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MAY/JUNE 2013

## 41 FREE FAMILY HISTORY TOOLS

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Tips to Uncover Your Ancestors' Records

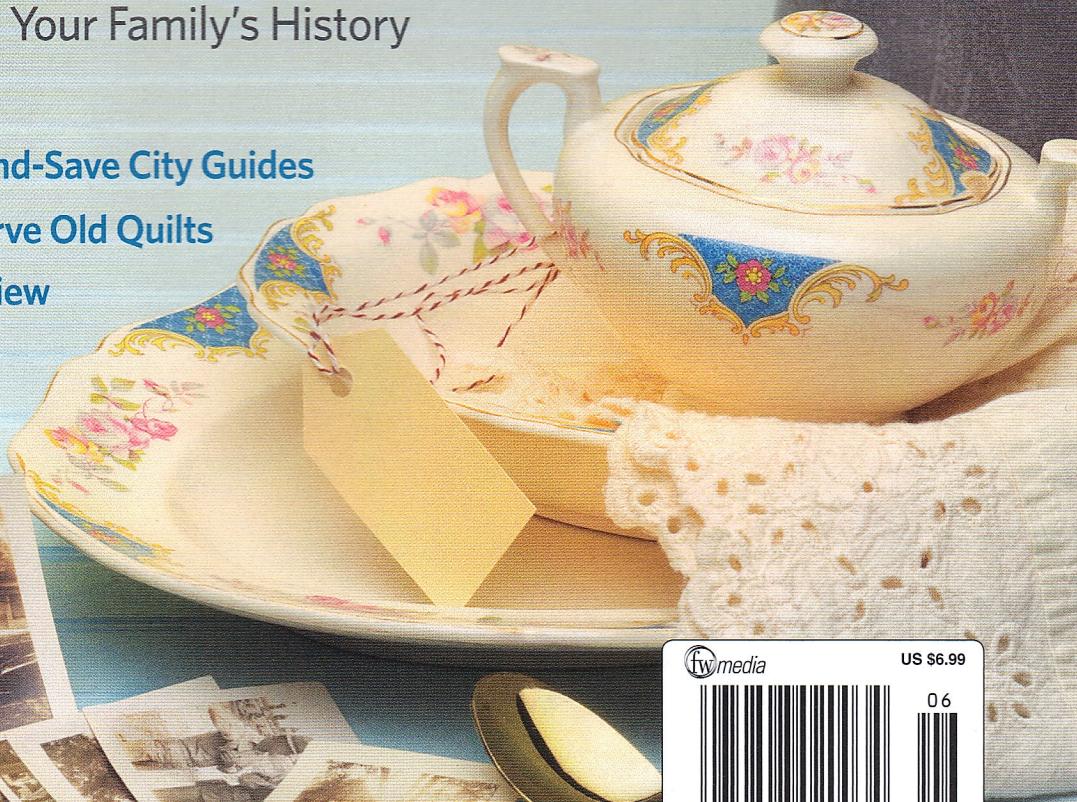
### 6 STEPS to Write Your Family's History



+ Clip-and-Save City Guides

+ How to Preserve Old Quilts

+ RootsMagic 6 Review



Display until June 24, 2013



## ASK THE ARCHIVIST

### PRESERVING HEIRLOOM QUILTS

**Q. GOT A COVER** quilted by Grandma or Great-grandma? Textile conservationist Julia M. Brennan <[www.caringfortextiles.com](http://www.caringfortextiles.com)> shares tips on caring for and displaying old (or new) family quilts.

#### Q. What makes heirloom quilts so special?

**A.** Quilts are a unique form of textile, made of fabrics reflecting a certain time in history and a certain wealth or status. Women often made quilts to mark events or anniversaries; they might have monograms, names or dates. Passed down from generation to generation, quilts become intimate parts of a family's history.

#### Q. Why do quilts require special care?

**A.** Quilts are complicated. They're constructed in multiple layers, usually with batting or padding inside, and fabrics of varying type, strength and color fastness. Outer layers may have delicate embroidery, stitching, ribbons or other embellishments. Quilts are also usually large, making them tricky to manage.

#### Q. How can you safely clean a quilt?

**A.** Examine it for condition problems. Vacuum the front and back with a soft brush attachment and low suction, if you can, to remove surface soil, dirt and insect debris. If the quilt is delicate, frayed, split, has a lot of surface embellishments or is a crazy quilt, I recommend holding a piece of nylon mesh—such as a window screen—over the quilt as a protective screen while you vacuum.

Most dry cleaners don't have experience with heirloom textiles, and their cleaning process isn't gentle enough. Don't



put a quilt in a washer or dryer. If you're certain it won't bleed, run, tear, fray or fall apart, you can wash it passively in a tub and lay it flat to dry. But beware: You may do irreversible damage.

#### Q. What's the best way to store quilts?

**A.** Fan-fold the quilt and put crushed archival tissue between layers. Wrap it in tissue or clean cotton sheets. Don't use plastic, which traps moisture. Periodically refold the quilt in a different way to avoid permanent creases. Store it in an acid-free box. If you're using a cedar chest or dresser drawer, line it with a clean cotton sheet as a buffer between the quilt and the acidic wood. There's an instructional video on my website <[www.caringfortextiles.com/inthenews.htm](http://www.caringfortextiles.com/inthenews.htm)>. Display a valuable quilt only on a limited basis and make sure it's not exposed to a lot of light (natural or artificial).

#### Q. How can you preserve the story behind an heirloom quilt?

**A.** Interview older family members: Does anyone know who made or bought it, when and why? Where did the fabric come from (such as old clothing)? Copy the information onto an archival cardstock tag and attach it to the quilt with a loop of white thread—not a safety pin, which may rust. Take pictures of the quilt, both overall and detail shots, so you have another record of it.

## RESOURCE ROUNDUP

Use these archival resources for completing the projects described here.

Guide to Collections Care  
**free** (print or digital download)  
<[www.gaylord.com/catalog.asp](http://www.gaylord.com/catalog.asp)>

Heirloom Preservation Made Easy on-demand webinar  
<[shopfamilytree.com/heirloom-preservation-made-easy-webinar](http://shopfamilytree.com/heirloom-preservation-made-easy-webinar)>

Large acid-free textile box  
**\$37.30**  
<[www.university-products.com/cart.php?m=product\\_list&c=924](http://www.university-products.com/cart.php?m=product_list&c=924)>

Textile Preservation Kit for Quilts  
**\$65.95**  
<[www.gaylord.com](http://www.gaylord.com)>  
(search for product No. WW-30245KT)

## ARCHIVAL ACTION

### PRESERVE AN OLD QUILT

**SUPPLIES:** Camera, vacuum, archival tissue, acid-free box

**COST:** Varies

**TIME:** 1-2 hours

**1.** Unfold the quilt. Place it in a clean, well-lit area. Photograph both sides. Take close-up photos of special elements, such as embellishments or embroidered signatures.

**2.** Inspect the fabric and seams for rips, moisture damage and insect infestation. Photograph any damaged areas.

**3.** Clean the quilt gently, according to the instructions on the previous page. To kill insects and larvae, vacuum carefully and wrap the quilt tightly in heavy-duty plastic zipper bags or plastic sealed with duct tape. Freeze it at -10 degrees for 10 days. Thaw at room temperature to avoid condensation, then open and re-vacuum.

**4.** Document what you know about the quilt's history with an archival pen on archival paper, and slip the paper

into a polypropylene sheet protector. Keep this document with the quilt (or if you display the quilt, keep it with your photos of the quilt).

**5.** Store your quilt according to the instructions on the previous page. Want to display it? If it's sturdy and doesn't have heavy embellishments or a fragile surface, you can hang it from the top edge. Hand-stitch a cotton sleeve and put a dowel through it, or use non-adhesive Velcro and a slat. You also can spread a quilt across a rarely used bed.

**6.** To research your quilt based on the fabrics used, consult a guide such as *Clues in the Calico: A Guide to Identifying and Dating Antique Quilts* by Barbara Brackman (EPM Publications).



## HEIRLOOM ID

Redwork quilt, circa 1900

Private collection; used with permission



### Seeing Red

Redwork, a style of decorative needlework featuring a contrasting-color (typically, red) thread embroidery outline against a white or off-white background, was especially popular from 1888 to about 1925.

This quilt, purchased at the Brandywine River Museum in Chadds Ford, Pa. <[www.brandywinemuseum.org](http://www.brandywinemuseum.org)>, appears to commemorate a wedding: Center squares prominently feature two sets of monograms and the date. The other embroidered squares highlight the skills of the creator and may refer to other significant themes for the couple or their community. ■