

**ROGUE VALLEY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY**

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The *Rogue Digger* is a publication of the Rogue Valley Genealogical Society ([www.rvgsociety.org](http://www.rvgsociety.org)), which is a non-profit organization governed by a thirteen-member Board consisting of elected officers, past president, and appointed directors of the Standing Committees, all with voting rights. A subscription to *The Rogue Digger* is included with membership. Annual dues are \$30 for an individual; additional members in the same household are \$15 each. Membership includes library checkout privileges. Our library website is [www.rvgslibrary.org](http://www.rvgslibrary.org). Background map of Jackson County, OR, and miner's image courtesy RVGS.

***Editor's Note:***

The Rogue Valley Genealogical Society is pleased to present in this issue an essay by one of our members and Part 1 of a story from our February 2016 Quilts and Genealogy program. Part 2 will appear in the September 2016 issue. And speaking of September, don't forget that our 50th year heritage celebration and annual Genealogy Week will be held September 19-27. Watch for updates in the eNews on our website.

## HOPE FOR THE FUTURE FROM TRACES OF THE PAST

by Donalee Phillips

Researching my family history and tracing the past to the present has been a quest for me since I was a small child. Many consider the pursuit of genealogy to be “just looking up dead people” or a popular hobby. But to me, I consider myself to be our keeper of the traditions and history which make us unique in this world. My genealogical work is very important, for the results are building a legacy for those who need roots from the past and hope for the future.

We can learn much from the past. Not only do we learn from others' mistakes but also from their successes and their survival in the face of severe challenges. Knowing the past helps us build the foundation and skills to build a bridge to a brighter future, bringing hope for tomorrow.

Genealogical interests are not a new interest, and it is not isolated to any one culture. It bridges across every culture and every era. For example, the Jewish people have made very detailed genealogical records part of their lives since time began. Likewise, the African tribes, Native American tribes, Celtic tribes, Asians, and all cultures had oral and then written genealogies in their cultures. Obviously, it was important to them to preserve family legacies, culture, stories, and traditions. St. Paul wrote the premise for this thought when he penned, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so through endurance and the encouragement of scriptures we might have hope.” (Romans 15:4). I firmly believe that if family history was important in Biblical and ancient times, it is still important today and will be tomorrow.

I have learned to enjoy history...a course many folks would have left out of the curriculum of their schools. I have had incredible results with my research over the years. For example, while researching my maternal ancestors I discovered many mysteries from the past. Some of these stalwart emigrants and pioneers were Welsh, French, and German. And I was pleasantly surprised when my DNA tests proved that the long-rumored Native American heritage was true!



My parents and grandparents departed this world a long time ago. But I still miss them deeply. While first trying to search for their information, it was kind of sad and painful. But then those feelings evolved into joy and excitement at discovering their faith, trials, strengths, and perseverance throughout their lives. Searching through the echoes of the past for my husband's and my families has sent me to places I never thought I'd ever go for excitement and fun: cemeteries, churches of all kinds, courthouses, hospitals, mountain tops, swamps, and historical societies across the nation and beyond.

My ancestors may be gone, but over the past years I have discovered and recovered a bit of them with every search I make. It matters little if they were scalawags or saints, pastors or pirates. These kinfolk are biologically and spiritually my relatives. DNA results prove that we carry a bit of them along with us on our journey in life. It is all passed to our descendants...along with a bit of our own unique selves. I am part of them. They are part of me. They will be a part of those who come after me...forever.

Discovering family history can be exciting and fun. I am not just looking up "dead people," a common comment from those misinformed souls who do not partake of genealogy as a science or an important activity. But perhaps only fellow researchers can truly appreciate finding an ancestor's tombstone in a weed-clogged, red-bug infested field, on a humid, hot day in Missouri. Perhaps, only a fellow searcher can appreciate the joy and excitement of finally connecting family to another family across the oceans to Europe or beyond while online.



Recently, while doing a computer search at the Jackson County Genealogy Library, the joyous, excited cry of a new visitor blurted out, "I found him, I found him!" That discovery brought chuckles and smiles to us all. Been there! Done that! Still doing that!

I have come to realize that genealogy is a history on an individualized scale. It helps fulfill a necessary desire of human beings to figure out how we fit into the encompassing world about us. And it gives us the hope of facing tomorrow with the courage, faith, knowledge, and ingenuity that brought our ancestors through. Genealogy is the tracing of many family trees braided together from the past, the present, and eventually the future.



## THE HELMAN QUILTS

### MORE MYSTERIES IN OUR BACKYARD



by Lynn Ransford

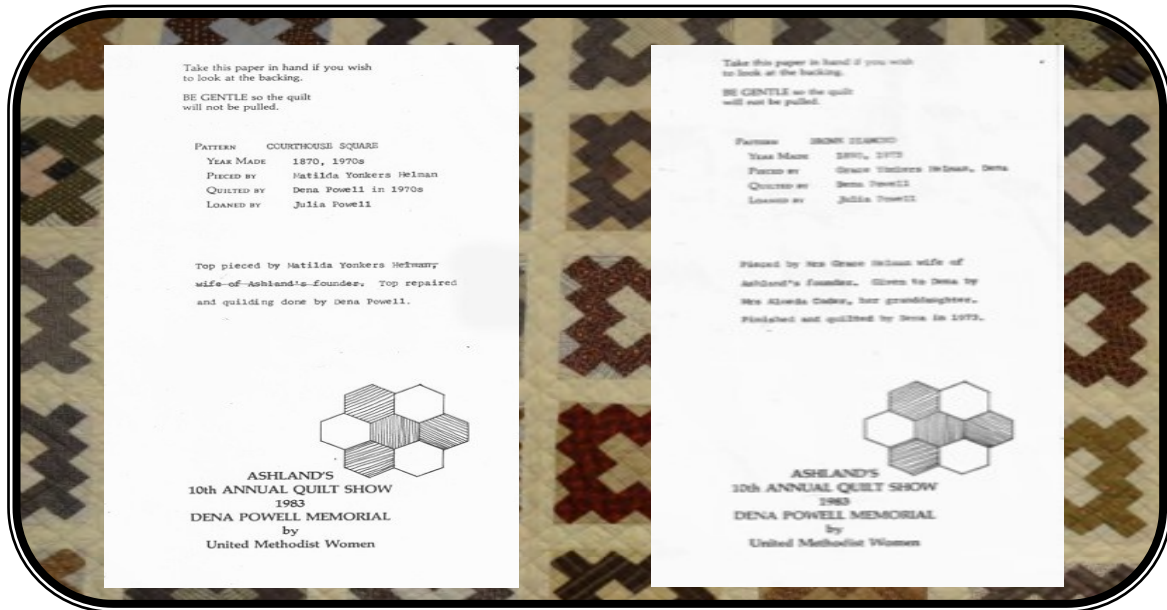
Two quilts donated to JCGL by Julia Powell, daughter of the well-known quilter, Dena Powell, may or may not have been quilted by the same person. The Brown Diamond quilt was, indeed, pieced by a Helman relative, but probably not ‘the wife of Ashland’s founder.’ What about the other quilt?

How I got involved in the Helman Quilts project is pretty funny. Years ago I took an OLLI class, “Mysteries in Our Backyard.” Anne Billeter was one of the instructors of that class. I was so impressed by Anne and all that goes on in the Rogue Valley Genealogical Society that I joined and returned to the Jackson County Genealogy Library numerous times for various projects with my work at Beekman House, the Historic Jacksonville Cemetery, Ashland Cemetery, and with the quilting registry.

So, when my friend, Barb MacMillen, at a Monday Night Football party, asked me about looking over and possibly talking about two antique quilts that had been donated to the library, I was intrigued. She explained that they were Helman Quilts, donated by Julia Powell Woosnam, daughter of the well-known local quilter, Dena Powell. Almeda Helman Coder had given the quilt tops to Dena. I knew about Almeda Helman Coder—she was the first librarian in Ashland. Now I was truly interested. Barb knew that I would be. Almeda was related to Abel Helman -- one of the founders of Ashland, where I live.



It was over a year ago in January 2015 that Barb and I met at the library to look at the Helman quilts. Each came with an information sheet.



The papers read: Courthouse Square, “Top pieced by Matilda Yonkers Helman, *wife* of Ashland’s founder.” And Brown Diamond: “Pieced by Mrs. Grace Helman *wife* of Ashland’s founder.” Grace and Matilda—*both* wives of Abel Helman?! We asked ourselves, “Did Abel Helman have two wives? Or, could Grace and Matilda have been the same person?” On the information sheets, both Grace and Matilda are listed with “Yonkers” as the maiden names. Could they have been sisters? In those days, men often did marry sisters if one had died young, perhaps in childbirth.

To find out more about Abel’s wife, or wives, we headed for the computer and the library’s Helman pioneer file. Thanks to Dorothy Cotton, a resourceful, talented sleuth of a librarian, (actually I’ve found all the librarians here to be diligent and tenacious), we found that Abel did, in fact, have two wives! But, alas, neither was named Grace nor Matilda, and neither had the maiden name of Yonkers. Abel’s wives were Martha Jane Kanagy and Susan A. Culp Rockfellow. Uh-oh. Who, then, were the quilt makers, Grace and Matilda Yonkers Helman? Again we asked, “Were they the same person?” The style of quilt making is similar—for instance, the sashing between blocks. Again, if they were the same person, that

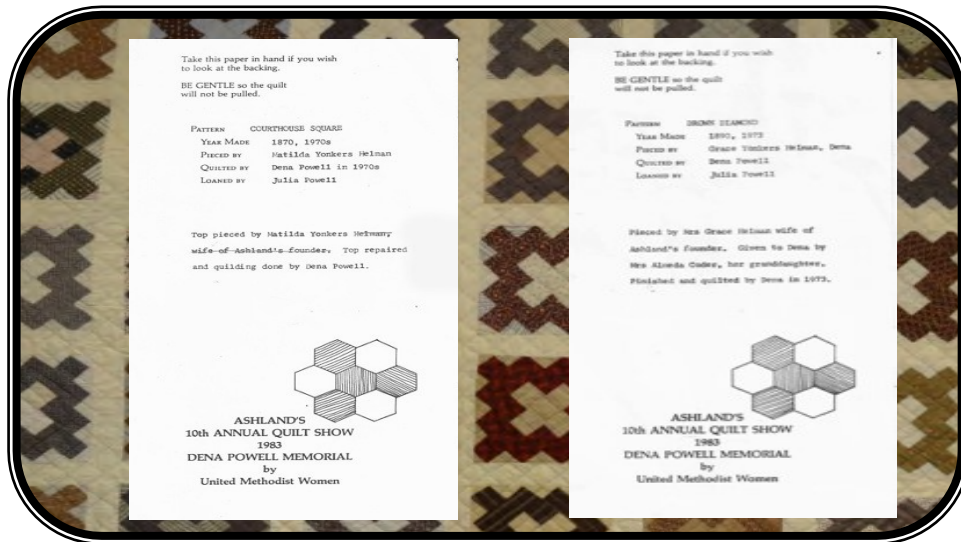
would explain the same maiden name—Yonkers. Yet, the workmanship was different. It didn't look as though the same person had made both quilt tops. It also appeared that the quilting itself couldn't have been done by the same person, even though our information sheets said it had been! We now had two mysteries to solve: 1) that of the quilt top makers, and 2) that of the quilter herself—it didn't appear that Dena Powell, the quilter, could have done the quilting on both—that workmanship was *quite* different for each quilt!

We guessed that, perhaps, a young daughter or a younger sister pieced the more recent 1890 Brown Diamond quilt. Yet, she couldn't have been so young as to explain a different skill level because of her name embroidered on the Brown Diamond quilt: “Grace Arilla Younker Helman.”



She couldn't have been too young with a married name (Helman) following her maiden name, of Younker. Even a young bride, say 16, would not be so young that the less accurate construction, e.g. the unaligned sashing, could be attributed to that of a child. And what about the maiden name “Younker” (Y-o-u-n-k-e-r) that Grace embroidered on the Brown Diamond quilt?

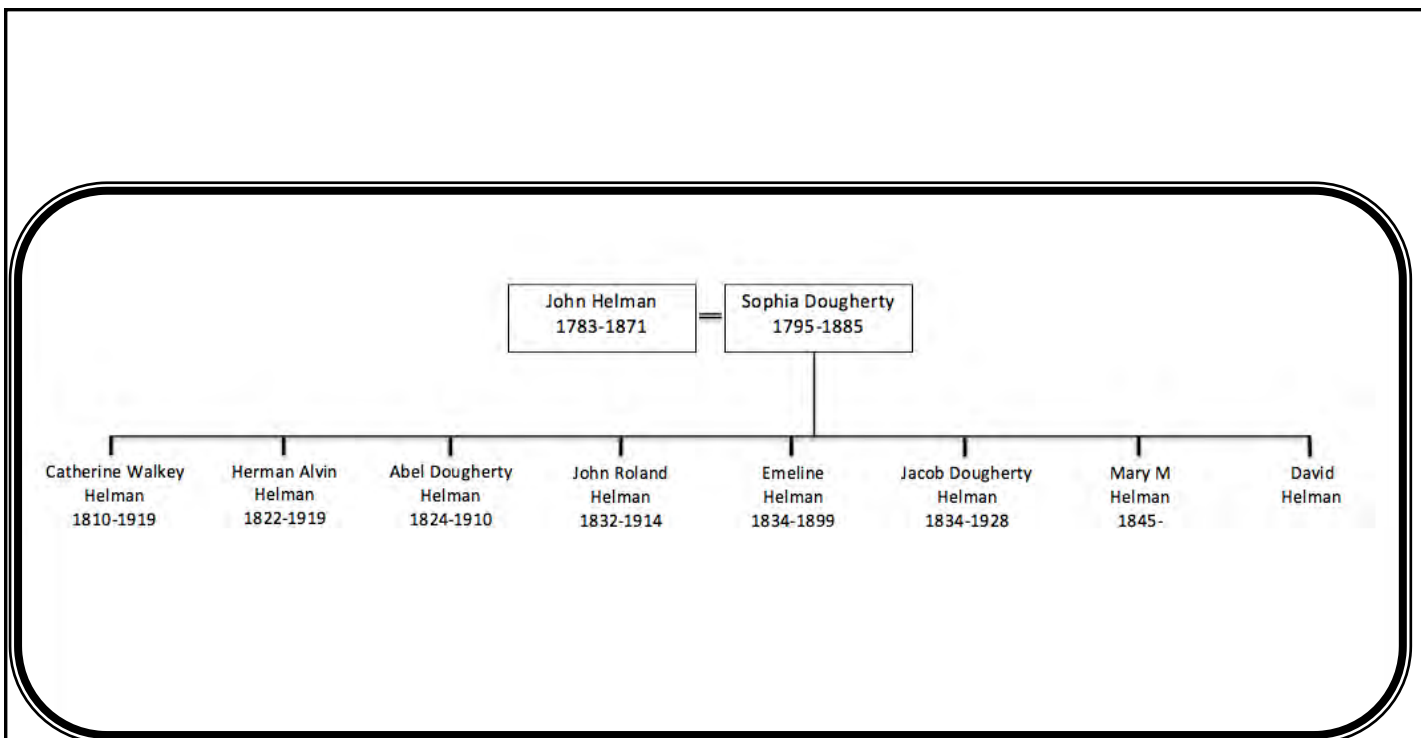
Looking at our information sheets...



Younker was different from the names on the sheets, “Yonkers” (Y-o-n-k-e-r-s—no ‘u’ and with an ‘s’ added). Was Matilda’s last name the same as Grace’s, or a bit different? Again, were they related? Were they the same person? Sisters? Two unrelated ladies? Or did the 20-year span between the constructions of the quilts mean that they could have been mother and daughter? But mother and daughter both weren’t likely to have the Helman name. We could only be sure that Grace had the Helman name (because, remember, she had embroidered her name at the edge of the Brown Diamond quilt: “Grace Arilla Younker *Helman*”). There is no name on the Courthouse Square quilt—we have only our information sheet that said Matilda Younkers Helman did that quilt.

Back to the computer! Dorothy looked up Abel Helman’s children and Abel Helman’s siblings, wisely guessing that to have the Helman name, Grace might have married one of Abel’s brothers or one of his sons (since we now knew that Grace wasn’t Abel’s wife, even though our information paper said that she was).

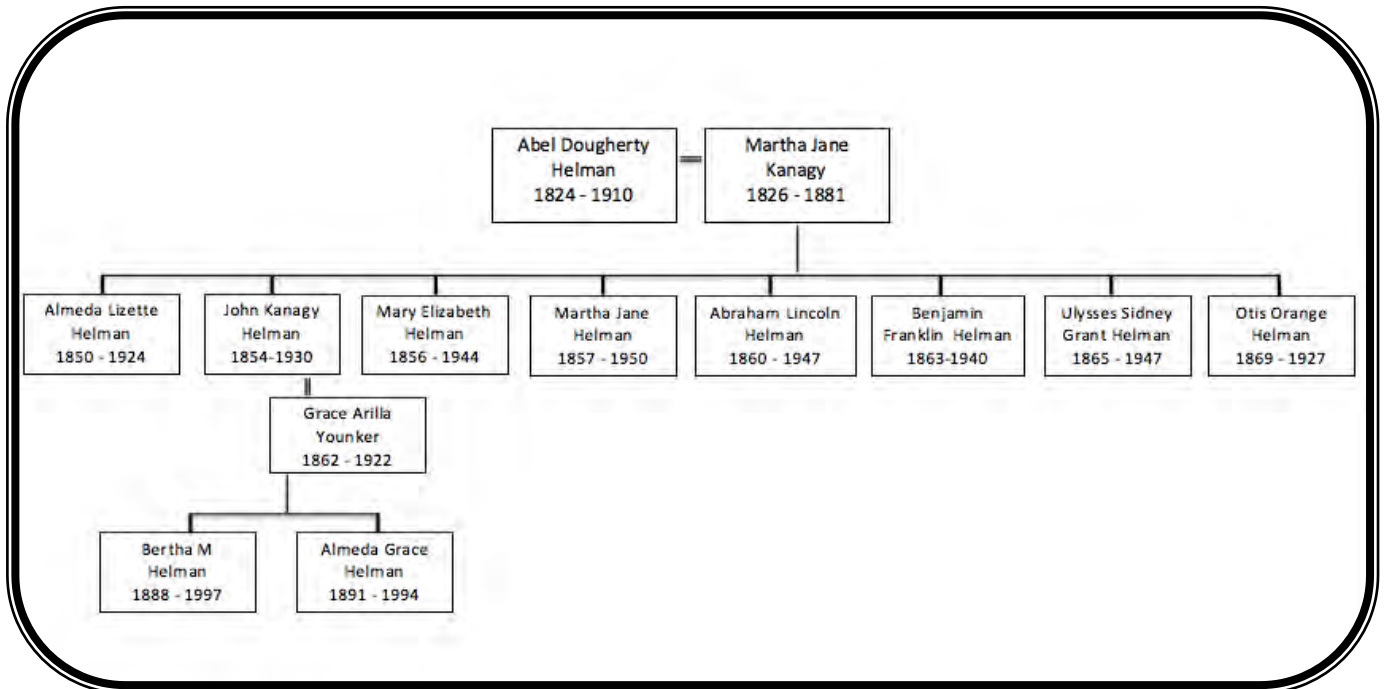
Looking for the wives’ names of Abel Helman’s brothers, we found nothing. Nothing was in the file—no Grace, no Matilda, any Younker or Yonkers. Later, we did find some of the brothers’ wives listed elsewhere. You can see that list on the following page—still no Grace or Matilda.



Interesting aside: In his Last Will and Testament, John Helman, Abel's father, listed his eight children and what share of his estate they were to inherit. With eight, each child should have inherited one-eighth. But his son John inherited  $\frac{3}{8}$ , perhaps because he was named executor. Abel Helman and his brother, David, were to be given "\$1 and no more." The same was true for daughter, Catherine. This had nothing to do with our quilts, but it sure piqued my curiosity. Anne and Barb and I came up with several hypotheses. Of course, our first thought was, "Oh, my, what did they do to displease their father and lose favor?" But Anne suggested that perhaps Abel had borrowed on his inheritance when he made the trip west. That would have been costly. Or, we thought, maybe, by 1871, when his father died, Abel had already come here and established himself very successfully. His father may have determined he had no need for his share of the family estate, as perhaps the two grandchildren, who inherited  $\frac{2}{8}$ ths, did. But then, years later, Abel's businesses (his mills) had difficulties and we know Abel suffered financial losses—maybe he got an advance from his father's estate at that time? A lot about Abel Helman remains a mystery.



Thanks to Dorothy, we found that Abel Helman and his first wife, Martha Jane Kanagy, also had eight children. And here is a chart showing Abel and Martha's children:



Lo, and behold! Their second child, John Kanagy Helman (who, incidentally, was the first non-Native American child born in Ashland, in 1854) married Grace Arilla Younker, born in Wood County, Ohio. They were married in Ashland in 1886. Grace was 24. Hurrah! We found her! Grace Arilla Younker Helman, the one who signed and pieced the Brown Diamond quilt in 1890. She was not the wife, but was the daughter-in-law of Ashland's founder, Abel Helman. She was Abel's *son's* wife!

Grace Younker and John Kanagy Helman, Martha's and Abel's son, had two daughters: Bertha and Almeda Helman. Bertha was born in 1888 and Almeda was born in 1890—the same year that her mother, Grace, put together the Brown Diamond quilt... in Ashland. So, we figured out that Grace was 28 years old when she made the quilt. As we thought earlier, she was not a young child, which might have explained the less accurate piecing than that of the Courthouse Square maker. But Grace had a two-year-old and was either pregnant or with an infant (baby Almeda) when she put together the Brown Diamond quilt. That certainly could have been distracting!

Below is Almeda, on the left, as a young child. She's probably 5-8 years old in this picture with her mother, Grace, our Brown Diamond quilter. We were so excited to find this photo—just a month ago—in the SOHS files! On the right is Almeda as an older adult.



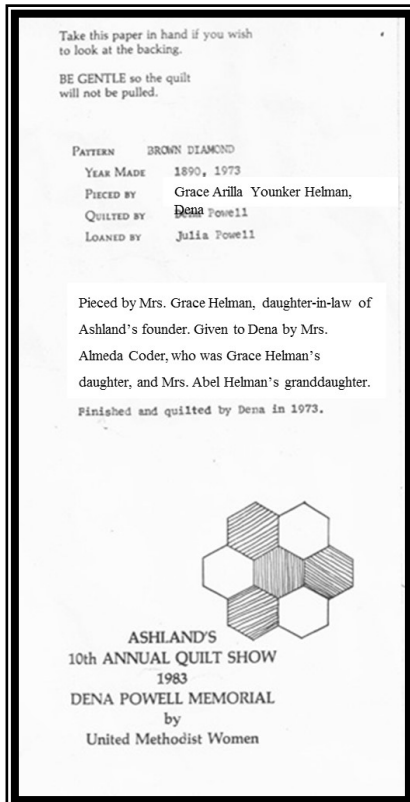
Grace and Almeda Helman. SOHS #8296.



Almeda Helman Coder  
Photo courtesy Julia Powell Woosnam

Almeda lived to be 103. She died in 1994. Almeda Helman (later, Almeda Helman Coder) was the granddaughter of Abel Helman and his wife, Martha Kanagy Helman. With that new data, we were able to clarify (and correct) a lot of information that was on the original Brown Diamond information sheet,

the one that came with the quilt.



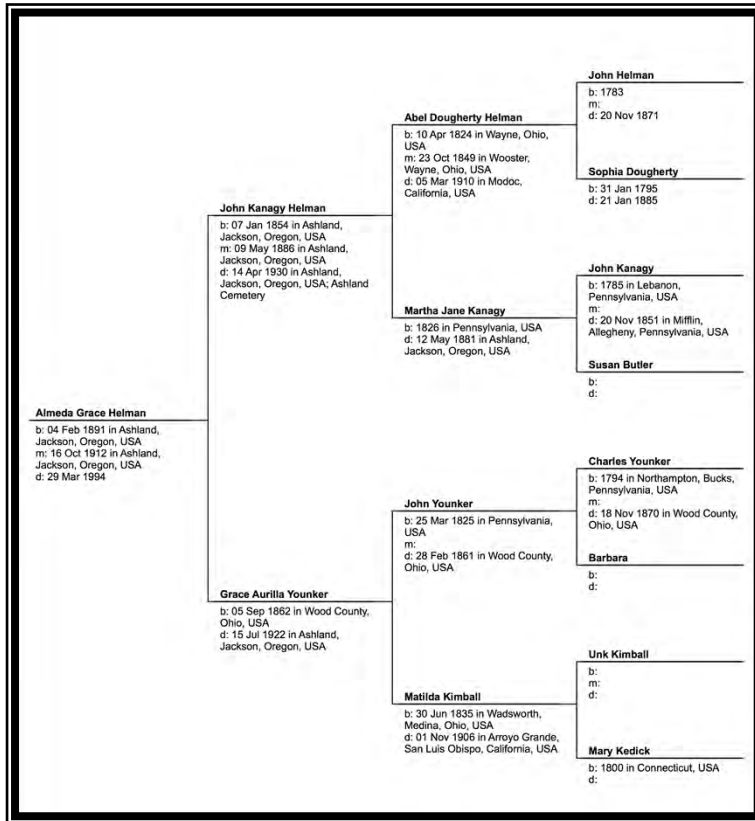
On the "Pieced by..." line we can now list the name "Grace Arilla Younker Helman..." (Adding her middle name, Arilla, and changing the spelling of Yonkers—more about spelling variations in a minute). "Dena" is also on the "Pieced by..." line—and we'll get to that later, too.

In the middle of the page, we can change "Pieced by Mrs. Grace Helman wife of Ashland's founder" to "Pieced by Mrs. Grace Helman, daughter-in-law of Ashland's founder."

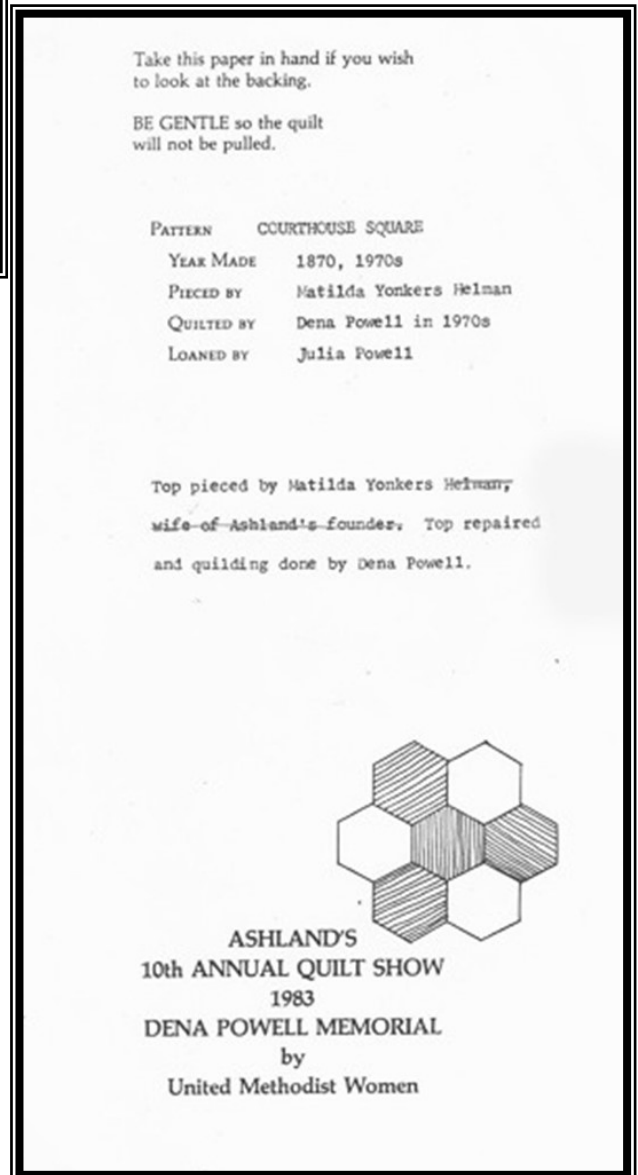
Now look at the next sentence: "Given to Dena by Mrs. Almeda Coder, her granddaughter." We puzzled over that one. Whose granddaughter? Not Dena's. "Her" must have referred to Martha Kanagy Helman. In fact, Almeda Helman Coder was indeed the granddaughter of Martha

Helman and Abel—she was their son’s, John’s, daughter. Perhaps the line should read: “Given to Dena by Mrs. Almeda Coder, who was Grace Helman’s daughter and *Mrs. Abel Helman’s* granddaughter.” This

information is illustrated in the pedigree below left for Almeda.



Now, we knew about the person who made the Brown Diamond quilt (Grace) and about the person who gave it to Dena (Almeda) and how they were related to the Helman family. But we still had many questions about who made the Courthouse Square quilt.



Looking at the information sheet for the other Helman quilt we see that Courthouse Square was made in 1870. It was 20 years older than the Brown Diamond quilt. It was “Pieced by Matilda Yonkers Helman.” Who was Matilda? We still didn’t know. With a maiden name of “Yonkers,” the same as the name listed for Grace Arilla (the maker of the Brown Diamond quilt), we kept thinking that Matilda must have been her sister, perhaps married to another Helman sibling. Abel married Martha Kanagy in Ohio, and then left her there for a year when he went west. We guessed that when Abel went back to Ohio, to get his wife and daughter (and his partner’s wife and family) around 1854, he might also

have brought his brother, John Helman, west with him. Abel's brother, John, might have married a Matilda Yonkers. We couldn't find if that was so. No mention of a Matilda.

But Barb MacMillen was determined to find Matilda Yonkers. Barb knew there were often different spellings for names, e.g., Yonkers vs. Younker. She also knew that sometimes Yonker was spelled with a "J"—J-o-n-k-e-r and that the "J" was pronounced as a "Y," leading to another spelling version of the same family name. And there was one wrong transcription with a "t"—Y-o-u-n-t-e-r!

After a hard day of research at the library, Barb went home to do still more searching—still determined to find Matilda. That night, Barb emailed me. She explained she could not resist exploring further. After searching for several hours, Barb said she got a hit: she found a George Younker buried in the Ashland Cemetery in 1941. Pursuing George, she found an Ohio 1870 census with a 10 year-old George Younker listed in the same household with a Matilda Kimball Younker, age 35! Barb was getting closer. In that household, with George and Matilda, there were two other children of Matilda's: Elsie D., 13, and there was Grace A., age 7! Grace A. —Grace *Arilla* Younker was daughter of Matilda Younker, we were sure! Hurrah! Barb found them! Another valuable piece (pardon the expression) of the quilt story was discovered and put in place.

Yes! We knew the quilt makers had to be related! Grace and Matilda were mother and daughter! One of our early hypotheses—that our quilt makers were mother and daughter -- proved to be true! Just last month, we were thrilled to find this picture of Grace and Matilda in the SOHS file. We were so pleased that they were willing to permit us to use the photo.



Elsie, Matilda, George, and Gracie Younker  
SOHS #28107

More became clear. We understood now how the information sheets could show Matilda Yonkers (or Matilda Younker) as a Helman. It was the result of an easy misunderstanding. When Almeda Helman Coder, Abel and Martha Helman's granddaughter, gave the quilt tops to Dena Powell, she, no doubt, said something like, "These are Helman family quilts; this one was made by my grandmother..." And, as it turns out, indeed it was! Matilda Younker *was* Almeda's grandmother—but on her *mother's* side.

Matilda was Almeda's "other" grandmother, not her Helman grandmother, married to Abel. When Almeda gave the quilts to Dena and said, "...Made by my grandmother..." whom we were told made the Courthouse Square--that was true! The quilts were and are indeed Almeda Helman Coder's family quilts. They are truly Helman family quilts—amazing!

Now that we had finally determined who the quilt makers were, and how they were related, more mysteries popped up. The Ohio 1870 Census showed Matilda Kimball Younker, and her children—Elsie, Grace, and George—were all living with a Mary Nesmith, age 71. Mary was born in 1799. Who was she? Why were Matilda and her children living with this older woman? Were they all living with Mary Nesmith in 1870 because Matilda and her children were alone? Had Matilda's husband John Younker, Grace's father, been killed in the Civil War? That would have been around the same time period. We didn't know. We couldn't find Matilda Kimball Younker's husband. All we knew for sure was that Matilda was in Ohio in 1870 when she made the Courthouse Square quilt. Our quilt was made in Ohio!

Was Mary Nesmith an old friend of the Kimball's, Matilda's family? In an 1850 census, Matilda Kimball, our Courthouse Square quilt maker, was living with Mary Nesmith when she was 15 years old. Why? Mary Nesmith was 51 at that time. Where was Matilda's family? We didn't know. Further digging, looking at later census data, Barb solved for the unknown again! Mary Nesmith, and her relationship to Matilda, was no longer a mystery. What happened to Matilda's family was no longer a mystery. Mary Nesmith was Matilda's mother! Mary Kimball, Matilda's mother, had remarried a John Nesmith! Mary Kedick Kimball was Mary Kedick Kimball Nesmith!



Barb also found that George Younker, Grace's brother, was in San Luis Obispo, CA (according to the 1910 Census), and that his mother, Matilda Kimball Younker, our quilt maker, died in 1906, and was buried in San Luis Obispo. We know that George must have returned to our area later. He is shown to be in Grants Pass in the 1930 census, a single 70 year old. And we knew he was buried in Ashland in 1941. (Another interesting aside: Anne Billeter, aware of all Barb's continuing, on-going research, couldn't resist looking up more about George. She found that a year after the Census, in 1931, George, 71 years old, was married for the first time! He married a 69 year-old widow. )

We still didn't know where Matilda was when her daughter was married. Was she here, in Ashland, to help her daughter Grace with childrearing and quilting, or not? We didn't know if Matilda came to San Luis Obispo from Ohio, to join her son around 1910, or if she was here in Ashland before that. Perhaps George and Grace (and Elsie) came to Ashland with their mother, Matilda, prior to Grace's marriage to John Helman in 1886? We didn't know. And then, Barb did discover, later, (from Almeda's obituary) that Grace came to Ashland in 1884 on the first passenger train from Portland! Did she come with her mother, Matilda, and her siblings? Or, did they come later? Barb found the answer to that one, too! She found a land record that indicated Matilda was in Jackson County in 1884! So it is very likely that Matilda was here to help her daughter, Grace, with her wedding, with childcare and with the Brown Diamond quilting in 1890! Thanks to Barb, so much was found. Even so, many little pieces of the story, construction pieces, remained unanswered.

**Part 2 will appear the September 2016 issue!**

