

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Quilt Voices Program"

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by Jay A. Graybeal

In observance of Women's History Month, the Historical Society of Carroll County will present a theatrical program "Quilt Voices" which explores the lives of mid-19th-century middle-class women. The program will be held at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 30th at the Society's Shriver-Weybright Auditorium, 210 E. Main St., Westminster. An introductory statement provides the history of this innovative program.

This dramatic performance evolved from the research completed last year in preparation for the exhibit on Baltimore Album Quilts at the Maryland Historical Society. This research was intended to tell us about the lives of Baltimore women in the 1850's, the era when local women made their spectacular Album Quilts.

The research involved months of reading numerous diaries and letters from the Manuscripts Division of the Library at the MHS to learn first hand what life was like for middle-class women. It was this group who were sufficiently educated to write diaries and who had the leisure time for such a pursuit. Additionally, recipe books, behavior manuals, women's magazines, newspapers and other literature written for women before the Civil War, also part of the library's collection, significantly expanded our understanding of the expectations placed on women at the time.

It became clear as the research progressed that these words, written by and for women, spoke so beautifully and effectively about their lives that the quotations should be used in a project which could extend our newly discovered understanding of middle class Baltimore women's lives to a wide audience throughout the State. The result, "Quilt voices", is a remarkably entertaining, yet informative program which contrasts the "ideal of true womanhood" with the often grim realities of mid-19th century life.

The MHS and other history museums rarely use theatre or dramas to interpret history so we are especially pleased to use this medium to broaden understanding of both a period of history and, more importantly, of the half of the population sometimes overlooked by history, that is women. In addition to this performance, the actors will take the show to about 14 sites around the State over the next year.

The script was written by Emmy award winning scriptwriter, Helen Jean Burn, professor at Towson State University. Her script uses the actual words of 1850's women taken from their letters and diaries and other literature published at that time. Only the words spoken by the "Historian" who sets a scene or provides some historical background are "new" words.

The director is Richard Pilcher, who serves on the faculty at the Baltimore School for the Arts. The actors are freelance performers from the Baltimore area. The dramatic readings will be performed by professional actresses Harriet Lynn, Natalie Smith and Nancy Krebs.

Harriet Lynn has performed in national Broadway companies, regional theatre, television, radio and film, including a featured role with Ginger Rogers and Betty Grable in "Hello Dolly". Locally she has appeared on MPT's "Crabs", in Center Stage's Young People's Theatre and as an artist-in-residence with the Maryland Arts Council.

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Natalie Smith has performed with a number of summer stock, repertory companies and dinner theatres, including Allenberry Playhouse, Actors Ensemble and Main Stage Repertory. She teaches musical theatre at Peabody Preparatory School and administers outreach programs at Baltimore School for the Arts.

Nancy Krebs is a professional actor-singer with experience in television and regional theatres throughout the country, notably Center Stage, Alaska Repertory Theatre and Meadowbrook. She teaches Voice and Musical Theatre at the Baltimore School for the Arts.

The program was developed by the Maryland Historical Society with funding from the Maryland Humanities Council. Admission is free and refreshments will be served after the program.

Photo Caption: Nancy Krebs, Natalie Smith and Harriet Lynn will perform "Quilt Voices", a program which presents dramatic readings from mid-19th-century middle-class women's diaries, letters and literature. The readings will reveal how women dealt with issues such as childbirth, death, health and disease, education, morals, friendship, celebrations and church as the center of social life. Courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society.