

Hands All Around Quilt Guild (HAAQG)

A History

Written by co-founder, Diane Skidmore

“An organizational meeting of those who create, sew and appreciate fine quilts will be held on Thursday evening, November 4th at 7:15 PM at the Normal Public Library community room. Anyone in the area is welcome to help form a group who would exchange ideas, give input on projects, evaluate antique quilts, organize quilt displays and retain a directory of instructors, hand quilters and sources of quilt fabrics. Please bring your ideas.”

On November 4, 1982, Diane Skidmore and Nancy Saint waited in the basement of the Normal Public Library with a coffee urn full of hot cider, a plate of cookies, and high hopes that someone would respond to their ad in the paper.

Although November 4th 1982 was the first meeting of a group that was to become the HAAQG of CI – in reality, the genesis of the guild was born on the banks of Lake Evergreen in the late 1970's. Nancy and Diane discovered that they shared a love of making quilts sitting, sewing on the shore between sailboat races. The mid 1970's was a time of rebirth for quilt making – locally, many individuals and small groups in isolation made quilted items, but good instructional materials & patterns were scarce – nice 100% cotton fabrics were hard to come by – trial and error was a great teacher! Guilds were popping up all over the country to fill the need for education and fellowship. For over 2 years Diane and Nancy scanned the Quilters Newsletter and Lady's Circle Patchwork Quilts magazines looking for evidence of a guild in our area – finally in the summer of 1982, they decided that they would give it until September and if nothing showed up, they we would just start their own guild!

On that November 4th evening in 1982, 34 women answered Diane's and Nancy's ad. Ten of those 34 women met at Nancy's on December 13th to start defining who we were and developing by-laws to create a non-profit organization. The group wrestled with questions like – what do we want to include in our meetings? And can we ask members for \$2 to cover mailing costs? They decided that they would model their by-laws from the Evergreen Sailing Association. Temporary officers and committee chairs were agreed upon. Nancy and Diane were Co-chairpersons; Karen Kahle - Sec/Treas; Irene Cox - Program Chair; and Pam Yeast - Publicity. From January until they voted on the new by-laws, officers and guild name, the group was known as the Mclean County Quilter's Guild.

Some of the names considered were Country Quilters, Corn Belt Quilters, Prairieland or Prairie Home Quilters. The suggestion of Hands All Around Quilters Guild came from Susan Morrisroe – she had made a wall hanging from the Hands All Around block in 1976 and commented “wouldn't that make a great name for a quilting group someday?”

Right from the beginning each meeting included a lecture, demonstrations by members, and show-and-tell time. All members were encouraged to come to a Project Night outside the regular meetings. That first year, trips to the Decatur Guild's annual show and the Quilter's Showcase in Carlinville were organized. Lectures and demonstrations in the spring of 1983 included Making Templates and Hand and Machine Piecing by Nancy and Diane, Pattern Drafting by Lois Jett, Strip Quilted Clothing by Terri Campen, Paper Piecing by Christine Wilson. Cathy Grafton, one of our first "out-of-town lecturers," gave a program on making miniature quilts. Her three small kids colored at a table in the back of the room while the group members were inspired to make beautiful miniature quilts.

In May, members accepted the new by-laws and elected officers for the first full year – Nancy Saint – President, Diane Skidmore – Vice President, Irene Cox – Secretary, and Denesa Ernst –Treasurer. The Hands All Around Quilt Guild of Central Illinois was born.

In September 1983 Barb Miller organized our first fund raiser at the Ewing Arts Fair. It was a raging success! Guild members made a Log Cabin quilt. The silent auction of the quilt and sale of member-made quilted items raised the amazing amount of \$450.00.

By October, membership had increased to over 50 members – the guild had finagled 10% discounts for members at local and regional fabric shops, published a membership directory and Regional Quilt Resource Guide, and planning for the first quilt show at Miller Park Pavilion was well underway.

In the 1970's and early 80's, many area quilt shows were held in gymnasiums –quilts were displayed by folding them on tables. Diane wanted to establish their quilt show as a "museum quality show" that presented our quilts to the community as art in an ascetically pleasing setting. We selected a name for the show that reflected the variety of forms quilt art could take and that could be used for years to come – Quilt Spectrum. Diane's woodworker husband, Ron, helped her design and build ten quilt frames that could fully display four full-size quilts each. The set up day dawned at Miller Park Pavilion with the sound of drills – the frames had never actually been assembled before! Vendors packed their wares upstairs. Beautiful quilts were brought in and displayed using antique chairs, beds, toys, ferns, and flowering plants. Since the members had never done it before, it took the committee until well after midnight to complete the set-up. There was no money for security, so Diane, Cathy Grafton, Barb Miller and others slept in sleeping bags on the floor– locked into the pavilion with a very noisy pop machine for company. The show was a great success - in spite of our \$1 entry fee, we raised in excess of \$1500. The guild's first, full year ended in May of 1984 with their first salad supper.

The May salad supper continues today. The guild boasts over 300 members from across central Illinois – including several of the "founding mothers." Monthly meetings now host nationally-known quilters. Members still share their efforts during show-and-tell and still share the love of quilting on which the guild was originally founded. Thanks, Diane and Nancy. And as they say, "the rest is history."