

VISIT WITH FAVORITE QUILTERS

by Carol Newman

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... Enola Gish, the "Kansas Quilt Lady" of Baldwin City (is) a well-known quilt show organizer, quilt columnist and quilt teacher. (She) was in the midst of preparing all those activities the rainy Monday we talked. Although I arrived at 10 and intending not to wear out my welcome, I didn't leave Enola's house until 3 that afternoon.

As we talked, she brought out quilts she was preparing for a show - quilts to which she would apply a "sleeve" on the back so they could be hung - and she brought out many quilts in her personal collection and photographs of even more quilts. Each quilt has some little story, some bit of history that Enola has searched out and hopes to preserve and pass on.

As the day passed, I couldn't help comparing her work with the much ballyhooed "Kentucky Quilt Project" a Smithsonian traveling exhibit ... Enola has done essentially the same thing for Kansas practically singlehandedly - and more than once.

Not only did she find 40 quilts for "Kansas Quilts", a show which in 1979-80 traveled the state for 18 months and spent a month in the State Capitol building, but she also collected 40 old and new Kansas quilts for "Quilt Treasures I" for the Hansen Museum in Logan, and for "Quilt Treasures II" also in Logan, she assembled 20 quilts 100 years old or older.

She has hung quilt shows in Leavenworth, Iola, McCune, Valley Falls and points between. She has hung historical shows of Kansas quilts old and new as well as theme shows of Log Cabin quilts and flower quilts.

The mass of pictorial and printed material she has gathered about Kansas quilts represents an almost overwhelming investment of time and money. Why does she do it? Enola said, "My dream would be to get the stories of these quilters down before we lose them."

As Enola sees it, they are making more than quilts. "I hate those antique dealers who come and take away our history.

"The quilts play an important part in looking back at Kansas," Enola said. "When early settlers came, they didn't have anything, and a quilt might have been given to them for the trip as a real touch of home. It was the early expression of art to these women. The quilts served as the flowers that didn't grow during the depression and dust-bowl days. The women kept the churches going with their quilting bees. I want to see our children and grandchildren know their history."

Somehow a quilt represents more than a functional household item. "I am not a bed-cover quilt person," Enola said. "I have a quilt." You can see that feeling is represented in Enola's choice of quilts for a particular show and the way those quilts are displayed.



MOUNTAIN MIST ad for "Martha's Vineyard" published McCALL NEEDLEWORK S/S 1970

"From the home of Wm Cary, uncle of poetess Phoebe Cary, comes this charming bedroom room in Cary House, College Hill, Cincinnati, Ohio. Everything here reflects the furnishings of over 100 years ago. Except one thing, the dainty lavender-on-white 'Martha's Vineyard' on the bed. It's new! But reminiscent, we'd like to think, of little Phoebe's first childhood trip East. Surprized? Only the pattern is old."

The ad notes that Cary House is a restored house circa 1816 and a gift to the Cincinnati Art Museum. Why was the pattern chosen for the bed? Did the museum know something of the origin of the pattern?" A quick phone call to the museum brought the information that the quilt was not on the bed now nor is it part of their collection. It was suggested that Mountain Mist may have asked to use the room as a background for the quilt.

Ed note: During the conversation we discovered the museum has a new quilt catalog. They sent us a copy and it is a beauty. See the Classified Ads for information on how to get your copy.