

HOOSIER WOMEN AT WORK

STUDIES IN INDIANA WOMEN'S HISTORY

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Marie Webster and Her Quilts: Their Story

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Early Life

Marie Webster was born July 19, 1859 in Wabash, Indiana, as the oldest of six children of parents Minerva (Lumaree) and Josiah Scott Daugherty. During childhood, Marie learned to sew from her mother. At some point during her early years, Marie made a unique quilt in the multi-colored style of the late nineteenth century.

Marie was a good student in school and gave the salutatory address at her high school graduation in 1878. She wanted to go to college after high school but an "eye disease" (later determined to be severe hay fever or allergies) prevented her from attending college. Instead of going to college, Father Hallinan tutored her in Greek and Latin. She also loved to read. In addition, Marie wrote and edited articles for the local Wabash newspaper.

Marie portrayed "Columbia" in a Fourth of July parade observed by George Webster, Jr. It was love at first sight. They were married February 14, 1884 in the Presbyterian Church followed by a lavish 200-invitee reception in the Daugherty home. Marie and George honeymooned throughout the southern U.S., including celebrating Mardi Gras in New Orleans. Their child, son Lawrence Burns Webster, was born October 29, 1884. They lived in Chicago for a few years then moved to Marion, George's hometown where she remained for fifty-four years. George was a banker, served on the school board and the library board, played the church organ, and was known for his generosity and sense of humor. Besides caring for her son, Marie also enjoyed reading, sewing, amateur dramatics, gardening and a variety of social and volunteer activities.



Marie Webster in colonial outfit, courtesy of Mary Schafer.

The discovery of natural gas beneath the town of Marion in 1887 had triggered an economic boom bringing great prosperity to Marion. Entrepreneurs thronged to Marion and produced steel, tin, furniture, paper and glass (including the Mason jar). As a partner in one of the thriving banks, George prospered. He and Marie enjoyed an active social life and traveled extensively to New York, Philadelphia and Chicago, including a trip in 1893 to the Columbia Exposition at the Chicago World's Fair. They also made a grand tour of Europe in 1899 “when England's Arts and Crafts Movement and France's Art Nouveau style were at their peak.”¹

In 1902, the Websters moved to a new Colonial Revival home at 926 South Washington Street, where they would live for the next forty years. This was the site of the development of Marie's Practical Patchwork Company and where she cultivated her “beloved flower garden which inspired her quilt designs.”² At the beginning of the 20th Century, Marie was quite taken by the Arts and Crafts Movement and Colonial Revival Movement, as well as the simplicity and pastel color schemes with natural subject matter that ensued. Louis Tiffany (ornamental glass), Gustav Stickley (Mission-style

¹ Rosalind Webster and Marty Frolli, *A Joy Forever: Marie Webster's Quilt Pattern*, (Santa Barbara, CA: Practical Patchwork, 1992).

² Ibid.

furniture) and the architects of the era such as Charles and Henry Greene, Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, were all associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement and the Colonial Revival Movement.

“By 1900, the merging forces of the Arts and Crafts Movement and the Colonial Revival Movement sparked a renewed interest in quilts.”³ Two editors played significant roles in this renewed interest: Gustav Stickley of *Craftsman Magazine* and Ed Bok of the *Ladies Home Journal*. Stickley advocated simple designs for Craftsman furniture and sturdy fabric with simple applique designs, unlike the silks and satins lauded earlier. Stickley even sponsored a contest for applique designs of “pillows and curtains with flowers, leaves, and seed pods appliqued in linen.” In addition, Stickley published “Patch Quilts and Philosophy” in 1908 in the *Craftsman* magazine. “Patch Quilts and Philosophy” was published under the byline of Elizabeth Daingerfield, although it actually was her older sister, Isabella (known as Bessie) who actually authored the article. Bessie had completed missionary work in rural Kentucky and wrote about the women she met there: “There is much beautiful and skilled handiwork hidden away in these hills. From the cradle to the grave the women make quilts.” Bessie was most impressed by quilts inspired by nature, especially one with a mountain lily patch whose form was repeated in the quilting.⁴

Edward Bok, editor of the *Ladies Home Journal* for thirty years, played a very important role in the Quilt Revival. He asked readers to send him quilts for possible use in articles in the magazine. Marie Webster took him up on the challenge and sent him her “Pink Rose” quilt which she had designed to use natural floral designs in light colors. He was so taken with the quilt, he wrote and asked her to send him three more of her quilts to include as a full color page. Full-color depictions (some references say paintings, some photos) of her four quilts, Pink Rose, Iris, Snowflake and Wind-blown Tulip, appeared in the January 1, 1911 issue. These were the first quilts to be shown in full color in a major publication. Marie became a celebrity in her field and the first quilt designer to gain widespread name recognition. The initial publication created an uproar among the subscribers, many of whom wrote to Marie and asked for her patterns. From there, the art of applique with natural forms and pastel colors sparked the quilting world.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Cuesta Benberry, “Marie D. Webster: A Major Influence on Quilt Design in the 20th Century,” *Quilter’s Newsletter Magazine* (July/August 1990).

In January, 1912, "The New Flower Patchwork Quilts" in the *Ladies Home Journal* featured her most original work. Instead of the traditional square block format, Marie gave each of the four quilts a central focus. The White Dogwood quilt had blocks set on point reserving the center block for quilting. Morning Glory, Poppy and Sunflower were designed with medallion centers (popular in the nineteenth century). Ed Bok had requested a sunflower quilt because of its popularity as an Arts and Crafts Movement motif. In August, 1912, the last set was published as "The Baby Patchwork Quilt." These included four flower quilts: Daisy, Pansies and Butterflies, Morning Glory Wreath and Sunbonnet Lassies. They also included two other quilts, Bedtime and Sunbonnet Lassies. The *Ladies Home Journal* published a total of 14 of Marie's quilts and nine pillow motifs in 1911-1912.

The response to Marie's patterns was electrifying. She received requests for patterns from all over the world. The *Ladies Home Journal* sold transfer patterns for some of her designs. Marie decided to sell complete patterns including directions, templates, and a picture of the finished quilt. She also provided fabric swatches glued to the back of the direction sheet for color inspirations. She also (with the assistance of her sister, Emma) provided a full-size placement guide to show how the applique pieces should be layered and arranged. She recommended the use of colorfast materials. Her son, Lawrence, an engineer, also assisted by making full-size blueprints of the pattern pieces. Two friends, Ida Hess and Evangeline Beshore also assisted.

The cottage industry begun in Marie's home lasted until the start of World War II.⁵ The "Marie D. Webster's New Quilt Patterns" sold for fifty cents each throughout the entire life of the Practical Patchwork Co. They also expanded and sold kits and finished quilts with the aid of quilters from the Flinn Home of Marion as well as quilters in church groups including in Booneville, Kentucky. They advertised in women's magazines and also produced a catalog series, "Quilts and Spreads." Marie produced ten more designs between 1912 and 1920: Bunnies, Grapes and Vines, French Baskets, Daffodils and Butterflies, Wreath of Roses, Magpie Rose, Poinsettia, Clematis in Bloom, Nasturtium Wreath and Cherokee Rose.

⁵ Cuesta Benberry, "Marie D. Webster: A Major Influence on Quilt Design in the 20th Century," *Quilter's Newsletter Magazine* (July/August 1990).



In 1912, Doubleday, Page & Co., New York publishers, asked Marie to write a history of quilting. After extensive research, the first book about quilting, *Quilts: Their Story and How to Make Them*, was published in 1915.⁶ It was acclaimed by its readers, reviewed by over twenty publications, and generated mail from all over the world. Her lifelong interest in needlework, art, history and research enabled Marie to produce a book that is still considered today as an important reference work. It included both historical information as well as photographs of quilts and other quilted items from ancient Egypt, the Renaissance, the Middle Ages through the early-20th century. Her lecture career started after publication of the book and included presentations to many organizations including the Mississippi Centennial Exposition, the Wabash Literary Circle and the Indianapolis Women's Prison. She also inspired Dr. William Dunton at a Psychiatric Hospital in Baltimore to curate three quilt shows of Marie's quilts in Baltimore and to use quilting for patient therapy and rehabilitation. He also was inspired to write *Old Quilts*.⁷ In Kansas, Carrie Hall and Rose Kretsinger were inspired to write *Romance of the Patchwork Quilt*.⁸

Marie also became a quilt contest judge and continued to promote quilting well into her 80s. Her granddaughters, Rosalind Webster Perry and Katherine Webster Dwight, continue the tradition of sharing their grandmother's quilting designs and passion. The Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA) (now Newfields) was gifted many of Marie's quilts, correspondence and her scrapbook by Marie's daughter-

⁶ Quilts of Indiana: Crossroads of Memories, Indiana Quilt Registry Project, 1991.

⁷ William Rush Jr. Dunton, *Old Quilts*, (Self-published, 1946).

⁸ Carrie Hall and Rose Kretsinger, *Romance of the Patchwork Quilt*, (1935).

in-law (and Rosalind and Katherine's mother), Mrs. Gerrish Thurber, and recently had a wonderful exhibit of the quilts and artifacts. The IMA provided access to the quilts and documents for my research. Marie's Home is now a museum and houses The Quilters Hall of Fame. Numerous honorees in The Quilters Hall of Fame also credit Marie for their inspiration.

Her entrepreneurial nature and her love of quilting continue to inspire quilters today in what is now a \$3.7 billion U.S. industry with 10 million active quilters (*Quilting in America*, 2017).⁹

And the beat goes on...

In 2012, at the American Quilt Study Group meeting in Lincoln, Nebraska, I did my historic portrayal of Rose Kretsinger, noted 20th century Kansas quilter, for the attendees. After my performance, a woman came up to me and complimented me on my presentation adding that "No one had ever done my grandmother like you did Rose" to which I responded, "Who's your grandmother?" After I found out that her grandmother was Marie Webster, I learned that I was speaking with Rosalind Webster Perry, who has many of Marie's memorabilia, including Marie's original notes from her quilt history lectures Marie gave during her lifetime. When I expressed an interest in learning more about Marie and seeing the lecture notes, Rosalind was very excited. Since then, I have portrayed Marie from Florida to Indiana (at the Marie Webster House). Rosalind and her sister, Katherine, have been instrumental in aiding my research about their grandmother. Rosalind has written several books about her grandmother and her quilt designs: *Marie Webster's Garden of Quilts* (with Marti Frolli); *A Joy Forever: Marie Webster's Quilt Patterns* (with Marti Frolli); *The Quilters Hall of Fame: 42 Masters Who Have Shaped Our Art* (with Merikay Waldvogel); re-issue of *Quilts: Their Story and How to Make Them*.

Rosalind and the community of Marion were instrumental in the restoration of her grandmother's home on Washington Street in Marion and providing it as home to The Quilters Hall of Fame. Marie's home is now on the National Register of Historic Places (1992), is a National Historic Landmark (1993) and has been designated by the National Park Service a National Historic Landmark of Women's History.¹⁰

⁹ Marie Webster, *Quilts: Their Story and How To Make Them*, (New York, Tudor Publishing. 1915).

¹⁰ Rosalind Webster Perry and Merikay Waldvogel, *The Quilters Hall of Fame: 42 Masters Who Have Shaped Our Art*.

The Marie Webster Home has been preserved much as it was during Marie's residence there. The Quilters Hall of Fame and the Marie Webster Quilt Guild maintain it as a living history tribute to Marie, her family, and her incredible story.

* Deborah Divine is a quilter, researcher and collector, who is president of The Quilters Hall of Fame. She was the first Program Manager of the Kansas Scenic Byway Program, and was on the research faculty at the University of Florida where she was recognized as one of the top 50 researchers on campus her last two years at the University. Rosalind W. Perry inspired Deborah to do a historic portrayal of Marie Webster using Marie's original script and provided other extensive information.