



The Atheneum Society of Wilbraham

Local People Preserving Historic Wilbraham

PRESS RELEASE

Contact Info:

Joan Paris, President

Atheneum Society of Wilbraham, Inc.

450 Main Street

(413) 596-4097 Museum

(413) 596-4240 Home Office

(413) 205-8669 Cell

jparis@endeavorsgroup.com

www.wilbrahamatheneum.org

At Home With Colonial Quilting in Wilbraham

Ten fourth grade students from Wilbraham Girl Scout Troop 149 visited a present day quilting display at the Old Meeting House on Tuesday, May 6 and attended a lesson in the children's room of the c.1793 Meeting House to recreate the charm of colonial quilting.

Wilbraham's public access [WPA] television producer, Jack Wilson filmed their reaction and resident photographer, Lucy Peltier, a Wilbraham local artist, captured their experience for the archives at The Old Meeting House. The exhibit was prepared and mounted by Marcie and Morrie Hayn, Co- Curators and Sandy Sanders, Assistant Curator for the museum.

Sandy Sanders, Atheneum trustee for the Old Meeting House museum directed the exhibit and Joan Paris, Atheneum president prepared and delivered an hour-long historic presentation along with an art study and quilting primer of relevant information.

The reproduced art print, The Quilting Bee, 19th Century Americana by Morgan Weistling was studied for its rich representation of early American quilting, its warm tones and detailed composition.

Primer Excerpt:

Quilt making is recorded as early as 1750, but reached its height of industry between the years of 1830 and 1870. Before the advent and precision of sewing machines and

quilting machines, early American quilting and fabric piercing was done by hand. Out on the American prairie during our country's westward migration, calico dresses were transformed into patchwork quilts. In other parts of the country, scrap fabric from clothes was conserved, cut in measured squares and laid out to form an interesting and colorful design. During the Colonial era, cloth was purchased and taxed from England and other European countries. After the cloth was cut for clothing, the valuable scraps were fit and stitched together to create a "Crazy patch" quilt, which was largely made from remnant ribbons, silks, velvets and wools.

Each quilt was made of two layers of cloth, filled with a soft fiber such as cotton, wool or soft feathers called down. The layers were stitched together with many small stitches adding to the beauty of the quilt.

Hand quilting was performed on a sturdy quilting frame so that the fabric could be pulled taut for square blocks and even stitches. These frames were an excellent example of ingenuity on the part of our ancestors since one type of frame did not always work.

A typical quilting frame was constructed of four sturdy lengths of wood. Two of the strips were long enough to hold the width of a quilt. Heavy cloth was attached along the length. The ends of the quilt would be basted or pinned to this cloth. The other two pieces of wood would hold the first two apart so that the ends of the quilt could be rolled tightly leaving a nice firm area for the quilters to do their stitching. As each section was finished, the quilt was rolled back and a new section emerged to be stitched.

The frame was propped to a comfortable height up to a comfortable height for the quilters using four chairs, usually ladder-back chairs. Some frames were built with a stand on each end so that chairs would not be required. Quilting frames were handmade until mail order companies began to sell quilt frames commercially shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, but sturdy home made frames were always preferred

Some quilt designs showed historical events or special family occasions. The quilts were well made of durable fabrics and they were passed down from one generation to the next- building a supply of warm blankets and preserving the family history. They were in a sense, just like family scrapbooks containing information and pictures of important family events like weddings, births, deaths or upcoming distant journeys.

Women often gathered to help a young woman complete her quilting for her dowry chest. The woman of the household was required to make the bedding for her home and a bride-to-be would need to make a "baker's dozen" of quilts before her wedding day. Twelve were made for every day use and the thirteenth was an elaborate bride's quilt, which often required the skilled needlework of other women to complete the special "top".

By the middle of the 1800's fabric was abundant and affordable and new and interesting styles emerged. Women of the day gathered in "quilting- bees" to accomplish the quilting work for themselves and each other and the children played and napped under the quilting frame or very nearby the bustle of busy bees. The gatherings were joyous, social events and the women took turns quilting, preparing the evening meal for the families and tending to the children.

Quilting is still popular today, but the quilts that are created are most often used as quilt art and hung on the wall. Many women join quilting clubs or attend quilting classes to learn the centuries old craft. Sometimes quilts are created to raise awareness about social causes.

References:

Finley, Ruth E. (1929). *Old Patchwork Quilts*. Philadelphia and London: J.B. Lippincott Company.

Callahan, Nancy. (1987). *The Freedom Quilting Bee*. Tuscaloosa and London: The university of Alabama Press.

Forrest, John and Blincoe, Deborah. (1995). *The Natural History of the Traditional Quilt*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Holstein, Jonathan. (1972). *American Pieced Quilts*. New York: The Viking Press.

Note: You can find books and magazines showing quilting designs in bookstores, libraries and fabric stores or consult the above captioned adult resources.

Children's Reading Suggestions:

- *The Keeping Quilt* by Patricia Polacco (\$16, Simon and Schuster) depicts the age-old theme of -Who am I and where do I fit in?
- *The Patchwork Quilt* by Valerie Flournoy, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney, (\$15.99, Dutton) in which the passing of family time is embedded in the quilt
- *The Log Cabin Quilt* illustrated by Ellen Howard, illustrated by Ronald Himler (\$15.95, Holiday House) tells of a hard winter without much comfort, and how a girl chinks the drafty cabin walls with quilt scraps
- *Luka's Quilt* written and illustrated by Georgia Guback, (\$14.00, Greenwillow), is the only book I know of about the intricate art of Hawaiian quilting
- *The Quilt Story* by Tony Johnston, illustrated by Tomie de Paola (\$5.99, Paperstar) that shares the warmth and fun of quilts and their stories across the years.
- *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* by Deborah Hopkinson, illustrated by James Ransome (\$16.00, Knopf) in which an escaping slave leaves behind directions to freedom on the quilt she makes while serving in The Big House
- *Selina and the Bear Paw Quilt* by Barbara Classen Smucker, (\$16.00, Crown) with its tale of escape from war, and the actual quilting patterns that a family preserved in the storybook
- *Eight Hands Round: A Patchwork Alphabet* by Ann Whitford Paul, illustrated by Jeanette Winter (\$5.95, HarperCollins) in which the ABCs are each names of quilt patterns
- *The Canada Geese Quilt* by Natalie Kinsey Warnock, illustrated by Leslie Bowman, (\$3.99, Yearling) in which a ten year old makes a quilt

- ***The Boy and the Quilt*** by Cheryl Benner, illustrated by Shirley Kurtz (\$6.95, Good Books) about a boy making a quilt
- ***Sam Johnson and the Blue Ribbon Quilt*** by Lisa Ernst Campbell (\$4.95 MulberryBooks) which is about a grownup man who wants to make quilts and win prizes for them
- ***The Josephina Story Quilt*** by Eleanor Coerr, illustrated by Bruce Degen (\$3.75/\$14.95 Harper Collins) that's a westering tale told in quilt form.

**Timeline of
Quilting History**

Pieced Patchwork
1780 ~ present

Whole Cloth
1750 ~1850

Chintz Appliqué
1775 ~1865

Establishment of
US Textile Mills
1813 ~ 1840

Baltimore Album
1840 ~1900

Friendship Blocks
1840 ~ 1900s

Early Sewing Machines
1845 ~ 1855

Published Patterns
1855 - present

Civil War Quilting
1861 ~ 1865

Charm Quilts
1870 ~ 1950

Crazy Quilts
1880 ~ 1910

Establishment of Quilt Guilds
1920 ~ 1970

Feedsacks
1925 ~ 1940

Rotary Cutters
1979 ~ present



The Quilting Bee, 19th Century Americana

by Morgan Weistling

“There are times when an idea for a painting will linger for years in my mind before it is ever committed to canvas. I’ve thought about this painting for at least 15 years. It all began when my mother showed me a quilt her grandmother had made as a little girl in the late 1800s. I was amazed by its detail and beauty. I began to research quilt making and discovered the wonderful American tradition of quilting bees, and I knew I had my painting.

At a quilting bee, women would have family and neighbors gather to finish a quilt. It was a real community event. Often a quilt was made to mark a special occasion, such as a wedding or an upcoming journey. The older, more experienced women would do most of the quilt work, but as in my painting, the less experienced would learn the craft alongside the veterans. The quilt in this painting is the actual quilt my great-grandmother made as a little girl, which made the creative process all the more personal for me.”