

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

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Quilts offer scraps of history
by Jay Graybeal

Quilting is one of the few remaining traditional art forms practiced by local residents. For many quilters, historic patterns, colors and fabrics serve as the inspiration for contemporary designs.

The Historical Society of Carroll County and the Carroll County Extension Homemakers Council are co-sponsoring a third year of quilt documentation days as part of a state-wide effort to register examples of this unique textile art form made in Maryland. To date, over 450 Maryland quilts have been documented by the Carroll County project staff.

The Historical Society will host three documentation days held in the Society's Shriver-Weybright Auditorium on June 24 and 25 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and June 27 from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m. Owners of quilts made in Maryland are invited to bring these items for free documentation by a textile historian. The historian will complete a standard six-page worksheet in use throughout the state. Each quilt will be photographed (black and white prints, color prints, color slides). For more information about the documentation days or to make an appointment to have a quilt documented, call Mary Popp at 239-8958 or the historical society at 848-6494.

Finished household textiles were traditionally the women's responsibility – the task of clothing herself, her husband and children as well as providing bedcoverings and other necessary household textiles was hers. Their importance is underscored by the fact that household textiles kept in a chest often formed the most valuable portion of a young women's possessions prior to her marriage. Few of these items, however, were made entirely by her. Much of the cloth production was performed by professional male weavers or purchase from local merchants. If cloth was made at home, men were involved in the planting, cultivation, and production of the raw material. Tailors, stockingmakers and seamstresses made much of the clothing before these items became available readymade in the mid nineteenth century.

The Historical Society's textile collection includes quilts, coverlets, linens, samplers, costumes and accessories spanning two centuries. They parallel textile developments elsewhere in America but also reflect strong regional influences. These influences can be seen in the selection of fabrics, patterns and decorative motifs.

Textiles probably passed down through the female side of families because of the traditional associations. Women honored objects such as quilts, wedding dresses or samplers because of kinship and the oral family traditions that accompanied them. Fancier quilts are more likely to survive because their owners generally did not use them daily. For this reason the documentation project also seeks to document everyday quilts.

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Unlike most local quilts, an appliqued example made in 1857 by Margaret Buckey (1837-1925) was influenced by national events. The central section of this remarkable pictorial quilt features an eagle with a banner containing “E. Pluribus Unum,” crossed flags with 13 stars, scales and a liberty cap on a pole, all surrounded by 30 stars. The use of these patriotic motifs suggests that Buckey favored national unity on the eve of the Civil War. This quilt was donated to the historical society as a bequest in 1981 from Vivian Englar Barnes. In addition to being a fine example of applique work, Mary Buckey’s quilt is a reminder of a turbulent era in American history. Most other local quilts help to document the lives of local women when quilting was a part of everyday life.

Photo credit: Courtesy of Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: The 1857 Carroll County quilt was made by Margaret Buckey and displays patriotic motifs popular just before the Civil War.