

Her remarkable quilts record an almost-forgotten history

By JO ANN STEVENSON
Times Staff Writer

"Malton is the forgotten corner of Mississauga," says Annie May Johnston, "except at tax time." Annie May should know. She's been a Malton resident for most of her ninety years. To keep herself busy, she preserves Malton's history in her paintings and on quilts.

Her beautiful work was displayed recently at the Burnhamthorpe Public School at Mississauga Memory Days, where Annie May was guest of honor.

"To see all those bright, beaming eyes was

something I'll always remember," said Annie May, who has preserved a zest for a life of all sorts. Her wild overgrown perennial garden spills over with color and variety. In the winter, this talent for creativity spills off onto canvas and quilts.

"My father's farm was 100 acres on the south-east corner of Derry Rd. & Airport Rd. which is now the International Centre."

The Johnston homestead, built in 1851 and demolished in 1969, is now Reid Paper. The only building of pioneer Malton that still stands is the old Village Hall behind the Post Office. "They'll get it

soon, no doubt," said Annie May. She may be right, the building is condemned.

One of the quilts displayed at the school was of twenty churches in the area. All but one, Malton Trinity, has been destroyed and they will celebrate their 25th anniversary on June 18.

"Malton would still be mud roads and backhouses if it weren't for Mary Fix, former reeve of Toronto Township. She came out to open the firehall and noticed how few old Malton residents were in attendance. She drove to the old town to see for herself and saw the discrepancy

between the facilities in the new town and with us. We had plumbing in no time after that."

When Annie May was 15, she began working on quilts under orders from her mother. The resulting quilt, which she calls a crazy quilt, filled her with such pride, she embroidered Christmas 1906 in the centre to make it memorable and has quilted ever since.

"Each piece I make is different. I enjoy using everything leftover to create a fresh design." Plenty of quilts have been sent to church bazaars and to Red Cross workers. All of the proceeds Annie has made from quilting she has donated to church work but now she keeps the quilts for displays.

In 1967 Annie May was introduced to liquid embroidery, a technique that allows the painting of scenes onto quilts. The results have been local historical quilts with great beauty as well as valuable content for the Malton community.

Of the literally hundreds of quilts Annie makes, it is hard to choose a favorite.

Each is unique. They have been displayed in Malton library and the Brampton art gallery. Pictures of the quilts were shown in issues of the Canadian Quilter and will be included soon in a U.S. tour.

The first prize winner in a plowing contest and the Calthumpian parades held in Malton until the first world war eliminated the young men that supported the parades are two of the many epics she tells in pictures.

The homes and churches that played a part in Annie's life are all recorded and birds and flowers that have known her augment the patterns she designs.

Annie May Johnston reflects the times she has known and her cheerful outlook points to the future with optimism.

Her quilts harness the past. All of Mississauga can use them to steady their ride to the future.



Annie May Johnston was guest of honor at Mississauga Memory Days, an event planned by Burnhamthorpe Public School recently. Three of her two hundred quilts are shown. In the left, a quilt of twenty churches from the Malton area complete with dates of construction and destruction. Centre is a traditional quilt called the log cabin which belongs to a series of three. On the right is a quilt of familiar scenes from Annie's 90 years in Malton including the Calathumpian Parades held in Malton until the first world war depleted the men.