

Provenance and Labels



This article generously written and provided by Heather Ford.

Quilt appraisal is one of the services our Guild offers its members. We appraise quilts for replacement value, in case they are lost, stolen or maybe damaged or destroyed. Should you have a quilt appraised I am sure you will be surprised at the replacement value. Many of you will have a significant value of quilts in your possession and may benefit from having them listed on your household insurance policy in case something unfortunate happens to any of your quilts. Quilt appraisal offers an insurance company a quilting industry estimate of the value of your quilt.

Provenance, what exactly does that mean?

This question took me to the google equivalent of Mr Webster's dictionary, which informed me that the meaning of the word Provenance is – *place or source of origin place or source of origin*. So how to establish this with regard to quilts?

The answer is: **WHO, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, WHAT AND HOW** would provide a good idea of the “*place or source of origin*” of my quilts.

The next question I asked is why I would even be thinking about the provenance of my quilts:

- I know **WHO** made my quilts, I did, maybe with help from my friendly quilter.
- I know **WHEN** I made them, now was that July last year or was it the year before, mmmm maybe I don't remember exactly when I made this (imaginary) quilt.
- I certainly remember **WHERE** I made it, in my sewing room at home, hang on or did I start it at a workshop and who was that workshop with and where was the workshop held?
- **WHY** did I make this quilt? Did I make it for someone special and was there a special reason for making it, birthday, arrival of a baby, a wedding or was it for a competition, in a workshop or just because I could?
- **WHAT** materials did I use?
- **HOW** was it made, by hand or machine or combination of both?

Okay, I have now worked out how to establish the provenance of my quilts, but I still haven't answered why I should even be bothered about it. I'm just an ordinary everyday quilter, why should this matter to me? I guess the answer is, maybe it won't matter to me, but it may matter to those who come after me.

In 100 years' time when I am long gone, and one or maybe more of my quilts have survived, my great-great, plus a few more greats granddaughter, may well be very interested in the **who, when, where, why, what** and **how** of the quilts she now owns. A story to help create an emotional tie to me, a family member from long ago.

Someone else in 100 years' time who will be very interested in the provenance of my quilts, is a quilt historian or a researcher. Provenance is a very important tool for historians and researchers.

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If perchance, I am not an everyday quilter but an award-winning quilter or a professional quilter, then the provenance of my work is vitally important, as a record of my body of work.

For all of us, it is a record of our progress on our quilting journey over a period of time, and shouldn't we all be interested in and care about this?

Australia has a very small antique quilt sales market, but in America the number of antique quilts sold is quite substantial. Many quilt shops have antique quilts for sale and both the Houston and Paducah quilt shows include vendors selling nothing but antique quilts, tops and blocks. The provenance of a quilt plays a very important role in determining its sale value, along with the condition of the quilt of course. A quilt with a recorded provenance will be worth considerably more than one with no verifiable provenance.

That's the crux of it – recorded/ verifiable provenance. So how do I go about this? The Rolls Royce of recording provenance entails the following.

A Quilt Diary

I have one student who does this religiously, she is my gold star quilter as far as provenance is concerned. The Appraisal Panel recently appraised a raffle quilt for one of our country groups and they have a very detailed record of everything and I mean everything about the making of that quilt. Fantastic recorded/ verifiable provenance, another gold star.

Back to my quilt diary, this can be a notebook, a folder with sheets of paper, whatever suits me and yes, it is hand written. I actually find I am more likely to maintain a record if I do it by hand, as I don't have to go to the computer each time I work on the quilt to update the file. I just do it as I make the quilt. What fantastic quilt provenance to have a hand-written record by the maker. I can of course transfer this information to the computer later.

This diary will be a record of everything pertaining to a particular quilt. Since I will probably be starting and stopping and coming back to the quilt, I sometimes have a separate book for each particular quilt. This won't be a consideration if you finish each project before you start the next.

What to include in this diary? All the following should be considered –

- The start date and the date the quilt is finished.
- Thoughts about the design if it's my original design.
- Sketches of design ideas, for me these will be very simple as I am not an artist and don't draw well. Maybe graph paper sketches of blocks and the quilt
- The size of the finished quilt.
- The name of the quilt. You should always name your quilts; this is part of its identity.
- Who the quilt will be for (someone in particular, or maybe it's for charity).
- Reason for making the quilt (was it a special occasion – someone's birthday, arrival of a baby, a wedding.... there are lots of reasons to make a quilt).

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- The design source if it's not my original design (was it a kit, block of the month, pattern, public domain blocks as in a sampler quilt, a workshop – who the workshop was with and where was it held, where did I get the kit, pattern, block of the month pattern and the costs involved in all of this).
- Fabric choices – where and when I got the fabrics, if they were special purchases, or just fabric from my stash and the cost of the fabric. Don't forget to include swatches of the fabric. Maybe the fabric/kit/pattern was purchased on holiday somewhere – you probably have lovely memories there.
- What type of threads were used and an estimate of the amount used to make the quilt?
- As a quilt teacher my quilts are often samples for future workshops and as I will be writing patterns for these workshops, I include fabric requirements, including things like vliesofix or pellon, notions, any other tools like special rulers or machine feet, special pins or needles etc, which will be required for the workshop, for me everything I need to write a requirements list and a pattern.
- I also record a description of the processes used and any hints and tips which I will include in my patterns.
- I take photos of the progress, as in recent years I have come to include photos of each part of the process in my patterns.
- Embellishments and the cost of the embellishments.
- Each time I work on the quilt I record the date and how long I spend working on the quilt and what part of the process it is. At the end I have a good idea of how long it has taken me to make the quilt and each part of it.
- Who quilted it and what type of machine was used (domestic, sit down, long arm, long arm computer aided, or maybe it was hand quilted.) The cost of the quilting if it was done by someone else.
- Reason why I made THIS QUILT (I loved the design or the fabric, I wanted to play with the tool, just because I could).
- Techniques used (hand pieced, machine pieced, EPP, foundation pieced, embroidered, needle turned - any and all of the techniques used).
- Fibre content of the materials used in the top (including embellishments or special fabrics) and the fibre content of the backing and wadding.
- Care instructions – there may be special care instructions for something like an art quilt.
- In fact, anything at all about the making of the quilt.
- A photo of the whole of the front of the finished quilt and a close up of part of the front. Plus, a photo of the label when attached and the back of the quilt.

This is a pretty complete record of the making of the quilt. I may want to add more of the story of my life as I make the quilt, what was happening in my life at the time. Remember that emotional tie to a family member who comes after me, and the quilt historian and researcher I spoke about earlier. Provenance gold!

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Labels

Now we come to labels, the next part of my recorded provenance.

My quilt diary is a much more detailed record than my label can possibly be, but the label should include

- The name of the quilt.
- My full name as the quilt maker and where I live and my relationship to the recipient. For a group quilt include the names of all those who worked on the quilt and include a general place e.g. Marion, South Australia.
- The full name of the quilter (if that is different to the quilt maker).
- The name of the designer of the quilt.
- Who the quilt is for (add the reason if it is a special occasion)?
- The date the quilt was started and finished (month and year will be sufficient).
- The fibre content of materials used (top, wadding and backing).
- The techniques used (hand/machine work, embroidery, embellished etc).
- Care instructions - the thing most often missing from the labels we see when appraising quilts, along with the materials used and the techniques used.
- There can be more than one label on a quilt. I might choose to have a separate care, fibre content and techniques label.
- I may wish to include some of the quilt story from my diary.

How to make a Quilt Label

- Embroider the details onto some fabric by hand or machine.
- Write a label with an acid free, permanent fabric marker. A hint/tip - you might like to place the fabric on a fine sandpaper board when writing the label as it will help hold the fabric in place.
- Write directly onto the back of the quilt with the acid free, permanent marker.
- My favourite method to create a label is to use inkjet fabric and the computer. What is on the computer screen is what will be on the label. You can import photos or graphics. When they were small my granddaughters loved to have their photo on the label of their quilts. It is very easy to print your own labels and clear instructions are on the packet as to how to do this. Another hint/tip - the fabric used has a very high thread count and it is quite hard to stitch through by hand, so I usually add a one inch border of my backing fabric to all sides of the label so I am hand stitching through fabric with a lower thread count.
- There are computer programmes available to help you design your label.

With a quilt diary and a good label, I have created a recorded/verifiable provenance for my quilt and in doing so have ***“Preserved the past”*** for future generations.

And you thought we were just making quilts!!!!

Heather Ford
May 2020