Nancy Kirk of The Kirk Collection (www.kirkcollection.com) is well-known as a quilt restorer, quilt historian, appraiser, author and speaker. She has been advising collectors on the care of their quilts for over 20 years. Nancy appeared for four seasons on Simply Quilts on HGTV, and has written for many quilting magazines. She is the author of The Passionate Quilt Collector and DVDs on Quilt Restoration and many quilt and embroidery patterns. Nancy is president of The Quilt Heritage Foundation and founder of The Crazy Quilt Society.
Nancy Kirk

TAKING CARE OF GRANDMA’S QUILT

A guide to caring for, cleaning, displaying and documenting your heirloom quilts

SPS Publications
TAKING CARE OF GRANDMA’S QUILT

Quilts get handed down from mother to child to grandchild, then put away in a closet or hope chest, until one day the owner realizes she has an heirloom on her hands and the responsibility to care for it.

How to care for grandma’s quilt is a growing concern as people realize the increasing value of yesterday’s bedcovers. This book describes ways to care for antique quilts, but most of the advice works for contemporary quilts as well. After all, the quilts being made today will be tomorrow’s treasured antiques if they are used carefully and preserved well.

For more information please visit our website at www.kirkcollection.com.
ABOUT NANCY KIRK

Nancy started The Kirk Collection with her husband, Bill, in 1987. Initially they dealt in antique quilts, and then expanded to antique fabrics, reproduction fabrics and designing fabrics and patterns for quilters.

Nancy is a popular lecturer and writer who has authored articles for a number of quilting magazines including Quilters Newsletter Magazine and Quilting Today. She has been featured in American Patchwork and Quilting and has appeared for four seasons on Simply Quilts with Alex Anderson on HGTV.

Nancy designed two lines of Civil War reproduction fabrics for Benartex, and several series of embroidery patterns for Cactus Punch.

She serves as president of the Quilt Heritage Foundation which sponsors the Crazy Quilt
Society (www.crazyquilt.com) and the Quilt Preservation Society (www.quiltpreservation.com).

Since the death of her husband in 2003, Nancy has focused on teaching and writing on quilt restoration, quilt care, crazy quilting, antique quilts and appraising.

She is the proud Mom of son, Benjamin, and daughter, Jessica, and lives in Omaha, NE in the Bemis park neighborhood, one of the first rehab neighborhoods in the city.

To subscribe to Old News, the free e-newsletter from The Kirk Collection, and Nancy’s popular Monday Minute, please go to the website at www.kirkcollection.com.
For Ben and Jessie and Aunt Kat
who are always there for me

In memory of Bill Kirk, 1949-2003,
whose love and encouragement made
everything possible.
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Dear Quilt Collector,

Whether you have one heirloom quilt or hundreds, your job is much like mine -- being the curator of your quilt collection.

I wrote this book to help you with the important job you have undertaken to care for your quilts and help to preserve our quilting heritage.

This book is designed for the private collector and is filled with practical advice you can implement at home. While we wish every quilt could be kept in temperature and humidity controlled environments, we know this is not realistic. This small book will give you common-sense and easy to implement ideas.

The techniques and procedures in this book
are the product of 21 years as an antique quilt dealer, restorer, and collector. I owe a great debt to a number of conservators and museum professionals who have graciously shared their expertise with me during my career.

Over the years we have adapted good conservation practices for use at home. We’ve tried to give you techniques which can be used by private collectors which will still maintain your quilts in good condition for future generations.

Warmly,

Nancy Kirk
The Kirk Collection
www.kirkcollection.com
2008
TAKING CARE
OF GRANDMA’S QUILT

READ THIS FIRST!

While this book is divided into chapters and makes the most sense when read from front to back, most people picking up a book like this are trying to solve a particular problem -- usually cleaning a stained or damaged quilt.

If this is you, turn directly to Lesson #9 which has complete washing instructions plus touches on the other key items in caring for quilts. Then move around in the book to find answers to your other questions.

Thanks for helping to preserve our quilting heritage.
Lesson #1

Environmental Protection

Quilts like to live where people live -- in moderate temperatures and humidity, in a clean, dust-free environment. Not everyone can have a totally temperature and humidity controlled house, but a little common sense will go a long-way.

Generally, people don’t live in unheated or unairconditioned basements or attics. Quilts shouldn’t either. If your quilts are going into storage for a long or short time, pick a room where a person could live comfortably -- a bedroom, den, home office, even a closet in a front hall, living room or dining room.
Bathrooms generally have too much moisture, even if there is a built-in linen closet. Laundry rooms may work if the storage area can be isolated from the washer/dryer and is away from any plumbing pipes that could burst. In some cases, under the bed can be a good place to store quilts if they are in proper storage containers such as an acid free box.

I like to keep quilts in acid-free boxes, folded and padded with acid free tissue. I prefer using enamel covered-metal shelves which allow air circulation and avoid the problems of rust.

In the next lesson we will talk about why we use acid-free boxes and tissue.
**LESSON #2**

**WHY USE ACID-FREE PRODUCTS FOR QUILT CARE?**

That's a good question. There are several things that can damage quilts -- we’ll go over the list in the next two lessons. But one major danger, especially to cotton quilts, is the acids and acidic gases produced by wood products.

For years, many mothers told their daughters to keep their special clothing and textiles in their cedar chests. This advice came from a time when much clothing, including summer clothes, was made from wool. Cedar is a natural moth repellent, and this saved clothing and wool blankets from moth damage.
Unfortunately, it damaged countless cotton quilts and linens as the acids from the wood ate away at the fibers and caused brown spots on the fabrics.

Once we learned this, conservators and their suppliers developed acid free tissue and boxes to prevent this damage from acids. There is another substance in wood and wood pulp called lignin which also can cause damage to textiles. So when you are selecting acid free products, make sure they are also lignin-free.

Using these acid free products will help keep your cotton quilts in great shape for future generations.

It is important to note that boxes and tissue are made acid-free and pH neutral by applying an alkaline solution to them during the manufacturing process. Over time, this alkaline treatment dissipates, and the boxes and paper return to their acidic state. You can get testing pens to
check the pH of boxes and paper. I recommend changing the tissue every three years and boxes every 15 years to be safe.

Rather than try to keep files and index cards on every storage box in some complex filing system, I simply put on the box label “Change tissue in 2011, change box in 2023.” That way I know when I need to take action; it doesn’t really matter where or when I bought the box, only when I need to change it.
LESSON #3

DANGER! DANGER!

Sometimes we want to put up a warning tape and safe perimeter around our heirloom quilts to keep them from the dangers that lurk out there -- dogs that can chew a hole, children who can drop juice on them, spouses that think they would be good pads to lie on when fixing the car.

While all of these dangers are real, the most common damage to quilts comes from five sources in addition to wood acids discussed in the last chapter:
1. **PHYSICAL HANDLING**

Just touching, moving and rearranging quilts creates more damage than any other cause. And that’s the pits, because the greatest joy from quilts comes from -- physical handling!

2. **LIGHT**

Fluorescent light and sunlight do the most damage to quilts, but incandescent bulbs are not far behind. Exposure to the ultra-violet rays in light cause irreversible damage to quilts and we can’t rub them with sunscreen. Again, it’s the pits, because one of the greatest pleasures of quilts is looking at them!

3. **UNINTENTIONAL WATER**

Floods, broken pipes, moist basements, improper drying -- all of these can cause stains, promote mold, and allow mildew to grow. And there is very little that can be done about mold
and mildew once it has really gotten started. Make sure the place you store your quilts does not back up on plumbing pipes which have a nasty habit of bursting on occasion.

4. IMPROPER WASHING AND DRYING

Throwing an antique quilt in the washing machine, then tossing it in the dryer can turn a perfectly good quilt into a large, lumpy rag in nothing flat.

5. DIRT

Surprisingly, dirt is not a serious problem for most quilts, at least those that are washable. Body oils left in the quilt when it is put in storage can do irreparable damage however.

In Lesson 4, we’ll talk about ways to address each of these dangers without having to put your quilts in a vault somewhere. In the meantime, keep this phrase in mind -- Use, Not Abuse.
LESSON #4

RESPONSES TO DANGER

In the last lesson we talked about the dangers that quilts face every day. In this lesson we’ll talk about ways you can deal with these dangers in a home setting.

1. PHYSICAL HANDLING

With fragile antique quilts you can minimize handling in several ways:

• Store the quilt flat on a bed, layered between two white cotton sheets. When you want to look at it, remove the top sheet and move it using the bottom sheet as a carrier.
• If you want to use an heirloom quilt on a bed, consider removing it gently at night and placing it on a quilt rack or gently folded on a chest or over a chair. This avoids the twisting a pulling that bed clothes endure overnight with restless sleepers.

• If you will be hanging the quilt on a wall, use a D-shaped sleeve (see page 64) and use an ostrich feather duster to clean the surface once a week so you don’t have to take it down often to clean.

• Don’t. Just don’t handle it if it is very fragile. It takes a lot of self discipline. And train the children and any others-in-law who may someday inherit them, how to take care of the quilts.

2. LIGHT

Try not to hang or display quilts in rooms with fluorescent lights or with sunny windows.
If you must use fluorescents, get ultra-violet shields for the light tubes. They are expensive, but not nearly as expensive as losing a major heirloom quilt. Keep window blinds closed most of the time, or consider having UV film installed on the windows (this usually means calling a glass company).

Because living in the dark is not an option for most of us, let the quilts live in the dark when they are not on display. They actually like it! An acid free box is one option. Another is a darkened guest room with a sheet on top until company comes. You can safely stack dozens of quilts on one bed so long as they have white cotton sheets between them. You can still invite folks over to look at them -- host a “bed-turn-ing”.

Next lesson we will talk about dealing with unintentional water, improper washing and dirt.

In the meantime, look around the house and see where your quilts are now and start think-
ing about how you can keep them safe. In a later lesson, we’ll talk about bringing them out to play. Don’t worry, you still get to enjoy your quilts!
LESSON #5

FACING DANGERS WITH CONFIDENCE

In the last lesson we looked at how to respond to the dangers of physical handling and light. In this lesson we’ll talk about avoiding or overcoming the dangers of unintentional water, improper washing and dirt.

I know this is out of order, but let’s take the last one first, because dirt is really not much of a danger to quilts. It’s not good for them, but dust and dirt pose few dangers for cotton fibers. In most cases, too much cleaning and improper cleaning do much more damage than the dirt that was there in the first place.
If your quilts are out and on display, try to dust them at least once a month with an ostrich feather duster. Chicken feathers just won’t do. Chicken feathers just move dust around, while ostrich feathers actually lift it up. I generally don’t use the convenience dusting products out on the market these days because many are impregnated with chemicals and I just don’t know what effects they may have on quilts.

In the old days, quilts were only washed every few years – not monthly or even annually. I’m not advocating that for today. Our sense of clean and aesthetics has changed over the years. But if a quilt is not being used as a bed cover – if it is hanging on a wall or displayed on a rack, there is no need to wash it unless some accident happens.

Quilts that are used on beds can be saved from over-washing with the addition of a chin guard or whisker guard as they used to be known. They were popular in the 20’s and
30’s and I hope they make a come back. A chin guard is a small pillow case for the end of a quilt. They run the width of the quilt, covering the front and back.

In the old days they were basted on by hand and the stitches and the chin guard removed and washed wherever the sheets are washed. That’s more trouble than most people will take, but today chin guards can be attached with ties or Velcro. Then the quilt has protection when it is pulled up under the chin at night. Wash the chin guard with the sheets and only wash the quilt when it is put away out of season.

So that brings up improper washing and dry cleaning. You can find complete washing instructions in the next section. But here are the basics – test that all the fabrics are washable, wash by hand in the tub, not the machine, and dry flat using a couple of fans to dry it quickly.

Some people automatically assume dry cleaning is the safe way to clean a quilt. Wrong. For several reasons. Cotton quilts which are
color fast should be washed. Dry cleaning is actually a wet cleaning process. If your cleaner is not willing to test each fabric individually with the solvents they plan to use, find another cleaner. Reserve dry cleaning for wool quilts and quilts with wool batting.

Machine washing can tear the stitches in a hand-quilted quilt – the agitation action is too much stress on a quilt. Washing quilts is a long and tedious process, best done with a friend when you have a whole day, or when you want to catch up on a good book during all the times the tub is filling and refilling with wash and rinse water. Professional conservators charge $400 to $600 to wash a quilt, so reward yourself if you take the time to do it properly.

Finally, the danger of unintentional water. Basically we’re talking floods. In most cases its not a literal flood where the whole house is underwater, but that can happen. Perhaps a pipe
bursts or a basement has rising water or rising damp on the walls. Think about where you plan to store your quilts. Make sure the closet doesn’t back up on the bathroom plumbing, and keep them in a part of the house where you will know immediately if a problem arises.

If water does harm your quilts, try to give them a conservation wash (assuming they are washable) as soon as possible. Don’t throw them in the dryer as this will probably set in any stains.

If you can’t clean a damaged quilt right away, freeze it. If the fabrics are already running, cover it in plastic, protecting each part of the quilt from the rest of the quilt (i.e. plastic on top and underneath. Then place the whole quilt in a clear plastic bag and put it in the freezer. The quilt can be left this way for quite awhile until you decide on a conservation approach. If you don’t have a home freezer that will accommodate it, rent space in a commercial freezer (like a frozen warehouse).
If you collect antique quilts it’s a good idea to always freeze them when you first bring them home. We’ll talk more about that in the next lesson.
Lesson #6

Other Storage Options

We talked early on about using acid-free storage boxes. This is a great way to store quilts, and arguably the best way. However, there are alternatives for home storage.

Easiest and certainly the best, is flat storage on a bed. Place a white cotton sheet down, then the quilt (upside down if there is a chance of much exposure to light) then another white cotton sheet. You can safely stack many cotton quilts this way.

Of course we are working on the assumption that the bed in question is in a room with
no children, no pets. If this is not possible where you live, choose an alternate storage method.

Start buying all the white cotton sheets you can find at garage sales. It’s also worth talking to your local hospitals and nursing homes to see what they do with their flat sheets when they start to wear out or fray at the edges. They may be willing to donate them to the cause -- perhaps to your local quilt guild where they can be distributed to members.

The sheet gives you a carrier when the quilt needs to be moved, and the cover sheet protects the quilt from light and dust.

Another option is a polypropylene or polyethylene bin. You need to call the manufacturer’s customer service number to check for sure, but many Rubbermaid bins (but not all) are polypropylene. The danger is some are also watertight -- a good thing if there is a flood, but a bad thing if moisture is trapped inside and mold
or mildew starts to grow. Also, most of the plastic bins are not light tight, so wrapping the quilt in a sheet before putting it in a bin is important, and storage in the dark is best.

If you must store your quilts in a closet, line any wooden shelves with aluminum foil first to prevent contact with the wood. Heavy duty is easiest to work with. Then wrap the folded quilt in a white cotton sheet before storing it.

Whatever method you choose, bring your quilt out of storage at least once every three months to check its condition. If it has been folded, refold it along different lines to help prevent set in creases. It does not need to be folded in equal segments -- in fact it’s safer to use uneven segments -- about a third in from one end, then about a fifth from the other, etc.

The next lessons will talk about display options when you want to bring your quilts out to play.
A note about freezing: when you bring a new quilt home for the first time, a good conservation practice is to place it in a plastic bag, seal the bag with tape, and freeze it for 72 hours. Then take the bag out for 24 hours, then re-freeze it for another 72 hours. This process will kill any “friends” -- insect larvae and similar pests -- that might be along for the ride.
Caring for quilts is not just a matter of wrapping them up and storing them out of sight. The greatest joy of quilts is taking them out and enjoying the sight and touch of them.

Remember quilts were originally intended as bed coverings and many millions are still enjoyed this way today. If you decide to use your heirloom quilts on a bed, consider making a chin guard as we discussed in an earlier lesson, or taking them off the bed just before sleep -- that is, using the quilt as a decorative top cover, but not for sleeping.
Many people display quilts in their living spaces as part of the decoration. In these two lessons, we’ll discuss the safest ways to do this. Here we’ll look at a variety of display options and in the next lesson we’ll talk about how to hang quilts on the wall as art.

Some home display ideas that people have found effective:

• draped over a quilt rack
• hanging over a bannister
• on the back of a bench or chair
• on a trunk or chest at the end of the bed
• folded in a cabinet or pie safe

All these options contribute to a beautiful home, but present dangers to the quilts.
In most of these cases, the quilt is likely to touch wood. Even when coated with three coats of polyurethane, wood can off-gas acids which can eat at quilts. The simple solution is to wrap the quilt rack or line the shelves with aluminum foil to prevent contact between the wood and the quilt.

In a conservation lab we would use mylar, but aluminum foil is much cheaper, easily available and just as effective as a barrier. I find heavy duty foil is easiest to work with. Then for aesthetic reasons, I cover the foil with muslin or another light cotton broadcloth to make a more pleasing background.

At quilt shows I’ve seen some furniture makers who have crafted end tables and coffee tables with openings to insert a folded quilt. This could be a great option -- but check that the top is tightly sealed against spills and that the quilts won’t be touching wood.

Perhaps my least favorite quilt display is
using a quilt on a dining table, even if covered with clear plastic. I know it’s appealing and many guests will ooh! and aah!, but I think it puts the quilt in so much danger it’s not worth the risk.

If you really want the look, this is a possible use for the inexpensive import quilts. Most of the workmanship in the cheap imports is such that they will not live to reach heirloom status. But even then, someone will get the idea that it’s ok to use Grandma’s precious quilt, because they saw their good friend (you) do it and it must be ok since you know so much about quilts.

You have the opportunity to teach many others how to care for their quilts by your example as much as by any lectures or lessons you give. Because you obviously love quilts and know how to care for them, your less informed friends will copy what they see you do.


LESSON #8

MANAGING YOUR QUILT GALLERY

Perhaps you didn’t know you are the curator of a quilt gallery, but if you display your quilts in your home and hang them on the walls, yes, you have a gallery and yes, you are the curator.

So make yourself a brass nameplate for the door if you like, and get ready to accept the responsibilities and joys of your new job.

Many quilts hold their own as great works of art, and quilts are collected now by major art museums. The only major difference from paintings is that we so rarely know the name of the artist, usually a woman, who worked in ano-
nymity, spending hundreds, maybe thousands, of hours to bring beauty into the world.

If you decide to hang your quilts, I suggest you designate one or more walls as your quilt gallery, and rotate the exhibit. Vertical display is hard on quilts, even if you do everything right. Quilts are relatively heavy, and gravity pulls on the fabric and the stitching over time.

We talked about exposure to light in an earlier lesson. The damage from UV rays is permanent, cumulative and irreversible. Try to use a wall which does not face a window and gets only indirect light.

I recommend leaving each quilt up only three months or less each year. If you have less than four quilts, this is a good excuse to buy or make another! If you have six quilts, hang each for two months, if 12, then a month each. When great works of art are loaned to museums, they go with contracts specifying how many foot
candles (a measurement of light) they can be exposed to in the course of an exhibition.

Very valuable quilts should be tracked with a log showing how many days out of storage and how much exposure to light. There is a “blue wool” patch you can purchase from museum supply houses that will show the effect of light -- it fades and can be compared with a chart to see how much effect light has had on the exhibit wall.

To hang a quilt you will probably use a sleeve sewn to the back. It should be in the shape of a D. The shorter side is stitched to the back of the quilt without going through the front, and the curved portion accommodates a rod.

Before we knew just how dangerous wood was to quilts, most people used wooden rods. Today we recommend brass or aluminum. Plastic is acceptable if it is polyethylene or polypro-
pylene, not PVC like plumbing pipes are made from.

When using a D shaped sleeve, the quilt will hang straight, rather than bending around the rod as it would with a flat sleeve.

Sleeves should generally be made from un-bleached washed muslin. The exception is with new quilts. If they have a variety of fabrics, I like piecing a sleeve from the fabrics in the top. This provides a source for restoration fabrics in the future.

If you decide to have a quilt framed, be sure to work with a framer with experience in textile framing. All quilt frames should be made with rabbets (spacers) to allow air to circulate over the surface of the piece.

As curator of your gallery, consider signage for your quilt. Plan time to dust your quilt weekly, and rotate the quilts on exhibit on
a regular schedule. Make appointments with yourself to do this important task.

Make a nameplate, a business card, give yourself a title. Recruit helpers, either from your family or friends, to assist you in the gallery.

You have an important job as curator of your quilt collection. Enjoy it!
LESSON #9

TAKING CARE OF GRANDMA’S QUILT

Whether you have your grandmother’s quilt, a great garage sale find, or a quilt made this year, you own part of our quilting heritage. As the owner, and curator of your quilt collection, you have a responsibility to decide how your quilts will be used or displayed, stored, cleaned and cared for.

Each decision you make will affect how long the quilt will last and whether it will become an heirloom for future generations. This lesson will cover cleaning of quilts.
STEP ONE: ASSESS THE QUILT

Before washing, assess the quilt. If it is damaged or very fragile, consider living with the problems instead of trying to clean it. A cotton quilt with wool batting, or an old quilt with very thick cotton batting needs special care and may come apart completely if washed.

There are very few quilts made before 1920 that you want to wash today. Washing may further damage fabric which is already starting to deteriorate, and will hurt the resale value of the quilt. On an older quilt, never wash it first if you are trying to sell it. Many collectors would rather have it in a stained and discolored state than risk the potential for more damage.

If the quilt is for personal use on a bed and your decision is to wash it, follow Steps 2-5.
**STEP TWO: REPAIR ANY DAMAGE**

First repair any tears or rips in the fabric or quilting. If this is beyond your ability, consult a local quilt shop or museum for reputable conservators. If a local quilter does the work, be sure they do it in the style of the original quilter, not the way they would do it today.

And use authentic fabrics if replacements are needed. If you want to attempt restoration yourself, but would like some guidance, we have a Quilt Restoration Workshop available on DVD. The workshop teaches basic techniques and gives good guidelines on when to conserve, when to restore, and when to salvage a quilt.

**STEP THREE: CLEANING THE QUILT**

Never dry clean a cotton quilt. Cotton was meant to be washed and will hold up better in the long run with proper washing. Dry cleaning is the only alternative for wool quilts and cer-
tain crazy quilts which include specialty fabrics. However, be aware that dry cleaning chemicals are often reused, and the soil from another garment may end up on your priceless quilt.

Before dry cleaning or washing, try vacuuming a soiled quilt. Even if it is cleaned further after trying this, much of the surface dirt will be removed by this process and cleaning will be easier.

To vacuum a quilt, you will need a piece of fiberglass screening available from most hardware stores. A piece 18” square is sufficient. Wrap cloth tape (or sew bias tape) around the edges to make them smooth so they won’t catch any quilting stitches. Then place the screen over a section of the quilt, and vacuum using a clean brush attachment. The screen will protect the fabric and stitches and the vacuuming will remove loose dirt.

Give cotton quilts a bath in the bath tub. If the quilt has never been washed and is from be-
fore 1930, consider soaking it for a hour in cold salt water — about 1 cup salt in a tub of water. This will help “set” the colors and help avoid loss of dyes. Be aware that some early fabrics were dyed with “fugitive” dyes which disappear when they hit water.

If you suspect your quilt may have these, consult a local quilt expert before washing.

Wash the quilt with Orvus Quilt Soap -- this is a gentle detergent with no perfumes or optical brighteners. It is most effective at a 2% solution, but that is more suds than most home tubs can handle -- you’ll feel like you are in an episode of *I Love Lucy*!

Fill the tub, adding the Orvus under running water. Place a white cotton sheet in the tub to use as a lifting sheet to hold the wet quilt. Add the quilt in gentle accordion folds.

Press it up and down with your hands. Do not twist or agitate the quilt. If the water turns
dark from the soil or yellow from nicotine staining, drain the tub and repeat. Once you feel the quilt is clean -- the sudsy water is clear -- drain and rinse well. It can take four to five rinses to get all the suds out. Rinse until the water runs clear.

In an ideal environment, you would wash the quilt using distilled water. This could prove very expensive. If you can, use distilled water for the final rinse to help remove minerals which might otherwise stay in your quilt.

**STEP FIVE: DRY THE QUILT FLAT**

Press out all the water possible using your hands in a downward motion. Put six or seven colorfast or white terry towels into the tub with the quilt and continue to press to absorb as much water as possible.

Gather the quilt into your arms and transfer to a clean laundry basket. Remember, don’t
hold it by just one side or you may rip the small stitches. If the quilt is sturdy, has no damage, and was made after 1930, you may want to put it in the washing machine to spin on the gentle cycle.

Do not be tempted to use the washing machine to wash the quilt or rinse it. The agitating motion can easily damage the quilt. After spinning, or directly from the tub if the quilt is more fragile, spread the quilt out flat on a bed or on the floor in a spare room to dry.

I use an inexpensive comforter with a white back. I place the back side up to protect the bed from the damp quilt. Then place the quilt flat on the bed.

If you use the floor, place a flannel or cotton sheet under the quilt to protect it from the carpet or flooring while drying. (Make sure that your carpet is colorfast so that the quilt does not take on the colors of the carpet.)
Conservators will use three panels of un-bleached cheesecloth, pressing them onto the top of the quilt. Because moisture wicks up, this will pull the water and any minerals it contains up into the cheesecloth as it dries. This will prevent “tide marks” on the quilt.

Place a box fan or oscillating fan next to the quilt, and it should dry in a few hours. The key is to dry your quilt as quickly as possible.

If there are still stains in the quilt, you may be tempted to use commercial stain removers. This is always a risk. The new stain removers on the market were manufactured for use with contemporary fabrics and may react differently with older fabric and dyes. Check with a local expert on the possibility of removing difficult stains.

**STEP SIX: STORE QUILTS PROPERLY**

The real enemies of quilts are light, moisture, and acids from wood and paper. Many
people store their quilts in a plastic bag or in the cedar chest, thinking that is the way to preserve them and keep them safe.

Unfortunately, the plastic bag can trap moisture and eventually allow mold to grow, and the cedar chest can stain the quilt with resins from the wood, and cause the fabric to disintegrate from the acids in any cellulose product.

Acid free boxes and tissue paper are available, but an acceptable home solution is to keep the quilt in a white cotton pillow case when storing it on a shelf.

Folded quilts should be taken out and refolded differently every month, but most people aren’t that organized. I suggest a minimum schedule of every Christmas and Fourth of July, to help people remember. If a quilt is stored flat on a bed in a spare room, it is important to keep it out of direct sunlight.
Even a few days of direct sunlight can fade a quilt.

**STEP SEVEN: KEEP THE HISTORY**

One of the most valuable additions to a quilt is a written history, telling who made it, when, and where they lived. It is also important to record the ownership of the quilt. If the quilt is ever sold, the “provenance” will greatly increase the value, and if it is kept in the family, it will give future generations an important record of family history.

Hopefully, if the quilter is still living, you can talk with her about when and how she made the quilt, get a picture of her with the quilt, and record your own memories of the quilt -- maybe you slept under it as a child when visiting Grandma’s house.

If the quilter is no longer living, try to find people who remember her. If possible get her
full name, where she lived, her birth and death dates (years), and any stories about her that people remember. If there is any special information about this quilt, such as “it was made as a friendship quilt by her bridesmaids”, record that too. Try to get a photo of the quilter, or perhaps a copy of her obituary.

Then add the history of how you got the quilt -- i.e handed down to your mother (include her name and biographical information) and she handed it down to you (include your biographical information). If you have made a decision about who this quilt will go to in the future, you could note that as well.

If the quilt stays in the family, this will be a precious gift to your children and grandchildren. And when someone has to take care of your things, they will know why this quilt was important to you.

We buy antique quilts all the time, usually at auctions. They are for sale because no one knows the history of the quilt or the quilter.
Once you have recorded the history, you can keep it in a notebook or journal, register it with your local quilt guild or historical society if they have a registry project, or keep it with the quilt.

It is a good idea to make a muslin label for the quilt. Use a Pigma fabric pen to write the information on a small square or rectangle of muslin. Follow the package directions to make it permanent. Then stitch it carefully to the back of the quilt, sewing only through the backing, not through the face of the quilt.

A Memory Pocket

Another option for labeling a quilt is to make a memory pocket. Make a muslin pocket with a front, back and flap. I recommend a finished size of 12” x 15” to accommodate standard paper sizes and photographs.
Sew the pocket to the back of the quilt as you would a label, careful not to stitch through the face of the quilt.

To avoid the problem of acid stains from paper products, encase them in polyethylene sleeves before placing them in the pocket. Be sure to use archival polyethylene, not the polyvinyl chloride sheet protectors usually available from office supply stores.

On the outside of the pocket, use a Pigma pen to record the basic label information. Add the words “Remove contents before washing” (or “before dry cleaning” if it is a wool or crazy quilt).

**STEP EIGHT: DISPLAYING YOUR QUILT**

Of course, quilts can be displayed on a bed as the maker probably intended originally. To protect an heirloom quilt, make sure the bed does not receive direct sunlight. If it will be used for warmth, consider adding a “chin
guard”, a strip of muslin across the top stitched loosely with basting stitches, which protects the edge from body soil and the added stress of being pulled up to cover the sleeper.

Otherwise, remove the quilt before using the bed and fold it onto a quilt rack or chest at night. If you plan to display the quilt for long periods on a wooden quilt rack or banister/stair railing, cover the wood with aluminum foil, then place a piece of muslin or acid free tissue between the quilt and rack.

To display a quilt on the wall, the best method is to create a muslin sleeve. I use a 9 inch piece of muslin the width of the quilt.

Fold the muslin in half lengthwise, and stitch a seam using a 1/2 inch seam allowance. Hem the two ends, using two folds 1/4 inch each with the hemmed ends out. Place the tube so the seam is centered in the back, with the raw edges to the quilt (this creates a smooth interior for
the rod to pass through), and press so the tube will be a D shape – that is, the part that will be sewn to the quilt is shorter than the part which will hang loose. Ideally every sleeve will be sized for the rod you plan to use. By using a D-Shaped sleeve, the quilt will hang straight down in front instead of bending over the rod.

Stitch the sleeve to the back of the quilt using a whip stitch. Stitch both the top and bottom edge of the tube, careful to attach it only to the back of the quilt. Then slide a rod or dowel through the sleeve and hang the rod from the wall using curtain hardware or the system of your choice.

Using this method, the weight of the quilt will be on the new muslin rather than the older quilt. If you hang your quilts, it is best to take them down every few months and give them a rest on a bed, or folded and stored properly.
While the quilt is hanging, dust it weekly with a clean ostrich feather duster to remove surface dust which accumulates. (Ostrich feathers remove the dust from the surface. Chicken feathers only move it around. It’s important to reserve this duster for your quilts only.)
LESSON #10
OTHER IMPORTANT STUFF

There are a few other questions people ask all the time.

• How should I ship my quilts if I’m sending them to an appraiser, restorer or as a gift?
• How often should I have my quilts appraised?
• Are quilts a good investment?
• Can my quilt be restored?
• My quilts are all new – why should I bother with all this?

Let’s take these one at a time.
HOW TO SHIP A QUILT:

We recommend folding the quilt carefully with acid free tissue in the folds. Then pack the quilt in a clear plastic bag. Please don’t use a dark garbage bag. We have heard too many horror stories of quilts being accidentally thrown away, mistaken for garbage.

We recommend shipping via UPS or Federal Express so you have complete tracking information and insuring the quilt for its full value. While the U.S. Post Office can be less expensive, delivery confirmation is not the same as true tracking.

It is best to ship on Monday so your quilt will not spend the weekend in a shipping warehouse.
HOW OFTEN SHOULD I HAVE MY QUILTS APPRAISED?

Generally it is best to have your quilts appraised every three years. Consult with your insurance agent to determine what value each quilt or your collection needs to reach before they require a written appraisal for replacement insurance. Amounts vary by company and type of policy.

Quilts which are used for teaching or to illustrate books or lectures need to be appraised for their income producing value, not just replacement value.

If you are planning to donate a quilt to a museum or charitable organization you will need an appraisal near the time of the donation for tax purposes. Otherwise plan to have your appraisals updated every three years.
ARE QUILTS A GOOD INVESTMENT?

A recent study at Creighton University showed that quilts can appreciate between 5% and 17% per year, but the quilt trends studied were based on price guides which generally feature quilts in excellent condition and with desirable patterns. However this follows the value growth we observed as dealers over 21 years.

The problem arises when a collector buys a quilt at full retail value at auction or from a dealer. While the quilt may double in value in seven to ten years, if it has to be sold quickly it will be sold at wholesale – generally 50% of retail. So after holding a quilt for 10 years you may only recover your initial investment, and that is assuming no damage or fading in the interim.

Quilts are best enjoyed when purchased like any work of art – for the enjoyment of the owner. If at some time in the future it sells for
more than you paid for it, consider it a bonus. Because of the cost of maintaining quilts in temperature and humidity controlled environments, plus the cost of insurance, acid free boxes and tissue, quilts are generally not the place to park your retirement savings.

**CAN MY QUILT BE RESTORED?**

It depends. Virtually any quilt can be restored if you want to spend enough time and money. Whether it should be restored is another question.

First be clear about the past of the quilt. Does it have special family significance or other historic importance? What are your plans for its future? Will it stay in the family or be sold? Will it be donated to a museum?

If the quilt has historic significance or is destined for a public collection, generally it should not be restored other than very minor repairs like a seam coming loose.
If more than 30% of the quilt is damaged, and you replace the fabrics, will you really have an antique quilt any more?

Quilt restoration is a complex issue. For more information please consult our Quilt Restoration Workshop DVDs and the advanced workshop, Restoring Crazy Quilts.

**My Quilts Are All New – Why Should I Bother?**

Our most precious antique quilts were all new at one time. We are now aware of how much history has been lost because people did not sign their quilts. But I still hear quilters today say “That old thing! That’s just a quick bed quilt.” Or “I made this quilt for the baby to use, not to be an heirloom.”

Even so, your quilts may live far longer than you do. It will be a great gift to future genera-
tions if you label your quilts, include your full name including your maiden name, date of birth, date the quilt was made, name of the quilt, and the town you lived in when you made the quilt.

In 150 years, someone will be able to show your quilt at their local quilt guild and say something like “My great-grandmother made this quilt back in 2008!”
APPENDIX

OTHER RESOURCES FROM THE KIRK COLLECTION

Collecting Antique Quilts with Nancy Kirk
Quilt Restoration Workshop (4 DVD Set)
Restoring Crazy Quilts (4 DVD Set)
Dating Fabrics; A Video Workshop (DVD)
Free Quilt Inventory Form (download at
www.kirkcollection.com)

All available at www.kirkcollection.com
or by calling (800) 398-2542.
Invite Nancy Kirk to speak at your next meeting or event. Nancy speaks to quilt groups about antique quilts, quilt history, patriotic quilts and related subjects.

She also delivers motivational and inspirations talks and workshops for business and community organizations and women’s groups based on her experiences as an entrepreneur, adoptive Mom and writer. Your audiences will face life’s challenges with greater courage.

For more information contact: The Kirk Collection (800) 398-2542 or go to www.nancykirk-speaks.com
FINAL THOUGHTS

I hope you have found this small book helpful in caring for your heirloom quilts. I would love to hear from you with any thoughts or suggestions you have for future editions or other books or videos you would like to see.

To subscribe to our free on-line newsletter and find other resources please visit our website at www.kirkcollection.com. You’ll receive information, tips and inspiration.
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