

Kentucky Quilt Trail Project

The Quilt Trail project began in Adams County, Ohio when Donna Sue Groves, field representative for the Ohio Arts Council, decided to paint an 8' x 8' quilt square on her barn in honor of her mother, a lifetime quilter. The Adams County Arts Council picked up on the idea and they painted 20 squares in their county and developed a driving tour, which has increased tourism. It has provided an added economic impact in two ways:

- Tourists are attracted to small businesses near the quilt trail; and
- Many local artisans have developed quilt-related products to sell.

The project has spread into other states, including Tennessee, North Carolina, Texas, and Iowa. Handmade in America received a \$38,000 grant from the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area to develop trails in North Carolina. In Kentucky, the project was spearheaded by Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) coordinators, working in collaboration with community groups and often with county Extension Agents. Some RC & D offices in eastern Kentucky provided \$500 per county for start up expenses.

The Kentucky Arts Council has awarded three Arts Build Communities grants and two Community Scholars grants in support of quilt trail projects. To see a sample of work done through this project, go to <http://www.abcquiltalley.com>.

Southeast Kentucky Tourism Development Association awarded between \$500 and \$2,000 per county to 14 counties in their region for quilt trail projects.

The Lucille Little Foundation awarded a large grant to Elliott County for economic development, including development of a quilt trail and a regional quilt trail website. (To see a sample of this website, go to www.kentuckyquilttrail.org.)

There are currently over 300 painted quilt squares on barns, floodwalls, and other buildings in Kentucky. Fifty nine counties in Kentucky are participating and more counties are getting started all the time.

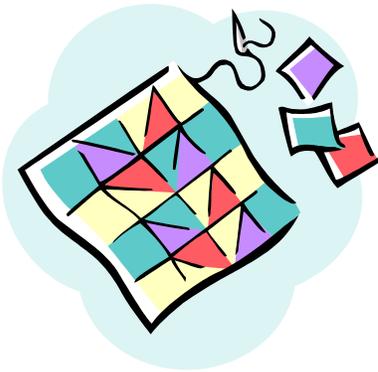
Every Quilt Tells a Story: Community Scholar Stories of Kentucky Quilt Squares

Many of the quilt patterns, the barns, and the buildings that are a part of the Kentucky Quilt Trail have fascinating stories behind them, and many of these stories have been documented by Community Scholars. Community Scholars are graduates of a six-day training program sponsored by the Kentucky Folklife Program at different locations around the state. Participants learn to use the tools of the folklorist to identify and document traditions in their own communities through oral history interviews and documentary photography. Here is an example of one quilt trail story documented by Community Scholars.

Community Scholar Gwenda Lynn Huff's retelling of her 2008 interview with Johnda Barker:

Kentucky Route 32 winds through creek bottoms, past steep pasture land, and through a hardwood forest. Redbuds, dogwoods, service berry, and native wildflowers welcome you in spring and beckon you in the fall to experience Mother Natures' wondrous wardrobe.

This scenic road takes you to Martha, Kentucky. In the early 1800's, Emmett Barker's great-grandparents left Pound Gap, Virginia and settled on a farm in Martha, Kentucky. Along with them, GW & Elizabeth Branham brought a wooden trunk stuffed with family treasures. Recently, Emmett and his wife Carol searched through that trunk. They found a quilt square that had traveled in the trunk from Virginia.



"We loved the quilt square idea from the start and talking Mom and my cousin, Deanna, into working on the square was easy. Mom really took the time to pick a different square along with one being a part of our family history. The barn at her family farm was a great selection due to so many of her brothers serving in World War II and the Korean War along with other family members who have been in the military" said, Emmetts and Carol's

daughter, Johnda Barker.

"I don't know what the pattern is but it was the one we chose because it had to be Emmett's grandmother who pieced the square." Carol said.

A dirt driveway leads to the brightly hued quilt square mounted on a red barn. "The barn was built sometime in the 60's," Emmett said. "It was used mostly for tobacco and cattle. We stored hay in the loft."

The shadow doesn't fall upon the quilt square, instead the light and dark of evening shadows highlight the path that leads to the quilt square posed in a spotlight created by nature's sun beams.

Johnda says "I have lots of our family's quilt 'collection' including quilts handmade by several great-grand and grand mothers. My prize quilt is a cathedral window made by my grandmother with material from the dresses four or five generations of us have worn. It is like a walk down memory lane for me because I remember my mom making the dresses and us wearing them and my grandmother making the quilt from them."

Inside the small house each antique bed is covered with a handmade quilt. "I make quilts and so did everyone else in my family. My mom made everything from curtains to bedspreads," said Carol as she talked about the house that was built prior to the civil war.

"We don't live here, we live in Louisa. Coming here is like going back in time. It is home. It will always be home," Emmett said. "We come here every week-end. It's our get-away and our connection to the past."

"You know where to find me for the rest of our lives....at Johnny and Martha Barker's farm in Martha, Kentucky! There is still no place like Papaw and Mamaw's even at my age!! It's my little wide spot in the road," Johnda added.

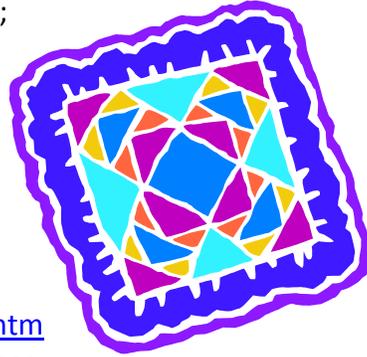
Kentucky's Potential as a Leader in the Quilt Trails Project



Kentuckians have long held a special connection to the quilt heritage of the Commonwealth via the personal memories of family quilting and the stories the quilts told in pattern and fabric. As the idea of a quilt trail takes on national prominence, Kentucky is uniquely positioned to become a leader in the Quilt Trails Project because:

- Kentucky enjoys a national reputation as the center of traditional and contemporary quilting with vibrant quilting groups throughout the Commonwealth;
- Kentucky is home to the National Quilt Museum in Paducah;
- The Quilt Trails Project dovetails well with existing and emerging tourism trails in Kentucky, such as the Agri-Tourism Trail, Country Music Highway, the Kentucky Artisan Heritage Trail, etc.
- The Quilt Trails Project also meshes well with tourism themes in Kentucky, such as agri-tourism, history, and arts and crafts,
- The project enjoys support from diverse local, regional, and statewide organizations and agencies;

- The Kentucky Folklife Program has a statewide network of certified Community Scholars who have been trained to record oral histories using digital equipment that produces a high quality recording suitable for use in audio driving tours, such as the MORE THAN MUSIC audio driving tour of the Route 23 region;
- The Kentucky Arts Council has developed a statewide web site to provide networking and easy access to community quilt trails at <http://artscouncil.ky.gov/QTrails/QTrails.htm>;
- The Kentucky Commonwealth Office of Technology, Division of Geographic Information has included the KY Quilt Trails as one of their Cross Kentucky Trails and posted GPS and other information about the trails. Access the site at <http://kygeonet.ky.gov/kyquiltbarns/viewer.htm>
- The Jessamine County Quilt Trail Committee has developed a Yahoo discussion site open to all interested parties to share information about quilt trails and seek advice from one another. Interested parties can join at http://us.rd.yahoo.com/evt=42879/*http://groups.yahoo.com/group/KQTP



Author: Judy Sizemore, on behalf of the Kentucky Arts Council, for KEHA State Lesson in Cultural Arts Plan of Work 2009-2010.

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