

WRITTEN IN THREAD: THE EVOLUTION OF QUILTING IN THE  
BETHEL AND AURORA COLONIES

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of the History of Art and Architecture  
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts

December 2012

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Title: Written in Thread: The Evolution of Quilting in the Bethel and Aurora Colonies

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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December 2012

Title: Written in Thread: The Evolution of Quilting in the Bethel and Aurora Colonies

According to current models, 19<sup>th</sup> century American quilts are presented as simple objects of cultural heritage or considered for their similarities to other forms of modern art. This thesis follows a three part approach in order to study these objects which are valuable sources of historical information in their full context. This approach includes the historical, social/aesthetic, and material contexts of the objects. The topic of the study is the quilts of the Bethel and Aurora colonies, 19<sup>th</sup> century Christian “utopian” sects in Missouri and Oregon. While societies such as the Bethel and Aurora colonies shunned many aspects of modernization, quilts appear to be an area of connection with the outside world. The quilts serve as material evidence for the tension between communal and secular worldviews in the colonies.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Albert Narath for his guidance throughout the completion of this manuscript. Additionally, I would like to thank Professors Ocean Howell and Andrew Schulz for their advice on this project. The Marion D. Ross Graduate Student travel award was invaluable in the completion of this project, as it enabled me to travel to Ambridge, Pennsylvania and Bethel, Missouri in order to conduct research on the Rappite communities and the Bethel colony. I would like to thank the award committee and donor for this assistance. In Pennsylvania, Old Economy Village Museum docent Sandy Gantz and curator Sarah Buffington were immensely helpful and I would like to thank them for taking the time to assist me. Particularly special thanks are due to Michael Gaines, Executive Director of the Hannibal Arts Council in Hannibal, MO. His help in exploring the buildings of Bethel, MO contributed to this research greatly, and without his help this thesis would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Marilyn Shouse and Nancy Brumbaugh who spent the day with me in Bethel and provided me with valuable information.

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Peter, who has been the voice of truth throughout this process. I give my deepest expression of love and appreciation for the encouragement that you gave and the sacrifices you made during this graduate program.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE QUILTS OF THE BETHEL AND AURORA COLONIES

*"Much of the social history of early America has been lost to us precisely because women were expected to use needles rather than pens. Yet if textiles are in one sense an emblem of women's oppression, they have also been an almost universal medium of female expression."*

-Laurel Thatcher Ulrich

#### Introduction

A formal family portrait from Oregon's Willamette Valley, taken in 1860, depicts a stern couple surrounded by their four children (figure 1.1).<sup>1</sup> The photograph is set against a painted canvas background which depicts a pastoral scene receding into the distance. At the center of the group is a baby boy wearing a formal gown, being held in a standing position between the mother and the father atop a small table. This table is draped with a white cloth, on top of which is an intricately stitched patchwork quilt, carefully arranged with its corner pointed forwards. The photograph is black and white, but it is possible to make out the tonal variations and intricate stitching on the quilt. The textile is the central focus point of the formal portrait, speaking to the significance of this object to the family who surrounds it.

The photograph depicts the Wolfer family; wife and mother Christina Stauffer Wolfer is the artisan who created the quilt. The family was a part of the Aurora colony, one of the last efforts towards Christian communal living in the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States. The colony was preceded by similar settlements in Missouri and Pennsylvania. The majority of the Oregon settlers emigrated from Germany before traveling across the

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<sup>1</sup> All figures are included in appendix B.

United States, seeking a utopian ideal. Their story is one of many such experiences from the height of the American industrial revolution. During this time, much of the national consciousness was preoccupied with anti-modernization. The quilts created by the women of the Aurora colony, and the settlement which preceded it in Bethel, Missouri, are objects which serve as a gateway to the study of life in such communities. American quilts from the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century are tangible representations of female pioneer lives, and physical signs of a collective yearning for a simplified and spiritually-based existence.

In current models, 19<sup>th</sup> century quilts are presented in two ways. First, they are displayed as the simple material heritage of pioneer communities, without being placed within the larger context of 19<sup>th</sup> century applied arts. Alternatively, they are considered in terms of their compositional similarities to modern painting. Several art exhibitions and publications by prestigious institutions have addressed this connection (figures 1.2, 1.3).<sup>2</sup> Both characterizations of American quilts are problematic. The objects at hand are

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<sup>2</sup> In the 1970's, a new interest in 19<sup>th</sup> century American quilting occurred in conjunction with first-wave feminism. Artists began to explore the concept of "women's work" and needlework was revived as an art form worthy of museum display. This provided the impetus for two exhibitions which displayed 19<sup>th</sup> century patchwork quilts as objects of art. They began to explore the idea that these quilts represent the emergence of American abstraction. They were the 1971 Abstract Design in American Quilts at the Whitney Museum of American Art and the 1972 American Pieced Quilts in the Renwick Gallery of the National Collection of Fine Arts at the Smithsonian Institution. Catalogs were published in conjunction with both exhibitions with compelling curatorial comments regarding abstraction. These comments include references to color field painting, geometric illusions, and mannerisms of formal abstraction. Curators maintained that 19<sup>th</sup> century female quilt-makers did not consider themselves to be artists, but that quilts were a vehicle for creative expression when such opportunities were rare. Jonathan Holstein, curator of the Whitney exhibition, writes that creative choices were made even within prescribed patterns. This is an astute observation and true of American patchwork quilts. However, not every American pieced quilt deviated from patterns, and there is significance to be discussed in those that do not deviate from established trends as well as those that are particularly innovative. Ultimately, any direct influence on American quilting by abstract art (or vice versa) is difficult to prove, particularly because quilting trends were generally wrapped up in Anti-Modernization movements. For more on these exhibitions see Holstein, Freudenheim.

textiles created with a concern for aesthetics, but were made for functional purposes. The processes by which they were created, their quotidian uses, and the social and philosophical meanings of each style of quilt, in addition to their aesthetic properties, contribute to their full contexts. 19<sup>th</sup> century American quilts are multifaceted information sources which provide inroads to the knowledge of large social movements and day-to-day life.

To present 19<sup>th</sup> century American quilts as objects of cultural and historical interest to a given community, without attempting to classify them in the larger body of contemporary related works, is to ignore their contribution to the larger canon of artistic and visual culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States. Similarly, to compare geometric patchwork quilts to early modern art is to disregard the fact that they were a physical embodiment of 19<sup>th</sup> century Anti-Modernization movements, and therefore cannot be considered as a direct parallel to other forms of abstract art. 19<sup>th</sup> century American quilts are objects which always display an aesthetic sensibility, but are also harbingers of social realities. The study of these objects serves as an inroad into the lives of 19<sup>th</sup> century American women influenced by institutionalized reactions to a swiftly industrializing nation. In this thesis, I aim to illustrate a complete view of the material, historical, and social significance of the quilts created and used by a 19<sup>th</sup> century Christian sectarian group.

In both colonies, quilts appeared as a rare craft which kept up with outside trends, when the majority of visual culture was intentionally anachronistic. Tensions between tradition and technology consistently underscored life in both communities. This tension can be attributed to adaptability to change among the colonists. This adaptability

emerged as the initial impetus towards utopianism began to fade. This development parallels the evolution of quilting in the Bethel and Aurora colonies throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These tensions between technology and tradition and communism and individual interests are perhaps most legible in the textiles produced by female colonists.

In 1856, a group of nine men and one woman embarked from Northeastern Missouri on the Oregon Trail. Rather than a small family group setting out on their own, they were a scouting party for the cooperative Bethel community, a Christian sectarian society. Their home in Missouri had once been isolated, but as the United States expanded, they sought a new home in the Pacific Northwest, truly set apart from secular society. Ultimately, the group settled in the Willamette Valley, Oregon. They named their new town Aurora Mills, after the daughter of their leader, Wilhelm Keil. Many original Bethel colonists remained in Missouri, and both groups operated simultaneously for several decades. The groups were comprised almost entirely of German immigrants, Protestants who sought greater religious freedoms in America. In the United States, they practiced what they believed to be the only true form of Christianity: communal living. This desire for a utopian way of life was popular in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, when increasing capitalism and urbanization led many Christians to begin rural, separatist communities.

The Bethel and Aurora colonists created functional and artistic objects for use in the community, including furniture, clothing, and textiles. Patchwork quilts were commonly produced in both settlements. Quilt-making was an essential part of life for female colonists. The evolution of three key quilt styles can be traced through the artifacts of these communities, and they function as a case study for the development of the American patchwork quilt. They are botanical quilts, Log Cabin quilts, and Crazy

quilts. The quilts of the Bethel colony are not mentioned in any scholarly work to date. The quilts which are held in the present day Aurora Colony Historical museum have been discussed briefly in two works outlined in the following literature review. However, these examinations do not present a comprehensive approach to the works in their full context. In one case this was not the goal, and in the second case, the work was written before most of the Aurora quilts were donated to the site's historical museum. Here, I seek to present the Bethel and Aurora quilts case study for the holistic interpretation of the quilts from both settlements. In so doing, I seek to contribute a historiographic account to the field of utopian studies, as well as to the body of literature on the origins, evolution, aesthetics, and social significance of American patchwork quilts, using representative examples.

Aurora and Bethel quilt-makers produced many different quilt patterns. They utilized both factory-made fabrics and cloth made by hand in the settlements. In general, the patterns they used for the making of their quilts were analogous with outside trends. Colony women integrated styles which were popular throughout neighboring regions. In communities where all aspects of life were intended to be set-apart and anachronistic, quilts were a creative pursuit that seemingly kept pace with the outside world. The trend of anti-modernization that inspired 19<sup>th</sup> century American patchwork quilts was a part of popular culture, and not just present in separatist communities. However, the process of making fabric by hand, which occurred in both colonies, added a sectarian dimension to the anachronistic aspect of life in Bethel and Aurora. The meanings that can be inferred from the quilt patterns and styles seen in the communities speak to the common psychological and philosophical experiences of 19<sup>th</sup> century American pioneers. Quilts

played a prominent role in the Westward migration, and were often created as symbols of remembrance and celebration. They were vehicles for creative escape and social interaction for women whose roles were otherwise firmly regulated.<sup>3</sup> The analysis of these quilts sheds light on the level of social control in the Bethel and Aurora colonies.

Bethel and Aurora were established towards the end of the sectarian phenomenon in the United States. Several of the quilts included in this thesis were produced after the dissolution of the Aurora colony by those who remained in the area, and therefore serve as material evidence of a moment of social change. Quilts are both reflective of the drastic cultural shifts that occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States, and served as a mouthpiece for the anti-modernization movement.<sup>4</sup> They are an art form which begin with a prescribed structure and become a unique creation based on the decisions and preferences of their maker. This resulted in pronounced differences between textiles which follow the same original pattern. The material study and comparative regional analysis of these quilts sheds light on what areas of life were controlled in the colonies, and where creative freedoms were granted.

I seek to fill a gap in scholarship by providing a partial catalogue of the quilts from *both* the Bethel and Aurora communities, which are essentially linked. It would be implausible to believe no quilts from the first colony were brought to the second. Understanding the movement of an art form as it evolves over a given period of time helps to frame the changing social landscape of the culture it emerges from. In her book

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<sup>3</sup> Saxton, Martha. *Being good: Women's Moral Values in Early America*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003): 12.

<sup>4</sup> Hanson, Marin F. and Patricia Cox Crews. *American Quilts in the Modern Age, 1870-1940: The International Quilt Study Center Collections*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009): 1.

*Quilts of the Oregon Trail*, Mary Bywater Cross states the importance of tracing quilts from both pre and post Oregon Trail locations in order to achieve a dynamic picture of 19<sup>th</sup> century American textiles, a framework by which this thesis abides.<sup>5</sup> The quilts discussed in this thesis were made during both phases of westward expansion. Within the set of textiles catalogued here, a discernable evolution of styles can be observed. Thus, this thesis serves as a focused case study for the development of three American patchwork quilt formats. Analyzing the quilts of Bethel and Aurora opens up a view of the lives of women in 19<sup>th</sup> century “utopian” groups, as well as helping to tell the larger story of women of the American frontier.

#### *A Brief History of Quilting*

19<sup>th</sup> century patchwork quilts are derivative of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century woven and appliqué coverlets which were popular in colonial America. Although they existed in completely handmade form, pieced quilts did not become overwhelmingly popular in the United States until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when factory production of fabrics allowed for quick procurement of materials.<sup>6</sup> Most of the quilts discussed here are patchwork/ pieced quilts, or fabric patches arranged on top of a solid piece of fabric. The floral quilts discussed in this thesis are appliqué-style. This involves piecing a smaller portion of carefully shaped fabric pieces into a pattern on top of a base fabric, then intricately stitching designs into the quilt top. In colonial America, prior to the majority of immigration from Germany, blankets featuring intricate needlework; appliqué or “whole

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<sup>5</sup> Bywater Cross, Mary. *Quilts of the Oregon Trail*. (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2007): 6.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

cloth” quilts (patterns created on fabric with embroidery that adds texture to the object) were common. In addition, the patterns of hand-woven coverlets, often intricately designed, were the predecessors of later 19<sup>th</sup> century patchwork quilt designs. Many such coverlets can still be found in Bethel.

In the American East and Midwest in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, many Protestant denominations experienced spiritual revivals and a return to conservatism and service. Women became involved in quilting groups in order to raise money to give to the poor. These groups were so commonplace that the absence of a quilting circle within a church or religious group was rare. The gatherings became the primary outlet for women’s social interactions.<sup>7</sup> Quilts functioned in the same ways for the women of sectarian colonies. The textiles were often named by their original makers, and these titles became fixtures as patterns were shared. In the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women’s publications often contained quilt patterns, which led to the standardization of many quilt names. Rapid innovations in transportation and communication in the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States affected the popularity of quilting, as mail-order catalogues and magazines which featured quilting patterns, ideas, and supplies were available even in rural communities. In urban areas department stores served a similar function. 19<sup>th</sup> century quilts are standardized, and individual design choices were made within the scope of larger boundaries. These prescribed quilt patterns, often referred to as “settings,” were a chief part of such publications.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Saxton, Martha. *Being good: Women's Moral Values in Early America*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Hanson and Crews, *American Quilts in the Modern Age*, 14.

## **Outline of Chapters**

Following the review of current literature on the topic in this chapter, chapter two presents a history of the Bethel and Aurora colonies, with firsthand accounts of women's lives and the journey from Missouri to Oregon. This section also includes an exploration of the spiritual and philosophical foundations of the communities in the larger context of the utopian and sectarian movements, and women's experiences in both colonies. Chapter three follows the development and evolution of the quilt designs and their cultural relevance, as well as the transference of styles among different communities during the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This chapter also includes a discussion of the conversations on quilts as art and cultural capital that follow this analysis. Chapter four provides analyses of representative examples of the quilts made in Bethel and Aurora. Preceding these descriptions is an outline of the processes by which fabrics and quilts were physically created in the colonies. Appendix A lists the entirety of the quilts viewed and analyzed during the process of this research in spreadsheet form. These listings are included for the consideration of the material contexts of the quilts, but also to the service of future research. By combining a historiographic approach with a categorical study, this thesis seeks to present these museum objects in their full context.

## **Literature Review**

### *The History of the Aurora Colony: Primary Sources*

The available material on the Aurora colony can be categorized into primary and secondary sources. The primary materials are kept at the Oregon Historical Society (OHS) Research Library, the Oregon State Library in Salem, and in the Knight Library

Special Collections in the Clark Moore Will archives, which are the most comprehensive source of primary material on Aurora. In the OHS Research library are the notes and materials Eugene E. Snyder used when writing *Aurora, Their Last Utopia*, a book to be described below. This includes the 1937 firsthand recollections of Gottlieb Boehringer, an original colony member, as dictated to his son. There is also a collection of land deed documents connected to the dissolution of the communal aspects of the colony in the 1880s. Lastly, there is a songbook handwritten in German by Frederick Keil, son of Wilhelm Keil. The OHS library obtained an English translation for most of the book. Accompanying material indicates that the songs were written by Wilhelm Keil himself, and the lyrics to songs such as “Aurora” and “The Pilgrim at the Fountain” offer insights to the experience of life in the settlement.

The materials available on microfilm at the Oregon State Library at the capital in Salem include extensive handwritten documents from the Colony’s dissolution proceedings. More specifically, they are *United States District Court, Oregon, and Michael Baehert et. al. vs. Phillip Miller et. al in matter of dissolution of Aurora, Ore and the Bethel, MO communities, file 752, judgment docket 663, 1881-83*. These microfilm files also include the original handwritten constitution of the Aurora Colony, signed by male and female members, and an inventory of Keil’s estate.

The Clark Moore Will Papers in Knight Library Special collections are unique to the University of Oregon, and are the most comprehensive existing set of firsthand accounts regarding the colony. Clark Will was the son of an original colony member, John W. Will and he made it a lifetime project to research the history of the colony in order to write a book which was never completed (figure 1.4). He did, however write

several published articles. The papers contain a collection of firsthand accounts and correspondences with original colony members. Until his death in 1982, he corresponded with students and scholars who researched the colony, providing them with firsthand information, including stories regarding the lives of women. Most of these letters are kept in the archives, and provide a comprehensive look at the notable studies and researchers on Aurora. Will also composed illustrations and maps that were intended for his final book. The file contains a diary of the Oregon Trail journey of the colonists, a compilation of the obituaries of colony members from 20<sup>th</sup> century newspapers and other news clippings concerning Aurora from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This collection of newspaper articles provides a comprehensive history of the Aurora Colony Historical society and museum.<sup>9</sup>

### *The History of the Aurora Colony: Secondary Sources*

The existing secondary sources regarding Aurora are books, theses, and articles. Monographs on the subject are separated between works of scholarly research done several years after the dissolution of the colony, and those based on firsthand observation. Three books fall into this category. They are: Charles Nordhoff's *The Communistic Societies of the United States: The Classic Eye-Witness Report of the Economists, Zoarites, Shakers, Amana, Oneida, Bethel, Aurora, Icarian and other Utopian Communities that Flourished in 19<sup>th</sup> century America*, written based on his visit, Henry Theophilus Finck's *My Adventures in the Golden Age of Music*, and William G. Bek's *A German Communistic Society in Missouri* (about Bethel, MO). Finck was born in Bethel,

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<sup>9</sup> For a more detailed description of the Clark Moore Will papers, see <http://nwdadb.wsulibs.wsu.edu/findaid/ark:/80444/xv05822>.

MO and traveled to Oregon. He was a musician who was prominently involved with Bethel and Aurora's musical groups, and went on to attend Harvard University. He became a music critic and was the music and epicurean editor for the *New York Evening Post* in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The C. M. Will papers contain citations of his writing regarding his experiences in Aurora. William G. Bek was an author interested in chronicling the lives of Germanic Christian immigrants in the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and though he did not visit Aurora, had much to say about his experience in Bethel. His writings began as a series of articles for the *German American Annals*, which was a bi-monthly publication.<sup>10</sup>

Secondary research about the colony includes three works whose authors corresponded with Will, or were referenced by Will. There are also a group of monographs regarding the utopian movement in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century United States that were useful in this research. Those referenced in the Will papers are: *Bethel and Aurora, an experiment in communism as practical Christianity; with some account of past and present ventures in collective living* by Robert Hendricks, published in 1933 (in which Finck is mentioned), Russell Blankenship's *And There Were Men*, a 1942 history of pioneer America that features Aurora and Bethel, and Frederick Woodward Skiff's *Adventures in Americana; recollections of forty years collecting books, furniture, china, guns and glass* (1935). Hendricks' work has been criticized recently by James Kopp, whose recent work is discussed below, as being more speculative than factual. A review of Hendricks's work points to the fact that his bias is due to a fervent belief in the

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<sup>10</sup> "A Summary of Communal Organization in the U.S." Clark Moore Will papers, Coll 062/ Series II: Box 1-3, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

benefits of socialism; chapters 33-37 and appendices are devoted to promoting these ideas. Skiff, author of *Adventures in Americana*, was an avid collector of Northwest antiques, and wrote about his Aurora experiences and collections in this book.

Eugene Snyder, a colony descendant, wrote a short volume titled *Aurora, Their Last Utopia* in 1993. It contains a brief overview of the history of the colony and several family stories. The book also includes photographs that do not appear in the Will files, with a particular focus on colony architecture. James Kopp's 2009 *Eden within Eden: Oregon's Utopian Heritage* is the most recent work concerning Aurora. The book contains a full chapter on the community and focuses on the many other communal and utopian societies that have shaped the state of Oregon. Kopp Utilized the Will papers in his research. A former Old Aurora Colony Museum board president, Kopp was fascinated by Edward Bellamy's 1888 novel *Looking Backwards*, a fictional and utopian view of the future in which all U.S. citizens are employed under a socialist government system.<sup>11</sup> The sentiments that lead to the writing of this book were common in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the Aurora Colony was a part of this movement. Kopp passed away in 2009, leaving behind an unfinished book, a children's story told from the perspective of Aurora Keil (daughter of leader Wilhelm Keil). Kopp's wife is working with the Old Aurora Colony museum to complete the project, and it will be published by Oregon State University in 2012.<sup>12</sup>

Monographs not specifically concerning Aurora that address the utopian movement in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century United States are Eugene A. Bestor's *Backwoods*

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<sup>11</sup> Jeff Baker, "Utopia Still Mesmerizes," *The Oregonian*, August 20, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Allison Dittmore (assistant curator, Old Aurora Colony Museum), in discussion and email correspondence with the author, July 9 and July 11, 2012.

*utopias; the sectarian and Owenite phases of communitarian socialism in America, 1663-1829* (1950), Peyton E. Richter's *Utopias: social ideals and communal experiments* (1971) and the more recent *Communal utopias and the American experience: religious communities, 1732-2000* by Robert P. Sutton (2003). Books on more specific aspects of this research that have proved valuable to the larger context are Miranda's *Communism in the Bible* 1985, *Women's Voices from the Western Frontier* (Susan Butruille, 1995), and Saxton's *Being Good: Women's Moral Values in Early America* (2003).

The theses written about Aurora are either historical or focused on objects. Three theses have been written about the history of Aurora. The first is Ione Juanita Beale Harkness' *Certain community settlements of Oregon* (University of Southern California, 1925), followed by John. E. Simon's *Wilhelm Keil, Founder of Aurora* written in 1935 at the University of Oregon. This thesis became an article for the Oregon Historical Quarterly the same year, titled *Wilhelm Keil and Communist Colonies*. Will mentions this work in his notes. The third was Coralie Stanton's 1963 *The Aurora Colony, Oregon*, an M.A. Thesis from Oregon State University. Three theses have been written regarding the objects used and produced in the Aurora Colony. Robert McCarl's *Aurora Colony Furniture: a model for the folkloristic interpretation of museum artifacts* was written for the department of Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Oregon in 1974, and the author's correspondence with Will is available in the archives. McCarl later worked for the Smithsonian Institution. Audrey Ann Buhl's *Clothing and household textiles of Aurora Colony, Oregon 1857 to 1877* was written in 1971 (Oregon State University) and Bonnie Parks' *Aurora Blue: Identifying and Analyzing Interior Paint in an Oregon Utopia, ca. 1870* was written in 1986.

These three works are similar in subject matter to the research presented in this thesis. However, the research contained here differs in its contributions to scholarship as it is the first to approach the subject from the perspective of art history. Buhl's intent in the writing of her thesis was to photograph as many textiles from the Aurora colony as possible. It was written shortly after the museum at Aurora opened, in 1966.<sup>13</sup> 40 years later, donations and the passing of colony descendants has allowed for a much larger quantity of colony quilts in the museum itself, including 12 log cabin quilts, one of the styles discussed at length in this thesis. The Old Aurora Colony museum did not have a full-time curator until 2005.<sup>14</sup> A 2001 grant from the Dallas (Texas) Quilt guild allowed the museum to purchase acid-free storage materials for the quilts. The majority of the quilts in the museum's collection were donated after the time Buhl wrote her thesis, and many were not acquired until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as colony descendants began to donate a large quantity of objects. The current registration records of the quilts were compiled by volunteer quilting experts throughout the first decade of the 20<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>15</sup>

These efforts were made after the time of Buhl's thesis. Buhl's work presents a generalized outline of the different types of textiles used and created in Aurora (available at the time), and neglects to engage in visual or historical analysis of the objects, or a discussion of their meaning and significance to the larger body of American textiles. In conjunction with the fact that majority of the quilts now available in Aurora were donated after the time Buhl's thesis was written, my thesis also centers on styles that are not the

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<sup>13</sup> Charlotte Graydon. "Ox Barn Museum to Open." *The Oregonian*, September 21, 1966.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

main focus of Buhl’s work. Thus, it serves as a complement and follow-up to the earlier thesis. In addition, it does not mention any objects found in Bethel, Missouri. This offers a compelling reason to analyze the collection’s recent donations, and to redefine the quilts as a product of the communities in which they were made. In this thesis, I hope to connect the works created in the two communities and offer a larger context within which the composition and meaning of the quilts can be understood, as well as to incorporate more recent scholarship on American quilts.

The research model of my thesis is most reflective of Robert McCarl’s 1974 work, which he defines as a new “model for the study of museum artifacts.”<sup>16</sup> In his thesis, he presents the furniture by “describing the historic background of the artifacts, and then presenting [his] hypothesis concerning methods of construction, origins of design, relative place in the culture and physical documentation of a representative sample of furniture pieces.”<sup>17</sup> He goes on to explain that the taxonomic directory of museum-held objects is incomplete without an attempt to reconstruct historical contexts.<sup>18</sup> Although I do not aim to create a complete catalogue of the quilts at Aurora and Bethel, my study mirrors McCarl’s methods. This is a particularly relevant task following the 2008 publication of Jane Kirkpatrick’s *Aurora: An American Experience in Quilt, Community in Craft*. Although not defined as a scholarly work, this illustrated book, while well-researched, presents speculative views of the meaning of quilt style seen in Aurora, and does not address objects from the Bethel community. In current models,

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<sup>16</sup>Robert Smith McCarl. *Aurora colony furniture: a model for the folkloristic interpretation of museum artifacts*. (Thesis (M.A.)—University of Oregon, Interdisciplinary Studies, 1974): 1.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

the quilts created by the Bethel and Aurora colonists have been admired for their craftsmanship, but not been considered in their full artistic and social context. By examining the works along the lines of McCarl's approach, I aim to illustrate them from historical, social/material, and aesthetic perspectives.<sup>19</sup>

*Scholarship on the History, Meaning, and Types of Quilts*

The most comprehensive monographs on quilts that have aided in this study can be divided in to four categories: writing on quilts in America and quilts as objects of art, books about specific quilt patterns, books about the quilts of Christian sectarian communities other than Bethel and Aurora, and monographs on textile history and quilt patterns. In the 1970's an interest in quilts as objects of art was sparked in conjunction with feminist art movements. One curator in particular who took a scholarly interest in the formal properties and abstract design in quilts was Jonathan Holstein of the Whitney, and he published two volumes related to his 1971 exhibition *Abstract Design in American Quilts*; a catalogue and a longer "biography of the exhibition." This exhibition included Amish quilts, and Holstein also contributed to a book regarding the quilts of such communities, referenced below. The descriptions of each quilt are brief, and Holstein provides a sketch of how the exhibition was developed. Photographs of the quilt in the exhibit are accompanied by Holstein's enthusiastic supports the performance of formal visual analysis on quilts, encouraging researchers to approach the objects in this way. Robert Shaw's 2009 *American Quilts, The Democratic Art* presents a

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<sup>19</sup> McCarl, *Aurora Colony Furniture*, 3.

comprehensive history of American quilting, focusing on the transference of styles and development of trends. His introduction also opens up the idea of compositional analysis of the objects, but again is left unresolved in the body of the work. In 1994, a quilt study conference in Kentucky resulted in a publication, *Expanding Quilt Scholarship*, which contains several articles outlining what is left to be explored in the field. Including quilts in the art historical canon, commenting on their formal qualities, and analyzing their connection to American life, are all addressed as avenues for further exploration.

The International Quilt Study Center & Museum at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln is an authoritative source on the history, meaning, and styles of quilts. In 2009 they published *American Quilts in the Modern Age, 1870-1940: The International Quilt Study Center Collections*. In it, the authors lay out a comprehensive look at the scope of American quilting. This monograph is organized by quilt style, which allows the viewer to perceive the many variations and personal touches that exist within the prescribed limits of each quilt pattern. A history of quilting is also provided. This monograph was highly influential to this thesis as it allowed for a visual comparison of quilts from different regions, communities, and years. The books which have been identified as foundational to these topics do not include any mention of the quilts of Bethel or Aurora, and this thesis seeks to include the objects in this larger canon.

Books on particular quilt styles which offer the most detailed views of meanings and composition include discussions of floral quilts and log cabin quilts. Patricia Cox Crews, a co-author of the International Quilt Study Center's monograph also wrote *A Flowering of Quilts* in 2001, which discusses the symbolism, meaning, and relation to everyday life of floral quilts in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Sandi Fox's 1985 book

*Small Endearments* gives a focused and detailed description of the personal meanings attached to the Log Cabin quilt. Laura Fisher's *Quilts of Illusion* (1990) outlines the way log cabin and similar style quilts operate on the principles of optical illusion, focusing on the way such compositions are achieved using fabric. The two most comprehensive works on quilts of similar religious communities are Gordon's *Shaker Textile Arts* (1980) and Kraybill's *A Quiet Spirit* (1996), of which Jonathan Holstein (of the Whitney exhibit) is a contributor. Books on textile history and quilt patterns were the last area of fundamental literature for this thesis. Wein's *The Great American Log Cabin Quilt Book* (1984) details the way a log cabin quilt block is constructed- essential to the understanding of the individual choices used to create each quilt. Mary Bywater Cross' *Quilts of the Oregon Trail* (*Treasures in the Trunk* in Earlier editions) gives examples of 19<sup>th</sup> century quilts from Oregon, with a few examples of Aurora quilts.

These three quilts do not fall into the categories discussed here, and I will not attempt to recreate Bywater Cross' analyses of the works. However, she provides biographical information of female quilters in Aurora with useful anecdotes about their lives, as the makers of all three quilts are identified. One notable Aurora quilter featured in this book is Emma Giesy, who will be discussed in chapter two of this thesis. Works from nearby regions also serve as relevant examples in Bywater Cross' book. Eileen Trestain's *Dating fabrics: a color guide, 1800-1960* is the most comprehensive monograph available on ascertaining the date of a quilt based on its materials. Some research has also been performed on the architecture of the Aurora colony, which had an

intentionally anachronistic visual culture in its prime years.<sup>20</sup> In addition, there are two works of fiction written about the Aurora Colony.

*Fictional and Subjective Accounts of the Aurora Colony*

The Bethel and Aurora colonies have also been used as the subject of two works of fiction, a romance novel written in the 50's (Second Eden: A Romance, by Cobie de Lespinasse) and the Change and Cherish historical trilogy written by Jane Kirkpatrick in 2006-08. The former novel was dedicated to Clark M. Will, and he states in a 1965 letter that the cover illustration depicts the living room of the home he was raised in. Kopp, author of *Eden Within Eden*, wrote an article for the Oregon Historical Quarterly in 2009 which discusses the fictionalization of the settlement. He also references the early 20<sup>th</sup> century work by Hendricks, and discusses the ways in which communities such as Bethel and Aurora tend to be approached from a romanticizing and imaginative standpoint. He does not condemn this approach, as he states that these views bring new context to the possible personal stories contained in such communities, and especially praises Kirkpatrick for conducting thorough research. Both de Lespinasse and Kirkpatrick are native Oregonians, and the former author engaged in a good deal of correspondence with Clark M. Will. Neither novelist changed factual information, but expanded upon true stories to create possibilities. In doing so, Kirkpatrick opens up possibilities for

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<sup>20</sup>The architecture of the Aurora colony has been studied and catalogued, most notably by University of Oregon professor Phillip Dole. He compiled the *Aurora Colony Historical Resources Inventory*, which includes details of all of the structures in the community, in 1988, and wrote an article for the Oregon Historical Quarterly Winter 1991/1992 regarding the intentional anachronism of this architecture. This volume is dedicated to the history of Aurora, and also contains original articles on the marriage patterns which occurred in Aurora after the dissolution of the cooperative society, and an article focused on religious concerns. Additionally, Oregon professor Leland Roth has written about Aurora's architecture in *Building at the End of the Oregon Trail* (1997). Certain elements of colony architecture will be presented in this thesis in discussion of the larger visual culture of the communities.

understanding the lives of the women who created the quilts in the colony, as her story focuses on Emma Wagner Giesy, a real woman who traveled from Bethel, Missouri to the Northwest in the original scouting party for Aurora.

### **Research Process**

Research was performed in Knight Library special collections at the University of Oregon, the Oregon State library in Salem, Oregon, and at the Oregon Historical Society Research Library in Portland, Oregon. Field research included the study of quilts at the Old Economy Village Museum, Ambridge, Pennsylvania, the Bethel Colony, Missouri, and the Aurora Colony Museum, Aurora, Oregon. All quilts discussed in this thesis were viewed firsthand by the author, with the exception of Shaker and Amish quilts included in the discussion of other religious communities. The quilts viewed and photographed at the Old Economy Village Museum and the Aurora Colony Historical Museum are a part of each institution's permanent collection. However, the quilts that exist in Bethel, Missouri are currently located throughout several privately owned houses, as the public museum at the site closed in the 1990's. In compiling an inventory of quilts held in Bethel and Aurora, the objects were photographed by the author. Quilts were also photographed by the author at the Old Economy Village Museum in Ambridge, Pennsylvania. Photographs of Bethel and Aurora architecture were also taken by the author. Neither site has published a catalogue of its collections. The quilts from Amish communities and Oregon communities outside of Oregon are reproduced from published monographs. Secondary sources regarding the history and meaning of quilts are combined with the author's own visual analyses. The history of the Bethel and Aurora colonies given here is largely based on firsthand sources from the Clark Moor Will

collection. The following historical account of the Bethel and Aurora colonies contributes the first component of the full historical and material context of the quilts in question: it provides the social and historical framework for the objects.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

“We have built a stately house/ And trusted God therein, despite weather, storms and decay/ We live so faithfully, so united, so free/ It was dreadful to those who were evil- we were just too faithful.”

*-Hymn written by Wilhelm Keil, leader of the Bethel and Aurora colonies<sup>21</sup>*

“Dr. Keil’s movement began in 1842 and lasted ‘till about 1877. The men composing it were honest, whole-souled people; but with the next generation questions arose that the first cannot settle.”

*-Martin Giesy, Colony Member<sup>22</sup>*

A quilt created in approximately 1890, is speckled with red fabric patches, symbolizing the hearth of a home (figure 5.15). Fabric “logs” surround these patches, structures stitched in thread by women who had witnessed the literal constructions of rudimentary cabins in the wilderness. Bearing the weight of moral duty, the women of the Bethel and Aurora colonies traveled across a foreign country. They were charged with the task of creating peaceful and morally pure domestic environments in their new surroundings. These so-called Log Cabin quilts were a tangible representation of these life experiences, which had been brought about by a widespread desire for social change in the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States.

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<sup>21</sup> Wilhelm Keil. “Hymn no. 6.” Translation from songbook handwritten in German by Frederick Keil. Aurora Colony Records, MSS 461, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, Portland, OR.

<sup>22</sup> Darrel Boone, *Thesis of Bethel-Aurora Communal Colony*, 20. Clark Moore Will papers, Coll 062/ Series II: Box 1-3, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

## The Utopian Movement

Along with most of the Western world, the United States' role as a full-fledged member of the postwar industrialized world had not yet been firmly established by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many citizens reacted to rapidly growing industry, poor labor conditions, and an increasing emphasis on capitalist success by expressing a desire for a return to moral absolutes. This historical background serves to fulfill one category of the "total context" of these quilts, which is the American utopian movement and Westward migration. The historical and cultural significance of the quilts catalogued in this thesis lies in the specific circumstances that surrounded their creation. This is the 19<sup>th</sup> century Utopian movement in the United States, which led to the creation of many sectarian, Christian groups. The life of the Bethel and Aurora colonies span the years that this trend was prevalent, and serve as a relevant case study for the evolution of quilts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States. The utopian movement was a result of the Second Great awakening, a pervasive Protestant revival in the United States that lasted for the majority of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and coincided with the mainstream Westward movement that occurred during this time. The religious movement was accompanied by "millennialist" beliefs, or the notion that Christ was to return to earth and reign for 1000 years before returning to heaven. The creation of most of these sectarian, utopian communities was inspired by such ideas, as well as by a reaction to the rise of industrialization, and the theory that the existence of small, morally exemplary communities could bring about widespread change in the United States.

The utopian movement was a part of a large-scale attempt at social reform that occurred in the United States between 1830 and 1860.<sup>23</sup> The literary and artistic romanticism so common at the time was related and influential to this phenomenon. Anti-modernization sentiments were prevalent in many aspects of American society. In addition to the Utopian movement, which influenced the creation of the Bethel and Aurora colonies, the so-called “Aesthetic movement” and “Colonial Revival movement” in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century helped to maintain the popularity of quilts such as those created in the settlements.

Eighteenth-century rationalism, 19<sup>th</sup> century romanticism, and the discovery of the American frontier all served as influences for this movement. These phenomena coincided with a ceding of the early American, Calvinist principles of predestination and an increase in the belief in God-given free will and autonomy within Christianity. These influences were combined with the contemporary American idea of the unlimited potential of man, fueling the impulsion towards social change. The final element in this groundswell was the increase in industrialization and decrease in the quality of labor conditions. A swift change from an agrarian to industrial economy had occurred, and observers whose religious and social principles were strongly humanist noticed and looked for solutions. Those who became part of the utopian movement included artists and writers, factory workers, farmers, secular humanists, and, most frequently, Protestants.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Russell Blankenship. *And there were men*. (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1942): 96.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 97-98.

German immigrants, some of whom ultimately became the Aurora colonists, were largely Lutheran or Methodist, and had not traditionally recognized the early American, Calvinist belief in predestination. Thus, they were more easily influenced by this rise in the belief in the “boundless potentiality of man.” Additionally, many 19<sup>th</sup> century communal, sectarian Christians believed that a rise in industrialization was linked with a sinful drive for individualism and self-gain. The rapidly industrializing, riverbank area in Western Pennsylvania (now Ambridge) where many German immigrants lived during this time was a hub for the discourse on such issues.

Certain contemporary utopian groups, such as the Shakers, believed that Christ had already returned, and that they must create and inhabit the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Many others, including the Bethel and Aurora colonists, believed that Christ’s return was imminent, and were concerned with readying themselves for the occasion. Much of the utopian movement was fueled by the belief that cultural improvements could only be achieved by separating from society and starting small communities of their own. They were fearful of repeating the violence brought on by 18<sup>th</sup> century European war, and hoped to influence social change through example rather than force. Their primary concern was the increasing emphasis on individual success and achievement brought on by industrialization and capitalism. According to the worldview of many of these communities, Christians must live in a communal fashion as did the Apostles of Christ in the book of Acts. This was often referred to as “early Christianity.”<sup>25</sup>

This term refers to the idea that Christians should live as Christ’s apostles did in the book of Acts (thus, “early” Christianity). While not all groups associated with the

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<sup>25</sup> For further reading regarding the Utopian and Christian sectarian movements, see Bestor, Hendricks, Richter Sutton.

utopian movement practiced forms of communal living, those who did were guided by two passages from the book of Acts. Acts 2:44-45 reads: “And all that believed were together, and had all things in common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.”<sup>26</sup> Acts 4:34-35 states: “Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.”<sup>27</sup> These were the guiding principles of the Bethel and Aurora colonies, as well as many contemporary religious groups.<sup>28</sup> In referencing “communism” and “communitarian” communities here, I refer to this sharing of work and possessions. Many who wrote about utopian communities in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including several authors on the Bethel/Aurora groups, used the words “communist” and “socialist.” This word was used in its most basic sense to refer to groups which lived a communal lifestyle on a micro scale, and does not refer to larger political agendas in this case.

### **Before the Aurora Colony**

The creation of the Aurora colony was inspired by three occurrences: the large scale utopian movement, Keil’s early work as a Methodist preacher, and an earlier communal group near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Wilhelm or William Keil, the leader of the two communities, was born in 1812 in Bleicherode, a central Germanic region

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<sup>26</sup> Acts 2:44-45 (KJV).

<sup>27</sup> Acts 4:34-35 (KJV).

<sup>28</sup> For further reading on the guiding literature and philosophy of the Bethel/ Aurora colonies, see Hendricks 142-143.

(Prussia) (figure 2.1). He and his wife Louisa immigrated to the United States in 1936; both were aged 24. They traveled on a vessel called the “August Edward,” the same ship that carried John Augustus Roebling, designer of the Brooklyn Bridge.<sup>29</sup> During a short residence in New York City he worked as a tailor, but in 1938 the couple relocated to the Pittsburgh, PA area, to live among a large concentration of German immigrants. Like many who hailed from Prussia, Keil was a professed Lutheran. However, he had a proclivity towards mysticism, and opened an apothecary shop in Pennsylvania without any formal pharmaceutical training. He experimented with plants and drug mixtures, creating “secret formulas” which earned him the label of “doctor,” one he used throughout the rest of his life.<sup>30</sup> All firsthand accounts, whether negative or positive, vouch for his commanding and gregarious personality, which he later utilized to great effect as a sectarian leader.

Prior to Keil’s arrival in Western Pennsylvania, another leader with a utopian vision, George Rapp, sailed to New York City with his existing religious group, the Harmony society (figure 2.2). Immigration records state that he arrived, along with several followers, his wife and two children to Philadelphia aboard the ship “Canton” on October 7, 1803. Other followers, all from the Wurrtenburg region in Southern Germany, arrived on the “S.S. Commerce.”<sup>31</sup> The immigration was the result of religious

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<sup>29</sup> For further reading regarding Roeblig’s association with eventual members of the Aurora colony, see Hendricks, p. 2-4, Blankenship p. 103-04, and Washington A. Roeblig to Clark M. Will. May 18, 1924. Clark Moore Will papers, Coll 062/ Series II: Box 1-3, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

<sup>30</sup> Eugene E. Snyder. *Aurora, their last utopia: Oregon's Christian commune, 1856-1883*. - (Portland, OR: Binford & Mort, 1993):7-9 .

persecution; the group was restricted from meeting by the Lutheran church in their home country. Rapp's group eventually branched into three settlements, but the primary community was located in Economy, Pennsylvania, on the banks of the Ohio River (figures 2.3, 2.4). The Harmonist's way of life was plain, and descendant of a nearby area Dale Owens explains, "My father found among the German occupants indications of plenty and material comfort but with scarcely a touch of fancy or ornament save the flowers in the garden."<sup>32</sup> All of these communities lived according to communistic and "early Christian," guidelines. Although he did not initially preach celibacy, Rapp, who considered himself a prophet, began to suggest a celibate lifestyle as a way to prepare for the imminent second coming of Christ.<sup>33</sup> Rapp used a verse from 1 Corinthians in order to justify this new rule, which states "He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord; But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife."<sup>34</sup>

This was not a popular policy with all members of the Harmony society. A member of the community named Bernhard Mueller (who had taken on the name of "Count Maximilian de Leon") began speaking to Rapp's followers about personal rights, including marriage and having children.<sup>35</sup> Leon immigrated with 50 religious followers,

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<sup>31</sup>"Communal Minded Germans Flee Germany." Clark Moore Will papers, Coll 062/ Series II: Box 1-3, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

<sup>32</sup> "A Summary of Communal Organizations in the U.S." Clark Moore Will papers, Coll 062/ Series II: Box 1-3, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

<sup>33</sup> Snyder, Aurora, 16-21.

<sup>34</sup> "Verse for the Week," The National Observer, Monday February 15, 1965. Clark Moore Will papers, Coll 062/ Series II: Box 1-3, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

and the group had begun living at Economy together. Eventually, his speaking against celibacy caused a rift in the original group, and Mueller began a separate communal living situation in 1832 in Phillipsburgh, PA which allowed for married couples and families to live together. Approximately 175 people made up this group, and they called themselves the Leonists.<sup>36</sup> Mueller abandoned the group shortly after, relocating to Louisiana with several of his followers.<sup>37</sup> Although they had been through many changes, the desire for communal living remained for many German immigrants living in the region. This group in need of a leader found Wilhelm Keil to be the perfect fit for their community.<sup>38</sup> A number of Harmony society members soon began attending Keil's public sermons as well, and Bek writes: "He counseled carefully with the ex-Harmonists and the ex-Leonists. They having had experience in such matters and being men of rare ability as mechanics and artisans, he solicited their participation most earnestly."<sup>39</sup> Hendricks states: "Their counsel was for a new trial of Communism under his leadership, in a place where there would be none to dispute or hinder the working out of the experiments in which they had been participants."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Robert J. Hendricks, *Bethel and Aurora, an experiment in communism as practical Christianity; with some account of past and present ventures in collective living*. (New York: Press of the pioneers, 1933): 6.

<sup>36</sup>Washington A. Roebig to Clark M. Will. May 18, 1924. Clark Moore Will papers, Coll 062/ Series II: Box 1-3, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> William G. Bek. *A German communistic society in Missouri*. (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri, 1908): 60-61.

<sup>39</sup> Bek, *A German Communistic Society*, 62.

<sup>40</sup> Hendricks, *Bethel and Aurora*, 8.

The Lutheran Keil became enamored with the evangelical Methodist preaching he was witness to in Pennsylvania. He was specifically influenced by the 1838 Pittsburgh revival meetings run by William Nast, the founder of the German Methodist Church. He also met Rev. J. Martin Hartmann, who was interested in communist principles, and influenced Keil's agendas. Keil was authorized as a Methodist preacher in 1839 and began work in Deer Creek, PA. Keil as, according to Bek's account, desperate to be a full and complete leader of his congregation, and resented the sanctions and leadership of the Methodist church. He was zealous and commanding, and as Bek explains, "Keil was possessor of a mysterious book, written for the most part in blood, which contained all sorts of mystic symbols and formulae, unintelligible to anyone but Keil...After his conversion Keil invited Nast and several brethren to witness the burning of this mysterious book which was regarded as the work of the devil...He gave up his medical practice entirely and devoted himself to independent preaching...the entire congregation at Deer Creek [PA]...followed him blindly...With Keil the entire congregation again severed their connection with the church."<sup>41</sup> Ultimately, Keil severed all connections with denominationally organized religion. This sentiment was common throughout the utopian movement, especially among those who adhered to the ideals of early Christianity. Also, as appears in Will's notes, "Unrest among the newly arrived German settlers was great. [The] first United States financial crisis was near: 1837. Many people regarded communal colony life as the only ideal way of living..."<sup>42</sup> Despite Keil's

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<sup>41</sup> Bek, *A German Communistic Society*, 56-7.

commanding presence and the larger religious and social ideals that caused recent immigrants to become members of communal groups, it is also likely that membership in these communities was based on the common ancestry of its members, who had largely settled in Western Pennsylvania.

### **Keil as a Leader**

The Bethel and Aurora colonists differed from other 19<sup>th</sup> century pioneers in their religious and social beliefs, but also in the fact that they were ultimately under the moral authority of a commanding leader. Accounts of his personality and leadership style differ, but the consensus makes clear that in partaking in the communal system, colonists also relinquished much of their privacy and autonomy. Having renounced organized Christianity, he taught that to serve Christ and to act according to the “Golden Rule” was the primary aim of Christians, and to follow the spare lifestyle of Christ’s apostles. Keil would often announce that he was in danger of martyrdom and public sacrifice, making them fearful about his loss.<sup>43</sup>

Charles Nordhoff, who visited the Aurora colony during its communal period, also discussed Keil’s warning of his own martyrdom in his account. He tells of Keil’s public burning of his mystic book, and states: “He seems to have been a fanatic in religious matters, for he soon left the Methodists to form a sect of his own; and it is related that he gathered a number of Germans about him, to whom he gave himself out as a being to be worshipped, and later as one of the two witnesses in the Book of

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<sup>42</sup> “A Summary of Communal Organizations in the U.S.” Clark Moore Will papers, Coll 062/ Series II: Box 1-3, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 58.

Revelation; and in this capacity he gave public notice that on a certain day, after a fast of forty days, he would be slain in the presence of his followers.” Nordhoff refers to these followers as “ignorant and simple minded Germans,” which is certainly a generality. However, it is worthwhile to consider their ethnic homogeny and status as new immigrants. This, combined with the promise of the United States as a utopia of religious freedom, gave them a reason to remain together in one, religious based group. This set of circumstances also provided a fertile environment for the development of charismatic religious leaders who claimed an understanding of pure, unencumbered Christianity.<sup>44</sup>

Keil also used dramatic public techniques in order to garner followers and gain legitimacy as a religious leader. Bek writes: “Keil knew how to perplex them by telling them that he had visions... Sometimes he perverted the [scriptural] text completely if his purpose was thereby the better accomplished. One time he is said to have made the startling assertion that on a certain day he would be publicly sacrificed... Persons outside the pale of his influence believed that his followers worshipped Keil more than Christ. In fact it is vouched that women, carried away by his preaching and entering into a peculiar hypnotic state, cried out; ‘Thou art Christ.’”<sup>45</sup> This intense dependence on Keil formed the social atmosphere in the colonies. Boone also describes the effect Keil had on female colonists, stating that wives often prevented their husbands from withdrawing from the

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<sup>44</sup> Charles Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies of the United States: The Classic Eye-Witness Report of the Economists, Zoarites, Shakers, Amana, Oneida, Bethel, Aurora, Icarian and other Utopian Communities that Flourished in 19<sup>th</sup> century America*. (New York: Hillary House Publishers: 1875): 307.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

colony for fear of the leader's supernatural retribution. He writes that Keil controlled the colonists by instilling in them a fear of the outside world.<sup>46</sup>

Keil also required regular confessions of his followers, a technique that had previously been effective in preserving the allegiance of the Rappist and Leonist colonists. These meetings subjected the colonists to a series of questions on private topics, including sexuality. Single people came alone and married couples were required to come together. The information Keil garnered from these confessions were then used in public during speeches and sermons in order to, according to Bek "intimidate the simple folk and to scourge them into line, to more easily compel them to do his bidding."<sup>47</sup> In Aurora, Henry T. Finck observed: "The colony was held together by Keil's personal magnetism and eloquence as a preacher, but he was an ignorant man and I suspect he never ignored his own interests."<sup>48</sup> Although the members of the Bethel and Aurora groups willingly joined communal societies because of their larger religious and social beliefs, these passages illustrate the control tactics used by Keil to maintain the cohesion of the groups. They also demonstrate some of the experiences women may have had as colony members.

While Bek tends to discuss Keil from a negative standpoint, Hendricks' account is quite different. He describes the preacher as fatherly, tall and impressive, with "an upright bearing, a most open countenance, but with positive features and even a bold and

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<sup>46</sup> Boone, *Bethel-Aurora Colony*, 25.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 60. For further accounts of such matters, see Bek, 70.

<sup>48</sup> Henry T. Finck to Clark M. Will, September 23, 1925. Clark Moore Will papers, Coll 062/ Series II: Box 1-3, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

searching eye and direct gaze; [he] could inspire courage and confidence, and obedience to his wishes, in any one by the piercing look of his eyes, as if he were gazing into the innermost recesses of the heart and searching the very soul of his listener.”<sup>49</sup> He states that Keil was “benign” and honest, friendly, and knowledgeable, not putting himself in the position of God, but rather serving as a spiritual father.<sup>50</sup> This volume is the one marked as “speculative” and possibly fictional by Kopp. Keil’s true personality, bearing, and leadership style was certainly a combination of the attributes described by 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century writers.

### **Life in Bethel and the Journey to Oregon**

The Bethel colony was settled in 1844 with the first group of colonists relocating from Pennsylvania; some traveled by land and some via the Mississippi River (figure 2.5). Bethel (its name meaning *The House of God*) is located in Northeastern Missouri (Shelby County), approximately 45 miles to the West of the Mississippi river and Hannibal, MO. At the time, the land was considered in the far Western United States. Keil chose to move his group there in order to live a more secluded and autonomous existence, and in order to move away from “the fermenting hot-bed of social thought which dominated the area about Pittsburgh. To this end he deputized Adam Schuele, David Wagner, and Christian Presser to seek out a colony site preferably west of the Mississippi in 1843.”<sup>51</sup> A second group arrived the next year. The settlement area was

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<sup>49</sup> Hendricks, *Bethel and Aurora*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, xiii.

chosen because it was near a water source (the North river) and a saw mill was already in operation nearby.<sup>52</sup>

Neither the Bethel or Aurora colonies were operated with a large amount of written records, but both communities did produce a constitution. In fact, Hendricks states, “For over thirty years, few of the newly admitted members or the younger people knew there was a constitution.”<sup>53</sup> One stipulation of the constitution that the former Rappists demanded was a clause allowing a withdrawal from the community with all contributions refunded in case of dissatisfaction after three years.<sup>54</sup> The business records of Bethel (and Aurora) are minimal as well, and Bek goes on to state that “One of the most embarrassing things in the preparation of this study is the fact that it is absolutely impossible to obtain an accurate account of their business transactions. The fact is that only very few accounts were kept, and these few have been carelessly dealt with and have apparently been lost.”<sup>55</sup> This lack of records helps to account for the fact that there seem to be no original writings regarding art and craft in the colonies. Bethel’s constitution was written in German, and the later Aurora constitution is written in English. The constitution of Bethel contains seven tenets which lay out its socialist governance (12 elected elder representatives under Keil and a pay-in with an initial obligation to remain a community member for a set number of years), rules for marriage (marriages were only

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<sup>51</sup> “A Summary of Communal Organizations in the U.S.” Clark Moore Will papers, Coll 062/ Series II: Box 1-3, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

<sup>52</sup> Bek, *A German Communistic Society*, 65.

<sup>53</sup> Hendricks, *Bethel and Aurora*, 18.

<sup>54</sup> Boone, *Thesis of Bethel-Aurora Communal Colony*, 5.

<sup>55</sup> Bek, *A German Communistic Society*, 103.

to take place between fellow believers, though not necessarily colonists only) and monetary penalties for leaving the group.<sup>56</sup> Initially, 61 contributions to the communal fund made up a starting account of \$31,000.<sup>57</sup> For the most part, there were no strict rules or law enforcement, as Keil maintained legislation over major decisions.

The fact that the constitution of Bethel required a limited requirement for participation in the communal aspects of the group indicates that a tension existed between individualism and communism. Bek further explores this, stating: “it must be remembered that this society which, so to speak, stands on the borderline of communism” He further states that Bethel featured a “strange mixture of communism and individualism.”<sup>58</sup> The minimal regulations of the Bethel constitution support this idea, and it can be assumed that a tension between individualism and socialism constituted one of the chief tensions of life in both communities. This tension is brought into sharper focus when considering the often-referenced “rugged individualism” that has come to shade our understanding of 19<sup>th</sup> century American pioneers.

By the early 1850’s, the community’s population was about 1,000.<sup>59</sup> A tract of land (4,000 acres) in nearby Adair county, which Keil called Nineveh, was also purchased. There, a tannery (where the primary output was leather gloves), blacksmith, and wagon-making shops were established (figures 2.6, 2.7, 2.8). Work was viewed as a tenet of biblical discipline and as a service to the common good. All of the goods

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<sup>56</sup> For a complete translation of the Bethel constitution, see Hendricks 16-17.

<sup>57</sup> Blankenship. *And there were men*, 1942.

<sup>58</sup> Bek, *A German Communistic society*, 68.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

manufactured in the colony were sold in order to fund the communal government. Tensions regarding communistic living were present in the vocational sphere, and colonists in Bethel and Aurora often earned small amounts of money for themselves through various pursuits. Bethel colonists did interact and trade with outsiders, and were not teetotalers; they made wine of homegrown currants. Perhaps most successfully, they distilled whiskey made of their own grains, which they called “Golden Rule” and sold it in Missouri and Illinois.<sup>60</sup> In terms of education, school was conducted in English, and, partly because of the group’s distancing from the German Methodist church, there was little effort to retain either spoken or written High German. Only men taught in the Bethel colony, but women did eventually become teachers in Aurora. Keil did not wish his members to be over-educated, which, as has been stated by researchers, reflected his desire to be an autocrat.<sup>61</sup> In Aurora, as described below, a greater degree of education was eventually allowed.

The visual culture and built environment of Bethel was intentionally plain. Keil himself had a large, brick and timber home which he called Elim about 2 miles outside of town (figure 2.9). The homes and other buildings in Bethel were either brick or whitewashed timber, and generally built in the dogtrot style with two stories.<sup>62</sup> However, while the buildings of both colonies were intentionally anachronistic, the quilts created by colonists in both settlements were in keeping with contemporary trends. This is because patchwork quilts throughout the United States at this time were intentionally

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>62</sup> For further information on the architecture of Aurora (and Bethel), see Dole and Roth.

reminiscent of American culture before industrialization. This element of the Bethel and Aurora quilts is discussed further in the following chapters.

## **Travel to Oregon**

Keil was deeply offended by the encroaching “worldly” population, and feared that these factors were to blame for the falling away of several Bethel colonists. Keil “wrote later (in a letter dated October 13, 1855) that he had problems at Bethel because the people were not submitting to discipline nor giving ‘heed to the day of the Lord,’ but were letting their children grow up ‘in a blasphemous and unspiritual life.’”<sup>63 64</sup> These fears, combined with Keil’s restless nature and his interest in the promise of Oregon’s vast spaces, led him to send an exploratory party to the West coast in 1853. The group was comprised of 9 men and one woman; its leader was favored emissary of Wilhelm Keil and the woman was his wife, Emma (figure 2.10).

The group arrived in the Willapa region, in Washington State. It proved to be inhospitable and overly remote, and the group eventually chose to settle in the Willamette valley, which they perceived to be more temperate; land there was also particularly inexpensive at the time.<sup>65</sup> Keil’s followers settled 30 miles south of Portland, Oregon in 1856, after a time spent in the city during a difficult winter. One story which highlights the experience of colony women is Emma Giesy’s. Before the group moved on to Oregon, she gave birth to a son, Andrew Jackson Giesy on October 19, 1853 at Fort Steilacoom, Washington, where the group sought refuge after giving up on building. Her

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<sup>63</sup> Snyder, *Aurora*, 50.

<sup>64</sup> For further reading on the reasons for the Bethel colony’s migration, see Blankenship 107-08.

<sup>65</sup> Clark Moor Will, “The Aurora Story.” (Marion County History, vol. 1, June 1955): 12-15.

baby was ill and was cared for by the officer's wives at the fort while the men of the group were scouting in Oregon.<sup>66</sup> Despite this assistance, Emma was alone and faced certain language barriers; Christian Giesy died during this time and Emma later remarried in Aurora. She became one of the noteworthy quilters of the Aurora colony.

Clark M. Will has some accounts of the pioneer women associated with the Aurora Colony in his notes as well, some dictated to him by his mother. They read:

Emma Wagner Giesy ably fitted herself into the cares of camp life-uncomplaining and with enduring fortitude did this young bride face trail life and its dangers... The life of the pioneer woman was hard and its scope narrow yet she rose to act with courage in times of peril...The story is told of an incident that happened at a camp site in Indian country along the Platt. We saw many Indians...related my mother. They gave us some concern as late one evening a mounted war party dashed wildly into our midst at mealtime, the odor of cooking food stemming their gesturing demand for food, as they wheeled their mounts right up to the steaming kettles. In great fright and trembling our women cooks got busy with their dippers and into each leather chow bag, of this mounted war party, went a large dipper-full of piping hot potato soup. Many women folk cried, some laughed as they saw their precious soup dripping from those leather bags as the Indian warriors...bounded away...Like our immigrant forebears did these colony women, the homemakers, fit into the struggle to establish homes in a new country under conditions so different to what they left in Pennsylvania and Missouri.<sup>67</sup>

Although this account may be speculative in terms of Emma Giesy's temperament, it does illustrate the life of the women who created quilts both in Bethel and in Aurora.

Keil, who traveled from Missouri in 1855, spent time in Portland during these transitional years as well, by some accounts working as a doctor. His trip from Missouri was a memorable one, as he had reportedly promised his son Willie that he would see

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<sup>66</sup> "Keil's Emmissaries," Clark Moore Will papers, Coll 062/ Series II: Box 1-3, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

<sup>67</sup> Clark M. Will, "Colony Mothers Help Write Colony History." Clark Moore Will papers, Coll 062/ Series II: Box 1-3, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

Oregon. Willie died of Smallpox before this promise could be fulfilled, and Keil arranged to have his coffin, filled with alcohol as a preservative, carried from Missouri to Oregon in a special wagon drawn by four mules.<sup>68 69</sup> Certain accounts suggest that this traveling party was not approached by Indians because the coffin provoked fear and distrust.<sup>70</sup> Another large group of 252 colonists traveled to Aurora from Bethel in 1863 (figure 2.11).<sup>71</sup>

Once a settlement in Aurora was established in 1856, citizens lived communally in a large house, which remained as Keil's personal estate as building continued. Settlers from the earlier Northeast Missouri colony continued to arrive in small groups. The community was initially named "Aurora Mills," both after Keil's daughter (one of his nine children) and the saw and gristmills run by the Colony. The name Aurora also refers to the concept of dawn, pointing to the new beginning Keil hoped to make, as Aurora was the Roman goddess of the morning.<sup>72</sup> Train tracks through Aurora, still operational today, carried passengers to and from Portland, and visitors often called the colony "Dutchtown" after the "Pennsylvania Dutch" that was spoken there (figures 2.12, 2.13).<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Clark M. Will, "Willapa has Willie..." Clark Moore Will papers, Coll 062/ Series II: Box 1-3, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

<sup>69</sup> For more on the funeral procession, see Hendricks 53.

<sup>70</sup> Kenneth Holmes. "The Traveling Coffin Helped Pacify Indians." *Columbian*, December 16, 1964. Clark Moore Will papers, Coll 062/ Series II: Box 1-3, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon.

<sup>71</sup> Will, "The Aurora Story," 13.

<sup>72</sup> Hendricks, *Bethel and Aurora*, 114.

<sup>73</sup> For a more complete chronicle of the initial scouting party and Oregon trail journey of the Aurora settlers, see "Keil's Emmisaries" and "Master Diary 1863 Plains Trip Record," Clark Moore Will papers, Coll 062/ Series II: Box 1-3, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, Oregon; also see Hendricks 59-107.

Keil governed from afar, but his letters to the colonists in Bethel were contradictory. At times he urged them to retain a stronghold in Bethel, and at other times he begged them to join the rest of the party in Oregon. One such letter reads:

From Pennsylvania...I led you out of an over-done church-life through guidance of your hearts; even as Moses guided the Children of Israel through the wilderness because his people would not listen to the voice of God and each attempted to follow the desires of his mind so that he, Moses, came even near forsaking them. But Moses was a resolute man in his relationship with his people even as I was with you...To this extent was it in Bethel; the elder folks even did not assemble on the Lord's day at the sound of my Trumpet, neither did their children; the young ones during the last few months growing fast into an unholy life during all which time no one was more faithful to the voice of God than I; yet none obeyed. By His own good will did God calls us; like children, unto me He sent a people weak in faith...A part of your young folks I have taken through the wilderness...We are now one in heart and spirit...It would be a good thing if all the young men and young women of Bethel could so be led across the wilderness so they could be near me and so learn to recognize the true Christ.<sup>74</sup>

Towards the end of his life he became more consistent and requested that the Bethel group move westward, but the group may have lost confidence in him as they never left Missouri.<sup>75</sup> The colonists in Aurora eventually freed themselves from his grasp as well; having experienced contact with other pioneers. These settlers exposed them to the freedoms of private land ownership and alternative forms of government.<sup>76</sup> He had prevented marriages that he did not approve of, and towards the end of his life his wishes in this area were disregarded.<sup>77</sup> Keil was to die approximately 10 years later, in 1877, and had not claimed a successor, so the communal period of Aurora was a brief and

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<sup>74</sup> Frederick Woodward Skiff. *Adventures in americana; recollections of forty years collecting books, furniture, china, guns and glass.* (Portland, Or: Metropolitan Press, 1935): 209-210.

<sup>75</sup> Bek, *A German Communistic Society*, 106.

<sup>76</sup> Boone, *Bethel-Aurora Colony*, 24.

<sup>77</sup> Boone, *Bethel-Aurora Colony*, 23-24.

concentrated one.<sup>78</sup> He had not participated in efforts to prepare for his death by installing leadership councils, clinging to his position as a ruler.<sup>79</sup>

### **Life in the Aurora Colony**

A hymn written by Wilhelm Keil reads: "...Now I stand in God's creation, As a stranger, as a guest,/And He who made me calls, In you I seek my rest, Aurora (figure 2.14)."<sup>80</sup> The leader of the colonies believed that he had found the site of his utopian dream in Oregon. The constitution of the Aurora colony was very similar to that of Bethel. It emphasized the paternal nature of the colony's government and the basic tenets of "early Christianity."<sup>81</sup> Outsiders who were interested in joining the community were allowed trial periods and some eventually became members. Those who were "idle or drunken" were asked to leave.<sup>82</sup> The architecture of the settlement used more timber than brick, as had been common in Bethel. However, the style of homes in the settlement were nearly identical to those in Bethel, with the exception of an occasional flourish on a porch rail of homes created in the later colony days (the 1870's).<sup>83</sup> Hendricks asserts that the socialist system of Aurora worked well, and that a regular and ordered system of buildings and labor lent to a high quality of life. He goes so far as to assert that "The

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<sup>78</sup> For further firsthand accounts of the journey to Oregon, see Skiff 200-215.

<sup>79</sup> Boone, *Bethel-Aurora Colony*, 25.

<sup>80</sup> Wilhelm Keil, "Aurora Hymn." Translation from original songbook handwritten in German by Frederick Keil, Aurora Colony Records, MSS 461, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, Portland, OR.

<sup>81</sup> An approximation of the Aurora Constitution is included in Nordhoff, 309-310. The original, handwritten document signed by colonists is in Aurora Colony Papers, Reel 11, Items #1-2, Oregon State Library, Salem, OR.

<sup>82</sup> Boone, *Bethel-Aurora Colony*, 15.

<sup>83</sup> Roth, Leland M., Howard Davis, and Donald Peting. *Building at the end of the Oregon Trail: tour guide*, 1997.

women worked, but their labor was made as light and pleasant as possible. They had no worries about the wood piles...men did the heavy tasks. This made a pleasing contrast to the homes of many neighboring farm women.”<sup>84</sup> His descriptions of the aesthetic and organizational qualities of the colony are so different from other firsthand accounts (Nordhoff’s) that both deserve to be included here for the sake of comparison. Hendricks writes: “Dirt was taboo. New comers with uncleanly traits reformed. ..Everybody in colony life knows everybody else and his habits...They were amenable to the discipline of public opinion. Another thing, there were flowers and trees and vines...There were flowers in the gardens, floral beauty everywhere...the whole year through. Aurora was a community of beauty and music.”<sup>85</sup> He goes on to state that the communistic lifestyle in the colony freed colonists from worry, allowing them long lives and a sense of social harmony, and lightening their workload so that they might be exemplary mothers.<sup>86</sup>

In contrast, Charles Nordhoff, who visited Aurora during its colony period, commented on the untidy atmosphere of the community. He explains that beauty and creativity was a tenuous issue, stating: “In fact there is little room for poetry or for the imagination in Aurora. What is not directly useful is sternly left out.”<sup>87</sup> Nordhoff even found the layout of the town and its landscaping drab, noticing that Aurora contained: “...plenty of everything that is absolutely necessary to support life- and nothing superfluous...It was a droll illustration of their devotion to the useful, to find in the borders of the garden, where flowers had been planted, these flowers alternating with

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<sup>84</sup> Hendricks, *Bethel and Aurora*, 124.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>87</sup> Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies*, 317.

lettuce, radishes, and other small vegetables... There is an air of untidiness about the streets of the settlement which is displeasing... The village seems to have been laid out haphazard.<sup>88</sup> Both authors had different aims in their descriptions, and the reader of both passages may draw their own conclusions, but both speak to the community life, and possibly to the female experience of the Aurora colony.

Henry Theophilus Finck, who lived near Aurora and participated in the colony musical programs, offers a more balanced approach to colony life, vouching for Keil's possible manipulation of the colonists. He does, however, agree with Hendricks about the aesthetics of the settlement. He states that Keil was "rather unprepossessing, short and heavy [but] had a pleasant manner and an undoubted gift of leadership, and he managed to blind his followers to his own selfishness. The colonists gladly gave him the lion's share of their best without questioning his right to it... although ignorant he had considerable eloquence and knew how to key up his hearers emotionally... Occasionally a hysterical or nervous young woman would rise suddenly, fling up her arms and with shrill cries rush up toward the preacher."<sup>89</sup> Finck, who was not a colony member but lived nearby and occasionally attended their church, states that Keil was not well-educated. When given a world history book by Finck's father, he was quite interested and included the content in his sermons.

He goes on to describe the Aurora colonists to be honest, trustworthy, and kind.<sup>90</sup> In terms of the way the colony appeared, he states that the colonists wore their finest

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<sup>88</sup> Nordhoff, *The Communistic Societies*, 317-18.

<sup>89</sup> Henry Theophilus Finck. *My adventures in the golden age of music*. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1926): 38.

clothes on Sundays. They had beautiful flower gardens, and made food that became very popular among travelers. Eventually, the Aurora colony opened a successful German restaurant at the Oregon State fair in Salem.<sup>91</sup> Finck's viewpoint, which does not have a clear bias, bridges the gap between the two accounts above. Darrel Boone, another colony descendent who wrote about the society, also disagrees with Nordhoff's views, stating: "I have been assured by interviews I have had with surviving members of the colony...that during the colony period Aurora had a much more cultured and interesting community life than any other comparable community on the Pacific Coast." He goes on to assert the level of education of the community members, explaining that the colony school went through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, better than the average Oregon school at the time. Additionally, he claims that several colony members attended local colleges, and that two men in the Giesy family attended the University of Oregon Medical School.<sup>92</sup>

Clark Will's description of his foster mother, Otilia Will Wolfer, includes a listing of the activities she performed in service to her family and the colony. Will states that his sister was more interested in helping in the gardens and working with the men, and this was presumably allowed. He states that this left him to be his mother's helper as she cooked and baked, canned goods, including jams and sauerkraut, did laundry and sewing, and caring for egg-producing hens. He describes her as often singing Bavarian folk songs as she worked. He also describes seasonal activities such as corn husking, apple butter and cider making, meat processing, and soap making (figures 2.15, 2.16). In

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Boone, *Bethel-Aurora Colony*, 15.

rural 19<sup>th</sup> century communities, work relating to milk and eggs were so closely associated with women that men often refused to participate, and this was almost certainly the case in Bethel and Aurora.<sup>93</sup> The accounts listed above are the most comprehensive available concerning the lives of Aurora women, but to better understand the lives of the colony quilters, a description of women's moral values at the time serves as a helpful supplement.

By all accounts, the clothing of the Aurora colonists was simple and unadorned. Photographs of the colonists attest to this, as do the accounts of Charles Nordhoff, who states: "As we walked along through the vegetable garden and vineyard, I saw some elderly women hoeing the vines and clearing the ground of weeds...Dr. Keil said, nodding to the women 'They like this work; it is their choice to spend the afternoon thus. If I should tell them to go and put on fine clothes and lounge around, they would be very much aggrieved.' He goes on to state, "I suppose the lack of smart dress and finery among the young people on Sunday, and at the wedding, gave a somewhat monotonous and dreary impression of the assemblage."<sup>94</sup>

### **The Visual Culture of the Bethel and Aurora Colonies**

Keil, who himself had been a tailor for a short time in New York city, established a woman's skirt which could be gathered up and secured to allow for freedom of motion while walking and working, especially around open flames. Cotton calico was the primary fabric used for women's clothing, and they were encouraged to dress simply at

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<sup>93</sup> Susan G. Butruille. *Women's Voices from the Western Frontier*. (Boise, ID: Tamarack Books, 1995): 186.

<sup>94</sup>Nordhoff, *Communistic Societies*, 319-22.

all times (figure 2.17). They were warned against ornamentation that would express individuality or put an undue expense on the colony.<sup>95</sup> Ribbons were occasionally used for ornamentation.<sup>96</sup>

The architecture, clothing, and furniture in Aurora demonstrate anachronistic tendencies consistent with the philosophy of separation from the industrialized world. This strikes a contrast with the communities' quilts, which, as discussed below, are consistent with contemporary outside trends. Although he was likely aware of the urban architecture of Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and Portland, Keil intentionally prescribed an extremely conservative building style (figures 2.18, 2.19, 2.20). Philip Dole explains that the source of Bethel and Aurora's simple architecture was the colonist's Germanic heritage and differed somewhat from other Oregon homes.<sup>97</sup> This differs from the quilts which appear to be more in line with contemporary trends.<sup>98</sup>

The furniture utilized in the Aurora Colony was also designed in conservative, Germanic styles. However, McCarl notes that what popular and Victorian components

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<sup>95</sup> Bywater Cross, *Quilts of the Oregon Trail*, 112.

<sup>96</sup> One women's dress at the Aurora Colony Museum is black cotton with small white dots. A doll from the colony period is also clothed in a simple black petticoat, bonnet, and white blouse. In colony photographs, children are often seen wearing slightly more ornate clothing than adults, who wore almost exclusively dark colors. Collars and ruffles, and patterns were generally only worn by boys and girls, while adult women are sometimes pictured with floral shawls. The simple dress of the Aurora colonists strikes a clear contrast between the sumptuous dresses, full skirts, bustles and corsets popular in the United States in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and even the high collars and sportswear of the 1890's.

<sup>97</sup> Philip Dole. "Aurora Colony Architecture: Building in a Nineteenth-Century Cooperative Society." (*Oregon Historical Quarterly* 92, no. 4, 1991-2): 378.

<sup>98</sup> In general, the architectural language of both the Bethel and Aurora colonies was austere, and there was little intention towards innovation in this area. This conservatism is based on architectural patterns which can be traced to other American "utopian" settlements, but also to German influences. These factors may have been due to Keil's intention to create a community that was visibly set apart. It was characterized by large, whitewashed rectangular timber structures, often in the dogtrot style (a central stairway directly off the front door), with large multifunctional rooms. For more on this see Dole, Roth.

emerge in Aurora furniture were based on the tension between personal and collective agendas that existed in the later years of the settlement. The colonists made furniture to sell as well as to use. Furniture made in the colony was popular with consumers because it was inexpensive and simple. Aurora Colony furniture was made in workshops by teams of communally focused artisans, and was therefore highly standardized. In the manufacturing process, the division of labor was more important than the innovative or modern nature of the product. The way furniture was made was based on the most integral social principles of the colony. McCarl states, “The colony furniture....is the product of a highly cohesive and sensitive group acutely aware of the changes in technology which surrounded it, yet desirous of retaining those forms and methods of construction which provided for the widest distribution of labor, the most economic return, and the least expenditure of energy possible.”<sup>99</sup> Regulations had to do with economical concerns for the colony, and the desire to be unified in all things. However, quilt production was a more private activity carried out in the home. Therefore, less ideological thought governed their production, and quilt-makers were able to maintain closer ties to outside trends.

### **Moral and Domestic Expectations for Women in the Colonies**

19<sup>th</sup> century American, Protestant women were expected to uphold a particular set of moral values. This code of behaviors stemmed from the social circumstances of the rapidly expanding United States. Many of the women who took part in spiritual revivals, including Bethel and Aurora colonists, experienced moral tensions as expanding views of religion coincided with Victorian gender roles and they grappled with politics and the

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<sup>99</sup> McCarl, *Aurora Colony Furniture*, 143.

economy.<sup>100</sup> With the emphasis placed more strongly on the sanctity of family life, women's roles were weighted with meaning and duty. They were considered the foundational support which allowed for their husband's investment of time and energy as providers and explorers.<sup>101</sup>

Practitioners of these systems relied on scripture to support their social structures. In communities such as Bethel and Aurora, "The idealized moral identity of white women grew out of Christian virtues such as humility, charity and kindness ... A tender, apparently non-coercive emotional style identified its practitioners. It encouraged obedience and submission to authority rather than self-reliance."<sup>102</sup> Marriage and family roles, already distinct in 19<sup>th</sup> century protestant culture, were heightened when the idea of Westward emigration was included. The task of serving as the moral compass for the family was made more challenging by the difficult conditions of the Oregon Trail, and women often asserted the importance of observing the Sabbath in the midst of travel.<sup>103</sup> They also continued normal domestic tasks outdoors, and in wagons, as is evidenced by the account of the Bethel colonists.<sup>104</sup>

The women of the Bethel colony would have been responsible for maintaining the equilibrium of the group as they journeyed westward to seek their utopia. As Martha Saxton has written, "The conditions of early-nineteenth century marriage for white

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<sup>100</sup> Martha Saxton. *Being good: Women's Moral Values in Early America*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 10.

<sup>101</sup> Bywater Cross, *Quilts of the Oregon Trail*, 147.

<sup>102</sup> Saxton, *Being Good*, 15.

<sup>103</sup> Bywater Cross, *Quilts of the Oregon Trail*, 57.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

women in Missouri made difficult the choice of marriage itself, much less that of a husband. The duties of wives began with obedience and included repeated childbirth, the responsibility for the health and happiness of family members, and the probability of leaving their birth families and moving several times.<sup>105</sup> Women took part in the Westward migration once their husbands or fathers had made the decision to do so. Women's journals from the Oregon Trail generally suggest a stoic and realistic attitude that reflected their supporting roles.<sup>106</sup> As Westward emigration became more common, women and their families considered quilts to be a priceless connection to loved ones they might never see again.

An object created by a family member's own hand was a treasured possession and a reminder of home for women, and many were given as special going-away presents. Colorful quilts were also used to add brightness and warmth to the rudimentary tents and cabins that many early Western settlers lived in. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States, quilts were often created as commemorative items, celebrating these departures, but also births and deaths, weddings and community and church activities.<sup>107</sup> This leads the historian to treat the objects as documents which betray information about the lives of women.<sup>108</sup> In Bethel and subsequently Aurora, as Bek had noted, there was a tension between the newly defined American value of the pursuit of individual happiness and the well-being

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<sup>105</sup> Saxton, *Being Good*, 12.

<sup>106</sup> Bywater Cross, Mary. *Quilts of the Oregon Trail*. ( Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2007): 6.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 6-7.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

of the entire community, which could only have been heightened by the communistic ideals that governed the communities.

Nordhoff adds a firsthand account of this female experience, outlining a wedding he witnessed in Aurora. He writes:

On a Sunday I attended a wedding; the marriage took place in the schoolhouse, and was witnessed by a small congregation of young people, friends of the bride and groom. The young girls came to the wedding in clean calico dresses and sun-bonnets; and I noticed that even the bride wore only a very plain woolen dress, with a bit of bright ribbon around her neck. The ceremony was performed by the schoolmaster, who is also a justice of the peace; when it was over, the company quietly and somewhat shyly walked up to congratulate the newly married, some of the young women kissing the bride... It struck me that the young women were undersized, and did not look robust and strong; there were no rosy cheeks, and there was a very subdued air upon all the congregation. The poor little bride looked pale and scared; but the bridegroom, a stout young fellow, looked proud and happy, as was proper. Dr. Keil was not present, but drove out in a very plain country wagon as the weddingers entered the schoolroom.<sup>109</sup>

Keil clearly exerted enough control that his physical presence was not required in order for his authority to be felt.

## **The End of the Colonies**

Wilhelm Keil died in 1877, and the communal way of life in Aurora (and Bethel) did not continue (figure 2.21). Contact with the outside world, particularly through the train track that cut through the colony, as well as many later pioneers and gold-seekers, caused a drifting away of the colonists from Keil's authority. Keil had also lost several more of his children to smallpox towards the end of his life, which caused him to withdrawal from his flock in his grief, and at other times to rebuke them in dramatic

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<sup>109</sup> Nordhoff, Charles. *The Communistic Societies of the United States: The Classic Eye-Witness Report of the Economists, Zoarites, Shakers, Amana, Oneida, Bethel, Aurora, Icarian and other Utopian Communities that Flourished in 19<sup>th</sup> century America*. (New York: Hillary House Publishers: 1961), 312-13.

outbursts.<sup>110</sup> One former member stated: “When children of the Aurora Colonists died, Keil said, ‘They had been possessed of evil spirits or else they would not have died’...when his old children died he said, ‘It was an offering for the sins of others.’”<sup>111</sup> Boone suggests that Keil had been able to retain control of the colonists because they were German and used to a dictatorial government. With the “Americanization” of the second generation of colonists, ideals began to change.<sup>112</sup>

Another possible cause of the quick undoing of the communal society was Keil’s authoritarian position on marriage. He apparently exerted strong control over the matches that were made, and denied many proposed unions. Although the original Bethel constitution stated that marriages with non members (assuming they were Christians) was allowed, Finck states that “there is every indication that Keil really endeavored to stop all marriages with non-members.”<sup>113</sup> Several other accounts support this statement, suggesting that in the 1870’s Aurora came to be known as a town of bachelors and unmarried women. With an encroaching outside population of Oregon Trail settlers, this was likely a control that Keil could not maintain. However, Keil was still spoken of with reverence by former colony members in several sources.

Keil had been married since his young adulthood in Germany, and his wife (Louisa Keil) had always urged the colonists to heed his commands. However, she died just two years after he did, on July 20, 1879, and never named a successor of any sort for

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<sup>110</sup> Finck, *Golden Age of Music*, 217.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 218.

<sup>112</sup> Boone, *Bethel-Aurora Colony*, 26.

<sup>113</sup> Finck, *Golden Age of Music*, 220.

her husband.<sup>114</sup> Although his goal had been to serve as an Autocrat, Keil's personality seems to have been suited for leading dramatic exoduses and for drawing people together against perceived evil. Once a quieter, day to day life had been achieved in Aurora, there was less room for such things, and it does appear that he had begun to arrange for the future in the years leading up to his death. Snyder states that "if there had been enough time, Aurora might have produced a successor. But Dr. Keil's death came too soon. He was moving in that direction- transferring ownership of properties to individual members, drawing up Articles of Agreement, and instituting a Board of Trustees (though their powers were nominal). Dr. Keil might have found it painful to hand over the reins...but eventually machinery for succession might have been in place."<sup>115</sup> Shortly after Keil's death elders voted to dissolve the commune, although were several dissenters who believed in future communistic possibilities.<sup>116</sup> Negotiations were made regarding all of the community properties in Oregon and Missouri, and by 1879 the connection between Bethel and Aurora was dissolved.<sup>117</sup> Lengthy legal proceedings continued into the 1880's in order to re-title properties.<sup>118</sup> Despite the dissolution of the communal society, Aurora was still a part of the Victorian United States, and many familial roles and expectations remained the same. This included the primacy of the church in community life, and women's roles as moral reformers and creators of peaceful and beautiful home

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<sup>114</sup> Snyder, *Aurora*, 100.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 100-01.

<sup>118</sup> For detailed descriptions of these proceedings and the original, handwritten documentation, see Snyder, Bek, *Aurora Colony Papers*, Reel 11, Items #1-2, Oregon State Library, Salem, OR.

environments.<sup>119</sup> The quilts created by the female colonists of Bethel and Aurora, discussed in the following chapters, span the historical period discussed here, and also the near entirety of the Utopian movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States.

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<sup>119</sup> Bywater Cross, *Quilts of the Oregon Trail*, 147.

## CHAPTER III

### SOCIAL AND AESTHETIC CONTEXT

*“The blocks she whorled into the classical arrangements of her Log Cabin quilts were visual abstractions of life on the American frontier.”*

-Sandi Fox

The preceding descriptions place the Bethel and Aurora quilts in context with social movements and contemporary visual culture. The botanical, “Log Cabin” and “Crazy” quilts made by the female colonists reflect their life experiences through their compositional symbolism and associations with anti-modernist domestic movements. Within each of these three categories, an evolution can be observed. The quilts of the Bethel and Aurora colonies can be utilized as a capsule study of the development of these three quilt styles. In addition to the materiality of the quilts, their comparison to textiles created by contemporary non-colony members, as well as members of other sectarian religious groups, indicates a level of communication with the outside world not otherwise documented. The commercial pursuits of the colony, including the production of woven textiles and furniture, were controlled in order to reduce the supremacy of individuals, as well as to manage costs. The more cloistered, domestic nature of patchwork quilt production does not appear to have been subject to the same level of regulation. These conclusions, which help to create a picture of everyday life in the colonies, are drawn from the observation of the objects themselves.

#### Quilts and Fabrics

There are three types of quilts referenced here: the log cabin quilt, the botanical or floral quilt, and the crazy quilt. All three are patchwork quilts, which generally include a

single piece of fabric as a backing (though occasionally the backing is made of two or three pieces of fabric), a filling (or “batting”), and a “patchwork” top, a composed group of fabrics which form a pattern. Log Cabin quilts are the best example of the many design possibilities within a prescribed compositional structure. Quilters rarely deviate from the preordained structure of square elements. However, the colors and tones of the fabrics they choose create a wide variation of illusions, using elements of depth and translucence. Hansen and Crews explain this optical experience as “...value contrast, the point at which the darkest dark of a design meets the lightest light. The eye combines the myriad dark fabrics (and alternatively, light fabrics) into a single unit as it searches for patterns formed by dark and light areas. This visual involvement engages us psychologically and emotionally and contributes significantly to the dynamic qualities of Log Cabin quilts.”<sup>120</sup>

There are several prescribed patterns, or “settings,” for log cabin quilts that were established throughout the 19th century. These include the “barn raising setting,” the “streak of lightning setting,” and the “straight furrow setting,” among many others that will be described below. Floral and botanical quilts are comprised of patchwork compositions that include flower and plant shapes. Crazy quilts are the most abstract of all patchwork quilts, and, although often intricately composed, are constructed of fabric scraps that are not figural in any way. Crazy quilts often include embroidered symbols and initials, as well as a variety of decorative stitches, making them highly personalized.

<sup>121</sup> Other quilt styles were made in Bethel and Aurora. However, the three styles

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<sup>120</sup> Hanson, Marin F. and Patricia Cox Crews. *American Quilts in the Modern Age, 1870-1940: (The International Quilt Study Center Collections. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009): 92.*

featured in this thesis are included because they are the most prevalent *in both settlements*, and are thus most easily traced. Many of the quilts donated to the Old Aurora Colony museum in the time period outlined in chapter one fall into these three categories. Buhl does not focus on these three styles, and rather discusses “nine patch,” “double-x,” “cake-stand” and “weather vane” quilts, which are simpler and less personalized styles.

### *Quilt-Making, Fabric Production, and Dating*

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the rapid expansion of factory production of textiles caused a change in the way clothing and household goods were obtained. The Bethel and Aurora colonists utilized both factory produced and homemade fabrics in their quilts and other household textiles.<sup>122</sup> The colonists were skilled fabric makers, but also traded with outside communities for materials. This thesis references “factory produced” and “colony made” fabrics in its discussion of quilts.

When the industrial revolution in the United States made myriad fabric choices available to the average woman, patchwork quilts reached their height of popularity. Patchwork quilts from the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century demonstrate the large abundance of fabrics commercially available at the time.<sup>123</sup> Though fabric was painstakingly produced by hand in Bethel and Aurora, the colonists’ interactions with outsiders also enabled them

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<sup>121</sup> For a more comprehensive explanation of quilt-making see Ickis, Marguerite. *The standard book of quilt making and collecting*. New York: Dover, 1959.

<sup>122</sup> For a more detailed description of this history, see Hanson, Marin F. and Patricia Cox Crews. *American Quilts in the Modern Age, 1870-1940: The International Quilt Study Center Collections*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009.

<sup>123</sup> Marin F. Hanson and Patricia Cox Crews. *American Quilts in the Modern Age, 1870-1940: The International Quilt Study Center Collections*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 92.

to purchase factory made cottons and calicoes. Additionally, spinning wheels, reels, and flax wheels found in Bethel and Aurora would have been used in the community's handmade fabric making process.

Weaving and fabric making traditions from Bethel continued in Aurora. Kirkpatrick notes that "Raw materials for the colonists' work came mostly from the land itself and they made...looms of various sizes. They raised the plants for natural dyes...wool came from their sheep. They raised flax and wove plaids and other wool patterns at their mill."<sup>124</sup> Techniques at Bethel were much the same, although in Aurora, a small wool production factory was established in the early 1860's.<sup>125</sup> Woven wool coverlets, found in a large quantity in both Bethel and Aurora today, were sold commercially. The solid colored wool and linen which can be seen in quilts from both colonies are easily discernable from factory produced fabrics, which usually contain intricate patterning.

The majority of quilts at the Old Aurora Colony Museum were dated by textile experts in 2002. Two other factors which help determine the order in which these quilts were produced are a visible shift between the majority use of handmade fabrics and the more widespread use of commercially produced material. Between 1832 and 1834, the sewing machine was invented by Walter Hunt. The first patent came in 1846, and by 1856, they were common in American homes, marketed as a life-changing appliance.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Kirkpatrick, Jane. *Aurora: An American Experience in Quilt, Community, and Craft*. (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2008):88.

<sup>125</sup> Buhl, Audrey Ann. *Clothing and household textiles of Aurora Colony, Oregon 1857 to 1877*. (Thesis (M.S.)--Oregon State University, 1971): 35.

<sup>126</sup> Trestain, Eileen Jahnke. *Dating fabrics: a color guide, 1800-1960*. (Paducah, KY: American Quilter's Society, 1998): 41.

Because 1856 is the year the Aurora colony was settled, it can be concluded with certainty that the Bethel colony quilts created before the division of the colonies are entirely handmade. Aurora colonists did have sewing machines, but the quilts created there are both hand and machine stitched. Most likely, there was not such a machine in each home. Differing accounts exist as to Keil's allowances for such technology. The labor-intensive tasks of spinning, dyeing and quilting emphasized the set-apart nature of the colony at a time when mechanical processes were quickly being instituted in the United States. Christina Schuele Snyder, a Colonist who traveled from Bethel to Aurora in 1863, recalls: "the Colony housewife...was compelled to make by hand the various articles which women...buy at stores as a matter of course."<sup>127</sup> Also, at social occasions such as the one described by Finck, hand-sewing was the norm, particularly on crazy quilts, where improvisational, decorative stitching was an important part of the design. The fact that some quilts from Aurora were machine stitched has been confirmed by the recent analysis done at the museum.

In Bethel and in Aurora, linen and wool was handmade by colonists. Early (presumably 1840's and '50's) quilts from the Bethel colony are made of these materials. Buhl provides an excellent description of the Aurora fabric-making processes in her thesis, but the following is a very brief account.<sup>128</sup> Sheep were raised for the making of wool in both colonies, and after they were sheared, the wool was washed and prepared for the spinning wheel, usually by "carding" or brushing with a tool similar to a

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> For the complete description of the fabric-making processes, see Buhl, Audrey Ann. *Clothing and household textiles of Aurora Colony, Oregon 1857 to 1877*. Thesis (M.S.)--Oregon State University, 1971.

hairbrush. Once the wool was spun, the wool was woven into yardage on hand looms.<sup>129</sup> Male colony members generally operated these looms (figure 3.1).<sup>130</sup> If yarn was the goal of production, a reel was used to weave the material into a skein.<sup>131</sup> Linen was produced on a smaller scale in Aurora, (and presumably Bethel, as specialized flax wheels can be seen there). Linen is more difficult to dye than wool, and therefore was usually used in its natural state, and is seen on quilt backings in Aurora. A flax wheel, which is a modified version of a traditional spinning wheel, is used to finish the linen fiber, and these objects were handmade in the colonies (figure 3.2).<sup>132</sup>

Dyes were made of natural materials including plants, plant roots (madder) and insect bodies (cochineal). On woven coverlets from the two colonies, the most commonly seen colors are red and blue- the red made of the madder and cochineal, and the indigo plants for the blue.<sup>133</sup> Peach leaves, when boiled, created a green pigment, walnut hulls were used for the creation of brown pigments, and onion skins were used to create yellow.<sup>134</sup> These dyes were used on the skeins of wool used to weave the coverlets, but were also used on the brushed wool used in clothing and patchwork quilts. As a final note about the dating and production of fabrics, it is tempting to assume that all solid fabrics in the quilts to be discussed here are hand-made, while all patterned fabrics

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<sup>129</sup> Buhl, *Clothing and Household Textiles*, 36.

<sup>130</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Aurora*, 88.

<sup>131</sup> Buhl, *Clothing and Household Textiles*, 42.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 45-46.

<sup>133</sup> Informational plaque in former gift shop, Bethel, Missouri.

<sup>134</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Aurora*, 23.

are commercially produced. While the latter statement is certainly fact, the former may or may not be the case, and this ambiguity is heightened by the fact that Trestain focuses on patterned fabrics in her monograph.

A quilting frame, about the size of a dinner table, was either hung from the ceiling or propped on four chairs (figure 3.3). Quilters would gather around the frame and work on individual portions of the textile. It held the quilt taught while the top was composed and stitched. These large objects invited quilters to congregate around it, and a modern quilting frame is currently on display at the Aurora colony museum. Conversely, independent quilters could use quilting hoops, which held smaller portions tight, in order to work on details.<sup>135</sup>

### **Floral and Botanical Quilts: Origins and Meaning**

Nature as a quilt theme was an established tradition well before the Oregon Trail began. 19<sup>th</sup> century women, whose lives were dictated by Victorian moral codes, had a close connection with nature in their domestic lives. The unpredictability and hazards of the outdoors were also a consistent part of life for travelers and early Western settlers. Floral appliqué quilts, very popular in the early and mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, took on deeper meanings as Oregon was settled. Symbols of rebirth and peace, such as birds, were more frequently incorporated into these patterns.<sup>136</sup>

The Log Cabin and Crazy quilts discussed here consist of scrap material covering the entirety of a muslin base. However, floral and botanical quilts are stitched on a generally white fabric base. Small, pre-formed cloth pieces are sewn on top of the

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<sup>135</sup> Buhl, *Clothing and Household Textiles*, 95-98.

<sup>136</sup> Bywater Cross, *Quilts of the Oregon Trail*, 152-3.

foundation material in a set pattern, and an appliqué stitching pattern is then applied to the entire composition. The dominance of the red (or pink) and green color scheme of these floral appliqué quilts has been defined by quilt historians as a classic pattern identifiable to 1840-1865. In Bethel, many quilts were produced in this style. The style is almost always defined by the dominance of red and green blocks with pink, orange, and/ or blue details, on a white ground and conventional and two dimensional floral motifs.<sup>137</sup> Quilts created in this style *beyond* 1865, as can be found in the quilts of Aurora, can be considered a response to the colonial revival movement. The colonial revival movement is defined as the period following the American Centennial in which an interest in 18<sup>th</sup> century architecture and art was revived. This was one of many responses to an increase in industrialization and a yearning for America's Agrarian roots that occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>138</sup>

Botanical and floral quilts contain religious symbolism and are representative of women's activities during the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century United States (and through to the Victorian period), botany gained popularity as an appropriate field of study for women. The popularity of such themes in quilts

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 155.

<sup>138</sup> Floral quilts produced in Bethel before 1865 were a response to American trends and feature embedded religious content which speaks to the beliefs of their makers. The same is true for quilts from both communities created in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century (approximately after 1865), but these textiles can also be connected to the colonial revival movement. These designations have been assigned by historians, but do not greatly affect the way in which the Bethel and Aurora quilts are interpreted. The entirety of the Bethel/Aurora phenomenon was centered on principles similar to those of the colonial revival, which gained secular popularity later in the century. This demonstrates a cycle of influence among secular and separatist groups in the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States. For more on the colonial revival, see Crews (*Flowering*) and Cox and Crews.

coincided with this phenomenon.<sup>139</sup> The study of botany and practice of gardening for women aligned with the increased emphasis on domestic roles for women. The established goal for women was to create a haven in the home, so comforting and inspiring, that values would be appropriately adjusted among all family members.<sup>140</sup>

Plants were frequently used for their edible and medicinal properties in 19<sup>th</sup> century America. Keil himself was a self proclaimed practitioner of herbal medicine, but women's connection with herbal healing methods was also important in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The use of chemicals for pharmaceuticals is a 20<sup>th</sup> century development, and wives and mothers in rural communities like Bethel and Aurora had a knowledge of plant properties that was essential for the care of their families.<sup>141</sup>

Flowers also were widely considered the height of beauty in 19<sup>th</sup> century Protestant culture, and the analyses of blooms based on their assigned spiritual properties was a popular pastime. By utilizing floral motifs in their needlework, women sought to provide spiritual inspiration and moral guidance to their families. Floral symbolism was popularly connected to spiritual properties. Floral quilts were created, in part, in an attempt to create the spiritually pure domestic space described in chapter two. Women's publications were full of floral needlework and quilt patterns and ideas for home decorating as well as gardening guides.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Crews, *A Flowering of Quilts*, 1.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>141</sup> Crews, *A Flowering of Quilts*, 1-2.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

Ascribing meanings to flower types was a popular 19<sup>th</sup> century pastime for women and girls. Flowers were ascribed human characteristics for use in teaching morality. While this was not a new phenomenon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its popularity surged with the publishing of “dictionaries” outlining proposed languages and meanings of flowers.<sup>143</sup> These ascribed symbolisms often fell into spiritual categories. For example, grapes represent the blood of Christ, roses represent either passionate or divine love, tulips represent renown, fame, spring, or dreaminess, and sunflowers represent homage and devotion.<sup>144</sup> The concepts of natural theology were widespread at the time, often in conjunction with romantic and transcendentalist art and literature. Gardening and the study of botany was promoted as a spiritual endeavor. Because of this influence, Christian women used flower themes to decorate their homes in order to suggest the spiritually enlightened nature of her family and household.<sup>145</sup> Floral quilts can also be understood in conjunction with the 19<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon of anti-modernization. The popularity of floral appliqué quilts faded for a time after the 1870’s due to the increasing availability of factory-produced fabrics and the circulation of patchwork patterns, such as Log Cabin and Crazy quilts.<sup>146</sup> However, they experienced a resurgence in popularity at the turn of the century as a part of the colonial revival movement.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 14-18.

<sup>144</sup> Bywater Cross, *Quilts of the Oregon Trail*, 153.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>147</sup> Hanson, *American Quilts*, 227.

## Log Cabin Quilts: A Symbol of the American Frontier

All patchwork quilts can be said to speak in some way to the 19<sup>th</sup> century female experience. The log cabin quilt, however, has specific compositional references to pioneer life. The contrast between dark and light color fields is common to most of these quilts; it is difficult not to ascribe a form of symbolism to these textiles. The log cabin quilt's basic elements of construction are rectangular strips of fabric which are reminiscent of timber structures.<sup>148</sup> This gives the form a particular significance to the Pacific Northwest, where many early property claims had to be cleared of large amounts of timber.<sup>149</sup> As America's concept of the Western frontier expanded throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, each point of settlement was inhabited by women who had been separated from their families of origin. The difficult separations that occurred throughout this American expansion was perhaps felt most deeply by the wives and mothers who attempted to make homes in temporary and rudimentary structures. This experience was certainly true for the women who traveled from Bethel to Aurora.

The log cabin quilt is a patchwork quilt constructed of square units of long, rectangular fabric pieces which are composed around a central block of fabric. This central fabric piece is traditionally considered to represent a hearth, and red and pink fabrics are often, though not always, used for this component. All log cabin quilts are constructed from this basic unit of design, with the exception of the "Pineapple" and "Courthouse Steps" variations, which differ slightly. However, The Old Aurora Colony museum only holds one of the former and none of the latter style.

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>149</sup> Bywater Cross, *Quilts of the Oregon Trail*, 153.

In the shared consciousness of 19th century American pioneers, the log cabin became a symbol of steadfastness and perseverance. The log cabin was a tangible form of domestic architecture, but also an idea that came to symbolize the fortitude and industriousness required to traverse the Western frontier. The log cabin quilt became a visual symbol of these characteristics, and ultimately the archetypal American quilt. Female quilt-makers, relegated to the home by Victorian (and community) standards helped to “build” comforting symbols of home. They did this by affixing fabric “bricks” to a foundation of muslin fabric, literally and symbolically building around the hearth.<sup>150</sup>

Ultimately the symbolism of the log cabin became so synonymous with America’s pioneering spirit that presidential campaigns (those of William Henry Harrison and Abraham Lincoln) used it as an emblem of their personalities as leaders. The use of the symbol demonstrated that they were hardworking, steadfast, pioneering, and individualistic. In addition, the American Centennial, utilized the log cabin as a symbol of American roots, romanticizing the nation’s beginnings and contributing to the Colonial revival movement.<sup>151</sup>

The rectangular strips that make up a cog cabin arrangement are constant. Aside from the basic pieces, the options for Log Cabin compositions are virtually endless. Log cabin quilts have strictly prescribed forms. Within the basic framework, quilt-makers are free to experiment with color composition, and texture, often resulting in a play between light and dark fabrics. Upon viewing a Log Cabin quilt, the eye processes a contrast between shades; in particular the exact point at which the light and dark tones meet.

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<sup>150</sup> Fox, *Small Endearments*, 75.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

Although the light and dark areas are bound by the evenly distributed between the basic square units of the quilt, the planes appear to exist independently; the log cabin blocks are overshadowed by the more legible composition.<sup>152</sup> In reality, a complicated manipulation within the prescribed form has been performed.<sup>153</sup> By intentionally focusing on the underlying log cabin blocks, the viewer can appreciate the way in which the larger composition is achieved.<sup>154</sup> Ironically, and despite the sophisticated visual illusions that can be achieved in the making of Log Cabin quilts, they are considered some of the simplest to make.<sup>155</sup> It is perhaps these precise, straight lines basic and framework that lead to the popularity of the style. This popularity was felt at state and county fairs, where awards were given specifically for excellence in the style.<sup>156</sup>

Because Log Cabin quilts were so widespread throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States, their philosophical meaning was well understood. Even without this understanding, viewers are likely to make cognitive associations between the composition of the quilts and their illustrative titles. This leads the viewer to ascribe a scene or setting to the otherwise abstract works. The majority of Log Cabin quilts are oriented in a diagonal fashion, which leads to the visual illusion of movement. Mary Bywater Cross suggests that 19<sup>th</sup> century quilt-makers were largely aware of the power of

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<sup>152</sup> Fisher, *Quilts of Illusion*, 88.

<sup>153</sup> Cox and Crews, *American Quilts*, 92.

<sup>154</sup> Fisher, *Quilts of Illusion*, 88.

<sup>155</sup> Wien, Carol Anne. *The Great American Log Cabin Quilt Book*. (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984): xi.

<sup>156</sup> Cox and Crews, *American Quilts*, 93-95.

the diagonal line to carry the viewer's eye across the surface of the textile.<sup>157</sup> When combined with evocative titles such as "sunshine and shadow" or "barn-raising," such inferences can be made. Although the Log Cabin quilt can appear abstract, the maker must work with a prescribed and unchangeable setting. The decisions made within that framework determine the overall aesthetic of the composition.

### **Crazy Quilts: The Aesthetic Movement**

This style was enormously popular in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century among every class of American women. Its popularity originated among wealthy, urban Victorian women who were influenced by the Aesthetic movement. This movement infiltrated many art forms, but the decorative arts were the most deeply influenced by it. Aestheticism is defined as an increased interest in sensuality and nature and often included Eastern influences. It was often implemented in response to industrialization and the "ugliness" of the urban sphere; Victorian women who sought to make their homes a refuge were attracted to such notions. The crazy quilt can also be most closely associated with contemporary modern art. This is because of its experimental and personal nature, but also because of its international origins. The European and American fascination with Japanese art and culture was a large influence in the rise in popularity of the Crazy quilt. The world's fairs of the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 1885 Gilbert and Sullivan operetta *The Mikado* added to this fascination, as well as Japanese novelty stores in most U.S. cities.<sup>158</sup> The Crazy quilt is the style most indicative of the aesthetic and cultural ambiguity of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century United States. Japanese culture was considered to be exotic, elaborate and

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<sup>157</sup> Bywater Cross, *Quilts of the Oregon Trail*, 153.

<sup>158</sup> Cox and Crews, *American Quilts*, 4.

nature-inspired, but also spiritually uplifting and inspiring and morally genuine.<sup>159</sup> The other influence towards the Crazy quilt was an earlier British style called “silk mosaic work” which consisted of the piecing of hundreds of hexagonal silk pieces.<sup>160</sup> Thus, most American Crazy quilts are composed of luxurious silks and velvets. However, many crazy quilts seen in Aurora are constructed of utilitarian and scrap materials, indicating the transference of a popular style throughout the country.

The basic composition of the crazy quilt style did not experience the same evolution as the geometric/ log cabin quilts. These quilts are composed of irregularly shaped fabric scraps, laid out in an abstract format and then sewn together with bold, visible stitching. They often contain embroidered symbols and initials that give them personal meaning. They are not composed in the symmetrical or regular manner of botanical quilts, nor do they feature the depth and shading of geometric and log cabin quilts. Use of colors is not symbolic or representative, and with the exception of embroidery crazy quilts are purely non-objective. However, the interplay of shapes and colors is often thoughtful and dynamic. Like the log cabin quilt, crazy quilts are generally pieced on top of a foundation fabric. Although this does not appear to be the case with the Bethel and Aurora quilts, crazy and log cabin styles were often mixed within a single quilt.<sup>161</sup>

In the 1880’s a women’s magazine gave the crazy quilt its name; previously the construction technique and origins of the name were conveyed. The magazine stated:

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 6.

“When the present favorite style of quilt was introduced it was called the Japanese, but the national sense of humor has been too keen, and the Japanese is now generally known as the ‘crazy’ quilt.”<sup>162</sup> Stories published in such magazines included accounts of women who claimed they enjoyed the improvisational nature of the style and the fact that it was not governed by geometric rules. The Crazy quilt emerged as an anomaly in the otherwise rigid Victorian household structure.

The embroidered motifs in early crazy quilts usually included Japanese patterns such as cranes and butterflies. By the time the quilts seen in Bethel and Aurora were created, embroidered passages were personal and represented the lives of the quilters. However, the Victorian idealization of domesticity contributed to the desire to portray a carefree life, and the embroidered objects in Crazy quilts were generally confined to this positive sphere.<sup>163</sup> Although it does not appear to have been the case in Aurora, stories circulated regarding the schemes used by women to obtain free silk samples. *Good Housekeeping* published a limerick in 1890 regarding this phenomenon. It states: “Oh, the crazy-quilt mania triumphantly raves, and maid, wife, and widow are bound as its slaves...And thus it has been since the panic began, In many loved homes it has wrought desolation, And cursed is the power by many a man, That has brought him so close to the verge of starvation, But make it she must, She will do it or bust, beg, swap, and buy pieces or get them on trust.”<sup>164</sup> This mania was inspired by the desire to include the widest and most luxurious variety of fabrics in one’s quilts. The style was eventually

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid 128.

regarded as crude, coinciding with the colonial revival, which favored symmetrical appliqué quilts. Magazines began to promote the use of the crazy quilt style exclusively for more utilitarian quilts. At the end of the 19th century, most Crazy quilts of this nature were produced in rural areas.<sup>165</sup> This is the window of time in which the majority of Crazy quilts in Aurora were produced. Although Aurora colonists were not involved with the upper-class crazy quilt phase, they did experiment with abstract fabric compositions and in the utilization of the crazy quilt as a scrapbook of sorts. Although manufacturers often supplied heat-transfer embroidery patches for makers of Crazy quilts, the Aurora quilts are all hand-embroidered.<sup>166</sup> However, like all Crazy quilts, they lead the viewer to analyze their many details, searching for tangible forms and hidden meanings.

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid 6.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid 131.

## CHAPTER IV

### MATERIAL CONTEXT

*“My sisters had invited a dozen girls to one of the crazy-quilt parties then in favor, each bringing her own silk patches to sew on. While they were chatting away like magpies I came through the room...”*  
-Henry Theophilus Finck<sup>167</sup>

*“All new pieces of material that were not used in garments or even some that were not badly worn were always saved for the quilts. I am sure that the aunts and probably many of their friends were very generous with their pieces as I do not recognize much of the materials in my quilts. When we would go to Aurora or when any of the relatives came down, they generally would bring a finished quilt back with them, or some other handiwork that mother did not have time to do. And I assure you for us it was needed and appreciated”*  
-Hulda Mae Giesy Buell<sup>168</sup>

### The Quilts of the Bethel and Aurora Colonies

The following is a selective inventory of floral, Log Cabin (and early geometric), and Crazy quilts from Bethel and Aurora. The quilts discussed here were chosen because they are representative examples of larger trends. A listing of the entire body of quilts surveyed for this thesis is contained in appendix A.

#### Woven Wool Blankets in Bethel, MO

Woven wool coverlets are a determined predecessor of patchwork quilts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Quilts were often made during this time which followed the aesthetic of the simple blankets as an intentional nod to anti-modernism.<sup>169</sup> Therefore, it is reasonable to

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<sup>167</sup> Finck, *Adventures in the Golden Age of Music*, 42.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Cox and Crews, *American Quilts*, 288.

analyze the style of such blankets as predecessors to later quilts. As mentioned above, wool produced in both colonies was used for the construction of simple woven blankets as well as quilts. Most of these blankets were red, green, black and blue checkered patterns. A brief description of these bed-coverings help to contextualize the quilts themselves.

Currently in the Bair house in Bethel, MO is a woven coverlet made of colony produced and dyed yarns. Marilyn Shouse of Bethel states that the coverlet is titled *Winter and Summer* (figure 4.1).<sup>170</sup> Rather than the traditional checks, it is woven in an intricate indigo and ivory pattern of geometric shapes which include rectangular forms and grids. What is most important to note about this coverlet is the title. Rather than being a simple abstract pattern, it has been given a name that evokes ideas of light, darkness, and the changing of seasons. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Log cabin quilts became more popular, they often carried names with similar connotations, such as “streak of lightening” and “sunshine and shadow,” so it is significant that such a name is ascribed to this blanket. Although they will not be described further because of their similarity to the blankets described here, many such blankets also exist in Aurora.

#### *Botanical Quilts in Bethel*

Botanical quilts created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century can generally be associated with anti-modernization sentiments and the colonial revival movement. Although the latter movement did not fully take off until the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, its origins were felt in the

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<sup>170</sup> Marilyn Shouse, Bethel Resident and property owner, in conversation with the author, March 29, 2012.

utopian movement and reaction to industrialization.<sup>171</sup> This, combined with the ascribed femininity and spirituality of floral themes, contributed to the popularity of botanical quilts. It is not the purpose of this thesis to provide a comprehensive study of quilts produced in the Pennsylvania communities established prior to Bethel. However, one is included here in order to demonstrate the aesthetic lineage of botanical quilts in both of Keil's communities. This early 19<sup>th</sup> century quilt was used on the bed of George Rapp's daughter (figure 4.2).<sup>172</sup> The quilt is white with intricate appliqué stitches and it is covered with pink and green floral motifs. The interior design of the textile is separated from the border by a thin pink rectangular line. The fact that this quilt is carefully composed and not made of patchwork scraps also lends to its likely creation during the earlier 1800's. The regularity and perfect chromatic matching of the wool fabrics in this quilt indicate that they were made in Economy.

The two most distinctive features of this quilt are the flowers which appear to be in various stages of blooming, as well as the circular vine forms which connect the stems to one another. Within the center of the quilt, enclosed by the pink border, there are nine circles which contain 9 to 11 blooms each. These flowers, though joined by the stem, are either represented as buds, partly blooming, or fully blooming. The exterior of the pink border features a waving vine of pink flowers which are in the middle stage of blooming. The idea of blooming flowers on a vine can be associated with Christian symbolism, and

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<sup>171</sup> Hanson, *American Quilts in the Modern Age*, 229.

<sup>172</sup> Sandy Gantz (docent, Old Economy Village Museum, Ambridge, PA) in conversation with the author, March 27, 2012.

this motif appears on Bethel and Aurora quilts as well.<sup>173</sup> This combined with the circular forms on the interior of the quilt may connote ideas of fertility and/ or life stages. The attention to detail in conveying the life cycle of plants also indicates a focus on the strictly feminine domain of botany, which will be discussed in the next chapter. The patchwork portions of the quilt are placed above white fabric, which features intricate appliqué stitching.

Two botanical quilts currently in Bethel that were products of the colony serve as examples of common types. Just as in the Economy quilt, the first example contains intricate appliqué stitching on white fabric which draws from the 18<sup>th</sup> century tradition of American appliqué quilts (figure 4.3).<sup>174</sup> This quilt also has large botanical motifs throughout and is bordered by a vine. There is less of an emphasis on circular forms here, but the motif is still present in the botanical medallions that make up the body of the quilt. The pink and green colors are nearly identical to that of the Economy quilt. Here, the vine does not contain fully blooming flowers, but pale pink buds. A grape or berry form drips from the leaves. Although this plant form is not evocative any particular botanical form, the theological concept of the product of the vine is still present.

The second exemplary botanical quilt in Bethel is also pink and white, and its simple composition is balanced with an elegant appliqué pattern (figure 4.4). The white quilt is decorated with twelve coral-pink floral medallions which could also be

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<sup>173</sup> John 15:1-2 reads: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” (KJV)

<sup>174</sup> For further reading on 18<sup>th</sup> century appliqué quilts, see Hanson, Marin F. and Patricia Cox Crews. *American Quilts in the Modern Age, 1870-1940: The International Quilt Study Center Collections*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009.

interpreted as clovers. From each flower shape sprouts four thinner, abstract forms which appear to be buds. There is no vine border, but the quilt's edge features abstract forms made from two triangles that form a bow shape. The solid color of the presumably handmade and dyed fabrics implies a pre-1850 date.

These three quilts have not been assigned discernable names. Although the “winter and summer” coverlet, as well as many of the quilts to be discussed below, include a stylistic play of light and shadow, the botanical quilts of the Bethel colony do not employ such techniques. There is a mathematical order to all three of these quilts, with a symmetrical and even distribution of elements. Less obvious in the Economy quilts, both of the Bethel examples take on a diagonal orientation that contributes a sense of motion to the objects. The three works also contain varying degrees of circular shapes, which further imply fertility and life cycles. The botanical quilts created in the earlier colony years (the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) speak to the nature of women's roles in the domestic sphere. The pink color which dominates all three quilts is less symbolically expressive than it is naturalistic, but it does lend a particularly feminine appearance to all three objects. Images evocative of the biblical vine, as well as those suggesting the cycles of life, contribute to this group of works, and will be seen again in the quilts of Aurora.

### *Geometric and Early Log Cabin Quilts of Bethel, MO*

A stylistic comparison between Bethel Colony geometric quilts and the later Log Cabin quilts in Aurora reveals a traceable evolution in style and composition. Features such as the “stacking” of rectangular pieces of fabric and a stylistic play between light and dark materials can be seen on quilts which span the life of both communities. This

juxtaposition between light and dark gives the illusion of shading and of differing levels of depth in the fabric composition. None of the geometric quilts in Bethel have been titled or labeled as Log Cabin quilts, but the aforementioned compositional features are shared by both groups. Although it is difficult to discern without taking apart a quilt, most Log Cabin quilts are pieced on top of a foundation fabric, rather than being composed strictly of patchwork above the batting.<sup>175</sup> One reason for this is the greater degree of intricacy and number of fabric pieces utilized on these quilts. The Log Cabin quilts of Aurora, which will be discussed shortly, are almost certainly composed in this manner, but earlier geometric quilts made in Bethel may not have been composed in this way.

Two quilts currently held in the Bauer house in Bethel serve as examples of these early geometric types. The first quilt is composed of rectangular wool blocks of dark green and dark blue (figures 4.5,4.6). They are arranged in diagonal lines which descend from left to right. This diagonal orientation suggests movement, and the entire composition is less visually restful and symmetrical than the botanical quilts described above. The carefully executed overlap of the rectangular pieces in form the illusion of a jagged line. The theme of dark planes passing over light (or conversely, light breaking through darkness) is present here. This compositional technique later became a hallmark of Log Cabin quilts. In between the dark lines on this object are rectangular blocks of the same size cut from a red and blue checkered material and a lighter, orange and brown cloth. The regularity and quantity of both the light and dark materials further suggest that the quilt is composed of hand-woven fabrics. Red yarn serves a decorative purpose, but

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<sup>175</sup> Hanson, *American Quilts in the Modern Age*, 4.

also binds together the layers of fabric. This clear denotation of function sets this textile apart from later, decorative Log Cabin quilts which are often machine stitched, downplaying the functional stitching.

A second quilt in the Bauer house is composed of longer rectangular pieces (figures 4.7, 4.8). Although the illusionary qualities are minimal, the similarity between the quilt and later Log Cabin style quilts is still discernable. This quilt is composed of square blocks, within which are arranged long rectangular fabric blocks in a fan formation. The rectangular elements carry the distinctive feeling of logs being built upon one another. The quilt appears to be comprised of handmade fabrics. This indicates its earlier date of creation (approximately the 1840's or 1850's). Three possible exceptions are a small amount of pale blue cotton patches that are more worn than the rest of the material, a beige and red wool, and a grey twill. The back of the quilt is comprised of a single piece of red cotton. As was seen in the previous quilt, large pieces of yarn both decorate the top of the quilt and serve the functional purpose of holding the three layers of the bedcovering together. Areas where the patchwork top has worn away reveal a cotton filling. This particular quilt is similar to a Log Cabin variation found in Pennsylvania Amish communities in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century called "Strip Patch," to be described further in the following chapter.

A quilt currently located in the former gift shop of Bethel is a red, white and blue textile made of diagonally oriented jagged stripes (figure 4.9). Its spare composition and solid fabrics indicate its early time period, possibly the 1840's. It does not have the characteristic long rectangular patches which make up the standard Log Cabin quilt. However, its light and dark variable tones and diagonal orientation are stylistically

similar to later designs. A final exemplary geometric quilt was found in the Bair house (figure 4.10). As with the previous quilt, it is made of simple handmade fabrics. This quilt is covered, in a diagonal formation, with button-sized fabric medallions. They are arranged in a diagonal formation which is evocative of later Log Cabin quilts. The illusion of dark planes hovering over light ones, as well as the consistent return to the diagonal orientation of quilt forms, ties these early works together and indicates that they are part of the stylistic Lineage of the Log Cabin quilt.

### *Crazy Quilts in Bethel, MO*

Crazy quilts, the most abstract and personalized of the textiles, were also made in Bethel and Aurora. Because Crazy quilts did not become popular in the United States until after 1860, these quilts were likely made well after the Aurora colony was established.<sup>176</sup> The popularity of the Crazy quilt developed in conjunction with the Aesthetic movement, which held that industrialization was causing the nation to become “uglier” in all areas; from factories to poor labor conditions to environmental harm. Victorian women were encouraged to create beautiful objects for domestic use as they were in charge of the safe haven from the outside world.<sup>177</sup> The Crazy quilt grew in popularity based on this sentiment, which was not incongruent to the goals of the Bethel and Aurora colonies.

The first exemplary crazy quilt in Bethel was marked with a label from the former museum which stated: “Crazy Quilt, 19<sup>th</sup> century, made by unknown (figure 4.11).” The

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<sup>176</sup> Hanson, *American Quilts in the Modern Age*, 6.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

difference in the ages of each scrap is clear due to the various stages in the disintegration. A wide range of fabrics are used here, from functional plaid and checked material to luxurious silk scraps. There is a good deal of individual contribution to this quilt, particularly in the creative hand stitching. Of particular note on this quilt is its inclusion of pink flowers reminiscent of earlier botanical quilts. Such flowers are present in embroidery and in the print of commercial fabric scraps. The backing, which is made of camel-colored twill or linen, appears to be machine stitched. The hand stitching on the front of the quilt includes chevron patterns, infinity loops, vegetal forms which appear to be wheat stalks, and crosses. Although the majority of this stitching is white, some is done in yellow, and the cross shaped stitches are done in green. The hand-embroidered portions include thorny roses, and other floral motifs. The whimsical stitching and embroidery is presumably improvisational. The edges of the quilt are just barely finished with casual hand stitching.

The second exemplary crazy quilt in Bethel features a plaque from the former museum which states it was made in 1888 by Christina (Dena) Erich Bower [Bauer] (figure 4.12). Here, the stitching is done in a combination of white, red, black and gold threads which add to the jewel-toned vibrancy of the work. These stitches range from elegant vine patterns to unique bracket patterns. On dark fabric, Bauer uses light thread to create these stitches, and on light fabric she uses dark thread. This quilt also contains a greater quantity of silks than the previous crazy quilt.

A third crazy quilt in Bethel contains more delicate stitching (figure 4.13). This quilt contains no embroidery. Although it was on display in one of the old museum exhibits in the Bethel colony, there is no explanatory information currently

accompanying it. Rather than a focus on creative stitching and embroidery work, the quilter here uses abstract color planes made of pastel silk fabrics in order to create an interesting composition. Although the quilt is abstract, each “crazy” patch is confined to a discernable square. The composition of crazy quilts in Bethel and Aurora are quite similar. However, while the Bethel crazy quilts are generally composed of very small pieces of fabric, several quilts in Aurora utilize a smaller amount of large, bold scraps.

### *Botanical Quilts in Aurora*

An example of a communal period botanical quilt in Aurora is one named “cookie cutter,” after the tools used to trace the birds on the corners of the textile (figure 4.14, 4.15). It was created by an unknown Aurora quilter of the Wollfer-Scholl family (c. 1870). The colors here are bright and crisp, and the geometric arrangement of natural forms indicates bounty and promise, and order. Considering the regularity of the materials, the quilt is likely comprised of colony-made fabrics. The heavy use of diagonal lines adds a sense of vibrancy and movement to the quilt. There is no attempt at demonstrating light or shadow here, and although abstract shapes are included, the images are primarily representational. A detail at the center of each abstract flower form illustrates the rays of the sun. Additionally, the grapevine border once again evokes Christian vine themes, indicating the necessary connectedness of Christians with Christ, and of the constant “pruning” and shaping of believers.

### *Aurora Log Cabin and Geometric Quilts*

One of the earliest quilts in the Old Aurora colony museum is quite similar in material and composition to the geometric quilts in Bethel (figure 4.16). Like the

Missouri versions, this quilt has stylistic components which are tempting to label as early incarnations of the Log Cabin quilt. Here, the construction method of putting patchwork pieces on top of a piece of base material, common to Log Cabin quilts, is used. The base material is handmade deep blue wool, and the rectangular patches are similar in size and shape to those seen in Bethel. However, these patches are “stacked” vertically in columns rather than being arranged diagonally. The combination of handmade and dyed wool and scraps of commercial fabrics is similar to the Bethel quilts. The utilitarian and decorative red wool yarn that dots the top of the quilts in Bethel also appears here. It is equally likely that this quilt was made in Bethel or Aurora.

Quilts were made for cribs and children’s beds, and even doll beds, in addition to full sized bed-coverings. One such quilt is a Log Cabin quilt in the “Light and Dark” setting created by an unknown quilters of the colony (figure 4.17). This quilt is a true Log Cabin, whereas the geometric quilts described previously contain certain elements of the style but are less strictly defined. It was donated to the museum in 1978, and is of the group that was reviewed in 2001. The fabrics used in this quilt have been identified as being from the 1860-85 period, although some may be older. Presumably, this quilt was made after 1885, when the communal aspects of the colony had dissolved but most colonists remained in the Area. Although the sewing machine was available at this point, this quilt is hand pieced and stitched. Analysts noted that several quilters must have worked on this quilt, as there are varying skill levels of stitching.<sup>178</sup>

The primary aesthetic feature of this object is the strong contrast between light and dark colors, creating a sense of recession in the lighter areas. The form is geometric

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<sup>178</sup> Museum Collection Records, Old Aurora Colony Museum, Aurora, OR.

and non-representational. The title of the pattern illuminates the sense of setting in the abstract pattern. The “light and dark” variation of the Log Cabin quilt was commonly made throughout the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, is evocative of seasons and atmospheric light in, recalling the Bethel “Winter and Summer” coverlet.<sup>179</sup> As is the case with the following Log Cabin quilts, the colors and simulated light effects in Log Cabin quilts serve a symbolic purpose. This is achieved by the translucence and optical illusions present in the Log Cabin quilts of Aurora, combined with their evocative titles.

With the exception of the above “light and dark” Log Cabin quilt and another in the “Pineapple” variation (see appendix A) the entirety of the Log Cabin quilt collection at the Aurora museum are made in the “Barn Raising” setting. In the Old Aurora Colony Museum’s collection, there are 11 Log Cabin quilts, nine of which are done in the Barn Raising setting. This distinctive style is comprised of diamond-shaped fields comprised of dark material which seem to hover or float above a light-colored plane. One example is a Log Cabin quilt, done in the Barn Raising variation, created by Mary Schuele Rapp in 1875 (figure 4.18). The patchwork quilt is made up of contrasting square and diamond patterns, creating the appearance of shadow over a brightly colored grid and bringing to mind an ominous cloud passing over a landscape. Schuele’s use of the same color tones in darker shades enhances this shadowed effect, producing a sharp and jarring contrast. The dark areas seem to overpower the light, although they are evenly proportioned.

As in the “cookie cutter” quilt, the diagonal orientation suggests movement, but here the open, floating squares suggest instability. Although it is clear that this quilt is

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<sup>179</sup> For more on Log Cabin variations and titles, see. Hanson, *American Quilts in the Modern Age*, 90-112.

made of fabric scraps rather than specifically prepared materials, the color choices clearly strike a contrast to those in the previous quilt. There is also a use of optical illusion that came to be characteristic of Log Cabin quilts and was further developed later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some handmade fabric may be present in the red “hearth” squares in the center of each set of rectangular fabrics. While Schule could have made the choice to cut patches of fabric that would allow for even lines in the diagonal formations (as was done with the shapes in the previous quilt), she chose to run the diagonal pattern along the pre-cut, sharply rectangular patches, created a jagged, pointed edge along each diagonal line. These pointed edges also border the quilt itself.

The Barn Raising variation of the Log Cabin Quilt style was extremely common in the period in which Schuele created her work. In regards to the style, “The related quilt in the Chevron setting can be imagined as a Barn Raising setting can be imagined as a Barn raising setting split in the middle, with the two halves swapped. In addition to differences in color palettes, the later quilts tend to be made from fewer and larger blocks, which required less time to construct. This may reflect a simplified modern aesthetic or a preference by makers who divided their time between domestic and outside amusements.”<sup>180</sup> In addition to the geometric and Log Cabin quilts in Bethel and Aurora, there is one Log Cabin quilt from the Rappite group at the Old Economy Village Museum in Pennsylvania. However, due to its stylistic similarities with late 19<sup>th</sup> century quilts, it may have been produced after Keil left the area with his followers.

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<sup>180</sup> Marin F. Hanson and Patricia Cox Crews. *American Quilts in the Modern Age, 1870-1940: The International Quilt Study Center Collections*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 114.

### *Crazy Quilts from Aurora*

In his account of his experience with the Aurora Colony, Finck confirms that quilting was a social event. He writes, “My sisters had invited a dozen girls to one of the crazy-quilt parties then in favor, each bringing her own silk patches to sew on. While they were chatting away like magpies I came through the room...”<sup>181</sup> Crazy quilts, a type of pieced quilt that gained popularity in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, are indeed a composite of the work of many quilters.

A crazy quilt found in Aurora, likely made by Judith Zimmerman Yoder, was likely made by such a quilting party. It was found inside a trunk in the basement of the colony’s communal store in the 1990’s (figure 4.20). It features a large amount of red, colony-made wool and 39 unique embroidered motifs. It was donated to the museum in 2001.<sup>182</sup> This quilt is also well-worn, with some fabric patches almost completely disintegrated. It features all-over decorative, colorful stitching of cotton thread. These bright outlines are equivalent to strong contour hatching in a painting, drawing the viewer’s attention to the diversity of shapes contained in the composition. These threads are primarily yellow, green and white. The embroidered elements include flowers, wheat stalks, stars and/ or snowflakes, a butterfly, and a dog’s head. These symbols add personality and individualism to the quilt, highlighting symbols of individual importance to their embroiderers. These simple elements are perhaps the most personally expressive of any remaining material culture in Bethel and Aurora.

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<sup>181</sup> Finck, *Adventures*, 42.

<sup>182</sup> Museum Collection Records, Old Aurora Colony Museum, Aurora, OR.

Dark colors are dominant in this quilt, but here there is a greater variety of tones. Again, the fabric pieces are approximately the same size, but here they are generally smaller. The variety of fabric types is also larger, and the quilt contains small portions of silk, velvet and even suiting in addition to more commonplace materials. This diversity of materials generates a tactile interest, compelling the viewer to feel the variety of textures. Of particular interest are a small number of faded denim patches, and it is tempting to imagine that these were taken from worn men's clothing. The single piece of purple floral fabric that makes up the back of this quilt is faded in a pattern that indicates the quilt was hung in the window, and it has been patched in one spot with a piece of blue fabric. The abstract composition is organized by square portions, although they do not line up in a precise manner. This prototypical Crazy quilt was likely what Finck referred to in his recollection.

Another woolen crazy quilt was made by a colony member of the Yancey family and donated to the Aurora museum in 2002 (figure 4.19). The most unique feature of this quilt is the simultaneously decorative and functional white wool yarn that dots the top of the quilt, contrasting with the areas of dark fabric. This use of visible yarn ties is seen in the earlier quilts of the Bethel colony. This quilt is quite well worn as evidenced by holes revealing the batting, and appears to be made of a combination of commercial and handmade fabrics. The backing is made of a single piece of plaid calico fabric. Although the Crazy quilt's composition is abstract, the design is controlled by the separation of individual square zones. The composition, while not symmetrical or mathematically regular is still repetitive, and each fabric piece is approximately the same size. Unlike many of the Log Cabin quilts from Aurora, the fabrics used here are not particularly

luxurious. Utilitarian plaids, checks, and solid wools dominate the composition. This quilt does not contain the improvisational stitching or personalized embroidery characteristic of most Crazy quilts. The fact that this quilt appears to be frequently used is unusual for a crazy quilt, which were normally made as artistic expressions and displayed on walls and draped on furniture rather than utilized on a day to day basis.<sup>183</sup>

Another Aurora crazy quilt created by Mary Zimmerman and Margaret Stauffer was donated in 1969 (before Buhl's thesis was written) but was not featured in her manuscript (figure 4.21). This quilt was donated by a former Marion county resident with relatives who were colonists, Hulda Mae Giesy Buell, who provided some information about it. Mary Zimmerman was her aunt, and she stated that some of the fabric scraps in the quilt were made from the dresses she wore as a child, and that her mother Martha Zimmerman provided them. She specifically references the plaids and black and white checked patterns as ones she remembers wearing. In the Aurora museum's records, Buell is quoted as stating: "All new pieces of material that were not used in garments or even some that were not badly worn were always saved for the quilts. I am sure that the aunts and probably many of their friends were very generous with their pieces as I do not recognize much of the materials in my quilts. When we would go to Aurora or when any of the relatives came down, they generally would bring a finished quilt back with them, or some other handiwork that mother did not have time to do. And I assure you for us it was needed and appreciated."<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

Here, Mary Zimmerman and Margaret Stauffer have utilized a combination of scrap materials. Although the wool may have been created by colonists, the corduroy, silk and cotton was certainly produced outside of the community, as no records of the production of such fabrics exist. However, there are several pieces of wool that can be attributed to colony production due to their solid color. In figure 4.21, the red and royal blue wool was almost certainly hand-produced by colony members. The decorative stitching is done in white thread in a combination of straight and chevron styles. Zimmerman and Stauffer have combined patchwork pieces in a wide variety of shapes and sizes that is two dimensional. Its backing is made of a single piece of blue cotton. Unlike many crazy quilts, the composition here is not mediated by square compartments, and there is a much larger range of sizes in the fabric pieces. The fabric scraps were used without being altered, but rather the composition evolved as the useable pieces of fabric were placed one at a time. There is a large variety of textures in this quilt, as it includes velvets, silks, denim, and a large quantity of green corduroy.

### **Contemporary Quilts from Surrounding Areas**

The quilts created by other Oregon Trail settlers from nearby regions are included here in order to provide, as McCarl states, the Bethel and Aurora quilts' "relative place in society." Quilts of all three described types were made by other pioneers who were not Christian sectarians but often had similar geographical backgrounds. A floral quilt created by a non-colony member who was a Marion county settler has many similarities to the Aurora "cookie cutter" quilt (figure 4.22). It was created by members of the Robbins family of Indiana and can be easily dated as the back of the quilt contains the inscription

“Jacob and Sarah, Oregon Rose!, 1851.”<sup>185</sup> The quilt was made in honor of the family’s impending trip Westward, and it traveled the Oregon trail in 1852. It is a part of the Molalla Area Historical Society’s collection.<sup>186</sup>

The color schemes of the appliqué quilt is greens and faded reds. It contains 9 evenly spaced rose medallions. The symmetry and mathematical accuracy is similar to the floral quilts in Bethel and Aurora. The textile is bordered by a grapevine; each grape sprig contains 6 berries. The primary floral medallions are more intricate and multifaceted than any observed in Bethel or Aurora, but the roses in various stages of blooming are reminiscent of the Economy (Rappite) and Bethel designs. The entire quilt is bordered by a thin red line. One possible reason for the rigid symmetry of such botanical quilts is the legibility of the pattern when the object is displayed on a bed. Its worn and dirty state indicates its journey across the country. The fact that the floral theme was chosen to represent the trip lends itself to the symbolism of new beginnings, obedience to God, and fertility which can be ascribed to the botanical design.

A Log Cabin quilt designed and created by Grace Jane Simpson Skeeters, an Oregon Trail pioneer who traveled from Kentucky to Oregon in 1853 (figure 4.23). She was a member of the Hillman party who discovered Crater Lake on their journey. The quilt is done in the same “Barn Raising” style so popular in Aurora. However, perhaps because it was made in Jackson County (Southern Oregon), then a boom area quite different than sectarian Aurora, it is very modern and experimental. It is a part of the permanent collection of the Southern Oregon Historical Society in Medford. Only two

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<sup>185</sup> Mary Bywater Cross, *Quilts of the Oregon Trail*. (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2007):78.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

fabric colors were used to make up the quilt: red and green. However, the green has since faded and these portions now appear grey.<sup>187</sup>

The quilt has been dated between 1875 and 1900, the same time period of the Log Cabin quilts created in Aurora. This textile is an example of the way the Log Cabin quilt can be adapted even within its prescribed limits. When solid fabric colors are used within the traditional light and dark areas, a bold pattern emerges which is reminiscent of color-field painting. The viewer is drawn to the relationship between the dark and light planes, and tends to infer a hierarchy of depth. While this also occurs when viewing a scrap Log Cabin quilt, the exclusive use of two solid fabrics heightens this effect. This difference is most likely caused by the availability of material and relative lack of restrictions in then-affluent Jacksonville.

A crazy quilt made in Lane County, Oregon in 1894 (the date is embroidered) by Annis Parsons Bonnett, who traveled the Oregon Trail in 1854, exhibits similar qualities to the crazy quilts from Bethel and Aurora (figure 4.24). The maker's family lived in Springfield, Oregon.<sup>188</sup> Although the composition is haphazard and improvisational, it is a composition nonetheless. The upper and lower edges are bordered by fairly even, rectangular patches, and the sides are bordered by a fan pattern which was popular as another quilt style at the time. The interior of the quilt is regulated by a general color scheme (dark jewel tones) the use of mainly silks. The fabric scraps are all relatively even in size. The freehand embroidery on this crazy-quilt is particularly abstract and

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<sup>187</sup> Bywater Cross, *Quilts of the Oregon Trail*, 96-97.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, 98-99.

composed mainly of freeform lines and small x-shaped stitches which cover the majority of the textile. The quilt is composed mainly of silks, more luxurious than what was generally used in Aurora. The themes of celebrations and migration are common to these quilts.<sup>189</sup> In general, the compositions are very similar, with the exception of the progression towards modernism visible in the Jackson County Log Cabin quilt.

### **Contemporary Amish Quilts**

The relative place in society and culture of the quilts analyzed here is further contextualized by a look at textiles from other sectarian societies. The Aurora colonists and the Amish, who were contemporary sectarian Christians, originally hailed from nearby Germanic regions. Both communities held the belief that true Christians must be baptized as adults and lived separatist, communitarian lifestyles. Of late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century Christian sects, “The Amish (as well as the Mennonites and the Hutterites) emerged from the Anabaptist movement, a 17<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon that was one of many contributors to the later utopian movement.<sup>190</sup> Most Pennsylvania Amish groups had inhabited the United States for about a century longer than the Pennsylvania Rappite and subsequent Bethel and Aurora colonies. However, they all came to America to escape religious persecution and to seek political harmony.<sup>191</sup> In Amish spiritual and community life, quilts are considered to be a unique area of personal expression. Humility, service to others, and a denial of self-interest are philosophies shared by the

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<sup>189</sup> Bywater Cross, *Quilts of the Oregon Trail*, 152.

<sup>190</sup> Donald B. Kraybill, Patricia T. Herr, and Jonathan Holstein. *A quiet spirit: Amish quilts from the collection of Cindy Tietze & Stuart Hodosh*. Los Angeles, Calif: (UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1996), 14.

<sup>191</sup> Kraybill, *A Quiet Spirit*, 15.

Amish and the Aurora colonists. Considering these mutual values, we can understand that the role of quilts were similar to both cultures.

Amish women are (and continue to be) prolific quilters, and in particular made many Log Cabin quilts which have compositional connections to those created in Bethel and Aurora. An early 20<sup>th</sup> century Amish geometric quilt, which may be a Log Cabin variation, is comprised of long rectangular patches in pinwheel formations (figure 4.25). This arrangement, which reads as an inversion of the traditional square Log Cabin Block, is similar to a geometric quilt found in Bethel. A Log Cabin quilt in the “Sunshine and Shadow” setting created by Amish quilters in approximately 1900 bears compositional and material similarities to both the Bethel “sunshine and shadow” coverlet and many Log Cabins in Aurora (figure 4.26).

The religious and spiritual value systems of the Aurora colonists are very similar to those of the Amish. The primary difference between the two groups was that Bethel and Aurora were run by an autonomous leader and the emphasis on plainness was not as pervasive. The primary social value of the Amish is submission to God, which entails self-surrender and a quiet spirit. To the Amish, this includes abandoning personal interests and working for the betterment of one’s society, emphasizing service in all things. The Amish value above all Christ’s service to others, and make this the cornerstone of their existence- a value similar to Wilhelm Keil’s “diamond rule.”<sup>192</sup> Also, like the Amish, the Aurora and Bethel colonists worshipped formally in church every other week, in order to emphasize the sovereignty of God in everyday life.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Kraybill, *A Quiet Spirit*, 20.

<sup>193</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Aurora*, 118-21.

Quilts emerge as unique areas of similarity to outside culture in Amish communities as they did in Bethel and Aurora.<sup>194</sup> This uniqueness of expression emerges when the quilts of such communities are contrasted with the larger visual culture. In the case of the Amish in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, colorful quilts often contrasted with the society's spare clothing and architecture.

## **Conclusion**

Colony quilts were, at least in the beginning, created “from scratch” through a painstaking process that allowed for a widespread division of labor. The weaving and dying of fabric by hand, using naturally harvested ingredients, allowed for a connectedness with and dependence on nature that had been yearned for by the members of the utopian movement. Later, when sewing machines and commercial fabric scraps were used for the making of quilts, quilt-making remained a social activity for women. It allowed them to retain the strong sense of community that was the goal of their society. A process that was almost impossible to complete on one's own, quilting fit perfectly into the social systems of the Bethel and Aurora colonies. It allowed women to share knowledge with one other and to engage in charitable works through the donation of quilts to others, as evidenced by the reminiscence of the recipient of the Stauffer crazy quilt.

The female quilters of the Bethel and Aurora colonies would certainly have understood the meanings of the quilts they commonly created. The patterns were rarely original creations, but the women of Aurora were closely connected to each of the three

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<sup>194</sup> For more on the philosophical components of Amish quilts, see Kraybill 22.

quilt types discussed here. Their yearning after a personal relationship with God and morally perfected community apart from the industrial world was reflected in the floral symbolism of appliqué quilts. Their experiences leaving family and beginning new lives in an unknown place are reflected in Log Cabin quilts. And their desire to follow their prescribed roles by creating beautiful places of refuge in their homes was reflected in their creation of Victorian crazy quilts.

On the other hand, mid 19<sup>th</sup> century geometric quilts from Bethel (and one from Aurora) are strikingly similar to later Log Cabin quilts which had official names and patterns. The long, slender rectangular patches, seemingly stacked one on top of another, are manipulated into diagonal formations with an emphasis on the value contrast between light and dark fields in these early quilts. Although it would be impossible to determine without a large scale study of early 19<sup>th</sup> century quilts and bed-coverings in the United States, it is tempting to consider them predecessors to the quintessential American style. Once Log Cabin quilts were created on a regular basis in Aurora, the colonists displayed a preference for the “barn raising” variation. Several other Log Cabin styles and patterns were produced elsewhere at the time. The Bethel and Aurora quilters of both types negotiated the life experiences which were philosophically linked to the Log Cabin quilt.

Once they were able to obtain commercially produced fabrics, Aurora women continued to use large varieties of fabric scraps to create their Log Cabin quilts. They did not specially purchase or produce solid-color fabrics with which to create modern, color-field creations such as the Jacksonville quilt referenced above. Amish quilters also moved towards the use of solid colors in their Log Cabin quilts towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It can be concluded that although the Aurora colonists may have had a hand

in originating the Log Cabin quilt, they did not continue to innovate it throughout the century. The botanical and floral quilts created in Bethel and Aurora did not evolve to a great extent throughout the life of both colonies. This is largely to do with the fact that once the first-wave popularity of the “green-and-red appliqué” quilt ceded in the 1860’s, the colonial revival period followed swiftly on its heels.

Quilts emerged in the colonies not as an area of deviance from rules, but as an art form that kept up with outside trends when the rest of the colony did not. These tensions were combined with an adaptability to change that naturally emerged as the initial impetus towards utopianism began to fade. This adaptability apparently allowed for a lack of resistance to quilt-making trends. Regardless of whether the quilts of Bethel and Aurora were unique creations, analyzing them, or any object on display in a cultural museum, using these three approaches can create a full, “slice of life” look at the social, historical, and technological situation in the moment of its creation.

The Aurora colony came to an end just as the popularity of patchwork quilting began to wane. Colonial revival style botanical quilts and bold renditions of Log Cabin quilts were commonly produced until about 1930, when the roles of American women during the WWII period drastically changed domestic priorities. Colony women negotiated cultural space in the quilts they produced, but were not necessarily the innovators of the concepts addressed by the textiles. This close connection with outside trends indicates some level of communication with outside communities. Quilt-making occurred among groups of women in the privacy of individual homes. Therefore, the quilts themselves do not seem to have been governed by the meticulously planned social principles which governed the architecture, clothing, and furniture that was produced by

the communal group. The styles, composition techniques and subject matter of quilts produced in Bethel and Aurora were largely similar to those from other Oregon Trail Settlers and to quilts made throughout the country. This strikes a contrast to the majority of the visual culture of the two colonies, which were intentionally anachronistic as an intentional response to industrialization and the anti-modernist movements that swept the nation.

Many of the quilts surveyed here (particularly the Aurora quilts) were produced after Keil's death in 1877. This does not necessarily indicate a sudden rise in artistic freedoms and may be a coincidence, as dates of production align with the popularity of log cabin and crazy quilt styles in secular America. However, the dominance of utilitarian geometric quilts from the colonies' early (Bethel) phase, when compared with appliqué quilts popular at the time (even the floral quilt belonging to the daughter of George Rapp) do represent a spare and practical aesthetic. Even at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with few exceptions the fabrics and designs of log cabin and crazy quilts in Bethel and Aurora were less luxurious and trendsetting than those produced elsewhere, and utility continued to reign. In his account of the Bethel Colony, William Bek expresses his observation that, even in its early years, a near-constant tension existed between individual desires and larger communal goals. A slow reintegration with popular society unfolded as the tensions between Keil's ideals and colonist's desires unfurled the communistic groups. This development parallels the evolution of quilting in the Bethel and Aurora colonies throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The three-part analysis of museum objects presented in this thesis reveals a unique historical, social/aesthetic, and material context for cultural objects. This analysis presents a microcosm of life during a

given period; here, the lives of women in the sectarian Bethel and Aurora colonies. In studying the quilts of these settlements, a complete picture of their creation, meaning, and relationship with the larger body of contemporary textiles emerges.

## APPENDIX A

### TABLE OF QUILTS

*Dates given by museum records or estimated based on research*

P E N N	Date	Description/ Name	Material s	Size	Maker	Current Location	Figure No.
	before 1850	pink/ green floral appliqué	Wool	~75"x75"	Unknown	Old Economy Village Museum	4.2
	after 1860	Log Cabin/ Barn Raising	cotton, muslin	73.25"x72.5 "	Unknown	Old Economy Village Museum	5.1
M I S S O U R I	Date	Description/ Name	Materials	Size	Maker	Current Location	Figure No.
	after 1840	geometric, checkered quilt	handmade wool, linen	~40"x77"	Unknown	Bethel, MO	4.9
	after 1840	"summer & winter" coverlet	handspun wool	~50"x70"	Unknown	Bair House, Bethel, MO	4.1
	after 1840	checkered coverlet	handspun wool	~50"x70"	Unknown	Bair House, Bethel, MO	5.2
	after 1840	"red and green" appliqué	wool, cotton	~75"x75"	Unknown	Bair House, Bethel, MO	4.4
	after 1840	checkered coverlet	handspun wool	~75"x75"	Unknown	old gift shop, Bethel, MO	5.3
	after 1840	geometric red/ white/ blue	handspun wool	~75"x75"	Unknown	old gift shop, Bethel, MO	4.10
	1850-75	floral appliqué	cotton, wool	~75"x75"	Unknown	Bethel, MO	4.3
	before 1860	geometric (or early log cabin)	handmade wool, cotton	~55"x75"	Unknown	Bauer House, Bethel, MO	4.5, 4.6
	before 1860	checkered coverlet	wool	~55"x75"	Unknown	Bauer House, Bethel, MO	5.4
	before 1860	geometric (or early Log cabin)	handmade wool, cotton	~55"x75"	Unknown	Bauer House, Bethel, MO	4.7, 4.8
	after 1860	crazy quilt	various scrap materials	~80"x80"	Unknown	Bethel, MO	4.11
	after 1860	crazy quilt, "fan" style	silk, satin, cotton	~80"x80"	Unknown	Bethel, MO	4.13
	1888	crazy quilt	velvet, silk, other	~75"x75"	Christina "Dena" Erich Bauer	former gift shop, Bethel, MO	4.12

O R E G O N	Date	Description/ Name	Materials	Size	Maker	Current Location	Figure No.
	Approx. 1850-70	Geometric (early log cabin) quilt	wool	~75"x75"	Unknown	Aurora Col. Museum	4.16
	after 1850	Log Cabin/Barn Raising	cotton, wool, linen, silk, other	39.5"x40"	Unknown	Aurora Col. Museum	5.5
	After 1850	Log Cabin. Barn Raising	cotton	~75"x75"	Unknown	Aurora Col. Museum	5.6
	after 1850	Log Cabin/ Barn Raising	cotton	~82"x82"	Unknown	Kraus House, Aurora Col. Museum	5.7
	After 1850	Log Cabin/ Barn Raising	Cotton	~75"x75"	Unknown	Kraus House, Aurora Col. Museum	5.8
	1850-70	checkered quilt (doll)	cotton, wool	14"x18.5"	Unknown	Kraus House, Aurora Col. Museum	5.9
	after 1860, completed Sept. 2000	crazy quilt (doll)	cotton, wool, linen, velveteen, silk, other	14" x 18.25"	unknown, finished by Mary Hansen	Kraus House, Aurora Col. Museum	5.10
	after 1860	crazy quilt	wool	~75"x75"	Yancy Family	Aurora Col. Museum	4.19
	after 1860	crazy quilt	wool, velveteen, silk, other	68"x73"	Judith Zimmerman Yoder	Aurora Col. Museum	4.20
	after 1860	Log Cabin/ Light and Dark	cotton, rayon	56.5"x 37.5"	Unknown	Aurora Col. Museum	4.17
	after 1860	crazy quilt	satin, other	~75"x75"	Elizabeth Giesy Kraus	Aurora Col. Museum	5.11
	after 1860	crazy quilt	Cotton, corduroy, denim, wool, other.	69.5"x82.5'	Mary Zimmerman, Margaret Stauffer	Aurora Col. Museum	4.21
	1870-1880	Log Cabin/ Barn Raising	cotton	77"x77"	Snyder/ Forstner Family	Aurora Col. Museum	5.12
	1870	"Cookie Cutter" applique	cotton, wool	~75"x75"	Wolfer/Scholl Family	Aurora Col. Museum	4.14, 4.15
	1875	Log Cabin/ Barn Raising	Cotton	~75"x75"	Mary Schuele Rapp	Aurora Col. Museum	4.18
	1880-1910	Log Cabin/ Barn Raising	cotton	86"x70"	Yancey Family	Aurora Col. Museum	5.13
	1890	Log Cabin/ Pineapple	cotton, wool, linen, silk	80"x81"	Unknown	Aurora Col. Museum	5.14
	approx. 1890	Log Cabin/ Barn Raising	cotton, velveteen, silk	80"x89"	Emily Giesy Miller	Aurora Col. Museum	5.15
	1900-1925	Log Cabin/ Barn Raising	cotton, wool, linen, velveteen, silk	67"x84"	Unkown	Aurora Col. Museum	5.16
	1918 (date embroidered)	Crazy quilt	cotton	67"x74"	Julia King	Aurora Col. Musuem	5.17

## APPENDIX B

### FIGURES



Figure 1.1: Wolfer Family of the Aurora Colony feat. Christina Stauffer Wolfer with her Crazy quilt, c. 1860, Aurora, OR



Figures 1.2, 1.3: Installation views of “Abstract Design in American Quilts,” Whitney Museum of American Art, Curator Jonathan Holstein, 1970



Figure 1.4: Clark M. Will with Aurora colony textile and spinning wheel, Woodburn Independent, April 1963

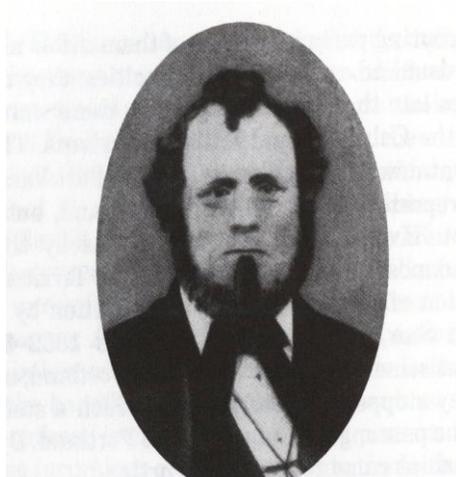


Figure 2.1: Wilhelm Keil in 1855, age 43



Figure 2.2: Johan Georg Rapp (George Rapp) 1757-1847



Figures 2.3: Prayer/ Meditation "Hut" in Economy (Rappite Community), Ambridge, Pennsylvania; photograph taken by the author



Figure 2.4: Original Street in Economy (Rappite Community), Ambridge, Pennsylvania; photograph taken by the author



Figure 2.5: Map of Bethel drawn from memory by colonist G. Wolfer, redrawn by C.M. Will, Special Collections, University of Oregon



Figures 2.6, 2.7, 2.8: Bethel Colony businesses, photographs of prints in Bethel, Missouri taken by the author



Figure 2.9: “Elim,” Wilhelm Keil’s residence outside of Bethel, MO, built approx 1850, photograph taken by the author



Figure 2.10: Oregon Trail Map of the Bethel colonists, hand-drawn by Clark M. Will, Special Collections, University of Oregon





Figure 2.13: Drawing/ Map of Aurora colony by Clark M. Will, Special Collections, University of Oregon

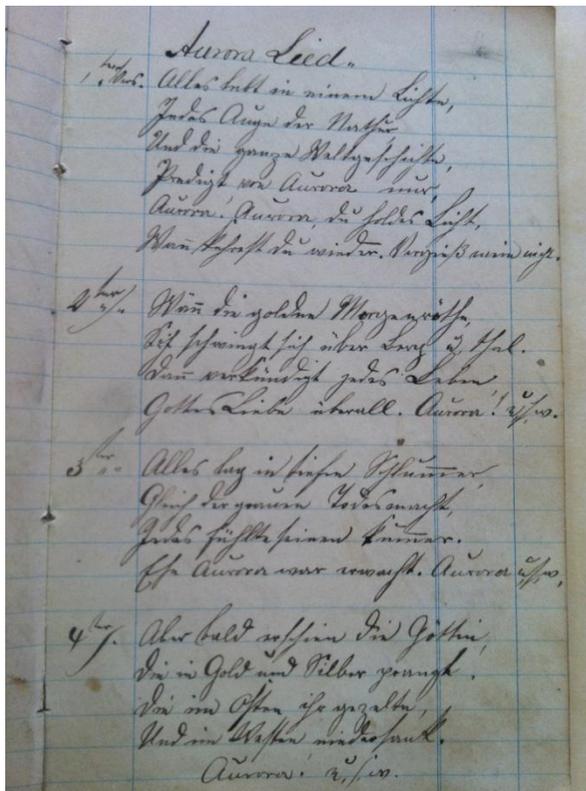
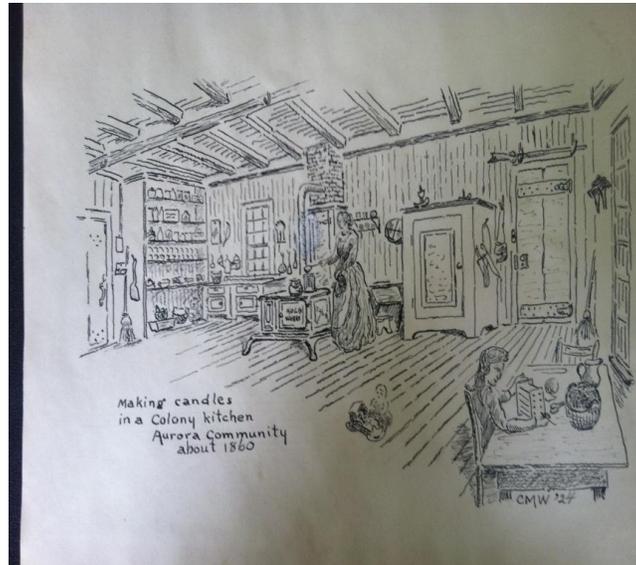


Figure 2.14: “Aurora Hymn,” by Wilhelm Keil, handwritten in German by Frederick Keil, Oregon Historical Society collection, photograph taken by the author



Figures 2.15, 2.16: Drawings of Colony women by C.M. Will, Special Collections, University of Oregon, photographs taken by the author



Figure 2.17: Woman's dress, Aurora, OR, Photograph taken by the Author



Figures 2.18, 2.19: Buildings in Bethel, MO, Photographs taken by the author



Figure 2.20: Home in Aurora, OR, Photograph taken by the author

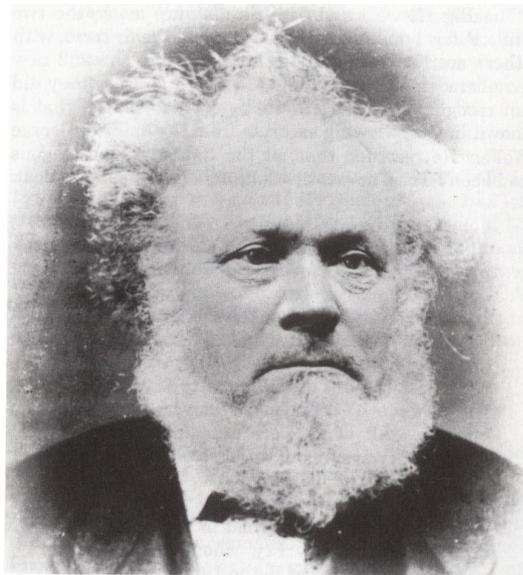


Figure 2.21: Wilhelm Keil in the 1870's



Figure 3.1: Loom at Old Economy Village in Ambridge, PA, similar to looms used in Bethel and Aurora, Photograph taken by the author



Figure 3.2: Spinning wheel and flax wheel in Bair house, Bethel, MO, photograph taken by the author



Figure 3.3: Quilt frame at Aurora Colony Museum, OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 4.1: “Winter and Summer” Coverlet, Bair House, Bethel, MO, Photograph taken by the author



Figure 4.2: “Red and Green” appliqué floral quilt belonging to daughter of George Rapp, Old Economy Village Museum, Ambridge, PA, photograph taken by the author



Figure 4.3: “Red and Green” appliqué floral quilt, Bethel, MO, photograph taken by the author



Figure 4.4: Appliquéd floral quilt, Bair house, Bethel, MO, photograph taken by the author



Figures 4.5, 4.6: Geometric quilt, Bauer house, Bethel, MO, photographs taken by the author



Figures 4.7, 4.8: Geometric quilt, Bauer house, Bethel, MO, photographs taken by the author



Figure 4.9: Geometric quilt, Bethel, MO, photograph taken by the author



Figure 4.10: Geometric quilt, Bethel, MO, photograph taken by the author



Figure 4.11: Crazy quilt, Bethel, MO, photograph taken by the author



Figure 4.12: Crazy quilt, Christina Bauer, Bethel, MO, photograph taken by the author



Figure 4.13: Crazy quilt, Bethel, MO, photograph taken by the author



Figure 4.14: "Cookie Cutter" quilt, Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 4.15: Detail of “Cookie Cutter” quilt, Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 4.16: Geometric quilt, Aurora ,OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 4.17: Log Cabin Quilt, Light and Dark setting, Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 4.18: Log Cabin quilt, barn raising setting, Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 4.19: Crazy quilt, Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 4.20: Crazy quilt, Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 4.21: Crazy quilt, Aurora, OR photograph taken by the author



Figure 4.22: Oregon Rose Quilt, Mollala Area Historical Society



Figure 4.23: Log Cabin Quilt, Barn Raising setting, Jane Simpson Skeeters, Southern Oregon Historical Society



Figure 4.24: Crazy Quilt, Springfield, OR, Lane County Historical Society



Figure 4.25: Log Cabin Quilt, Strip Patch Variation, Ohio, Amish, 1920-30



Figure 4.26: Log Cabin Quilt, Sunshine and Shadow setting, Pennsylvania, Amish, c. 1900



Figure 5.1: Log Cabin Quilt, Barn raising setting, Old Economy Village Museum, Ambridge, PA, photographs taken by the author



Figure 5.2: Checkered coverlet, handspun wool, Bair House, Bethel, MO, photograph taken by the author



Figure 5.3: Checkered coverlet, handspun wool, Bethel, MO, photograph taken by author



Figure 5.4: Checkered coverlet, handspun wool, Bauer house, Bethel, MO, photograph taken by the author



Figure 5.5: Log Cabin Quilt, Barn Raising Setting, Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 5.6: Log Cabin Quilt, Barn Raising setting, Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 5.7: Log Cabin Quilt, Barn Raising setting, Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 5.8: Log Cabin Quilt, Barn Raising setting, Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 5.9: Geometric doll quilts, Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 5.10: Crazy quilt (doll), Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 5.11: Crazy quilt, Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 5.12: Log Cabin Quilt, barn raising setting, Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 5.13: Log Cabin Quilt, barn raising setting, Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 5.14: Log Cabin Quilt, Pineapple setting, Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 5.15: Log Cabin Quilt, Barn Raising setting, Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author



Figure 5.16: Log Cabin Quilt, Barn Raising setting, Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author

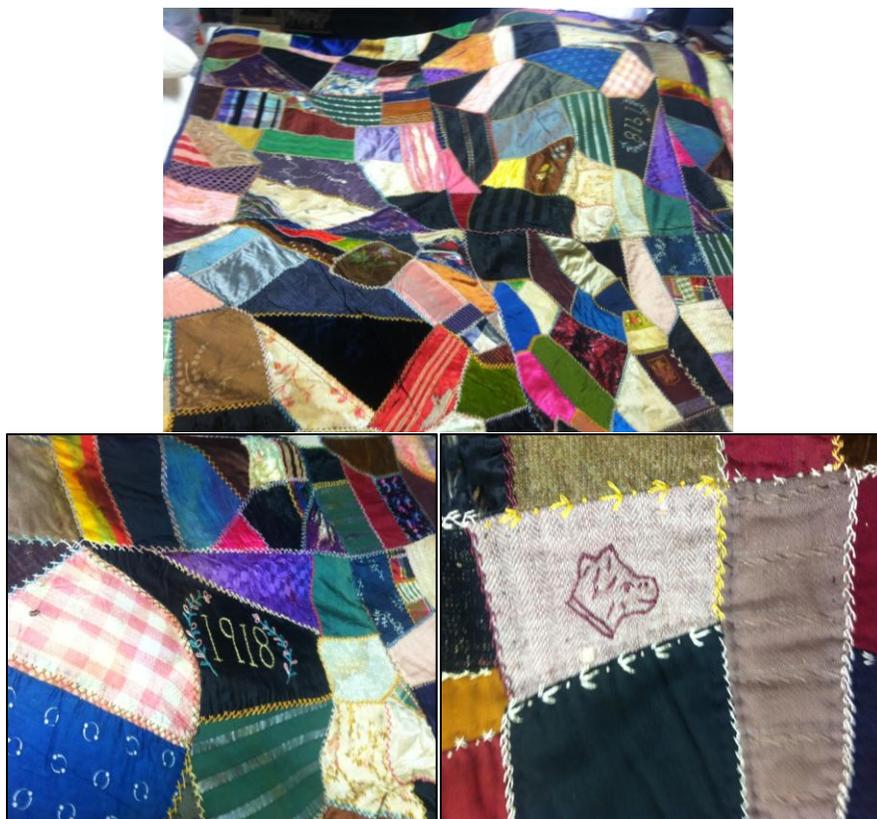


Figure 5.17: Crazy Quilt (and details), Aurora, OR, photograph taken by the author

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