

Watauga Arts Council
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Maybe you had a grandmother like mine....one of those capable women who seemed to do it all! And somehow, between all the countless chores (and they were a lot harder to accomplish with her limited resources than mine are with all of today's machines and gadgets) and raising ten children, Grandmother still found the time to create some wonderful quilts which we've all treasured over the years..

It seems that I'm running across a lot of people lately who cherish a closet-full of quilts which not only kept you warm, but hold a lot of warm memories within their folds as well. And many of those people have a favorite quilt design which prods those wonderful memories – one that their grandmother used frequently or perhaps it's a square which was on an often-used quilt. Anytime they see that design, the memories are relived again.

And then there was my grandfather – with his cows, horses, and all those mysterious nooks and crannies tucked away in that old barn of his. Whenever I see a big old rambling white barn, I remember watching Pop milk the cows which his dog had helped him round up from the fields, the smell of the hay, the stalls full of assorted animals, and a cat or two prowling around in search of mice and a free sip of milk from time to time.

Last year, when Handmade in America

contacted me to ask if we would participate in the Quilt Trails project which places barn quilts along driving trails in western North Carolina, I put the idea of barns and quilts together in my mind and was intrigued! The idea of sharing these memories by putting favorite quilt designs on wonderful old barns seems



totally logical to me and a great way of involving the whole community in a wonderful project which everyone can enjoy.

John Turner, one of our most devoted board members and a wonderful traditional dancer, had already heard about this idea in Ashe County and had created his own quilt square and put it up on his barn on 421 west of Boone. Obviously he was the perfect choice to coordinate this project, particularly since his wife, Carol, is an accomplished quilter...and he was quite willing to help.

So now, based on similar projects in North Carolina and in neighboring states, the Watauga County Arts Council is developing its own version of the Quilt Trails Project which, along with a similar project in Avery county, will link quilt trails already under development in Madison, Yancey, Mitchell, and Ashe counties.

Through this project, vibrant quilt patterns are being painted on pre-built eight foot wooden squares. They are being installed on barns, public buildings, shops, and other appropriate buildings around the community. Seven are already up with a total of at least fifteen in process. A series of self-guided trails maps will be ultimately developed to direct sight-seers along the highways and byways to view these icons of tradition in their new and significant role as public art.

Grant funds from The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area and coordinated through HandMade in America have provided supplies for the first several quilts. In Watauga County, Blue Ridge Electric Membership Corporation sponsored the project by assisting with "hanging" the quilt squares on the barns and Boone Paint and Interiors has given us a discount on the painting supplies while Watauga Building Supply helped us find the special MDO board at a discount.

Each quilt square requires a team of volunteer painters and a willing property owner to donate hanging space on their building. Making a quilt square together can allow volunteer groups from community centers, churches, school classes, and even families the opportunity to create and paint their own quilt square as a group project. The square which is chosen may represent a family pattern from a beloved quilt or perhaps something new.

If you have a barn or other dominant building on which you'd like to see a quilt square displayed, or if you and your family or other group would like to create a square together, please call us (264-1789) or email me at wcac@watauga-arts.org.

And even if you don't have a barn to put it on and you can't participate in painting a square, I hope you'll still thoroughly enjoy the barn quilts as you drive around our community and discover them.