

When I was invited by the guild to prepare a special exhibition for the quilt show I was totally unsure what to do. As an appraiser, I see so many wonderful quilts (some questionable) but they are all a work of art. My decision to bring in *The Canada Packers Quilts* came from a question I received about 4 years ago while visiting Winnipeg, Manitoba. I was asked at that time by Uli Thenhaus if I knew what happened to the *Canada Packer Quilts*?

Four years ago, I knew nothing about them. I heard them mentioned a couple of times but that was it. So I came home and did a little sleuthing only to realize it would be a topic I would have to look into more deeply at another time. Doing this exhibition was my opportunity to do my research.

It seemed when I travelled to a lot of the rural areas and appraised quilts, that the Agricultural Fair winners would appear. I even had a few *Canada Packer* runner up quilts cross my table. So again, that little voice appeared, I have to look into this collection.

When I visited our Ontario collection, located at the [Country Heritage Park](#), I noticed they had the quilts, but the story was not written for the public to understand exactly what took place in order for this collection to evolve. I have spent quite a few hours researching and traveling to pull this all together and it makes me feel good to have completed it.

What are the Canada Packers Quilts?

These quilts represented Ontario's best from over 2,000 entries at rural fairs during the period of 1979-1997. This competition was held in co-operation with the Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies.

I now know that in 1976 the original (8) quilts of the collection had been collected and were not part of the competition. These quilts were purchased from private individuals by an associate of the company at that time.

The Competition

The first competition started in 1978 with the winner being announced in 1979. At this time the Ontario competition was the only competition being held. Anyone could enter the quilt competition at the local fair which was an association with OAAS. The winner at the local fair then competed at a District competition; this winner in turn competed at the Provincial Competition and the winner was announced at the OAAS annual convention. The Grand Champion Quilt was added to the Canada Packers collection. A monetary award was given to the winners.

The Ontario *Canada Packer Quilt Competition* was eventually one of 3 quilt competition collection projects that stopped abruptly and no one ever heard about again. Manitoba and Alberta also started their collections with their agricultural societies. Our Ontario collection hangs on display at the Country Heritage Park in Milton, the Manitoba collection is in a museum in Austen, Manitoba and the Alberta collection is currently not located....(still working on this)

This Exhibit

Quilts over time have many styles and designs. In order to appreciate the existence of these quilts one should be aware of the background of quilt history and realize how these quilts fit into the period 1970 to 1990. This was a *period in time* when these particular fabrics and patterns were used. The quilts reflect these fashion trends. It was a time of....

- ✓ **Themes:** make love not war; go back to nature; pop culture; social protests; multinational textile artists
- ✓ **Self Expression:** baby boomers express themselves using clothes, handmade items, and changing dress codes, (anything goes),
- ✓ **Fabric:** synthetic fabrics, blending synthetics with natural fabrics; polyester suits and pants; read the label easy care - wash and wear
- ✓ **Fabric designs :** large in scale, flower power, Hawaiian influence, geometric designs; screen printing; near eastern; other ethnic patterns; spandex;
- ✓ **Colours:** hot pinks, orange, neon green, chartreuse, golden yellow,
- ✓ electric blue, aqua, turquoise, purple and fushia; from pure white to off white
- ✓ **Embellishment:** Simple checks, puckered nylon fabric woven fabric with a metallic silver or gold thread; ribbons & bows in 1980s.
- ✓ **Quilting techniques :** all types were used included -ribbons & bows; ropes & tassels; appliqued fabrics; embroideries; patchwork;
- ✓ **Patterns:** very popular and publishing of patterns still takes place;
- ✓ **New quilting tools:** --the rotary cutter, iron on transfers,
- ✓ **Batting :** the type and composition changed (polyester) - affected the quilting

In the power point presentation you will see an introduction by Murray Stewart, from Ontario he was the person who put this competition all together; Uli Thenhaus from Winnipeg, Manitoba and the movie "Patterns of Love" created in 1979 which discussed the origin and history of quilting, its decline and resurgence with two of our quilt historians at that time.

As you will see, I have now been able to answer Uli's question about the Canada Packer Quilt Collections. I hope bringing these quilts back into the limelight, will help us appreciate all quilts in all periods of time. What I did find fascinating was that this company under the direction of Murray Stewart, who coordinated this collection realized how the art of quilting was making a revival across Canada. This was just after the Great American Quilt Revival show known as "Abstract Design in American Quilts" was held at the Whitney Museum in New York in 1971. Quilts then were taken off the beds and put on the walls. Quilting went from a craft to an art. I hope that you enjoy seeing these quilts as much as I have in finding them and putting them in the context of Canadian Quilting History.