

The Art of Appraisals

❖ BY EILEEN DOUGHTY ❖

Reprinted from

THE
PROFESSIONAL QUILTER™

Summer 2003
Issue 84

The Professional Quilter
22412 Rolling Hill Lane
Laytonsville, MD 20882
www.professionalquilter.com

The Art of Appraisals

Your quilt has more than a personal value. Learn why you might need an appraisal and how to go about getting one.

❖ BY EILEEN DOUGHTY ❖

Quilts certainly are valued for personal and/or esthetic reasons, but a more business-like side to the valuation of quilts exists, the quilt appraisal. It is a non-subjective process of determining the value of a quilt. I interviewed six professionals certified to appraise quilts to find out more about appraisers, what they do and what quilters should know about the appraisal system.

BECOMING AN APPRAISER

Quilt appraisers probably come from as many different backgrounds as quilters do. And, not all appraisers make quilts themselves. Many enjoy studying history, collecting antique quilts or doing “detective work.”

Several professional associations offer established standards for appraisal practice (see sidebar). Some have programs certifying different levels of quilt or textile appraisers as a specialty and may also offer skills courses.

Certified appraisers have passed examinations testing their knowledge and skills. They are bound to the ethics of the profession—the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP) established by the Appraisal Foundation.

The American Quilter’s Society (AQS) certification process requires the applicant to be familiar with all sorts of quilts, from antique to the most contemporary art quilt. AQS tests applicants on their knowledge of fabric dates and construction techniques, their ability to recognize patterns and regional influences and their awareness of market values.

In practice, some appraisers may choose to specialize in certain types of quilts, but most do not. However, no ethical appraiser will accept an assignment for which she is not qualified.

Working as an appraiser is a continual learning process. Many appraisers belong to fabric and quilt-dating clubs. They attend quilt exhibits, visit antique stores and surf the Internet. Florida appraiser Teddy Pruett said: “There is no class that can teach you how to relate to the clients, how to ask the right questions, how to think fast on your feet, and how to be tactful and diplomatic when explaining that a family’s cherished oral history has no relationship to the quilt that is on your table! There is no substitute for seeing and touching literally hundreds and hundreds of quilts.”

FINDING AN APPRAISER

Surprisingly, appraisers are not subject to licensing requirements. Choosing a certified appraiser insures that she will follow standards and ethical rules. In the rare instance that an appraiser does something unethical or provides bad service, the client would have recourse through the appraisal organization. Several web sites provide lists of certified appraisers (see sidebar). Quilt stores and quilt shows may also provide an “appraisal day” or provide references.

It is perfectly acceptable to ask the appraiser about her length of experience and area of expertise or to provide you with her written resumé, as you would interviewing anyone providing a service for payment. For example, it is possible that an antiques appraiser can do an appropriate valuation of an antique quilt, but the client should ask about her experience with that specialty.

Surprisingly, appraisers are not subject to licensing requirements. Choosing a certified appraiser insures that she will follow standards and ethical rules.

WHY GET A QUILT APPRAISED?

Bunnie Jordan, an appraiser from Virginia, explains that one common reason for an appraisal is to provide a basis for insurance coverage for loss or damage. The quilt owner should check with her insurance company about the need for an appraisal, e.g., what documents the insurer requires, exactly what coverage is provided and whether the quilt is insured when it is outside the home. An appraiser could evaluate a quilt from photos and/or other documentation after a loss, but it would be a general range of value, and the

insurance company would most likely pay the lowest value given for that quilt.

Another reason to obtain a “fair market appraisal” is to document the value for a buyer or establish pricing guidelines for a quiltmaker. However, fair market appraisals do not necessarily mean the quilt will sell for the appraised value, says California appraiser Anne Copeland.

Other reasons for appraisals include establishing value for estate settlement or donation for IRS requirements. Sometimes exhibit venues require a written appraisal when a quilt is valued above a certain amount. Occasionally a quilt is appraised purely to record descriptive documentation.

Not all quilts need to be appraised. If the quilt is very tattered, and the value is mostly sentimental, an appraisal is not likely to be warranted.

DO APPRAISALS EXPIRE?

Appraisals don't expire, but Wisconsin appraiser Carol Butzke and California appraiser Julia Zgliniec both suggest having your quilt re-appraised every three to five years. Appraised values of quilts, as with all properties, can vary with the marketplace and the economy in general. You may want to check with your insurance company about periodic valuations.

Contemporary, i.e., “new,” quilts may increase in value if they have since received an award or have been shown in exhibitions or publications. Antiques may also increase in value. The value may decrease if the quilt suffers damage or deterioration.

DOES ONE QUILT APPRAISAL CARRY OVER TO OTHER QUILTS?

Quilts made by one person have too many variables to be considered “one appraisal fits all.” Even if none of the quilts in question were exhibited or won awards, the techniques, materials, originality, workmanship, degree of difficulty and complexity all have to be considered by the appraiser.

Yet exceptions exist. For quiltmakers who price their work by a standard

Resources

Locating a quilt appraiser on the Internet

- American Quilter's Society, www.aqsquilt.com/appraisers.shtml.
- Professional Association of Appraisers for Quilted Textiles, <http://quiltappraisers.org>.
- Quilt History, www.quilthistory.com/quilt.htm.

Organizations that offer certification and related services

- American Quilter's Society, www.aqsquilt.com/interest.shtml.
- Professional Association of Appraisers—Quilted Textiles (PAAQT), www.quiltappraisers.org.
- American Society of Appraisers (ASA), www.appraisers.org.
- Appraisers Association of American (AAA), www.appraisersassoc.org.
- International Society of Appraisers (ISA), www.isa-appraisers.org.
- The Appraisal Foundation, www.appraisalfoundation.org. The web site also has information on the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP). ❖

square-foot figure and have an extensive sales record, additional appraisals may not be needed. If a quilt typical of the maker's work was lost, the appraisal for another of her quilts could be used as a basis for determining value. If a fancier has a truly large collection of quilts, and if the insurance company is agreeable, representative samples might be enough (one red and green appliqué, one depression-era kit quilt, etc.).

HOW MUCH DOES AN APPRAISAL COST?

Appraisal fees vary by geographic location and experience of the appraiser. Fees may be set per item or per hour. The type of quilt should not affect the fee, and fees should never be set in relation to the appraisal value. Fees ranging between \$25 to \$45 are common. Should an appraisal require substantial research, expect to pay a higher fee.

PREPARING FOR AN APPRAISAL

You will most likely need to make an appointment for an appraisal. You will need to bring the quilt to the appraisal, along with a photograph, if possible.

If you are the quiltmaker, provide your resumé, especially awards or exhibitions specific to that quilt. You

may also include your other quilt awards, exhibits, publications and sales. You should provide an idea of the cost of materials and how much, if any, of the labor was contracted, e.g., if someone else did the quilting.

For an antique quilt, bring any existing written documentation to verify the provenance. Provide, if possible, the names, dates and locations of the ancestors involved.

Bring the receipt if you have just bought a quilt. It is worth what you have paid for it unless there is some extenuating circumstance. It could be a very rare piece and in excellent condition, and the sellers did not realize what they had. Or it could be in poor condition, and you paid too much.

If you have a quilt that, according to family lore, your ancestor made during the Civil War, and the appraiser says it is a 1930's quilt, don't be disappointed. Oral history is sometimes distorted unintentionally down through the years, sometimes even within one generation.

A warning, as Teddy Pruett said: “There have been several instances where a person told me that they had a quilt for me to appraise, but they didn't want me to see it dirty, so they washed it. No more quilt!”

(continued on page 10)

THE APPRAISAL PROCESS

Appraisals can be conducted in just about any venue: in a home, while displayed at a quilt show, before or after lectures or in any mutually agreed-upon location. Maryland appraiser Phyllis Twigg has done some appraisals in very unusual locations, including inside a trailer home which was not as wide as the quilt. Another was on the balcony of a tennis court, and then she remembers the conference room adjacent to a multiple-stall bathroom with very loud flushing toilets in constant use.

The appraiser will thoroughly examine the quilt and measure it. The physical condition is noted, along with details of the workmanship, style, techniques and materials used. She will consider the aesthetic qualities of balance, color and design. She will rank the quilt among others of similar style or category. A photograph is usually taken.

She will read the provenance that the owner provided and ask a number of questions about the quilt and its maker. When was it made? Is it signed and dated? Is the quilt part of a larger collection? Was it in an exhibition? Was the quilt made for a special purpose or event?

The appraiser will use her expertise to place a value on the quilt. A professional quiltmaker can give the appraiser an idea of her selling history, but it is ultimately up to the appraiser to establish the value.

Most, if not all, quilt appraisers will gladly share information with the client about an antique quilt's fabric, pattern or general history to help her see the quilt as a piece of material culture as well as a functional object. The appraiser may give conservation tips. Even if a quilt has little monetary value, the appraiser may provide some suggestions to help keep the quilt a treasured family heirloom.

The process for a written appraisal normally takes 20 to 30 minutes. Additional research required for an unusual quilt would, of course, be variable. The appraiser generally takes her notes home from an appraisal, types them and sends the documents to the client.

The client should feel free to ask questions. Appraisers want the client to feel confident in the result of the appraisal. If the client has any disagreement with the appraiser, it should be brought to her attention. If the response is not satisfactory, the client may contact the certifying organization. An ombudsman will be appointed to help settle the difference.

APPRAISAL DOCUMENTATION

The appraisal document should include:

- the purpose of the appraisal (insurance, donation, etc.),
- a description of the quilt, including condition and ownership,
- provenance of the quilt,
- statements of methodology used to determine value,
- the appraised value,
- the marketplace where the given value could be realized, and
- a Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP) statement.

Photographs, appraiser credentials and sometimes bibliography and definitions may be included. The document must be signed and dated. Some appraisers may affix a seal. The original is given to the client and the appraiser keeps a copy.

DO APPRAISERS ENJOY THEIR WORK?

Quilt appraisers naturally have had a great variety of experiences. They love being able to see and touch so many quilts of all kinds. One of the intangible benefits they often mention is the joy people show when they learn their old quilt is of great value and has an interesting history. On the flip side, sometimes they may have to inform a client that her old quilt is worth exactly what was paid for it—or even less. But overall, as Teddy Pruett said: "I wish there were some way to relay the best part of the appraisal business—the fun of sharing knowledge.... What a win-win situation. I never know which of us is the more thrilled!" ❖

About the author: Eileen Doughty has been a professional quilter for more than

a decade. She makes commissioned quilts, specializing in landscapes. Her art quilts have been exhibited across the United States and overseas. Eileen is also the founder of Q&A Quilt Art, a critique group in metropolitan Washington, D.C., that also exhibits as a group. She lives in Vienna, Va., with her husband, two children and a greyhound. Eileen invites you to see her work at www.DoughtyDesigns.com or that of her critique group at www.QuiltArtists.com.

Reprinted from *The Professional Quilter*, a quarterly business journal for serious quilters. Providing business information and networking opportunities for professional quilters since 1983, *The Professional Quilter* is available by subscription for \$27.95 per year (\$32 Canada; \$40 other foreign air mail US funds) from The Professional Quilter, 22412 Rolling Hill Lane, Laytonsville, MD 20882. You can learn more on our web page, www.professionalquilter.com.