

Volunteer Appreciation: *Wylie House Quilters*

The Wylie House quilters finished their first reproduction project for us in 1993. Called a “nine patch,” it now covers a large bed upstairs in the “Boys Room.” A prolific bunch, our quilters are working on their eighth piece since then!

Not surprisingly, all have done other kinds of handwork, including sewing, knitting, crocheting and various types of embroidery. “I sewed all my children’s clothes and I’ve made many things for my grandchildren, too. Last year I made twelve afghans for my family before I came back here to quilt last spring,” said Virginia Miller, who has been working with us for nearly a decade. She brought her good friend and fellow church-goer, Ellen Pittman, into the fold about five years ago.

Virginia and Ellen Pittman have been sewing and quilting since childhood, a skill they learned from their respective mothers. “I used to sit underneath the quilting frame when I was a child. My mother gave me scraps of fabric, a needle and some thread and let me go,” Ellen remarked. When asked if her mother had not worried about giving sewing needles to a small child, Ellen replied, “No, it was different back then. You learned to sew as quickly as you could manipulate a needle. I used to thread all my mother’s needles for her. I’d string up to six needles on a spool of thread so she could simply keep sewing with that color of thread. She’d pull out however much thread she needed, cut and knot it off, and when she finished with that string, she’d just come back for the next.”

Virginia was raised on a farm in northeast Monroe Co. and married a farmer later in life. “We’d sew and quilt on cloudy or rainy days because we didn’t have to be out in the fields. To this day, I love a good thunderstorm. You feel free to do whatever you want to do.”

Marjorie Clayton and Diamond Mather knew each other through bridge and a women’s investment club before they came to Wylie House. Our longest serving quilters, they were part of the group that made our first reproduction mentioned above. Marj had done a lot of sewing for daughter and herself, and had also taken classes in crewel and counted cross-stitch embroidery before she ever tried her hand at quilting. “I started coming to Wylie House in the early 1990s and I just got hooked. My grandmother quilted. She was from Pennsylvania. I loved the colors and patterns but had never done it myself until I came to Wylie House.”

Diamond has always been interested in quilting but, like Marj, got a late start on it in life. Although fascinated with the design and colors of blocks her mother kept in a box, her parents were more protective and didn’t allow her to handle needles, pins, or scissors as a child. “My mother would only let me play with a pile of quilt patches she had. I’d spend hours arranging the colors until I had them just right. My parents took a trip to the big exposition in Chicago in 1934 and an older woman they knew came to care of me. She was a quilter. She set me down with fabric, thread and a needle. Oh, I was thrilled to death to have these things! But I didn’t seriously try to quilt until I made my first baby quilt for my daughter many years later. My mother’s mother quilted but my mother wasn’t interested. She’d say, ‘Why would you want to cut fabric up and then sew it back together again when you can buy a good blanket?’” A good question indeed, but one that few quilters would ponder! If you’re quilting, you’ve already stitched your way through the answer.

-Bridget Edwards



Left to right: Diamond Mather, Ellen Pittman, Virginia Miller, and Marjorie Clayton.