



I work for Harvard University, where I am the David P. Wheatland Curator of the Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments. As a museum curator, I interpret material culture. I know that every object tells a story, expresses an idea, or represents a feeling.

I developed an interest in art and needlework as a young girl in the 1960s in the company of my grandmother. Together we would traipse around the Jersey shore with sketchbook and paints, setting up our easels side-by-side in marinas, on beaches, and by historic buildings. At night, I joined her in embroidery, needlepoint, and other needle arts. As a Girl Scout, I learned to

use a sewing machine, and received one as a gift from my parents when I turned 13. Early projects were clothes—some quite psychedelic and mod!

The times seemed to be a-changing. My father was a civil rights' attorney and put a peace sign atop a flagpole in front of our house. When I was a teen in the 1970s, I went on many protest marches in NYC for peace, women's rights, and other social causes. I wanted to be a physicist, but not make bombs or rockets. Therefore, I studied the history and philosophy of science alongside math and science in college in order to become a socially responsible scientist. I was part of a generation that broke down barriers barring women from certain colleges, clubs, and professions, but that did not mean that we were welcomed fully as newcomers to those enclaves. There were quotas and harassments. My classes and career were in heavily male-dominated fields, and I often found myself the only woman in a room. When I became a mother in 1989, I had to fight for maternity leave from the Chicago museum where I worked. "But we thought you were a career gal..." the director said. In 2000, I was one of two equally good candidates offered



a job, but told that I would be the assistant because the other "was older and a man." In spite of these challenges, I have had a successful career as a historian of science, educator, and museum curator. In January 2018, I received the top international prize in my field of history of astronomy, and am proud to say that I am the first woman to receive the honor. I mention all these things because these experiences, beliefs, and values would come to be embodied in my quilts.

In 1997, as bedtime reading matter, I purchased an art book about Amish quilts. It explored the relationship of traditional patterns to common things in people's lives. For example, the triangles on the back of the Amish buggies turn up in quilts like Ocean Waves, and the crisscrossed shadows of the spokes of buggy wheels are resonant with the shimmering diagonals of such quilts. The possible meanings in the textiles intrigued me, and quilts were beautiful to behold.

When I received a gift of a new sewing machine on my fortieth birthday, I decided to learn to quilt.

My first two quilts—made for my daughters—were traditional bed quilts but used color and pattern to explore earth and planetary sciences in a way that was meaningful to the girls' interests. Soon I started to make art quilts in addition to bed quilts. Two were made out of my daughter's baby clothes and represented the cities in which they were born and meaningful events at the time. Miriam was born in Chicago, and her quilt was an abstract riff on the North Wind pattern. Since Naomi was born in the Bronx, I reinterpreted the New York Beauty block, as the Chrysler Building, and put it in a landscape looking northward from the Empire State Building. The sky shows the Moon in eclipse, as I saw it out of my hospital window on the night Naomi was born. The constellation of the Pleiades (which has personal meaning for my daughters and me) is formed in crystals.

My quilts often draw upon my research and have included 16th-century anatomical prints and metamorphosing optical techniques, and later American observatories, telescopes, and solar eclipses. My wedding canopy was commemorative. It featured an image of the Sun with Venus in transit across it in June 2012. As we were observing this rare event at Mt. Wilson Observatory, my sweetheart had proposed to me. I am currently working on projects devoted to women's rights and suffrage. One shows a medieval synagogue scene with a female interloper among a group of arguing men. I call it "Betty Friedan joins the Talmud class." Others will combine historical images of mill girls, suffragettes, and women's marches with period antique blocks.

Find Sara online: <http://www.altazimutharts.com>
<https://scholar.harvard.edu/saraschechner>