

Wooden quilt blocks with unique patterns cropping up in Aroostook County



Joseph Cyr | Houlton Pioneer Times

The Houlton Higher Education Center recently erected a barn quilt block on a shed at the school to become part of the Friends and Needles Quilt Guild's Northern Maine Quilt Barn Trail.

Showing off the new square are (from left) Chuck Ames, Toni Eppley, Jennifer Metzger, Jean Kervin and Bernadette Farrar.

By Joseph Cyr, Houlton Pioneer Times

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HOULTON, Maine — Most people associate quilt squares with lovely patterns of cloth that are sewn together to make warm, colorful covers for beds.

But many may not know that quilt squares also can be made of wood and found adorning barns and buildings on a much larger scale.

That is the premise of the Northern Maine Quilt Barn Trail, a project in the works by the Friends and Needles Quilt Guild of Houlton. The project features large wooden blocks, typically 4-foot square, painted to look like squares on a quilt, that are then hung on barns and other structures to form a trail for people to view.

The guild, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary, also is gearing up for its annual quilt show, held Aug. 15-17 at the Houlton Higher Education Center on Military Street

The idea for a trail was presented to the guild back in 2011. The group pondered how it could pull off such a task and the wheels were soon put into motion. The first block, marking the start of the Aroostook County trail, is located at Rather-B-Quilting, 224 B Road, owned by Peggy Crane.

"We decided we wanted to do this because they can be a tourist attraction," guild member Jennifer Metzger said. "People can plug these locations into a GPS and come from all over to see them. It is a way to bring people to the area."

According to Metzger, the original idea of quilt barn squares began with Donna Sue Groves with a wish to honor her mother, Maxine, and her Appalachian heritage by having a painted quilt block hung on her Adams County, Ohio, barn. Groves, working with the Ohio Arts Council and other community organizations, was inspired to change her plan from a single block to a sampler of 20 quilt squares that could be created along a driving trail, which would invite visitors to travel through the Ohio countryside.

While some communities around the country have trails that lure people to downtown areas that can be viewed by walking, the majority of barn quilt trails are spread out through a countryside setting. Squares are most often mounted on farm buildings, homes, along fences or occasionally mounted on a post for people to search out.

"A lot of people come and visit areas to check off their list," Metzger said. "It's similar to geocaching."

Each block is designed to reflect some aspect of the building owner's personality. The block on Crane's home depicts flying geese in a quilt pattern called a "churn dash." The block is named "Churning Geese."

Crane designed the pattern on fabric, and the image was then transferred to the large wooden board.

"We let the person whose property the block is going to be mounted on decide the content of the square," Metzger said. "We've studied them enough to get a good sense of what color schemes work best."

The second block was placed on a storage shed at the Houlton Higher Education Center in November 2013, and features a design in the shape of an old-fashioned schoolhouse. The staff of the center participated in the project and it was co-sponsored by the RSU29/SAD 70 Adult Education program.

The schoolhouse block is a symbol of protest by the child labor movement, Metzger said. A similar block hangs in Kirksville, Kentucky, on an old schoolhouse.

A third square was erected on a barn owned by Mac Moody on the Bangor Road. Moody's square is called the "Mariner's Compass" block.

In May, the group received a \$100 grant from the Maine Pine Tree Guild to assist with one of the blocks. The group is working on its next square, to be mounted in Mars Hill at the Bear Paw Inn. Naturally, it features a bear paw print. Additional blocks also are in the works as the guild strives to expand its trail.

The guild's annual quilt show at the Houlton Higher Education Center will be 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Aug. 15-16, and 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 17. Admission is \$5.

For more information, visit the Friends and Needles Quilt Guild at www.friendsandneedles.org or follow them on Facebook.

Source: <http://bangordailynews.com/2014/08/09/living/wooden-quilt-blocks-with-unique-patterns-cropping-up-in-arostook-county/>