

Quilting collection evokes life of love

Longtime joy weaves practical, decorative

By JOHN NORBERG
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Carroll County

DELPHI — There are moments that are quilted in our memories, pieces of time that are carefully stitched together for remembering, to warm us when days grow cold.

Laura Smith has such memories, memories of a lifetime.

On Tuesday afternoon, memories from Laura Smith's life were displayed on the walls of St. Elizabeth Health Care Center, where she lives. Some of the 200 quilts she created in her lifetime were put out for public viewing.

Each quilt comes from a time in her life. Each quilt, a memory.

Smith, 80, uses a wheelchair now, and her hands aren't as nimble as they once were when she cut out tiny pieces of cloth and sewed them all together with intricate stitching.

But she has her memories, hundreds of them.

She started quilting when she was 15, at first taught by her mother. Times were different then. Life was slower. Young women had time to quilt.

When she married, Smith learned more about quilting from a niece of her husband, Charlie, and despite the demands of caring for their 10 children, she kept up her quilting.

She did it for the most obvious of reasons — so that her family would

have blankets to keep them warm.

After retiring in the 1970s, she began doing more quilts, and her patterns became more intricate. Her purpose was more art than warmth.

She doesn't remember how long it took to make each quilt.

"It depends," she said. "Sometimes I had two or three of them going at once. I just enjoyed everything about making them."

Her favorite designs are circular intertwining wedding rings, a pattern as much a part of the American landscape as quilting bees.

"Some of it's tedious work, but a lot of it isn't. I used patterns and I had my own ideas."

Gail Feleki, one of her daughters, who lives in Rensselaer, said all the quilts her mother made are still in the family. They always will be.

"In the beginning the quilts she made were for practical purposes," Feleki said. "I didn't appreciate them like I should have, then. But since I've matured, I've come to appreciate them."

Smith has 18 grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren.

Smith doesn't quilt, not anymore.

But she has her memories, hundreds of them.



By Darcy Chang/Journal and Courier
Laura Smith gets a kiss from her great-granddaughter, Leanne Hazelgrove, 3. Smith's family gathered Tuesday at St. Elizabeth Health Care Center in Delphi to see a display of quilts she made.

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