

Quilts Played an Important Role for Escaped Slaves

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Professor Raymond Dobard, art history professor at Howard University and well-known quilter, believes that quilts were used as a tool for communication on the Underground Railroad. Co-author Jacqueline Tobin met Ozella McDaniel Williams in Charleston who told Tobin her family's story about how quilts were used.

Dobard and Tobin built their book *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* around her story and their research.

Dobard will be at the Calvert Library Prince Frederick on Tuesday, Oct. 27 at 7 p.m. to talk about their story and answer questions. He has new material to share since his book was published in 1999 and will offer clarifications to questions about the accuracy of the book that have arisen since publication.

In *Hidden in Plain View*, the authors offer information about certain quilt patterns, including a prominent one called the Charleston Code that seem to have been used as essential tools for escape along the Underground Railroad.

In 1994, historian Jacqueline Tobin met African American quilter Ozella Williams amid piles of beautiful handmade quilts in the Old Market Building of Charleston, SC. With the admonition to "write this down," Williams began to describe how slaves made coded quilts and used them to navigate their escape on the Underground Railroad.

Just as quickly as she started, Williams stopped, informing Tobin that she would learn the rest when she was "ready." During the three years it took for Williams's narrative to unfold – and as the friendship and trust between the two women grew – Tobin enlisted Raymond Dobard, Ph.D., an art history professor and well-known African American quilter, to help unravel the mystery.

Part adventure and part history, *Hidden in Plain View* traces the origin of the Charleston Code from Africa to the Carolinas, from the low-country island Gullah peoples to free blacks living in the cities of the North, and shows how three people from completely different backgrounds pieced together one amazing American story.

The book is available through online book sellers if you would like to purchase one to bring for Dobard's autograph.

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