

DONNA and BRYCE HAMILTON

It all started at a garage sale in 1973. That was the year that Donna and Bryce Hamilton bought their first "nice antique quilt". Since then they have traveled an estimated 175,000 miles across the United States buying and selling quilts. They purchase about one in four quilts they see and figure they have bought and sold approximately 2,000 quilts. They have about 75 in their own collection.

In 1976, the Smithsonian National Collection of Fine Arts and the United States Information Service sponsored Donna and Bryce for a six months tour in Europe doing shows and lectures. They visited Iceland, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Austria, England and communist dominated Romania.

For the next six months, "home" to the Hamiltons and their 30 exhibit quilts, was a VW van. Donna handled the "how-to" and Bryce handled the lectures. Bryce says, "We compliment each other".

When asked how the Europeans responded to Bryce as a male quilter, Donna replied, "Except in England, there is no tradition of quilting. They have no preconceived ideas so they don't think of it as 'woman's work' with quilting bees, etc. Most of the areas respond to quilts on the level of design".

In England they separate patchwork from quilting and do either one or the other. If they knew how to piece they were used to doing it in the English manner over paper. Many of the women came to Donna and thanked her for showing them "the quicker and easier American method".

Since the Hamiltons have returned they have made their home in Minneapolis, MN., where Donna said she was "going to sit on the front porch and rock". There is no record of how much rocking she has done but they have about 75 ladies currently making quilts for them which they sell to shops around the country. Just keeping track of all that seems like a bit of organizing.



Bryce foresees the day "when there will be fewer and fewer people willing to devote the hours and hours of delicate needlework that go into one intricately designed patchwork quilt. I think that in another 15 years we will no longer be able to find people who are willing to do it for anything less than a reasonable hourly wage. We see mostly 50-60 year old women - no one younger coming up."

As to why they chose this vocation, the Hamiltons replied that "we love the close personal contact with the ladies that make the quilts. Most of them have become friends through the years. Also, though we put in more hours than in the normal job, we have total control of our time. We love the freedom to come and go as we please. Sometimes we work all day and way into the night, but we know that if we want to take off for a few days we can do that too."

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