

That gift from grandma might be worth a considerable amount

■ CRAFT

Continued from Page D1

Karppinen, 53. "You can have a fabulous old quilt, but if it's in poor condition, in terms of value, you can have a significantly newer quilt that would have an equal or greater value."

Patterns are another consideration when determining value.

"There are fashions in quilting just as there are in interior decor and clothing," she said. "If you ask any quilter in the world what were the three most popular patterns in the late 1920s and '30s they would give you the same three answers. If you find something outside of the common, its rarity would increase its value."

She knows of a Baltimore Album Quilt that went for \$146,000. The style was popular from 1840 to 1855, she said.

Historical fabrics, marked with war motifs or presidents, also increase the going rate. Ms. Karppinen purchased a quilt top — no back, no batting — about six years ago featuring triangles dated 1776 to 1876. The centennial pieces are decorated with rust-colored eagles and American flags.

"It really has very little value other than the historical fabric," she said while spreading out the vintage quilt top and showing how the dimpled stitching prevents it from lying flat and being properly attached to a backing. "This design is triangles, really pretty simple. Anybody who can sew a straight line can really do this. You can see the quality of this work isn't good."

But because the quilt has centennial pieces, it's worth about \$250.

"There are so many historical events that were reflected in quilts. Women didn't get to vote until 1920. But they really voted with their needles," said Ms. Karppinen. "They were astute political commentators."

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, for example, used patterns such as "Drunkard's Path" and "Tumbler" to encourage sobriety.

"You have to try to discern the clues and listen to the story that the quilt is telling you. It can tell you about the economics of the maker, the skill of the maker, the occupation of the maker," said Ms. Karppinen. "There is one crazy quilt in the Bowers Museum in Orange County that is made of Victorian silks. The maker was an opera star who quilted. She had her opera gowns and dresses made, and saved all the leftovers."

Complicated designs and solid construction also give a quilt value. Ms. Karppinen said it shouldn't be put together like many found at department stores that have only four stitches per inch versus 10 or more.

"We call them toenail hookers," said Ms. Karppinen with a giggle. "If the



LEN WOOD / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS

"Buy what you like because then you can enjoy it," said quilt appraiser Linda Karppinen. "If nothing else, at least you can wrap up in it when it rains."

stitches are that big, you can catch your toes in them."

The Santa Barbara resident has been hooked on quilts ever since her mother and sister-in-law taught her the techniques more than 20 years ago. She began appraising them in 1996 after attending classes in Colorado offered by the American Quilter's Society. She said it's the perfect job because "you sit and people bring you quilts to look at" and you can dig up history.

"It's a never-ending search," she said. "There's an element of chasing clues like a genealogist. If you find an answer, it just brings you 10 more questions. If I figure out this was professionally quilted, I have to ask myself, 'OK. How does that jibe with the story that the quilt was the property of an Appalachian hillbilly mother of 11 children who died at age 32, poor as dirt?' Why was this her quilt — and did she really make it?"

Many of Ms. Karppinen's clients who make their own quilts want them appraised for insurance purposes. Others are simply curious about the

dusty old cloth they found in the attic. Her local business usually picks up when adult education quilting classes begin in the fall, but she's in demand year-round in the Los Angeles area.

The lowest appraisal Ms. Karppinen has ever given is \$200. But she actually was approached with a pre-World War II Hawaiian quilt she suspects was worth about \$20,000. Dutifully following the code of ethics that goes along with her job, she passed on giving an estimate since that particular style was beyond her expertise.

Why would anyone want to drop 20 G's on a quilt when they could cuddle up in a new VW Cabrio? Investing in quilts, it turns out, is more than just financial.

"You take 100 people down the street and say, 'Was your grandmother a quilter?' Fifty or 60 of them will say, 'Yeah, my grandmother was a quilter.'"

"There's an emotional connection to them," added Ms. Karppinen. "They're tender artifacts."

e-mail: cboechler@newspress.com



One of Mrs. Karppinen's big finds is a quilt top made of historical fabric featuring triangles dated 1776 to 1876.

SEW TOGETHER

Susan West, publicity chair for the quilt show, invites quilters and quilter wannabees to become a member of the Coastal Quilters Guild or sit in on a monthly meeting.

"It's kind of nice to be with a group of women where you're not just saying, 'Nice haircut!' 'Great earrings!' 'Nice pair of shoes!' she said.

Especially if you're a guy.

The Guild meets at 7 p.m. the second Thursday of every month at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, 4575 Auhay Drive, Santa Barbara. Annual memberships are about \$25 and meetings are \$5 for nonmembers. Information: 687-1443 or www.coastalquilters.org.

CARING FOR QUILTS

Linda Karppinen offers these tips to keep your quilt in top shape:

● **Don't wash** — Colors might run, threads could break. "Sometimes the dirt is the only thing holding these guys together." Cleaning alternative: Secure mesh-like material, such as a nylon stocking, over vacuum nozzle and carefully vacuum both sides. The stocking prevents the material from being sucked up and losing embellishments.

● **Never store in plastic bags** — Condensation, rot, mildew and odor might form. Instead, fold quilt so binding is inside and wrap in a 100 percent cotton sheet or place inside a cotton pillowcase.

● **Limit light exposure** — Could wash out color or turn quilt brown.

● **Dry it outside** — If you feel the need to wash a quilt, dry it by placing a sheet on the grass, laying the quilt on top and covering it with another sheet. "Chlorophyll has a cleansing effect." It can also sweeten a musty, dry quilt.

● **Avoid contact with wood or paper** — Forget storing the quilt in a cedar chest — unless it's wrapped as above. Eventually, acid will leach out of paper and wood (if it's not coated with polyurethane) and could cause stains.