**The Quilters of Goulbourn Township:
Mediating Change and Making Transformations**

by

Katherine Anne Scott Hons. B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in Canadian Studies

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submitted by Katherine Scott, Hons. B.A.

**in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts**

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ABSTRACT

The folk revivals of the late twentieth century have brought many changes to the meaning of quilts and quilting in the popular Canadian imagination. This essay, through an interdisciplinary approach including folk histories, women's history, material culture research, and oral interviews of one community of quilters from the Ottawa Valley's Goulbourn Township, seeks to answer how older quilters have responded to the changes taking place in their craft world. It is here argued that these women have mediated the issues of change, tradition, and progress to both actively transform the meanings and techniques of quilting from their mothers' generation and navigate the changes wrought by the later quilting revival. Goulbourn's quilters have positioned themselves as bearers of tradition while accepting progressive, self-directed change as appropriate to the meaning of their work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Upon the completion of any quilt, it is taken out of its frame, shaken to discard any loose strings, and inspected for flaws and successes alike. It is a shared event. I would like to share the completion of this thesis with all the quilters of Goulbourn Township and thank them for opening their doors, sharing their stories and bravely allowing me to put in a few stitches. This thesis is dedicated to the memory of one of their own, my grandmother, Evelyn Vaughan, whose quiet, unending faith in me was always there when mine ran out. Her love was always in her smile, but now I know she had friends who could make her giggle.

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INTRODUCTION

Background of Topic

Quilts and quilting have been subject to many significant changes in the past 100 years. Shifts in style, technique and meaning largely correspond to changes taking place within the wider structures of society such as, conceptualizations of women's work, maintenance and development of communities, and the meaning associated with the making of hand-made objects. Quilting, which is technically the stitching together of several layers of material to add strength and warmth, has existed in many cultures and been applied to a variety of objects from armour to art. However, the quilting of blankets (quilts) is a process that has become an important symbol of early Canadian pioneer life. This romanticization of the quilt can perhaps help to explain its renaissance, which began in the late 1960's, at a time when folk revivals were taking place in many areas of mainstream Canadian culture.

While great numbers of Canadian women took up quilting in the late twentieth century, they did so under circumstances and with values quite different from those of previous generations. New contexts and meanings have been created for the quilt through romantic interpretations of Canadian pioneer history, increased acknowledgement and acceptance of outsider (including women) and textile arts in the established art world, and an increased availability and variety of fabrics and specialized equipment. All of these play heavily in the quilting revival. However, the question remains as to how many older women, who had arguably less social power at the time of the revival and who had learned to quilt or been exposed to quilting long before this renaissance took place, have interacted and reacted to the changes involved in and stemming from the quilting revival.

This thesis will investigate the meanings given to quilts and quilting by older women in order to better understand how the quilting revival has impacted their attitudes regarding the work they produce as well as the way in which they produce it. It will be argued that, in the case of one community of quilters in the Ottawa Valley's Goulbourn Township, older quilters have acted within the values of their community, which regards changes positively within a modernist, progress-oriented framework, to actively change the meanings, techniques and spaces associated with quilting. This has been accomplished through a process of acceptance and rejection of issues stemming from both their mothers' generation as well as from the later quilting revival. While a chronological history of quilting is not the focus of this work, it will be relevant as a backdrop against which the investigation will take place. Instead, how this history has been lived and understood by those who have been involved in quilting will be its focus. It is hoped that by looking at the responses of older women to the history of their craft, a better understanding of that history will emerge. The central point of interest will concern the revival stage of quilting in Canada and how this revival helped to create new meaning of what it is to make a quilt. While there is a well documented self-awareness for younger quilters who took up the craft in the context of rediscovering the quilt as a mode of expression, this thesis will attempt to understand how this history was understood and lived by women who did not need to "rediscover" the quilt.

Literature Review

In terms of quantity, most of what is written about quilts comes from popular media. These works, both in magazine and book format, focus mainly on instruction and style. Much of the academic work on quilting in Canada approaches the subject from a historical framework.

Several survey works exist, including Mary Conroy's 300 Years of Canadian Quilts¹, which combines the history of quilt making in Canada with a small section of patterns to aid the quilter in duplicating some of the examples reviewed in the text. Ruth McKendry also provides patterns in the back of her survey work, Classic Quilts², thus implying that much of the work produced on quilting history is done so with the active quilter in mind. Both Conroy and McKendry, whose work also includes the more extensive Quilts and Other Bed Coverings in the Canadian Tradition³, provide a very complete history of quilting in Canada. Both these books also demonstrate a large concern for the identification and decoding of quilt patterns. McKendry's work provides a substantial body of historical research, but does not place much emphasis on analysis of this information. As well, it is a broad survey of the history of quilt production and use in Canada, which does not allow for much discussion regarding the intricacies of regionally and culturally based variation to style and technique. What these works do provide in relation to this thesis is a broad historical sweep of quilting styles and techniques that clearly maps the twentieth century decline and rebirth of the quilt. It is this period that will act as a backdrop to the probing of this paper.

Other academic works that concern themselves with quilts come from art history. This field of inquiry naturally leads to questions regarding the aesthetic and expressive qualities of quilts. Katherine Lipsett's article in the catalogue for the Whyte Museum's 1989 exhibit, Redefined: The Quilt as Art,⁴ clearly demonstrates the concern for biography regarding quilt artists and the expressive uses of their medium. She argues that quilts represent just one of

¹ Mary Conroy, 300 Years of Canadian Quilts (Toronto: Griffin House, 1976).

² Ruth McKendry, Classic Quilts (Toronto: Key Porter, 1997).

³ Ruth McKendry, Quilts and Other Bed Coverings in the Canadian Tradition (Toronto: Discovery Books, 1979).

⁴ Katherine Lipsett, "Redefined: The Quilt as Art," Redefined: The Quilt as Art, ed. Katherine Lipsett (Banff: Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, 1989).

several media choices for artists that may be employed, “in spite of the craft connotation of work in textiles.”⁵ In this way, Lipsett reinforces the blurring of boundaries between art and craft that has been a major concern in the quilting revival. Bridgett Elliot’s article in the same exhibit looks at the quilt’s relationship with the modernist and male-dominated art world.⁶ In looking at antique quilts, many of the same questions are asked of the objects. While biography becomes less of a focus, as women’s histories are not well documented in general, design becomes a major area of interest to the art historian or heritage researcher. In the Royal Ontario Museum’s exhibit, Pieced Quilts of Ontario, Dorothy K. Burnham examines the exhibited quilts in reference to their historical context and their design features.⁷ Burnham’s look at Ontario’s heritage quilts thus treats the objects, much the same way as other works of art. This art historical approach to looking at quilts, both old and new, demonstrates the concern for the aesthetics and expressive quality of the object and the voice of the quilter concerning the meanings and values of her work become secondary. It is also important to note that, while heritage quilts often survive their producers, “art quilts” are often produced by women who are part of the revival of the craft. For this reason, the responses of older women who are not consciously or fully engaged in the “rediscovery” of quilting as a mode of artistic expression are conspicuously absent. Nonetheless, these studies demonstrate some of the issues older women may be reacting or responding to in their work.

Folklorists have often studied quilts through the lens of material culture research. Joan Mulholland’s article, “Patchwork: The Evolution of a Women’s Genre,”⁸ is one such example of

⁵ Lipsett, 15.

⁶ Bridgett Elliott, “Changing Differences: Quilting and Modernism,” Redefined: The Quilt as Art, ed. Katherine Lipsett (Banff: Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, 1989). 18-31.

⁷ Dorothy K. Burnham, Pieced Quilts of Ontario (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1975).

⁸ Joan Mulholland, “Patchwork: The Evolution of a Women’s Genre,” Journal of American Culture 19.4 (1996): online version.

a study that looks carefully at how the quilt may act as a container of information regarding its own meaning. She investigates ways in which quilts have come to represent a mode of speech or communication. Mulholland's use of material culture research demonstrates the amount of information one may extract from a competent investigation of the objects and the context of their production and consumption.

While Mulholland's work focuses largely on quilts as objects, both Joyce Ice and Susan Roach investigate quilting as a process and put more emphasis on the social context of production as well as the quilters themselves. Roach documented a personal, family, quilting bee and drew a series of conclusions as to the quilt's role as a vessel for communication, a role partially derived from the context in which it is produced. She regards the quilting bee as a speech event that lends layers of meaning to the final product.⁹ Ice's look at one particular quilting group in the United States¹⁰ gains further relevance to this thesis through the demographic makeup of the women studied. Ice's investigation of this quilting group (composed mainly of older women) and how they understood their quilting and quilts should aid in providing a comparison for the quilters studied here.

The works discussed above demonstrate the varying methods of inquiry employed in the study of quilts. However, what evolves from this body of work is a clearly discernable renaissance of the craft that has altered the way in which quilters and consumers of quilts respond to these objects. While social histories of quilts and quilting demonstrate this shift by mapping changes in design and construction methods against broader social changes, this does

⁹ Susan Roach, "The Kinship Quilt: An Ethnographic Semiotic Analysis of a Quilting Bee," Women's Folklore, Women's Culture, ed. Rosan A. Jordan and Susan J. Kalcik (University of Pennsylvania P: Philadelphia, 1971) 54-64.

¹⁰ Joyce Ice, "Women's Aesthetics and the Quilting Process," Feminist Theory and the Study of Folklore ed. Susan Tower Hollis, Linda Pershing and M. Jane Young (Urbana: University of Illinois P., 1993) 166-177.

not fully explain how women who quilted through the decline and revival of quilting aided in or responded to this process. Art historical work involving quilts frequently highlights works executed by younger women who would label themselves textile/quilt artists or responds to older quilts with an emphasis on the object rather than the producer of the object. Folklorists often focus their research on quilts as objects, through the use of material culture research, but may also provide insight into the context of production through studies of quilting as a ritual or process. What is largely absent from this initial research is a clear understanding of how older women have understood or conceptualized the many changes that quilts have undergone, in terms of use, aesthetics, process and the accompanying changes in meaning.

Outline and Methods

In order to come to a more complete understanding of the complex web of changes and issues mediated by the older quilters of this study, an interdisciplinary approach has been adopted. These varying methods of inquiry strongly correspond to the individual chapters and, as such, will be outlined here. Central to the structure of this paper is the movement of inquiry from broad trends to increasingly specific applications in order to discover how one community of quilters has mediated and understood the many changes that have taken place within their craft. In this way, the investigation will outline broad trends in the history of quilting in Canada before moving to a more specific investigation of Goulbourn Township and the values associated with local, women's and social histories that have interacted with quilting's decline and subsequent revival. Once this has been accomplished, the issues and changes discussed in these two chapters will be narrowed once again in a case study of Goulbourn Township's older quilters in order to understand how they have come to understand and navigate the changes brought about in the meaning and practice of their craft.

As this thesis deals specifically with changes that have taken and continue to take place in the meaning and making of quilts, the first chapter will engage in a survey of what these changes entail. While a brief history of quilting will be provided, the main focus will be on shifting meanings within the imagining and making of quilts. Of crucial importance to the ideas discussed in this chapter will be the methodological concerns of hand-made objects as symbols within a culture. The work of Clifford Geertz will be especially relevant in this regard. Geertz suggests that art must be understood as part of a complex web of symbols within a culture. In order to understand the meaning of a work, one must understand how it is used therein.¹¹ In this way, the changes that have taken place in the meaning and use of quilts will be better understood in terms of shifting roles within mainstream Canadian culture.

Three specific periods will be identified in the shifting uses and subsequent meanings of quilts, namely quilting as necessity, quilting's decline, and the revival and re-imagining of the quilt. It will be demonstrated that, through time, the quilt has been applied for both practical and expressive purposes as well as serving an important role in the social lives of many women. Quilting all but disappeared in the post-war period only to reappear in the late 1960's and 1970's in the context of increased urbanization, the rise of second wave feminism and a mounting challenge to the established, male-dominated art world. However, as most of this activity was undertaken by younger women who were not so much remembering the quilt as they were reinventing it, the question remains as to how this new context affected those women who never ceased to quilt or those who rediscovered the craft with a clear memory of a time when quilts meant something quite different.

As it is assumed that quilting has been subject to change over time and in space, it is

¹¹ Clifford Geertz, "Art as a Cultural System," *Modern Language Notes* 91 (1976) 1488.

important to consider the history within which the women of this study have lived their lives and produced their quilts; this will be the focus of the second chapter. In order to better understand how history has been understood by many of the older residents living in Goulbourn Township, a brief local history will be outlined. Central to this investigation is an understanding of the core values of the community and, it will be argued, these can be better understood by looking at the locally produced, folk histories of the area. An investigation of the main local histories will be reviewed. Through this study, it will be argued that the quilters operate within a community that places great emphasis on a hard-working and progress-oriented pioneer tradition. Progressive vision and change find little resistance in this location in so far as it remains under the control of the community. This acceptance of change becomes relevant when one considers the central role played by this concept in the objectives of the study.

In addition to space and community, gender history is also significant to the quilters. As quilting is regarded as a “domestic art”, how changes in the concept of domesticity and women’s work have shifted over time gains tremendous relevance to this work. Sources from women’s history research will be consulted in order to demonstrate the active role played by women in navigating and incorporating changing ideals into their lives. Particular emphasis will be placed on the role of the Women’s Institute in demonstrating the application of change and reform into the lives of many rural women, including those of Goulbourn. Also key to this discussion will be the professionalization of home-based labour, which began in the 1920’s and was further developed during the post-World War Two period. Because the women of this study fall within the parameters generally associated with broad surveys of women’s history (English-speaking, Christian, and deriving heritage from western-European countries), their experiences through

history, while rightly individual in nature, tend to conform more readily to this history than is often the case.

Connected to the change in women's home-based work is the changing ideal of what a home should look like. The modernization of home interiors in Canada is a concept that can be traced to several combining sources. These sources, which include newly emerging mass media directed specifically at women, the boom of department stores and catalogue outlets, and the rise of home decorating as a modernist-style, authoritative profession, combined to create an ideal that, if not fully realised by many Canadian women clearly had an impact on creating an environment in which women were ideally expected to play the role of domestic consumer, rather than producer. Clearly this had an impact on the meaning of quilting for many women as many of these home improvements rendered quilt-making both unnecessary and, potentially, unappealing.

The final chapter will look specifically at the ideas and concerns of one community of older quilters from Goulbourn Township in order to come to an understanding of how they have understood, mediated, and participated in the changes and issues outlined in the first two chapters. These quilters live and work in Goulbourn Township, just west of, and now amalgamated with, the city of Ottawa, Ontario. This area lends itself well to this investigation as there are several locally known quilters operating in the area who regularly gather on a regular basis. Many of the individual members of these groups communicate with each other, thus forming a community of quilters. These women range in age from 61 to 87 and have been quilting anywhere from 2 to 80 years. Their roots in the area vary just as widely as some were born to local villages and farms while others married into local families or immigrated to the area for a variety of reasons.

The use of oral interviews will be the main source of information in this chapter. This method is useful in gathering the stories and histories of groups that are under-represented or excluded in the established canon of history. While the historian often employs oral interviews as supplemental to established, elite history through a question and answer interview technique, the folklorist employs very different methods and concepts. In search of authentic folklore traditions, the folklorist often assumes the role of observer. In this way, beliefs, traditions, and, on occasion, histories are revealed slowly, with a less mediated outcome. Richard Dorson suggests that an “oral folk history” is a compromise between these two methodologies.¹² It seeks to find members of a folk community and gain information using an open interview technique. This technique acknowledges the voices that have gone unheard while placing an emphasis on the understandings of a folk group rather than the collection of raw historical data.

I was granted somewhat of an insider connection with many of these women as I was born and continue to live in the area. More importantly, my grandmother quilted within this network. The selection of women began with the quilters of Richmond, with whom my grandmother participated, and spread outward from this point through word of mouth and the passing on of names. In this way, the Richmond quilters acted as a gateway into the larger community of quilters known to them. My native status was further developed through my participation with these groups. I was invited to sit and quilt while getting to know the groups. The exchange of stories and ideas that took place at this time allowed for a general sense of the group before interviewing specific members. By interviewing this community of older quilters, both as collectives and as individuals, a better understanding of their roles in and reactions to the folk revival of the late twentieth century was achieved.

¹² Richard Dorson, “The Oral Historian and the Folklorist” in Dunaway, David and Willa K. Baum (eds.) Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology (California: 1996) 286-291.

One of the important distinctions experienced by these women involves the importance given to enacting the craft as older women – a shift that gives their work particular layers of meaning. As well, ideas regarding the space in which the participants collectively work on their quilts are of great significance. These spaces are largely public and, as such, mark a considerable departure from the domestic spaces their mothers occupied in terms of quilting. It is also relevant in developing a unique role for the participants within the larger community. Finally, concepts of change over time will be investigated in regards to both how these women perceive their quilting as being different from their mothers' work and how they perceive the changes associated with the quilting revival of the late twentieth century. Through this investigation, it will be argued that these women are not only responding to a quilting revival of their daughter's generation but that they themselves have been agents of changes from the generation before them. They have navigated the shifts in quilting by accepting many of the changes they consider useful while rejecting those that do not fit their needs or their understanding of the importance and value in quilting.

It must be stated here that this study may only speak to the ideas of a specific quilting community in the Ottawa Valley. Because the major thrust is toward an understanding of the shift and continuation of values within a community of quilters, and because these values are reliant on a web of identities and values that are formed, reinforced and changed by and within the interaction of the community (be it a small community of quilters or their interaction with the larger community of Goulbourn) this study cannot draw broad conclusions as to how all older Canadian women have reacted to the quilting revival. What can, however, be accomplished here, is to further an understanding as to how these women have been both agents of and respondents to many of the changes brought about in the meaning and technique of quilting.

CHAPTER ONE - The Shifting Meanings of Quilts and Quilting

Introduction

My grandmother made me a quilt for my 18th birthday. It's worn now and acts as a throw-blanket in my living room. This location has provided me the opportunity to observe a variety of different reactions to the object as it comes to people's attention. Some will never notice the quilt as a special object; it is merely another blanket to them. Some will ask me questions on where I purchased the quilt, or who made it. Others will tell me stories of quilts they or their relatives have made, perhaps elaborating on the symbols embedded in the design. The fact is that all recognize the object as a quilt and form a conception of what that should mean. My house is not the only place people are confronted by quilts. Flipping through popular decorating magazines, attending a craft fair or taking a tour of the National Gallery of Canada will ultimately present the conscious observer with quilts in various contexts.

This chapter will attempt to bring clarity to how quilts have been conceptualized by past and contemporary cultures in Canada. While quilting is technically the process of stitching two pieces of material together to provide extra strength or warmth, quilted blankets, or quilts, seem to hold a unique place in the imaginations of many individuals.

The history of quilting in Canada stretches back to the earliest inhabitants. First Nations people practised a variety of quilting traditions, as did subsequent groups of settlers and immigrant communities. Each community possessed a unique quilting style based on a variety of factors including availability of materials, economics and aesthetic norms. As a result of settlement patterns, regional difference in quilting may also be observed in Canada. This chapter will look at the history of quilting in Upper Canada or Ontario specifically, from early colonial settlement to the present. This will be accomplished through two distinct sections. The first will outline

three periods of quilting, namely, the arrival of the quilt, the decline of the quilt and the revival of quilting. Special emphasis will be placed on the material culture of quilts and quilting in order to understand the meaning of trends observed and the relationship between quilts, their producers and their consumers.

The second section of this chapter will look at the present meanings given to quilts in Canada. This will enable an investigation of the shifts that have taken place in the relevance and meaning of these objects from past to present. As well, it will enable a picture to be drawn as to the material culture of quilting today. In this way, the shifts in meaning and use of quilts from past to present will be observed and provide an understanding as to the material culture context in which aged craftswomen produce their quilts. In order to begin to understand how quilts acquire so many meanings, it is important to clarify the issues involved in material culture research.

What is Material Culture?

“Material culture research” is, in many ways, an ambiguous term. One can question whether the study of objects is a discipline on its own or a line of inquiry employed by various researchers in a broad range of disciplines. Thomas J. Schlereth points to three terms commonly used in the study of artefacts within a culture, namely material culture, material history and material life. Material culture, the term preferred by both Schlereth and this author, may be arguably vague in meaning. However, it is this ambiguity that allows for a more interdisciplinary approach to the study of objects. While “material life” is another term that may provide an opportunity for interdisciplinary study, Schlereth singles it out as pointing the researcher in a direction that may place an over-emphasis on economics and demographics. “Material history”, which is an idiom that has found large acceptance in Canada, clearly removes

the question of ambiguity but tends to ground the study of objects to the past.¹ In establishing his preference for the term “material culture”, Schlereth next turns to the issue of material culture as a field or discipline. He argues that the type of evidence used is what defines material culture research in the present and conceptualizes material culture as becoming, “an investigation that uses artefacts...to explore cultural questions both in certain established disciplines (such as history or anthropology) and in certain research fields (such as the history of technology or the applied arts).”²

Material culture can thus be seen as the recognition that objects are part and parcel of the complex interactions that take place within a culture. For this reason, the object offers a unique entry point to the investigation of the beliefs of a social group.³ Clifford Geertz supports this idea of the importance of material culture research in his article, “Art as a Cultural System”. Looking at the material culture of art works, Geertz argues that, in order to understand the meaning of an object, it is important to understand its use. He challenges us to use an anthropological approach to the investigation of art works, which involves recognition of the idea that art is a part of a system of symbols that, in turn, form the basis of culture. In doing so, Geertz proposes the study of art in the context of the object's real world of use and meaning; in his words, “meaning is use”.⁴ One must examine why an object is important and, in doing so, one must look to the social context in which it is produced. Art production, or in fact the production of any object, cannot be studied as an independent function but must take into account the larger culture or body of symbols within a culture. In this way, quilts may be seen as engaging in a relationship

¹ Thomas J. Schlereth, “Material Culture or Material Life: Discipline or Field? Theory or Method?” Living in a Material World, ed. Gerald L. Pocius (St. John's, Nfld.: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1991) 234.

² Schlereth, 236.

³ Michael Owen Jones, Exploring Folk Art: Twenty Years of Thought on Craft, Work and Aesthetics (Logan, Utah, Utah State U.P., 1987) 3-4.

⁴ Clifford Geertz, “Art as a Cultural System,” Modern Language Notes. 91 (1976): 1488.

with values and ideas that go beyond the aesthetic. Using this interdisciplinary approach, the quilt is not studied in isolation but as part of the complex workings of a culture. The following discussion will attempt to shed light on how the relationships between quilting and culture have shifted over time. In order to accomplish this task, a brief history of quilting must first be presented.

History of Quilting

British settlement in Upper Canada, begun after the conquest in 1763 and the American Revolution, intensified after the War of 1812 and again after the Irish Potato Famine in the 1840s. This period saw a lack of surplus bedding as one of the many obstacles faced by newly arriving immigrants. This scarcity had not been experienced in Europe where households had been stable for generations and the climate was more moderate. The clearing of land for livestock took time and the acquisition of sheep hardy enough to withstand harsh winters was part of the problem. In addition, local stores that had been established did not necessarily have fabric on hand for those able to purchase raw goods.⁵ To exacerbate this problem even further, American textiles had been banned in an effort to protect English industries. Bedding was an immediate necessity.

This scarcity of material continued in many poor areas throughout the nineteenth century, necessitating the reuse of fabrics. Garments too worn to wear and old government-issued blankets were patched together in the form of quilts. Many women went as far as to reuse the thread from such items in order to ensure a minimum amount of waste. This thrift was brought one step further by the recycling of worn-out quilts as filling for the next blanket once these had fallen to pieces. Ruth McKendry recounts one woman's reaction to the shortage of textiles in

⁵ Ruth McKendry, Quilts and Other Bed Coverings in the Canadian Tradition. (Toronto: Discovery, 1979) 18.

pioneer Ontario. In 1887, Anna Leveridge writes home to England that, “Blankets are still so dear in this country that we have to make quilts to keep warm. I take care of all pieces of cloth out of old clothes and stitch them on the machine.”⁶ In this way, the first stage of quilt production in early Upper Canada was one of necessity. Quilts were the most practical means to overcoming the textile shortage by allowing the maker to reuse even the smallest pieces of fabric and patching them together to form a blanket.

As farms began producing local flax, quilts were still made but came to acquire the additional role of reflecting the status of their maker or owner. Quilts that have survived from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century vary considerably in form, style and use. They could be intended for a guest room, a child’s cot, or a wedding bed. There were good quilts and everyday quilts. As well, quilts could employ a variety of techniques such as pieced quilts, appliqué and whole cloth. All these forms reflected the desired use of the quilt as well as the amount of fabric, new and used, available to the maker. As Marilyn Walker demonstrates in her book Ontario’s Heritage Quilts, the change in season also brought a change in the quilts used as bed coverings. Summer quilts were lighter in weight and often brought a change in colour to the room to reflect the colours of the season. Heavier and, frequently, darker quilts reflected the opposite during the cold winters.⁷

Not all quilts were the product of necessity. Many surviving quilts from the late Victorian and Early Edwardian period contain such luxurious fabrics as velvet, taffeta and silk. This becomes an important point in attempting to negotiate the romanticism of early European-Canadian life as well as the corresponding romanticism of quilt history in Canada. It aids in demonstrating that even middle class and upper class women were still employing quilting

⁶ McKendry, Classic Quilts (Toronto: Key Porter, 1997) 91-93.

⁷ Marilyn I. Walker, Ontario’s Heritage Quilts (Toronto: Boston Mills P., 1992) 25-43.

techniques even if they had the spending power to purchase luxurious materials. The use of these fabrics obviously demonstrates that those who were working within economic constraints were not the only women quilting. Popular from 1880 to 1900, “crazy quilts” and other quilt samplers were frequently made from scraps of precious materials and were used to help instruct young ladies in their quilting education.⁸ Crazy quilts were made of irregularly shaped pieces that followed no particular design while sampler quilts had a different design in each block. This style was employed to aid in perfecting the skill of quilting and the completed projects were often used to decorate parlours. The fabrics in these quilts were much more expensive and varied than the cotton, linen and wool of the early pioneers. Velvets and taffeta from gowns are found juxtaposed with the silks and ribbons left over from other endeavours.

While access to materials became easier, the stitching of quilts did not. Working on her own, a quilter could piece together several quilt tops, but many hands remained the most efficient way to stitch the fronts of quilts to their backing. From the earliest days of pioneer settlement, bees, or gatherings of neighbours and family to share in large, collective projects such as quilting or taking in the harvest, were great aids in this regard. While men assisted each other in farm work or barn raisings, women would gather and collectively stitch the quilts they had pieced together during the winter. These gatherings secondarily allowed women to communicate ideas, knowledge and concerns with each other on topics ranging from health and childcare to humorous stories and simple gossip. At the same time, young women were given the opportunity to exhibit their skills as quilters while also being introduced to other young people their age.

⁸McKendry, *Classic Quilts*, 28.

Several issues surface from the study of bees that relate to the meanings quilts had for women. Skill played a large part in the communal stitching of quilts. Communities shared established criteria in terms of skill, mainly focusing on the small size and evenness of a quilter's stitching. If a woman's quilting was considered of high quality, she would be invited to many bees. As Ruth McKendry points out, young, unmarried women had a fine line to walk in terms of their skills. If they were regarded as competent quilters, they would be invited to a bee where they had an opportunity to become acquainted with the young men of the area, who would be helping with other jobs. However, if their skill was too highly regarded, they could be kept quilting while the less skilled young women were let go to prepare supper for the men and socialize. In this way, the less reputable quilters were given the first opportunity to meet the young men.⁹

As hinted to above, the second issue involved in the quilting bee was social bonding. Largely dictated by time of the year, these gatherings took place following a long winter of sewing quilt-tops in isolation, at the end of which one could gather together with friends and neighbours in order to, among other things, turn sewn tops into quilts. Food and festivities were enjoyed at the end of the day. Whether it is a matter of older women finding an opportunity to gather and exchange news and information or young people becoming more casually acquainted and pairing off to ensure the renewal of the community, bees provided an opportunity for members of the community to gather, bond and communicate. It is important to note, however, that not all quilting rituals took place at large bees. As well, the materials exchange at this time, in the form of scraps, could result in the ties of the community involved manifesting themselves visually. The fabric of the curtains in one neighbour's kitchen could perhaps be found in the

⁹McKendry, *Classic Quilts*, 43-49.

patches of a quilt in the home of another. These pieces of material must have acted as ties that bound the women of an area together through their quilts, an idea also touched on later in terms of family histories. While large groups would help in the assemblage of pieced, everyday quilts, gatherings for wedding quilts were more intimate. The ritual for the special wedding quilt would take place at home with the bride-to-be, the mother of the bride and a few select others (most likely relatives thought to be highly skilled quilters).¹⁰ Regardless of the size, the act of gathering to quilt at a bee was the act of stitching together a community. It is not surprising that by the end of the nineteenth century, churches became another focus for quilting groups as towns developed and the social lives of their citizens began to centre on religious institutions.

Into the early twentieth century, women continued to quilt blankets in a continuation of the ideas of frugality, feminine pursuits and social bonding. This continued into the depression period of the 1930's. However, by the time large numbers of women entered the wage labour force, during and after World War II, many had begun to purchase their bed coverings and quilting entered a period of decline. Those who did not purchase manufactured bedding incorporated the patterns and designs of these new objects. The patchwork or geometric patterns that had once been the mainstay of quilt design began to shift in response to this trend. Realistically designed flowers and figures were incorporated into the blankets of households that still saw quilt production as the main source for bedding.¹¹

It was not until the 1960's that women began, in any great numbers, to take up their needles and begin again to discover or rediscover the practice of quilting. Mary Lou Woods' study of contemporary quilters provides substantial insight into the demographic of women who

¹⁰ Marilyn I. Walker, 125.

¹¹ McKendry, *Classic Quilts*, 29.

have participated in the renaissance of quilting in the late twentieth century. In her study, conducted in 1990 through her connection with the Canadian Quilters' Association, she found that over 60% of women participating in her study were between the ages of 35 and 54. Over 84% of the quilters interviewed by Woods did not learn to quilt from family members. Most quilters had acquired their skills from organized classes while many others learned from clubs, books or defined themselves as "self-taught". These women were overwhelmingly urban and most had attended or completed some form of postsecondary education. The quilters questioned referred to a wide range of perceived reasons for the revival of quilting. These ranged from the popularity of country decorating, to the need for creative outlet and a link to past generations.¹² This latter idea is further discussed by Bridgett Elliot who suggests that the nationalist sentiments that came to the fore during the Canadian centennial celebrations, "many of which focussed on the distinctive qualities of the North American colonial past,"¹³ spurred a series of museum and art galleries to take a second look at the quilt both as an artefact and a medium for artistic expression.

Shifting Meanings

Today, quilts are displayed everywhere from guest bedrooms to museum walls. Historic quilts have been pulled out of closets and put on display. New quilts are made alone or in large groups. Some quilts are displayed in art galleries, others in festivals and fairs, and still others in private homes. These diverse and changing contexts in which the quilt is placed have an impact on the meaning of the object. The context of production and consumption of these objects allows one to begin to understand how quilts function in a post-modern cultural framework. If, as

¹² Mary Lou Woods, "The Canadian Quilters Association/Association Canadienne de la Counterpoint: A Sociologist Looks at an Old Craft in Contemporary Canadian Life," *Patchworks* 1 (1992) 41-46.

¹³ Bridgett Elliot, "Changing Differences: Quilting and Modernism," *Redefined: The Quilt as Art*, ed. Katherine Lipsett (Banff: Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, 1989): 18.

Richard Geertz suggests, meaning is use, one must first understand how these objects are used today in order to understand what they mean. What is the culture of the quilt?

One unique meaning of the quilt in the contemporary context stems from its use as an historical document. This history can be explored as both a vessel of information for the academic researcher or as a container of private or family histories. Here, the meaning of the quilt moves from its primary function as bedcovering or treasured artefact, and begins to take on meaning in relation to the historical information it can provide. In order to understand how a quilt can transmit meaning as an object of academic study, a case study of one historic quilt, may be of assistance. It is important to note that these ideas have both historical and contemporary layers that change the meaning of the object depending on time and place.

Jules David Prown provides a methodological framework for this entry into material culture in the folklore discipline. He suggests that the object can be broken down into layers for investigation much the same way Erwin Panofsky approached the decoding of symbolism in art history research¹⁴ (and as such, this method can be seen as one of the many interdisciplinary approaches to the task). Prown suggests the first step in “uncovering the metaphors... embedded in objects” is an examination of their physical details. The artefact in question here (Appendix A) measures 165cm by 167cm, forming an almost perfect square. Within these dimensions, the object consists of 42 individual square patches. These are stitched together in seven rows of six squares and are framed by a thin band of black fabric. Within each individual patch, slivers of fabric are arranged in horizontal strips, beginning with dark colours in the corners and moving to

¹⁴ As a humanist art historian, Panofsky used works of art as objects of analysis through which one may journey back through an evolution of ideas. Art is a good source of information in this regard as human records do not age but are immersed in time. They cannot be separated from time. In looking at and analysing a work of art, one is looking at the history of civilisation. In this way, Panofsky defined his work in terms of transforming “the chaotic variety of human records into what may be called a cosmos of culture.”

warm oranges and golds in the centre before returning to the dark fabrics in the opposite corner. When sewn together, these patches form a pattern, which resembles a series of boxes with dark centres and light edges. Using this photograph, it is difficult to ascertain the colour of the fabric on the opposite side of the artefact; however, one can imagine the object as consisting of two pieces of cloth, sewn together with a stuffing of some sort in the middle. It is interesting to consider the limitations to this level of analysis when one is faced with the challenge of being physically disengaged from the artefact, as is the case with the photograph.

The second level of analysis involved in Prown's approach involves an intellectual engagement with the physical characteristics of the object. How do these physical characteristics reveal the use of the object? Prown suggests one must be careful not to draw conclusions too early in this stage of investigation. Presumably, this could lead to the projection of culturally based knowledge, which is neither accurate nor appropriate, onto the object. The layering of material, for example, suggests that this object is designed to provide a certain amount of warmth. Its shape suggests a blanket and its construction technique signifies a quilt. Beyond this, the use of small slivers of material in forming the blanket may suggest a conservation of material and indicate that this quilt was constructed from scraps of fabric for some reason. The placement of these scraps also points towards a concern for both design (termed a log cabin design) and aesthetics in the construction of the quilt. In addition, the observation that, within this design, not all strips are identical but follow the light/dark patterning, indicates that the quilter perhaps did not have enough fabric to complete the entire design using identical fabrics (or nine identical fabrics as it were) but has, none the less, maintained the pattern of the quilt using several different light and dark fabrics.

The emotional response to the object is the final stage of analysis set out by Prown. This does not require further physical interaction with the artefact but involves the intuition of the analyst in determining how one emotionally interacts with the object. This, as suggested by Panofsky, must be done within the bounds of reason and obtainable cultural evidence.¹⁵ It is here, through this emotional response and educated reasoning, that conclusions may be drawn as to how the “material” interacts with the “culture”.¹⁶ As this quilt was constructed around 1900 in Frontenac County, Ontario, one may begin to find clues as to how this quilt may have acted metaphorically in this time and place. In terms of the structural metaphors imbedded in the quilt, the use of small scraps of fabric to produce an aesthetically appealing design connects to an obvious concern for economics. The use of leftover material from the making of clothing was often employed in the construction of quilts and this design, in particular, enables the quilter to use even the smallest of these scraps. This may connect to the economic conditions of this particular family, in this particular time and place (the quilter here is unknown) as well as to a concern for frugality in general.¹⁷ The use of scrap material in the quilt’s construction may also indicate that it was employed for everyday use within the home. The concern for design and colour displayed in this everyday quilt indicates the object may have acted as a form of artistic expression for the producer. One must also consider that not all these materials may have been found in the producer’s home and her relationship with neighbouring women may have been important in obtaining material she felt would suit her design. This brings into play the idea of community and women’s relationships with each other at the time this quilt was made. As well,

¹⁵ Panofsky, Meaning in the Visual Art: Papers in and on Art History (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1955) 38.

¹⁶ Jules David Prown, “On the ‘Art’ in Artefact,” Living in a Material World: Canadian and American Approaches to Material Culture, ed. Gerald Pocius (St. John’s, Nfld. : Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1991) 145-149.

¹⁷ McKendry, Quilts and Other Bed Coverings in the Canadian Tradition, 85-86.

the final construction of the quilt may have employed the hands of many women, in a bee or other gathering, and here the quilt begins to act as a sign of ritual and communication among women in this time and place. Finally, the idea of this quilt's excellent physical condition has implications for how it acts as a sign in the present. The preservation of this object for over a hundred years indicates the value placed on the artefact by those who have owned the quilt. This may indicate its value as a family heirloom, its perceived importance as an historical record of women's labour, an appreciation for its aesthetic appeal, or its market value as an antique object.

Through this study of one antique quilt, it becomes obvious that its use as an historical document not only reveals the layering of meanings on the quilt through time and space, but that one of these layers is in fact formed through the investigation process. This can be seen in less elaborate examples such as the telling of family stories that arise from informal discussions regarding specific quilts. If one examines Alice Walker's short story, "Everyday Use" one can see this less formal use of quilts as historical evidence put to use. While this story can be read as the general struggle of the African American community in dealing with history in the present, it also contains many hints as to how quilts may be used as personal containers of historical information. Walker presents us with a woman and her two daughters. The oldest daughter returns home for a visit with a new, "African" name (Wangero) and proceeds to ask her mother to give her various items to take back with her. These items, a butter churn and two quilts, are intended to be displayed rather than put to their original use. The mother offers other quilts which were stitched by machine and would thus last longer but the daughter protests that these did not contain the hand stitching and recycled materials in which she had found value in the two older quilts.¹⁸ The conflict ends with the quilts being given to the younger daughter who remains

¹⁸ Alice Walker, "Everyday Use," In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973) 32-33.

at home and who is to be married to a local man. Wangero concludes the argument by accusing her mother of not understanding her heritage and leaves without the quilts.¹⁹

Within this story, there is one overt example of the quilts in question gaining meaning as tangible links to the family's history:

In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's Paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War.²⁰

The idea that this quilt gains value and meaning through its connection to past members of the family (who either helped in its construction or had pieces of their material life included in the quilt) gives the quilt meaning. Beyond this, how the family views the importance of the various pieces of fabric listed can also help to create a level of historical meaning for the object. How does the family now interpret Grandpa Ezra's participation in the Civil War? What were the circumstances under which he fought? These are questions that go beyond the physical nature of the quilt and, perhaps, involve the oral history surrounding the quilt, with the physical characteristics acting as a kind of mental cue card for the retelling of personal family history. Nonetheless, the evidence is preserved and given a place of importance within the quilt and, in this way, the quilt becomes a signifier of historical information through both its physical characteristics and the personal histories that may arise from its viewing.

Tied to the history of quilts, but creating a separate meaning for them, is the issue of collecting. A commodification has developed around quilts that may be understood in light of a culture of collecting. Eugene W. Metcalf suggests that this phenomenon can be seen as the taking of objects and using them to give meaning to modern life in a consumption-

¹⁹ Alice Walker, 34

²⁰ Alice Walker, 32.

based ritual that contributes to the significance of objects. This creation of meaning is accomplished by “interpreting historical experience”. Metcalf argues that the acquiring of folk art has a meaning beyond simple conspicuous consumption in that it acts as a form of communication. He states, “It is a system of communication by which people come together to establish, accept or reject, the meaning and values of their society.”²¹ In this way, the consumption and display of quilts can be seen as a means by which the quilt signifies a specific set of meanings or values. These meanings are closely tied to the ideals of a past era and can be reflected upon the owner of the object.

While Metcalf was dealing with American folk art, one can see his ideas regarding quilts in Canada if one considers the ideas of Peter Harcourt who suggests that a rural nostalgia, or pastoral nationalism is observable in the art and academic thought that surrounds issues of Canadian identity.²² Again, the argument put forth by Bridget Elliot, in relation to the significance of the Canadian centennial celebrations in aiding in the “rediscovery” of the quilt gains further weight in light of Harcourt’s ideas. However, in order to understand how quilts communicate these ideas, one must understand how the post-modern consumer culture behaves.

The idea of how the consumer, or perhaps collector, creates meaning for quilts can be more fully understood in light of the ideas put forth by Don Slater. Slater suggests that the consumed object in a post-modern consumerism no longer gains value solely through its physical qualities (objects are no longer worth their weight in gold). Instead, objects acquire meaning through non-material qualities. The ideas associated with the objects contribute

²¹ Eugene W. Metcalf, “Artefacts and Cultural Meaning: The Ritual of Collecting American Folk Art,” Living in a Material World, ed. Gerald L. Pocius (St. John's, Nfld.: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1991) 202-204.

²² Peter Harcourt, “The Canadian Nation: An Unfinished Text,” Canadian Journal of Film Studies 2. 2-3 (1993): 10-13.

greatly to their value. As well, he argues that we increasingly encounter objects in a mediated context of representation. This involves the use of advertising, magazines and celebrities, which present objects as already containing a specific set of values. Thirdly, Slater points to an increased emphasis placed on the mental labour involved in the creation of an object. In the post-modern context, such things as design and technical knowledge replace physical labour as the main source of value. The result of Slater's argument is a material world that is saturated in signs.²³

It is in light of these ideas concerning collecting, identity formation and the values of the post-modern consumed object that quilts take on yet another layer of meaning. Through the ritual of consumerism, they come to signify a kind of identity formation. They establish the owner as a person (or institution) that subscribes to an understood set of values. These values may include, as suggested by Harcourt, ideas of a pastoral nationalism or link to an idealized rural past. Such qualities as thrift, hard work, collective ingenuity or the imagined simplicity of rural life may be some of the other qualities the owner of quilts wishes to express in establishing a set of values or identity for his or her self.

The values transmitted by quilts in the post-modern consumer ritual are not completely within the control of the consumer. As suggested by Slater, such things as advertising, magazines and celebrity watching increasingly mediate our encounter with objects. This can be readily observed in the presentation of quilts in the popular media. The front cover of Country Living magazine (Appendix B) featured a quilt on the cover in November of 1991 while another quilt was featured on the front of Better Homes and Gardens in February of 1999 (Appendix C). Both these images present the quilts in a romanticized country setting. Better Homes and

²³ Don Slater, Consumer Culture and Modernity (Cambridge: Polity P., 1997) 193-195.

Gardens deals with an interior room, the use of the word “romantic” in the heading clearly denotes the idealistic and uncomplicated qualities associated with a time when quilts were first used in North America. Country Living clearly connects the quilt with the values of simple, rural life with a view of a farm landscape seen through the window. The fact that the quilt is displayed here on the wall further suggests that this object is a focal point in creating this set of values and ideas. A third example of how the values associated with quilts are mediated through the media can be found in an advertisement by a popular catalogue company, Land’s End. The ad suggests that one may purchase the feeling of “coming home” by purchasing one of their many hand-crafted quilts. One particular quilt, the Adult School House, is featured as, “feel[ing] at home anywhere. Deep in a cottage, or atop a Gotham high rise.”²⁴ Although these images are not specifically Canadian in origin, they do effectively demonstrate how the meanings of quilts are mediated. In the context of images such as these, the consumer is not only buying or collecting quilts, they are consuming the values associated with these images - a rural ideal, based on a romantic, and “homey” set of values.

It may be important to note that, within this post-modern shift of consumer culture, not only are new meanings of quilts negotiated through the process of consumption, but the quilts themselves may also change to reflect the demands of the consumer. Rosemary O. Joyce investigates the influence of market demands on folk artists and finds that, among other changes, consumer demands for a less expensive product have led to the shift in shape and size of quilts in the Amish community she studies.²⁵ Less expensive and smaller quilted objects are a popular alternative to a full-sized quilt, and still allow the consumer to display the characteristics they

²⁴ Land’s End, Advertisement, Country Living Nov. 1991: 79.

²⁵ Rosemary O. Joyce, “Fame Don’t Make the Sun Any Cooler: Folk Artists and the Marketplace,” Folk Art and Art Worlds, eds. John Michael Vlach and Simon J. Bronner (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Research P., 1986) 229.

associate with the traditional form. It is this same consumer ritual that creates additional meaning for the quilt, which reflects these meanings back on their production.

Gene Bluestein, in his work, Poplore: Folk and Pop in American Culture, helps to further explain this interaction between mass media and craft production. Bluestein discusses the popularization of folk culture in the United States. While focusing mainly on music in America, many of his theories can also be applied to textiles and the quilt revival. Bluestein notes the reluctance of many folklorists to recognize the validity of revivals (as exemplified by scholar Richard M. Dorson's term "fakelore") but maintains that these revivals actively contribute to the development and preservation of traditional modes of expression.²⁶ What is most relevant in Bluestein's argument is the role played by the popular media in forwarding new and old ideas of folk. Just as radio and television played a role in promoting the syncretization of old and new styles of music from various cultures in the United States, magazines and books can be seen as playing a similar role in the popularization of the quilt. Not only do they inform us of the values transmitted by these objects but the producers of quilts also interact with these media to produce new works that combine images and ideas found within the media with the producer's own ideas as well as those associated with older quilt styles. It is here that the blur between urban and rural, folk and pop, as well as the connection to the commercial market are enacted, making quilts fit neatly into Bluestein's category of poplore. This popularization of quilts, through new rituals, uses and forms, can be seen as creating new meaning for the objects.

A third layer of meaning for quilts in the contemporary context relates to their use as a medium for artistic expression. Perhaps the best method for revealing the issues surrounding this role of the quilt is through an investigation of the tension between the perceptions of the quilt as

²⁶ Gene Bluestein, Poplore: Folk and Pop in American Culture (Amherst, U. of Massachusetts P., 1994) 65-99.

art and perceptions of the quilt as craft. Howard S. Becker discusses the differences he perceives between craftsperson, artist-craftsperson and artist. Becker defines the craft as a body of knowledge and skill that can be used to produce useful objects. The term “useful” here is defined as an end to a means. This is to say that craft is not an end in itself in the way that art is commonly perceived. Instead, it is employed to create objects that have a practical application. In this way, the craftsperson becomes a master at their craft and can manipulate the materials used to create the best results possible. Within this craft context, the object itself is created within a community that establishes the criteria by which the finished work is considered of quality. Becker defines the artist-craftsperson as one who is regarded as an innovator among fellow craftspeople. They employ additional consideration, such as originality, to their work while still functioning within the craft community. The artist-craftsperson does, however, experience continuity with their work and that of the art world. Finally, the artist in Becker’s continuum is seen as an outside invader within the craft world. They bring to their work new standards, criteria and style. These individuals frequently set up their own small museums or exhibitions and are judged by fellow artists rather than craftspeople. Despite this movement to the art world for validation of their work, these artists are judged using new standards rather than those employed for the evaluation of mainstream art works. Becker suggests that these three “art worlds”, of artist, artist-craftsperson and craftsperson, can be seen as co-existing and interacting with each other.²⁷ While this framework may overly rely on modernist ideals of hierarchy within the art worlds, it is useful in exploring the complexities of the meaning of quilts within the art/craft continuum.

It is significant to note that changes take place within the craft tradition, but these

²⁷ Howard S. Becker, Art Worlds (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1982) 273-286.

changes are generally regarded as taking place over a long period of time and are based on gradual, as opposed to radical, change. This can be seen in the context of how quilters, as craftspeople, responded to an increased acceptance of craft as an expressive art form, which began to take place in the mid-nineteenth century. The Arts and Crafts movement is credited with elevating craft in general, in response to the decreased quality of workmanship experienced with widespread industrialization. This movement gave women, and middle class women in particular, “a socially acceptable and humanitarian outlet for their artistic production.”²⁸ One aspect of the increased emphasis placed on the value of craftsmanship, design and the dignity of labour can be seen in the appearance of borders in quilt design. Borders were not historically always used on quilts but they give the quilt a similar structure to painting. While one could suggest that the quilter was responding to the ideas of the Arts and Crafts movement by adopting the structures of the “high” arts, one could also argue that quilts, through their design, demonstrate that modernism has little discussed North American roots.²⁹ In this way, it can be suggested that the ideas of the art and craft world have frequently been in dialogue with one another and one can see the historic roots for the tensions that exist between artists, artist-craftspeople, and craftspeople in terms of quilting.

The display of quilts in contemporary institutions of art and culture further demonstrates a continuation of this tension. Kevin Moore suggests that contemporary museums have moved away from a celebration of the achievements of the white male to a history of the cultures of society as a whole. Beyond this, a further emphasis has been placed on displaying the material cultures of disadvantaged groups, including women.³⁰ Moore comments on the difficulty art

²⁸ Whitney Chadwick, Women, Art, and Society (New York, N.Y.: Thames and Hudson, 1990) 225-228.

²⁹ Elliott, 22.

³⁰ Kevin Moore, Museums and Popular Culture (London: Cassell, 1997) 32-33.

curators have in exhibiting folk art in a way that moves beyond the formalist ideals of letting the object speak for itself. In this way, the producers and consumers of the objects are marginalized in importance and the object is detached from the culture in which it was produced.³¹ Gerald Pocius argues that Canadian cultural institutions, in particular, are able to carry out material culture research on their objects as funding stems more from the public sphere than from private wealth. He contrasts this to the United States where he finds most institutions reflect the private, elite concerns of luxury rather than an understanding of objects. Despite this, he comments that research is often the first area of museum budgets to be reduced in times of cutbacks, reflecting the lack of consistent concern in this area. It is this research into the objects, including the consumer and producers of the objects that will allow for a less formalistic approach within museums in the display of quilts.³²

Ivan Karp proposes that museums can be placed on a continuum with festivals. Festivals, he suggests, provide an active experience for the cultural consumer. "Festivals communicate messages about authenticity while they also invoke pleasurable, sensual experiences that more totally involve the person."³³ Ideas relating to festivals can perhaps be seen in many "craft fairs" where producers of quilts and those who wish to view or buy their works interact in a more informal atmosphere. Karp sees museums as contrasting with this arrangement as they are based on the control of the individual's experience and a refinement of taste, through connoisseurship and the training of those who are in a position to select what is displayed within the museum.³⁴ Here, in the various settings in which quilts are displayed in the public sphere, it becomes

³¹ Moore, 79.

³² Gerald L. Pocius, "Researching Artefacts in Canada: Institutional Power and Levels of Dialogue," Living in a Material World, ed. Gerald L. Pocius (St. John's, Nfld.: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1991) 249-251.

³³ Ivan Karp, "Festivals," Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington : Smithsonian Institution Press, c1991) 282.

³⁴ Karp., 282-283.

obvious that there must be quilters who are considered artists and those that are considered artist-craftspeople or craftspeople.

Joyce Wieland is a Canadian-born artist (now deceased) who is often credited with helping to elevate the quilt to the status of art. Her one-woman-show at the National Gallery of Canada in 1971 included her famous quilt, *Reason Over Passion* in which the notorious words of then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau were quilted in a variety of colours. While Wieland experienced a distinct gender bias in the art world, she balanced this by using the new freedom of materials and objects associated with the dematerialization of art in the contemporary movement to look at issues of femininity and, later feminism, in her work.³⁵ Wieland's own words demonstrate the self-consciousness with which she interacted with the craft world, "I wanted to elevate and honour craft, to join women together and make them proud of what they had done."³⁶ Wieland had learned quilting techniques on her summer trips to Nova Scotia with her husband, Michael Snow, where she encountered many expert quilters in the region. She employed many of these women to work on her pieces and personally thanked them individually in her retrospective at the National Gallery.³⁷ In this way, Wieland can be seen as an artist, borrowing from the craft community, bringing different standards and ideas to a work that is displayed and judged by other artists rather than craftspeople. Wieland and her critics were, as Becker points out, actively challenging and expanding the existing canon as new standards were used for the evaluation of the works. These standards included a consideration for the emerging ideas of second wave feminism in the 1960's and 1970's.

³⁵ Maria Tippet, *By a Lady: Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women* (Toronto : Viking, 1992) 153.

³⁶ Marie Fleming, *Joyce Wieland* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1987) 81.

³⁷ Gunda Lambton, *Stealing the Show: Seven Women Artists in Canadian Public Art* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill/Queens U.P. 1994) 87.

Artist-craftspeople can also be witnessed in the culture of contemporary quilting and the work of Ann Bird can be held as exemplary in this light. Bird can be seen as an innovator within the quilting community. Many of her designs break free from the formal “patterns” of traditional quilts with expressive landscapes and freeform use of colour and design being featured in many quilts. Bird suggests that all the quilts she’s made in the past 20 years have been intended to hang on walls.³⁸ Despite this, Bird remains a revered member of the quilting community. She teaches lessons to master quilters, enters her quilts in festivals and quilt shows and is a member of the Ottawa Valley Quilters’ Guild. Clearly, Ann Bird is functioning within the context of a craft community while she is set apart as a highly skilled innovator within this group.

While Joyce Wieland and Ann Bird can be singled out as an artist and artist-craftsperson, the communities from which Wieland borrows and Bird participates can be seen as consisting of craftspeople. These women may do all their work alone or may gather to aid in the finishing of a quilt. Nonetheless, they can be seen as forming a craft community with established values and standards. These standards and values have significantly shifted over time, through the complexities of reviving a craft, through the pressures of the market and through the acceptance of innovations put forth by such members of the community as Ann Bird. How these women function as a group has also changed over time. While women historically have tended to gather together to quilt through bees and quilting groups, today, there exist many new points of contact through which quilters may come together and share knowledge, share work or even simply bond and socialize. This may be through casual contact, through organized guilds and groups or through the specialty stores that sell quilting supplies.

Beyond casual contact, which includes casual conversation between friends or

³⁸ Leanne Yoheas-Hayes, “Patching Together a Wilderness Vision” Ottawa Citizen 20 July 1998: B8.

acquaintances, specialty stores provide an interesting site for the transmission of ideas and advice concerning quilts. These shops bring craftspeople, who may otherwise work alone, into contact with others and provide a site for the sharing of advice, knowledge and anecdote. This situation was obvious in the anecdotal account of my time spent in Maple Tree Quilts in Ottawa's Glebe neighbourhood (no longer in business) as well as at The Quilter's Helper in Richmond, Ontario. Both these sites were not particularly busy stores, with often no more than one or two customers present at a time. This allowed the staff to ensure the customer received the supplies they required as well as any tips that might accompany the specific merchandise being purchased. The quilters at a site did not always know each other personally but exchanged information at most encounters. This sharing could flow both ways between the staff and customer within each contact. The Quilter's Helper in Richmond even organized retreats and workshops for interested quilters. What becomes obvious here is the significance of a store site as it is used as a point of contact for the transmission of ideas and experience for quilters of various backgrounds, skill levels, and interests. While the traditional bee is no longer prevalent in the social aspect of quilting, other sites have replaced the exchange of skill and advice as well as the social contact that accompanied these gatherings. It must not go unnoticed that the site which has gained significance is the store setting and this may be indicative of the shift in societal structures from the rural agricultural society of the past to the settled and urban society of the present which is highly reliant on consumerism rather than communal aid. It should also be noted that, while many women in Mary Lou Woods' study suggested that the increased commercialisation of quilts aided in an increased availability in supplies, 10% felt that the profit motive of many in the quilting industry was a concerning aspect of the quilting revival.³⁹

³⁹ Woods, 46

The formation of quilters' guilds is also a point of contact between contemporary quilting communities. While guilds in other crafts have a long history, these tended to be male-dominated organizations based around such activities as carpentry and masonry. In the Ottawa region alone there are four official quilting guilds which provide members with the opportunity to share information, gain inspiration and ideas from each other's works as well as participate in workshops. The members of these guilds do not quilt together in a formal context but some members may gather together in this regard.⁴⁰ The craft world of quilting can thus be seen as one that falls within the framework set out by Becker. Individual quilters gather formally and informally, establishing and reinforcing the criteria for "quality" quilts. As well, as has been seen, artist-craftspeople and artists also appear within the context of a quilting culture. The three "worlds" of the quilt can be seen as coexisting and interacting with each other in a way that demonstrates a continuing separation of craft from art in the context of contemporary quilting. These varying perceptions of quilts can be argued to create meaning for the objects. This is to say, whether a quilt is an object produced by a craftsperson within the community of quilters, by an artist-craftsperson who is seen as an innovator within the community or by an artist who borrows from the community but functions within a broadening art world, has significant implications for the meaning of individual quilts.

A final example of the unique way that quilts acquire meaning in the contemporary context can be seen in its employment as a metaphor for cohesion and a tangible representation of an imagined community. The quilt as a material reflection of community has a historical precedent as seen in many "name quilts". These quilts frequently contained the embroidered signatures of individuals who considered themselves part of a community. The friendship or

⁴⁰ A list of some of the guilds in Canada and their various activities can be found at, "Quilt Guilds – Canada," Valley Brook Botanicals and Design <<http://quilt.com/Guilds/QuiltGuildsCanada.html>>.

name quilt often was used as a part of a fundraising campaign by church groups or given to a departing minister. Frequently, those whose names appear on the quilt donated money to the cause in order to be included.⁴¹ The friendship quilt is a manifestation of community. The names of those included are perceived, both by the viewer of the quilt as well as by those who are named therein, as members of a collective. The quilt becomes a symbol of this social bond.

While the scale of many of today's social projects is unarguably larger, what has also taken place is a shifting of the types of communities that are represented in these quilts. Increasingly, the modern quilt has come to serve as a representation of specific communities formed out of specific contexts. The success of the AIDS Quilt, for which patches were made for those who fell victim to the disease, is perhaps the most celebrated example. This project reflects the forming of communities based on a psychological connection or medical experience that is commonly shared rather than familial or religious connection or geographic proximity. Begun in 1987, the AIDS Memorial Quilt is described as a "tool for healing, remembrance, education, and prevention in the struggle to end AIDS."⁴² Containing more than 83 000 names on roughly 43 000 panels, the quilt is part of a moving display that has traveled throughout the world in enacting its mission. The NAMES Project, which directs the efforts of those wishing to contribute panels or money for the AIDS quilt, suggests that the quilt is a meaningful medium through which to memorialize those who have died from AIDS due to its history as a beautiful object that provided warmth and comfort. As well, the historically based image of a quilt as the product of a collective endeavour helped to create communities through which quilters could escape the isolation of rural and domestic life and find comfort and strength in telling stories,

⁴¹ At least one such quilt exists in Richmond's St. John the Baptist church. Dating from the 1940's this quilt contains many of the names of women of the congregation at that time.

⁴² "About the Quilt," The Aids Memorial Quilt 12 April 2002 <<http://www.aidsquilt.org/about.htm>>.

exchanging experience and information and enjoy the company of others.⁴³ As well, it should also be added that the ability of quilts to be continually added to also allows for the continuing growth of the memorial as the disease claims more victims. As well, the quilt is a memorial that can travel, adding to the idea that one does not have to make a long pilgrimage to view the quilt. Instead, the quilt may arrive in a place that is close to home and, as such, can be viewed and understood in a closer proximity to where the experience of losing a loved one took place. For these reasons, it is easily understood how the quilt gains meaning as a metaphor for the imagined community of victims of AIDS, their families and their friends. The acceptance of quilts in this capacity can be seen with the adoption of the medium in similar communities, such as the quilt project to commemorate victims of breast and ovarian cancers.

Canada itself can be seen as an imagined community that can employ the metaphor of the quilt. It can be argued that the quilt, in this capacity, reflects the new challenges posed to a society that is becoming increasingly culturally diverse. Here, the quilt is not only used to describe or physically represent a bond, but is designed to bring about a sense of cohesion which may not have previously existed. Articles such as the one entitled, "The Canadian Quilt", in January 1998, Canada and the World Backgrounder, employ the idea of the quilt as a thing which can unify a group yet allow for individuality. The idea of piecing together patches which may or may not be similar but which work to create a whole is especially strong in political rhetoric in Canada. This can be evidenced in the by-line to the article, "Each person who makes Canada their home adds a new panel to the national quilt."⁴⁴ Another article, in the Alberta Report, calls for another quilt-inspired vision of Canada, one in which the "patchwork" of federal

⁴³ "About the Quilt."

⁴⁴ "The Canadian Quilt," Canada and the World Backgrounder 63.4 (Jan.1, 1998): 24.

and provincial policies are more closely sewn together.⁴⁵ In this way, both socially and politically, the quilt again gains meaning as a metaphor for a collective model or imagined community. Here, on the national level, the community imagined is one that both celebrates a culturally diverse but cohesive country and strives to create strength through stitching together, or forming bonds, between federal and provincial governments and their policies.

The idea of quilts as a metaphor for cohesion can also be found in popular magazine articles that deal with the complexities involved in negotiating one's personal identity in contemporary society. This phenomenon can be seen in the personalized accounts of specific women. Several articles can be found relating to women's use of quilting as a symbolic gesture of piecing their lives together. An example of this can be found in an article featured in a Canadian women's magazine, Chatelaine. "By a Thread" recounts one woman's assessment of the psychological benefits of quilting "one orderly square at a time."⁴⁶ It can be argued then, that quilts take on yet another layer of meaning through their use as a symbol of cohesion and imagined communities. While this does have historical precedents, the communities imagined through these quilts are unique to the contemporary experience. Such ever-expanding communities as victims and families of AIDS and an increasingly culturally diverse Canada require the quilt to take on meanings it never had before, or to use these meanings in a unique way. As well, the vision of personal or psychological cohesion, which can be found in the quilt, is inarguably the product of 21st century, post-modern identity formation.

Conclusion

This look at the history of quilting demonstrates the ability of quilts to reflect the economic, geographic and social patterns of their producers and consumers. Originally

⁴⁵ Michael Jenkinson, "A Strong National Patchwork," Alberta Report 23.11 (1996): 6.

⁴⁶ Paulette Bourgeois, "By a Thread," Chatelaine. (Nov., 1998) 111-114.

employed as a response to harsh climatic and economic conditions faced by early settlers, quilting became a means of aesthetic, social and economic expression. As well, the production of quilts in both these earlier phases has acted as a site for community and familial bonding. While the craft witnessed a decline with the entry of women into the work force in the middle of the twentieth century, primarily urban, middle-aged women revived it in the late 1960s to the present day. The role of quilts as historical records (both public and private), as objects negotiated in the post-modern consumer culture, as signifiers in the tension between art and craft as well as their role as symbols of diverse cohesion and imagined communities, all demonstrate the meanings taken on by this medium in current Canadian life. While these meanings often draw on the historical elements of the quilt, they are markedly transformed in their new context. While it can be argued that artefacts outlast the rituals from which they stem, we inevitably find new rituals, and new meanings through which to understand the quilt.

How the broad changes discussed in this chapter are played out in a specific community is reliant on the history and values of that community. In order to understand how the shifting meanings associated with quilts and quilting have been negotiated and understood by the quilters of Goulbourn Township, one must first understand the time and place in which they have enacted their craft. Chapter Two will draw conclusions as to the changing geographic, social and aesthetic context within which these quilters operate. An investigation of the overlapping local, gender and material histories of twentieth century Goulbourn will aid in creating a bridge between the broad trends associated with quilting and the specific experiences of Goulbourn Township's quilters. As Geertz suggests, it is important to connect objects with the social context in which they are produced – this is the goal of the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: Changing Contexts

Introduction

Norma Craig lives in her childhood home. The house, built by her great, great grandfather in 1878, stands on one of the last remaining pieces of farmland between the booming suburb of Kanata and the expanding village of Stittsville. When Mrs. Craig points toward the one room schoolhouse she attended as a young girl, her point of reference is now a McDonald's restaurant. Her references to the world around us are in terms of where new buildings stand, or where the old ones used to be. There is a changing landscape all around her, and she has participated in a tremendous amount of change. When she was a young woman, her father insisted that she acquire a practical skill so as not to be fully dependant on a husband. Mrs. Craig received a business certificate, and the day she finished she put the piece of paper down on the kitchen table and implored her father, "Now can I stay home?"¹ She chose to take over her parents' farm, and together with her husband and family, turned it into one of the most successful dairy farms in Canada.² She shows me the place in the big farm kitchen where her mother used to piece together her quilts. Very little is the same in this domain either. While her mother used to quilt in order to keep the family and the farm hands warm, Mrs. Craig's quilts have come to mean something quite different. Styles, colours and patterns have changed. There are trends that have been adopted and discarded. There is, in a sense, more history between then and now - more change.

The changes that have and continue to take place in Mrs. Craig's life, as with all the quilters of this study, are important to how they frame their experiences and their roles within

¹ Norma Craig, personal interview, 31 January 2002.

² Norma Craig's farm had the top producing dairy herd in Canada before she and her husband sold their herd and retired from farming.

their local and craft communities. The quilters of this study reside and quilt within what was once Goulbourn Township, and is now a largely rural area within the Ottawa mega city. Other boundaries are also imagined by these women as defining their community, including individual villages, parts of villages or even parishes within these communities. However a study of the quilters of Goulbourn Township assumes a shared experience of this space. An historical investigation of the township will help to provide insight into some of the values and ideas that dominate this space as well as many of the changes that have occurred and continue to evolve in this region.

While these women share a geographical region, and with it a local community, they also share a history as women. Because quilting is often labelled a “domestic art” or a “home-based craft” concepts of domesticity and the changes that have taken place in terms of how this is framed for and by Canadian women are especially relevant to this study. The fact that these quilters are all Canadian-born women of western-European descent also plays an important role in how the participants of this study understand their roles as quilters. Born between 1913 and 1941, many have seen vast changes take place in their lives and many of these changes have been influenced by their gender. The reform movements of the early and mid twentieth century, agrarian feminism, established and shifting gender roles within the home and community, and the mechanization and professionalization of housework that began in the 1920’s and gained force following the Second World War all contribute to a change in the meaning of hand made objects produced by women.

Transformations in the local community and shifting meanings attributed to home-based labour both contribute to the environment of change in which the Goulbourn quilters function. The effects of modernism on consumption, production and distribution of goods within Canada

were also acting to change the way society viewed the home interior and the consumption habits of the female consumer. These issues will also be investigated in order to better understand the importance of the complex web of professionalization and consumerism that was at work changing how society dealt with material goods in the early to mid twentieth century.

This chapter will attempt to come to an understanding of the spaces in which the quilters of this study operate. The following pages will trace the changes that have taken place in the physical community of Goulbourn Township. As well they will bring forth an understanding of transformations in concepts of domesticity, consumerism and women's participation in the creation of modern home interiors. In doing so, it is hoped an understanding of the role of quilts and quilting within these changing spaces will be better understood. In order to accomplish this task, a variety of sources and approaches will be employed, including local history publications, research into Canadian women's history as well as writings regarding modernist concepts of consumerism and home decoration, in order to reveal and understand the changes that have occurred and continue to develop in the lives and homes of Goulbourn's quilters.

Local History

A shared sense of history and set of accompanying values are two central aspects to the creation of communities. Goulbourn Township, in this sense has many communities. The Township consists of two large villages and several hamlets that today act as centres for the surrounding rural area as well as bedroom communities for the larger city of Ottawa, with which the township has recently been amalgamated. Grey stone and red brick church towers, locally owned businesses and nineteenth-century homes line main streets while post-war bungalows, aluminium-sided community centres and small strip malls attest to continuing investment and development in the villages and hamlets of the region. Dairy cows, soya and corn fill the fields

of farms stretching out between these centres. Describing the physical characteristics of an area is much easier than pinpointing what defines it as a community. Diane Tye suggests that, in looking at the values of a community, folk histories focus on the ways in which a community imagines itself as opposed to how it has been represented by outside and formal institutions.³ While Tye focuses her study on the private collections of artefacts within a Nova Scotia community, suggesting that what a community keeps and collects may provide insight into how its history is collectively imagined, one may also argue that local history publications act in the same way.

The locally produced literature on Goulbourn's history breaks down primarily by region, signifying a conceptual delineation of communities within the region. While Harry and Olive Walker co-wrote one book that recounts the history of Carleton County, other smaller works focus on Goulbourn's two largest villages, Richmond and Stittsville. The smaller hamlets and farming areas that adjoin these two centres are discussed separately within these texts and denote their close connection with these two larger centres. For the most part, academic historians did not write these books. Harold Walker, who wrote Carleton Saga, and John Curry, who wrote Richmond on the Jock, were locally based journalists. Other works, such as Richmond 150 and Stittsville's Country Tales, are compilations of articles and remembrances that were submitted to the editors of the books. Richmond residents compiled Richmond 150 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the village while Country Tales was published by the Stittsville Women's Institute. The insider perspective of these histories is evident.

It is crucial to consider how the authors and editors of these works constructed the histories before one can move to their content. There is, for the most part, very little archival

³ Diane Tye, "Retrospective Analysis of Folk History: A Nova Scotia Case Study," Material History Bulletin 30 (Fall, 1989): 1.

information available on the histories of these communities. This, however, varies depending on the location studied. Richmond for example has more available archival information on which to draw than other smaller locations such as Munster or Hazeldean. This formal and archived data is supplemented with oral histories collected formally and informally from local residents, especially those considered to be elders or leaders in a particular area of community life. In the two more celebratory books, Richmond 150 and Country Tales, local groups and personalities have also submitted their own histories to be edited and compiled with others, thus mediating for the reader what is important to remember and understand about their contribution to and place in the history of the community. Tweedsmuir histories, as collected by the local Women's Institutes, also have a large role to play, especially in the Country Tales book, which is published by the Women's Institute and draws heavily from news articles gathered by the group. The book brings to the fore the important role this organization of women plays in collecting and preserving information and news they feel is important for their community to remember.

How then are the communities of Goulbourn imagined? As discussed earlier it is important to note that Goulbourn is not regarded as one, homogeneous community. Individual villages and agricultural regions are given delineated attentions within the collections of published works and within these works themselves. The individual histories of these locations, especially those in which the quilters of this study reside and work, will be discussed individually. However, some commonalities in values may be discussed here. Primary among these is the idea of a pioneer history. The hardships of pioneer life and the interesting and sometimes unbelievable situations they created are given substantial treatment in all the works. Family stories of early pioneering relatives have been passed down to the authors and editors to create a history of hard work and community building. John Curry makes this connection clear

in his conclusion of Richmond on the Jock, “The goal of those early visionaries was to establish in a community a loyal and reliable cadre of settlers in this part of Upper Canada. The past 175 years are proof that their goal has been met and surpassed.”⁴

While stories of individuals who have assumed prominent roles within the community are frequent, these individuals are not portrayed as working for themselves. Collective efforts, as embodied in the early pioneers, are seen as important to the development and growth of the area. As suggested by Country Tales, “A community where residents enjoy working and playing together is assured of a better tomorrow.”⁵ Central to the sense of collectivity and community building, which started with early settlement, is the importance given to volunteerism within these histories. Several pages are devoted to the histories and continued contributions of community organizations such as local volunteer fire departments, Women’s Institutes, the locally run hydro company, and various churches. Community events such as fairs and celebrations are highlighted. While extraordinary events and individual achievements are given their space, these often refer to how they have impacted or benefited the community as a whole, reinforcing the importance of collectivity and the giving of one’s time and energy to the greater good. This was a lesson credited to the pioneer founders and one that continues to be stressed.

Healthy community life is not the only aspect of the township viewed as essential to its continued development; economic and technological progress are also seen as playing key roles. Events such as the lighting of the first street lights in Stittsville, the opening of successful businesses, the founding of cheese factories and other light industries, and the opening of the new regional high school in Richmond are recorded as a testament to the region’s continuing response to modernity. In this way, the area is able to live a kind of double life in terms of

⁴ John Curry, Richmond on the Jock (Stittsville: The Stittsville News, 1993) 103.

⁵ Stittsville Women’s Institute, Country Tales ([Stittsville]: [Stittsville Women’s Institute], 1963) 137.

values. There is a strong current and some residual evidence of a pioneer past coupled with a drive to keep up with the changes of the present day. However, these two ideas are not, in reality, entirely conflictual. Instead, the hard work and ambitions of the founders of the community act as a model for following generations to continue the work of ensuring that the area, “did not succumb to mediocrity over the years.”⁶ Despite this pride in the maintenance of services and technological improvements, there is still a hint of nostalgia and a wariness of urban or even suburban influence in the area. While much of the eastern part of the township has not escaped the housing boom that followed World War II or the suburban sprawl of the late twentieth century, the Goulbourn Historical Society consoles readers of Richmond Ontario with the fact that, “Even today, the major traffic arteries have by-passed the village, as have the sprawling sub-divisions which so often accompany them.” For this reason, “It is still possible to feel close to those first settlers and the Richmond they knew.”⁷ While the idea of value conflicts brought about by urban or outside influences will be dealt with later, here it becomes important to note that progress is held to be important to the communities of Goulbourn, only in so far as it is reflective of its established values based on self-sufficiency and pioneering spirit.

Keeping in mind the values discussed above, a brief history of some of the communities of Goulbourn Township, as communicated through local history publications, is also relevant to an understanding of the area. This history is well known to most of the women of this study. As I was getting to know many women for this essay, stories were often shared with me that fell into this broad framework of history, implying that this is a shared vision of the past of the area and one which they felt important that I understand (not withstanding the fact that I am, myself, the sixth generation of my mother’s family to live in the community). As well, the shared perception

⁶ Curry, 100.

⁷ Goulbourn Historical Society, Richmond Ontario: Founded 1818 (pamphlet on the history of Richmond, n.d.) 4.

of this history may well indicate the importance and validity given to written history by many of the participants of the study, which they instinctively add to with their oral accounts of their own personal histories – a theory further reinforced by the women of the Ashton quilters who went so far as to bring me a photocopy of a historical piece clipped from a local newspaper. While all the informal stories I was told were personal accounts of events, undisputable facts were often embedded in the stories affirming that this more formal, published history acts as a substantial framework within which the daily lives or smaller family stories of the quilters have taken place.

Goulbourn Township was the product of war. This is true both of its founding years and of the housing boom that followed WWII. These two conflicts may be used to frame the history of the area into three distinct eras, namely the founding and initial settling of the region, a period of suburban growth following the Second World War, followed by the contemporary era of amalgamation into the greater city of Ottawa.

Following the War of 1812 and the Napoleonic Wars, the British faced “peace” for the first time in more than a generation. As Britain was simultaneously entering an economic depression, there were neither land nor jobs in Great Britain for the resultant disbanded soldiers. It was decided to establish settlements of soldiers-farmers who could be called to defend the colony if needed. Soldiers from the Irish 99th and 100th Regiments of Foot settled Richmond in 1818. The so called Richmond Settlement included the eastern half of Beckwith Township in Lanark County and the newly surveyed Townships of Goulbourn, March and Huntley in Carleton County, with its administration located in the perfectly rectangular village (also called Richmond) established on the banks of the Jock (Jacques or Goodwood) River.

Richmond Village, with its commissary, became the economic, social and political centre of the settlement. The Jock was used as a major transportation route as was the new road, which

joined Kingston, Perth, and Richmond to the new community emerging at the confluence of the Rideau and Ottawa Rivers.⁸ In 1823, the British military ended its subsidy and diverted the funds towards building the Rideau Canal. However, another wave of settlement seems to have occurred in the 1840's as many local families mark their arrival from this period. Whereas this evidence may seem to indicate a booming town, the population of Richmond in 1851 was only 434.⁹

Despite the sporadic quality of the soil in the township, the land was used largely for mixed farming and agriculture dominated the lives of most residents of the area. As the century progressed, other hamlets emerged where local farmers, unwilling or unable to travel to Richmond for their basic needs, established stores and built schools and churches. Up the Jock River from Richmond, the hamlets of Munster and Ashton stand as pioneer settlements in the same township. Ashton is a small village carved out of the bush by the early nineteenth century soldier-farmers in the northwest corner of the township. On the border of Lanark and Goulbourn, Ashton was the site of a general store, a grain elevator, a tailor and a potashery.¹⁰ Today, four spires attest to its role as a religious centre for the surrounding families. To the north of Richmond, Stittsville emerged largely in response to the completion of the Canadian Central Railroad, which joined Carleton Place with Ottawa, via Ashton and Stittsville. To the east and slightly north of Stittsville, the crossroad community of Hazeldean evolved atop a hill on the township limits. The fertile land of this area is credited for producing several highly successful farms, along with an accompaniment of supporting businesses. Today, Hazeldean straddles the booming sub-divisions of Kanata and the quickly expanding village of Stittsville.

⁸ This community would come to be called Bytown and, later, Ottawa.

⁹ Richmond 150, 44.

¹⁰ Harry Walker and Olive Walker, The Carleton Saga (Ottawa: The Runge P., 1968) 494-506.

Stittsville's boom came with the suburban growth that is associated with the end of the Second World War. In a matter of ten years, between 1957 and 1967, the population rose from 400 to 1 700,¹¹ likely due to its proximity to the Trans Canada highway and the City of Kanata. Stittsville is not alone in its rapid growth in the second half of the century. One needs only to drive the streets of Richmond or Munster to see that the popular bungalow style of the 1950's and 60's dominates the landscape. Starting in the late 1940's intense growth took place around the cities of Ontario as builders filled the demand for larger, more up-to-date homes that had not been accessible to many during the Depression. The move to the "suburbs" is one that will be further discussed below, but it is important to note that Goulbourn Township's close proximity to Ottawa made it a somewhat attractive site for the spread of suburban development and the eruption of bedroom communities after World War II. Harry and Olive Walker, the authors of Carleton Saga, a local history of the county published in 1968, express some of the anxiety associated with this rapid growth:

Goulbourn's present population (1968) is 3,500.... But much of the future of the township is contained in the new 'Glen Cairn' development of 600 acres, adjacent to the Green Belt perimeter.... Its present population is 1,500. But what the end result will be when 600 acres of some of the finest farmland in the County is converted into another satellite Suburbia of the Capital is something beyond the thinking of anybody.¹²

Pauline Greenhill notes the changes that have taken place in post-war Ontario towns in her study of folk poetry in Ontario. She argues there is a discernable rift in the values between inhabitants. Many still subscribe to older, more rural ideals and see their community based on such. Newer inhabitants who migrate to these areas are often met with a certain amount of

¹¹ Walker and Walker, 500-501

¹² Walker and Walker, 509.

scepticism and apprehension. However, as noted by Greenhill, those who use these towns as bedroom communities frequently have little connection to the community themselves.¹³

The line between the two groups is most clearly evident during times of crisis.¹⁴ 1999-2000 brought just such a crisis to the township of Goulbourn. Amalgamation with the city of Ottawa was imposed on the area by the provincial government, spawning the formation of The Rural Alliance, a group of rural citizens who opposed the merging of rural townships with the new “mega-city” of Ottawa. Discourse surrounding a loss of culture and autonomy abounded in the debate, supporting Greenhill’s argument. Petitions were signed and meetings were held, drawing attention to the fact that many of the residents of rural Ottawa felt they were “different” from those who chose to reside in the city centre and suburbs. The Rural Alliance argued that the only form of government that could adequately represent the interests of rural citizens was one run by these same people. The group had a clearly thought out list of reasons why local affairs need to be managed by local government. Among these were the following:

- *Independent*, self-sustaining rural communities
- Services that reflect *community values* and needs
- Preservation and strengthening of community *identity*
- *Self-determination* on issues that most directly affect the day-to-day lives of constituents
- An economy based on natural resources, particularly *agriculture*
- Preservation and enhancement of the *unique character* of villages and the natural landscape
- *Working in harmony* with our urban and rural neighbours¹⁵

¹³ Pauline Greenhill, True Poetry: Traditional and Popular Verse in Ontario (Montreal/Kingston: McGill/Queens U.P., 1989) 23-37.

¹⁴ Greenhill, 23-24.

¹⁵ “Rural Alliance,” Rideau Watch (August, 1997) 20 February 2002
<<http://www.hypercon.com/rideauwatch/rural01.htm>>

Greenhill's suggestion that times of crisis bring the old/new, rural/urban or resident/commuter rift within rural communities to the surface is exemplified here.¹⁶ One can clearly see the rhetoric of distinct community and unique culture in the recent debate, suggesting that the residents of rural areas around Ottawa, including Goulbourn, have a collective consciousness as a community with a unique lifestyle and culture that is increasingly under threat by the encroachment and meddling of the urban centre.

As well, the issue of self-directed progress is again exemplified as a major concern for the community.

The history of Goulbourn Township then, is one largely framed by pioneering stories and values. Tales of withstanding hardships to carve a community out of the bush and, using all the modernist ideology at their disposal, developing it into something worthy of pride abound in its local histories. Tales of institutions, their founding and contributions are emphasised and given credit for their role in aiding to build a strong and healthy community. Factors such as immigration patterns, geography, and religion have contributed to the creation of multiple communities within this politically defined area. Many core values, based on a shared sense of history and vision, spring to the surface and help to draw boundaries beyond which change is deemed unacceptable. The amalgamation debate of the late 1990's presents an example of this shared vision of community; however the exemplified split between traditional and dormitory citizens will gain further significance in the proceeding chapter in the context of examining the relationship between traditional (local) and revivalist ("other") streams of quilters.

¹⁶ This is not to say that other rifts do not exist that divide the traditional communities of Goulbourn. The historic and continued presence of Orange Lodges, while perhaps generational in nature and declining in membership, may be considered one such tension based on religion.

Women's History

Within this framework of the historical development of the area, women were carrying out their daily lives. The following section will attempt to give a background of the forces being enacted by and the forces acting on the women of this study as they participated in their craft. This will include an investigation of women's labour, the reform movements of the early twentieth century, and the importance of consumerism, as well as changing conceptions of domesticity that have accompanied and supported them. While writing women's history in Canada is a tumultuous task and one which frequently results in omissions, because the women of this study identify themselves with and act within dominant, mainstream Canadian culture, much can be gained from literature which, in other cases, may appear to overly generalize or disregard minority women from the new, emerging canons of history. This literature will aid in furthering an understanding of changing ideas of home-based labour, an issue which has clear implications for how quilting is conceptualized by the women of this study.

Perhaps the most widely studied and discussed aspect of women's history in the twentieth century is the relationship between women and the labour market. While it is frequently and easily argued that women have always worked, the rise of the industrial revolution, coupled with the Victorian ideal of "the angel in the house" has led to a myth of women's non-participation in the new economic structure emerging during this period and into the twentieth century. The Canadian reality of this myth was one framed by the frontier as opposed to the emerging cities of Europe. Women in late nineteenth century Ontario were mainly engaged in farming and, especially in eastern Ontario, the dairy industry.

Farming women had many responsibilities that took them outside the home, particularly in the dairy industry where women were traditionally thought to have a more appropriate and gentle touch in the milking of cows. The money made from milk produced on farms frequently

remained in the hands of the milker and, as such, many farm women found themselves with purchasing power as a result of their efforts (when the proceeds of their labour were not being used to supplement bad yields from other crops). By the late nineteenth century, however, the soil of many Ontario farms had become overextended and farmers were encouraged to shift their focus from wheat to dairy and meat cattle. At the same time, and into the twentieth century, the production and sale of dairy products increasingly fell from the hands of women and into those of the larger structure of the farm (her husband) and, eventually, the commercial creameries. While commercial creameries would not overtake the domestic production of butter until the 1920's, Loise I. Carbert argues that farm women lost their control of this sector when dairy cattle became the property of the farm owner and this property likely became increasingly important to the owner/operator in the late nineteenth century with the shift to dairy production from wheat.¹⁷

The Women's Institute [WI] stands as a significant example of the agricultural ideals and values held by many of the women living in Goulbourn Township and, as such, these ideas and values warrant some discussion. The Women's Institute was established as part of the reform movements of the early twentieth century. In the same vein as the urban reform movement of the same period, it was motivated by ideas surrounding nation building and, especially, the building of a healthy, strong nation – a task that began in the home. In the city, the Ottawa chapter of the Canadian National Council of Women was established in response to the rise of first wave or maternal feminism and stands as a fine example of the efforts of the urban reform movement. It began its efforts in 1894, focusing on such issues as public health (including the establishment of a Victorian Order of Nurses), nation building, the creation of a public library, the placement of women on school boards, and improving working conditions for women.

¹⁷ Louise I. Carbert, Agrarian Feminism: The Politics of Ontario Farm Women (Toronto: University of Toronto P., 1995) 6-10.

Likewise, the rural reform movement sought to educate farmwomen and encourage them to use new technologies and scientific approaches to better their homes and the lives of their families. Margaret Kechnie sees the Women's Institute as an important organization in furthering the ideas of agricultural nationalism that was, "intended to revitalize rural areas ravaged by declining population and a lingering depression [and] re-create Britain in Canada."¹⁸ The Institute encouraged women to stay away from the evils of growing cities, for the same reasons being addressed by such groups as the National Council of Women, and remain on the farm. It further challenged farm wives to stay out of the work force, out of the fields, and focus full-time energy on making and maintaining homes with a physical and moral atmosphere conducive to nurturing the future leaders of the new Canadian nation.

This theory, as pointed out by Kechnie, was based on the agrarian myth that cities were hotbeds of corruption, a plight the urban reform movement sought to repair. A nation built on the values of rural, agrarian life would be stronger and morally superior. These were the values that would uplift and support civilization.¹⁹ The rhetoric of the Women's Institute was not based on marginal ideas. They were supported by a membership that reached a peak of over 50 000 Canadian women in the 1950's.²⁰ In Richmond, the Women's Institute also reached its peak at this time, boasting 55 members.²¹

What is significant about the Women's Institute as a rural women's organization, is its ability to maintain membership following the First World War, at a time when other groups stemming from the ideas of first wave feminism, such as the National Council of Women, were

¹⁸ Margaret Kechnie, "Rural Women's Role in the 'Great National Work of Home Building': The Women's Institutes in Early Twentieth Century Ontario," *Canadian Woman Studies* 20:2 (2000): 119.

¹⁹ Kechnie, 120.

²⁰ Kechnie, 118.

²¹ *Richmond* 150, 28-29

experiencing a period of decline. In fact, by 1989, the Canadian Women's Institute still held a membership of 35 000 with 19 350 of these residing in Ontario. However, despite its continuation into the period generally associated with second wave feminism (the late 1960's), the Women's Institute did not adopt these new ideas, as did other surviving groups, such as the Young Women's Christian Association. As pointed out by Carbert, who discusses various agrarian women's groups in her work, Agrarian Feminism: The Politics of Ontario Farm Women, while national leaders of the organization took positions in support of issues such as increased access to abortion and enforced spousal support payments to divorced women, there is evidence to support the argument that these second wave issues were not the concern of the local membership. At the same time, the group has not aligned itself with antifeminist groups, such as R.E.A.L. Women. The Federated Women's Institute of Canada is atypical of most service or interest groups, which according to the theories associated with social movements, should decline as the issues around which members have coalesced become resolved.²² This has been the case with other rural women's groups, such as the Ontario Farm Women's Network, which have sprung up to replace the conservative WI. These newer organizations sought to replace the role of farmwomen as domestic helpers with one of women as partners in the business and culture of farming. In this way, the Women's Institute in Ontario appears to resemble a living continuation of the first wave of feminism in Canada.

While the rural reform movement sought to remind women of their primary role as mother and wife, that is to say as it sought to confine them to concerns of domesticity, women in the villages and hamlets of Ontario were reminded of the same values. By the end of the First World War, it was generally assumed that most young women would enter the workforce for a

²² Carbert, 18-20.

period of time before getting married. This paid employment was seen as temporary and, in many cases, young women would remain at home and return their earnings to the household as a collective. At the same time, there is no denying the increased freedom experienced by women at this time. This freedom did not go unnoticed by the wider society. Anxiety over the image of the “flapper” abounded in the media, as did stories encouraging young women to leave their careers behind upon embarking on their imminent marriages.²³ To further encourage the transition from work to wife, and in keeping with the ideal of applying new sciences in the home, women were encouraged to see their role as homemakers in terms of a professional career.

The early twentieth century saw a marked increase in the education of women in Canada. By 1931, an average of ten years of education could be expected from boys and girls in the Ontario education system with the leaving age averaging around 16.²⁴ While school attendance was clearly subject to many factors, including social class and location, it is also important to consider that many students would have their education interrupted for a variety of reasons such as helping with farm or household labour or a need to seek employment to help with family income. However, girls would not leave the education system without some training in the “domestic sciences”, which were increasingly incorporated into the public education curriculum. School-aged girls were taught skills thought to prepare them for their future roles as wives and mothers such as sewing, cooking as well as hygiene and nutrition. It is important to note, as does Alison Prentice et al., that many of these courses were fraught with resistance as they were found to undermine the role of mothers in educating their daughters in this regard as well as teaching girls skills with food or equipment that was beyond the financial reach of most households at the time. For example, while girls were instructed using scientifically measured recipes, most family

²³ Alison Prentice et al., *Canadian Women: A History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Canada, 1996) 282-283.

²⁴ Prentice et al., 279.

recipes, if written down, used instructions such as a “pinch” or a “dash”. Supporters of the curriculum, however, argued that with the increasing number of girls working away from home before marriage, these skills might not be sufficiently instilled in the future wives and mothers when it came time for them to run their own households.²⁵

Mothering, too, became subject to expert advice to women. No longer was instinct and tradition sufficient for the proper rearing of children. From the birthing process, which increasingly took place in hospitals with doctors as opposed to in homes with midwives, to the technicalities of raising children, the task of rearing the leaders and citizens of the nation’s future was not to be undertaken without the appropriate, scientific knowledge. By 1938, more than half of all births in Ontario took place in hospitals.²⁶ This trend, paired with the prenatal supervision of the mother and foetus, was seen as a necessity in helping to reduce maternal and child mortality rates. Rigid daily schedules of feeding and exercise for infants and children echoed the broader and equally as rigid timeline for development. A child’s failure to conform to these norms was a reflection of a mother’s inadequacies. Likely some gap in her knowledge, which could have been minimized through proper education and adherence to professional advice from psychologists, doctors and educators, was the root to the problem.

It is certain that many girls did not have the opportunity to acquire higher grades of education in which these domestic science courses were taught, and that many schools did not have the resources to provide such extensive courses. The values that support such endeavours are clearly those which support the ideal of marriage and motherhood for young women. While short periods of work for young women were considered appropriate and helpful to the family, this was regarded as a temporary phase in life. Coupled with the urban and rural reform

²⁵ Prentice et al., 279-281.

²⁶ Prentice et al., 285-286.

movements discussed above, these traditional values were combined with the newer ideas concerning the scientific and managerial approach women should employ upon accomplishment of these tasks. The healthy and happy development of the family unit, especially the development of their children as the citizens of the future, was the responsibility of women and they were, as professional homemakers and mothers, to approach this task with all the expert and scientifically reinforced knowledge at their disposal.

The impossibility for many women to meet the ideals discussed above arises from many factors. Primary among these was economics. As mentioned earlier, many women simply were not in a position to pursue a secondary education, and for those in Goulbourn Township that were, the small continuation schools of the area were unlikely sites for the impartment of cutting edge, home economics facilities. These specialized classrooms, and the curriculum that accompanied them would not reach the area until the construction of South Carleton High School, which replaced the small township continuation schools in 1952. The establishment of a Saint John Ambulance Brigade in Richmond further suggests that these concerns did not escape the community studied here. Home Nursing and First Aid certificates were handed out to participating women starting in 1951 indicating that, while there was a movement toward raising the efficiency of emergency response in the area (the Brigade was present at most events, including the fair) these same skills should be at the disposal of women in the home. The information on caring for home medical needs should not be left to intuition and folk medicine, but rather imparted to women through professionals to ensure the health and safety of their families.

Even without formal education, the popular media, and especially the emerging magazines directly speaking to Canadian women, ensured that many women still had access to

the information required to be capable wives and mothers. Articles and advertisements encouraged girls to give up their jobs for marriage and provided them with pages of advice in how best to enact the ideals required of them when they did. However, once this choice was made, the logistics of operating a household on one income were not realistic for most working-class families. As pointed out by Prentice et al., when “60 percent of Canadian working men and 82 percent of working women earned less than the minimum necessary for the support of a family of four (in 1929)...[t]he concept of the family wage was unrealistic at the best of times.”²⁷

Perhaps related to the economic strain of maintaining a family, the amenities required to run a household on the scientific model set out by the reform movement were equally unrealistic for many. Even by 1941, only 14.8% of rural Ontario homes had running water and 9.5% had flush toilets.²⁸ While this is above the national average, it clearly demonstrates the restraints placed on many women to reach the model outlined by social groups, the government, and the mass media. Quality of housing was not only a concern of the Women’s Institute, which encouraged women to maintain flower gardens to help improve the immediate atmosphere of the domestic realm, the government also attempted to address this issue.

By the 1930’s the government introduced the Home Improvement Plan. This initiative provided eligible recipients with low-interest loans to help maintain their property investments. Loans of up to \$3 000 were granted for such projects as painting, papering, resurfacing of exteriors, roof repairs/replacements, and structural changes such as additions, the building of cupboards or the creation of basement recreation rooms. The purchase of new, labour-saving, electrical appliances was also encouraged through the H.I.P., with companies such as General

²⁷ Prentice et al., 293.

²⁸ E.A. (Nora) Cebotarev, “From Domesticity to the Public Sphere: Farm Women, 1945-1986,” A Diversity of Women: Ontario 1945-1980, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto : University of Toronto P., 1995) 203.

Electric forming close ties to the programme. Hobbs and Pierson argue that the hopes of this plan were to create a “keeping up with the Jones” mentality by causing a chain reaction of home repair.²⁹ In this way, it would only take one house in the neighbourhood to be given such a loan and the others would stretch beyond their means in an effort to keep up. While the plan is arguably urban-centred and class oriented (one has to be able to pay back the loan), its main concern with the modernization of the Canadian household is evident (as is its strength as a work creation project). While much of the advertisement for the plan, which included such widespread media support that Chatelaine magazine declared 1937 “Home Improvement Year”, was focused on such concerns as how to remove or conceal outdated Victorian detailing on exteriors, many houses in Canada at the time still needed to be brought to a level in compliance with fire and safety codes.³⁰

Even such initiatives as the Home Improvement Plan attempted to maintain the values of women remaining outside of the labour market. Loans granted by the H.I.P. were geared toward male homeowners and single (male) income families. Households with two income earners were not eligible for the programme. In this way, one can see that, even before the growth of the welfare state, public policy also encouraged women to restrict their work to the domestic sphere. At the same time, it acknowledges the difficulty such arrangements cause in attempting to maintain a standard of living in line with the expected modernization of the home and housework.

However, the modernization that schools, the media and the government advocated further changed the nature of work in the home. Not only were scientific approaches encouraged

²⁹ Margaret Hobbs and Ruth Roach Pierson, “A Kitchen That Wastes No Steps: Gender, Class and the Home Improvement Plan, 1936-1940,” Age of Contentment: Readings in Canadian Social History, 1900-1945, ed. Jeffrey Keshen (Toronto : Harcourt Brace Canada, 1997) 144-146.

³⁰ Hobbs and Pierson, 158.

through the reform movements, but also the new factory-like approach to domestic labour effectively turned women into managers (answering still to the boss/husband of the operation). It is estimated that 80-85% of household spending was controlled by women during the 1930's. Women were the targets of advertising, encouraging them to spend money on home renovations that would help them create the laboratory or factory in which their labour would be made most efficient. This increase in advertising directed at women, encouraging them to buy new goods, created an environment in which their role shifted from one of producer of household goods to consumer of household goods. Evidence of their labour was, as much as possible, to be hidden by cupboards and machines in order to make the effects of their labour appear effortless.

It would appear that despite the cost, many married women met the ideal of remaining in the home. By the beginning of the Second World War, only one in twenty married women engaged in the paid labour force.³¹ As WWII began, many women joined the war effort through volunteer organizations, just as they had during the First World War. Women could do their part by collecting together the materials needed to supply the munitions factories or by growing of produce in victory gardens. The Women's Institute played a large role in organizing rural women in this regard.³² As well, women contributed through their consumption of goods, in ensuring that the wartime economy was a healthy one. This purchasing power was, however, greatly increased through their engagement, in large numbers, in the paid labour force.

Within the first few years of WWII, the massive pool of male workers left unemployed by the Depression had been exhausted through the expansion of the armed forces and war industries. In September of 1942 the government established a Women's Division of the

³¹ Joan Sangster, "Doing Two Jobs: The Wage-Earning Mother, 1945-1970," A Diversity of Women: Ontario 1945-1980, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) 99.

³² Prentice, 342-343.

Selective Service Agency, which isolated young, single women deemed eligible to take on work. Only one year later, married women were also found to be eligible for recruitment into part-time, lower wage work left abandoned by those seeking more money in the war industries or by those taking on evening shifts in the war effort. Despite the myth of women selflessly abandoning their long-term domestic plans for the temporary aid of king and country, “many women indicated that an improved standard of living, not the call to loyalty and service, had drawn them into paid employment.”³³ However, by the end of the war, this call to work for women would not be supported by the dominant values. In 1944, 75% of Canadian men and 68% of women felt that preference of jobs should be given to men in the post-war economy.³⁴ This sentiment was reinforced by government policy, such as the retraction of funding for daycare and tax exemptions for dual-income families.

In post-war Ontario, single wage families, living happily in newly constructed suburban homes became the ideal. Women were once again expected to focus their energies on making and maintaining a healthy, supportive and nurturing home for their families. New technologies, so heavily promoted since the 1920's came into reach for more women to help them in their pursuit of this vision. However, as pointed out by Veronica Strong-Boag, these acted to simultaneously raise the housekeeping expectations placed on women and to keep their labour inside the domestic sphere.³⁵ To add to the ties connecting women to the home, new suburbs and bedroom communities became a gendered landscape in which women carried out their family lives during the day in an atmosphere devoid of men who commuted greater distances to work, often taking the only family car with them when they went. Despite this, Strong-Boag argues

³³ Prentice, 342-345.

³⁴ Prentice, 348.

³⁵ Veronica Strong-Boag, “Their Side of the Story: Women’s Voices from Ontario Suburbs, 1945-1960,” A Diversity of Women: Ontario 1945-1980, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1995) 61.

that women often found a sense of support and connectedness in their new communities, one in which social bonds were formed through such contact points as schools, child-care sharing and collective shopping trips.

While women were expected to revert to many of the Victorian ideals of the homemaker charged with the supportive role to mate and informed, loving mother to the future citizens of the nation, consumerism was added to this list of one of the crucial roles played by women in society. Hobbs and Pierson argue that, with the shift of the house from home to factory, modernization shifted the role of women from producers to consumers.³⁶ This was an ideal introduced in the 1930's, a time when few women had the means to participate in such an ideology as they were too busy "making do". However, with the vibrancy of the post-war economy and fears that without confident consumer spending it would be short-lived, the idea was again picked up in full force in the late 1940's and 1950's. Advertising, especially through the new medium of television, was frequently directed at women and encouraged them to buy new technologies which had been developed during the war and that were now being applied to peacetime activities such as housekeeping.

There are other differences between the targeting of women as consumers in the 1920's and 30's and that of the post-war era, namely an ideological one. As argued by Hobbs and Pierson, the motivation behind spending money during the depression can be seen through the lens of enlightened self-interest. This is to say that, through bettering ones self, one ultimately helps to better society as a whole.³⁷ Pushing women to be wise and healthy consumers after the Second World War was an effort based largely on economic patriotism. The reform movements, which had pushed for the improved appearance of Canadian cities and farms in hopes that this

³⁶ Hobbs and Pierson, 149-150.

³⁷ Hobbs and Pierson, 152.

would create a healthier society, also continued after the WWII. Added to this was a fear that the new economic vibrancy and Canada's novel role as a leading producer of manufactured goods after the collapse of industrial infrastructure in Europe would be short-lived unless Canadians bought into the dreams of modernity. The job of spending money fell to women, even if the task of earning the money was still guarded as a male domain.

Like the 1920's it was not always possible, nor desirable, for Canadian families to adhere to the idea of separate spheres. Much discussed in the literature is the image of a new Canadian society emerging victorious from the Second World War into an almost homogenously middle-class society in which new purchasing power was at the disposal of all. In fact, as discussed by Strong-Boag, only the poorest and richest of Canadian families saw little benefit from the wages of working wives. Those in the growing middle class can strongly attribute this new status to the wages of women working outside the home.³⁸ Whereas it was found acceptable for young women of the 1920's and 30's to engage in paid labour until marriage, women of the late 1940's and 50's increasingly found themselves engaging in two phases of employment – one lasting from young adulthood until marriage or shortly thereafter and another following the rearing of children to school age. Strong-Boag also notes, in her analysis of the extensive mass media debate regarding women's paid labour at this time, that what is misguided in the discourse surrounding women's employment is the misconception that Canadian women were able to make a fully free choice regarding their decision to work out. This choice is framed as one made either unconstrained by the daunting task of assuming the dual roles of wife/mother and worker, or made in isolation to the financial realities of the family. This is to say that the burden of being a working wife and mother as well as the idea that the labour of women was necessary to maintain

³⁸ Veronica Strong-Boag, "Canada's Wage-Earning Wives and the Construction of the Middle Class, 1945-60," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 29:3 (Fall, 1994): 8.

the middle class ideals assumed to be within the reach of all Canadians was ignored altogether by the media.³⁹

Through this look at women's history in Canada, one can see several major trends that must be regarded as significant to the production of home-based crafts. Women's engagement in the paid labour force, which has ebbed and flowed in acceptance, as well as a shift in conceptualization of women as producers to women as consumers, coupled with the professionalization of this role within the home, meant that evidence of labour was, ideally, to be disguised. This trend corresponds to the rise of modernist home decorating in creating a living environment in which newness was regarded as a healthy and progressive step toward living the ideals of the machine age. As quilts are often conceived of as a "domestic art", it is important to consider what the effects of the history outlined above had on the homes of Canadian women. The following discussion will attempt to unravel how this shift in the living spaces of Canadians was received and navigated by Canadian women, an issue which will further help to create a picture of the changes taking place in the lives of the quilters of this study.

Modernism and the Environment of Women

One of the major factors in the creation of crafts in the twentieth century is the issue of modernism. This includes a concern with the progression of society, through increased technology, increased sophistication and increased social status.⁴⁰ If one examines the issues brought forward by the reform movements of the twenties and the H.I.P of the Depression, one can see these forces at work. The push was for an incorporation of technologies and sciences into the home in order to use these developments to better the lives of Canadian women and their families. Expert, and frequently male, knowledge was key as it overtook several areas of life

³⁹ Strong-Boag, "Canada's Wage-Earning Wives," 20-21.

⁴⁰ Don Slater, Consumer Culture and Modernity (Cambridge: Polity P., 1997) 29.

traditionally under the direction of women. Such activities as birthing and child rearing were now seen as better handled by those with a fuller (and officiated) understanding of the scientific knowledge needed to perform these tasks safely and effectively. The lives of women, and by direct relation the lives of the men and children they cared for, could be greatly improved by using scientific knowledge, imported to them through the media and reform groups such as the Women's Institute. Their meals could be made more nutritious, their children could be raised more affectively, their workload could be reduced and their homes could be made safer and, resultantly, happier.

This trend had an effect on almost all aspects of women's lives, including the production of hand made objects. As mentioned above, starting in the early twentieth century, women moved from being producers to consumers. The government, industry and advertisers helped to create and reinforce this trend. While the women of this study may have grown up in homes in which quilts were made by hand (often with the help of sewing machines) such displays of self-sufficiency became signifiers of a lowered position in the capitalist class structure, which relies heavily on conspicuous consumption. During the depression, "making do" was regarded as an asset, but being able to spend was truly a help to the economy and, as such, the country. Following the Second World War, spending, that is buying objects, became a matter of national pride. Added to this, more and more postwar women worked outside the home thus allowing them to purchase the clothing and blankets they needed and no longer had time to make for themselves.

Two excellent examples of this push to modernization can be found in the proliferation of department stores and the change in home decorating tastes in the early to mid twentieth century. These two examples intertwine with several other factors, including the rise of mass media

targeting women, the increased availability of credit and the issues underlying “shopping” to create an environment in which “new” or the appearance of newness became increasingly important in terms of home interiors.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the Arts and Crafts Movement emerged as a response to the industrial revolution. Mass production was regarded as having a definite and, one could argue, negative affect on the value of craft labour. Through its stress on revealing the labour in made objects, the Arts and Crafts Movement experienced support in Canada, as in the United States and Britain. Evidence in support of the ideas of the movement in Canada can be found in the exhibitions of the Canadian Handicraft Guild, founded by Alice Peck and Mary Phillips in 1905. The Guild held annual exhibitions, ran several craft shops, and sponsored lectures and instructional classes from 1905 to 1936. The guild’s major concern was the maintenance of the high quality of Canadian crafts (especially native crafts initially) in the face of mass production and distribution of inferior quality works. It is important to note that the Canadian Handicraft Guild evolved from the Women’s Art Association of Canada, and while men did eventually emerge within the guild, the main thrust of the organization was women’s “home arts”.⁴¹ However, as Anne Massey points out, the arts and crafts movement had little influence on interior decoration at the time. Likewise, Arts Nouveaux, which followed with its emphasis on the use of new materials and the rejection of academic models of design, was mainly directed at the middle and intellectual classes and, as such, also had a limited scope of influence on home interiors in the early twentieth century.⁴²

⁴¹ Ellen Easton McLeod, “Alice Peck, May Phillips and the Canadian Handicrafts Guild,” Framing our Past: Canadian Women’s History in the Twentieth Century, eds. Sharon Anne Cook, Lorna R. McLean and Kate O’Rourke (Montreal/Kingston : McGill/Queen’s U.P., 2001) 54-56.

⁴² Anne Massey, Interior Design of the Twentieth Century (London : Thames & Hudson, 2001) 12-33.

The arrival of the modern movement, which the T. Eaton Company heralded in its advertisement in the Toronto Globe of November 5, 1925 announcing furnishings bought at L'Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris of that year,⁴³ promised to bring a more accessible design trend that could benefit and be enjoyed by all. Mass production could be harnessed to bring standardized parts and objects that would enable consumers to furnish their homes at accessible prices. Mass production and distribution, which the Handicrafts Guild blamed for the deterioration of the Canadian craft traditions, could also democratize home decorating. The new techniques in producing and manipulating plastics and metals allowed for cleaner, healthier surfaces stripped of unnecessary and cluttering ornament.⁴⁴ Hospital wards, large cafeterias and other institutional settings where health and sanitation were a large concern, first realized the benefits of modern interiors. At the same time, the home of the 1920's could demonstrate the same modern thinking by simply subscribing to improved plumbing and adding more wiring.

Taking the art of living well in the modern age one step further included an introduction of the modern aesthetic into home interiors, and by the end of the decade the new textures, shapes and colours of the modern era would begin to find their way into the aesthetics of the home. Kitchens were the targets of some of the earliest and most drastic changes suggested by new modernist decorating sensibilities. The new time-saving appliances that were made available starting in the 1920's, were to help turn the kitchen from the hearth of the home, where families gathered and lingered, to one where professional housewives conducted their business of providing a healthy home life for their families. As mentioned above, cupboards were recommended to hide the evidence of this labour while the countertops of the workstation should

⁴³ Virginia Wright, Modern Furniture in Canada, 1920 to 1970 (Toronto: University of Toronto P., 1996) 8.

⁴⁴ Massey, 63.

be flush and at waist level to maximize efficiency and minimize strain. Both kitchens and bathrooms could be modernized with chrome and ceramics as well as improved lighting while new bending, moulding and casting techniques enabled the rounding of corners on furniture and counters. Veneers contributed further by allowing geometry and shape to cabinetry. Likewise, by the end of WWII, furniture in other parts of the home began to reflect the technological innovations of Canadian engineers. Plastics and metals were bent and manipulated like never before and could be used to create smooth, clean surfaces for tables and chairs. In finishing the appeal, new colours and textures found their way into upholstery, carpets, paints and wallpaper.⁴⁵ How these ideals were realized and negotiated by women, however, becomes important when one considers the relative success of the modern movement as opposed to those that came before it. This can be attributed to the complex web of rising professional interior designers, the support of the media, the rise of department stores and the new consumer culture that surrounded them.

With the professionalization of so many aspects of women's domestic lives, interior design saw a similar shift to the hands of those who knew best. Curricula were established in Canadian colleges and universities. These experts, via department stores and the new popular media aimed at women such as Chatelaine magazine, conveyed to women how best to accomplish and appreciate a truly modern home. Anne Elizabeth Wilson commented to readers in the March 1928 issue of the magazine:

We can no more stem the tide of this new century movement than turn our faces against the on march of time. Whether we like it or no, it is a thing that must be reckoned with and made place for, and if we are wise in our generation we shall learn to know its foibles early!⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Virginia Wright, 3-7.

⁴⁶ Anne Elizabeth Wilson, "What is this Modernist Movement? An explanation of the new and sometimes bewildering note in decoration," reprinted in A Woman's Place: Seventy Years in the Lives of Canadian Women, ed. Sylvia Fraser (Toronto: Key Porter, 1997) p. 91.

In helping women accomplish the integration of this movement into their homes, advice was appropriately provided according to modernist ideals – that is by professionals. The Ontario College of Art and Design introduced its first specialization courses in interior design in 1930 through the Department of Design and Applied Arts.⁴⁷ Some of these new professionals no doubt worked for the newly emerged department stores, such as the T. Eaton Company, in advising consumers as well as putting together displays, an important site of cultural communication when one considers the important role these stores played in the lives of women.

Don Slater defines a consumer culture as one in which the core values are derived from consumption rather than other sources such as an agrarianism or militarism.⁴⁸ This culture of consuming evolves from an emphasis of “having” over “being” – a state that clearly reflects the ideas of liberalism and the push for private property and material wealth. Slater reviews the literature surrounding the study of modernity’s culture of consumption and finds that several key themes evolve, several of which are of relevance here. First, Slater points to the trend that portrays consumer culture as one in which cultural goods or experiences are controlled by institutions whose primary objective is financial as opposed to cultural. Within this system, production is moved from the known consumer/neighbour to the objectified “everyone”. While goods are targeted at “all people”, and it is seen as a basic principal that they have a right to consume these goods, the consumer is still restricted in their freedom through the amount of money they have, or their ability to pay. Within this structure, the consumer is seen to be a rational person making logical choices. Through their consumption, they may achieve the status of hero as they keep the system operating and move it forward – modernity’s progress is created

⁴⁷ Virginia Wright, 35.

⁴⁸ Slater, 24.

through consumption.⁴⁹ Despite this heroizing of the rational consumer, driving the system and supporting modernity, the irrational emotion of desire still has a role to play:

Economic modernization is characterized, on the one hand, by rational planning, discipline and labour underpinned by a work ethic; yet, on the other hand, it structurally depends upon fostering irrational desires and passions, a hedonistic orientation to gratification in the present which must surely undermine it.⁵⁰

This irrational “dupe” consumer image is more often characterized as female. Slater points out that, although women make the majority of household purchases, their role in the system remains that of the scapegoat for desire (a messy glitch to the modern consumer culture). It is this notion of irrational underpinning in consumption that drives the mass marketing machinery that evolves in the 1920’s along with corresponding efforts to educate the female consumer and persuade her to shop responsibly. While the essentialist underpinnings of this arrangement are clear, one must not underestimate the importance of desire in the process of consumption.

In looking at women and consumption, especially shopping, Cynthia Wright argues that one must not only look at the financial transactions made by women, but that it is equally crucial to consider what women do not purchase, but desire nonetheless. This is to say that one must also take into consideration window shopping as part of our consumption,⁵¹ as this places the emphasis on desires, obtainable or not, and herein lies one of the sources for the values of a society. In this way, what is displayed and how it is done so becomes highly important to consider and gives further importance to the role played by the emerging professional interior designer. Window shopping, as a form of consumption, gains further relevance when one considers that only a specific demographic of women partook in the culture of department store

⁴⁹ Slater, 25-35.

⁵⁰ Slater, 29.

⁵¹ Cynthia Wright, “Feminine Trifles of Vast Importance,” *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women’s History*, eds. Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde (Toronto: University of Toronto P., 1992) 232.

shopping in the early years of the twentieth century. These women were, for the most part, upper and middle class, and lived in urban areas. They were able to use department stores as a public, feminine space in which to carry out their roles as consumers. Cafeterias, sitting rooms and advertising catered to the ideal of women coming together in these spaces to pass the day socializing and purchasing the physical manifestations of their station in life. Christine Frederick's book, Selling Mrs. Consumer, published in 1929, connects the rise of women's purchasing power to the rise in the scientific approach to home economics by arguing that rational planning was not enough for most women, they also needed the "thrill" that shopping could give them. This provided the adventure that rational, planned home economics denied them,⁵² further emphasizing the importance of consumerism and marketing in the creation of desire.

No one was left out in the process of marketing for modernity. For those women who could not travel to more urban areas where the displays and products of department stores were highly accessible, catalogue sales were presented as an option. Here, women could look through the catalogue and place an order, which would be delivered to them by mail. Window-shopping or the consumption of desire was made accessible to women even when stores were not. While there was initial hesitation to the idea of mail ordering goods from catalogues, as they took away from local shops⁵³ and required trust in the sending of cash through the mail to a company with no local affiliation, the catalogue industry was a success in Canada and can be seen as a source for the consumption of desire for many women in rural communities.

⁵² Cynthia Wright, 238

⁵³ It is interesting to note that this same argument was used in the opposition to the spread of large department stores in and their disruption to city communities, a debate that continues to evolve today with such companies as Wal-Mart.

The emerging profession of interior design, the mass media and the new department stores all aided a woman attempting to navigate the ideas of modern interior design. However, complete remodelling of a home interior was not a realistic endeavour for most women, nor was the aid of a professional interior decorator. How then, did women incorporate this new aesthetic into their homes? Virginia Wright, in her study of modern furniture in Canada, suggests that department store displays were designed to both inspire women with the new modern style while attempting to reassure them at the same time. Displays did not promote a radical and overarching conversion to the modern in one single purchase. They tended to be more conservative examples of the aesthetic that did not require the sacrifice of older, often inherited furniture simply to stay in fashion.⁵⁴ Instead, an eclectic historicism, which focuses on updating rather than remodelling or converting completely to the streamlined appearance of the machine age aesthetic,⁵⁵ was the strain of modernism that could more easily provide the consumer with the image they sought. Women's magazines also aided women in this vein. Interior decorating editorials, such as those in Canadian Home and Garden, provided women with advice for a much more reasonable price than hiring a professional. Canadian Home and Garden featured such articles as "Cheerful Modernism for the Small House," with columnist Mary-Etta Macpherson who "dismissed the avant-garde of Europe and gave practical advice to women."⁵⁶ If one did decide to make a major purchase in order to materialize their desire for the modern aesthetic, the increased availability of instalment buying helped to ease the financial burden. Here one can see the complex web that supported the transformation of Canadian home interiors. Professional interior decorators, as accessed through the new women's magazines and department store

⁵⁴ Virginia Wright, 22.

⁵⁵ Virginia Wright, 68.

⁵⁶ Virginia Wright, 28.

displays and catalogues, could inform the consumer of the new aesthetic and promote its value. The purchasing of objects of desire was made easier through credit, catalogues, and reduced prices through mass production and distribution. The values of sanitation and healthy living environments, as promoted through the government and social reform groups, became easier. By making taking advantage of new engineering and technology as well as lower prices, increased accessibility and consumer appeal these ideas could quickly be translated into reality.

Conclusion

Not one of us can escape change. From the physical spaces we occupy to the symbolic roles we play, this is true for all of us as it is true for Mrs. Craig and the other quilters of Goulbourn Township. While now outdated theories of folk culture have argued that folk groups can be investigated as almost static relics of past traditions and essential or core roots of a culture, this is arguably not the case. The women of this study have negotiated a tremendous amount of change through their lives. While many were born in Goulbourn and have witnessed the transition of this area from a cluster of villages and farms to a bedroom community for the city of Ottawa, others have moved to the area during the post-war housing boom. Some have farmed while others have worked in the villages, whether in the home or in the paid labour force. Their individual paths have led them to a place with a deep sense of history which draws on a mythology of pioneering spirit and progressive community building. Change is welcome here in so far as it remains within the control of the community.

The spaces women have made for themselves within this community have also experienced transition. Concepts of labour, whether in the home or in the public sphere have shifted tremendously in the past century and the women of this study have been active participants. The establishment of Women's Institutes in the area attest to the significant role

women have played in social reform and in helping to enact a vision of a healthier society for future generations of Canadians. At the same time, the professionalisation of home-based labour has contributed to a conception of women as consumers of domestic goods rather than producers – a significant shift which has obvious repercussions for “home-based arts”.

Accompanying this shift is the ideal of the home as a site of invisible labour. The evidence of women’s work in the home increasingly came to be disguised, a process made ever possible through mechanization and the modernization of home interiors. Through the complex web of professional interior design, mass media and marketing targeted at Canadian women, and the rise of department stores and catalogue shopping, the modernist aesthetic of the early to mid-twentieth century saturated the Canadian furnishing market. With this new style came an interest in streamlining and modernizing home interiors, and in creating a site in which domestic labour could be made more efficient or disguised altogether. New materials and shapes sought to reflect the technological innovations brought about by the war industry and were regarded as a benefit to all Canadians in terms of democratizing home decorating and creating more sanitary and appealing spaces free of clutter and unnecessary ornamentation. While all these transformations, both in physical and symbolic space, were taking place, women were enacting their daily lives, negotiating change, actively shaping their worlds, and, most important to this study, making quilts.

What remains to be seen is how aged women, who theoretically should have begun their quilting lives before the fall and revival of the quilt, have responded to or participated in these changes taking place in the quilt world. One must consider, as do Fabian and Szonbati-Fabian⁵⁷ that any study regarding the work of people, demands communication between the researcher

⁵⁷ Johannes Fabian and Ilona Szonbati-Fabian, “Folk Art from an Anthropological Perspective,” Perspeactives on American Folk Art, ed. Ian M. G. Quimby and Scott T. Swank (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980) 263.

and those being studied. To fail to do so most often results in projected knowledge from the outside, which may be inaccurate and based on assumption. The next chapter will deal primarily with how the women of Goulbourn Township view the changes that have taken place in the execution and meanings of their work.

CHAPTER THREE: HOW CHANGE IS MEDIATED BY THE QUILTERS OF GOULBOURN TOWNSHIP

Introduction

This chapter will investigate the many meanings given to quilts and quilting by the quilters of Goulbourn Township. This case study of one community of quilters will allow for an investigation of how many of the broad trends discussed in Chapters One and Two have been negotiated by a specific group of women who have lived through the decline and renaissance of their craft. These quilters range in age from 61 to 87 and, working alone and in groups, have been quilting from as little as two to more than eighty years. There are two formal quilting groups presented here: the Richmond quilters and the Ashton quilters. One woman is an occasional participant with the Richmond quilters but also, on occasion, employs their services to finish her quilts. Many of the women who comprise these groups also quilt projects at home.

While these quilters have opinions and responses to the quilting revival of the late twentieth century, they themselves have been agents of change since their mothers' generation. These women stand in a unique position. They were introduced to their craft prior to the Second World War and continued on to participate in the quilting revival of the 1960's. As a result, many of these women have memories of mothers quilting to keep their families warm and conserve materials while they themselves came of age at a time when store-bought blankets were more practical due to technological innovations such as central heating, mass production and distribution of ready made bed coverings and increased female participation in the paid labour force. As such, many have also undergone their own personal revivals of quilting after leaving the craft for a period of time while engaged with work and/or raising their children. Despite this gap in their quilting work, the Goulbourn quilters see their quilts as differing from those of the younger revivalists in both technique, meaning and aesthetic.

Quilters and Ageing

One cannot discuss the reaction of aged women to the quilting revival without first acknowledging that they are, in fact, aged. While this is by no means the only defining characteristic of these women, as the following discussion will reveal, it is one that lends a significant amount of meaning to their quilts. Mark Novak and Lori Campbell define gerontology as the study of, “ageing from two points of view: how ageing affects the individual and how an ageing population will change society.”¹ Even as ageing and concepts of age greatly inform how the women of this study define themselves, their interaction as a community and with the larger society also play a part in how they view themselves and their work as quilters. This section will investigate concepts of ageing and attempt to understand how the quilters studied respond to this label, whether self-imposed or inflicted from outside, and how this influences their concepts of their craft. It is important to note that these concepts of age influence many aspects of the lives of these women and as such issues of ageism will tend to spill over into other sections of this thesis.

Defining what it is to be old is no easy task. As pointed out by Matthews in his book, The Social World of Old Women, post-modernism, through research such as Aires’ work in childhood studies, brings the biological determinism of this category into question. Matthews points out that the link between chronological age and “oldness” is a relatively new construct. He suggests that, in the agrarian past, age was more closely linked with inability or dependency. One simply worked, in one capacity or another, until one was unable to function, at which point a person was labelled old as a result of their dependence on family or society. With

¹ Mark Novak and Lori Campbell, Ageing and Society: A Canadian Perspective (Toronto: Nelson Thompson Learning, 2001) 4.

industrialization and the increased mechanization of labour, came a system in which the very young and very old were kept out of the work force to ensure jobs for the dominant, middle aged group. The phenomenon of retirement greatly contributed to the concept of “old” as over 65 years of age. During the great depression of the 1930’s, this status was frequently associated with poverty and, following the rise of the welfare state and such programmes as old age pension, the connection between physical decline, dependency and “oldness” was reinforced while linking these characteristics to biological age.²

While the state helped to institutionalize the concept of “old” as people over 65 years of age, other sources in mainstream Canadian culture helped to create and reinforce a series of myths as to what “oldness” looks like. Mass media have used the aged population in Canada as targets in the health care “crisis” while birthday cards and jokes lament and poke fun at the physical decline and the certain unhappiness that is seen as an essential part of growing older.³ Isabella Paoletti’s study of ageing in Italy investigates the social production of identity in older women. Her work suggests that “old” is a category resistant to change in terms of how it is conceptualized. This is to say that one may meet an active, healthy eighty-year-old woman without experiencing a change in how they perceive “oldness”. This can be explained by the lack of an alternative to this category due to its connection with time. While other categories such as race and gender have alternatives (it is possible for one to be considered more or less black, black or white, more or less feminine, feminine or masculine), old does not have an

²Sarah H. Matthews, The Social World of Old Women: Management of Self-Identity (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979) 35-42.

³ Novak and Campbell, 7-8.

apparent alternative.⁴ Instead, exceptions to the stereotype of old prove to excuse the individual for their apparent connection with this category (she is very spry for her age).

In reality, most older Canadians are not unhappy with their biological age. In a Commonwealth Fund study of five nations completed in 1993, 58% of older Canadians felt, “generally very content.”⁵ Another study cited by Novak and Campbell suggests that 72% of older Canadians felt they were in good to excellent health compared to others, and 95% experienced some degree of life satisfaction.⁶ These studies appear to indicate that, while growing old is culturally constructed as a period of declining health and happiness, this is not the experience of many older adults in Canada.

The inconsistency between the stereotype of ageing and how older people feel about the category of old can be explained by ageing’s status as a weak stigma. Matthews defines a stigma as a relationship (one based on power) as opposed to an attribute. These stigmas are ideas taken into account with little conscious thought as to their social meaning despite the large role they play in a social interaction.⁷ For example, while it would have been wonderful for this study if every interview I conducted began with the interviewee playing her role as the archetypal old crone storyteller and beginning every thought with, “back in the good old days...” this was almost never the case. Instead, much of the information I gathered through this study focused on the present and future activities of the women involved. However, the stigma of older people as living largely in the past through reminiscences did play a large factor in the assumptions both parties had as to the meaning and direction of the interview relationship. The weakness in the

⁴ Isabella Paoletti, Being an Older Woman: Study of the Social Production of Identity (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998) 9-11.

⁵ Novak and Campbell, 8.

⁶ Novak and Campbell, 81-84.

⁷ Matthews, 65.

stigma of ageing arises from the flexibility available to older people in deciding its definition and whether or not they fit into this definition. There are multiple degrees of conformity and non-conformity within this category. Even if an older person does not feel age plays a part in their identity, interaction with the outside, as well as with the self, may still result in reinforcing this assumption. Older women may maintain a self-identity of old, even with the weakness of the stigma associated with ageing, through their contact with others who still consider them old or through evidence in their own behaviour that fits the culturally learned stereotype of old.⁸

Many of the women of this study revealed a clear negotiation of the stigma of ageing. The primary way through which this was accomplished was humour. Norma Craig (71 and “young” by the standards of many of the women interviewed) recalled a laugh she shared with one of the quilters from the Richmond group, “as long as we don’t get drunk and disorderly we’re all right.”⁹ This joke gains its humour from the idea that it would not suit the stereotype of a group of older women if they were to get drunk and rowdy. Mrs. Craig speaks to the idea of the women getting older, “Mary says, ‘some of us are getting pretty old. Some of us can’t see, some of us can’t hear and some of us can’t walk but we have a good time’.”¹⁰ This statement acknowledges the assumption that “getting pretty old” results in the loss of physical ability but emphasizes that, despite this loss, these women get out and have fun. While they don’t have the same kind of fun as they may have had if they were young men (drunk and disorderly) their “good time” clearly flies in the face of what they feel is expected of them as older women.

Jokes are one way in which the women studied dealt with issues of ageing. But comparing one’s stage of ageing to another who one considers older, was also a strategy shared

⁸ Matthews, 65-92.

⁹ Norma Craig, personal interview, 31 January 2002.

¹⁰ Norma Craig.

with me. 87 year-old Mrs. Lalonde of Richmond shared her anxiety over losing mobility in her hands:

Well my hands don't move they way they want to.... You want to bend over the material. It doesn't stay like it was. I remember Granny [interviewer's grandmother] saying that to me often. She'd complain about her hands.... She lost power of her hands and I'm losing power now.... But I was younger than her... I used to say, "God, poor old Evelyn". But then her hands, mine is getting the same now.¹¹

Thelma Criggar of Ashton, who is also 87, demonstrates the same strategy but with different results:

I don't know I think when you're doing that you're keeping your fingers like you see lots of people with arthritis and my fingers aren't crooked at all. Lots of them have bumps on them. But I think it's just keeping them going.... Well sometimes it stiffens up on me but I just go like that.... I never sit with my hands not going.¹²

These examples demonstrate that ageing is a factor relevant to the identities of these women. They employ various strategies in dealing with the stereotypes involved in ageing, especially physical decline. Many women did not discuss ageing with me, and indeed, some did not consider themselves old. But those that did used humour and comparison as tools for discussing this with me and with each other.

It is thus evident that ageing relates closely with how many of the women see their quilting. Mrs. Lalonde comments that the stiffening of her hands, as she relates it to ageing, has affected how she quilts. The material of the quilt "doesn't stay like it was," due to her decrease in mobility. Mrs. Criggar also mentions other small challenges in threading needles, "I'm not bad at it. Sometimes my eyes get a bit blurry though."¹³ These complaints are not uncharacteristic of older women in Canada. Women tend to experience some disability earlier in

¹¹ Mary Lalonde, personal interview, 14 April 2001.

¹² Thelma Criggar, personal interview, 28 February 2002.

¹³ Thelma Criggar.

life as compared with men. Most commonly, these disabilities include decreases in mobility, agility and hearing.¹⁴ However, the tendency in Novak and Campbell's research is for adaptation and, while this begins to waver after 80 years of age, it allows older adults to cope with these changes.

Social contact is another important part of ageing and one that is given great importance by the women of this study. Several quilters expressed the social aspect of quilting. One Richmond quilter explains: "Well, we get together and have lots of fun and talk. About everything and anything. I don't know, it seems they kind of give you a lift or something,"¹⁵ while another quilter explains, "It's an outing for us. It's a time to socialize.... It's just congenial."¹⁶ While these women all quilt together in Richmond, Mrs. Criggar in Ashton values the same social contact in her smaller group of quilters, even if they are unable to quilt for some reason: "Well there were two of us, now one was here yesterday but she just had her eyes done so maybe the next quilt... she'll be with us."¹⁷ This connecting to other women through quilting also translates to Mrs. Craig who is not formally part of any quilting group but has close ties to the women in Richmond and, because of time constraints and previous health conditions, has taken her tops to be quilted by this group. She stated that for her quilt that is ready to be "put in" she will go to the weekly quilting to participate with the group. Her casual contact with this group in the community demonstrates that her status with these women will be one of insider when she goes to participate. She recounts teasing one of the women in the group:

¹⁴ Novak and Campbell, 81.

¹⁵ Participant R2, personal interview, 4 April 2001.

¹⁶ Participant R1, personal interview, 4 April 2001.

¹⁷ Norma Criggar.

I was talking to one of the other ladies... at the medical centre and told her I had a quilt for them so, [she] said, "oh" and I said, "I heard you're not going to do too many more," and she said, "who told you that?" and I said, "well, I just heard it," well she says, "you just bring it over and we'll (laughter) we'll do it." So I told Mary this and Mary says she's going to give her a hard time.¹⁸

It quickly becomes clear that social contact is an important part of quilting for these women, even if it is as simple as playing cards, quilting and sharing lunch: "I love to come down. Play cards with these old gals. Lots of fun. Giggle and laugh. Take our lunch and trade sandwiches and trade things. We have lots of fun together."¹⁹

For many, this contact becomes increasingly important as they age. Retirement from outside work, mothering, farming or other work results in a reallocation of time. Jiri Zuzanek and Sheila J. Boy point out that while many studies indicate a decline in leisure pursuits in later life, other scholars have disputed this claim as a "rocking chair myth". While this debate goes on, it is clear that in later life, mid-life work patterns experience a shift and, at the same time as daily life activities such as personal maintenance expand to fill this gap, an increase in leisure activity also takes place.²⁰ In this way, where "work", whether paid or unpaid, often provided a major point of social contact for many women, other activities must now fill the void. Lillian Mears of the Richmond quilters explains:

Well, ok I knew these ladies or most of them. I just thought I'd like to try it because well ok my husband is a curler and a golfer and I thought well I got (inaudible) something to do too. And I enjoy it. They're a great bunch of ladies and ah we have fun really.²¹

¹⁸ Norma Craig.

¹⁹ Participant R5, personal interview, 18 April 2001.

²⁰ Jiri Zuzanek and Sheila J. Boy, "Life Course and the Daily Lives of Older Adults in Canada," Daily Life in Later Years, ed. Karen Altergott (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1988) 153-164.

²¹ Lillian Mears, personal interview, 18 April 2001.

However, the women of this study use the time spent quilting with other women to fulfill many social goals. A member of the Richmond group sees the members as a “group of people [that] need that little bit of good to one another thing.”²² The importance of this is expanded on by another woman who comments on living alone, a phenomenon unknown to many of these women in the past when overcrowding was more commonly a feature of domestic life:

I’m alone. If the kids come home weekends that’s alright. But if not I’m alone two or three weeks maybe. I regulate my weeks by Wednesday²³ ... so that if I didn’t do that I wouldn’t know what day it was. I mean you don’t just walk up and look at a calendar. I have to look at the paper sometimes to see the date. But, you look forward to Wednesday. It breaks your week and you know you’re going to enjoy it and that’s it.²⁴

Eileen Kavanagh expands on this idea:

Everybody sort of not looks after each other but kind of cares enough to call if something’s wrong or, you know, if somebody can’t get a drive or something we we’d take them. You know, or at least I would anyway because I can drive and I will be driving for a lot more years than some of these older ladies will.²⁵

Social contact is a concern for almost all the women of this study. Encounters with other quilters are enjoyable and fun. It is a leisure activity that lends happiness to one’s life. Life changes due to the passage into later life, however, lend increased importance to this contact by many women. It is a way to form bonds that help to create a support network which may have changed or broken down upon retirement, the death of a spouse or movement of children from the home or community.

Social interaction appears to usurp the level of skill in terms of importance for the group.

Both Susan Roach and Joyce Ice note this phenomenon in their studies of quilting groups.

²² Participant R5.

²³ The Richmond quilters meet every Wednesday, weather permitting.

²⁴ Participant R1.

²⁵ Eileen Kavanagh, personal interview, 18 April 2001.

Roach notes that while traditionally women were invited to bees based on their reputation as skilled quilters, the women of her study, as family members, suspended this requirement to ensure the participation of all willing family members. This was taken as far as to demand that the men of the family all take a turn at putting in a few stitches.²⁶ Joyce Ice notes the need and willingness to compromise when working as a group. Quilting alone allows women full control over the aesthetic and technical aspects of the finished product. Joyce sees quilting as a group as necessitating a, “consensus that encompasses notions of the ideal and the pragmatic.”²⁷ My experiences with the two quilting groups of this study demonstrate how the values of collectivity and social contact upstage the ideal aesthetics of the finished quilts. Both groups invited me to quilt with them as we got to know each other. The Richmond group told me not to worry about the quality of my stitches because Mrs. Lalonde, as the apparent authority on competence, would just tear them out and redo them if they proved too problematic. While many jokes were exchanged as to Mrs. Lalonde’s high standards, the group clearly felt it was important that I should become a participant observer rather than just an observer. The women of Ashton demonstrated the same concern. I was given a needle from our second meeting and told that I should not worry about the quality of my stitches. Making contact with me and enjoying a common activity was a social mechanism to ensure that I was not left out of the group and that I did not make them uncomfortable in my observer role. Any negative impact my novice stitches would have on the finished product was of less importance.

Ageing is often framed as a loss of societal roles and a development of new, if temporary,

²⁶ Susan Roach, “The Kinship Quilt: An Ethnographic Semiotic Analysis of a Quilting Bee,” *Women’s Folklore, Women’s Culture* eds. Rosan A Jordan and Susan J. Kalcik (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania P., 1985) 63.

²⁷ Joyce Ice, “Women’s Aesthetics and the Quilting Process,” *Feminist Theory and the Study of Folklore* eds. Susan Tower Hollis, Linda Pershing and M. Jane Young (Urbana: University of Illinois P., 1993) 196.

identities. Assuming that our identity formation takes place in collision with others in society this argument becomes relevant when one's role in society is dramatically altered.²⁸ Quilting can be seen as allowing for a later-life identity. This is particularly relevant when one considers that the status or importance given to one's activities in later life, both by the individual doer and the wider community, has a greater effect on one's life satisfaction than rates of participation. This is to say that how often one participates in an activity is not as relevant as the meaning given to that activity by the individual and their community.²⁹ While many of the quilters view their participation in the craft as "just a day out", others ascribe additional importance to their work both for themselves, their families and the wider community in which they live. Mary Lalonde describes it this way:

And you have to say, "Well, I made this." That was the biggest part of it you see.... Now I made quilts, my kids have all quilts. Every one of them. My grandchildren too have. And I have some in the cedar chest now made. Maybe some for the great grandchildren.³⁰

One can see that not only is quilting important for the personal satisfaction of making a hand-made object, but the importance it is given by family is also crucial. Many quilts are destined for family members as gifts and women are asked by their children for specific patterns and colours they desire to be quilted. This gives status to the individual as one is in the possession of a valued skill. In terms of the wider community, some women expressed pride in the amount of money they have raised through the raffling of quilts for various causes. Mrs. Criggar of Ashton has made quilts to be raffled for several charities. She remembers, "It sold [for] twelve hundred and twenty-four dollars... and it was a girl that works in the Carleton Place Post Office she was

²⁸ Zuzanek and Boy, 151-153.

²⁹ Zuzanek and Boy, 160-162.

³⁰ Mary Lalonde.

the one that won it.”³¹ Clearly there is pride in the amount of money raised through the raffling of a quilt as well as the connection it gives to the person who wins the prize. Mrs. Lalonde recounts raffling one of her group’s quilts:

In the Richmond club here. Golden Age Club. We made some and we raffled them to make money.... We made eighteen hundred dollars on one quilt. Selling tickets. That was a big job but anyway, it was nice. It was a good cause I figure ‘cause we sent the money down [to] the Queensway Hospital.³²

Through the importance given to their work through their families and their contributions to the community, the quilters are able to shed yet another stigma of ageing, that of dependence. They assert themselves as the bearers of a valued skill and the fruits of the labour are given value. While quilting has not always played a central role in the identities of these women, for many it has become so as previous sources of identity have come under flux in later life.

Ageing and concepts of age greatly inform how the women in this study view their work. They view quilting and the making of quilts as a healthy, enjoyable experience that helps them defy culturally imposed stereotypes of ageing. By meeting on a regular basis and staying active and, perhaps more importantly, productive, they come to frame their work as an important source of physical activity and social contact – two major concerns of ageing in general. The quilters, their families as well as the communities in which they live, see their work as having value. This value stems from the achievement of making something “by hand”, the giving of gifts, and by the appeal of quilts as money raising efforts within the community. In this way, age plays greatly into the meaning of the quilts these women produce. They are not merely hand-made objects that demonstrate technical skill or an eye for pattern and design, they are representations of the ability of these women despite and because of their age. Their increased availability to

³¹ Norma Criggar.

³² Mary Lalonde.

leisure time as well as their shedding of the stigmas of ageing are firmly implanted in the importance of these objects.

Quilters and Community

The idea of space is one that also plays heavily in how the women of this study derive meaning for their work as well as how they interact with their community. While community and social contact were touched on in relation to ageing, it becomes important to investigate how the quilters of Goulbourn Township negotiate the space in which they quilt. This space ranges from their homes, churches, and community centres and expands into the larger communities of village, township or region. Also relevant are the relationships within these spaces and how they come to bear meaning for the work of these women.

Traditionally, communities are seen as developing in physical space. While such technologies as the telephone, television and the Internet have challenged this assumption, many of the women of this study are still very much grounded in a locally based community. As mentioned earlier, Pauline Greenhill discusses the clash between new and old communities forming in the satellite towns and villages around Ontario's cities. These sites have two distinct layers, one of the traditional community and that of the "new comers". While this distinction is one that plays out in the quilters' perceptions of their quilting communities, it is not the only way in which quilters interact with themselves and their locality.

Many women in this study were born in Goulbourn Township, while others only moved to the region after marriage to a locally born husband. Still, others have found themselves residents through other life circumstances, especially employment, with no connection to others living in the area. As this section will demonstrate, the place of one's birth has little to do with a sense of community found among fellow quilters. Instead, other factors, such as shifts in social

roles and identity and space and interaction with the local community, play a more significant role. A brief discussion of how these women came together to quilt will provide background for this point.

The women of the Richmond quilting group came together through the efforts of Mary Lalonde and one other woman. While Mrs. Lalonde's friend has since left the group and relocated to a nursing home about an hour's drive from the village, Mrs. Lalonde tells the tale of why they felt it important to put a quilting group together: "I was the one that opened the quilting," she explained:

Whenever Mrs. _____ come in she heard that I was doing quilting.... I knew Mr. _____ for quite a while. I knew his first wife and they used to take me out to play euchre here and there.... So anyway, Burt said, "well I'd like for you to meet Mary you'll like her. So she met me and we had a nice [time], she was a very good friend of mine. And then we started. And so she was interested in quilting and so was I. So anyway, I said well we'll put a quilt in. Somebody asked us, we made a couple quilts for some of the other people... between her and I."³³

Here Mrs. Lalonde recounts meeting the new wife of a local man with whom she had been a friend. The introduction of Mary to his second wife seems to indicate a continuation of a friendship. The fact that the two women were quilters solidified the relationship and gave them a common interest and pursuit. They made quilts for themselves and others in their basements for some time before the size of the group grew. How the group grew from two to more than seven members also affirms a desire to stay connected to community. Mrs. Lalonde indicated that she was a driving force behind the formation of a group of quilters. Her friendship with the other co-founder was helped in its formation by their common interest of quilting. The recruitment of other women seems to be based on a desire to have a "little group" as well as to help avoid

³³ Mary Lalonde.

“sitting alone at home”.³⁴ While the idea of social contact in relation to ageing was discussed earlier in this chapter, here it takes on new relevance in terms of keeping women attached to the community. Mrs. _____ was helped in her transitional period following her marriage to her husband through her connection with Mary and their quilts. As a member of Mr. _____ social circle, Mrs. Lalonde took his new wife’s interest in the craft as a common point on which to help her navigate this new social role. Likewise, the other women of the community who were experiencing new social roles, such as the interviewer’s grandmother who had been recently widowed, and found themselves “sitting alone” were invited to participate in the same process.

Newer members of the Richmond group recount similar reasons for joining the quilters. While many of these are discussed above in terms of ageing, many other comments mark the group as a contact point to establishing or furthering bonds within the community. Eileen Kavanagh moved to the area following her marriage to a local man. While she’s been living in Fallowfield, just north of the village of Richmond, for thirty years, she mentions that, “They (the other quilters) know so much about the area and my husband’s from here so I am really interested in learning it.”³⁵ She describes herself as a “new kid on the block” in terms of the quilting group as she only began to quilt with the women a few years ago after her retirement. She also appears to imply that knowing the people and stories of the area are important aspects to both belonging and understanding where her husband is from. Other women appear to take the community aspect of the group as either a non-issue or as an understanding. For the most part, these women were born in the area or married local men as well, but for whatever reason they do not mention the group as a community-building entity. This could be explained by a multitude

³⁴ Mary Lalonde.

³⁵ Eileen Kavanagh.

of factors including being born to the area or having established bonds to the community that have not been disrupted by such life events as widowhood.

The space in which these quilters gather is important to their sense of community and belonging. No longer does the group quilt in the basements of the founding members. They now meet every Wednesday in a room at the local community centre on one of the two main streets:

So I went... here, you see, and I asked if we could get this room. And I dealt through J ____ and I said to him, "Well all I want with the room is to quilt one day a week." And I said, "Whenever you need the room just tell us. We'll just stay at home."... "We won't be interfering with you." And he said, "That's good." So we got into the room here.³⁶

It can be argued that the acquisition of the room in the community centre is relevant in that it allows the quilters to enact their craft in a public space, as opposed to the private space of their basements. Joyce Ice also makes note of this same relevance to space in her study of a quilting group in central Texas. She comments that the meeting of the group in the Masonic temple on the main street of Lytton Springs allows them to interact with the community both physically and symbolically through their use of space.³⁷ Some quilters quilt independently at home and all piece their quilts at home (often with input from the group) but the public space of the community centre makes the activities of the group known to the wider community.

The wider community responds in several ways. One way the community is perceived as enacting with the quilts and quilters of the group, and one which is frequently discussed at the end of a session of quilting, is through evaluation. A quilt that is being stitched by the group is stored in the room at the front of the community centre that is also used by the Golden Age Club (often referred to as "the seniors"). I often heard women speculate, as they tidied up for the day,

³⁶ Mary Lalonde.

³⁷ Joyce Ice, "Women's Aesthetics and the Quilting Process," 167.

as to how others from outside the group would respond to the quilt. Some of the members of the quilting group also attend senior's meetings in the room and bring back news as to how the quilt was received. As well, the public space appears to be an appropriate setting for the women as they also hire their services to others in the community for a small fee. Mrs. Lalonde explains: "They bring the top, the bat (the batting), and the lining and everything and the thread and everything you see. So we just tell them, "Well, we charge so much to do it." So it's fine."³⁸ In addition, the location of the group's activities connects them to the community in terms of people stopping by to socialize or gain help during their weekly sessions. In terms of people that may not be connected to the group and, as such, may not come to see them on a regular basis, Mrs. Lalonde explains that these people are usually seeking advice:

They just want to see how to put them together. A lot of them come you see. They made... the squares and they'd say, "now how would you put this together?" but we'd tell them how to put it together. They could do that... yes, oh yes we showed them how to put it together to make them.³⁹

In this way, the women of the Richmond quilting group have developed a space to call their own but one in which the women may interact with the wider community while they work. They have placed themselves in a public space in which they have become, "the quilters", and where the wider community may borrow their services, discuss their works in progress, seek their advice or just stop in for a quick hello.

The Ashton quilting group shares many of the same characteristics in terms of their role within the community. The origins of the group are less well known, as all of the founding members have passed away or left the area for various reasons, and Mrs. Criggar stands as one of the three remaining members of a group that once numbered close to fifteen. Already an

³⁸ Mary Lalonde.

³⁹ Mary Lalonde.

accomplished sewer, Mrs. Criggar joined the group to learn the craft and has remained a member ever since. The group meets in the United Church in the centre of the village in a room off the main hall. When I met the group, they were busy preparing quilts for the upcoming church bazaar to be held in the coming months. The church appeared to be a centre for activity in the village during the day. People did stop by for various reasons, and enquiries were made as to how the quilting was coming. Again, this public space tended to bring the activities of the quilters into the public eye. The importance of this can be further evidenced by Mrs. Criggar's suggestion that she may set up her quilting frame in her garage for the summer, keeping the doors open. As her house is also situated close to the centre of the village, presumably this would have a similar result to the church space while she quilts independently.

Quilting on her own, in the case of Mrs. Criggar, does not appear to lessen the ties between her craft and the community. When she is not quilting with the women from her church she, as an individual, makes quilts for sale: "Every little while I think, I made that girl a quilt too."⁴⁰ While many of her quilts have been made for people as far away as south Asia, these sales ultimately stem from word of mouth in her previous place of employment as well as the local community:

I made one for a girl in Almonte [twenty minutes from Ashton] too for her daughter. She got one for her daughter. I forgot about hers till I ran into her at a funeral one day and she had her daughter with her and she said, 'this is the woman that made your quilt.'⁴¹

Through this statement, one can see that a weak social bond that may have previously existed between Mrs. Criggar and the girl for whom she made a quilt is strengthened. It is perhaps of

⁴⁰ Norma Criggar.

⁴¹ Norma Criggar.

further significance that the encounter took place at a local funeral, another social event that tends to aid in the establishment and reaffirmation of community.

It is also important to note that the quilters of this study interact across the boundaries of their immediate locations. As noted earlier, Mrs. Craig of Hazeldean connects with the women of Richmond through casual social contact, employment of their services and occasionally participating with the group as they work on one of her quilts. Mrs. Criggar of Ashton also has contacts within the Richmond group and expressed that she has thought about quilting with them as well. This is not to say that relationships stay within the physical confines of Goulbourn Township. Mrs. Craig noted that she knows quilters from other areas and Mrs. Criggar spoke often of her ties to other nearby towns and villages to the west and south of the township. However, a member leaving the area appears to affect the ties formed. One member of the Richmond group recalls one of the members of the group who has left the area to enter a nursing home: “Her hubby was so sick and then he died. And she needed someone to be close to and be friends with and call on when she needed things. So, now she’s gone to _____. I don’t see her that much but I didn’t expect I would.”⁴² While the member had had close ties with others in the group, and continues to quilt in her new location, her movement out of the physical area has affected the bond that was established by her physical presence.

However, the act of gathering to quilt is also not the sole support of this community of quilters. Two women from Richmond attended quilting guild meetings and, while one of them has passed away, another recounts how the experience differed from the quilting group studied here:

⁴² Participant R5.

Like the guild you just go every month and everyone gets a block every month.... And you bring it back the next month and then they put the names in a hat and they give the blocks out. And people quilt them themselves... they don't quilt at the meetings. You know, they discuss what blocks they're going to make the next month and how they're going to make them and you buy the materials from them and then you turn them in the next month.⁴³

This process is what Mrs. Criggar refers to as “quilting one block at a time” and it appears to lack acceptance among those who have taken note of it.

One may argue then, that the importance of community is crucial to the act of quilting among most of the women. The creation of groups, through interest, invitation or association, appears to be a meaningful part of the process for the women studied. As well, the public spaces in which most of the women quilt also helps to establish their position within their communities as well as allowing them to interact with these communities. These ties are further established through the selling of quilting services to others in the community as well as lending advice to those who seek it. However, the combination of shared interest, experience, space as well as the act of gathering, appears to be a delicate one. The leaving of a member, while greatly missed, changes that member's position within the group as it surely does within the community. And gathering alone, through such avenues as guild meetings, is not “the same” as it does not involve the process of making something as a collective effort. Despite the fragility of these symbolic and physical connections, the importance of making quilts as a group and within a community clearly lends meaning to the quilting process and quilts made by these women.

⁴³ Eileen Kavanagh.

Quilters and Memory

In examining how the quilters of Goulbourn Township compare their quilting to that of the quilting revival of the late twentieth century, it is important to first acknowledge they also have comparisons to make between their quilting and that of the previous generation. Many of the quilters can remember their mothers quilting and the connection and transmission of ideas between one generation and the next is not as clear-cut as one might assume. This brings into question the transmission of knowledge, in terms of quilting, from one generation to another and can be partially explained by the disruption to home-based knowledge experienced through young women leaving home to work or marry as previously noted.

Mrs. Lalonde is one woman who did learn to quilt from her mother. This process involved an apprenticeship-type relationship in which she was given secondary roles to play while the older quilters performed the main task of stitching the quilt in the frame:

I seen mother doing them. Put all the little quilt pieces together and everything. And I used to love to iron, press them out for her to cut them. Sometimes I did cutting too. She'd always be stern, "go right on the line Mary." You know, if you wanted it to be square or something like. But that's where I learned to quilt.⁴⁴

Thelma Criggar had a similar secondary role to play. Although her mother was reluctant to teach her how to sew on the sewing machine at home, threading needles for the older quilting women at the house was her role as apprentice, "It was just other older ones that came I used to thread the needles for them. And I didn't want that." Mrs. Craig credits her mother with teaching her how to quilt through observation and practice. This practice was not, however, done on large-scale quilts but, rather, doll's quilts, "We used to take little take scraps of fabrics and make doll's

⁴⁴ Mary Lalonde.

quilts you know and things like that.”⁴⁵ Her mother’s knowledge, however, was still called upon when, as a young adult, she began to make her first large-scale quilt:

I made my first quilt the year before I was married and it turned out square. And I still have it. Actually I can show it to you. And I gave it to Mom and she said, “Oh, you’ll never get this quilted.” So she was living in Stittsville at the time, so she took it up there and she said, “Norma I can’t make a quilt out of this it’s square.” So she took a piece of the side and put it on the end (laughter).⁴⁶

Here, Mrs. Craig’s apprenticeship appears to have been a long one. While she watched her mother quilt and made small doll quilts as a child, her first attempt at making a full-scale quilt was when she was about to be married and after her mother had moved to Stittsville.

The differences among these three stories lies in what the quilters recall taking away from the experience. Mrs. Lalonde recounts the story in terms of her mother teaching her how to quilt. She does not discuss stitching with the women but recalls how her young experience instilled an ability and interest in putting together “all the little pieces” that make a quilt. She credits her mother with teaching her how to quilt as she learned primarily through observation while participating in a secondary role. Mrs. Craig was also introduced to quilting through watching and assisting her mother as a young girl as well as through the making of small, doll quilts. Mrs. Criggar, on the other hand, was given a role that she clearly does not associate with learning how to quilt. She does not see her mother’s intent as teaching her the craft of quilting but rather her role ended at threading the needle. While she discusses being an able sewer her whole young life, it is only when she joined the group at the United Church in Ashton that she feels she learned how to quilt. What is particularly relevant here is the lack of a “coming of age” ritual typically associated with young women and quilting. These three women who aided or observed

⁴⁵ Norma Craig.

⁴⁶ Norma Craig.

their mothers in quilting, tell their stories as practical passing on of information from mother to daughter, or, in the case of Mrs. Criggar, simply aiding their mothers in their task. While Mrs. Craig and Mrs. Lalonde remember this as a learning experience, there is a lack of romanticism attached to the event, contrary to what one might expect. Mrs. Criggar's comments that her mother did not even want to teach her how to use the sewing machine go even further in challenging this idea.

It is possible that many of the women of this study did not learn how to quilt from their mothers in a grand, ritualistic way because this simply was not practical. There could be a number of reasons for this. The increased acceptance of young women in the work force, which began in the 1920's and boomed during the Second World War, may have played a significant role. One woman who was married during the Second World War had spent her time before her marriage doing housework for people in the village of Appleton and, as such was very busy. While she made one quilt on her own before her marriage, it is her husband's mother that she credits with teaching her the craft.⁴⁷ Lillian Mears of Richmond further suggests that, even in homes where quilting was a family affair, going out to work played a large role in whether one learned to quilt or not:

No, I didn't. My mother, my grandmother, my oldest sister did but I left home at fifteen to go to Ottawa so I just never did... I know my grandmother used to have the ladies in to quilt... but not being around much I didn't really. I wasn't too interested in it then to be quite truthful.⁴⁸

Here, the combination of working out and a lack of interest disallowed for the passing of knowledge from mother to daughter. And, as Mrs. Mears was making her own money in

⁴⁷ Participant R3, personal interview, 18 April 2001.

⁴⁸ Lillian Mears.

Ottawa, buying blankets did not make quilts a necessary part of her domestic life. Her quilting family did, however, provide her with quilts as gifts.

Work at home could also play a role in the lack of formal teaching between mothers and the daughters of this study. While many women were entering the war effort in factories and businesses in the cities, some had to take over work traditionally done by men on the farm: “No, I really never did go out to work because I was home, when my brother was over and he got killed over there so I was the ‘hired man’ I guess you’d call it.”⁴⁹ Another participant comments that her mother, while a quilter, was one whose life was not conducive to formally teaching her daughter how to quilt:

That’s where I was all the quilts sitting around the house all the time. But I never got asked if I’d like to quilt.... She didn’t have time. There were five ahead of me. She didn’t have time to do anything but look after kids. The quilting was her pastime. She loved that. That was her hobby. The only hobby she could afford to have.⁵⁰

Quilting for this woman’s mother became a strategy for peace in what is described as a hectic household full of children. Inviting her daughters into this time with her is perceived by her daughter, as being counter to the role quilting played in this regard.

Another issue related to learning to quilt from one’s mother relates to the definition of what quilting means to the women of this study. Some commented that their mothers tied their quilts, meaning they attached the top, batting and lining by tying them at appropriate intervals with pieces of yarn or fabric to hold them together. This process allows the maker to finish a quilt in less time and without placing it in a frame. Mrs. Craig recalls her mother making these quilts and termed them “every day quilts”, a hint that her mother, who both stitched and tied quilts depending on their usage, had an established distinction between the two. The coveted

⁴⁹ Participant R2.

⁵⁰ Participant R5.

skill of hand stitching quilts with small stitches using a needle, the process that requires so much work and often many hands, is eliminated for the sake of practicality and efficiency: “I remember when we were kids at home, they used to tie them.” There were other practicalities that also had to be considered in terms of tying quilts. The heaviness of the fabric used in making blankets also played a role, “Of course the material was a lot heavier then... pants and stuff and skirts and they needed to quilt them and they were heavy and they were really too hard to quilt so they tied them.”⁵¹ Another strategy of dealing with the heavy fabric of these quilts was to use the machine to keep the layers together. When asked if her mother quilted, Eileen Kavanagh remembers:

She did but it wasn't this kind of quilting, she made quilts out of heavy woollen coats and stuff and sewed them together and sort of quilted it on the machine... yah, they were like homemade type quilts but not quilted on a frame like this because it was much too thick. They were more made for warmth than anything.⁵²

The use of wool in making the quilt would obviously contribute to its warmth but could also be related to an interesting farm industry:

And mother used to quilt them and she used to tie them. She made them for my grandmother in the country. They would sheer the sheep and take the wool and, I don't know what they did with it. Cleaned it.... She used to make them for her but they were more like a comforter.⁵³

Another participant explained that, if one raised sheep on their farm they could, after sheering the sheep and washing the wool, have this wool sent way to be made into blankets. These could then be tied together in order to give extra warmth. These heavy wool blankets were too thick to stitch with a small needle and thread and so were tied. Whether reusing old woollen clothing or having blankets made from wool produced on the farm, the result was usually a need to tie

⁵¹ Participant R2.

⁵² Eileen Kavanagh.

⁵³ Participant R1.

blankets. This process was regarded as a different “kind” of quilting by the participants, if it was considered quilting at all. Whatever the reason their mothers had for tying their quilts, the women who discussed this process did not seem to feel their mothers had “taught” them how to quilt – meaning how to finely stitch their quilts.

For the women whose mothers did “quilt”, their memories of how this was done sets them apart somewhat from the previous generation. While many participants describe their style of quilting as “the old way” – a topic to be discussed later – their quilting is also described as being different from the previous generation. The above mentioned tied wool quilts are one example as they clearly demark a shift in the fabrics used by the women interviewed and that of their mothers. While wool would have obvious benefits in terms of warmth, it was also likely an economical choice if one was raising sheep, to use the wool in making blankets. As well, the economy and warmth of material may also have been a factor in the production of tied quilts from recycled woollen clothing.

Another example of the difference between the quilters of this study and the previous generation is in terms of the space used to work. As discussed in detail above, the Richmond and Ashton quilting groups quilt together in public spaces. The community centre in Richmond and the United Church in Ashton allow for interaction with the wider community while they work. For those that recall their mothers quilting with other women, the home, or domestic sphere, is always the setting for bees. The large amount of space needed to set up a quilt in a frame for quilting required many creative solutions:

And mother, you see, in the farm house there was an upstairs... above the kitchen. There was nobody sleeping there. Mother had a bed there but there was lots of room there to move... to have the quilting there. So she'd put up the quilt there and there'd be no

bothering downstairs in the house. So they'd quilt upstairs. That's where we did the quilting.⁵⁴

Mrs. Criggar's mother had a different solution to making room in her home for quilts:

And when they did quilting at the house they had four hooks at the ceiling and there was a string on each end of it. And they pulled those strings to put the quilt up to the ceiling when we were having supper or anything. And then let it down then quilt the next day with it down.⁵⁵

The idea of "having ladies in" to quilt comes up frequently in reference to memories of their mothers' quilting. Others remember their mothers quilting alone or do not mention the social aspects of their mother's craft. However, what remains consistent is the idea of quilting within the home. While women may gather together for such events, the places they gathered were not public spaces. They were bedrooms and dining rooms and kitchens. While these places were taken over by the quilts themselves, they were also often taken over by the many hands that helped to quilt them. This appears to be an appropriate site for the activities of the previous generations as, unlike the women of this study, they seem to have quilted for purely domestic reasons. This is not to say that these bees were not a community-building experience. As seen in the first chapter, they were often central to this phenomenon. However, while the women of this study take their "home-based" craft to the community, their mothers invited the community into their homes.

While quilting has experienced a renaissance in the late years of the twentieth century, it is important to understand that the quilters of Goulbourn have themselves been agents of change in terms of their craft. Most have memories of their mothers quilting and, as shown here, there are some marked differences between how they and their mothers quilted. The idea of

⁵⁴ Mary Lalonde.

⁵⁵ Thelma Criggar.

“everyday” or tied quilts appears to have been discarded by most as a product of necessity rather than skill. The necessity of the everyday quilt can be tied to concerns of both time and material. These quilts were faster, required no frame or other hands to construct and employed the use of heavier fabrics that very readily met requirements of warmth and economy. When finely stitched quilts were made and many hands shared the labour, the women involved gathered in each other’s homes. Their daughters, on the other hand, have brought their quilting rituals out of the home and into the community. While this appears to be an appropriate shift in considering how the two generations interact with their quilts and the wider community, it must be acknowledged as a marked difference in the meaning of their quilting. In this way, the women of this study have themselves been actors of change in terms of their craft and must not be regarded as static relics of a preserved tradition.

Quilters and the New Generation

As discussed in Chapter One, quilting saw a low period in the mid twentieth century, only to be revived in a neo-pioneer spirit of the late twentieth century. Quilting became an increasingly unnecessary task as more young women began working prior to marriage and, as such, had increased spending power. Store bought blankets could replace the traditional trousseau of twelve quilts, and could better display the ideals and aesthetic of the modern age. Comforters, bed spreads and blankets were easier to wash and featured designs that only the most time consuming of appliqué quilts could provide. By the 1960’s quilting experienced a revival as women sought to replicate or integrate the ideals of a “simpler” era into their lives. As well, the acceptance of textile art or the art quilt into the Canadian art world, lent a different status to the makers of many of these works. The women of this study sit on the bridge between two eras of quilt making. While the memories these women have of their mothers’ work is

discussed above, how these women frame the later changes that have taken place through the quilting revival is also significant.

Many of the women who were interviewed for this study have not quilted consistently throughout their lives. Many were introduced to it through their families but did not “find the time” to make many quilts while they were raising their families. One woman put it plainly: “I had three children and all the farm work, always so much to do. Then when the kids got up I started up again.”⁵⁶ Although the business described here was not limited to farm life, many women repeat this sentiment. One participant describes the hecticness of a military life, “Well we moved around a lot. All I seemed to do was move from here to here and back.... I don’t know how many times a year we moved sometimes you know.”⁵⁷ Several other women found time in their schedules to continue quilting even after their children were born while those who did not take up the craft until later life waited until their formal work loads of parenting and/or outside work were reduced. In this position between two eras of quilting, the women all marked several changes they felt had taken place since they began to quilt.

One significant change in the making of quilts is remarked in the merchandise available to aid in the craft. Mary Lalonde sums this up: “Well, it’s all what they have to work with today.... All we had was a ruler, a pencil and a pair of scissors.”⁵⁸ Mrs. Craig remarks the same phenomenon, “Oh, it’s changed a lot. The equipment you use now even. We used to just use a piece of cardboard with a pattern on it and a pencil and draw it all out and now you have rotary cutters and the boards and... rulers.”⁵⁹ Many of these new products are seen as helpful and have

⁵⁶ Participant R2.

⁵⁷ Participant R1.

⁵⁸ Mary Lalonde.

⁵⁹ Norma Craig.

changed the way these women make their quilts, "It does make it easier because you can cut strips, and you know, you can cut out a quilt in a day."⁶⁰ Time saving is one way in which new merchandise has changed the quilts. Mrs. Criggar has used rotary cutters and the new industry of instructional quilting books to devise an easier way to construct a double Irish chain quilt:

Well you don't have to make all those little blocks. You just sew a red strip a white strip a red strip a white strip and then take your cutter and cut it all along and sew it together and that's all you have to do.⁶¹

Rotary cutters are a significant change in cutting out quilts for many of the women of this study. Many commented that they are "easier on the hands" than scissors and, as seen above, have changed the time it takes to put together a quilt top.

Quilting frames are another product that has seen innovation in the past few years and are widely discussed. Many women made comments on how they are intended to save time and space, allowing the quilter to work on a quilt in the home without the need for large kitchens, pulley systems or designated rooms. The frames used by the women of Ashton and Richmond are made from four pieces of lumber two of which have holes in either end into which slide the side boards. These boards are held together at the corners by clamps and the quilt is stretched and then stapled or tacked to the frame before quilting and stays this way until it is complete. When a significant portion of one or both of the ends has been quilted, that end is rolled up once or twice to make room and allow the quilters access into the centre of the quilt. Jokes are frequently made when the quilt is near completion and as such has been rolled several times until the quilters knock each other's knees while they quilt.

New frames mark a significant change from this system both in size and intent. "Now

⁶⁰ Norma Craig.

⁶¹ Thelma Criggar.

they have the circular, oval ones you put it on a stand and you can sit and you do it. I prefer to do a quilt, if I'm doing it, in the whole frame 'cause you get a better stretch."⁶² Mrs. Craig is here referring to one kind of new frame in which part of the quilt is placed in a circular hoop and is quilted a section at a time. Clearly these frames take up less room and are intended to be used by only one quilter at a time. Her preference for stretching out the whole quilt in a big frame before quilting is repeated by many women. Another woman remarks on another kind of frame introduced:

I had a frame that you put your quilt in that's modern, that's not like this. You just put up the bars and put the quilt in it. Put the bar across the top and tighten it up by rolling up the bar you know, it's so easy. You don't have to sew it or... staple it or anything like that, you just put it all in. Well, you have to baste it before you put it in there 'cause it's not for a big quilt, it's meant for a small quilt.⁶³

This new frame is again intended to save time and space. However, its prescriptive nature disallows the user from fitting their quilt into the frame in one piece. For this reason, the three layers of the quilt have to be temporarily sewn together at the edges (basted) if one wishes to make a full-sized quilt. While this participant uses the new frame at home for making baby quilts, if a large quilt is ready to be quilted, the large frame at the community centre is used. What is interesting to note here is the "new" style frames are all intended for use by a single quilter in a small space and perhaps, as suggested above, only for small quilts. The fact that most of these women quilt large quilts with the help of many hands makes the newer frames seem impractical. While some women use these for smaller projects at home, Mrs. Craig and Mrs. Criggar both continue to use the large, "older" style quilting frames when working in their homes. In terms of the meaning these women give to the communal aspect of their craft, these

⁶² Norma Craig.

⁶³ Participant R5.

newer frames also do not appear to have a practical place. Perhaps, however, if one is a member of a guild, which, as discussed above, meets periodically to discuss aspects of the craft while leaving members to quilt on their own, these frames would fit well into the idea of the quilt as an individual endeavour.

The introduction of pattern templates is frequently mentioned in terms of changes brought about by the quilting revival. These templates, or patterns, allow the quilter to pencil a design onto the quilt, which will then be stitched over. This gives uniformity to the stitching on the quilt and is a significant factor in the overall aesthetic of the finished work, so much so that often, when a quilt is finished, the women will turn it over to the plain underside to discuss the effect of the stitched design without the interference of other aesthetic concerns found on the patterned top. Before the introduction of mass-produced templates to guide the quilter, women often made their own. Mrs. Craig describes how her mother made templates for her quilts: “she’d find a nice piece of cardboard and she’d make a cut out, a template. They didn’t have all this fancy stuff they have now.”⁶⁴ Mrs. Criggar’s comments regarding these home-made patterns suggests that they were given a certain amount of value:

Nearly all those patterns in that box there, those little patterns there, they belonged to _____ and then she died. I have a lot of my own at home and then I got some from my daughter-in-law’s grandmother. Her mother was giving up house and they brought me down a box of patterns.⁶⁵

The passing on of patterns, while clearly linking generations and communities of quilters, also demonstrates the value placed on these hand-made templates as much work and consideration was given to them. Their importance in linking the various parts of the quilt together, both aesthetically and physically, also contributes greatly to this value.

⁶⁴ Norma Craig.

⁶⁵ Thelma Criggar.

Other strategies were used to devise patterns for quilts, apart from templates. A Richmond quilter described one method of achieving a fan-like affect in the stitching pattern of a quilt, “Yes, they’ve got things, mother would take plates and a saucer and she’d make circles. And she’d quilt those circles. One on top of the other like that. They didn’t have all the patterns that they have now.”⁶⁶ Other women described how one could create a fan effect by tying a pencil to the end of a piece of string while the other end was attached to a pin. The string is drawn tight and used to make patterns of arches across the quilt. One woman’s comments suggest that this was the “favourite” pattern of a deceased member of the Richmond quilters, “Fans on the quilt, I think your grandmother [interviewer’s grandmother] did more. Some like fans.”⁶⁷ The commenting by many of the women in Richmond, with whom my grandmother quilted, that the fans were her favourite pattern, suggest that one could acquire a reputation based on one’s patterns, or preference for certain patterns. This also ties to the handing down of patterns in which one could remember a deceased member of the group or family through the use of one of “their” patterns.

For Mrs. Criggar, the need to adapt patterns, especially around the edges of quilts, is something that requires manipulation by the quilter in order to acquire the desired result:

I’ll do it out on paper. I want the corners to come even. There’s lots of people, when they’re doing the diamond all the way around, they wouldn’t come out just a straight diamond at the end just maybe half a diamond and I don’t want to do that. I just think if I measure them just a wee bit more each time till I get down to the [end] then I’ll have a full diamond. That’s where lots of people don’t know how I’m getting it so even but if you measure it out, then if you run out then if you pull your pattern just a little bit each time, and then it’s not noticeable. And that’s how you do that.⁶⁸

Many of the women use both handmade and mass-produced patterns and several

⁶⁶ Participant R5.

⁶⁷ Participant R3.

⁶⁸ Thelma Criggar.

remarked on the larger variety of patterns available today as compared to earlier years.

However, the association between quilters and their patterns, the handing down of patterns through family and community as well as the freedom to adapt patterns to different sizes of quilts are issues that are also raised. While one could imagine these templates necessitating a change to the way the Goulbourn quilters construct their quilts – that is, one could imagine that quilt dimensions could be prescribed by the template to ensure the pattern is not left incomplete at the end – this has not been the case. Instead, for the most part, the women have combined their old hand-made patterns with the mass produced patterns while denoting a generally positive acceptance of the new variety they are offered through store-bought templates as well as patterns found in books.

Along with an increased variety of quilting patterns, a heightened selection of fabrics is also widely credited in bringing about changes to the quilting world. However, this increase in selection is accompanied by a perceived increase in price, “Well it’s a lot. They’ve used a lot of different material now. And the price of material then was cheap.”⁶⁹ The expense in purchasing new material leads to a necessity to hunt out bargains. Mrs. Lalonde remarks: “Now material’s expensive. I remember buying material three yards for a dollar. You don’t get that now. I remember buying that. We’d run whenever there was a sale on.”⁷⁰ Hunting for bargains, as a strategy in dealing with the cost of new fabric can have humorous results. Mrs. Craig remembers driving with her mother all the way to Quyon, Quebec to Ma’am Mulligan’s shop, renowned for her inexpensive prices and disorganization:

Mom’s sister lived in Fort Coulangé, and so we used to cross at Quyon and go to Ma’am Mulligan’s... They had so many fires in that place it wasn’t funny (laughter) because she’d have the wood stove, a box stove and all around it would be fabric. I mean you

⁶⁹ Thelma Criggar.

⁷⁰ Mary Lalonde.

could climb up, literally climb to the ceiling, on this fabric. And one day I was over there getting fabric for a quilt and a fancy fabric for a coat for my daughter and when I was pulling the fabric out and out pops this pound of bacon that was rotted green (laughter) and yellow... and I said, "Mrs. Mulligan, look at what I found," and she says, "Ivan, I told you where that bacon was, I told you it was in that corner."⁷¹

While bargain hunting is one strategy in dealing with the price of new fabric, another is more important to the meaning of quilts for many quilters. It was frequently pointed out that quilts are an ideal way to make use of scrap material left over from other quilts and textile projects such as the making of aprons and clothing. Mrs. Craig remembers her mother making everyday quilts for the farm hands from used fabric, "It would be the bottom of the pyjama pants, or where they meet, and she would use that for the [farm hands].... They'd be heavier and she tied those."⁷² While all the quilters used new fabric for their quilts, this fabric was often found in their scrap bags. Mrs. Lalonde explained the importance of remnant material in creating a desired pattern for a quilt. She recounts telling one friend not to "throw a small piece away. Because I did one time and I... had to go into the garbage can to... find a piece."⁷³ Mrs. Lalonde later speaks of the irrationality of buying all new, expensive material for a quilt, "You take those nice, those quilt shops, they're expensive. I know up here, it's eight and nine dollars. That's expensive. I wouldn't take it home and cut it all up." Another Richmond quilter suggested that her scrap bag had to be used up as the fabric was not going to be used by her children if she didn't. "Well, I like to...get all the pieces that I have used up. 'Cause I know my kids have no interest in it."⁷⁴

The reuse of fabric is seen as essential as the price of material is an issue for most of the quilters. Thrift becomes an important characteristic to many in the making of quilts and to buy

⁷¹ Norma Craig.

⁷² Norma Craig.

⁷³ Mary Lalonde.

⁷⁴ Participant R2.

all new fabric for each quilt would cost more money than many see necessary:

Years ago you made it out of all the pieces of material you had but now-a-days, a lot of them go out and buy. Have to have all new material and every colour has to go with the other colour. I remember we used to make them out of men's dress pants... my goodness, they wouldn't do that now (laughing).⁷⁵

Mrs. Lalonde commented on one of the quilt tops brought in by a younger woman from the community for the Richmond quilters to quilt:

But it's like today, you take that lady that brought the cover. You look at the material in that. That's expensive. That's expensive material. I mean to say that, but it's nice. I agree, it's very nice. It's going to be very nice, proud, but that's the only thing, it'll cost her more money.⁷⁶

The idea that a quilt's appearance is mediated to some extent by what the quilter has available to them in terms of scrap material is an idea repeated by another Richmond quilter:

Well what I've been doing hasn't [changed] but the over all quilting has changed. It's gotten to be, well, an art form. I don't think I ever quilted on anything that was new. You made it out of what you had... and maybe that's why we have fun doing it, I don't know. We're not serious about it. We don't try to make something special out of it.⁷⁷

Here is the idea that a new generation of quilters has emerged who make aesthetics and design the primary concern of quilting; purchasing of large amounts of new material to ensure the maker's vision is fully realized is central to this shifting of priorities.

Finally, the batting used in quilts is another point of innovation that provokes discussion from the women interviewed and is seen as leading to various differences brought about in quilting. Batting is used as the middle layer in a quilt and is the source of warmth in the finished product. Cotton batting was prevalent when many of these women started quilting (while

⁷⁵ Participant R2.

⁷⁶ Mary Lalonde.

⁷⁷ Participant R1.

anything including old blankets could be used as batting) and required a high number of stitches, close together to ensure it did not “ball-up” through washing and use when the quilt was finished. Polyester batting is seen as a significant improvement that has changed quilting for many women. Mrs. Lalonde credits the manufacturers of quilting supplies with making nicer battings that help in the ease and quality of the quilts she makes: “All the companies has improved a lot on that.”⁷⁸ Less stitching is required and the needle flows through the layers of the quilt with much less effort. The most recent change in batting discussed by the Goulbourn quilters, is a woven or sheet batting that is much thinner than the polyester batting, making it easier to quilt. This batting then “puffs up” when the quilt is washed following completion to provide the air pockets necessary to create warmth and piling of the quilt.

Perhaps what is most relevant about woven batting is that its thinness allows the quilter to stitch the quilt on a standard sewing machine:

Well, in other places they’re sewing on the sewing machine. And they’re not using the batting I don’t think. They use that sheet stuff... Yes, they’re not as thick. And that’s how they can sew them on the sewing machine.⁷⁹

All of the women in Goulbourn use sewing machines at different stages of their quilt making. Machines are used in the piecing stages to assemble the quilt tops and linings as well as in finishing the edges, or binding the quilt after the layers have been stitched together. However, the actual quilting process is not one that is trusted to the machine. “Now they’re starting to machine quilt a lot and I suppose it’s stronger,”⁸⁰ but, despite this added strength and the comments many of the women made regarding arthritic pain in their hands, sewing machines may not guarantee a better quilt. Mrs. Criggar remarks on a quilt she appliquéd by hand while a

⁷⁸ Mary Lalonde.

⁷⁹ Participant R3.

⁸⁰ Norma Craig.

friend used a machine in this process. "There was a girl down the road who was doing a quilt here before I started and she had done hers by machine but she didn't allow for the turn-in and when she turned it in her girl [with a parasol] was smaller than mine."⁸¹ These women have grown up in homes with sewing machines and, while some still feel their peddle-powered machines are better and easier to use than modern electric models, it is a technology with which they are familiar and comfortable. All use their sewing machines in part of the quilting process as it saves time and effort. However, the act of hand stitching the quilts is part of their meaning. Stitching by hand is part of the skill of the craft for many and, without this process, the need to gather in a group would be eliminated. These two concepts of skill and social contact are part and parcel of the meaning of the finished product. In this way, innovations in batting that help the lone quilter to complete a quilt on her sewing machine do not seem to be regarded as something important to the Goulbourn quilters.

Harvey Green, in his look at the use of technology in the twentieth century, argues that there is little evidence to suggest that modernism and its thrust toward increased sophistication and mechanization, had a significant impact on amateur crafts.⁸² The specialization of quilting, as seen through the innovations discussed here, would seem to contradict this statement.

However, one could argue that these innovations were not brought about through the ideals of modernism but, rather, through a shift in the meaning of quilting brought on by its renaissance or revival. The Goulbourn quilters use many of these tools in their quilting and, to some extent, this has changed how their quilts are made. Different individual women use these tools to lesser or greater extents but all have taken what they need from them and incorporated them into their

⁸¹ Thelma Criggar.

⁸² Harvey Green, "The Promise and Peril of High Technology," *Craft in the Machine Age 1920-1945* ed. Janet Kardon (New York : H.N. Abrams in association with the American Craft Museum, 1995) 44.

work as far as it does not drastically change the meaning of what they are doing. This is especially evident in their acceptance of these tools while they acknowledge that they are the products of a younger generation of quilters. Many of the changes and innovations in quilting equipment are designed to make quilting easier for the lone quilter working at home. Less time, space and communal effort is required to create a quilt with these “gadgets”. The overall visual quality of the quilts produced using these new products is, for the most part, perceived as the same or better than the quilts produced by the women of this study. However, this is only one of the values held important by these women. Other qualities, such as the social contact, skill, and thrift of the “traditional” quilting process are held to be just as, if not more, important to most.

The acceptance of these innovations, in so long as they are regarded as appropriate to the meanings these women associate with quilting, and in so far as they are seen as useful and not overly prescriptive, is not surprising considering the general embracement of progress by the community in which they operate. As seen in the previous chapter, modernist-style progress has been largely framed as a continuation of the pioneering tradition of the community and, as such, is considered to be of value. However, as noted through the debate on amalgamation, change must be under the control of the community. As such, the agentive nature with which Goulbourn’s quilters navigate changes in their craft is entirely congruent with this ideal. The association of progress with the pioneering spirit of the founders of the community also demonstrates the reconciliation of the seeming contradiction between tradition and progress. Tradition is not seen as a stagnation or petrification of old ways of doing things. Instead, change, if understood as forward-moving progress, allows one to continually improve upon one’s community or work in the “spirit” of the first pioneers. If a “new” way is not better, it is rejected. If some change is regarded as beneficial and within the framework or community

values and goals, it is embraced. In the same way, the quilters of this community regard themselves as traditional quilters, especially in comparison with outside “others” engaging in the quilting revival with very different values and meanings, who are able to make changes to their work if it is to their benefit or the benefit of their work.

The proliferation of tools for quilting is linked by some to what they perceive as a quilting “trend”. Younger quilters are not regarded as having the time to commit to large projects that take them away from their busy lives, “It’s hard for the younger generation too, you know, because they’re working. They really haven’t got time.”⁸³ Time is what is required to produce quilts that encompass many of the values that differentiate the Goulbourn quilters from their younger peers. Communal work, hand stitching and producing or modifying patterns for stitching are examples of the kinds of elements held important to many of these women, which are not necessarily practical for women who work and have families. This is an interesting observation in itself as many of the women interviewed also took time away from quilting while they worked out and raised families. Joyce Ice also speaks to individual periods of activity and inactivity among quilters and suggests that these are more closely related to personal history and life course as opposed to broader trends of quilting history.⁸⁴ While there are exceptions to this trend, Mrs. Lalonde and Mrs. Craig for example, many of the women here have themselves experienced a personal revival of their craft. However, the methods to which they returned or acquired are seen as being more traditional and less mediated by technology than those adopted by younger quilters.

⁸³ Participant R2.

⁸⁴ Joyce Ice, “Splendid Companionship and Practical Assistance,” Quilting Together: Women, Quilts and Communities, ed. Joyce Ice and Linda Norris (Delhi, N.Y.: The Delaware Historical Association, 1989) 11.

This may be largely due to the differences in how the Goulbourn quilters have learned or relearned to quilt, that is through contact, collaboration and cooperation with other quilters who see the communal aspect of their work as largely central to its meaning. Again, this can be framed as an ideal shared between the quilters and their local community as embodied by the collective efforts of the early pioneers. Chapter Two demonstrated that while extraordinary events and individual achievements are given their space in the locally produced histories of Goulbourn, these often refer to how they have impacted or benefited the community as a whole, thus reinforcing the importance of collectivity and the giving of one's time and energy to the greater good. Quilters engaging in the quilting revival, while forming alternate communities through such structures as guilds, are regarded as perhaps missing this key component carried forward by the older quilters and reinforced by the values of the traditional, local community.

Quilting as a craft trend appears to be acknowledged by some of the women in Goulbourn and is seen as yet another separation between themselves and younger quilters. One woman from Richmond noted:

But, it's just the same as, well, everything goes in cycles. The way they are doing their quilting now, I'll bet ten years from now nobody will be hardly doing it... same as pictures they used to do and the macramé they used to do.... You do macramé for a few years. You never hear of it now... But, quilts, you'll just keep on, our kind.⁸⁵

Mrs. Lalonde shares the same idea of the trend involved in the quilting revival of the younger generation:

I find these simple things, we were brought up with all these things so we didn't mind doing it like that, but the young people today, a friend of mine, she went out and bought a whole lot of stuff to make quilts and I said, "Oh my goodness," I said, "You think you're going to quilt all your life." And she said, "Oh yes Mary." And then she's not making any more quilts now. You see, she only made one or two and then she found it too much work and all this stuff. She's not bothering with them.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Participant R1.

⁸⁶ Mary Lalonde.

Mrs. Criggar also suggests that a respect must be shown for the acquired skills needed to quilt properly and these skills take time to master, “But there’s a lady lives just up the road here she can’t even sew a button you know... and she wants to make a quilt herself.”⁸⁷

While some of the important considerations are lacking in the younger generation’s quilts, there is no doubt that they are viewed as bearing a high aesthetic value although this may be, as discussed above, at the expense of other important values such as usefulness and thrift, “Well, they’re works of art, let’s face it. It makes something one person would do, and that would be all they would ever do. They wouldn’t do a quilt and another in three or four weeks... They’re not doing it to be used the way we are.”⁸⁸ Susan Roach, in her study of a family quilting bee, notes Jan Mukarovsky’s analysis that the aesthetics of quilts, as with other forms of folk art, is often not the only primary function. Other concerns, such as thrift, community, and usefulness in this case, become just as, if not more, important. If one were interested in delineating folk art from formal art, this would be a marked difference.⁸⁹ It is a difference that many women see as setting them apart from a younger generation of quilters. While, as seen earlier, the quilting revival also codes quilts with multiple layers of meaning, the Goulbourn quilters clearly view many differences in value and meaning associated with quilting as representing significant differences between themselves and revivalist quilters.

Conclusion

Much the same way quilts are able to merge many smaller pieces of fabric into a larger whole, the quilters of Goulbourn township play out the same process as a group of individuals working within a wider community. Within this structure, a substantial amount of change has

⁸⁷ Thelma Criggar.

⁸⁸ Participant R1.

taken and continues to take place. Age, personal history, memory and a pragmatic attitude toward change have allowed the women of this study to take what they feel is important from their past and incorporate it with what they feel is useful from their present. From this change, several key issues arise, including the importance of ageing in creating unique meaning for quilters and their work, the placement and roles of these particular quilters within their communities, and the agentive relationship between the quilters and the changes that have taken place in the meanings and techniques of their craft.

Changes they have made or adopted to their quilting is consistent with the ideals of collective effort and self-directed progress demonstrated to be core values of the community in which they operate and, as such, allows them to identify themselves as bearers of tradition while enacting a process of acceptance and rejection of new styles, techniques and merchandise brought forth by the popularization of their craft. All of these issues point toward a group of women who have navigated a tremendous amount of change in the course of their quilting lives and have carved for themselves, a unique place in the living history of their community and their craft.

⁸⁹ Roach, 62-63.

CONCLUSION

*In this world of change naught which comes stays,
and naught which goes is lost*

-Mad. Swetchine¹

The preceding investigation of one quilting community in the Ottawa Valley's Goulbourn Township provides many insights into the roles and responses these women have experienced in the shifting meanings of their craft. By looking at the changing social, economic, geographic, and aesthetic environment in which they have, and continue to enact their craft, it may be concluded that the responses these women have had to the quilting revival of the late twentieth century demonstrate their active role in mediating the interconnected issues of change, tradition, progress, and community. Within the context of shifting meanings associated with domesticity, labour, social reform, historical romanticism as well as the tensions between art and craft, these women have come to identify themselves as craftspeople and bearers of tradition while playing an active role in changing the meaning of their craft. This change, however, is framed and understood in terms of modernist ideals of self-directed progress and innovation held as a core value of their community.

Whether born to Goulbourn or "newly" arrived during the post-war suburbanization, most of the women here have witnessed the transition of this area from a cluster of villages and farms to a bedroom community for the city of Ottawa; others have moved to the area during the post-war housing boom. Their individual paths have led them to a place with a deep sense of history drawn from a mythology of pioneering spirit

¹ Quoted in The New Dictionary of Thoughts: A Cyclopedia of Quotations, ed. Tryon Edwards, D.D. (N.p.: Standard Book Co., 1964) 78.

and progressive community building. The establishment of such groups as the Women's Institute in the area attests to the significant role women have played in social reform and in helping to enact a vision of a healthier society for future generations of Canadians. At the same time, the professionalisation, and increasing invisibility of home-based labour has contributed to a conception of women as consumers of domestic goods rather than producers, significantly changing the meaning of "home-based arts". Accompanying this shift was the development of a complex web of professional interior design, mass media and marketing targeted at Canadian women, and the rise of department stores and catalogue shopping, resulting in a modernist aesthetic that came to saturate the Canadian furnishing market. With this new style came an interest in streamlining and modernizing home interiors, and in creating a site in which domestic labour could be made more efficient or disguised altogether. New materials and shapes sought to reflect the technological innovations brought about by the war industry and were regarded as a benefit to all Canadians in terms of democratizing home decorating and creating more sanitary and appealing spaces free of clutter and unnecessary ornamentation. While all these transformations, both in physical and symbolic space, were taking place the meanings associated with quilts were also changing.

Originally employed as a response to harsh climatic and economic conditions faced by early settlers, the focus of quilting has shifted to place increased emphasis on the aesthetic, expressive, social and economic qualities of the objects. The production of quilts in earlier phases acted as a site for community and familial bonding. By mid-century, modernized interiors, including central heating, and ready-made blankets available in department stores and catalogues rendered the quilt obsolete for most women

and the craft experienced a period of decline. By the 1960's quilting witnessed a revival in correspondence with several similar folk revivals of the late twentieth century and, today, quilts have come to fulfill an endless list of roles. From historical records (both public and private), objects negotiated in the post-modern consumer culture, signifiers of the tension between art and craft, to their employment as symbols of diverse cohesion and imagined communities, quilts now reflect many of the concerns of contemporary Canadian society.

Within this context, Goulbourn's older quilters continue their craft. Age, personal history, memory and a pragmatic attitude toward change have allowed the women of this study to take what they feel is important from their past and incorporate it with what they feel is useful from their present. It should be noted that personal histories reveal that many of these women experienced individual periods of activity and inactivity in terms of their craft. As suggested by Ice, these periods may be more closely related to life circumstances, family obligation and work patterns.² However, general trends demonstrate that these women have led and organized their lives quite differently from the generation before them and many of these changes are evident in the meanings associated with their quilting. The physical movement of their work from domestic to public spaces marks a clear example of this shift. However, in the face of changes presented by the craft's revival, Goulbourn's quilters define their work as "the old way" of quilting. Much of this has to do with memory. While little romanticism is attached to the quilting knowledge inherited from their mothers, most have learned to quilt from

² Joyce Ice, "Splendid Companionship and Practical Assistance," Quilting Together: Women, Quilts and Communities, ed. Joyce Ice and Linda Norris (Delhi, N.Y.: The Delaware Historical Association, 1989) 10.

members of their mothers' generation if not their mothers specifically. In this way, these women, while undergoing a large amount of change in their lives, both socially and in terms of their quilting, maintain a clear connection with the past but have been decidedly active agents in departing from it.

In terms of changes brought about by the quilting revival, a clear divergence of paths is conceptualized here. This revival was accompanied by a general interest in replicating or connecting to a seemingly simpler period of time as well as an agenda of elevating the status of traditional female modes of expression into the established art world. The quilting renaissance can be closely linked with other folk revivals of this period. These revivals largely acted to popularize folk genres and connect them to the marketplace. The reviving of quilts is regarded by many of the older women as a "trend" and, as such, a passing interest rather than a lifelong pursuit. Regardless of the perceived transient nature of this revival, there is no denying the strong connection between it and the market. This strengthened link has resulted in the proliferation of books and magazines that contribute to the overall body of knowledge regarding quilting history, techniques and patterns, as well as an accompanying increase in the variety and innovation of quilting merchandise. It is at this point that the women studied here become agents in navigating this merchandise and its accompanied changes. This is done through a process of acceptance or rejection determined by how appropriately they fit into the core meanings these women attribute to quilts and the process of quilting.

This process of initiating and navigating change is one that is in line with the dominant values of the wider community in which these women reside and interact. Continuous improvement and progress denotes a community that wishes to continually

improve upon itself. However, this change is only appropriate where it is locally directed or managed. When imposed from the outside, there is a sentiment that “others” will not understand the core values and mechanisms that make Goulbourn unique – the values that comprise its culture. The same may be said for the established quilters acting within this space. There is a decided sense of pride, on the part of the women of this community, in the changes with which they feel involved. From raising money for local charities, to establishing themselves in downtown locations, to finding new and unique patterns to incorporate into their quilting, these women interact with the broader local and quilting communities in such a way as to remain fully in control of the changes they deem appropriate for their craft.

This change over time allows one to draw conclusions as to the role these women play within the craftsperson-artist continuum established by Becker. As craftspeople, they act within a shared set of standards and values that are subject to slow change over time. While it would be difficult to describe the changes these women have navigated as slow, it is through the acceptance and rejection of these changes that the craft community remains relatively stable. Innovators from within or outside the group are admired while only those innovations that prove consistent and appropriate for the core values of the group are accepted. In this way, the quilters have a give and take relationship with the quilting revival. They may be regarded as bearers of a certain amount of traditional knowledge and skill while they themselves are open to many of the perceived benefits of the popularization of their craft. It is in this way that they are able to identify themselves as the “old style” quilters within their community while still being able to benefit from the contingency provided by revivalist innovations and connections to the market.

While it is difficult to draw general conclusions from a study of one, specific, small community of quilters, many of the issues discussed here are in line with observations made by other quilt researchers. Joyce Ice, for example, also observed the importance of quilters establishing themselves, both physically and symbolically, in the centre of their communities.³ While quilting for extra income or to raise money in the vein of social activism is not a new meaning for quilts, the movement of this female entrepreneurship into public spaces inarguably adds meaning to the process while creating a unique relationship with the broader community. This appears to correspond with the research of Joyce Ice's quilters in Texas, as does the overall structure of the quilting group studied.

Susan Roach looked at one particular quilting event held within her family. Despite this methodological difference, she too draws conclusions similar to those found here. The need for aesthetic compromise in order to preserve the values of collective work connect to both Ice's work and more general theories of folk aesthetic.⁴ This consensus building approach to group quilting is one that, arguably, also allows for communication, acceptance or rejection of new ideas or values brought to the attention of the group. Ice refers to this phenomenon as the consensus between the idea and the pragmatic, which she sees as a vital part of the process of collective quilt making.⁵ As well, it is further linked to the suspension of the aesthetic values for the insertion of additional or supplementary values that frequently characterizes folk genres.⁶

³ Ice, "Women's Aesthetics and the Quilting Genre," 167-168.

⁴ Roach, 62-63.

⁵ Ice, "Women's Aesthetics and the Quilting Genre," 169.

⁶ Roach, 62-63.

It must also be noted that broad trends associated with historical surveys must be regarded as such. While they are helpful tools in furthering an understanding of the environment in which these women have enacted and changed their craft, as suggested by Ice's conclusions that most quilters experience phases of more or less activity, personal history has a substantial role to play in why and how changes have occurred within this group of women. Just as few women fall neatly into the trends outlined by the canon of Canadian women's history, these women do not necessarily frame their experiences in reference to these timelines and analysis. Major events, such as world wars and periods of economic growth or depression act as useful markers of time and related personal events. In the interest of this study, the perceptions these women have of events in history or changes in their craft hold just as many keys to understanding their roles within these shifts. One must be careful, in this sense, not to deform the personal experiences of these women to fit the outline of history. The specific may not always be framed perfectly by the general while, for certain, there are many connections and observations to be revealed.

Having taken note of these limits to this work, it is possible to conclude that the aged quilters of Goulbourn Township have born witness to and participated in a tremendous amount of change. Through the shifting meanings, aesthetics and techniques associated with quilting, they have positioned themselves, to a large extent, as established craftspeople and bearers of tradition while innovating and progressing their craft with the aid of new ideas and merchandise stemming from the quilting revival. In this way, they have navigated the tensions between tradition and progress, to become innovators within the history of quilting.

This is not to say that more research is not necessary. Unfortunately beyond the scope of this study are the effects of institutionalization on the members of such communities. How these women reform or abandon this late-life identity would be crucial to further understanding its structure. As well, while this thesis has focused primarily on shifts in meaning associated with quilts and quilting over time, how these are translated into aesthetic changes is also highly relevant. Broad surveys exist which attempt to map exactly this. However they frequently lack the voice of the producers of these objects – a task which becomes increasingly difficult as time passes. Connecting the two elements of quilting in an anthropological or art historical approach would enable a furthering of this body of knowledge. Also relevant to the particular period studied here are the effects of modernism, with its emphasis on the authoritative and often male voice, on the intergenerational transmission of traditional, female knowledge. How did the mothers and daughters of the early to mid twentieth century negotiate these voices? Quilting is just one skill set or body of knowledge that many women did not have the time or feel the importance to fully pass along to the next generation.

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APPENDIX A

Unknown, Log Cabin, Chevron Quilt, c. 1900. Verona, Frontenac County, Quilts and Other Bed Coverings, by Ruth McKendry, fig.419.

APPENDIX B

Front Cover, Country Living Nov. 1991.

APPENDIX C

Front Cover, Better Homes and Gardens Feb. 1999.