

THE CATAWISSA QUILT

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One day recently a carton arrived at the Society counter. Inside was a very special donation to our museum collection: a large antique quilt, a gift from Mary von Dorster of Groton, Connecticut, whose family was originally from Catawissa in Columbia County.



This handsome gift is a “friendship quilt” of a type common in the middle of the Nineteenth century. Such quilts recognize a circle of friends and/or relatives whose names are inscribed on the fabric. Often these quilts were made for a family member departing to a far-away new settlement so that the migrant could carry along a reminder of friends and family “back home.”



The gift quilt has twenty-five squares, each stitched with a circular appliqué wreath of green leaves and red flowers in a common design. In the middle of each wreath one or more names were inscribed in brown ink, all by one writer (that is, not a signature by each person). The quilt is in remarkably good condition: though the background white fabric is somewhat yellowed with age, the leaves and flowers are vibrantly colored and the ink inscriptions are still clearly legible.

Ms. Von Dorster’s accompanying letter noted that she believes the quilt was a product of Catawissa, and subsequent research has supported that family tradition. The donor received the quilt from her aunt, Mary Elizabeth von Dorster, who was a great-granddaughter of one of the couples inscribed on the quilt, “S. D. & Elizabeth Rinard.” Solomon Dyer Rinard (1827-1910), a native of Shamokin, came as a boy to Catawissa, where he later worked as a tinsmith and then a well-known merchant, postmaster, and finally president of the town’s first National Bank.

The kinship connections among the forty-six persons named on the quilt are partly indicated by the arrangement of the squares in a pattern of five across by five down. For convenience in reference, the squares have been arbitrarily numbered as follows:

1 2 3 4 5
 6 7 8 9 10
 11 12 13 14 15
 16 17 18 19 20
 21 22 23 24 25

The family with the most persons recorded on the quilt is that of George and Elizabeth (Johnston) Frederick (square #8). They lived in Catawissa and at the time of the 1850 federal census, when they were about 50 years old, they had eight children in their household. All of those children are also listed on the quilt: Martin (born c1833) and Anna (1835) in square #23, Akaias (1836) and Owen (1838) in #4, and Sarah (1841), Eunice (1843) and Azenith (1847) in square #24. The oldest child in the 1850 household, George age 21, was probably already married by the year the quilt was made and is represented in the pair George & Sarah Frederick (#22).

The Frederick family had children older than George who were out of the house by the time of the 1850 census, and among them, probably, was son William, who is recorded in square #13, just under the parents, along with his wife Angeline C. (Hartenstine) and William H., who is probably their son. William H. died as an infant of just a week old on February 18, 1850; his father apparently died at about the same time, for he wasn't recorded in the 1850 federal census that summer, and Angeline Fredericks was recorded in the Reading, PA household of Nicholas Mervine.

Angeline is, then, the link to several other names on the Catawissa quilt. She was born in Chester County in 1825 to farmers John (1796-1882) and Sarah Hartenstine (#17). Her siblings included these Hartenstines on the quilt: Cyrus (1838-1916) and Peter (1842-1916) (#18) and Eliza and Evalina (born in 1827 and 1836, both died in 1837; named in square #9). Henry S. Hartenstine (#14) may also have been a brother.



Angeline's residing with a Mervine in Reading is the connection to another set of relations, the Mervines. In 1813 her aunt (?) Hannah Hottenstein/Hartenstine married Nicholas Mervine (1782-1821), and Hannah is named in square #2 along with her granddaughter Sarah. Her son Nicholas (1817-1953) and Rebecca (his wife?) are in #21. Also of Reading are Samuel and Catherine Stackhouse (#11), whose relation to the Mervines isn't apparent.

Angeline later was linked also to the Rinards. Solomon D. Rinard's wife Elizabeth died in 1854 leaving one child, Mary Elizabeth (who became Mrs. Herbert Von Dorster and handed down the quilt). Shortly after his first wife's death, Solomon

married widow Angeline and they had three children. The fact that the quilt names Solomon with Elizabeth, and Angeline with William Fredericks, likely dates the quilt's origin to the period 1850-1854.

Other names on the quilt haven't been positively identified: Henry Stratten and Mrs. Leib (#3), Henrietta Currier (#6), Sarah Fortner (#5), Samuel Evans (#10), George & William Taylor (#15), Mary Beets (#20), and Mr. & Mrs. Boas (#25). The placement of five of these squares down the right edge of the quilt may hint at some non-kinship relation. If you can provide any information about one or more of these names, please contact the Society.

And please, if you have an opportunity, come to the Library and admire this fascinating testimonial to kinship and friendship in Catawissa more than 160 years in the past. For a short time, the quilt is hanging in the hallway between the Children's Library and the Society room.