

Lancaster Farming *Antiques Center*

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Virginia Correspondent
HARRISONBURG, Va. — The Virginia Quilt Museum, 301 South Main St., has a way of putting visitors "in stitches" around its unique Christmas tree.

The pine needles may not be real, but the seasonal tribute of a Christmas tree is embraced around and around by miniature quilts. The quilt donations came from all over Virginia. Now, on the encircling jute clothesline

they are suspended by tiny clothespins.

Museum director, Joan Knight, said when visitors see the unique decorating idea, interested persons — even non-Virginians — ask if they can make a quilt, too. To date 106 mini quilts are on the tree but others are on the way.

The Virginia state flower is represented by the white dogwood wreath that encircles the tiptop like a halo. And the state

"We don't take every quilt that is offered," she said, "but we do like to fill in the blanks (patterns not preserved previously)."

The request is reviewed by the committee which makes its decision based the criteria of the quilt's condition, if the pattern is one the museum needs, and if the quilt's history is significant.

"Quilting was an artistic outlet," Knight said, alluding to hand-stitching that most women of bygone days did at some time or other. She said it's still true, even when a machine is used to create a quilt.

Knight said that if machines to quilt had been available to women then, they would have certainly used them.

The house that is home to the museum has some impressive features that inspire the streak of creativity in those who enter it. The inlaid floors are notable. Many a quilter departs with an unspoken goal to recreate the pattern in her needlework. Likewise, the intricate design in the heavy cast iron radiators that are painted white.

If you want to preserve a quilt, heirloom or not, forget the plastic bag. Knight says putting a quilt in plastic is a mistake. The natural fibers cannot breathe.

"The best thing is to put it in an old pillow case," she said. Go to a thrift shop and buy a large pillow case if you have none at home.

"The other thing is take it out every six months and refold it."



Joan Knight, director of the Virginia Quilt Museum, Harrisonburg, takes a great amount of pride in her responsibility of overseeing the daily operation of the eight-year old facility that runs three large exhibits a year with a pleasing mix of vintage and contemporary pieces.



Close up of a side column. Two columns flank a full mirror at a large mahogany fireplace. A Cupid is at the base of each column. Dubbed "Pat and Mike," they once were the perfect spot for hanging stockings when the museum building was a private dwelling for the Sipe family.

bird, taking a lofty view of things at the very peak, is a replica of a red cardinal.

Knight says the wee quilts represent every section of Virginia. Patterns range from Sunbonnet Sue and Betty Boop with red-work embroidery, to Amish, white on white (whole cloth), YoYo, crazy quilt, fan, pinwheel, flying geese, cathedral window, A Shenandoah Valley postcard scene, star patterns, hand-stenciling, and applique.

"One of the things that is so popular today," Knight said, pointing to a Christmas quilt with fancy additions, "is embellishments."

Embellishments might be buttons, beads, little pearls or metallic threads.

After the 2000 Virginia State Legislature passed a resolution making the four-year-old Virginia Quilt Museum the "Official Quilt Museum of the Commonwealth of Virginia," quilters in Northern Virginia encouraged the museum to launch the Christmas tree quilt project, Knight said.

The invitation to participate went into a newsletter, along with a stipulation about sizes. Six by eight inches was the maximum, and two by three inches, the minimum.

Knight reports that in the U.S. only seven quilt museums exist. The nearest locations are in Kentucky and New England.

"We started it (the quilt museum) so Virginia quilts could be preserved for future generations."

Knight explained the procedure for other quilt donations. Now and then a family member will approach the museum with a quilt donation they want preserved.



The gaily decorated Christmas tree in the Virginia Quilt Museum boasts an inventory of 106 original miniature quilts. The squares were designed, crafted and donated by persons from all over the state. Mini clothespins hold them suspended on jute clothesline. Jute clothesline comes in links and can be folded up for easy storage. Some patterns displayed are Betty Boop with red embroidery, Sunbonnet Sue, YoYo, crazy quilt, fan quilt, pinwheel, flying geese, Cathedral window, stars, Amish, hand-stenciled, and applique.



Mariann Simmons is pictured with the notable log cabin miniature quilt, which required about 10 hours to stitch together the 12 one-inch blocks, each containing 13 strips.

That is, vary the fold lines on a regular schedule.

The second mistake owners make is to allow the valuable piece to be touched by the warm, bright rays of sunshine. Not only will fading occur but the heat will damage and disintegrate the fibers.

Lighting in the museum is adjusted to the correct level for textiles. Additionally, behind the curtains and draperies a filtering plexiglass offers protection from the sun's ultra-violet rays at the big windows.

The Virginia Quilt Museum is located in a house that Colonel E.T.H. Warren built in 1856. Warren, a lawyer, was killed while serving in the Civil War. The high-ceilinged dwelling was built as a wedding present for his wife.

In 1894, George Sipe, who was a lawyer also, became the owner. He added the a big addition at the rear and a pair of mahogany fireplaces with glazed tiles.

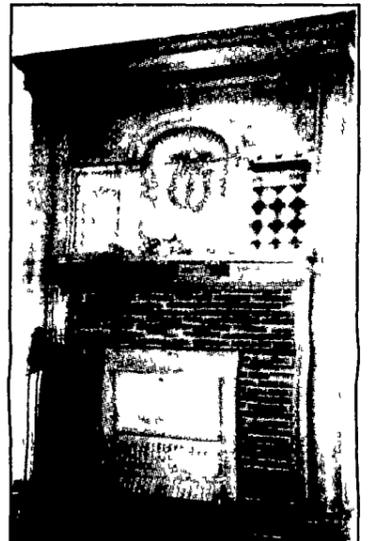
The historic residence eventually became city property, but in the year 2000, Harrisonburg officials turned over the real estate and made it a gift to the Virginia Quilt Museum.

With the support of grants and admission fees, the building has had extensive renovations completed. Rotting floor joists at ground level were removed and the thick concrete was poured underneath to satisfy current building code requirements. Volunteer and board member Vaughn Simmons said that despite termite destruction, he saw in his mind's eye, a lovely future for the floor planks and decrepit joists. Where feasible, he not only salvaged pieces of the original wood, but restored and incorporated them brilliantly in the decor.

The current "Time-Span" (new quilts from old tops by Becky Herdle) exhibit will continue through March 29.

Next year the Quilt Museum schedule includes the following: Apr. 3-June 28 — Time-Squared: Art Quilts by the Manhattan Quilters Guild; June through mid-Oct. — Art Quilts From the Fringe Benefit Quilters of Southwest Va.; Mid-Oct.- Feb. 2005 — Quilts Made by Men.

In 2005 expect to see "Memories by the Sackful," which will feature old feed bags. . . . Exhibits that are always fea-



In the less imposing of two mahogany fireplaces two small mirrors reflect quilts in the current "Time-Span Quilts," exhibit of pieces produced by Becky Herdle of Connecticut.



This Christmas stocking quilt made by Ann Lahr of Annandale, Northern Va., is an example of applique and embellishments.

tured are Vintage Quilts From the Museum Collection," and "Women of the Civil War Era."

Operating hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday and Sunday: 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Closed Tues., Wed., major holidays and between exhibitions.

For additional information, call (540) 433-3818.