

Set the record straight about origins of quilting

by BETTIE BRADLEY

When Therese Petersen of Crozier Court read a book that suggested the ancient art of quilting had been developed solely in the United States, she saw red.

"Patchwork Quilting — A Uniquely American Art manages to suggest that quilting was born fully blown in the U.S.A. which simply couldn't be farther from the truth," said Mrs. Petersen.

"This beautiful, ancient craft originated in China. It spread to the Middle East and was introduced to Europe by the crusaders. In fact, the largest collection of ancient quilts is in Cairo."

The first settlers brought their pieced and padded covers to North America where they originally served the sole purpose of providing much needed warmth.

Families often developed their own designs and these were passed down through the generations. Variations would be developed and given new names and these in turn would be passed on at

neighborhood quilting bees.

During the Victorian era, velvet and silk crazy quilts of random shapes were made that still survive.

The beautiful examples of art and needlecraft we see today may be antiques but they are also quite likely to be brand new because interest in quilting has grown phenomenally in recent years.

Today the new fast-dyed fabrics, dacron batts and sewing machines have sped up the essentially hand-made product.

Canadian women meet in churches and clubs to work together over their nine-foot quilting frames. Helen Robinson co-ordinates a group at First United Church in Port Credit. Another is held at Trinity Church.

There are also night school classes at Applewood School in Mississauga where Irene Gordon, an accomplished needlewoman, is teacher.

Excellent books containing scores of patterns are available at Central Library

and Port Credit library. McCall's also publishes moderately priced books on quilting and a quilter's newspaper, published in Sudbury, is available by mail.

Beginners are advised to start small — experimenting with a wall hanging or cushion covers, graduating to dining room chair cushions in Colonial design or perhaps a crib size cover.

When a large quilt is achieved there is not much doubt it will be destined to become a family heirloom.



Times photo by STAN CARMICHAEL

Therese Petersen holds "Dresden Plate", owned by the Hooker family of Mississauga. Forty years ago the quilt won two first prizes at the C.N.E.

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