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Review of *Going West!: Quilts and Community* By Roderick Kiracofe and Sandi Fox

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home to many settlers and the quilts they carried westward in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Generations later, some of these settlers' descendants gifted surviving quilts to local historical societies and museums. Drawing on information collected as part of the Nebraska State Quilt Guild's "Quilt Preservation Project," independent curator Sandi Fox researched the quilts tucked away in these cultural institutions. The Smithsonian American Art Museum's Renwick Gallery hosted the resulting exhibit, "Going West: Quilts and Community," from October 2007 through January 2008. The exhibit's catalog, *Going West!*, includes opening thoughts by the Smithsonian American Art Museum's director, Elizabeth Broun, an introductory essay by Roderick Kiracofe, and commentaries on individual quilts by Fox.

Kiracofe, a renowned quilt dealer and author, provides a thoughtful look at his favorites among the quilts exhibited, offering both context and commentary in a lively narrative. Speculating on makers' intentions and owners' use, he demonstrates that quilts have long had symbolic value in their ability to evoke emotion and memories. Quilts that traveled overland to Nebraska took up precious cargo space, and Kiracofe speculates that many were discarded along the way. But those that arrived intact—and particularly these that were preserved for subsequent generations—no doubt were tangible mementos of the lives settlers left behind. Neither Kiracofe nor Fox addresses the next step in these objects' biographies: how they ended up in institutions like the Fort Sydney Museum or the Loup County Historical Society. The donation of these cherished family heirlooms is a significant—but here neglected—aspect of quilts' ability to serve as much more than bedcovers.

Fox's commentaries draw on diaries, letters, and memoirs from the journey west to contextualize individual quilts. Unfortunately, rarely do these sources mention quilts, and only seldom are they directly related to the person who made or owned the quilts under consideration. As a result many of these accounts

Going West!: Quilts and Community. By Roderick Kiracofe and Sandi Fox. Washington, DC: Smithsonian American Art Museum, in association with D Giles, Ltd, London, 2007. 127 pp. Color illustrations. \$49.95

Located at the convergence of three major overland trails, Nebraska became the new

remain anecdotal, rather than insightful. When lucky enough to have a maker's name, Fox relies on genealogical research to detail her life. But for the many anonymous quilts, Fox meanders and speculates, in one case hopping from a migrant Mormon girl to New England mill workers before considering the origins of an anonymous comforter stitched from fabric from the Bemis Omaha Bag Company.

The photographic reproductions are exquisite. Generous detail shots provide an up-close view of quilting stitches, fabric prints, and weave structures. For those of us who missed the exhibition, we can enjoy an intimate view of these quilts that survived trips west and have thankfully been further preserved by small museums and historical societies.

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