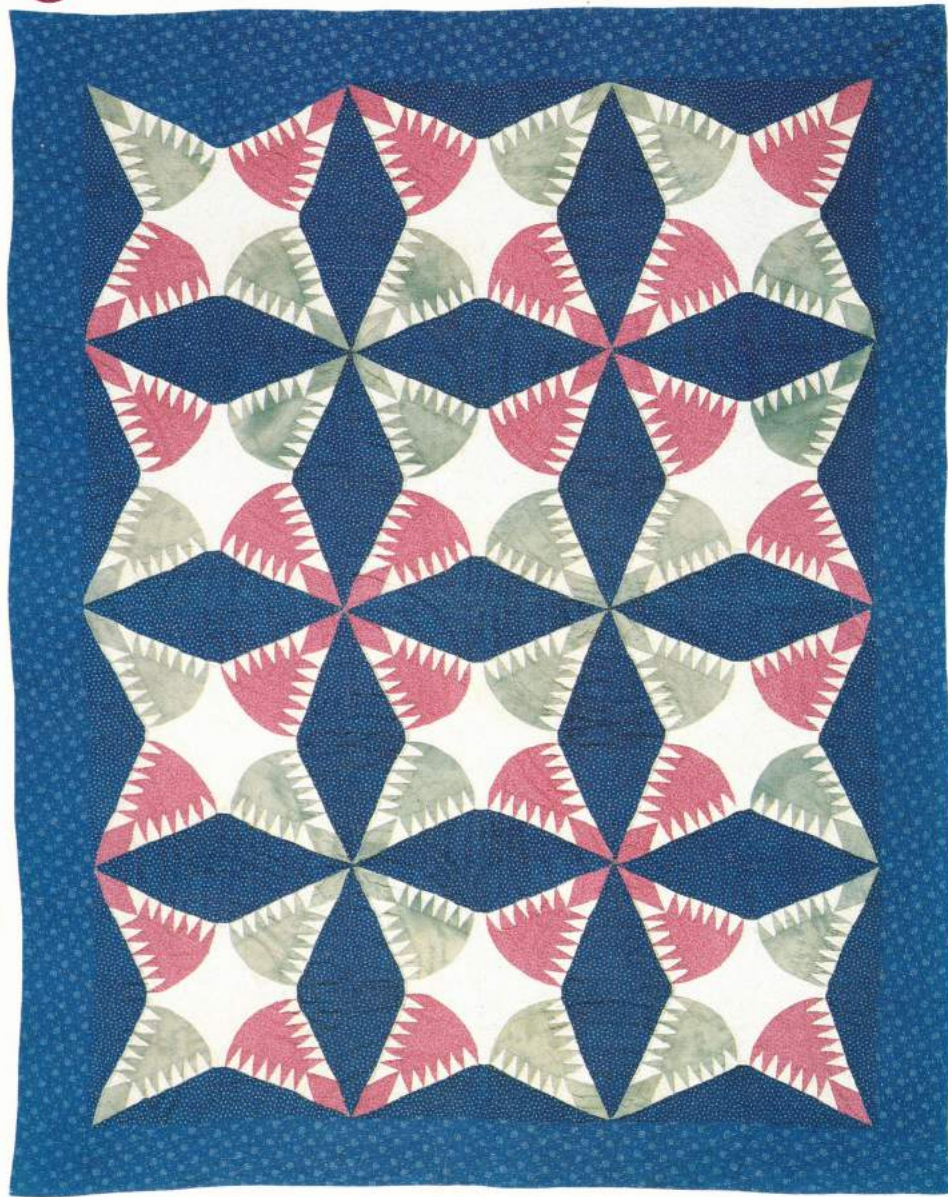


QUILT CLOSE-UP



FIVE SOUTHERN VIEWS

GRANDMA MITCHELL

Of Sand Mountain, Alabama

by Flavin Glover



Quilting is only one aspect of the work accomplished by Grandma Mitchell. One can readily learn about her life's experiences through her exceptionally keen memory and willingness to share. Now eighty-seven, she is alert and resourceful. While her eyes and hands no longer allow her to quilt and crochet, she routinely plays Scrabble and works crossword puzzles with amazing speed. You will hear more praise about her as a woman of character and wit than as a quilter. She is highly revered by her family.

It was through Jimmy and Londa Pate that I learned about their Grandma Mitchell who is often a topic of conversation in their home. She is deemed a remarkable woman who, at her age, still remains open and receptive to new ideas and experiences. Londa recently referred to her as "an eighty-seven-year-old student."

When Jimmy was asked his Grandma Mitchell's age, he paused, strained to recall, then responded, "Oh, uh, she's around seventy years old." The inquirer doubted the accuracy of his reply, since Jimmy's mother is sixty-three! Londa corrected him by saying, "Your grandmother is eighty-seven." "Oh, she is?" he replied, surprised. "I don't think of her as being that old."

It is understandable that Jimmy sees his grandmother as a younger, more vital person than an octogenarian. Jimmy, a nationally known Scrabble player, finds Grandma Mitchell a formidable opponent. During one of his recent visits to Cherokee County, she beat him! Later, at a routine game with a neighbor, she scored over four hundred points! You can see why people who live in the Sand Rock community, which has been her home for the past ten years, are wary when she challenges them to a game. Her daughter, Ruby Pate, is a good sport and typically plays at least one game with her each day, win or lose.

She was born Trudie Clegg, on July 28, 1895, in Randolph County, Alabama and lived most of her life in Randolph and Clay Counties. Her mother, Mary Green Clegg, died when she was young. It was her oldest sister, Sally Clegg Lynn, who taught her the rudiments of sewing around the age of twelve or thirteen years. Mrs. Mitchell recounted, "Sally had a big collection of quilts and patterns. Quilting was one of her hobbies that she kept working on even after she had arthritis. Her work was so pretty!"

She recalled Sally sitting at the quilt frame teaching her stitching techniques on a certain quilt which she remembered. "While I was learning, and when Sally wasn't watching, I would get under the quilt and stick the needle back up, through it. There were some pretty stitches on that quilt," she laughed. Sally was a good teacher, as Grandma Mitchell's quilts indicate. I was impressed by the complexity and craftsmanship of their quilts.

Grandma Mitchell recalled some of the traditions of her day:

A girl was supposed to have at least four quilts by marriage

time, one for each bed. I pieced nearly all of my quilts by hand. I'd make two or three every winter. I enjoyed it and after we got married I needed to make them for cover, to keep warm.

Most of the time I made string quilts from dresses we made and we'd swap scraps with friends. Chicken feed sacks were used to make lots of quilts. Some had big flowers on them and some would have checks. They would last for years.

We'd get enough lining to do two or more quilts at a time. It generally cost a nickel a yard. We got balls of quilting thread, thread that was larger than sewing thread and smaller than crochet thread.

We had one pattern I called Step-Around-the-Mountain, with dark piecing in the middle, a white row around and a dark row around. I have several pieced like that.

We picked scattered cotton and carried it to the gin. We saved it in sacks until we needed to make a quilt batting. It would take a chair-full of cotton to make one batting, usually two and a half to three pounds. It didn't take long to card one . . . just a few minutes. [It took approximately 150 carded batts, though, to make one quilt batting.] Later I bought them already fixed. Seems like they cost from \$1.00 to \$1.50. The white battings were higher.

We would have 'quiltings.' We'd all meet in each others' homes and quilt. The girls would do the cooking. We'd quilt as many as three quilts in one day. We needed a lot of quilts back then.

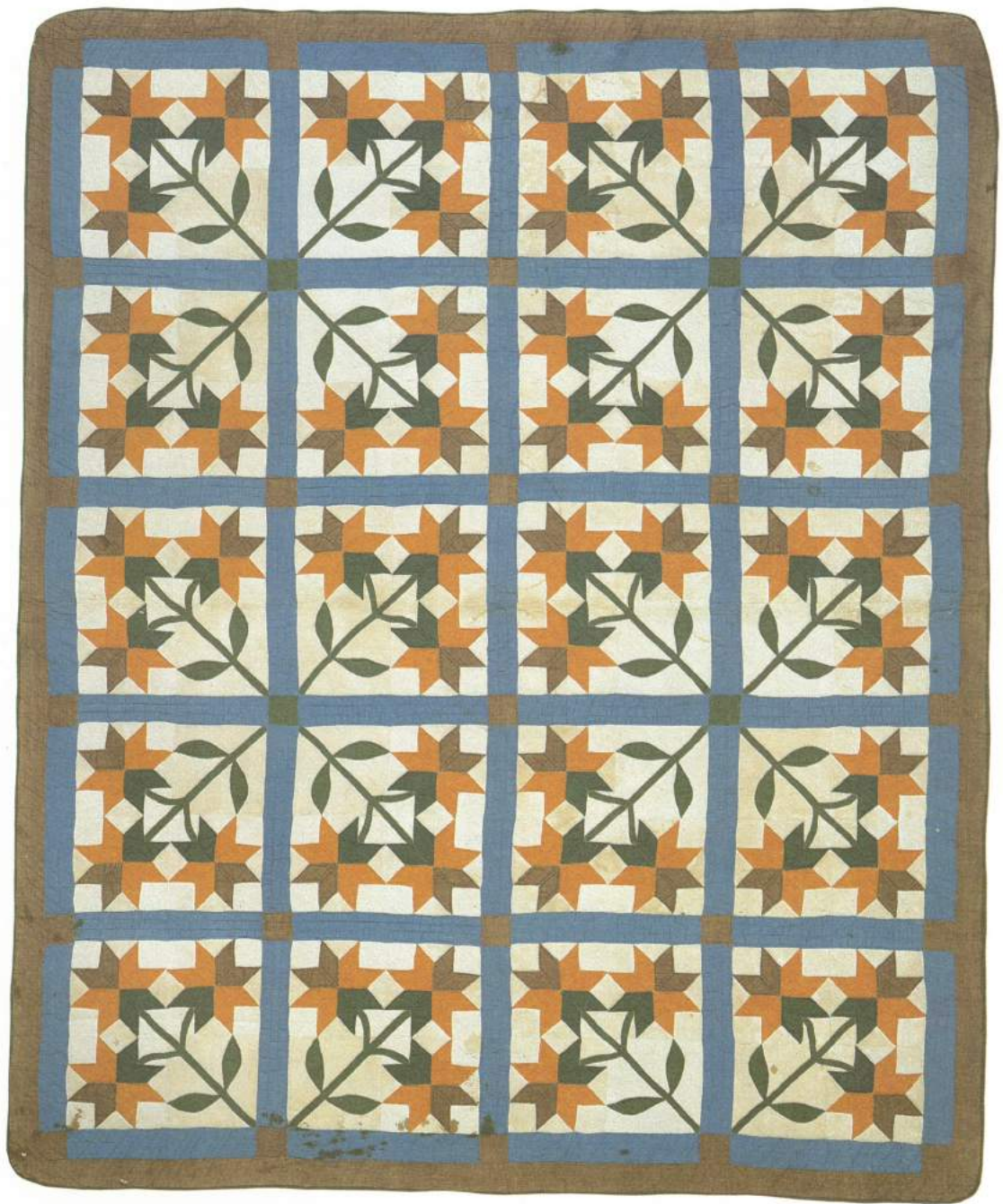
We'd air them (the quilts) by hanging on the line and let them sun. We'd wash them in a big black pot . . . boil them . . . like we did our clothes . . . wring them out and hang on the line.

I started embroidery after I had been married a long time. I was forty or fifty years old when I started making what I call 'pretty quilts,' like the State Flowers and State Birds. I made several appliqué quilts, too. A long time ago, we took a snuff box and rubbed in our hair. We laid a new piece of material on the old embroidery pattern and rubbed it with the snuff box, to transfer the patterns from piece to piece.

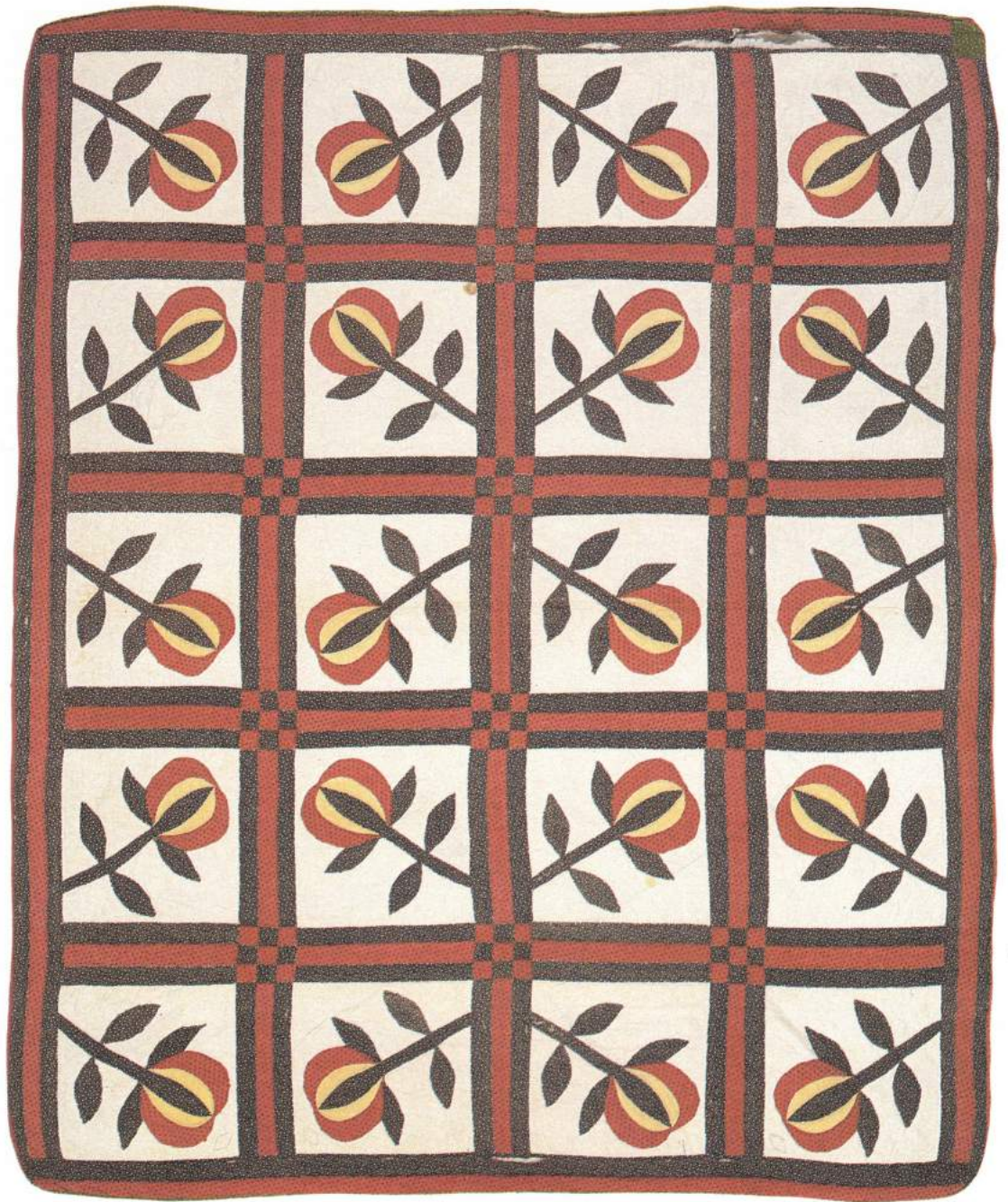
Grandma Mitchell kept her hands busy with needlework for over seventy years. In her "spare" minutes she was hand-tatting lace, making clothing for her family, quilting, embroidering, and crocheting. Her grandchildren recall favorite recipes she can prepare like no one else can. She was a good manager of her time. She allowed the duties of motherhood to come before her needlework and never allowed her housework to go unfinished. "I got my other work done before I sat down to quilt," she stated, proudly. Today she still practices that habit and her apartment is clean and tidy.

Trudie Mitchell has designated a special quilt to be given to each family member. Today, Trudy Pate is quilting on her mother's quilt frames. The tradition is alive and well. Her family indicates a high degree of appreciation for their Grandma Mitchell's quilts and other needlework. Although she has retired now from quilting, her quilts will be a handmade legacy to treasure.

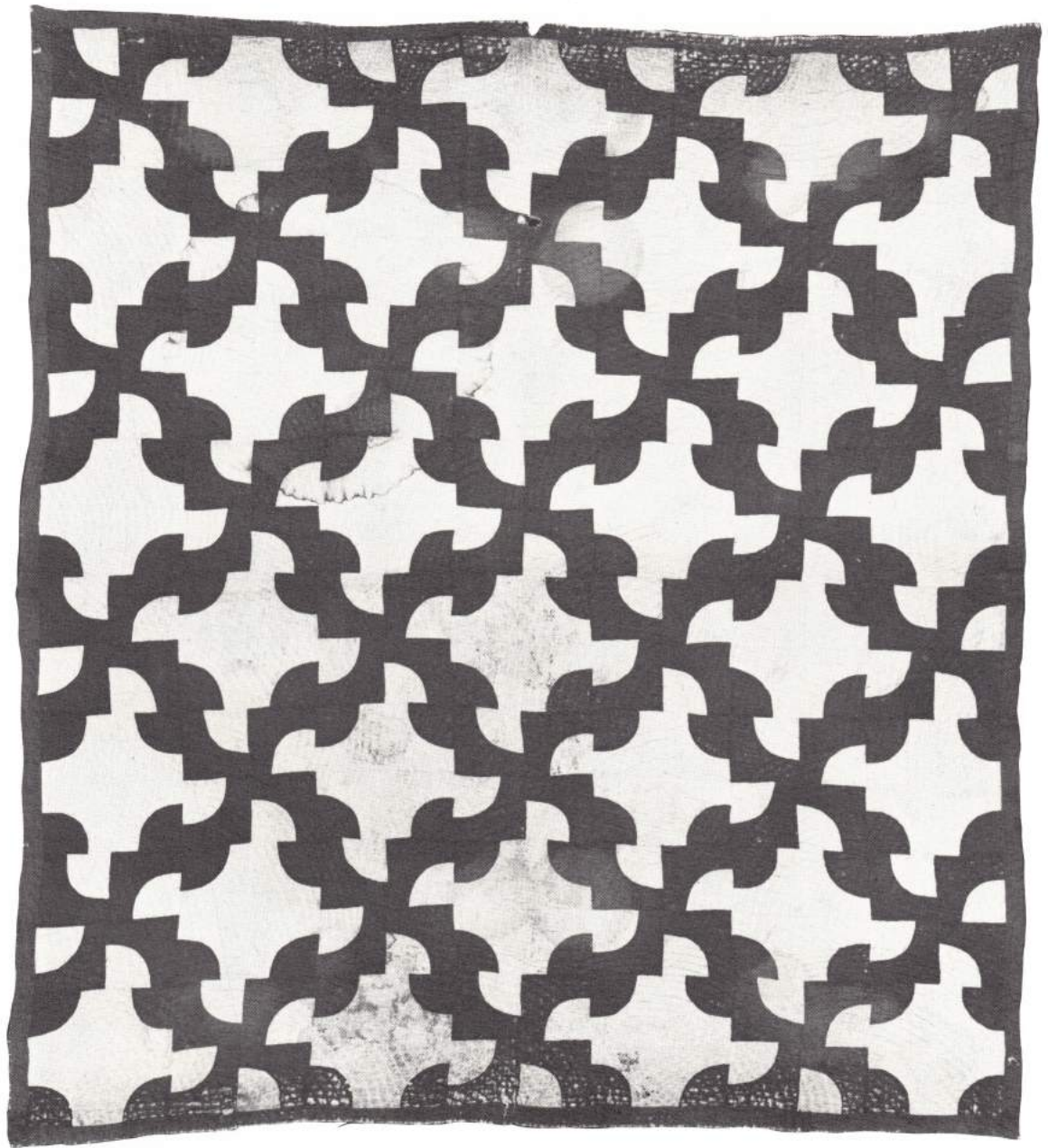
Flavin Glover is an Alabamian who has gained attention for her scenic log-cabin-design quilts. She is sometimes aided by her husband, Glenn, an able draftsman. They live in Auburn where she is a counselor for adolescents, an avid quilt researcher and a teacher.



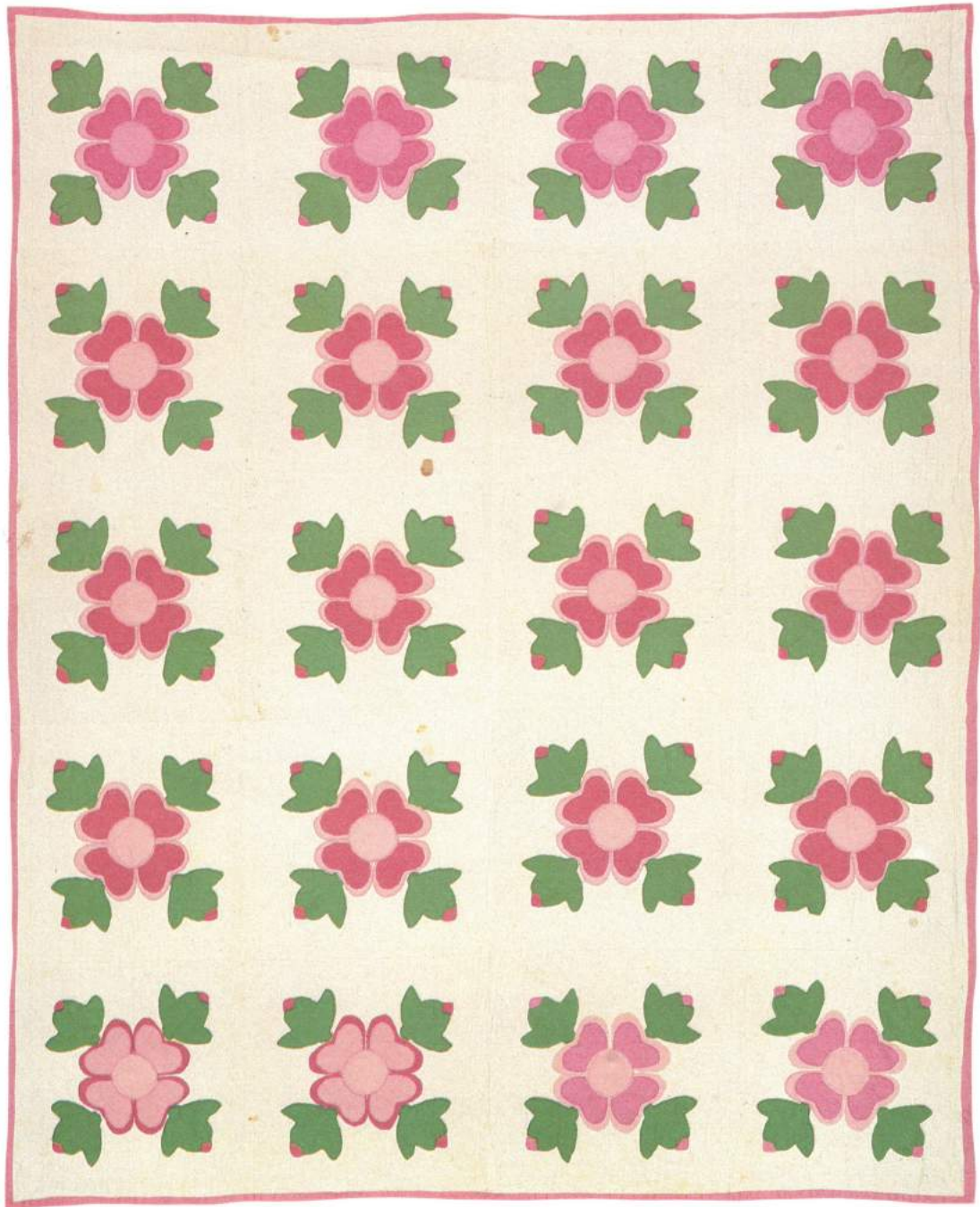
15. *NORTH CAROLINA LILY*



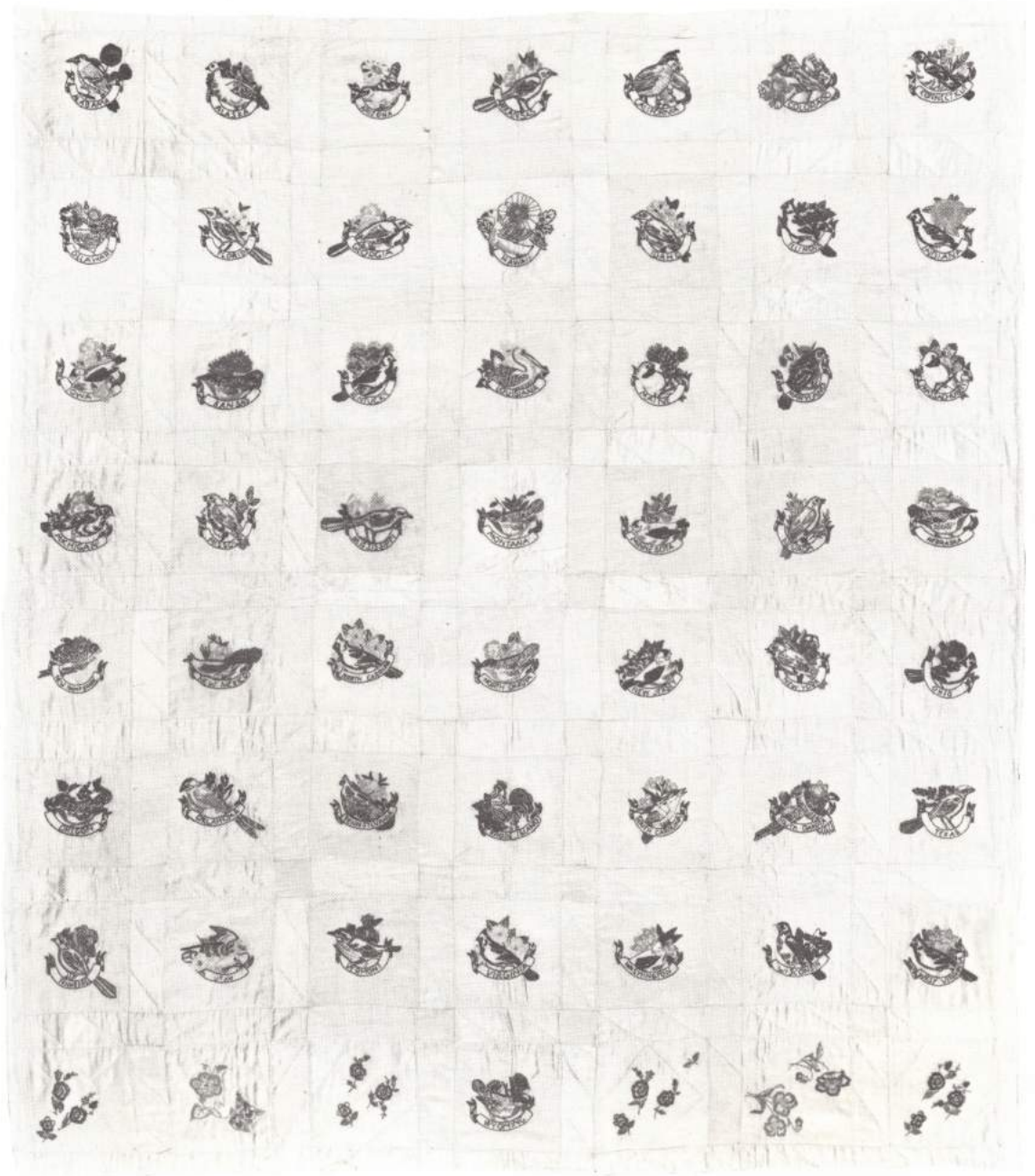
16. *TULIP*



17. *DRUNKARD'S PATH*



18. ROSE



19. STATE BIRDS