

Susan Little
May 3, 2023

Why Preserve the History of the Cranbrook Quilters Guild?

Does the history of the Guild matter? For 38 years area women have gathered at the Seniors Hall Tuesday mornings and the 2nd and 4th Tuesday evening September to June. Together they learned to quilt and preserved the art, they made quilts to give to babes, teens, the young and the old (430 since 2016) and they formed a supportive community for women of all ages. Men weren't excluded - men didn't ask to join. Definitively, a *Quilting Bee* eliminates the need for politicians as these women easily solve all the problems of the world while creating a wrap around piece of art.

So, is preserving this history on a website important? That is the Guild's plan. Working with the *Columbia Basin Institute of Regional History*, we plan to honour these women, their generosity, their art and the Guild that supported them. We intend to create a beautiful pictorial web-based story showing these women's contributions to area art and culture. In a sense we wish to create an enduring quilt show with "artist talks" stories and pictures. Bits and pieces of the history exist in the local archives, but we want to tell the whole story and make it accessible in one place. Did you know that the quilts in the North West Mounted Police quarters at Fort Steele were researched, created and donated by the members of the Cranbrook, Kimberley, Creston, Fernie and Moyie guilds in 1999?

What might this activity contribute to the community? History informs the future - at least that's what the historians tell us. Legacy projects such as ours document the people, the culture, the inspiration, the economics, against the back drop of area life. Our members are from the generation where a sewing machine was an essential household appliance. A lot of us learned to sew and quilt from our mums or grandmothers and had this reinforced in high school. We're still calmed by the memory of the rhythm of a treadle machine and have in our relics the apron we made in grade 7. The "us" I'm referring to are now in our late 60s stretching to our late 80s, and 90s. Sewing and quilting have a lot in common with cursive writing - soon there will be two to

more generations that do not have either of these skill sets. History tells us that once a skill is lost the attitude becomes 'it's way to hard or complex or costly to pursue or teach'.

What might be a spin off of recording this history? For one, we hope to learn how to preserve the quilt guild movement. Younger quilters are not joining guilds ... ergo the giving of quilts through local social and health services may be lost. The decline in participation is tied to the change in women's work - from traditional roles to contemporary roles. Some donations may continue as programs like *Quilts Of Valour* for injured military and the *Wrap a Smile* program for children undergoing surgery for cleft lip and palate, attract givers. But, giving 80 to 100 quilts a year to Bellies for Babies, Infant Development, the Transition House, Oncology, Paediatrics... may fade into the woodwork. It's heartwarming to know that someone has taken the time to sew a quilt to give you comfort, love, and encouragement - it says that you are not alone, that you are important. And this supportive community may be lost too. Research confirms the therapeutic nature of quilting and how it enhances your well-being especially when done in the company of other.

Another reason for recording this history is to learn how we can preserve the art of quilting in our community? How might we bring sewing and quilting into the schools when schools are diminishing these programs in favour of other interesting pursuits? Would we start young with stories and quilts to touch? Would we offer to teach a beginning quilting course using up-cycled fabrics from the thrift shops? Cotton shirts and jeans are great for quilts. Maybe we start with creative mending and move onto quilting. Many of us learned quilting through an evening program put on by Cranbrook Parks and Rec. We made a 'sampler' quilt. Lisa Sharpe ushered us through and she with two other quilters started the Guild in 1985. Do we gather basic sewing machines to give to kids who want to learn to sew?

And back to the beginning. Does the history of the guild matter? Yes, it matters as part of the regions heritage. Is it important to preserve the history? Yes, it is important as history does inform the future - if nothing else it tells us what we have lost along the way of progress. And it gives us the opportunity to decide if we are content to give up quilt guilds and quilting arts. What might the activity of preserving the history contribute to the community? It will hopefully be the inspiration for related activities that preserve the art, the giving and the community building.

Should you know a Guild member past or present and want to support this endeavour, we, like so many local groups need some funds to see the project through. We are after all, quilters, not historians or videographers, or web developers. Our budget is \$10,000. We have applied for

grants but we're not a registered society and that excludes us from most funding sources. You could check us out through our Facebook page or modest website - Cranbrook Quilters Guild. You can check out the Columbia Basin Institute of Regional History through its website, especially its record of *The Triangle Women's Institute*. Connect with us through cranbrookguild@gmail.com or call me Susan Little at (250) 426-7223.

Charitable donations can be made to The Cranbrook Quilters Guild History Project through the Columbia Basin Institute of Regional History. Email address: info@basininstitute.org. Cheques, cash or e-transfer. All donations over \$25 can receive a Federal Donation receipt for income tax purposes. Thank you in advance for your generosity.