

**Where Have All The Flowers Gone:**

**A Study of a Funeral Ribbon Quilt**

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Front cover is a reproduction of a collage, *The Life and Times of Roxie Hale*, created in 1991 by Lynne Ferguson and currently in the collection of Bruce and Janet Barrickman in Atlanta, GA.

## Introduction

Defining art begins with the intent of the artist. I believe that intent to create is adequate criteria for an object to be art. The term “folk” as a descriptor has ambiguous meaning for scholarly use in moving toward a better understanding of an object. As Pocius succinctly states, “art cannot be understood if it is constrained by disciplinary inferiorities that demand that creativity be delimited by prefixes such as *folk-*” (1995:425). The manner in which objects are depicted is often imposed from outside, “the binary naming process itself – “folk art” versus “real art” – is inevitably imposed from above and beyond the world of the practitioners” (Lippard 1004:13). More specific information about an object and its creator enhances our understanding in discerning its place and use by the creator and her culture.

Everything created is of equal value in the study of culture or as Pierce Lewis wrote, “most items in the human landscape are no more and no less important than other items in terms of their role as clues to culture” (Lewis 1979:78). Included in this human landscape are descriptions of material culture that are bound in cultural language. Scholarship is a precursor to an accepted understanding about our world; therefore we should lean toward less biased preposition of art. I prefer not to use the term “folk art” in this paper and it will only be used here only when quoted directly from another source.

My intent to be clear, concise and professional is juxtaposed by the strong emotional connection I have with my subject. The art object of this paper has great sentimental value to me. The artist, Roxie Belle Hall Hale, was my great-grandmother. The memory I have of her is strong. The pieces she created continue to bond relationships in my family.

As my connection to this object is significant I will be including my aesthetic perception taking my cue from Joyce Ice:

. . . scholars . . . have begun to examine women's art and experiences in more holistic ways, taking to account, among other things, the role of process in women's aesthetics . . . this approach takes into consideration women's perceptions of their art and emphasizes processes involving objects and people, rather than focusing simply upon the products alone. (Ice 1993:166)

### **The Funeral Ribbon Quilt**

The single object that I have chosen for this study is a pieced quilt sewn from satin funeral flower ribbons. It was made around 1965 in Monroe County, Tompkinsville, Kentucky, by Roxie Belle Hall Hale. The ribbons are understood to have come from the funeral flowers reverencing her husband, Sherman Hale. This quilt was passed from Roxie to her son and daughter-in-law, Earl and Glaye Hale. The quilt then skipped a generation and came to me.

The pieced top is a rectangular shape and about the size of a full size quilt. It measures 90 and 91 inches on the long sides and 76 ½ and 76 inches on the wide sides. It has two layers. It is sewn together by machine with white thread. Roxie Hale used a black Singer treadle sewing machine that sat in her kitchen to sew the ribbons. The quilts she made in the 1950's and 1960's are all machine pieced and hand quilted. This pieced ribbon quilt is not quilted.

The top layer is composed of 25 rows of satin ribbons 90 to 91 inches long. The ribbons are two different widths. The exposed part of the ribbons measure approximately 2 ¼ or 3 ½ inches wide. Seven of the ribbons measure 2 ¼ inches wide and the remaining eighteen are 3 ½ inches wide. The wider ribbon is most likely 4 inches wide over all or what florists call a "100 width" (Hale 2004). Seventeen of the ribbons are one solid satin

piece the whole length of the top. Eight are pieced together of shorter ribbon lengths. The pieced ribbons are the same color with one exception which incorporates a different colored ribbon. Twenty of the ribbons are solid colors, two are striped, one has a glitter surface, and two are variegated, where one color is subtly blended into another.

There appears to be a conscious attempt by the artist to create a pattern. The solitary green ribbon marks the center of the piece. There are four sets of three ribbons that have two different repeated patterns. One pattern is red and white striped, lavender, and gold. It is repeated twice. The other is rose, white, and orange, which is repeated twice. This repetition of three ribbons leads me to believe that these ribbons were sewn together in groups of three before they were all put together to form the top. Three pieces would have been a manageable width to work with. The artist also made an effort to separate colors and disperse the five lavender ribbons and numerous gold and yellow ribbons evenly throughout the design. No two colors appear together with the exception of a coral ribbon and peach ribbon, different values of the same hue, next to each other on one edge.



Funeral ribbon quilt made by Roxie Hale, 1965.

Photo by Lynne Ferguson 10/2004

The back of the quilt is two pieces of cotton material sewn together. One piece measures 75 X 78 inches. This piece is made from a sheet where the hemming at both short ends had been pulled out before being used in this quilt. It is stitched to a 75 X 10 inch rectangle of cotton that is a different weave and heavier weight than the sheet. It is believed to be feed sack or flour sackcloth. This fabric back of the quilt is somewhat stained with evidence of being damp at one time.

The quilt top was sewn to the back by pinning the top to the back with the insides out. Three sides were sewn and the piece was turned to the right side out. The last side, a 90-inch ribbon length side, was finished last. The ribbon top was folded down over the bottom cotton and machined stitched about ½ inch from the edge. There is no batting between the top and the backing; this piece is not quilted.

The ribbons used in this quilt are called satin. Satin refers to a type of textile weave characterized by a smooth surface and usually a lustrous face and dull back:

Fabric constructed by the satin weaving method, one of the three basic textile weaves.

Satin weave superficially resembles twill but does not have the regular step in each successive weft that characterizes twills. Thus, there is no strong diagonal line, and the fabric is smooth-faced, with an unbroken surface made up of long floating warp yarns. Because satins are susceptible to the wear caused by rubbing and snagging, they are considered luxury fabrics. Satin is made in different weights for various uses, including dresses (particularly evening wear), linings, bedspreads, and upholstery. Though originally of silk, it may be made of yarns of other fibers. [[www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)]

Florists stock many different colors of ribbons in bolts of 10 yards or larger. According to Patsy Hale, who has owned and operated Monroe County Florist in Tompkinsville, KY since 1969, ribbons were used to wrap wreaths, cover the backs of sprays, and make bows (2004). In the 1960's florists used about 2 ⅓ yards of ribbon for a bow compared to using 1 ½ yards today (Hale 2004). In relaying the importance of the

funeral ribbon bow Pat Hale says, “a bow then, especially, was more a focal point of a flower arrangement as much as the flowers were” (2004).

The ribbon color “depended on the flowers you use it with.” Pat spoke about the dark red ribbon and the dark red ribbon with glitter that are in the quilt: “Maybe it was used with roses...when we first went into the flower business this was the color the red roses were, now they are more of a burgundy shade.” Pat gave the names of these roses as “Happiness” and “Forever Yours.” Pat was even more specific about what flowers the other ribbons had originally been used on (Hale 2004).

I saw how she could ascertain flower to ribbon color when Pat went to her large flower cooler and brought out a bunch of gladiolas that were the exact shade of the orange-red ribbon in the quilt. This color is called Valeria gladiolas (2004). Pat pointed to the gold ribbon color and said:

“This is a Talisman ribbon and it was used a lot, you could use it with yellows, but it matched those large bronze mums, football mums . . . green, with your foliage on your flowers, green blends with most anything. So it could have been used in one of those cases where you had, different flowers in an arrangement and you wanted something solid and something that would blend with it, the green would blend with the foliage . . . the salmon color that matches a gladiola also.

The red and white striped . . . that would have easily been used with red carnations or white . . . the yellows could match a lot of different flowers, your mums, the little cushion poms, button poms, carnations. And the light pink, that is a color of carnations, it also would have blended with some of the gladiolas.

The spring color would probably been used in an arrangement that had maybe solid color flowers in it, maybe pinks, there’s not very many flowers in the blues, so more than likely it would have been in the pinks or maybe even white. [2004]

When people die and the services of a commercial funeral home are sought, there are certain records that the funeral home keeps. The family is usually given a memorial book after the service that contains many of these records. Part of this book is where

guests sign in when they come to the funeral home to pay their respects to the family. The funeral home that Roxie Hale employed at the death of her husband, Sherman Magnus Hale, in January 1965 was the Yokley Funeral Home, Inc. The memorial book she received is bound in green silk. One hundred and thirty six lines of “Friends who Called” were signed in his book. There is a listing of pallbearers; they were eight close friends of the family.

The list of “Flowers of Remembrance” is of interest to the study of the funeral ribbon quilt. There are twenty-nine bouquets of flowers listed. Here is an example of the detail: “#6 – Extension Staff, Soil Conservation Staff, Farm Bureau Staff: Basket Orange Glads – Bronze Mums” (Memorial book 1965).

Using the detail given by Pat Hale of Monroe County Florist one can determine that one of two colors of ribbon was used on this basket, the Valencia orange or the Talisman gold, both of which are sewed into the funeral ribbon quilt (2004). A lot of the flower types and colors that Pat spoke about including, red and white carnations, gold, yellow, and white chrysanthemums, and pink and red gladiolas are listed in arrangements in this memorial book.

The listing for #26 is “H. B. Swan – Basket: Blue mums & pink glads” (Memorial book 1965). I believe this seemingly unusual blue and pink flower-basket arrangement had a “spring” multicolored pink and satin blue bow that was sewn into the funeral ribbon quilt.

### **Ribbon Quilt Color Graph**

Color	Width of ribbon	Pieces used for length
<u>Pink</u> -	<u>3 ¼</u>	<u>1 piece - edge of top</u>
<u>Yellow, light</u> -	<u>3 ¼</u>	<u>three pieces</u>

<u>Light pink -</u>	<u>3 ¼ - 1 piece</u>
<u>Spring -</u>	<u>3 ¼ - three pieces, one piece gold</u>
<u>Autumn -</u>	<u>2 ¼ - 1 piece</u>
<u>Yellow, medium -</u>	<u>2 ¼ - two pieces</u>
<u>Red and White stripe -</u>	<u>2 ¼ - three pieces</u>
<u>Lavender -</u>	<u>3 ¼ - 1 piece</u>
<u>Gold -</u>	<u>3 ¼ - 1 piece</u>
<u>Rose with glitter -</u>	<u>2 ¼ - 1 piece</u>
<u>Orange -</u>	<u>3 ¼ - 1 piece</u>
<u>White -</u>	<u>3 ¼ - 1 piece</u>
<u>Green -</u>	<u>3 ¼ - 1 piece</u>
<u>Lavender -</u>	<u>3 ¼ - 1 piece</u>
<u>Rose -</u>	<u>2 ¼ - 1 piece</u>
<u>White -</u>	<u>3 ¼ - 2 pieces</u>
<u>Orange -</u>	<u>3 ¼ - 1 piece</u>
<u>Lavender -</u>	<u>3 ¼ - 1 piece</u>
<u>Gold -</u>	<u>3 ¼ - 1 piece</u>
<u>Red and White stripe -</u>	<u>2 ¼ - 2 pieces</u>
<u>Lavender -</u>	<u>3 ¼ - 1 piece</u>
<u>Gold -</u>	<u>3 ¼ - 1 piece</u>
<u>Lavender -</u>	<u>3 ¼ - 2 pieces</u>
<u>Coral -</u>	<u>2 ¼ - 1 piece</u>
<u>Peach -</u>	<u>2 ¾ - 1 piece</u>

### **Quilt Making**

Quilt making has been traditionally considered women's domestic work. It was brought to North America “as an art form among elite women” (Milspaw 1997:364). As domestic work, the quilt's function, usefulness, outweighed the idea of artfulness. Quilts were used to cover up with and to keep warm while sleeping. Some people displayed

their quilts on top of beds when company came. The change in perception of quilting from that of utilitarian to “art” was influenced by the “Arts and Crafts movement” and a widespread acceptance of weaving and collages as art forms (Zegart 2004). By the 1960's quilts began to be viewed in a wider aesthetic sense, as “art”.

As this idea developed museums began to put together exhibits of quilts that reflected views about modern art. In 1965 *Optical Quilts* exhibit opened at the Newark Museum, “quilts were now on a vertical plane-looked at as abstract art” (Zegart 2004). The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City opened *Abstract Design in American Quilts* in 1971. These types of exhibits highlight a problem with material culture study. As with other artifacts there is the “problem of historical bias in collections: both museums and families tend to preserve only unusual or ‘fancy’ quilts” (Milspaw 1997:367).

This idea of usefulness and Milspaw's notion may be the reason for the incredible proliferation and variety of the art form:

“women's work as quilt makers has not been bounded by concepts of artistic status, but rather by more mundane considerations: individual skill, access to textiles and other materials, community support and encouragement, and available time”[1997: 364].

Additionally, the reasons for doing this artwork are personal. The personal has to be considered along with cultural traditions in quilt work.

Milspaw's *Regional Style in Quilt Design* determined that the cultural background of the settlers in North America played a part in regional quilt design.

The settlers of Appalachia, with their emphasis on the plain and serviceable, their extreme independence, and their acquaintance with privation, would be inclined to produce textiles from salvage, and to emphasize in their designs the plain stripes and plaids of home-produced cloths [1997:387].

Roxie Hale ancestors were part of this Appalachian wave of settlers and this cultural heritage, but the greater influence for her work was personal.

### **Roxie**

She made quilts for practical and personal reasons. She made a quilt for the birth of her first five grandchildren and the death of her husband. She gave quilts to grandchildren when they married (Allen 2004). She made heavy quilts for winter and lighter quilts for summer. She quilted with her closest neighbor for company (Allen 2004).



Detail of a quilt made by Roxie Hale in 1956 for the birth of her great granddaughter. Photo by Lynne Ferguson 10/2004

Roxie Belle Hall Hale was born June 23, 1890 in Monroe County. Her parents were Marcus T. and Eliza Lougenie Hunter Hall. Marcus' family lived in Monroe County. Eliza was from the Rowlett's community in Hart County, Kentucky (Walker 2004). Marcus and Eliza had another child, a son, Edd, who died at age 23 in a WWI army camp (Walker 2004). Roxie married Sherman M. Hale whose family lived in the

Ebenezer community of Monroe County. The belief is their ancestors came from east Tennessee or Kentucky, even though there is some question that Sherman’s ancestors were from the north because of his name (Walker 2004). Roxie and Sherman had four children Ree, Ralph, Glenn and Earl. Three of their children died in childhood. Their youngest son, Earl, was the only child to survive to adulthood and raise a family.

When Earl Hale married Ersie Glaye White, called Glaye, they made their home in Monroe County with Roxie and Sherman. Granddaughter Sherlie Hale Walker remembers, “In the beginning, my parents, Earl and Glaye White Hale and their children, Sherlie, Betty Jean, and Charles lived with . . . Sherman and Roxie Hall Hale. The house was about two miles south of Tompkinsville, KY, on the Gamaliel Road” (2004:E). Eliza Lougenie Hall, Roxie’s mother lived on the property, “in the little house back behind the big house” (Walker 2004).



Detail of a flower basket pattern quilt made by Eliza Hall.  
Photo by Lynne Ferguson 10/2004

Eliza Hall was a quilter. I have a quilt that is recognized to have been made by her. It is a flower basket pattern hand pieced in red, white, and blue that is quilted with red, white, and blue thread. Another family member has a quilt where Eliza embroidered her full name and the date. Sherlie Walker remembers that if Eliza could sit up she would quilt (2004). Roxie, following tradition, most likely learned quilting from her mother, Eliza Hall.

Sherlie, who calls Roxie “Mama” recalls quilting at the family home on the Gamaliel Road.

I remember that Mama and some of their nearest neighbors would “put in a quilt”. This was done at either Mama’s house or Ray Curtis’ (female) who lived up the road toward town.

Putting in a quilt was the task of setting up the quilting frames, either the kind that was hung from the ceiling by ropes attached to hooks that could be raised out of the way when they were not working on the quilt or the kind that stood on the floor on legs. Then the quilt top, cotton batting, and the quilt lining were layered together and tightly fastened to the frames. A quilting pattern was then marked onto the quilt top with a soft lead pencil in the immediate work area. The most common pattern was the fan design but there were others that might have been used. The ladies sat around the quilting frames and stitched thru the layers of fabric as far as they could reach. Then the frames were adjusted, rolled in, and a new area marked and quilted until the top was finished. Then it was bound around the outside edges with some contrasting fabric to make the quilt usable.

The ladies had quite a collection of patterns for quilt pieces usually cut out of brown paper bags because they were durable. They used old clothing scraps for the cloth with lighter weight cotton used for light quilts and heavier cloth such as woolen scraps for winter quilts. Everything was done by hand at this time. I do not remember Mother ever quilting but all the children that were big enough got a turn at trying a few stitches. Usually we just played on the floor under the quilt [2004:E]

Glaze Hale moved her young family into the town of Tompkinsville. She wanted her children to have the educational opportunity of attending what she considered to be a better school (Walker 2004). This move became the catalyst for Roxie and Sherman’s

move into town. They wanted to be closer to their son and grandchildren. They bought a farm fronting Columbia Avenue in 1944. They moved into a house that was already built on the property (Walker 2004). At the same time Roxie's mother, Eliza, moved in with them.

In 1947 Sherman and Roxie deeded land on this property to their son and daughter-in-law, Earl and Glaye. Earl and Glaye then built a two-story house with a basement where they lived with their three children. A vegetable garden of about an acre separated the two houses. As Sherman and Roxie grew older they became less able to take care of the land and the large house. Around 1957 they sold most of the acreage and the house. They built a smaller modern home with indoor plumbing and a full basement even closer to their son's home. Only a small triangle of land and two driveways separated their houses.

Sherman and Roxie lived on Columbia Avenue with her mother, Eliza, until her mother's death in May 1948. Sherman died unexpectedly in January 1965 suffering a heart attack while shoveling snow. Roxie was 75 years-old when she pieced this memorial ribbon quilt with the help of a friend, Vera Page. She continued to live by herself on Columbia Avenue in Tompkinsville, Kentucky for five more years. She went into a nursing home in 1970 where she lived until her death, June of 1980.

Roxie and Sherman lived a very traditional early 1900's rural Kentucky life. They consulted a calendar with moon phases as they planted by the signs. Sherman plowed the family's vegetable garden with mules. They never threw away anything; everything was recycled. Roxie baked biscuits in her wood stove in the basement even though there was a perfectly good electric stove in the modern kitchen upstairs. They continued to use the privy even after building a modern house with an indoor bath and running water. Neither

of them ever drove a car. The toys at their house included a rope swing with a plank seat and a tin of old buttons, which you strung with a darning needle and in the evenings children were entertained with story telling.

It seems that her family's tradition of quilting has died with Roxie. Her daughter-in-law, Glaye, who may have quilted as a young woman didn't continue quilting in adulthood. She also may not have continued her mother's domestic traditions because of birth order. Glaye was the fourth daughter in her family and when it came time for her to contribute within the family labor structure the household chores were all taken by her older sisters. Glaye worked on her family's farm doing outside chores in the fields and at the barn with her brothers in a traditional male gender role. She liked showing a photograph of herself standing beside a horse she rode in competition at the county fair. She possibly didn't pass a quilting tradition on to her daughters because it was not a tradition she participated in. Not one of Roxie's granddaughters or great granddaughters' quilt, but her artistic ability influenced me in other ways.

Roxie was the only adult I knew that drew. She would draw animals for me on the backs of used envelopes, around the pictures and copy on newspapers, and brown paper bags. She would draw a chicken and hand me the pencil to copy her lines. My great-grandmother was my first art teacher. This was my first cognizant realization that people could create.

Roxie Hale and her friend, Vera Page, made two funeral ribbon quilts and two funeral ribbon pieced pillows. They were most likely made at the same time. Sherlie Walker remembers Roxie working on the ribbon quilt.

The funeral ribbon quilt was made from the ribbons from the funeral flowers of Sherman Hale who died in early 1965. I remember seeing Mama and friend working on the quilt. They took the ribbons and pressed them flat and stitched them together. I do not remember if

this was done by hand or by sewing machine. I was not actually involved in the structure of the quilt but was aware of it as it was sadly discussed by the family at the time [2004:E].

The quilts were displayed in 1965 and possibly in 1966. They were then stored away in a dresser drawer in Roxie Hale's guest room. Around 1970 after Roxie moved into a nursing home they were placed in a cardboard box and moved to the attic of the home of Earl and Glaye Hale. Thirty years later I brought up the subject of the funeral ribbon quilt with my mother, Betty Allen and her siblings, Sherlie and Charles. I wanted to see the quilt again and if possible have it in remembrance of my great grandmother. Betty and Charles had no memory of a quilt made of funeral ribbons. Sherlie remembered Mama making a funeral ribbon quilt but she had no idea what happened to it. In an extensive search of the family home on Columbia Avenue, my mother and I searched the upstairs attic closet. To our amazement we found two ribbon quilts and two small ribbon pillows in a cardboard box.

I couldn't believe it, there were two. They were wrinkled and had some water stains and minor separation damage, but they survived. The colors were still bright and vivid. The connection was made. These pieces validated my connection with my great-grandmother. Zeitlin and Harlow wrote in their introduction of *Giving Voice to Sorrow*, "Those who no longer walk the earth are dust and spirit. We can only know them through the creations they leave behind . . . or through our memories of a shared past with them" (2001:4). Now I had both the memories and an object created by my great-grandmother. The funeral ribbon quilt used for this paper is most likely the last piecing Roxie Hale did. There are no other works known to have been made by her after this quilt.

One ribbon quilt was placed into the collection of the Kentucky Library and Museum at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, KY. This quilt top is likely

the first one made. It is made of single strips of ribbon, end to end, with only one ribbon pieced to continue the strip. Most of the ribbons in this quilt top are exact replicas of ribbons in the second piece. It has white cotton backing of two pieces sewn together. This quilt top is edged on all four sides with gold ribbon. There is no batting between the top and the backing. The ribbons are machined stitched together and there is no quilting stitches holding the front to the quilt lining. This ribbon quilt is very similar to the subject of this paper.

The technique used is the same for both quilts with the exception of the edging. They were made near the same time in the same year. The form is the same; both are rectangles with ribbons strips running the long side. The bottom layers were both unhimmed sheets stitched to courser cotton, which appears to be feed sack material. They both consist of two layers and have not been quilted.

I have known of this object's existence for thirty-seven years. In my recollection a ribbon quilt was displayed in Roxie's guest bedroom. She called this room the "front room". The "front room" is a good description because it was at the front of the house and hardly anyone ever slept in this room. The front room was almost always closed off and the door was shut. To me it seemed cool, quiet, and a place where time stood still.

I remember going into the room by myself to smell the perfume and look at the ribbon quilt. I went in there with my Granny on Sunday. This is where she kept all the things she needed to be dressed just right for church on Sunday. This is where Granny kept her Sunday hat, hatpins, and her jewelry. Everything in the front room was placed with an eye to display. The dresser scarf was embroidered and edged with lace. It was centered on the dresser. In the middle of the scarf there was a mirrored bottom tray

holding small brightly colored bottles of perfume. The mirror over the dresser reflected the colors of the ribbon quilt.

The funeral ribbon quilt lay across the bed. When the ribbon quilt was displayed on the bed two small pillows made of the funeral ribbons accompanied it. This cover was not something anyone ever slept under. It was only put on the bed to be viewed. Visually the wide strips of different colors and the way the satin ribbons shined in the daylight was something that I can't believe anyone could resist noticing or touching.

Making the funeral ribbon quilt was a way for Roxie Hale to have a remembrance of her late husband. Sewing a quilt was also a traditional way that she visited with her friends. Making the ribbon quilts kept her busy and in the company of a friend. Her friend, Vera Page, was probably glad to have something constructive to do to help Roxie. More than likely they were both glad to have an excuse to visit.

Making something to remember a loved one by can be a very healing way to work through the grief associated with the death of a loved one. Erika Brady would describe this as a "beau geste . . . a mourner's reverent and symbolically charged disposal of an item or items associated with death" (1987:26). Creating a tangible object in remembrance is to create a "commemorative narrative . . . [to] capture the essence of a person who has died and serve to evoke his or her presence among the living" (Zeitlin, Harlow 2001:4). The object becomes a metonym evoking the life story of the dead. Philosopher John Paul Sartre says to possess the past you must tie it to a project (Hufford, et al 1978:41). There are many creative responses to death and women have traditionally used quilt making in this purpose for ages.

There are quilt patterns known as the "Widow's Quilt, or Darts of Death", quilts made from pieces of the deceased clothing, and, "quilts [had] very practical purposes . . .

as temporary covering for the body, line the casket, or offer protection for the body in the cold ground (Trechsel 1989:143-145). Funeral ribbon quilts are a type of mourning quilt. Gail Andrews Trechsel writes in her article *Mourning Quilts* about the role that mourning quilts have played in the life of women:

Quilts have been the constant companions of American women for over two centuries, created for all occasions, giving comfort day to day. Women made quilts to commemorate births and marriages, to honor community leaders and friends, and to memorialize the dead. Quilts in this last group, mourning quilts, provided the maker with a tangible memorial to the departed and sometimes served a practical purpose in the burial process or the home. [1989:139]

She also discusses the creation of mourning quilts made from funeral flower ribbons specifically:

The ribbon quilts have special meaning to the makers, commemorating a loved one and saving something associated with them. The ribbon quilts are related to other mourning quilts in memorializing the dead and in the comfort they provide the maker. The process of creating a whole from fragments is a healing activity and serves an important psychological function for those in mourning [1989:152].

Folklorist Mary Ann McDonald uses a dichotomy of parts to a whole, in describing how a funeral ribbon quilt made by a mother symbolizes her son, “this transformation from ribbons to quilt, from loss into useful object, enables Laura Lee to order her grieving within the framework of her life . . . the quilt symbolizes her son” (1990:176).

The funeral is over and everyone has left the graveyard. The grave is then covered over with dirt and baskets of flowers that cover the entire grave. The ribbons that were tied around the baskets and made into bows are gone. The flowers wilt and then freeze in the cold January wind. In a few weeks the remaining flowers and the paper maché baskets are removed to decompose out of sight.

The satin funeral flower ribbons were saved. They were taken home and the wire bounding the ribbon into bows has been cut or unwound. They are stored in the front room. They are special, “in one sense the funeral ribbons are the very last thing to be associated with the deceased . . . This connection makes them special and powerful . . . through their association with the dead” (McDonald 1990:177). Quilts that are made from funeral ribbons are, “more than quilts made from other fabrics . . . hold special meaning” (McDonald 1990:178).

### **Other Pieces**

There is an example making an object out of funeral ribbons on the paternal side of my family. My grandmother, Ella Hammer, used funeral ribbons to make a pillow. She saved ribbons of funeral flowers from the funeral of her son Paul. Ella sewed the ribbon strips together to make a pillow in 1987. She had never known anyone who had sewed funeral ribbons together before. Ella said, “I just wanted to keep those ribbons” (Hammer 2004). Ella has saved the rest of the ribbons from Paul’s flowers and she also saved ribbons from her husband’s funeral flowers. She stores them in a plastic bag in her home. She lives in the Eighty Eight community of Barren County, Kentucky.

In the 1980’s folklorist Mary Ann McDonald found a tradition of making quilts out of funeral ribbons in Chatham County, NC. As she can attest, after the discovery of this tradition, there is not a lot of documentation of this art. She writes,

the funeral-ribbon quilt, although not well documented, is not a tradition found only in Chatham County. Even though there is no published data on funeral-ribbon quilts, folklorist have seen them in other Afro-American communities . . . Folklorist Laurel Horton saw them else-where in NC, Tom Rankin says he saw funeral-ribbon quilts in East Tennessee summer of 1980” [McDonald 1990:166].

McDonald documented three African-American women who made quilts out of funeral ribbons in Chatham County, NC. The women knew each other and they each claimed independent invention for the idea of using funeral ribbons (1990:164-178).

McDonald's study covered:

where the ribbons came from, whether they were new or from a grave site; the expressed reasons for using the ribbons; the time when the quilt was made; and how the quilt is used now, both materially and symbolically. . . the three women . . . representing three different levels of symbolic use of these quilts [1990:164-178].

McDonald found that two of the women bought the ribbons they used in their quilts from a ribbon outlet store in Burlington, NC near their homes (1990:169-171). They made use of materials bought inexpensively. I have witnessed a similar textile use of materials bought cheaply from a clothing factory. A friend bought a pickup truck load of denim remnants cheap from an Osh Kosh factory in Tennessee. It took some time and imagination to consume all that material. She became very creative and used the material to make bedspreads, curtains, purses, as well as clothes for her family.

McDonald documented one quilter, Laura Lee, whose work is more closely related to the funeral ribbon quilt made by Roxie Hale. Lee picked up discarded funeral ribbons from flowers on graves for three of her five funeral ribbon quilts, "Laura Lee views quilting as a salvage art . . . the challenge is to turn available discarded materials into something beautiful" (1990:175). She made a quilt from the ribbons of floral arrangements from the funeral of a local judge she admired after the judge's wife gave her the ribbons (1990:175). She "also made a quilt from her son's funeral ribbons" (1990:175).

One assumption that Mary Ann McDonald makes in her study of ribbon quilts is clearly erroneous. She asserts that, "the use of material associated with funerals, and

therefore death, as cloth for quilts is not expected or accepted in Euro-American culture.

Funeral ribbons are the only quilt material I have found that is peculiar to Afro-Americans” (1990:166). She goes on to write,

all other sources for scraps mentioned by black quilters ... are common in the white tradition as well. Because funeral ribbons are used exclusively by Afro-Americans and excite such strong feelings among Euro-Americans, an examination of this tradition may reveal symbolic associations with death and the quilts themselves that are very different in Afro-American culture from Euro-American culture [1990:166].

Gail Andrews Trechsel wrote about a quilt made in Alabama of funeral ribbons in 1972:

Mrs. Bessie Alexander, a white quilter in Walker County, Alabama, made a quilt in 1972 from the funeral-flower ribbons of her mother-in-law. She was not aware of other quilts of this type, but said, “I just had so many ribbons; I wasn’t sure what to do with them. A quilt was the only thing I could think of.” In addition, she felt it was a “good way to keep something of sentimental value to you.” Mrs. Alexander made one for herself and her husband, then two more, smaller ones, for each of her husband’s sisters.

Mrs. Alexander takes great pleasure in showing her quilt to others. It is a beautiful object, its lengths of richly-colored satin arranged unbroken by scissor-cut or elaborate pattern. Mrs. Alexander organized the colors symmetrically, beginning with deep lavender at the center of the quilt. The other colors – red, yellow, orange, and olive – fan out, in pairs, on either side of the first lavender ribbon. [1989:151-152].

### **Conclusion**

The idea of independent invention for the use of ribbons in making quilts and a quilter’s comment about having so many ribbons that a quilt was the only thing she could think of lead me to believe that Roxie’s funeral ribbon quilt was most likely a spontaneous creative endeavor (McDonald 1990, Trechsel 1989). Pocius’ perception on creating compliments my understanding of the funeral quilt creation; it is this simple or complex:

“Art involves creation. And all creation is partly culturally based. Artists live in a particular time period and in a particular place. Thus creation never occurs completely in a vacuum; it must involve choice of techniques, as well as content, which are all culturally influenced and learned. The creator is never totally isolated, nor does he or she totally repeat what is known” [1995:424].

The funeral ribbon quilt is an object made by the artist as an outlet for sorrow and grief. Roxie’s creativity followed a customarily accepted path using the traditional form that she had used through out her life. It was pieced together in her usual way, with a sewing machine. She used recycled materials that held significant meaning. The stitching isn’t precisely straight and in one area the ribbons weren’t caught well by the stitching and they have pulled apart. It is not an outstanding example of a funeral ribbon quilt. It doesn’t represent Pocius’ idea of art excellence in that, “art, as that which represents a specific culture’s notion of excellence” (1995:413). Vlach wrote, “the approach to folk art that I am advocating is one which recognizes artists’ intentions first and the qualities of their works second” (1992). Roxie intended to create something wonderful, something lasting that evoked the memory of emotion she felt for her late husband, and she did.

No one ever brought it to Roxie’s attention that she was an artist and that the quilts she made were works of art. I don’t think she would have ever believed her work and life would be studied or written about. She went about fulfilling her commitment to loved ones by creating quilts and in doing so left us a piece of herself.

**How to make a floral funeral bow:** To make a funeral bow you loosed a couple of yards of ribbon while keeping the ribbon on the bolt. Then starting at the end you form a loop, twist the ribbon one turn and then form another loop. You hold the twisted loops between your forefinger and your thumb. Continue to make the loops until the bow is the right size. Then you cut the bow away from the ribbon bolt, tightly tie a wire around the twisted area, and then form the bow into an aesthetic pleasing shape.

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