

---

## Artifact Analysis: a Petticoat Quilt's Pedigree

Molly J. McPherson and Dr. Claire Nicolas, University of Nebraska- Lincoln, USA

Keywords: quilt, petticoat, history, genealogy

### Introduction and Background:

A rare petticoat quilt held in the collection at the University of Nebraska- Lincoln's International Quilt Study Center and Museum (IQSCM) provides a wealth of material information about American quilted petticoats and the documentation of American social history. Through an object-based analysis of this artifact, this research paints a picture of one particular family's history extending from the late colonial period through the early 20th century, and demonstrates important material and social findings made possible through material culture research.

Created from a woolen eighteenth century petticoat, this quilt has been professionally assessed four separate times throughout its collection history, with this analysis serving as the fifth report. Since 2002, the quilt has been analyzed by an appraiser, accessioned with a complete report by staff at IQSCM, further reviewed by IQSCM upon request of the donor, analyzed by Linda Baumgarten as part of her visiting scholar research, and then finally by McPherson in a course-related material culture research methods project for Nicholas in Fall of 2016.

### Research Design and Findings:

Using the Fleming model of artifact analysis, physical documentation was conducted, including a hand drawn diagram of construction and basic quilting pattern and fiber microscopy of twelve different samples taken from the quilt.

A secondary phase of research was to examine the collection's documentation on the object, which includes analytical reports from each of the previous four analyses. Each report contained a different interpretation of the fiber content, the date of construction, or the provenance. The most recent analysis, as reported here, concurs with most of Baumgarten's previous findings (2012) and expands on others in greater detail.

In a third step, public records for the donor's family genealogy (the Finney family) were compared to known information about the American quilting tradition of the period. Based on these records, the primary researcher was able to assess when the quilted petticoat was most likely made and by which member of the family. This had been previously disputed in the object assessments. Information gathered about when the petticoat was converted into a quilt and the quilt's inheritance or transmission trajectory contribute to a better understanding of the family's own travels and migration across America.

---

Significance and Discussion:

By virtue of its documentation within the Finney family history and donation to the IQSCM, this quilt represents a long history of appreciation for the value of handicraft. The conversion of the quilted petticoat into a bed quilt maintains a common nostalgia of Americana: to preserve that which can be reused or remade. The entrance of the quilt into a competition in 1928 documents the value it held for both the family members at that time, living in a new state and far from the original family settlement, as well as the value to the community of historic quilts and handicraft. Today, we utilize such objects for research of the transmission of ideas. When quilted petticoats fell out of style, the notion to convert the garment into bed covering was a common practice in America. Material culture researchers can use these adapted objects as records of genealogy and family migration histories. We can examine the fibers and better understand the technological advances of textile manufacture and the farming of animals for fiber as well as food. To study this quilt is to study the Finney family's journey through American history, and our journey forward into historic research.



Whole Cloth Petticoat Quilt  
International Quilt Study Center, University of Nebraska- Lincoln, 2002.006.0001