

## CREATING AN ALBUM QUILT

CH # 192

Based upon

Threads of Tradition Album Quilt, Binghamton, NY, displayed at the Women's League Creative Handicrafts Workshop, Biennial Convention, November 12, 1990.



The lobby of the Jewish Community Center in Binghamton is the permanent home of the “Threads of Tradition,” an album quilt designed and coordinated by Flora Rosefsky. “‘Hiddur Mitzvah’ in Hebrew is Judaism’s concept of beautifying ritual objects and the Jewish home,” explained Flora Rosefsky. “A dedicated group of quilters, Jews and non-Jews alike, performed a Hiddur Mitzvah when they extended the boundaries of the household to include the Jewish Center of Binghamton, New York. The making of their quilt was truly a modern day quilting bee.”

The project began on a snowy January morning when twenty-five women responded to an ad placed in a local Jewish newspaper. Quilters and non-quilters volunteered to help create an album quilt for the Center. Sandra Paston, a quilting teacher and designer, took on the assignment of teaching novice quilters the fine art of making templates, choosing fabrics and learning new embroidery and applique skills. She also agreed to sew the finished blocks together.

This future heirloom is composed of twenty-five squares reflecting its theme, “Jewish Holidays and Festivals, Ritual Objects and Symbols.” The major holidays are emphasized in the larger blocks ( 16" x 22" ). The center rectangle features the seven-branched menorah, the oldest symbol of Judaism. Other sections depict a daughter and mother lighting Sabbath candles, a Hasidic Jew singing and dancing as he embraces the Torah on Simchat Torah, an intricately-embroidered Torah, the golden domes of Jerusalem, a Jew in prayer at the Western Wall and a decorated sukkah.

The quilt took a little over a year to complete. On March 4, 1990, it was formally presented and now can be viewed at the Jewish Community Center, 500 Clubhouse Road, Binghamton, New York.

Upon completing the quilt, Sandra Paston, quilting co-ordinator and teacher, wrote the following poem, expressing her feelings:

“Judaism is more than just a religion.  
It is family and community, customs and traditions.  
It is a wonderful concept of God.  
It is Torah and law and education and growth.  
It is freedom and human rights and decency and peace.  
It is respect for, and love of, nature.  
It is history and future.  
It is warmth and caring and sharing not only with the Jewish community but with the non-Jewish  
community as well.  
It is hai, a way of life.”

Flora Rosefsky displayed this magnificent album quilt at Convention ‘90. It was a feast for our eyes and an inspiration to many women. Steps in creating your own album quilt for your synagogue or sisterhood follow.

The following is from a talk given by Flora Rosefsky, quilt designer and overall quilt coordinator, and by Sandra Paston, quilting instructor and assembler of the quilt. The techniques used for the Threads of Tradition Album Quilt are applique and embroidery.

#### STEPS IN CREATING AN ALBUM QUILT FOR YOUR SISTERHOOD/SYNAGOGUE

Find a project co-ordinator. She does not necessarily have to be an artist. Also, find an artist-designer and a quilting instructor.

Decide on the location of the finished quilt, to determine its size, dimensions, etc. Get permission from the synagogue to hang such a work of art when it is completed. The quilting instructor can be instrumental in the quilt’s layout, determining the actual block sizes.

Publicize an information session for interested quilters [note that the quilters can be at novice level]. At this session, the group can decide on the “theme,” or an artist/designer can present a theme and sketches. The Binghamton quilt used the latter technique. Once a theme is established, rough sketches and drawings are needed.

The artist/designer and the quilting instructor can collaborate in editing the designs to accommodate the skills of the group. The drawings are then transferred onto graph paper, which is cut to the exact size of the quilt blocks.

Each woman can select her favorite square, hopefully in a democratic fashion. In some cases, one woman may want to do the applique and another the embroidery on the same square.

Once each woman has chosen her square, the quilting teacher leads the women in weekly quilting classes, teaching them basic skills. The Binghamton group met every Monday morning at the JCC for two hours, 10 - 12 noon. Depending on the scope of the project, some women will complete their blocks rather quickly while others will “drag their feet” and procrastinate. The project coordinator needs to gently prod those people with reminders, memos, and phone calls.

Session one: teaching template making and use.

Session two: teaching applique.

Session three: teaching reverse applique.

**Sessions four through eight: selection and approval of all fabrics so the colors blend well together. Have approximately five tables set up with fabric samples, one table of pinks and reds, one for blues and greens, etc. A good resource for fabrics could be a local slipcover-upholstery shop which carries light weight fabrics. Also, women will gladly donate fabrics, even women who are not directly involved as quilters.**

**Session eight through the completion of all blocks: Help individual quilters with any problems that occur. This takes some creativity on the quilting instructor's part. For blocks that need embroidery, sessions may be needed to demonstrate this particular handicraft skill. The quilting instructor may also make up copies of instructions for various skills, which the quilters can take home with them. Naturally, much of the quilting work is done at home as well as in the weekly sessions.**

**Teach quilting: the sandwiching of the finished top layer, the batting and the back, sewing it all together in a specified design with even, small running stitches.**

**To square off the finished blocks, the quilting instructor cut the background blocks 2" larger in each direction to allow for the inexperience of the workers, so that the finished blocks would be correctly sized when squared off.**

**To assemble the quilt, the instructor added all the sashing after the squaring off, adding the outside border and binding as well.**

**Document the quilt on the back, by embroidering ( can be done by machine ) the names of the participants, and copyright information. The latter would be the ©, the year of completion and name of the designer or conceptual artist. Photograph the sessions; keep all the publicity material for future documentation.**

**Include a program booklet which lists the title of each square, its meaning and the names of the quilters.**

**Displaying the quilt: contact local museum curators for advice regarding cabinet design, which also includes special filtered lighting, a slanted board. A sleeve should be sewn on the back, about four inches wide, to accommodate a pole if it should ever be hung on hooks, as it was done for the Women's League Convention.**

**Presenting the quilt to the synagogue\*: a formal ceremony can be held with an official "unveiling." Lots of media coverage is possible. What is created is a treasured community heirloom for future generations to cherish.**

**\*Note: See "Dedication of a CH Gift to the Synagogue" on CH Order form.**

