



## Early Quilts



EARLY QUILTS MADE IN NEW ENGLAND THAT are now in the Western Reserve include whole cloth quilts made of glazed wool, known as “calamanco quilts”;<sup>5</sup> quilts with the lower corners omitted, sometimes known as “T-shaped” quilts or “cut-corner” quilts;<sup>6</sup> and quilts with repeated blocks arranged diagonally across the entire surface to the edges.<sup>7</sup>

Calamanco quilts are technically whole cloth quilts with elaborate decorations quilted into them (illustration 3). The fabric used is glazed wool. Although calamanco fabrics range from plain solid colors to stripes or flowers, calamanco quilts in America are usually in one color only, often either indigo or red. Because of this, the elaborate quilting designs stand out.<sup>8</sup>

The maker of the calamanco quilt in illustration 3 was Jane Wilson Eaton Chidsey. Jane was born in Branford, Connecticut, in 1805. Her family migrated west and in 1826 was living in Pompey, New

York, south of Syracuse. In that year Jane married Norman Chidsey, and they moved farther west to Brunswick, in Medina County, Ohio. The family apparently remained in Medina County, for Jane is listed in Medina County census records from 1850 through 1870. According to family records, Jane made this quilt in Pompey in 1820, when she was only fifteen.

Designs on calamanco coverlets vary, but most have a central focus surrounded by elaborate borders. This is true of the Chidsey calamanco quilt. Most, including this one, also include images of flowers and plants. In this quilt, the corners of the central square include large plants of curved leaves, and there are smaller plants around the edges of the square. The motifs in the corners of the quilt echo the plant designs in the corners of the central block, but these lines are straight, rather than curved.

Over time this calamanco quilt was lovingly treated, with various worn spots on the front repaired with blue thread. Fabric on the back includes a few triangular gores stitched to rectangular pieces.

ILLUSTRATION 3. *Calamanco Quilt, 1820.* Jane Chidsey, b. 1805, Branford, Connecticut. Quilt made in Pompey, New York. 86" x 86". Wool and linen. Collection of the Medina County Historical Society.



The T-shaped quilt was a style popular throughout New England from the 1780s to the present.<sup>9</sup> The particular quilt shown (illustration 4) was made in Boston, but the style was also popular in Connecticut. Of 3,042 quilts studied in Connecticut prior to 1998, 42 are T-shaped.<sup>10</sup> Quilts in this style are sometimes described as having “cut-out corners” because the corner blocks at the foot of the bed are missing. They were rarely “cut-out,” however. Instead, the corner blocks were deliberately omitted so the areas overhanging the sides and bottom of the bed would come together neatly without extra material bunching at the corners.

This quilt is early, as it incorporates fabrics dating from the 1790s to the 1830s. Some of the patterned fabrics may have been imported. The quilt is in a Flying Geese pattern alternating with wide strips of floral-printed fabric. It is remarkably well documented, thanks to Maria Ridlon Dean Mathews of Painesville, Ohio, a descendant of the quilt-maker and the owner of the quilt in the early twentieth century. She wrote the quilt’s history on a block of white fabric that she stitched to the lowest block of the column at the extreme right. It reads:

Bed spread pieced by  
Mrs. Matilda Lowe Dean, in Boston, Mass  
She was near Concord Mass April 19th 1775  
where Thomas Dean, afterwards her  
husband, was in battle.  
This quilt was, later, the property  
of Miss Mary Farley Dean, a grand-daughter  
of “Patty Lowe Dean,” at whose death, in 1898,  
it became the property of her niece,  
Mrs. Maria Ridlon Dean Mathews  
of Painesville, Ohio.

ILLUSTRATION 4. *T-Shaped Quilt*, c. 1830s. Matilda Lowe Dean. Quilt made in Boston, Massachusetts. 116" x 69". Cotton. Pieced. Collection of the Lake County Historical Society.

I have often seen among the inhabitants of the log-houses of America females with dresses composed of the muslins of Britain, the silks of India, and the crapes of China.

—Timothy Flint, *Recollections of the Last Ten Years*, 1818

Exhibited at the opening of new court-house in Painesville, Lake Co., Ohio, June 25, 1909 when bronze tablets commemorating historic events, in the lives of President Garfield, and Gov. Samuel Huntington, were unveiled.

Gov. Huntington was grand-father of Samuel Mathews, MD

Maria Ridlon Dean Mathews was the wife of Dr. Mathews, who was probably named after his Connecticut-born grandfather, Samuel Huntington, an early resident of Painesville.

Painesville’s new courthouse was dedicated during a Home Week celebration June 24, 25, and 26, 1909. The bronze tablets Maria Mathews mentioned were given by members of the Daughters of the American Revolution, who also had a “loan exhibit” in the courthouse.<sup>11</sup> President Garfield, who was assassinated in 1881, had lived fairly close to Painesville. He was born in Orange and lived for many years in Hiram.

Maria Mathews was not the only family member interested in history. In 1902 her son, Alfred Mathews, published a book, *Ohio and Her Western Reserve*, and dedicated it to his father, “the late Samuel Huntington Mathews, M.D.,” a representative “of the inconspicuous but sterling citizenry of the Puritan Connecticut stock in the Western Reserve.”<sup>12</sup>