

The Two Great American Quilt Revivals West Valley Quilt Study April 2019

1st Revival: <http://worldquilts.quiltstudy.org/americanstory/business/birthofmodern>

Between 1890 and 1930, Americans experienced a cultural shift from a society built around production to one centered on consumption. A culture of consumption became the means to the “good life.”

Quilts and the modern businesses that sold patterns, kits, and completed bedcovers were part of this shift toward modern consumer culture, emphasizing mass production, standardization, novelty, and branding. Mass consumer culture emerged along with the rise of big business, industrial advances, and the massive migration of Americans and new immigrants to the cities.

Because more women worked for wages by this time, but were still responsible for managing households, women of all classes became the primary consumers. Retail stores, magazines, and catalogs marketed fashion, cosmetics, home décor, and hobby items—including the knowledge and products required to quilt—to women.

In the midst of these great cultural changes, quilts and other manifestations of the Colonial Revival allowed women to recall a simpler, pre-industrial time through their home décor. Paradoxically, modern marketing and production processes made these Colonial Revival fashions possible.

Women were in the middle of quilt businesses, whether as magazine editors, small business owners, or workers in quilt cottage industries. Entrepreneurs created products to satisfy consumers’ desires, and used advertising, publishing, and the affordability of nationwide mail service to expand their reach. The success of some of these women made them household names.

2nd Revival: http://www.womenfolk.com/quilting_history/bicentennial-quilts.htm

As Early as the Beginning of the 1960s

In the April, 1961 edition of "Women's Day" magazine we find a preview of what was to come. Rose Wilder Lane, daughter of Laura Ingalls Wilder of "Little House on the Prairie" fame, wrote an article titled “Patchwork”. The romantic bit of history in her article included the same misconceptions found in books on quilting written during the Colonial Revival of the 1920s and 30s. The American Quilt Study Group would not begin serious research on quilt history until 1980 so Rose Wilder Lane wrote what was thought to be true at the time.

Soon the Back to Nature Movement Encouraged Old Style Craftsmanship

Just a few years later the back-to-nature movement inspired people to explore crafts from earlier times in history including patchwork. Hippies and communes may have led the way in this movement but others were influenced to try their hand at crafts.

Then Came the Quilt Exhibit at the Whitney Museum

Jonathan Holstein and Gail van der Hoof began collecting quilts at the end of the 1960s. Instead of looking only for fine museum quality quilts they chose quilts they found to be of the "greatest visual interest and impact". 1 In 1971 they were able to display the most fascinating of their quilts at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City.

America's 200th Birthday Inspired Even More to Become Quilters

When the Bicentennial celebration occurred in 1976 quilts made in honor of the occasion were popular along with parades and ceremonies that included burying time capsules.

Quilting and Fabrics During This Period

The 1960s showed a gradual increase in women wanting to learn to quilt and by the 1970s a few quilt guilds had formed. Popular women's magazines began to include more articles about quilt projects. Interest in quilting was on the rise.

Quilters used the fabric at hand which was often double knit. Serious quilters searched high and low to find what they called 'real cotton'. Some 100% cotton fabric could be found, but not easily. Meanwhile quilters put pressure on the fabric industry to produce more all cotton fabric.