

Nineteenth Century Potholder Quilts

Use the following guidelines to make your potholder quilt:

1. When selecting a size for your finished block, remember that the seam allowance WILL be included in the finished block; thus a traditional 8" block will become an 8 ¼ inch block when made by hand, or an 8 ½ inch block when made by machine. (The ¼ inch difference has to do with fabric shrinkage in hand work.)
2. After piecing the block either by hand or machine, layer the block with batting and back fabric. Pin or baste the piece as you prefer.
3. NOTE: the most authentic 19th Century batting available today is Mountain Mist Blue Ribbon 100% cotton batting. Traditionally, the back fabrics in potholder blocks are a mismatch of unused fabrics or occasionally a solid fabric is used.
4. Quilt the individual block by either hand or machine. Although machine quilting and piecing were uncommon during the Civil War, several of the surviving Civil War Union soldiers' quilts have blocks that are machine pieces and/or machine quilted.
5. If hand quilting, be sure that the batting and the back are at least two inches bigger (or more) on all four sides so that the piece can be secured into a quilting pvc frame. This allows for the traditional hand quilting method to be used and will give a finer block. However, because the blocks are small, you may simply quilt the block by using the same running stitch you used to piece the block. If you choose this method, heavily baste the piece to prevent slippage and ease of handling as you maneuver the block for quilting.
6. When the block is completely assembled and quilted, trim excess back, batting and top to make the block square and to make it the desired finished size.
7. Bind the quilt using a personal preference technique 19th Century binding techniques different from today's; but today's work well.
8. Finish the quilt by joining two blocks with tops facing each other and by whip stitching from the back along one side very near the edge of the finished binding. (Remember to bury your beginning and ending stitches) Although this whip stitching will generally show on the back, on the front it should look like sashing with a quilting line running down the center. Continue to add one block at a time in this method until the desired width of the quilt is reached. Complete more rows and add the rows together in the same method until the desired length is reached.
9. When the quilt is completely assembled, wash in cold water with a mild soap. Lay the quilt out in a flat area such as a bed, floor, or table to dry. Be sure to block and straighten the quilt while wet as it sets while drying. The whip stitching on the back will recede into the quilt with time and repeated washings.