

### Stitched Memories: Biographical Vignettes, Quilts, And Activities Present Social History

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## Review

### STITCHED MEMORIES

#### **Biographical vignettes, quilts, and activities present social history**

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**Brackman, Barbara** *Civil War Women: Their Quilts, Their Roles & Activities for Re-Enactors*. C&T; Publishing, Inc., 2000-10-01. \$25.95 ISBN 1571201041

Quilts have long held a fascination for Americans. Highly symbolic and intricately constructed, their patterns contain historical meaning understood by their creators as well as their modern collectors. Barbara Brackman is a quilter and historian who recognizes the importance of these textiles, particularly those produced during the Civil War. **Civil War Women**, her latest book, explores individual women and quilts of the period, and the connections that can be made between them.

The research and patterns in Brackman's 1997 book, *Quilts from the Civil War*, were well-received. That book provides historical information - on the Underground Railroad, soldiers' aid societies, fundraising fairs, wartime hardship, and patriotism - alongside stories of quilts and their quilters. The result is as much a craft book as a history, and includes amazing photographs of original and reproduced quilts in full color.

For this reason, it might be asked: is there more to say about Civil War quilts, and can the original book be improved upon? **Civil War Women** provides a resounding "yes" to both questions.

**Civil War Women** is a feast for the eyes. Not only does it include numerous photographs of quilts and easy-to-use patterns, it is filled with period photographs and illustrations. The focus of this book is, of course, quilts. However, Brackman takes a more sociological approach by basing each of the nine chapters on a War-era woman. When describing a woman's life, Brackman chooses a quilt pattern to which she believes the subject would have been drawn, given her personality and lifestyle. Her women are diverse, from freedwoman

Susie King Taylor to nurse Hannah Ropes to spy Belle Edmondson. With each biographical sketch and quilt history she offers excellent patterns to reproduce the quilt designs shown.

The one weakness is Brackman's decision to suggest reenactor activities at the end of chapters. Most of the suggestions are mundane for the experienced reenactor (e.g. writing letters home or sewing a quilt), and some are less than appropriate for a military reenactment (giving a "stump speech" on a social movement such as abolitionism; smuggling contraband sewing goods). In fact, some of the activities would be more appropriate for museum youth programs than for a Civil War reenactment.

All in all, Barbara Brackman has produced a lovely and insightful book on women and textiles of the era. **Civil War Women** will appeal to crafters, history buffs, and reenactors alike, and offers a good list of memoirs and diaries for further research.

*Karen R Mehaffey is a library director, writer, and reenactor who is currently writing a book on mourning and the American Civil War.*