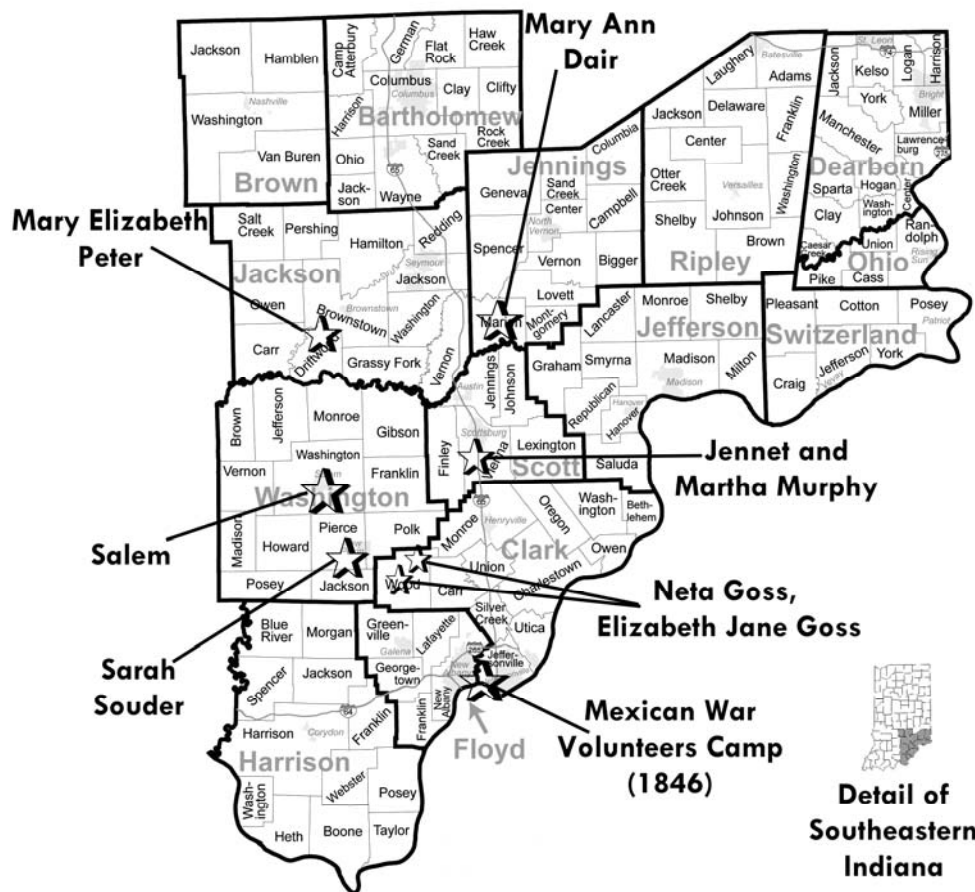


TRACING THE GENEALOGY  
OF A SOUTHERN INDIANA QUILT PATTERN  
by TERI KLASSEN



**FIGURE 1**—Southern Indiana counties with approximate points-of-origin of the Polk's Fancy quilts and the Mexican War volunteers rendezvous (1846). Map from [http://www.stats.indiana.edu/maptools/maps/boundary/townships\\_2000/region6\\_townships.pdf](http://www.stats.indiana.edu/maptools/maps/boundary/townships_2000/region6_townships.pdf). Source: Census 2000 TIGER files. Map produced by the Indiana Business Research Center, Indiana University Kelley School of Business. Reprinted with permission.

A certain quilt pattern is intertwined with the history of some southern Indiana families around the time of the Mexican War (1846-1848). Quilts with this unusual pattern

have been found among descendants of some families who were living at that time in the counties of Clark, Washington, Scott, Jackson and Jennings (see Figure 1).

GENEALOGY OF A SOUTHERN INDIANA QUILT PATTERN (continued)



**FIGURE 2**—Polk’s Fancy quilt, Neta (Goss) McGinnis, 1846. Quilt courtesy of Washington County Historical Society. Photograph by Teri Klassen.

The pattern is a difficult one, with about 40 pieces in each pattern block and typically 6, 10 or 15 pattern blocks per quilt, as well as sometimes elaborate borders and often extensive quilting. The only known record of the pattern’s name, “Polk’s Fancy,” was found at the Stevens Memorial Museum in Salem, Indiana. The Minute Book of the Washington County Historical Society, which is at the museum, has an entry on page 269, dated September 30, 1933, which lists three quilts donated by the quiltmaker’s son:

“Quilt—Thought to be “Polk’s Fancy”—initials N. G. 1846. Made by Mrs. Nettie Goss McGinnis—before her marriage. Presented by son—John McGinnis of Martinsburg.

Quilt—“Rose of Sharon”—early design made by Mrs. N. G. McGinnis 1842—initials N. G. presented by son John McGinnis.



**FIGURE 3**—Polk’s Fancy quilt, detail, Neta (Goss) McGinnis. Signed and dated “18 N.G. 46.” Quilt and photograph courtesy of Washington County Historical Society.

Quilt—Woolen Album Quilt—made by Mrs. McGinnis in old age—1894—Presented by son—John McGinnis.”

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**GENEALOGY OF A SOUTHERN INDIANA QUILT PATTERN (continued)**

That John McGinnis (1861-1941) remembered the names of these quilts 37 years after his mother's 1896 death is remarkable. Perhaps she talked of them often or had written them down at some point. Neta McGinnis (also called Nettie, Netty, Nellie and Neaty in family records and obituaries) had no surviving grandchildren. If she had, they probably would have inherited these quilts and the name of the Polk's Fancy pattern might never have been publicly recorded.

The names and patterns of the other two quilts McGinnis donated, Rose of Sharon and Album, are well-known and widespread, but the Polk's Fancy name was previously unknown and the pattern is rare (see Figure 2).

The name, Polk's Fancy, along with the 1846 date embroidered on the quilt (see Figure 3), reference a time when James K.

Polk was president (1845-1849) and some 2,800 Indiana volunteers rendezvoused at an Ohio River camp en route to joining General Zachary Taylor in the war on Mexico (June and July 1846).

Neta Goss would have been about 28 years old then and still single. Her family's Clark County farm was 15 to 20 miles northwest of the camp (see Figure 1). Another Polk's Fancy quiltmaker, Elizabeth Jane (Goss) Martin, also lived in Clark County's Wood Township and was a daughter of Neta's cousin, David Goss.

Local accounts of the Mexican War appear in several county histories of the late 1800's and early 1900's (Allen, Brown, Carroll, Cass, Clark, Clay, Daviess, Dearborn, Decatur, Greene, Johnson, Lawrence, LaPorte, Monroe, Montgomery, Orange, Owen,



**FIGURE 4**—Thomas and Elizabeth Jane (Goss) Martin, taken sometime before Thomas' death in 1893. Photograph courtesy of Alma Deckard and Mary Lee Deckard.

**GENEALOGY OF A SOUTHERN INDIANA QUILT PATTERN (continued)**

Vigo, Wabash and Washington). For an overview, see R. C. Buley's article "Indiana in the Mexican War" in the *Indiana Magazine of History* (September 1919, December 1919 and March 1920 issues).

I have not found any evidence that any of the Polk's Fancy quiltmakers had family members in the war, although it should be noted that the lists of Mexican War veterans are incomplete. The time period and the quiltmakers' proximity to the volunteers' camp suggest that the pattern name may have been an expression of the patriotism that swept Indiana at the beginning of the war. Although women could not vote, they presented themselves as enlightened citizens

when they used political quilt names.

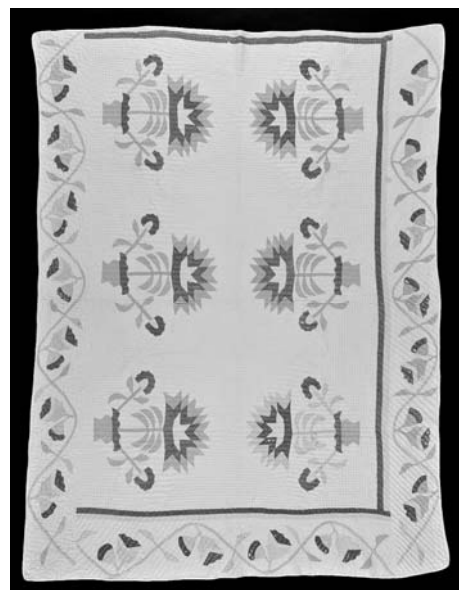
The Polk's Fancy quiltmakers also presented themselves as refined and up-to-date in choosing a difficult pattern in a fancy, then-fashionable quilt style: red and green floral figures on a white background. This also relates to their proximity to the Ohio River, which was a conduit for fashions and goods from the more industrialized and culturally established East.

Finally, for the several quiltmakers with German heritage, quilting can be seen as an example of their Americanization process, since Germany had no bed-quilt tradition.

The family-of-origin is fairly certain for



**FIGURE 5**—Polk's Fancy quilt, Elizabeth Jane (Goss) Martin, ca. late 1840's. Quilt courtesy of Alma Deckard and Mary Lee Deckard. Photograph by Michael Cavanagh and Kevin Montague.



**FIGURE 6**—Polk's Fancy quilt, probably Mary Elizabeth (Peter) Lubker, ca. late 1840's. Quilt courtesy of April Yorks. Photograph by Michael Cavanagh and Kevin Montague.

**GENEALOGY OF A SOUTHERN INDIANA QUILT PATTERN (continued)**



**FIGURE 7**—Polk's Fancy quilt, detail, Sarah (Souder) Johnson, probably late 1840's original, re-sized ca. 1860. Photograph and quilt courtesy of Adelia Hanson.

six of the ten Polk's Fancy quilts that have been discovered so far, but exactly which family member made the quilt and when is not always clear. My current theory is that the pattern was a local fad at the time of the Mexican War and had special appeal for single German-American young women born around 1830.

Brief accounts of each of these quiltmakers follows, along with grateful acknowledgment of the many people who have helped with my research. Any errors, of course, are my responsibility.

\* **Neta Goss (1818-1896), Figures 2 and 3.** Her German-American parents migrated from North Carolina to Clark County, Indiana between 1810 and 1814. She married William McGinnis in 1853 and is buried at Bethlehem Presbyterian Cemetery in Jackson Township, Washington County. Research assistance came from Martha Bowers, Willie

Harlen and a comprehensive Goss family genealogy at the Stevens Memorial Museum.

\* **Elizabeth Jane Goss (1833-1907), Figures 4 and 5.** Like Neta's parents, Elizabeth's German-American grandparents came from North Carolina to Clark County, Indiana. The initials appliquéd in one corner of the quilt, "E J G," indicate that she made it before she married Thomas Martin in 1850 and moved north to Monroe County. She is buried in Bloomington's Rose Hill Cemetery. The quilt is in the possession of her descendants in Bloomington. Research assistance came from Alma Deckard, Mary Lee Deckard, Janet Cooter, and the Goss genealogy.

\* **Mary Elizabeth Peter(s) (1832-1912), Figure 6.** Her family migrated from a German state to Jackson County, Indiana about 1838. She married Henry Lubker in 1865 and was buried in Lubker Cemetery near Tampico. *The Brownstown Banner* and *Seymour Daily Republican* of July 31, 1912 both

**GENEALOGY OF A SOUTHERN INDIANA QUILT PATTERN (continued)**

reported her death at age 79 from falling off a hay wagon. After a Lubker descendant sold the quilt to a dealer, it appeared in a quilting book: *The Great American Quilt Collection: Baskets* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press, 1994, pp. 68-77). It was then re-sold to a Michigan woman, its current owner.

In a previous article, having seen only a photograph of the quilt, I had tentatively attributed it to Henry Lubker's first wife, Catharine (Dinkelman) (1827-1864). I was led to Mary Elizabeth, his second wife, after I was able to inspect the quilt and found an "M"

and possibly an "E" in quilting stitches. Assistance came from Cindy Rennels, Julia Bright, Orville Lubker, Laura Lubker, Joanna Evans, April Yorks, Xenia Cord, Charlotte Sellers, Naomi Sexton and Joe Peters.

\* **Sarah Souder (1829-1913), Figures 7, 8 and 9.** Her German-American ancestors came by various routes from Pennsylvania to Washington County, Indiana, arriving probably in the 1810's. She married Nelson Johnson in 1845.

According to family sources, she made the quilt for a cherry-wood bed that Nelson



**FIGURE 8**—From left (detail): Adelia (Johnson) Baker, Nelson Johnson, and Sarah (Souder) Johnson, late 1800's. Photograph courtesy of Adelia Hanson.



**FIGURE 9**—Adelia (Johnson) Baker, ca. 1860, probably about the time that the quilt and bed were given to her. Photograph courtesy of Adelia Hanson.

**GENEALOGY OF A SOUTHERN INDIANA QUILT PATTERN (continued)**



**FIGURE 10**—Seated, Josephine Munson and the Polk's Fancy quilt attributed to Mary Ann Adam(s) and possibly Mary Ann (Adam(s)) Strack, ca. late 1840's and possibly 1870. Quilt courtesy of Josephine Munson and Carolyn Burton. Photograph by Mary Kay Munson.

made for their fourth child, Adelia (1858-1925). Since the pattern-blocks next to one border appear to have been cut in half, Sarah may have made the quilt earlier and later resized it to fit the child-size bed. Sarah is buried in Mt. Pleasant Cemetery in Pierce Township, Washington County.

Recording her memories of what descendants in Oklahoma call "the Adelia quilt," Delia (Franklin) Castor (1913-1997), wrote, "I do not know if the pattern was original with great grandmother or not, but I have not seen any like it, especially the combina-

**FIGURE 11**—Mary Ann (Adams) Strack, probably late 1800's. Photograph courtesy of Mary Kay Munson.



tion of appliqué and pieced portions" (e-mail from Adelia (Castor) Hanson, December 30, 2006). Assistance came from Nancy Hornback, Adelia Hanson, Martha Bowers, and the Souder family folder at the Stevens Memorial Museum.

\* **Mary Ann Dair (or Darr) (1831-1874), Figures 10 and 11.** Her family came from Bavaria to Jennings County, Indiana around 1845. The 1860 census listing of "Berne" is probably the census-taker's spelling of the German pronunciation of "Bäyern,"

**GENEALOGY OF A SOUTHERN INDIANA QUILT PATTERN (continued)**

**FIGURE 12**—Jennet (McCullough) and James Bishop Murphy, sometime before Jennet's death in 1859. Rendering courtesy of Hugh and Edith Murphy.



the German word for Bavaria.

Mary Ann married Henry Adam(s) in 1849, was hospitalized in 1870-1871 for “mania (hysteria)” according to Central State Hospital records at the Indiana State Archives, and is buried in Emanuel United Methodist Church Cemetery in Oregon Township, Clark County. Kansas descendants have the quilt.

According to family sources, Mary Ann and her oldest daughter, Mary Ann (1853-1916), made the quilt for the daughter's marriage to Philip Strack (or Stroch), which occurred in 1871. I have seen the quilt only in photographs, but its style, the timeline of the other Polk's Fancy quilts, the mother's illness just before the daughter's marriage, and a Kansas Quilt Project notation that the quilt colors are “vegetable dyed” suggest that the mother may have made the quilt (or at least started it) earlier than that. Assistance came from Nancy Hornback, Josephine Munson, Mary Kay Munson, Jeanne Burke,

Naomi Sexton, Pam Wasmer, and Denise Shafer.

\* **Jennet (McCullough) Murphy (1807-1859) or her daughter Martha (1831-1862), Figures 12, 13 and 14.** Jennet (spelled different ways in various records) married James Murphy in 1830 and migrated with Jennet's extended Scots-Irish family from South Carolina to Scott County, Indiana. Their oldest daughter, Martha, married William McKee in 1848.

According to family sources, the quilt burned in a house fire, possibly around 1930. But a copy made around 1920 by Jennet's great-granddaughter, Ethel Berta Mount (1898-1985), survives and is in the possession of Ethel's niece in Texas. Because she was a career woman not known as a quiltmaker, Ethel possibly collaborated with her mother, Annie Jane (Murphy) Mount (1874-1949), or grandmother, Nancy (Collin[g]s) Murphy (1853-1933), or hired a seamstress to make the copy.



**GENEALOGY OF A SOUTHERN INDIANA QUILT PATTERN (continued)**

Around 1985, descendant Harriett Comer hired seamstress Doris Inman of Bloomfield, Indiana to make copies of Ethel's copy for her two children. Family sources name Jennet as the maker of the original quilt, but Martha better fits the profile of the other quiltmakers, in that she was young and single at the time of the Mexican War. Jennet would have been about 40 years old at that time, a married woman with seven children.

If Martha made the quilt, her husband could have returned it to her birth family after she died in 1862, before he remarried in 1863 and moved to Iowa. Jennet

and Martha are buried in Hopewell Cemetery in Vienna Township, Scott County.

Assistance came from Gail Woodruff, Harriett Comer, Pearl Shirley, Pat Mount, James Mount, Luanna (Mount) Goetz, Margaret Comer [*Editor's Note: see related article by Margaret Comer on page 22 of this issue*], Frank Comer, Doris Inman, Carolyn Murphy, Xenia Cord, and Joanna Edwards.

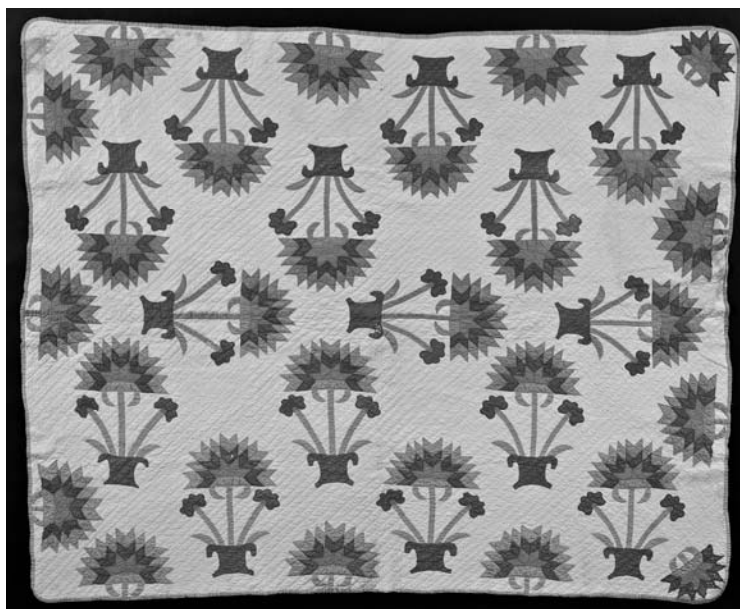
The Polk's Fancy pattern came to my attention in the form of a quilt that I got in the 1990's from an antiques dealer (now deceased), Sam Denney of Martinsville, Indiana.

**FIGURE 13**—Ethel Berta Mount, who reproduced the Polk's Fancy quilt attributed to Jennet Murphy, 1930. Photograph courtesy of Dr. James and Rowena Mount.



**FIGURE 14**—Polk's Fancy quilt, ca. 1920, attributed to Ethel Mount and possibly Annie Mount, Nancy Murphy, or a seamstress. Quilt courtesy of Luanna Goetz. Photograph by Michael Cavanagh and Kevin Montague.

GENEALOGY OF A SOUTHERN INDIANA QUILT PATTERN (continued)



**FIGURE 15**—Polk’s Fancy quilt, anonymous, ca. 1850. Quilt courtesy of Teri Klassen. Photograph by Michael Cavanagh and Kevin Montague.

He told me he did not remember its source (see Figure 15). I traced the Peter-Lubker quilt through the book that tells how to make it. I found Neta Goss’s quilt on a chance visit to the Stevens Memorial Museum, where it is on permanent display. I saw Elizabeth Jane’s quilt (which almost duplicates Neta’s but uses teal blue instead of green) at a quilt show at the Monroe County History Center in Bloomington. Quiltmaker Gail Woodruff, of Mitchell, who re-sized the pattern for the recent reproductions, told me of the Murphy quilt.

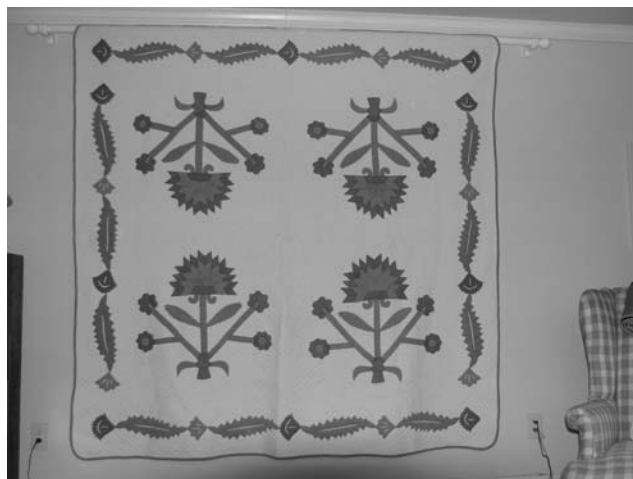
These five quilts were the basis of a paper that I wrote for the American Quilt Study Group journal, *Uncoverings* 2006, and

presented at the AQSG meeting in October 2006. Thanks to this public exposure, I have learned of five more quilts that had this pattern:

- Maryland collector Lucinda Cawley has one that she got from a dealer who reported buying it at an estate sale in Lebanon, Ohio, some 135 miles northeast of Salem, Indiana (see Figure 16).
- Kansas quilt researcher Nancy Hornback knew of the Dair and Souder quilts that are now in Kansas and Oklahoma.
- Quilt history friends told me of two quilts that were listed on eBay, both listed by Ohio dealers who had gotten them from other dealers and did not know their fam-

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**GENEALOGY OF A SOUTHERN INDIANA QUILT PATTERN (continued)**



**FIGURE 16**—Polk’s Fancy quilt, anonymous, ca. late 1840s. Photograph and quilt courtesy of Lucinda Cawley.

ily-of-origin. The pattern of one of these includes the distinctive central flower, but not the vase and side-flowers of Polk’s Fancy.

My future research goals are: (1) find more quilts; (2) confirm the pattern name; (3) confirm the period of pattern use; (4) investigate the Ohio connection; and (5) study the significance of the red-and-green floral quilt style in the antebellum period.

A copy of *Uncoverings 2006* with my article, “Polk’s Fancy: Quiltmaking, Patriotism, and Gender in the Mexican War Era,” is available at the Monroe County Public Library, Indiana University Main Library, and

Stevens Memorial Museum. Copies of that article are also available in the public libraries in Brownstown, Charlestown, and North Vernon, and at the Scott County Genealogical Society in Scottsburg.

Contact me for a copy of the AQSG article, for a postcard image of my quilt, or to report more Polk’s Fancy quilts at:

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