

Itchin' for some stitchin': Elsah hosts quilt showcase

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ELSAH - Quilts spanning more than a century were on display Sunday in Elsah.

Deborah M. Smith, owner of the **Maple Leaf Cottage Inn**, created the event to bring more people to Elsah and showcase some local talent. Everything at **Farley's Music Hall**, located at 37 Mill St. in Elsah, was made by hand, Smith said. Some of the items were passed down to residents of Elsah and the surrounding communities by ancestors.

"I called and I asked all my neighbors if they would like to participate in the show," Smith said. "I would love it, and I wanted it to reflect Elsay."

A quilt, donated by **Susan Young** greeted visitors Sunday by being the focal point of the hall's entrance. Other quilts, some of which won several awards, were draped on chairs along the side. Smith donated several of her own family quilts to the exhibition as well.

"We would wrap every newborn in a homemade quilt when they were born," she said. "It was our way of showing them right from the get-go they were loved."



Smith said members of her and her husband's families made a quilt for each child. Many of them were displayed Sunday, with intricate stitching and patterns, all done by hand.

Ann Badasch, owner of **My Just Desserts** in **Alton**, donated some quilts stitched by African Americans. Smith said the patterns were unlike other stitching work she has seen. One especially rare specimen featured a black-skinned woman in a bonnet with an umbrella. While women in bonnets are not especially rare in antique quilting, Smith said she had never seen one done with black skin.

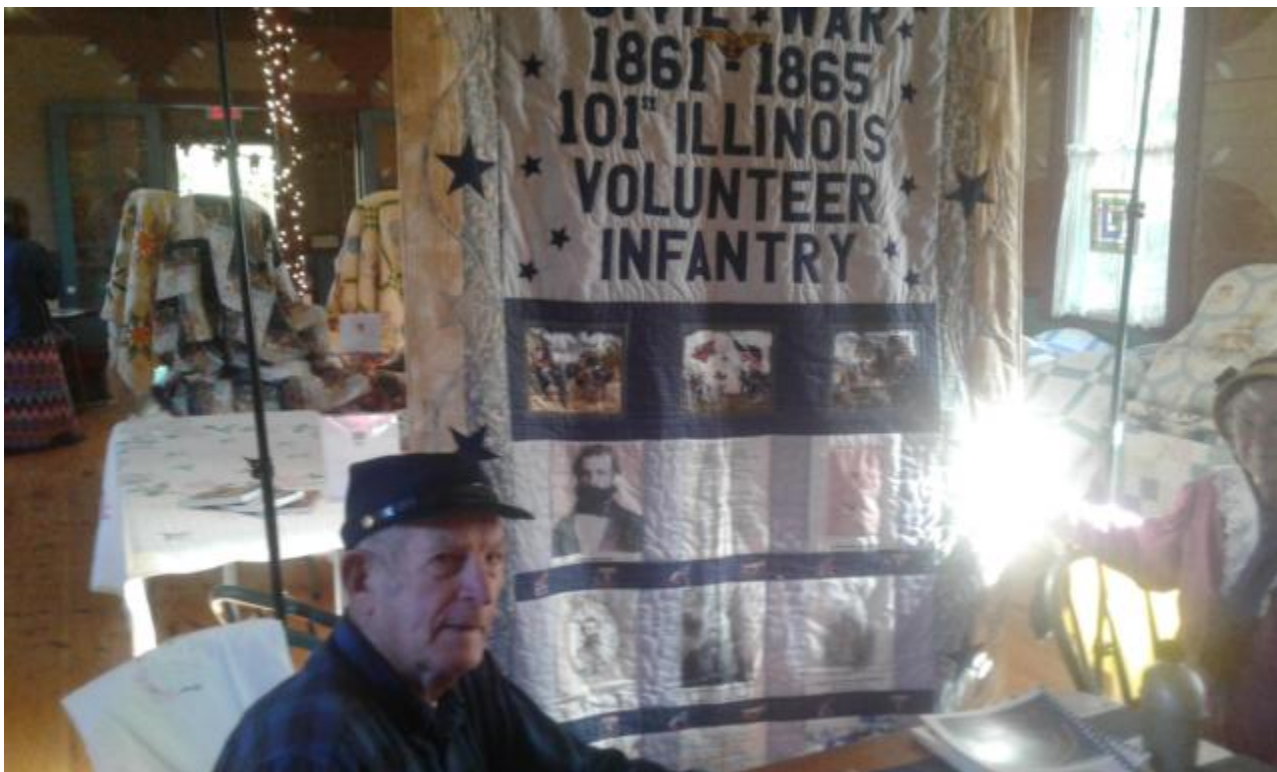
"I don't know if it was because they liked the contrast of pink and black, or if the woman has black skin," she said. "I think they were portraying a woman with black skin, though, and it's really beautiful and original."

Other quilts on display included a quilt from **Chautauqua's** annual raffle. It was donated to the showcase by **Rose Tomlinson**, who was unable to attend. Fellow Chautauqua resident May Young was at the hall to showcase it in her stead.

"This is what I remember, they had always done a quilt every year, and for about 100 years," Young said of her village.

Everyone in the village was handed blank fabric at the annual spring luncheon, and they were told to design it to their hearts' content. Those fabric pieces were then quilted together and raffled to raise money for Chautauqua.

Another quilt with some history was presented by **Wilbur and Peggy Meyer**. Wilbur's ancestor was a part of the **101st Illinois Regiment** in the Civil War. A trove of letters he wrote to his love at the time as well as her responses were found by the couple. They compiled the letters into a book and made a quilt to celebrate their love and the history behind it.



Visitors to Elsah can also visit the village's museum to scope a few historic quilts during the week. One such quilt was a "penny quilt" (called as such because the pieces of fabric cost a penny) and was created by the women's temperance movement in Elsah. In 1894, that movement made Elsah a "dry town," which means no alcohol is served in it.

"Elsah is a dry town to this day," Smith said. "All because of those women. You can get alcohol in Grafton and Alton, but you cannot here."