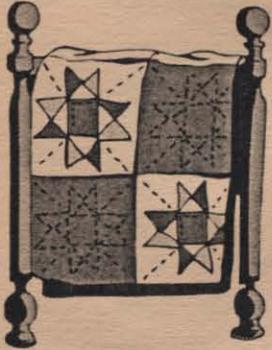




The Local Network

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Four Quick Quilt Tips: Recording, Cleaning, Storing, & Displaying Your Quilt

This handout was prepared by Jenny Yearous, Curator of Collections Management, State Historical Society of North Dakota. Updated 10/12/2004.

The curators at the State Historical Society of North Dakota try to take care of all the objects in the collections, following the highest standards and using only archival-quality materials. Textiles require special attention to protect and preserve them. By following these easy and inexpensive steps, you too can keep your heirloom quilts at their best for generations to come.

I Recording a Quilt's Story

In museum collections, the documentation of an item is just as important as the item itself. Before memories fade and information is lost, record in writing when your heirloom quilt was made, by whom, and any other facts about its history that are available.

Jenny Yearous, Curator of Museum Collections, SHSND, recently received a family quilt as a gift. Jenny's aunt could only remember that it had been made by her grandmother (Jenny's great-grandmother), but she wasn't sure whether it was her maternal or paternal grandmother. Luckily, other relatives could identify who made it, and, based on the quilt's style and fabric, Jenny was able to tell that it was made in the 1940s.

This loss of information from failing memories

can easily be eliminated through documenting your family treasures now. Follow these steps for easy, permanent documentation:

- I. Assemble these materials: a piece of washed, unbleached muslin, 4 to 6 inches square, some freezer paper, a permanent fabric pen such as "pigma," a fine needle, and some 100% cotton thread.
- II. Iron the muslin to the shiny side of the freezer paper using the cotton setting. This helps stabilize the fabric to make it easier to write on.
- III. On the piece of muslin, write out what you know about the quilt, such as who made it and when.
 - ▶ Use the maker's full name, including first, middle, maiden name, and married name. Identifying a quiltmaker by "Grandma" or her married name, such as Mrs. John Smith, can create confusion and misidentification, so it is important to use the maker's full name.
 - ▶ The date the quilt was made is also an important part of documenting the quilt. If there is room, it is also helpful to write down the name of the quilt, for whom it was made and why (such as for a new baby, wedding, graduation or parting gift).

- ▶ If you know any stories about the quilt, you may wish to write them on a separate sheet of paper that will be passed on with the quilt.

IV. Once you have the information down on the muslin square, remove the paper backing and handsew the square to the back of the quilt. In this way, the information can't be forgotten, and your children and grandchildren will always remember who made it and when. If you are a quilter, don't forget to mark the quilts you are making now in the same way.

2 Cleaning a Quilt

The answer to the question "What is the best way to wash a quilt?" is that you should avoid washing it if possible and never dry clean it. There are some safe, conservative solutions to handling quilts that smell musty or that have gotten dusty.

I. **AIRING THE QUILT** – If a quilt has been packed away for a long time and smells a bit musty, fresh air may be all that is needed. The quilt can be laid out on a spare bed or put outside in a place where it is out of the sun and strong winds. If you plan on laying it in the grass, place a clean sheet or blanket underneath and another one on top to protect it from the ground and the sun. If you hang it on a clothesline, have it draped over the line, not supported by one edge. Choose a calm day for hanging the quilt. The tattered ends on flags are caused by the wind whipping the fabric, and the same thing can happen to a quilt if the fabric is old and delicate.

II. **VACUUMING THE QUILT** – If you have no place to air your quilt, you might want to try vacuuming it. Don't get out your Hoover! What you will need is a small hand vacuum with a hose attachment, preferably with adjustable settings, the tube from a roll of paper towels, a large piece of fiberglass window screen, and either masking tape, twill tape, or bias tape.

- ▶ Cut the window screen to the size you want, as large as you can comfortably handle. Bind the edges with one of the tapes to prevent the rough edges of the screen from catching on the quilt.
- ▶ Place the screen on top of the quilt; it protects the quilt from the full power of the vacuum

and prevents loose pieces from being sucked into the vacuum.

- ▶ Using the vacuum cleaner's hose and an attachment with a broad head, vacuum the quilt through the screen on the lowest setting. For vacuums without adjustable settings, the suction can be lessened by poking holes in the paper towel tube and then using the tube as an extension on the hose. The suction should be low enough so that the quilt is not pulled up by the suction. If necessary, hold the nozzle a couple of inches away from the quilt to help reduce the pull.

III. **OTHER OPTIONS** – Wet cleaning a quilt or other old textiles can be a difficult process. If it is not done right, the consequences are often disastrous. We recommend that you consult with a textile professional before you attempt to wash any heirloom piece. There are some new fabric fresheners on the market, such as "Fabreeze" and other products similar to it. We do not recommend using such products on antique quilts until more studies have been done to determine the long-term effects of the chemicals on textiles. There are also home "dry cleaning" kits available, but these are not recommended because, again, we do not know what the long-term effects of the chemicals might be on old textiles.

3 Displaying a Quilt

Quilts warm our beds and our hearts. The best way to display or store your beautiful heirloom quilts is flat on a bed. A rarely used guest bed is best. A clean sheet can be laid over it to keep dust and light out when the bedroom is not being used and removed when guests arrive. Depending on how fragile the quilt is, you may wish to remove it from the bed for overnight guests so it doesn't get damaged through use.

If you have pets, small children, or no guest bed, hanging your quilt is another way for everyone to enjoy it. Prepare the quilt for hanging by following these steps:

- ▶ Make a sleeve of unbleached muslin two inches shorter than your quilt is wide. Center it on the back quilt and handsew it on using 100% cotton thread. It is OK to go through all the layers, and it helps to keep the back from pulling out of shape from the weight of

the quilt. If you are worried about the stitches showing, use thread that matches the front.

- ▶ Place a dowel, curtain rod, or yardstick through the sleeve and hang your quilt. The sleeve distributes the weight of the quilt across a wider area so there is less likelihood for distortion and damage from hanging.
- ▶ When hanging the quilt, choose a wall that is out of the direct sunlight to avoid fading. If you can, occasionally change or rotate the quilt on display so the quilt gets a chance to “rest” out of the light. Remember, damage from exposure to sunlight is cumulative, so rotating the quilts on display will help prolong each quilt’s life and give you a chance to enjoy them all.

Another alternative for hanging your quilt is using a velcro-type hook-and-loop fastener.

- ▶ Cut a piece of the hook-and-loop fastener an inch or two shorter than the width of the quilt. Machine sew the hook side to a piece of muslin. Handsew the muslin to the back of the quilt. Do not use the adhesive-style hook-and-loop fastener; the adhesive is not safe to use on your old quilt and will not hold up over time.
- ▶ The loop side can be either attached directly to the wall or attached it to a board, and the board can be hung on the wall like a picture. Remember, choose a wall that is out of the direct sunlight to help avoid fading.
- ▶ Attach the quilt’s hook side to the wall’s loop side. Small adjustments can be made in the placement of the quilt to help it lie flatter.
- 💡 **Fold the quilt with as few folds as possible.** If possible, pad out the folds with acid-free tissue or “snakes” made of tubes of unbleached muslin stuffed with polyester quilt batting. Once every six months to a year, pull out your quilts, wash and dry the bag, and refold the quilt along new lines. Refolding a quilt and padding the folds will help to keep the folds from becoming sharp and permanent.

By following these easy steps, you too can keep your quilts at “museum quality” for generations to come.

NOTE ON PREPARING MUSLIN OR OTHER FABRIC TO BE USED NEXT TO QUILTS:

Even if it is clean, wash muslin or old sheets before using as a sleeve or bag. Wash water should be as hot as possible, and use only a very small amount of detergent. If you have “Orvus,” that is preferred. Use detergent only; do not use bleach of any kind or other additives or fabric softeners. Put the cloth through a second wash cycle without detergent to make sure all the detergent is rinsed from the material. Dry as usual, but do not use fabric softener.

4 Storing a Quilt

Those quilts not on display will need to be stored . . . Think acid free and/or inert when you choose the method of storage.

NO-NOs!

- **Regular cardboard boxes** contain acids that damage fabrics over time.
- **Plastic storage boxes** can trap moisture that may cause mold and mildew to form.
- **Dry-cleaning or other plastic bags** often contain chemicals that may be harmful to textiles, and the plastic can trap moisture.
- **Using mothballs or cedar** where you store your quilt. They both give off vapors that can be damaging to the fabric.

Best Bets!

- 💡 **Acid-free boxes** are the best, but they can be expensive and difficult to find.
- 💡 **Muslin bags** are an inexpensive and safe alternative. Make a large pillowcase-like bag from unbleached muslin or an old white sheet to hold your quilt. The bag acts as a buffer between the quilt and the acids of the wood of a trunk or closet shelf. Textiles can be permanently stained with a wood-grain pattern if they are stored directly on a wooden shelf. Periodic washing of the bag helps to keep the acids away from the quilt and extends its life. White pillowcases can be used for smaller quilts. Keep the size of the bag appropriate to the size of the quilt and to the size of the shelf or trunk you want to store it on or in.

The Local Network



The Fargo Air Museum Fargo, North Dakota

The Fargo Air Museum recently received a Cultural Heritage Grant from the State Historical Society of North Dakota to build a new portable sound studio to record veterans' oral histories.

Cultural Heritage Grants and ND MAP Grants
2005-2007 Biennium
\$305,859 Distributed



Darkened counties received project funding.

Save this date!
The 19th annual Governor's Conference on North Dakota History will be held Nov. 2-3, 2007, at the North Dakota Heritage Center in Bismarck. Go to www.nd.gov/hist for a conference brochure, or call 701 328-2799, for information.

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