

Alice Mathis Quilting Blocks

Alice Mathis, or "Miss Alice" to her friends, was a farm laborer who lived and worked between Sanford, FL and Rochester, NY throughout her life. Her legacy, still felt in Rochester today, is a collection of materials from her life donated to the RMSC to tell the story of more than 40,000 African Americans who came to the city in the 1950's. Her gift gives context not only to her experiences, but that of other African Americans forced to journey from the South to find work.



Alice Mathis made many beautiful quilts throughout her life, which now reside in the RMSC Collection. Alice's quilts utilized a unique combination of African-inspired patterns, as well as the improvisational, organic style seen in the work of many African-American quilters of her era. Alice was resourceful and used pieces of clothes and daily materials to make her quilts, piecing them carefully together to make a colorful quilted montage of her life.

African American quilters from the migrant farming industry often quilted in groups, using the idle winter hours during the off-season to work in turns helping each other. The quilters would take turns with preparing food and providing child care for each other so that their neighbors could have time to focus on their work. The quilts served as practical objects as well as living pieces of history.

To learn more about African American quilters throughout history and in the present, check out the African American Quilt and Doll Guild at <https://www.aaqdg.org/> !

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To commemorate the work of Alice Mathis, we invite you to create a quilt block of your own!

1. Choose 4 pieces of fabric to form your quilt. The pieces should all be the same size.
2. Cut a fringe of about 2" on all sides of the pieces of fabric. Make sure you cut the same number of strips on each side (we recommend 8 strips.)
3. Decorate your quilt blocks with buttons, fabric markers, or shapes cut out of other fabric. Use hot glue or a needle and thread to attach the decorations.
4. Line up your quilt blocks and begin tying the fringe together. Use two regular knots to keep them secure.
5. Continue tying all the way around your blocks until all the fringe has been used.
6. You can keep adding to the quilt later by making more blocks out of scrap fabric, old clothes or blankets, or even cloth packaging. Be creative and resourceful just like Alice Mathis!

