correspondence, and financial documents not limited to individual exhibits or other activity.

II. “Kentucky Quilts 1800-1900” Exhibit, 1981-1985
6.5 linear feet, boxes 1, 3-9, 24, 28, 34

This series covers an exhibit by The Kentucky Quilt Project (KQP) February 5-March 31, 1983, “Kentucky Quilts 1800-1900;” Quilt Days for the 1983 exhibit; the 1983 exhibit; an exhibit book, Kentucky Quilts 1800-1900 by Jonathan Holstein and John Finley; and the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibits Service (SITES), July 1983-May 1985.

III. Other quilt exhibits and activity, 1983-1988
.8 linear feet, boxes 1, 5, 8, 9, 37

The third series covers the relatively quiet period between the 1983 “Kentucky Quilts, 1800-1900” and the 1991 to 1992 shows of “Kentucky Celebrates the American Quilt.” During this period The Kentucky Quilt Project sponsored or supported four exhibits.

IV. “Louisville Celebrates the American Quilt” Exhibit, 1990-1995
26 linear feet, boxes 1, 10-39

The fourth series is overwhelmingly the largest series including twenty-six of the thirty-nine linear feet in this collection. This series is subdivided into nine subseries covering each of the six exhibits included in “Louisville Celebrates the American Quilt” as well as the conference weekend, the Quilt Day, and those general files which pertain only to “Louisville Celebrates.” Of the subseries the exhibits “Abstract Design” and “Always There,” the conference weekend, and the general files compose the bulk of the material in this series.
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V. Quilt Journal, 1992-1995
2 linear feet, boxes 25-27

The *Quilt Journal*, a bimonthly periodical, was initiated during the development of the “Louisville Celebrates the American Quilt” exhibits. The first issue of the six issues published was distributed in November 1992 and continued during the exhibits and through the first issue of 1995.

VI. Quilt Index, 1991-1993
.2 linear feet, boxes 14, 17, 24

Efforts to develop a national quilt index developed early and were an ongoing theme of KQP. Material regarding this activity may be found in several places in the collection.