Crazy Quilt Craze

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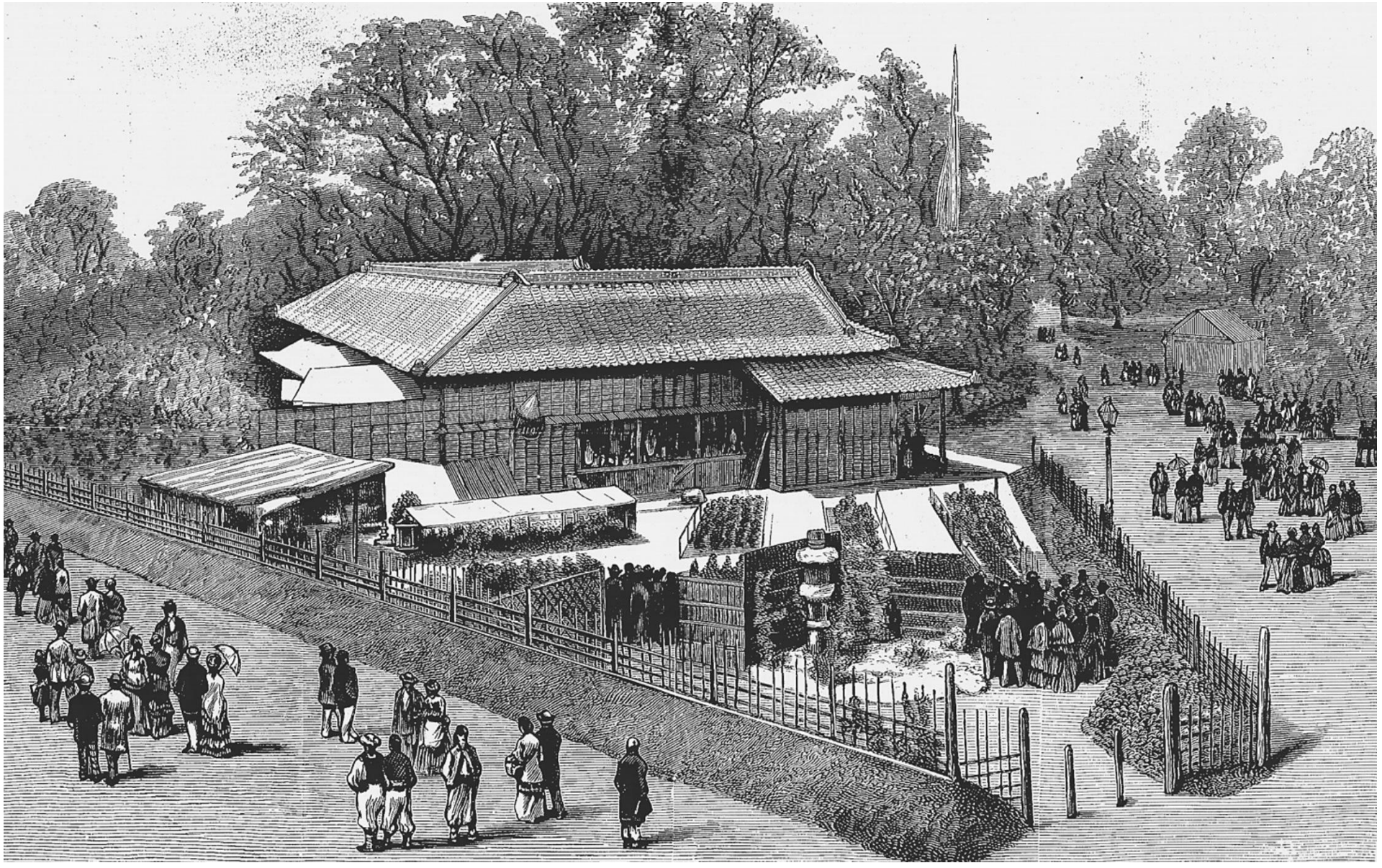
- The Crazy Quilt Craze took place between 1800 and 1900.
- Crazy Quilts were traditionally made in North America
- Due to the newly industrialized textile industry, crazy quilts were made from fabrics of varying sizes, shapes, colors, and textures.
- The word "crazy" conjures many meanings—erratic, jumbled, insane, bizarre—which initially makes sense when looking at the random patches of a crazy quilt. However, crazy quilts were not random, but rather planned works of art.
- By definition, crazy quilts are not quilts because the decorative surface fabrics are sewn directly onto a foundation fabric, and lack the batting of traditional quilts. That's because crazy quilts were not intended for a bed. They were meant for decoration and were often draped over the back of a couch for display.
- The most elaborate crazy quilts were made of silk, satins, velvets and heavily embroidered with images of flowers and animals.
- In the 1880s, textile manufacturers began printing crazy cloth— what we call cheater cloth today

Origins of the Crazy Quilt Craze

- Many historians attribute the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia for sparking the Crazy Quilt Craze, specifically Japanese culture.
- To the Western world, Japan was a mysterious island nation.
- In Japan, there'd been a shift in political power and the new regime was attempting to modernize the nation.
- To showcase this new era, the Meiji regime decided a grand display at the Exposition would be the perfect way to introduce the world their modernized nation.
- Yet it was traditional Japan, not the newly-industrialized one, that captivated the millions of visitors to the Japanese pavilion, bazaar, and gardens. (The 'cracked-ice' mosaic pattern on the path to the pavilion was a major influence for crazy quilts.)

Japanese Pavilion

(1876 Centennial Exposition)



Crazy Quilt
(from TIMA Collection)

- A late 19th century “crazy quilt” from this region in the TIMA collection.
- It dates to the 1890s and was passed down through the Livermore and Whalen families of Eastport before being donated by descendants of the family.
- The quilt includes a piece that has a large cursive “L” with the numbers 84 and 94 on either side of the letter as well as a piece that is a ribbon for the 13th reunion of the 1st Maine Cavalry of the American Civil War.
- Crazy quilts hit their heyday in the 1880s to early 1890s, putting this quilt in the middle of the craze. They were usually dated. This quilt may have been a 10 year project, begun in 1884 and finished in 1894.
- The quilt most likely was made by Sarah Preble Livermore who was born in 1867 and would have been 17 when she started the quilt. The large cursive “L’ stands for Livermore and Sarah’s last name would have still been Livermore until 1892 when she married Leveret Whalen and took the Whalen last name.

Crazy Quilt
Emma Augusta Bucknam Wadsworth
(from TIMA Collection)

- Crazy quilt made by Emma Augusta Bucknam Wadsworth of Eastport, Maine in 1895.
- The quilt is 44” wide by 56” high.
- Emma, born in Eastport in 1845, made the quilt when she was 50 years old for her niece, Marion Sabine Paine (married name), and she signed and dated the quilt in thread “Aunt Emma 1895.”
- After Emma passed away in 1901, at age 56, the quilt then came down through several generations of the Wadsworth family.
- Marion gave the quilt to her daughter, Emily Paine Fried (married name) who in turn gave it to her daughter Louise Wadsworth Fried Peck (married name). Louise gave the quilt to John L. Raye of Connecticut who is also a direct descendent and great grandson of Emma Augusta Bucknam Wadsworth.
- John and his wife, Frances Trzcinski, donated the quilt to the Tides Institute so that the quilt could come “home” to Eastport where it began.

What is a quilting bee?

A social event in which people get together to make a quilt.

Let’s have a quilting bee & make crazy quilt squares!

Materials:

- Square of white paper (cardstock works well)
- Scrapbook paper with different patterns and colors (magazine pages work great too)
- Scissors
- Glue

Instructions:

- Select different types of patterned/colored paper to use for your design
- Cut the shapes and glue them on as you go. You may also choose to lay out the pattern first and then do all the gluing at once. Either way works fine.
- It’s best if you begin your design in the center and work your way out to the edges.