

Kai Bay Bk. Feb-1-78 MN

# She's got a hand into everything . . .

There isn't much Irene Gordon doesn't have her hands into.

She's one of those who can do almost anything — the kind of person the rest of us just envy.

The walls of her Wanita Rd. home are decorated with original oil paintings and sketches; colorful crocheted afghans are draped over chairs and couches; macrame wall-hangings decorate the halls; and beautiful quilts lie on almost every bed. And they're all hers.

She makes all her own clothes and until her daughter was married less than a year ago, made her daughter's clothes.

Not only is she a Welcome Wagon hostess, but she works three days a week. She teaches a dress-making course offered by the Peel Board of Education and a quilting course at the Mississauga YMCA.

Last week, she instructed a group of women in the basics of traditional quilt-making at Mississauga Central Library.

She says she just likes to stay busy. "As long as I'm using my hands . . . I'm happy."

She manages to find time for her husband, who is out of town for five days a week, on Sunday.

Gordon pieced together her first quilt when she was 12 years old, a young girl growing up in Clarksburg, a small town near Thornbury, Ont. "It's pretty ratty, now, but I still have it . . . my mother embroidered my age into the corner."

She grew up knowing how to use her hands.

She recalls watching her mother and a group of women from the town quilting around the kitchen. "The women would help us . . . then we'd reciprocate another time."

Buried for so many years, the tradition is enjoying a rebirth.

The first patchwork quilts were made in 16th century Sicily, she explains. "Quilting is by no means a new art — although perhaps it is to us".

A quilt is one of only a few items the Pilgrims brought to America centuries ago. "They served to many purposes — as dividers, shawls, blankets, tablecloths . . .".

The art was lost for many years, she notes, but today hand work is being enjoyed again.

"Television killed interest in crafts. People weren't exposed to it. You have to be exposed to it somehow — see someone doing it, read about it — for an interest to develop.

"About 20 years ago, my husband and I saw people square dancing and thought it looked like fun. We joined a club and have been square dancing ever since. But if we hadn't been exposed to it . . . we never might have done it."

Quilting is by no means an easy craft to learn. To build a patchwork quilt requires patience, skill and most importantly, time.

And although traditional quilts were made on frames larger than the finished quilt itself, it is possible to quilt the individual blocks on a smaller frame and to piece them together later. Whether the frame is large or small, the fabric must be kept taut at all times. And perfect handstitching means nine stitches to the inch. And that takes practice.

She advises beginners to do some reading on the subject before tackling a large, complicated quilt. "You can start on something small — placemats, a tea cozy, pot holders. And start with an easy pattern — don't start off with an eight point star pattern."

Those who don't know a knit from a pearl can take heart. All it takes is time and practice.

"There are a lot of people who might be arty — but just don't know it."

## A few tips

Irene Gordon has been making quilts since she was 12 years old. Take a few tips from a pro:

- use polyester batting for best results. Cotton batting tends to mat when washed. Polyester remains fluffy and light even after washing.

- accuracy is the key to a perfect quilt. Pattern pieces must be cut perfectly, uniformly to ensure straight lines throughout.

- permanent press fabrics will wash more perfectly than others. Calico prints are best suited for quilts.

- press all seams in one

direction; don't press seams open.

- material must be kept taut at all time.

- seam allowances should be  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch wide, not the usual  $\frac{5}{8}$  used in sewing clothes.

- only quilting thread should be used. Although white thread is commonly used, colors are now available.

- a special quilting needle should be purchased.

- perfect stitching is 8 or 9 stitches per inch.

- a thimble is an absolute necessity.

- start with an easy pattern.



It takes a lot of time, patience and skill to hand craft a traditional quilt. Mrs. Irene Gordon, Wanita Dr., has been doing that for most of her life. She pieced together her first at 12 years of age.