

As the country grew so did the art of quilt making and many lovely patterns were the result. Quilting Bees were an important social event in the community in olden days. A time for work and the exchange of patterns, a time for fun and laughter, and a time for catching up on the latest news. When tea and cakes were served, many quilters were loathe to leave an unfinished square. Once started a square must be finished, that's part of the "unwritten quilter's code." Quilting was not a spectator's sport, everyone became involved — young and old, married or single. Putting the quilt in the frames, chalking or marking the design for the quilting, rolling the quilt as it was gradually completed, threading needles, etc. — all were jobs that an amateur could help with, at least until she also became a dedicated lover of the art of quilting. Many a husband has been pressed into helping set up the frames, before the company arrived. Often he became so interested that he too tried his hand at weaving the needle and thread through the layers of fabric and batting, with quite passable results.

In good quilting the stitches should be small and evenly spaced, making about 8 stitches to the inch. This came with practice. Fortunate was the group that boasted a good left-handed quilter. Many awkward corners were so much neater and easier done with the left hand.

Some lovely, special quilts were made, such as the "Bridal Wreath" for a daughter's "Hope Chest," or perhaps an "Autographed" quilt made by the church members for a beloved pastor and his wife as they left for a new charge.

Many quilting bees turned into a party when the men came in the evening to escort their womenfolk home. If a fiddler or a mouth organ player and a caller were present, a good old fashioned "Hoe Down" ended the happy day. From these occasions came many romances and this led to the need for more quilts and more quilting parties.

Recently quilting has enjoyed a comeback and is as valuable and as relevant today as it was in pioneer days. It is a practical and informal way to make friends and become part of the community. It is a link with the past, with our Grandparents and our Great Grandparents, and with those who cared enough to leave with us those treasured "Heirloom Quilts" of yesterday.

THE QUILTING PARTY

Old Song

*"In the sky the bright stars glittered, On the bank the pale moon shone;
And 'twas from Aunt Dinah's quilting party I was seeing Nellie home.
I was seeing Nellie home — I was seeing Nellie home;
And 'twas from Aunt Dinah's quilting party I was seeing Nellie home."*