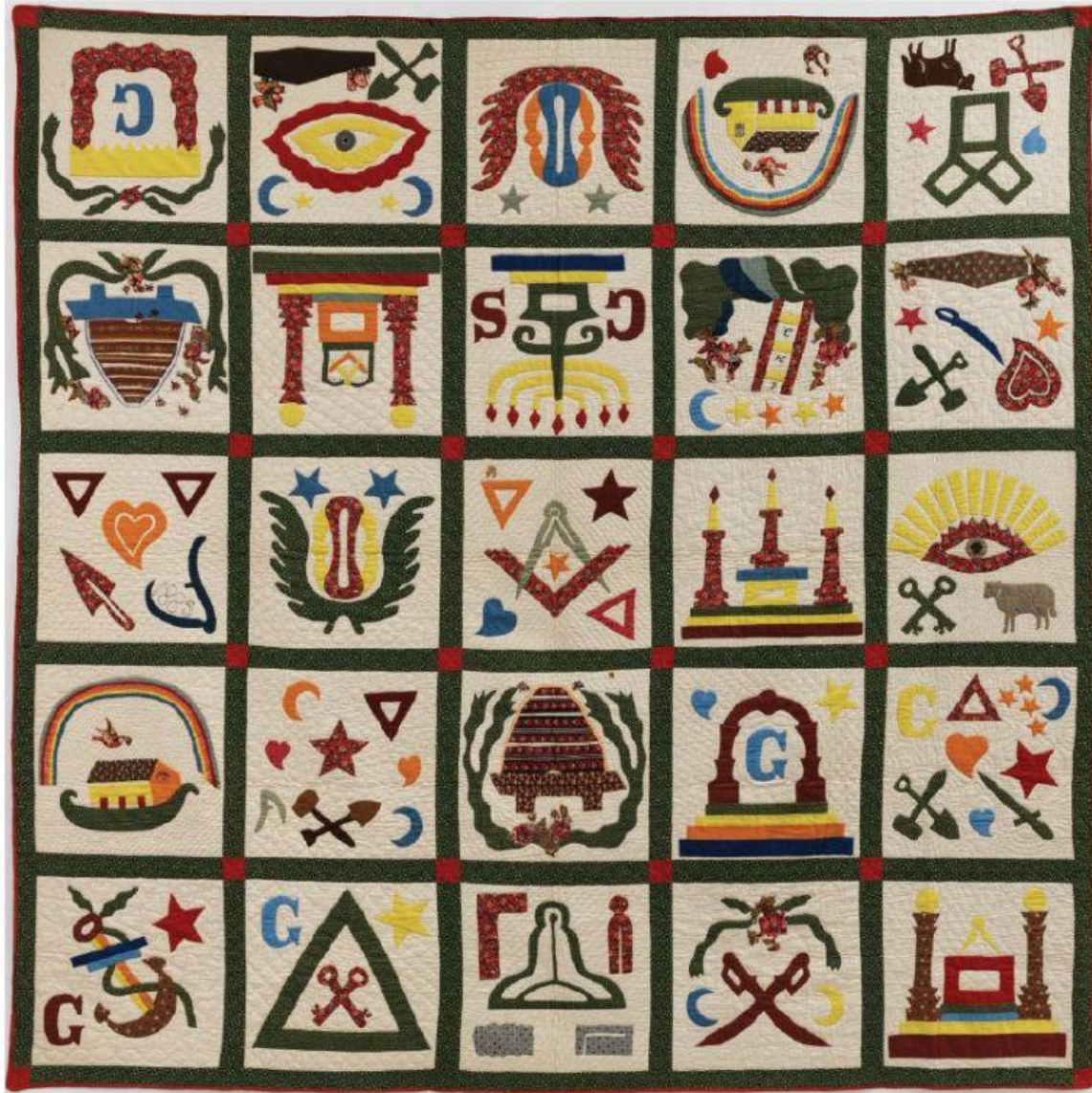


Name

Masonic Appliqué Quilt



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Artist unidentified (grandmother of Wayne Robb)

United States

1885

Cotton

86 x 88 1/2"

American Folk Art Museum, promised gift of Kendra and Allan Daniel, P.2015.2

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This colorful, striking quilt is appliquéd with a multitude of Masonic symbols. The brightness of the fabrics suggests that the quilt was a treasured heirloom stored away from sunlight and household dirt. Handwritten notes that descended with the quilt provide the outline of its history. It was made by the “grandmother of Wayne Robb (who was a Texas Ranger)” in Tennessee and was given as a wedding gift to Mr. and Mrs. George Fish of Spokane, Washington, in 1885. When George Fish died, in 1944, he willed the quilt to Rev. Raymond W. Moody (1915–2004), who served as chaplain for Spokane’s El Katif Shrine Temple.

Constructed in a grid of twenty-five blocks, each block contains a grouping of Masonic symbols, some well known, such as the beehive, the square and compasses, the all-seeing eye, the initial G, the archway, and the columns, while some are less commonly seen, such as a menorah, Euclid’s 47th problem, an ark and a rainbow, crossed swords, and a stylized winged hourglass. The top two rows are positioned in the opposite direction of the bottom three.

Although well known for its perceived secrecy and restricted to males, Freemasonry, in reality, has few true secrets. Masons have always relied on auxiliary groups of women to help them raise funds, to provide refreshments and decoration in the lodge, to sew their regalia, and even to assist them with learning rituals at home. This quilt provides evidence that although Mr. Fish was the Freemason, the women in his family probably identified with the order and were well versed in its values.

Look at the Questions ask but don’t answer then here, they are only guidelines to help you with the assignment

QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What are you looking at? What makes you say that?
- What do you think this object is made out of? How can you tell?
- What colors and patterns do you see?
- How many small red squares do you see? How many large white ones? The white squares that make up most of the quilt are called "quilt squares" or "quilt blocks."
- What do you see in each quilt square? Do any of the symbols repeat? If so, which ones?

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- There are many different ways to construct a quilt. For example, there are appliqué quilts and pieced quilts. In an appliqué quilt, designs are cut out of fabric and sewn on top of the fabric of the quilt squares. In a pieced quilt, designs are created by stitching different pieces of fabric side-by-side. Which kind of quilt do you think this is? Why?
- With designs as intricate as these, it would make sense for a quiltmaker to create an appliqué quilt rather than try to piece it together. Look very closely at the quilt: What other designs and patterns do you see? How did the quiltmaker create those patterns?
- Quilts have three layers: the decorative quilt top that you can see here, a plain fabric back, and a middle layer called batting. Batting is often fluffy wool or cotton—why might quilts include that middle layer?
- How are the rows of this quilt organized or oriented? Why might two of the rows face one direction and three face the other?
- This quilt was created in 1885. Do you see any signs of wear and tear? Stains? Fading in the colors? How do you think it might have been preserved so well all this time?

QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- This quilt is covered in a pattern of Masonic symbols. Masons are members of an international organization of men who agree to live by the same morals, values, and codes. Freemasonry goes back to the 1700s and still exists today. The Freemasons are called a fraternal order, which means they act like brothers to each other. One of the benefits of being a Freemason is that the group helps its members and their families if they get sick or pass away. Freemasons learn about the values of the fraternity by studying objects and symbols. **Distribute copies or project an image of the included glossary of Freemason symbols (pages 35 and 36).** Which symbols can you recognize in the quilt?
- Look for the beehives, which symbolize industry or hard work; for the level, which symbolizes equality; and for the plumb, which symbolizes uprightness. What can you tell about Masonic values based on these symbols?
- Some of the symbols on the quilt—the square and compasses, the letter G, the three boxes of the mathematician Euclid's 47th Proposition—have to do with geometry. Why might the Freemasons have a symbolic interest in geometry? How might geometry relate to their other values?
- Freemasons trace their symbolic roots back to the biblical King Solomon's Temple and the stonemasons that built it. The columns on the quilt, which are each topped with a globe—one representing the earthly world and the other the celestial world—are a direct reference to King Solomon's Temple. The level and plumb discussed earlier were stonemasons' tools. What other symbols can you find that seem to reference this symbolic history?
- Freemasonry is commonly thought of as a secret society, and its membership is only open to men. This quilt, like most quilts, was created by a woman. The maker of this quilt is known only as the grandmother of Wayne Robb. The quilt was a wedding gift for a man named George Fish and his wife, whose name we know as Mrs. Fish. What can you infer about the perceived secrecy of Freemasonry based on the fact that this quilt, covered in Masonic symbols, was both created by and owned by women?

Your assignment follows

Poetry or Short Story Prompt

- Ask students to brainstorm instances in which objects take on symbolic meaning. Can they think of examples from music, literature, movies, or television?
- Have them transfer the idea of the Masonic Quilt into a piece of fiction or a poem by selecting at least three objects of their own choosing to invest with symbolic meaning and incorporate into a poem or story.