

## FWC Quilting Section History

In 1977 FWC member Jane Hughes came back from a stay in Scotland with a Trip Around the World quilt she made. The Bicentennial in 1976 brought about a revival of interest in quilting, but though the Club had Handicraft, Needlecraft, and Sewing and Knitting Sections at various times, there was no Quilting Section. Jane determined to organize one.

She began with a few women who had inherited unquilted pieced quilt tops and wanted to finish them, and with Carol Wineman, who had studied printmaking in college, was attracted by the repetition of blocks, repeating patterns with changes, and wanted to learn more. The group was initially about six people. Over the years it continued to be composed this way, partly of those already familiar with quilting, and partly of those wishing to find out.

By 1980 they had grown to 18 members, enough to start an official FWC Section. They held an organizing meeting in October, choosing 11:00 to 3:30 on the third Thursday of the month for their meetings, taking turns in each other's homes. Members brought their own sandwiches for lunch, and the hostess provided beverages and dessert. The long meetings allowed enough time to work on large projects.

In February 1981 Jane Hughes, as chair, filed the first Quilting Section annual report with the FWC, noting that experience and interest varied widely among members.

In April 1982 the Quilters, along with the Painters, exhibited their work in the League Ballroom at the FWC Annual Spring Luncheon. The program from this event lists quilts by 25 quilters. Dates from 1940 to 1982 indicate that some of those inherited quilt tops did get finished. In 1984 the quilters once again exhibited their work at the FWC Annual Spring Luncheon, displaying over thirty items including soft toys as well as quilts.

The early 1980's saw the introduction of new equipment and new techniques for quilters, for example the rotary fabric cutter and its accompanying strip-piecing method. Jane arranged various workshops, and member Barb Kilbourn organized classes and lectures. They also researched the proper care of old linens and quilts. Jane had a viewing for each finished quilt she made, with cookies and an unveiling, and the group had many events that included spouses, such as cookouts and holiday celebrations. In 1983 Carol set up a photography session to document members' quilts, a tradition which has continued. The Quilting Section archive today holds hundreds of photos of members' quilts.

A note in the archives states that the meeting of October 20, 1988, was filmed and was shown on a local television station on Nov 9. The note does not give a context for this.

By 1988 a group of self-described "irregulars" had set aside Monday mornings from 9 to 11:30 for additional work on quilt projects. They also met through the summer, not just in the school year, and eventually most members migrated to this group. A brief foray into Monday evening meetings in 1990 didn't catch on. In 1996 after much discussion the

decision was made to drop Thursday as an official meeting time. Meetings since have been Mondays from 9:30 to noon, without sandwiches, but with the hostess still supplying beverages and a treat.

The purpose of the Quilting Section has always been to support each other in pursuit of creative ideas, to share knowledge and expertise that will facilitate creative projects, and to share this work with the wider community.

In the mutual support category, from about 1992 to 2009 significant birthdays and other milestones were celebrated with block exchanges; after that these became exchanges of friendship blocks between all members of the group. Basting bees were held, in which many members would help an individual member baste together the layers of her full-size quilt prior to quilting it. There were “ugly fabric” exchanges (one person’s trash is another’s treasure), year-end potluck luncheons, and the ongoing appreciation of show-and-tell sessions. In 2011-2012 the concept of mutual support expanded with an exchange of blocks with quilters in Ann Arbor’s sister city of Tübingen, Germany.

The sharing of knowledge and expertise that began when Jane Hughes organized workshops in 1982 continues to the present with “challenges,” in which a design problem is proposed for each quilter to solve in her own way while using common rules, such as subject matter, or common elements, such as a certain fabric or color. The group’s pattern challenges included Picasso’s Puzzle and Miniature Log Cabin; fabric challenges included charm quilts, lace, and scissor-print fabric; subject challenges included holidays, wearable vests, and perhaps as a counterbalance to wearable vests, nudes.

Members also gave demonstrations of new and unusual techniques, such as liberated pieced blocks and sashiko quilting, and held book and magazine exchanges, sessions on color theory, and a tutorial on the quilt-as-you-go technique. A “discovery day” in 1995 led to sessions on quilt documentation in 1996. There were also visits from collectors and quilting experts from outside the group, and trips to visit quilt shows. In 1983 members attended a show at Meadowbrook Hall; in 1988 a show of the Great Lakes Quilt Center’s collection at MSU in Lansing; and in October 2014 another trip to Lansing for a private viewing of ten quilts from the GLQC collection demonstrating the history of quilting. Several members joined the Ann Arbor Quilt Guild, contributing information to the FWC quilters from the Guild’s lectures and programs. In 1996 the group sent contributions in memory of longtime member Sue Ullrich’s husband John to the Guild to be forwarded to MSU to the Mary Schafer Quilt Fund, part of the GLQC.

Sharing the Section’s work with the wider community was intended both to provide meaningful, lovely, useful gifts to those in material or emotional need, and to increase and enhance the appreciation of quilts by the general public. In 1986 the quilters made and donated a series of wallhangings to Ronald McDonald House to improve the comfort level of families staying there. In 1991 a quilt was completed for Safe House, and another to be raffled by The House By the Side Of the Road. Safe House remained a favorite destination for the group’s quilt donations, with twelve going there in 1994; unrecorded numbers in 1998, 2004, and every year from 2007 to 2012; five in 2013; four each in

2014 through 2016; and seven in 2017. In 1998 the quilters made six children's quilts which were displayed at the FWC Annual Spring Luncheon before being donated to needy children. The Challenge that year was making wallhangings for a new Ann Arbor residential hospice. These were completed and presented in fall 1998. In winter 2000 the quilters began making lap quilts for the Bortz and Saline Nursing Homes. Fourteen quilters participated, and ten lap quilts were presented to each of the two nursing homes in 2001. In 2007 a quilt was donated to Gibraltar Veterinary Clinic, and in 2008 four quilts were created as a remembrance for the children of longtime member Gwen Stevens. Beginning in 2012 members have made fabric flower lapel pins as party favors for those attending the FWC Holiday Reception. In 2014 a quilt was presented to Ozone House for their raffle. In 2017 five quilts were donated to the UM Students' Refugee Assistance Program. These quilts were labeled bilingually, in English and Arabic.

From their beginning the quilters exhibited their work at FWC meetings, but in March 1990 they had their first show at Ann Arbor's Kempf House Center for Local History. The show was titled "The Art of Quilting: 1890 to the Present" and the program listed 42 quilts, about half made by FWC members and the rest antique quilts owned by them. This was so successful it became an annual event. The 1991 Kempf House Show program listed 29 quilts, mostly made by and otherwise owned by FWC quilters. The Third Annual Kempf House Show in 1992 listed 34 quilts as before, but with more information on construction techniques; the fourth, in 1993, lists 60 entries; the program for the fifth does not survive, but the show in March 1996 was called the Sixth Kempf House Show. This show consisted of seventy entries, including seven vests from the Vest Challenge and some stuffed teddy bears. After each of these shows there is a thank-you letter from Kempf House; the one for the sixth show expresses regret over disappointing attendance, and hopes the group will consider another show "in two years," but there does not seem to have been another Kempf House Show.

Meanwhile there were other venues in which the quilters held shows. In September 1992 they had an exhibit at the main Ann Arbor library on the historical development of quilts, with books and tools on display, as well as quilts. In 1993 Carol Wineman organized an exhibit and sale of members' work at Kerrytown Concert House, a portion of the sales to benefit the Washtenaw County Historical Society's Museum on Main Street. In March 1995 Garland Lewis organized an exhibit at North Campus Commons made up of 23 pieces completed as Challenge projects. North Campus Commons was also the site, in October 1998, of an exhibit of the wallhangings mentioned above, before they were donated to the new Ann Arbor hospice.

Members of the Quilting Section shared their knowledge of quilting as well as the physical results of it. In 1992, 1996, and 1997 they demonstrated quilting skills at Cobblestone Farm's holiday crafts exhibit. In 1993 they assisted at the Detroit History Museum, answering questions on the museum's display of quilts. In 1998 several members presented a class on quilting for women living on north campus.

Possibly the most complex project created by the Quilting Section to share their work with the community was the FWC 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Quilt. The idea was conceived in the

spring of 1995, a design committee was formed in the fall, and the finished quilt was presented to the FWC at the Spring Luncheon in April 1997. Like a super-challenge project, members who took part were given fabrics chosen to match paint chips of the room in the League where the quilt was to hang, and were to create blocks of a given size representing the FWC's interest sections. The finished quilt was mounted on a wall behind a sheet of protective lucite, and a maintenance agreement directed that it be taken down and shaken free of dust at stated intervals.

This project has its own booklet in the Quilting Section archives, a bound folder with photos documenting the construction of the quilt, swatches of the fabrics used, copies of instructions given to the quilters, a list of the 26 quilters who participated, a key to the blocks, and a list of expenses. There are also text, photos, a news clipping, and a video, of the presentation. Miniature books were given as thank-yous to the quilters involved. The quilt has since been moved from the Founders' Reading Room to the main hall of the League where it remains, visible to the many passers-by, as of this writing.

From 1981 to 2017 the Quilting Section has averaged 26 members per year. Average attendance at a session has been about 14.

The FWC Quilting Section's archives currently consist of a thick binder and seven large scrapbooks. In 2013 the quilters began keeping photos on Picasaweb, which in 2016 became Google Photos, and paper scrapbooks are no longer being assembled. There are plans, or anyway hopes, to digitize this large archive, thus making it accessible to all members at any time.

### **Quilting Section Chairs:**

1980-1982 Jane Hughes

1982-1984 Carol Wineman; co-chair Stella Clarke

1984-1985 Stella Clarke

1985-1987 Gwen Stevens

1987-1991 April Rossman

1991-1992 Jeanne Muller; co-chairs Barb Kilbourn and Emer Fahey

1992-1993 Barb Kilbourn

1993-1994 Nancy Aupperle

1994-1995 Ruth Markovitz

1995-1997 Joan Rutherford

1997-2000 Nancy Livermore; co-chair 1998-2000 Elisabeth Murau

2000-2002 Angie Miller; co-chair 2000-2001 Elisabeth Murau;  
co-chair 2001-2002 Carol Wineman

2002-2006 Janet Haessler; co-chair Dorothy Ristenbatt

2006-2008 April Rossman; co-chair Rita Stark

2008-2009 Rita Stark; co-chair April Rossman

2009-2011 Jean Ballou; co-chair Carol Wineman

2012-2017 Robin Richstone; co-chair Rita Stark

This article was written by Robin Richstone, July 2017, and is based on the Quilting Section Archives and interviews with Section members, especially Carol Wineman and Garland Lewis.