

## **For Further Reading: Smithsonian Associates tour March 8, 2025**

**Compiled by Alden O'Brien**

### **Needlework**

*A Maryland Sampling: Girlhood Embroidery, 1738-1860* by Gloria Seaman Allen et al. includes discussions of many Baltimore schools teaching African Americans and several surviving needleworks from them.

One such school was the Oblate Sisters in Baltimore, who are still around, and here's a page on their website devoted to samplers by African American students:

<https://www.oblatesisters.com/samplers> Bayou Bend Museum in Houston has one sampler from this school which is discussed in the blog of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: <https://www.mfah.org/blogs/inside-mfah/hidden-history-black-students-education-19th-centu>

A lecture from the Concord (MA) museum on African American needlework in early America: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=xnwa6HdHAUM>

Some African American samplers are included in the American Folk Art Museum's exhibition catalog from 2024, *Unnamed Figures: Black Presence and Absence in the Early American North*. DO NOT look for this on Amazon where a used copy is listed for over \$2000. Go to the Museum website where it is still available NEW for original price of \$75.

Some individual African American needlework pieces are discussed by Amy Finkel, one of the premier scholars and dealers in needlework, on her website [samplings.com](http://samplings.com). Search African American in the "search site" box.

\*This list is specific to the exhibition we are seeing—if you want a longer bibliography of more historic needlework, contact me.

### **Crazy Quilts and quilts generally**

Quilts are a huge topic and it's hard to recommend one easy, covers-it-all source. Some good overviews are Robert Shaw's *American Quilts: The Democratic Art, 1780-2007* and if you want some really comprehensive tomes with each category of quilt introduced by the best experts in the field, get the series from the International Quilt Study Center in Lincoln, Nebraska: *American Quilts in the Industrial Age, 1780-1870* and *American Quilts in the Modern Age, 1870-1840*. Take any "history" of quilts given in a mostly how-to-quilt book, or any "quilt history" book written before the 1980s with large heaps of salt. A LOT of myths get repeated in those. (Crazy quilts were the first quilts...brides made 12 quilts for their wedding plus a 13<sup>th</sup> "bride's quilt"...people put in a deliberate mistake because otherwise it

was arrogant to think you were perfect...don't get me started!) Serious quilt history research, depending on studying original period sources, gets more reliable in the 1980s.

\*Great online resource for quilts: the **Quilt Index**, [quiltindex.org](http://quiltindex.org), which is a database combining quilts from many state documentation n projects and museums who have contributed their collections. Search by pattern name, location, date range, maker's name if you have one...lots of articles on different types of quilts and other info, but if you want to look at lots and lots of examples of one or another pattern such as crazies, from a lot of sources, this is a great resource.

**Crazy Quilts:** a good introduction/overview is here:

<https://worldquilts.quiltstudy.org/crazyquiltstory/origins>

Barbara Brackman, one of our foremost quilt historians, discusses some different types of crazies in her blog posts: <https://barbarabrackman.blogspot.com/2018/07/contained-crazy-quilts.html> and <https://barbarabrackman.blogspot.com/2010/09/crazy-quilt-outliers.html> She discusses the Oscar Wilde connection here <https://barbarabrackman.blogspot.com/2018/09/oscar-crazy-quilts-1-correct-flowers.html> and here <https://barbarabrackman.blogspot.com/2018/09/oscar-crazy-quilts-2-portraits.html>

**African American quilt history:** lots of myths here too but reliable authors include Carolyn Mazloomi (whose exhibition of contemporary African American quilts in her collection is at the Renwick through June 21; she writes mostly about contemporary quilts), Kyra Hicks (*Black Threads: African American Quilting Sourcebook*, *This I accomplish: Harriet Powers' Bible Quilt and Other Pieces*), Cuesta Benberry (*Always There: The African-American Presence in American Quilts*), and Barbara Brackman (*Facts and Fabrications: Unraveling the History of Quilts and Slavery*).

African American quilts from various museum collections:

the Smithsonian's Anacostia Museum:

<https://anacostia.si.edu/collection/spotlight/african-american-quilts>

International Quilt Study Center:

<https://www.internationalquiltmuseum.org/collection/african-american>

Youtube lecture by Dr. Carolyn Mazloomi on African American quilt history:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ToXLhP7LiMg>

PBS episode on African American quilt history: <https://www.pbs.org/articles/black-quilters-historians-and-memory-keepers>

**Esther Krinitz's work** is visible online at [artandremembrance.org](http://artandremembrance.org) with high-resolution images of each work which you can zoom in on to see the details of stitches and yarn and so on; each piece has a short 1-2 minute video telling more about the scene; and other pages on the site talk more about Esther's life (same video you will see, but may not have full time for, in the gallery). There's also a book, *Memories of Survival*, by Esther and her daughter Bernice Steinhardt.

### **Claire McCardell**

*Claire McCardell: The Designer Who Set Women Free*, Elizabeth Evitts Dickinson

*What Shall I Wear?: The What, Where, When, and How Much of Fashion*, New Edition Claire McCardell with intro by Alison Tolman

*Empresses of Seventh Avenue: World War II, New York City, and the Birth of American Fashion* by Nancy MacDonell