

Pieced quilt, “King David’s Crown,” attributed to Susan Lorinda Brigham Munroe Shepherd (1821-1897) of Northampton, c. 1850.

Cotton

75" x 93 1/2"

Collection of Historic Northampton

MQ # 3946

The will of Thomas Shepherd established the Shepherd family home, along with its myriad contents, as a museum memorializing the Shepherd family in Northampton. The house is now owned and operated by the local historical society. The Shepherd family—Thomas in particular—kept everything. Multiple archival boxes hold documents and photographs chronicling the Shepherd family members’ business activities and daily home life, their travels, and their participation in the colonial revival movement.

This quilt was probably made by Thomas’s mother, Susan Munroe Shepherd, the daughter of John Foye Munroe and Susan Lorinda Brigham Munroe of Boston. After graduating from the Arcade High School of Boston in 1836 at the age of fifteen, Susan was sent to the Gothic Seminary in Northampton, a prestigious ladies’ academy. According to an 1836 catalogue of the school, Miss Margarette Dwight, proprietess, emphasized “the cultivation of traits of character that are estimable,” eradicating bad habits, and preparing students for “future usefulness” by “the acquisition of general and practical knowledge.”¹ Following this introduction to the goals of the school, Miss Dwight presented a long list of “standards” every pupil should strive to reach in their studies and in their behavior. Susan wrote these standards into her copybook, with the added notation that she had “not knowingly or intentionally violated them.”² The Gothic Seminary, in accordance with its name and architecture, was a very religious school. Miss Dwight declared that “THE WORD OF GOD is considered, not only [as] the means of enlightening the conscience, and purifying the heart, but as the *basis* of *all* correct Education.”

Appropriately, for she was a religious woman, Susan chose for her quilt a design that has assumed a biblical name, “King David’s Crown.”³ She probably made the quilt in preparation for her marriage to Henry Shepherd (1811-1900) of Northampton in 1851. The quilt is made of a variety of dress calicoes, including a bright orange wavy stripe which strikingly sets off the darker “crowns.” Made in a T-shape, the quilt would fit nicely around the foot posts of a tall-post bed.

Because widower Henry had four children, Susan instantly became a mother when they married. In her diary, Susan related in discreet Victorian fashion her emotions

¹ Shepherd family archives, box 5 folder 12, Historic Northampton.

² Ibid.

³ King David was the second king of ancient Israel, slayer of Goliath, and a wise and powerful ruler who brought prosperity to his people.

on her wedding day: “My sensations upon assuming the responsible situation in life and not that alone but Mother also—I will draw a veil over such feelings, they are sacred and even I can not transcribe them.”⁴

From generation to generation, the Shepherd family was active in Northampton business and farming. Henry’s father, Thomas Shepherd, imported some of the first merino sheep to the United States and became a successful manufacturer of fine wool broadcloth. Henry chose farming over manufacturing or merchandising; to supplement his income, he became superintendent of what soon became the Western Union Company. He was remembered as “a frisky man,” and a talented horseman.⁵ Susan and Henry’s son, Thomas (1856-1923), became the most successful businessman of the family. He presented Northampton’s citizens with a new wing for the local hospital, in addition to a number of other generous gifts.

LZB

510 words

⁴ Shepherd family archives, box 5, folder 14.

⁵ “The Shepherd Family of Northampton,” archives introduction, p. 5.