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The Quilt Index is a groundbreaking digital collection and a model for online access to material-specific collections. The Quilt Index is a partnership of The Alliance for American Quilts, MATRIX: Center for Humane Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Online and Michigan State University Museum. Currently featuring thousands of quilts, it will soon contain digital images and history on more than 50,000 quilts. Contributors from 25 museums, libraries, universities and state documentation projects are already participating in this unmatched virtual collection. Fully funded to grow and expand through 2010, the Quilt Index is now poised to become one of the largest test beds for digital humanities and cultural heritage resources on-line. Online access allows these items to be viewed and studied without harming the often-fragile originals.

Stored and served in MATRIX's next generation Kora repository, the database integrates objects contributed from many institutions (actual digitized objects as images or text, not just bibliographic records). Contributors to the Quilt Index come from across the country; and additional potential partners are located in every state in the US and internationally. Currently entering Phase 4, the Quilt Index will significantly enrich its impact by diversifying its presentation of object types to include ephemera such as journals, diaries, quilt patterns, newspaper columns, and quilt catalogs. At the same time it will advance networking and presentation tools to allow broad public participation as well as carefully curated galleries, essays, and teaching resources drawn from The Quilt Index and across the web.

Phase 1: Planning and Piloting (complete)
- Establish Task Force (The Alliance key as national organization dedicated to quilt objects)
- Survey regional, state, and international quilt documentation efforts (led by MSU Museum)
- Develop extensive metadata scheme for quilts “Comprehensive Fields” and core scheme “Core Fields” (MATRIX)

Phase 2: Implementation (complete)
- Implement scheme with four pilot contributors (Illinois State Museum, Quilts of Tennessee, MSU Museum, Kentucky Quilt Project, Inc.)
- Revise comprehensive fields based on active usage
- Develop and launch of site with 2000 quilt objects

Phase 3: Institutionalization and Expansion to Critical Mass (in progress)
- Expand contributors and adapt scheme to include significant museum objects
- Scale to include large numbers of quilts
- Plan and pilot journal articles in addition to quilt objects
- Evaluate QI use for teachers, students and researchers
- Publish processes, training manuals, specifications, as leadership documents
- Establish editorial board, application processes, sustainability measures
- Plan for private collections

Phase 4: Tools and Ephemera (in progress)
- Diversify content -- digitize and build collections of quilt-related materials
- Develop and implement online tools to enhance use, analysis, and publication
- Build galleries, lesson plans, and essays from targeted curators, teachers and researchers
- Establish infrastructure and capacity for public object submissions
- Build wiki and social networking capacity along with training and user guides
- Increase the capacity and utility of The Quilt Index collection for target audiences
- Evaluate the development and usability of tools
- Increase use across disciplines by scholars, researchers and an interested public
- Increase knowledge and use of physical collections

Partners

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URL
http://www.quitindex.org

Graveyard
Period: 1850-1875
Location Made: USA
Project Name: Kentucky Quilt Project
Institution & Contributor: University of Louisville Archives and Records Center

This quilt, made near the end of the Civil War reflects a period of national mourning. Elizabeth Roseberry Mitchell, the maker of the quilt, designed the quilt with a series of appliquéd coffins along the border of the textile and a center “graveyard.” As family members died, she moved coffins from the border to the graveyard. A book on Mitchell was authored by quilt scholar Linda Ow Lipsett (Halstead & Meadows Publishing, 1995).

Coat of Many Colors
Period: 1976-1999
Location Made: Gees Bend, Alabama (AL) USA
Project Name: Kentucky Quilt Project
Institution: International Quilt Study Center
Contributor: University of Louisville Archives and Records Center

This quilt was made circa 1980 by members of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Quilting Bee in Gees Bend, Alabama. It provides documentation of the importance of religion among some quiltmaking groups as well as an example of quilting that can be compared to other quilts from the Gees Bend area.

Masonic Appliquéd
Period: 1930-1949
Project Name: Michigan State University
Museum Collection
Institution & Contributor: Michigan State University Museum

This quilt made sometime between 1930-1949 includes boldly colored, appliquéd symbols used in Masonic rites.

Sun Sets on Sunbonnet Sue
Period: 1976-1999
Location Made: Lawrence, Kansas (KS)
Project Name: Michigan State University
Museum Collection
Institution & Contributor: Michigan State University Museum

Made in 1976 by a group of women in Lawrence Kansas, Sun Sets on Sunbonnet Sue not only reflects a sense of dark humor on the part of the quilters but illustrates national and international events as well as social issues that were important to that period. The quilt has been the focus of popular and academic papers, especially within feminist studies.