



20th-Century Quilting Bee in Scarsdale



THE NEW YORK TIMES
SUNDAY, MARCH 17, 1985

By ANN E. SILVERMAN

SEVERAL women sit talking to their friends as they stitch small bits of fabric into patchwork squares called Suburb, Rail Fence, Double Wedding Bands and Delectable Mountain. Others stand in a small group, admiring a partly completed quilt, offering advice and trading information. On the far side of the room, under the vaulted ceiling of the assembly hall, eight women are bent over a large patchwork quilt top, talking animatedly as they attach it to the two other layers of the quilt with large basting stitches.

Although this scene recalls days gone by, it took place on a recent Tuesday afternoon in Scarsdale. The Village Squares, a new quilting club, had begun its monthly meeting.

Most of these quilters first met in adult-education classes and later in each others' homes before forming the club. "The club attracted many of the people who used to meet individually at home," said Colette Laico, a quilting instructor at the Scarsdale Adult School and the first president of the Village Squares.

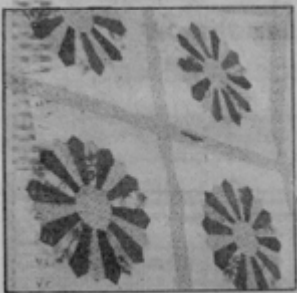
Nancy Siegel, at left, and other members, above at left, of the Village Squares. Above detail from a quilt.

"The women seemed to enjoy themselves so much that at the end of every semester they wanted to continue, and I encouraged them to get together in their own homes," she added. "After teaching so many classes, there were so many individual groups going on throughout Westchester County that they eventually came to me and said that they'd like to coordinate and have one area where they could meet," Mrs. Laico said.

After looking for a place to hold the meetings, the assembly hall at St. James the Less Church in Scarsdale was found through the effort of Gert Hofheimer, staff director of the Scarsdale Adult School and treasurer of the Village Squares.

"I was meeting with the minister from this church through my work with the senior citizens," Mrs. Hofheimer said. "He said that the church sewing group no longer met and that the room was available." The first meeting was held Jan. 10, last year. "It was a wonderful turnout. We had close to 60 people."

In its first year, the club has maintained a roster of about 60 members. "One of the first things we decided to do as a group was to make a quilt to-



gether," Mrs. Hofheimer said. Several members met at the home of the club's secretary, Helen Heilpern.

There, according to Mrs. Hofheimer, "we drew and cut and drew and cut" shapes from the fabric. The shapes were then packed in plastic bags, along with instructions explaining how to sew the pieces together to form a patchwork square. "We gave out sections of the quilt and as many people as wanted could work on it," she said. "We put the quilt together as a group."

The quilt, now almost completed, is made of lavender, pink and blue patches in the Shoo-Fly pattern, a traditional nine-patch design. It will be raffled off at the club's April 9 meeting and proceeds will be used to help pay club expenses and provide funds for upcoming programs.

"We're really trying to keep the informal, friendly feeling that women had when they originally began going to quilting bees and at the same time introduce some structure into the organization," said Marj Sturges, now president of the Village Squares.

The meetings, which are normally held on the second Tuesday of each month, begin at noon with a coffee hour and are followed by a short busi-

ness meeting. Members are encouraged to bring in finished projects, works in progress and pieces that relate to the subject of the afternoon's program to display to one another at 1:30. Each meeting concludes with a special program conducted either by a club member or an invited guest speaker.

During the last year, programs have included a sale and exchange of fabrics and quilting supplies, demonstrations of Celtic quilting and molas, a reverse applique technique, workshops on how to make hexagons and curved pieces, a film about quilting, as well as two programs on antique quilts.

According to Mrs. Sturges, future programs will include a demonstration on implements used for patchwork and quilting, and a workshop on "quick piecing."

"About half of our members have been quilters for five years or more," she said. "The other half are relatively new quilters who have had probably a year or so of quilting experience, which is a reason why we have to offer a lot of different programs in order to keep everyone's interest up."

One service that has proved to be especially popular with the members, and that immediately brings to mind the original spirit of the quilting bee, takes place during the coffee hour, before the formal meeting begins.

To help a member who has completed a quilt top, several women work as a team to baste together the separate layers of the quilt and prepare it for the actual quilting. "This seems to be something that people are very excited about doing because it involves having a large size table and we don't have the space in our homes," Mrs. Heilpern said. "Because it's so difficult for one person to put the three layers together properly, we do it as a joint venture."

On the recent afternoon, about eight women had gathered around a table, preparing to baste a large quilt made by Tykle Horowitz. "This is my first whole quilt. It's called Grandmother's Flower Garden, and it was very popular, especially in the 1930's," said Mrs. Horowitz, who has made wall hangings and pillows.

The women began by spreading a yellow and white gingham backing face down across the tabletop. "The backing is taped down, and it has to be very taut," explained Edda Murtha, as she smoothed the fabric with her hands. They then proceeded to place a flannel sheet, which Mrs. Horowitz chose instead of a thicker

batting, on top of the gingham and covered the sheet and backing with the quilt top. They worked slowly, carefully pinning the layers together before they began to baste. "When you go to quilt, if you don't do this just right, then it shifts and you have lumps in your quilt. This is the most tedious part of the job," Mrs. Murtha said.

Because making a patchwork quilt

involves considerable time and effort, care is taken when selecting a pattern, and designs are chosen for a variety of reasons.

Some quilters choose a traditional pattern they specially like and make changes to suit their taste. "My favorite is Grandmother's Flower Garden," said Mrs. Horowitz, who owns several examples of the design and had previously made a pillow in the pattern.

Others choose a design or color to commemorate a special event. "This is the traditional pattern normally called Rail Fence — it was made as a gift for my husband for when we went to Ireland," said Mary Ann C. Reynolds, a guest who belongs to a quilting club in New Jersey. "I renamed it Irish fields — I put 15 different colors of green in it and if you look at it from far away, it reminds you of the fields of Ireland, which they square off with stones. This was just my interpretation," she noted.

For Nancy Siegel, an accomplished quilter who has completed five quilts, the traditional names and patterns of the quilts provide a very personal way to honor a special person.

"I'm making quilts in memory of all the women in my life," she said, noting that the first, called Yankee Pride, had been made for her mother. "I put her name and her birth date and where she was born and whom she married on the back of it and gave it to her for Mother's Day." Mrs. Siegel has also made a quilt, in a flower-garden design, in honor of her late mother-in-law. "She liked to work in the garden — that was her hobby and her pastime. Now I'm making one for my present husband's mother. She collected tea cups so I'm making the tea cup pattern."

For further information about the Village Squares, call Gert Hofheimer at 723-4917.