

# QUILTERS' JOURNAL

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MARY SCHAFER, reknown quiltermaker of Flushing, Michigan in her Betsy Ross costume with her Pennsylvania Dutch quilt. Mrs. Schafer was much in demand as a speaker during the Bicentennial celebrations.

MARY SCHAFER

In a small, neat house in the suburbs of Flint, Michigan, lives a tiny, indefatigable, modest, quiltmaker "par excellence" who was baptized Maria Juliana Vido in Austria, Hungary. She and her mother came by ship to join her father in America when she was four.

Since her mother died when she was five, and her father did not want her to grow up without needlework skills, he sent her to various women in town to learn crocheting, tatting, and needlepoint. In the evening she would practice the techniques. One evening she was crocheting a piece of lace to be used as trim on her panties when her father remarked the holes were too large. She did it over!

In 1929 she married Fred Schafer, a German immigrant. They had one son and when he joined the Navy in 1952 she decided to make a quilt to keep herself occupied as they had always fascinated her. She purchased a kit and proceeded to make her first quilt called Rhododendron. She knew nothing about making quilts. One day after her son had returned from the Navy he was emptying the car trunk from a beach party and found an unclaimed, old, damp quilt full of sand. When she washed it, she liked it so much she decided to make one like it. There was no pattern or instructions so she put the quilt in front of her and set to work.

There are quilts on every bed and if you opened a cupboard or drawer you would find more.

Beside the best light in the house are two quilts in the making. Her favorite position for piecing or appliqueing is seated on the floor and she can sit there for hours. She can also jump up in a second with never a groan or a moan.

Mary has her own unique filing system of articles and magazines in a stack by the fireplace. In her bookcase is a shelf of quilt books.

She purchased her first books, those all time favorites McKim and Ickes from Barbara Bannister but the one that has had the greatest influence on her is Ruth Finley's OLD PATCHWORK QUILTS. She once saw an article written by Florence Peto in THE AMERICAN HOME so she wrote to her and said, "I enjoy your books". That was the start of a friendship by correspondence and eventually Mary purchased Mrs. Peto's book HISTORIC QUILTS from her and some of her lovely antique fabrics.

Mary has great respect for those early quiltmakers. Her aim in life is to upgrade the quality of quilts today. Her own perfectionist approach to quilting is an inspiration.

Besides the quilts she has made, she has an extensive collection of quilts gathered since the 1950's on trips to Pennsylvania and from her own area.

One can't talk quilts too long with Mary before hearing the name Betty Harriman. Betty was a fine quiltmaker

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MARY SCHAFER

from the South who specialized in restoring and making duplicates of historical quilts. She and Mary corresponded regularly twice a month and provided support and encouragement to each other. When Betty died Mary received her patterns and unfinished quilts, many of which she has now finished.

Several years before the Bicentennial became a household word, Mary Schafer decided that she wanted to commemorate the event with something special and something she could uniquely do. She set out to make a series of Bicentennial quilts using traditional block designs as a tribute to those American women who, by their skill, ingenuity and thrift recorded their culture, their personal tastes and the history of our forefathers and mothers. The result was seven quilts which she exhibited and displayed during her many lectures throughout the Bicentennial.

She says, "These quilts are my interpretation-my version of remembering how we came to be, celebrate what we are and reflect on where we are going.

When Mary Schafer decides to make a new quilt she prepares for that quilt in much the same way an actress prepares herself for a new role.. studying, reading and searching for just the interpretation she wants to give it. Each quilt is a personal statement and when the quilt is finished she can weave a fascinating story about its unique symbolism.

Mary is a fine quiltmaker. She has so many ribbons she could make several quilts of them. She regularly carries off blue ribbons at the Saginaw Fair and the Michigan State Fair. One of her quilts is pictured (#14) in the National Bicentennial Quilt Exposition catalog from Warren, Michigan. Another is pictured and described in Doloris Hinson's QUILTERS COMPANION. Three will be exhibited at the National Quilt Exhibit in Santa Rosa on April 21,22 and 23,1978.

--Joyce Gross---



Mary Schafer with her award-winning, three dimensional Attic Windows quilt.

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