



Jessie Darnell Halsell Interview Transcript July 9, 1985

Tape No. 14

Interviewer: Jeannette Lasansky (J)

Interviewee: Jessie Darnell Halsell (D)

Place: Ranch, Rio Hondo

Date: July 9, 1985

(J) Tell me the first time that you had anything to do with a quilt in your life. If you remember?

(D) My first remembrance of anything to do with quilting was in a church. Our girls leader there decided that we would do something for the Children's Home if they were in need of quilts. I was probably about 7 or 8 years old, I'm not real sure but she brought the fabrics, scraps, and we cut out little blocks to begin with, and after that, of course, by mother quilled. She placed quilts and quilled and I would help her. She taught us how to be as accurate as she knew how to with cutting out blocks and from that with my grandmother, I don't remember that I ever quilled any. Of course I was quite young, but we did do a lot of cutting. I'd go to her house on rainy days, we lived fairly close by, and I remember on those rainy days (she'd have the fabric stacked away, she did all the sewing, she had a large family and had a girl that was just a little older than I) and she'd show all these scraps and she come along and dump them out on the floor out of those sacks, and we'd go to work on a string quilt or a block quilt - the time passed was about all that I knew anything about then, and from that on up until I was a teenager I remember helping her quilt, and as we'd quilt, we'd talk quilts, and very interested. I was a teenager then, in my time, I remember I had quilled some and one of the neighbors said well she had a quilt in the house and would we like to come quilt? And her husband heard about it and he said "Yeah, you'll do like some of those other people, you'll run all these stitches out when they get down in, too." They weren't quite that bad and we quilled. I quilled quite a bit up until I married and then after that, well before I married really, I'd quilled some and had several quilts that I'd made when I did marry, but after that I stopped with a family and I didn't do much quilting, a little. I quilled in the next few years after I married but not very much. And after we moved from Oklahoma we were in Galveston, Texas during the war years, and I worked in the post office there and of course with holding down a public job and with a family, I didn't do any quilting then. We'd go back to Oklahoma and my mother belonged to the quilting club and she invited and talked about quilting and I was always interested in it but just didn't have the time to do it. The love was there and it was growing all the time, quilting, so when we moved in '48 and I started with knit quilting I mentioned before and then after a year or two I started on buying fabrics, falling in love over and over again with quilts. It's my hobby now and I love every minute of it. I can just let things go and go and go all I'm forced to do something about it and quilt. I've seen very ribbons, blues, and reds, some reds like blues, of course at state fairs and county fairs, some a lot of ribbons in Oklahoma, Cook, county and statewide, so quilting is always with me. I hope I'll always be able to quilt.

(J) You say it's like a breath of fresh air.

(D) I think it is. There's just more and more people are learning to appreciate quilting. They think of it more as an art. Some people were skeptical and didn't have the appreciation for it that they do have now. Some to see they'd go for pleasure, you know, that was the real thing was an old pattern or something and they never considered anything in fabric as being an art or being a real hobby with people. I think more and more people are learning quilts, the history of quilts, the background of quilts,

COLLECTION

AR.00027 Traditional Quilt Makers in New Mexico Survey

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DOCUMENT

DESCRIPTION

On July 9, 1985 Jeannette Lasansky interviewed quilter Jessie Darnell Halsell. The interview was transcribed into typescript circa 1985-6, and the transcript was digitized May 23, 2017.

Jessie Darnell was born in Boswell, Oklahoma, on March 7, 1913. Her family heritage was mixed, including some Choctaw (Native American). She attended high school, and completed some college courses. On February 14, 1933 she married Thomas E Halsell, and the couple moved to New Mexico in 1948. At various times Jessie Darnell Halsell worked for the post office, and taught school.

She learned to make nine patch and string quilts from her family, and later found patterns in quilting magazines. She sometimes rearranged these patterns to make her own designs. She purchased some fabrics, and also used scrap fabrics. She quilted first for her family, and "then for the pleasure."

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DATE

July 9 1985 Date created

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DIMENSIONS

11 in (length) x 8 ½ in (width)

CURATORIAL CATEGORY

Textiles-United States and Canada, Textiles and Dress

RELATED PEOPLE

Museum of International Folk Art (publisher)

Jeannette Lasansky (contributor)