

## Connie Nordstrom's Quilt

Early in the summer of 2003, on a raw, wet day, Connie Nordstrom, from Farmington, New Mexico, paid a visit to Colebrook. She and her husband had contacted me the day before announcing that their travel plans for the fact-finding quest they were on would take them to our town, and asking if we could help with locating certain gravesites in Colebrook. They arrived in a steady rain, which showed no signs of letting up, so we spent a good part of the morning researching our genealogy library as well as other aspects of Colebrook's past. At midday, in spite of the inclement weather, we made our way to the Hemlock Cemetery, where they were rewarded with more names on their list than they had hoped to find.

Mrs. Nordstrom describes herself as a quilter, teacher and lecturer. From this point on, I will let her describe her quest in her own words, as she has made available to our Historical Society all the fruits of her research, along with an exhaustive genealogy of several old Colebrook families. There are 20 pages of research in all, a valuable addition to our genealogy library.

"Behind the counter in a Durango antique mall, in a jumbled pile of various textiles, my eye caught sight of brown and madder patchwork. Wow, I thought – old! I asked to see it. I noticed signatures. I looked briefly at the textiles and dated them about 1850. But the top was so unremarkable that I left it there to 'think about it'. My husband was also peering over my shoulder, thinking 'another quilt?!' A few months later I returned and yes, it was still there. This time, looking more carefully, I saw 'Colebrook Conn.' on several of the blocks and my interest deepened. This was a mystery that needed to be solved. I could not resist."

"Another surprise occurred shortly thereafter when I discovered that one of my friends loved genealogy. So with her help, we began. The first few names were easy – the beginning of a big genealogical puzzle. As we continued the puzzle began to fill up, but there were still names that were elusive. Excited phone calls took place as new connections were made. After two years, we have positively identified all but one name on the quilt, that one unreadable."

"This is a family quilt. The majority of the names on this quilt top are related in a large extended family. Two signatures on the quilt were connective links to the two main family groups. Susanna Holden Larkin Doty is the first, and her granddaughter Harriet Larkin Doty is the second. We further discovered that these family groups lived in two areas: Colebrook, Connecticut and 3 small adjoining communities in New York State – Stephentown, Sand Lake and Berlin."

"Then turning to the top itself, I looked at construction details, fabrics, and handwriting. It appeared that these blocks had, for the most part, been made in family groups – not by individuals. Husbands and wives and their children, and even deceased family members had blocks with similar characteristics. The blocks, hand pieced, had been poorly put together by machine at a later date. The whole thing would have been rather worthless without the names and the place. Even the fabrics themselves were rather uninspiring."

Many questions have been answered, but the reason for the top and who made it remain a mystery. Who was the quilt made for? Even though Susanna was a connection for all the signers, she had been dead for several years when this top was assembled.

Why was it never completed? There are many possibilities: Civil War; did someone plan to move west and then stayed for some reason? Did someone die? Or, was this an idea that sounded good and fizzled and was put in a trunk for another day?"

"This New York friendship quilt stayed in the place of its origin for 120 years. In 1980 it was purchased in an antique shop in Mauldin Bridge, another small, New York town near Stephentown. Anna Marie Nobman had the same urge as I: to discover the story behind this textile. She kept it, moved to Durango, Colorado, and after 20 years decided that she would never do anything with it. Now it is mine, and I have extracted its story."

"What came next was another quilt exploration trip. My wonderful husband and I visited Stephentown, Sand Lake, Berlin, NY and Colebrook, Conn. in early summer 2003. We visited all key historical societies, met with local historians, saw important sites, soaked up the ambiance of these small, quiet towns and walked through ancient cemeteries."

"It was cold and rainy when we arrived in Colebrook, CT. As we approached on a dirt road, [they came by way of Mount Pisgah Road] winding through dense forest I began to sense a step back in time. The town center was nothing more than a cross road; a little store, warm and dry, offering a hot cup of coffee, a post office and an old inn, now the home of the local historical society. I spent the morning with the local historian, Bob Grigg, a kindly and knowledgeable gentleman who had spent much of his life in Colebrook. The historical society featured a cherry drop leaf table containing post cards and information about Colebrook that had been made by Erastus Doty, a key name on the quilt, and the second husband of Susanna. We were surrounded by ledgers and record books of all kinds dating back to the early 1800s. I learned much of the history of Colebrook in those hours. Early in the afternoon, with the rain still pouring, we all got out our umbrellas and went to the Hemlock Cemetery where many of the people named on the quilt are buried. As we traipsed through the wet grass we searched for the names on the stones. Some were well known and their stones were big and easy to find. Bob knew all about Susanna and Erastus Doty, but not where they had come from. Some stones were obscure and locating them was a thrill. Signatures on documents and names elaborately engraved on stones made these people real for me".

Next week we will continue with the history uncovered by Connie Nordstrom. The history of the Doty family is of particular interest, as there are still members living in the area.

### **Connie Nordstrom's Quilt, Continued**

Last week we learned of Mrs. Nordstrom's quest to unravel the history and genealogy of an old quilt that she had discovered in a small shop in Durango, Colorado that turned out to have strong ties to Colebrook, Connecticut. After leaving the Colebrook Historical Society in a steady rain, we went to Robertsville and paid a visit to the Hemlock Cemetery, the final resting place of several of the main characters of the quilt. Again in Connie's own words is the fruit of her research:

"The old homes, the rock walls, the winding, narrow roads, and the quiet left me in touch with my people. The farm buildings are long gone, but this lovely meadow was

the location of the farm and home of Susanna and Erastus Doty.” [The location of Rev. Doty’s home was 258 Colebrook River Road, the site of Allen’s Nursery today. The old white clapboard farmhouse was torn down and replaced with the present brick building in the late 1940s.]

“In contrast to our arrival in Colebrook, the drive into Stephentown, New York was sunny and beautiful. Again our visit started at the Stephentown historical society located in one of the many old churches in the area. The information available in this little facility was immense. I spent a good amount of time going through files, cards and documents. Another very helpful historian, Bill Zimmerman gave me directions to Hillside Cemetery, and told me how to find the birthplace and childhood home of Erastus Doty. The home was once a showcase in this tiny town, and boasted of marble sidewalks. Our visit to Hillside Cemetery was equally rewarding as the previous day although the sun and the flowers made it more lighthearted. I was touched once again as I came in contact with these people I had come to know so well.

“I have titled this talk: ‘Susanna Holden Larkin Doty 1782 – 1856, Her Quilt’ not because I know it was made in her memory, but because through this research I felt a deep connection with her, and her life. The majority of the names on this top are her children, her grandchildren, her nieces and her nephews. Susanna is the link to all of the families on this quilt. This is her story even though she died in 1856, before the quilt was likely made. The family names on the quilt are Holden, Larkin, Padelford, Hall, Horton and Feather, with additional friends named Sheldon, Bly and Hickcox.

Susanna Holden was born in Templeton, Massachusetts in 1782, the seventh of eight children born to Robert and Sarah Holden. She married Daniel Larkin of Berlin, New York in 1803 in Templeton at the age of 21 and had two children, but after only 8 years of marriage, Daniel died at the age of 33.

At the end of the Revolutionary War, Deacon William Doty returned home, married and settled on a farm in Stephentown, New York. He and Ruth Holmes Doty had 11 children. Erastus Doty was the seventh of these children, born in 1791. Erastus, crippled by a boyhood accident, walked with a cane throughout his life. Although he was raised a Presbyterian, and his father was instrumental in establishing the Presbyterian Church in Stephentown, Erastus became a Baptist clergyman. He was a carpenter by trade.

On December 3, 1814, at the age of 22, he married the widow Susanna Holden Larkin who was 10 years his senior. They had 3 children, Erastus Jr., Selima and Mary Ann. Sometime after 1820 the family left Stephentown and moved to Colebrook, Connecticut, a distance of 60 miles. In Colebrook, Erastus built the first Baptist meetinghouse in the eastern part of town [at what is today the intersection of Deer Hill and Connecticut Route 8]. In 1825 Erastus bought 37 acres of good farmland for \$347.00 and built a home for his family.

“Susanna, Erastus and their 5 children are named on the quilt as well as a sister-in-law of Erastus, Mrs. Deborah Doty, her son Clinton D. Doty and a niece, Arwilla A. Doty.

Abel Larkin, son of Susanna by her first marriage to Daniel, married Elizabeth Torrey and had 9 children. Abel, Elizabeth and these 9 children are named on the quilt. Two husbands of two of these 9 children, Clinton D. Doty and Ira H. Horton, as well as one deceased child and two living children are also named on the quilt.”

“Ira Larkin, second son of Susanna by her marriage to Daniel, married and had 5 children. Two of these are named on the quilt along with Ira.

Erastus Juno Doty, son of Susanna and Erastus, never married and died young at the age of 39 in Colebrook. His name is on the quilt.

Selima P. Doty, first daughter of Susanna and Erastus married Alvin Hall and both of their names are on the quilt.

Mary Ann Doty, second daughter of Susanna and Erastus married Albert Padelford. Mary Ann died young at the age of 31, but the names of their 4 children are on the quilt. James served in the Civil War with the New York Volunteers.”

“By carefully looking at birth, death and marriage dates, I have been able to determine that the quilt was made sometime between 1859 and 1863.

A significant name on the quilt is that of Harriet Larkin Doty, daughter of Abel Larkin. She was a granddaughter of Susanna and married Clinton De Witt Doty, a nephew of Erastus. Harriet lived until 1933 and died just before her 101<sup>st</sup> birthday. It is possible that Harriet organized this quilt project. In 1860 she would have been 28 years old, and childless. She had a connection to the Larkin’s through her Grandmother Susanna, and to the Doty’s through her husband’s Uncle Erastus.”

“But I still prefer to think of this as Susanna’s quilt – in a sense that she became the key link as this drama unfolded for me. To answer the question of why these blocks were made; who they were made for and why it was never finished are all unanswerable.

For me, the connection with this family, long dead, has been amazing. I have visited their farms, their homes, and their communities. I have seen their handiwork, and I have stood by their gravestones. They were real people, not just names on a quilt. They lived, shared joy at weddings, bore children in pain, wept at the loss of those same children, lived with the frequent visits of death, and shared female companionship.

This crude quilt has made them live again. Little did they know they would be remembered.”

The entire contents of Connie Nordstrom’s research and genealogical findings, along with a photo of the quilt are now in the genealogical section of the Colebrook Historical Society. For those of you who might in the past have made the long and torturous ascent of the stairs at the Society, we have good news: the entire library has been relocated to the old town vault, a wheelchair-accessible room with good lighting, where research, or just reading for pleasure can be pursued effortlessly.

Our hours are Saturdays and Sundays from 2-4 pm, or call (860) 379-3614.