

Donation of the Month

Object: Friendship Quilt
Catalog #: 2004.63.1
Donor: Sue Caraway



Folks often wonder how an object makes its way to the Museum. Sometimes the path is straight, sometimes it's more circuitous. For one particular friendship quilt, it all began when a dear friend of the Museum noticed a posting on a genealogical web site and sent along the link.

In 2003 Sue Caraway purchased 15 friendship quilt blocks at a California antique store. Intrigued with the

names embroidered across the center of each colorful block, she began trying to unravel their history. She found one of the names, Polena Holland, in the Social Security Death Index at RootsWeb.com; a few hours later Mrs. Caraway had tied Holland and six other names with Benton County. She posted her results on the website's newsletter under the title of "Quilting Together a Story."

Mrs. Caraway soon heard from several folks who could shed more light. From Velda Hinton she learned that Della Crone and her cousin Polena were the granddaughters of James Albert Crone and Nancy Lydia Watts. The Crones moved with their young children from Georgia to Arkansas in 1870; Nancy died along the way and was buried in Alabama. Polena married Barry Louis Holland in 1908. Talitah "Jimmie" Crone was Polena's mother.

From Elaine Dake she learned that the folks named on the quilt blocks all lived in the Maysville area, in the western part of Benton County near the border with Oklahoma. Della Crone lived about a quarter of a mile from the Baptist church and went there every Sunday morning to light the fire in the woodstove.

The Museum did a bit of digging of its own and sent Mrs. Caraway some historical info as well. Both Mary Locke and Minnie Johnson are buried in the Fairmont Cemetery just north of Springtown. Buried in the Maysville Cemetery are Della Crone, Polena Holland, Callie Payne, and Robert Payne. Della Crone, who never married, was the Crone family historian. She owned a farm at Maysville and was a member of the Baptist church for 57 years.



Dorcie Chastain was the youngest of 11 children. Her family homesteaded in the Fairmont district, near Springtown and Gentry, Arkansas. Dorcie taught at the Friendship School, south of Siloam Springs, Arkansas, in 1908; she later taught in Seminole County, Oklahoma, where she met and married her husband, W.I. Aldridge, in 1910. It was he who called her "Sally" although she was called "Dode" by her family and "Shug" by her mother. Dorcie returned to teaching after having four daughters. In 1931 the Aldridges moved to Apache, Oklahoma.

Melissa Chastain was Dorcie's sister. "Lissa" and several members of the Chastain family moved to Cortez, Colorado, to homestead. Lissa was married to Robert Shields who died around 1900 of "quick" consumption. After the couple's five children were grown, "Aunt Lissa" lived in a number of her relatives' households in Benton County and Missouri, helping out where needed.

Knowing some of the details of some of these folks' lives can help us date the quilt blocks, up to a point.

Because Polena wrote her last name as Holland rather than Crone, we know the quilt was made sometime after her marriage in 1908. But several members of this group moved in and out of the Benton County through the years; without knowing when they lived here or when some of them died, we can't place an end date for the manufacture of the blocks.

Trying to date the blocks based on their fabrics is a bit trickier as many of the patterns and colors are typical of the early 1900s. With its medium blue color and printed white wreaths, Callie Payne's block in the top right corner is the oldest of all the fabrics, dating to the turn of the 20th century or even earlier. The block just below Callie's may have McPalmer embroidered on it but it's hard to tell, because the signature seems to have been written with a shaky hand. Its rather loud blue and lavender plaid pattern may be the newest of all the fabrics, possibly dating to the 1920s or 1930s. Overall most of the fabrics are rather light in tone, complimenting the colorways frequently chosen by quilters in that later time period.

One more avenue for assigning a date may be the pattern of the blocks.



Although we don't know when this particular design was first created, we do know several of the instances when it was published. In style it is very similar to "Friendship Chain," except the center cruciform design is made up of a rectangle and two squares rather than five squares. The difference may be due to an incorrect pattern identification on the Museum's part or to the blocks' makers themselves, who may have modified the pattern to provide room for a signature.

The pattern for "Friendship Chain" was published by Nancy Cabot in April 1934. "Nancy Cabot" was the *nom de plume* for Loretta Leitner Rising, who wrote a syndicated column for the *Chicago Tribune* in the 1930s. Hundreds of Nancy Cabot patterns were available through mail order. Another mail-order source for this pattern was through the Manning Publishing Company of Chicago which published the periodical *Woman's World* during the 1920s and 1930s. When this particular pattern was featured in 1931, it went by the name of "Cross Patch."

The pattern was also called "Album" when it was published by the *Kansas City Star* in October 1935.

When it first started printing its quilting column in 1928, the *Star* used patterns syndicated by Ruby Short McKim who had a mail-order studio in Independence, Missouri. But by the time this pattern was published, and up through 1960 when the column was finally retired, traditional and new designs were offered by the *Star's* staff and its readers. Lots of Benton Countians subscribed to the *Star* and from time to time had their patterns published.

It's possible that the women who made the quilt blocks knew the pattern already or saw it in the *Star*. Why they made the blocks is another matter. As several of them were related to one another and they all lived in the same community, it's likely that the women belonged to the same church or were members of a local home demonstration club. Such clubs were very active in Benton County in the 1920s and 1930s and members often made friendship quilts of this sort.

Based on all the clues available, it seems reasonable to assume that the blocks were made in the late 1920s or 1930s. The quilt was itself made in 2003 by Sue Caraway, who found the blocks in an antique store. A short time after she received the Museum's contributions to her genealogical treasure hunt, Mrs. Caraway generously offered the quilt to the Museum so "it could be displayed and shared with friends and descendants of the makers."

What follows are the full names of the people listed on the quilt blocks, along with their birth and death years, if known. If anyone has further information to share, please send us an email. After all, that's how we heard about the quilt in the first place!



S.E. Abercrombie (possibly Sarah Anne Abercrombie, 1853-1946) Sally Doriece Chastain Aldridge (1887-?) Della Crone (1885-1967) Talitha James "Jimmie" Crone Deatherage (?-1944) N. Polena Pearl Crone Holland (1888-1972) Hazel B. Johnson Minnie Olive Johnson (1864-1937) Mary A. Locke (1851-1940) Mary Lott _____? McPalmer?
 Callie Payne (1862-1943)
 Robert H. Payne (1856-1937)
 Melissa "Lissa" Shields (1872-?)
 Marie Story
 Birdia Payne White

CREDITS

Cemeteries of Benton County, Arkansas, Northwest Arkansas Genealogical Society (1974-77); *Simon Sager Celebration*, Maggie Smith (1986); *History of Benton County, Arkansas*, Benton County Heritage Committee (1991); *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns*, Barbara Brackman, (1993); and personal emails from Sue Caraway, Elaine Dake, and Velda Hinton (July 2003).