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West Virginia Quilts and Quiltmakers: Echoes from the Hills

Fawn Valentine

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Tucked away in the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia, preserved for generations, handmade bed quilts are windows into the past. In 1983, three West Virginia county extension agents discussed the need to locate and document their state's historic quilts. Mary Nell Godbey, Margaret Meador, and Mary Lou Schmidt joined with other concerned women to found the West Virginia Heritage Quilt Search.

The search focused on documenting quilts made in West Virginia before 1940, which marked the end of a fertile period in American quilt history and the beginning of a decline in quiltmaking that would continue until the 1970s. Ultimately, the search registered more than 4,000 quilts.

This effort has culminated in ***West Virginia Quilts and Quiltmakers: Echoes from the Hills***, published by Ohio University Press on November 1, 2000, in association with the West Virginia Heritage Quilt Search, Inc. The book includes 159 color photographs of selected quilts, with maps showing where they were made, a database analysis of the statewide survey, and the oral histories of descendants of quiltmakers.

“Quilts warm the body and the soul,” says Valentine. “A quilt can wrap the psyche in a loving embrace. Family quilts are symbols of bloodlines reaching across decades and generations.”

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