

Interview Log

Interviewee: Janet Melvin Tape #: MAAF/KF/DE/FT8.19.226

Interviewer: Kelly Feltault # of Tapes: 1 of 1

Date: 8/19/98 # of Sides: 1

Location: Harrington DE; in Janet's home

Topic: quilting, Swedish embroidery; DE State Fair

Corresponding Photography Log #: MAAF/KF/DE/PS8.19.270-291

Comments: File name: deft226.doc. *Italics* indicate song title or emphasis; "quotations" indicate direct transcription; [brackets indicate additional information not on tape or commentary by fieldworker]. See FN08.19.98 for fieldnotes.

Janet's quilts and Swedish embroidery were a stand-out at the state fair, and while conversing with the fair organizers and judges her name came up often. Several of the organizers knew Janet and recommended her as well. She does not belong to one of the many quilt guilds in DE, but instead learns techniques and other needle work from seniors in her community in DE as well as the one in Florida where she spends the winters. This is another form of transmitting traditional culture, and not from old to young but within the same generation among people who already have similar skills.

BEGIN SIDE A

BIO: born in Felton DE; on old Mar Cain place on Johnny Cake Rd.; by Dr. Chipman; born at home in 1939; raised in Petersburg DE went to school at Caesar Rodney School [see interview with Deloris Blakey for info on integration of this school]; married and then lived on Paradise Alley rd; lived within 10 mile radius all her life; winter in FL now that retired; sold bigger home and got a smaller one.

SWEDISH EMBR: live in Zephyrhills FL; retirement town; met lady buying "monk's cloth" at Wal-Mart; "and well, you know how you are when you do crafts or quilting, I asked 'What are you going to do with the monk's cloth?' she said she made this beautiful afghan [pronounced similar to how Miss Rachel of VA pronounced it: af-i-Can] So she asked to learn and the woman showed her how to do it during several visits; learned from a woman in her 80s; done in winter; made 10-12 so far

OTHER NEEDLEWORK: crochet, quilts, knits but doesn't pearl; quilted first; only doing sw. embr. A few years; story of how one lady in DE has sw. embr. In attic;

QUILTING: retired in 1992; went to FL; took trip around U.S. come to DE for summer; sold home; sister-in-law quilts and she learned from her; did everything on machine for a while; then learned hand quilting from another woman in FL who quilted long time; quilts all the time; addition on trailer all windows because it is her quilting room; room big enough to set up quilting frame; demonstrated at the fair; quilted 2-3 summers with sister-in-law; would put them together and then Janet would quilt them in the winter in FL; now puts her own together in the summer, does several and then quilts them up in the winter;

Describes quilting room in FL;

LEARNING: mother crocheted everyday; never had time to teach us; worked in the fields; poor farmers; learned some from her mom; saw her do it often; made dresses from feed sacks and things; raised with needlework; when working always made something hand made either crocheted or something for people in office; kept hand in it; crocheted some afghans for her children; had 6 children and worked so didn't have time to really do this;

RETIRED: have to keep busy; quilts 10-12 hours a day; gets 7-8 quilts done a year; all queen sized; first quilt was a double wedding ring hand quilted; not quilting long but very productive; has to be busy

PATTERNS AND TECH: if just starting finds that "quilt in a day" books are good; easy; now does anything and prefers scrap quilts like double wedding ring; doing her last one this year all children have one; uses yellow and red as corner stones; gets fabric from yard sales etc;

Saves everything; grand kids quilt with her; they make their own quilts; almost finished; going to make a scrap quilt from left over pieces;

Likes a 2" folded binding sewn to top and done by hand on back after turned; double binding; puts her quilts up after done with them tired of looking at them but children use their quilts so this binding much stronger; 2" folded into 1" then used as binding; can be cut on the bias if rounded edges of quilt;

MEANING: gifts for children; graduation presents; 6 kids and 10 grand kids; all got one on birthdays; then did double wedding ring for all; oldest gets one first then down to the youngest; expert by time done with youngest; all have 2 hand-quilted ones and 2 machine done quilts;

COLORS: rose, green, blue but will use all colors;

BATTING: started with polyester now uses warmer natural cotton batting easier to needle through; homes not cold anymore so it's a good light weight quilt batting; usable in summer;

VALUE TO FAMILY: priceless for them; doesn't sell them; quilt another 10 years and still be giving them away; if sold them not as valuable to family; more appreciative if not sold; gives to friends;

[seems to be a relationship between labor intensity and reason for giving; ex: weddings and births get more labor intensive quilts while buying a home gets a quilt that "works up quicker"]

discussing patterns and techniques for swedish embroidery; hand stitch edges uses quilting stitches for binding; counting like in counted cross-stitch to weave thread; teaching other people;

camaraderie among needleworkers; another lady in Harrington making swedish embroidery; not exactly the same; using for raffles and giving to hospitals; lots of mother daughters working together on larger projects;

husbands of quilters; stories; quilting widows; how quilting changed her and her husbands regular patterns of eating and sleeping, "since I retired, I really retired"

fabric stash; own room set up for fabric and cutting; goes to PA and anywhere to buy fabric; 1st Saturday of every month they go to the Green Dragon in Lancaster Co. PA; flea market; stay the weekend; goes to the country store;

gets bored with the applique; so takes longer; tedious; has several hundred pieces; does starch and press technique; describes that; stuffed applique technique; husband did all her cutting when she first started quilting; he was better with the rotary cutter;

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