

The Vermont Quiltsearch

A project to document quilts in Vermont before their histories are lost

TIPS ON CARE, REPAIR AND STORAGE OF ANTIQUE QUILTS

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An antique quilt when properly cared for can last for generations. However, each quilt is an individual. Care and/or storage will vary depending upon the situation. After reading all of the suggestions you must use your own judgment in applying the information to your quilt. Each quilt is a handmade work of art deserving respect and proper care.

1. The most important piece of advice for care of any antique quilt is this: **NEVER STORE A QUILT IN A PLASTIC BAG.** Quilts are made of natural fibers which need to breathe; sealing in plastic causes deterioration and discoloration. Instead, store your quilt in well-washed muslin or in acid-free paper.
2. It is acceptable to transport a quilt in a plastic bag; however, we do suggest using a clear bag so the contents will be seen and not taken for trash.
3. If quilts are not kept on rolls, they should be refolded at least twice a year, always being certain to fold on different lines. Fold lines are a serious problem and cause eventual breakage as well as soiling and discoloration.
4. If you have information about the quilt, write it on a piece of paper. A pocket may be made of cotton and attached to the back of the quilt with long running stitches to contain this provenance. Another method used is to type information on a piece of muslin using a fabric ribbon typewriter. This can then be sewn to the back of the quilt as suggested above.
5. Quilts should never be stored in attics or basements which are subject to severe temperature changes. Do allow a quilt to be in direct contact with wood, such as a cedar chest. After time the wood causes color changes to appear that cannot be removed. If you wish to store a quilt in such an area, be sure the quilt or its cover does not touch the wood.
6. Quilts sometimes get a musty odor from being stored. This does not mean that the quilt is soiled or that it needs washing – it needs airing. A quilt can be aired outside on a cloudy day with a gentle breeze. We suggest using several clothes lines to distribute the weight of the quilt evenly. First put a sheet over the lines, then the quilt and then another sheet on top. If airing in this manner is not possible, the quilt may be spread on an unused bed for several days.
7. The risk in cleaning an antique quilt is so great that if you feel airing is not enough, we suggest that it be done only if absolutely necessary and after consulting an experienced textile person *and* only after investigating all other methods available to you (see bibliography).

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8. Repair of quilts falls under two categories: conservation and restoration. By definition, conservation is the maintenance and preservation or protection of a quilt in its original state. Restoration is the renewing of a quilt by adding new fabric to try to return it to its nearly original appearance. In stabilizing an antique quilt, we recommend the route of conservation, *i.e.*, covering broken or worn areas with a very fine bridal illusion (also known as tulle) or with silk crepe line, thus giving strength and stability to the affected area. Attach the material using long running stitches with a very fine needle and cotton thread for cotton or wool quilts, and silk thread for silk quilts.

Adapted from material on the care of quilts prepared by Karey P. Bresenhan, President of Quilts, Inc., of Houston, TX.

For further information on professional cleaning or conservation, contact the following:

The Textile Conservation Workshop
Main Street
South Salem NY 10590
914-763-5805

Bibliography

Kelly, Helen, *Dating Quilts from 1800 to the Present*,. Lafayette, CA: C&T Publishing, 1995

Puentes, Nancy O'Bryant, *First Aid for Family Quilts*. Wheatridge, CO: Moon Over the Mountain Publishing Co., 1987

For information on scheduling a quilt documentation or appraisal day in your area, please contact Richard Cleveland, POB 261, Northfield, VT 05663; 802-485-8892; e-mail markii@tds.net