

## A Brief History of Quilling

Quilling is a lovely old art form which some believe may date back to ancient Egypt. It has been known by many names including paper-rolling, paper-scrolling, filigree, paper mosaic. It is theorized that early quillers rolled their papers on a feather, or quill, hence the name quilling. Through the years its popularity has waxed and waned.

French and Italian nuns during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, decorated reliquaries and holy pictures with quilling. During the regency and Victorian eras, young ladies of affluence were taught paper filigree just as they were taught needlework. They decorated furniture, tea caddies, and boxes which were made with recessed sides specifically to accommodate quilling. The quilling during this period was quite “heavy” by our standards. Every inch of space was covered with tiny coils and shapes. Mica, wax chips and flaked shells were often added. References to quilling and patterns were published in magazines in the 1700’s. In 1875 “Mosaicon” kits were produced. In an article called Floral Mosaicon found in an Edwardian book of household management, mention is made of quill work being purchased by Queen Mary and Queen Alexander.

In the United States, early examples of quilling were usually scones and coats of arms. After the early nineteenth century, quilling all but disappeared. Margaret Carlson, of Kansas City Missouri, is credited with starting the “modern” revival of this art (in the mid 1950’s), after being asked to repair and do restorative work on some very old pieces. She became interested in the art form herself and taught many people to quill. In the mid-sixties, Gini Antoine of Independence, Missouri, pioneered a lacy form of paper filigree and began the custom of naming the different coils and shapes. Betty Christy’s book *“Quilling, Paper art for everyone”* published in 1974, listed 29 companies that specialized in quilling. Quilling papers and kits could be found in every “mom and pop” craft store. Unfortunately, once the big craft store chains started taking over, most of the small stores went out of business. Of the 29 companies listed in Betty’s book, only one survived. Hers. One fledgling company NOT listed in Betty Christy’s book was Lake City Crafts. Malinda Johnston, a Missouri quiller, started her company in 1974 just as Betty’s book was published. Lake City Crafts went on to become the largest manufacturer of quilling supplies, books, and kits in the country.

While quilling struggled for survival here in the USA, quilling was alive and well in England. In 1983, English quillers formed The Quilling Guild. The mission of the Guild is to promote and spread the art of quilling and enable quillers to meet and exchange ideas. I learned about the English Guild through Lake City Craft’s newsletter. I joined the English Guild as soon as I learned about it. When I received my membership information, I found the names of 12 other American quillers. These were the only other quillers I was aware of other than those I had taught to quill. I became the American representative to the English Guild and shortly thereafter began writing a newsletter, *“Quill America”* for the American quillers. In 1993, a small group of American quillers attended the International Festival of Quilling in England. They had such a wonderful time with each other, that they planned a reunion meeting in New Jersey the following spring. The meeting was such a success, that the American quillers, who kept in touch through *“Quill America”*, have had a national meeting each year. At the 2000 Quill America meeting, held in Nova Scotia, it was decided to organize the American and Canadian quillers into an official quilling guild. The North American Quilling Guild was born, and *“Quill America”* became its official newsletter. The quilling guilds of England and USA have played a large part in the revival of this beautiful art.

Another very important factor in this current quilling revival is been the internet. There is a large active group of quillers from all over the world who exchange ideas and scan their work for each other to see. Martha Stewart has even jumped on the bandwagon. Her February 2002 article about quilling in *“Martha Stewart Living”* stirred up so much interest that Lake City Crafts had to hire additional staff to keep up with the orders. Most recently, the scrapbooking industry has discovered quilling bringing a whole new group of potential quillers. We continue to write this ever changing history with each new person who learns to quill.

*Patricia Caputo*