

Pieced, appliquéd, and embroidered summer quilt, original pattern attributed to Emily L. (Wiley) Munroe (1823-1894) of Lynnfield, c. 1865.

Wool and cotton

69" x 68.5"

Collection of the New England Quilt Museum (2000. 02)

MQ #1538

The donors of this quilt to the New England Quilt Museum stated that it descended in the family of Wesley W. Munroe (1896-1964) of Lynnfield. Research reveals that the quilt was almost certainly made by Wesley's grandmother, Emily L. (Wiley) Munroe, the only daughter of Robert and Rosetta Wiley. Emily married Luther Simonds Munroe (1823-1885) in 1851, and together they had three daughters and three sons. As farmers in Lynnfield, the Wileys and Munroes supplied the nearby cities of Boston and Salem, as well as surrounding manufacturing towns, with eggs, milk, cheese, fresh produce, and hay.¹ Luther owned land valued at \$2,000 in the 1850 federal census—considerably more than his neighbors. Members of the family were also involved with the manufacturing of shoes, the largest industry in the state.²

Emily recycled the everyday, coarse wools and cottons of a farmer's wardrobe for use in her extraordinary folk art bedcover. The backgrounds of the 54 blocks consist of twill- and plain-woven wool and wool/cotton mixed fabrics in shades of brown, black, gray-blue, tan, and beige. Many of the fabrics are pieced to make them large enough for the squares, and they show signs of their original wearing, such as shininess from the seat of woolen trousers. Emily chose particularly coarse white wool for the horse and dog in the center block to give them a visual texture as if they were embroidered with French knots. She made the "clay" flower pots of coarsely-woven pumpkin-colored wool—a fabric commonly found on the back of New England's whole-cloth wool quilts. She appliquéd leaves of the flowers of green baize, probably cut from the lining of an old coat or cloak, or from a worn-out table cover, and she used cotton tape to embellish the horse saddles. With an extra touch of artistry and attention to detail, Emily often twisted yarns of two different colors to outline her motifs and used couching stitches to keep them in place. Each block of the quilt is worked on a foundation of denim, striped ticking, or plain cotton. Emily turned the edges of each 8 ½-inch-square block back and under, then whip-stitched the blocks together. There is no further finish around the outer edges, and no backing on the quilt.

The fabrics are consistent with the donor's belief that this quilt was made around the time of the Civil War. The connection to the war is found on Emily's side of the family. Four of her six brothers enlisted: Daniel and Joseph joined together on June 13, 1861 and served in the same regiment, Charles volunteered for duty in 1864; and baby

¹ Thomas B. Wellman, *History of the Town of Lynnfield, Mass., 1635-1895* (Boston: The Blanchard & Watts Engraving Co., 1895), 142.

² At that time, 41,000 men in Massachusetts (one out of eight) were employed in the shoemaking industry. W. H. Richardson, *The Boot and Shoe Manufacturers' Assistant and Guide*. (Boston: Higgins, Bradley & Dayton, 1858), 16.

brother Zachary Taylor Wiley lied about his age, declaring himself to be 21, in order to enlist in 1864 when he was actually only 16.³ No war in American history cost more lives—over 600,000 men were dead by the time the end came in the spring of 1865. Emily must have anxiously scanned the lists of dead and wounded in the newspapers at every opportunity, not only for her brothers, but for the scores of other Lynnfield men who served with the federal troops. With what distress did she greet the news that Joseph had been wounded at the Battle of Gettysburg, or when Daniel was wounded a year later? Was she thinking of Charles and young Zachary, who both served in the cavalry, when she appliquéd the horses on her quilt? They were all her younger brothers, and as the only sister and older sibling, she must have provided much of their care when they were little. Her concern was not just sisterly, but motherly. Did the quilt offer some distraction and comfort from her worry? Was she thinking of happier days as she embellished with embroidery the white house in the center—their childhood home?—and surrounded it with designs of apple trees, pet cats, dogs, horses, and baskets of flowers? Or perhaps the quilt was made in celebration once they all returned home safely. Emily's brothers were more fortunate than George W. Wiley of Lynnfield—undoubtedly a relative—who died of disease while serving in Maryland in 1864.

The exact motivations for the creation of this bed cover are no longer known, but clearly it reflects the life and loves of the family and was treasured by them. Emily's son, Harry Wingate Munroe, was probably the one who inherited the quilt. It next passed to his son, Wesley Wingate Munroe, who married local school teacher and widow Bernice Lang Ayers. Wesley and Bernice did not have children together, so the quilt passed to Bernice's daughter-in-law, who donated it to the New England Quilt Museum.

LZB

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³ *Massachusetts Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines in the Civil War* (Norwood, MA: Norwood Press, 1931), Vol. I 347. Zachary T. Wiley was born in 1848.