

Duncan Stars

Block Number: H 4
by Ginger Todd

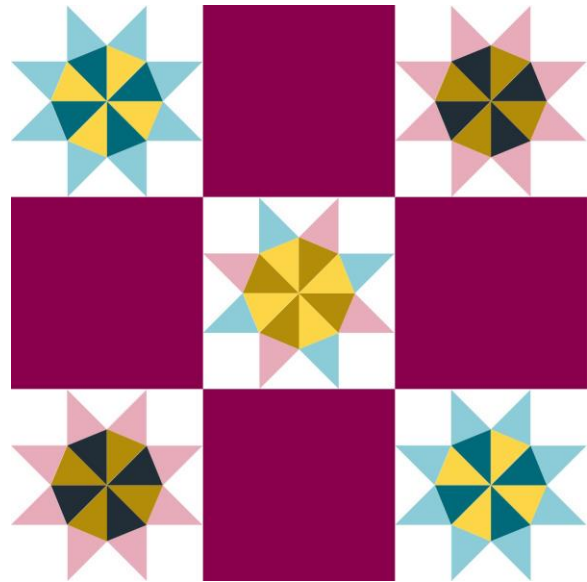
McDowell Rural Heritage Quilt Block
DUNCAN STARS A "History Mystery"

The newest quilt block on the Heritage Trail is located on a quiet wooded section off Dysartsville Road, where the American Flag waves proudly in the front yard of the old home place and Hemi, the farm's family dog, offers visitors a warm and friendly welcome. The host of Block H-4 is Romulus Jolley Duncan, who purchased the original property of 250 acres from J.W. Howell of Green Mountain, around 1955.

Romulus served in the field artillery division during World War II throughout most of the military action. During 1946-49 he attended Berea College in Kentucky, majoring in Agriculture. Later, after purchasing the farm around 1955, he was employed at Burke Dairy, while his wife Genevieve served as an elementary school teacher in Dysartsville. Duncan and his wife, Genevieve Tate Duncan, who passed away in December 1993, raised their three children on the homestead and Duncan still resides in the 100-plus year old home with his son Ronald Eugene Duncan.

Mr. Duncan recently celebrated his 91st birthday on July 4th of this year and approved of his son Ronald's idea to host a quilt block in recognition of the longevity of the farm. Ronald came upon the idea from seeing blocks throughout the county, articles in the McDowell News and discussions with current hosts led him to make contact with the McDowell Arts Association.

The idea of the design for the quilt block originated from a quilt that lay at the end of a rope cord, four-poster, $\frac{3}{4}$ - bed in the home. Cord beds were mainly used in rural areas, and although there were various sizes, they were usually shorter than a standard bed. A wood bed frame would have lengths of ropes (sometimes strips of leather) stretched and



latted across it, forming a base for a mattress of some sort.

Frequently the ropes needed to be tightened to ensure firmer support and a better nights sleep as they tended to sag in the middle, especially when the bed was first set up and the ropes new. This chore usually fell to the older boys in the household who used a tool called a bed key. The boys worked on opposite sides of the bed and tightened the ropes as they worked their way around the bed. An interesting note is that the expression "sleep tight" originated from the benefits of a recently tightened rope bed. The Duncan's rope bed is now stored out in a barn on the property but the quilt was brought out for display and served as a pattern for the heritage block.

The mother of Romulus, Constance Jolley Duncan, once did some reporting for the Spruce Pine newspaper Tri-County News (now Mitchell News-Journal). She was often driven around the area by his father for her article's material as she had no driver's license. Constance also authored a true historical narrative entitled: Through Tinted Lenses, published in 1959. It was in this book that a separate note was found among the

pages indicating that the cord bed in question was made in 1830, but there was no mention of the quilt. As is the home-site, an examination of the quilt indicates it is well over 100 years old by the quality hand stitching and placing of the pieces.

In the 1960's a tree farm was started and subsequently areas of the property bordering Hopper and South Muddy Creeks became a managed conservation easement in conjunction with the U.S. Forest Service to act as a buffer in preventing erosion. The Loblolly Pines (also known as the N.C. Pine or Arkansas Pine) are abundant in the area and are classified as Southern Yellow Pines, because of their yellow resinous wood. The word loblolly means: "a low wet place", however the trees are not limited to that habitat. The Loblolly Pine, which is able to endure ice storms, is thinned and harvested at appropriate time frames. It is an important commercial tree North Carolina, highly prized for its lumber as well as wood pulp used in paper making and other fibrous materials.

The pattern on the quilt inherited by the Duncan family, left by an unknown seamstress, is an interpretation of the star quilt pattern. Often referred to as the Lone Star quilt, one of the most popular since the 1800's, it features eight-pointed stars in the design and may remind you of looking into a kaleidoscope. The patterns were often more time-consuming to create than other quilt patterns and reflect a rich history of craftsmanship, incorporating the quilter's own favorite notions. The uniqueness of the various scraps and colors used in the hand pieced and quilted patterns tell stories of the quilter's heritage and that of her region and are historically treated as family treasures.

The original barn on the property, has long since deteriorated and been replaced by a more modern one, however, the original 100+ year old corn crib still exists. A corn crib (also known as a corn house) was first used by the Native Americans to store the harvest on the cob with or without the husks so that the air could circulate through the corn allowing it to dry. The idea was quickly picked up by the early settlers and designs varied greatly in

attempts to prevent pests yet have an open space in the middle for accessing the corn and promoting airflow.

Carol Duncan Hendricks of Mocksville, N.C., daughter of Romulus and sister to Ronald, came up to the farm for the installation of the quilt block, named Duncans Stars after the pattern on the original quilt. Carol dubbed the term "a quilt history mystery" in that they have no idea who made it or where it came from, just that it had always been there in the home as long as they could remember.

On Wednesday, July 11, 2012, Duncans Stars, the fourth Block of the Rural Heritage Quilt Trail, was placed on the original corn crib of the old farm place (now used for storage) located at 1441 Dysartsville Road by volunteer Mike Lucas, who also reproduced the design and painted the 4' X 4' block. A Certificate of Authenticity was presented to the Duncans by Jill Lucas, Chairman of the McDowell Quilt Trail Committee. The block reproduces the colors and star pattern of the original "history mystery" quilt with its many colors separated by blocks of maroon.