

HISTORY OF THE MERRIMACK VALLEY QUILT GUILD

It is a fact that quilting is taking over the minds and bodies of thousands of women. Housework, husbands and children are taking second place to fabric, batting and #10 needles. Not long ago, quilting was a quaint, folksy thing that the Amish and grandmothers did. Now the American quilt has been recognized as a form of art and personal expression....

In the Merrimack Valley of Massachusetts, a group was formed in the summer of 1980 for the purpose of encouraging and developing the art of quilting. Janet Elwin, a nationally known quilter, formerly of Amesbury, Massachusetts, noticed that within her quilting classes there was a bottled enthusiasm with no available outlet. With the thought of beginning a local quilting group, Janet invited some of her students and Gunilla Caulfield, the owner of a local quilt shop, into her home. The result of this first meeting was the formation of the Merrimack Valley Quilt Guild with it's initial membership of 15.

Each month more and more quilters arrived at the meetings. The programs during the first year were simple, interesting and inexpensive. Group members demonstrated techniques they used, explained patterns, gave slide shows, and took place in decoration and fabric swaps. The quilters applied of a charter to the New England Quilters Guild, and accepted it at the October 1980 meeting.

By January of 1981, after only four meetings, membership had grown to over 40. It was decided that the new guild would hold their first quilt show. This was a very big undertaking for such a new and inexperienced group, but their enthusiasm was evident.

Finally, following five long months of meetings, telephone calls and free advertising, the "Apple Blossom Quilt Shop" opened, displaying over 100 quilts. These quilts included more than 25 antiques, traditional and contemporary designs. Most of the new quilts were made by the guild's members. Others were borrowed from the generous members of the New England Quilters Guild. Hundreds of raffle tickets were sold for an appliqued apple blossom quilt made by the group's members. Printed programs and a door prize added a professional touch. The Universalist-Unitarian Church of Haverhill, MA with it's high ceilings and traditional décor, provided the show with a gallery-like atmosphere. Beautiful mild spring weather with apple blossoms blooming on schedule topped off the day of the show. Over 400 people "oohed and ahhed" and tried to decide which quilt would become viewer's choice. Their favorite, overall viewer's choice, went to Catherine Dwyer of Danvers, MA for her beautiful Broken Star quilt. The most popular entry from the membership was the spectacular Sample Quilt made by Ruth Veasey of Haverhill, MA.

The first Merrimack Valley Quilt Guild show closed after nine hours. The results were many, many compliments, a healthy new bank account and a satisfied and proud membership. With a solid foundation laid, the Merrimack Valley Quilt Guild looked forward to the future.