

***Continuing Education,
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Feedsacks and all Their Uses
By Susan T Franklin PhD***

Many of us remember feedsacks from our childhood. I do. How about you? As a child, I had an aunt and uncle who lived on a farm. Thus, many feedsacks came the way of my talented mother. My aunt and uncle had three boys; my parents had three daughters and one son. So, doesn't it make sense to give feedsacks to my mother who could easily use them?

Perhaps you slept under a quilt that had patches made from feedsacks or dried dishes with a feedsack towel. Whether the feedsacks came from flour, sugar, grain, feed, or seed, they had many uses.

For years, feedsacks weren't tempting to collect; however, that's changed. Feedsack clubs have surfaced around the country and interest in them continues to grow. In spite of that, *Webster's 9th Collegiate Dictionary* doesn't include the term! However, a whole sector of rural America evokes many happy memories of that "common" fabric. Sometimes, feedsacks were called textile bags and even "chicken linen." They were made of cotton or burlap and either loosely or tightly woven.

Americans used only barrels, boxes, or tins to store things for the first 200 years of United States history. According to Anna Lue Cook, author of *Textile Bags*, fabric bags were mentioned in the first half of the 19th century. They were made of homespun, handsewn and expensive to use. People wanted to convert from using barrels to bags, but no one could sew a strong enough seam. The bags would burst! What do you think changed that picture?

The invention of the sewing machine in 1846 it possible. The seam was stronger and the "bag" was born. It made the farmer's life easier to throw a bag of corn over a horse and take it to a mill and again, throw it over the horse to bring it home.

Bags grew in popularity and when they became too fragile for their intended purpose, the farm wife took over. She used the bags to create household products and clothing for both girls and boys and underwear for all. Curtains, napkins, pillow cases; probably whatever she felt her family needed.

For many housewives, feedsacks were all they had to make clothing for their families. Manufacturers were quick to see the emerging market for feedsacks. They added more color and pattern to the sack. Their philosophy: make them prettier and they will buy our bags. Competition grew and choices became more varied. Likely, the housewife, encouraged her spouse to buy products in feedsacks that would be most useful for her sewing needs.

The credit for designing printed feedsacks goes to Richard Peek, a salesman for Percy Kent, who first had the idea of printed feedsacks. Initially, these were called “Kenprints”. Would you believe that art directors were hired to determine the designs? Roses, lambs, lilacs, dots, children, and ducks were some choices used.

Gloria Nixon’s book, *Feedsack Quilts, Fashions from Hard Times*, has many wonderful examples. This book happens to be a reference book available at our *Quilt Documentation* meetings. Gloria notes that the patterned feedsack also is known as the dress print bag. In her book, she showcases fabrics with designs of cowboy scenes, fruit, birds, farm animals, children, nursery prints and more. A cowboy sack pictured (p107) once held 25# of flour and also has saguaro and prickly pear cactus plants.

I’ve brought four of my quilts to share with you. These include: 1) My childhood doll quilt with a farm print feedsack on the back, 2) Another doll quilt that I made for a quilt club challenge; again, the back fabric is a feedsack, 3) A miniature quilt I purchased from an elderly woman in Henryetta, Oklahoma; its back is a feedsack, and 4) finally, a doll quilt made entirely from feedsacks. Carol Hood, a friend from the *Arizona Quilt Study Group* (AQSG) gave it to me in 2012. At the previous AQSG meeting, I had done a presentation to the group on *Doll Quilts*. You can

imagine my surprise to receive this lovely quilt from Carol. I also have fabric pieces from feedsacks to share as well as some pictures.