

***The Quilts of Red and Green***  
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Jeana Kimball, in her book, *Red and Green, An Appliqué Tradition*, notes that during the mid-1800s, almost without exception, red and green quilts were stitched on a white ground. Accent colors typically were pink, yellow and sometimes blue. In Pennsylvania, strong shades of these colors, such as deep yellows and blues plus pumpkin orange were favored, while softer yellows and pinks were popular in the south.

An exception to the white ground was the discovery of several quilts made in Alamance and the adjoining counties in North Carolina. There, a yellow background is generally used rather than white or cream. It's unclear why the color choices of red and green seldom varied. Perhaps because mid-nineteenth century beds were decorated with accessories or green or crimson harrateen, an English fabric of linen or wool used chiefly for curtains or bed coverings in the 18th or early 19<sup>th</sup> century, or valences of chintz or richly embroidered line, theorize Patsy and Myron Orlofsky, in their book, *Quilts in America*. The authors conclude that quilts of red and green would harmonize very well with this color scheme.

Also, about 1850, a new aniline dye that produced a more colorfast product was introduced. Green first was produced by dyeing the fabric yellow and then overdyeing it with blue, or the reverse. About that time, too, Turkey red, another colorfast winner, entered the market. Surely the combination of those color advancements had an impact on the quilt maker using the fabrics to make quilts of red and green. It's important to realize, too, this period was the guilded age of appliqué. *Baltimore Album* appliqué was prominent from about 1845-1850. Thus, the fondness of appliqué carried over into the making of appliquéd red and green quilts.

A flower pot block first appeared in the middle to late nineteenth century. *Red and Green Four Block Flower Pot* quilts flourished and were repeated in spite of many obstacles. For example, no printed pattern existed until early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, per *Baltimore Album* expert, Marylou McDonald, as there was no paper large enough to accommodate such a large block (36" x 36"). Also, the block is complicated, so it seems unlikely a woman would make the block to mail to a friend so she could then use it as a pattern. Like most quilts, there are variations from quilt to quilt. Quilt makers, then and now, liked to express their individuality, but usually with their use of borders.

I have such a block in progress, *Pot of Flowers*, primarily red and green with touches of yellow, and probably originally one of a four block quilt. This block also has 72 circles! That will take some time to accomplish. Another project that I just finished hand quilting, a bell pull, I chose to do in mostly red and green is a reproduction of an 1851 border of a *Baltimore Album* appliqué quilt.

“Best” quilts in Red and Green, per Kimball, usually were stitched together minus sashing between blocks. However, if the quilt maker did use sashing, it was very narrow so it didn’t detract from the overall bold design of the appliqué. Sometimes, blocks were set with alternating white blocks in order that either stuffed (trapunto) work or intricate quilting might be used. Usually, these quilts had very large borders with intricate trailing vines that complemented the appliqué within the body of the quilt. A notable exception is the quilts of Susan McCord, an Indiana farmwife. Susan McCord had so many wonderful border ideas that her quilts likely had a different border on each side. *The Henry Ford Museum*, in Detroit, Michigan houses the collection of Susan McCord. A number of years ago it had a special exhibit honoring Susan and her quilts.

Nancy Hornbeck and Terry Clothier Thompson, in their book, *Quilts in Red and Green, and the Women Who Made Them*, reviewed 10 quilts from a study of 147 such quilts, documented in 1987-88, by the *Kansas Quilt Project*. They noted the quilts were part of a migration path that stretched from Pennsylvania through the Ohio Valley states to the Midwest. They learned most quilts appliquéd in the 19<sup>th</sup> century used a color palette of red and green. Because the colors had been readily available since about 1840, it became popular for quilt makers to continue what already was a popular color scheme. During the first half of the 1800s, as the Orlofskys noted, the colors were used for many home furnishings. Choosing them for appliqué became a natural extension. Appliqué quilts usually were floral, whether they were made in Baltimore and became the treasured *Baltimore Album* quilts or if made in red and green and stitched elsewhere.

Red and green appliqué quilts appeared first, during a general increase in quilt making in America, state Hornbeck and Thompson. While once a popular art form with the upper class, it spread to the middle class and flourished quickly. Social changes made needlework an acceptable form of activity. Also, immigrants from Europe to the mid-Atlantic region brought their love of strong colors and bold designs. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a spirit of restlessness prevailed and a willingness to try something new...whether it be in needlework or in trying to settle our great country to the west.

Usually, appliqué projects featured realistic modes. *Broderie perse* was common, using expensive chintz to design beautiful blocks. However, as fabrics changed and became less costly, women were free to use their imagination and determine the shape of the cutouts for their appliqué. The shift in technique was basic to the beginning of quilts of red and green. The maker could experiment, invent and also create a need for appliqué patterns.

Conclusions from the Kansas study mentioned earlier indicated that 95% of the makers were Protestant with the remaining five percent being Catholic. Almost all lived in either rural areas or small towns. In general, the quilt makers were middle class women. These women did an amazing job of creating beautiful quilts of red and green!