

A Piece of Malta in “The Nation’s Attic”

The Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C. has been described as “The Nation’s Attic” for its role in conserving our nation’s odds and ends. It is reassuring to know that we in Malta have a piece of our story in the attic.

Malta’s contribution is a beautiful quilt sewn together in 1847, by sixty members of the Maltaville Presbyterian Church and presented to their minister’s wife, Mrs. Mary B. Hill. Entitled “The Ladies of Maltaville” by the Smithsonian curators, the quilt is 92 by 91 inches and is composed of one large center piece and sixty individual squares each decorated with various designs: flowers, snowflakes, zodiac signs, geometric patterns or quotes. One of the more colorful quotes is from Issac Watts which reads “The Tulip and butterfly appears in gayer coats than I. Let me be dressed fine as I will, flies, worms and flowers, exceed me still.” Within the wreath on the centerpiece is written “Presented to Mrs. Mary B. Hill as an expression of esteem by the ladies of Malta Ville”. It is an “album quilt”

which was very popular in the middle of the nineteenth century. Like the pages of an autograph book, each quilt square includes the name or initials of the maker. Album quilts were made to commemorate special occasions or to honor highly regarded members of the community.

The history of the quilt is as interesting as its origins. Rev. and Mrs. Hill left the Malta community in the late 1840's. In 1927, their granddaughter, Miss Grace Hill of Richmond, Va. visited Maltaville seeking the descendants of those who made her grandmother's quilt. At that time she stated that she and her sister planned to place the quilt with a museum where it would be safe. No further information was known until 1951 when local residents, Mr. and Mrs. Williams, stumbled upon the quilt while visiting the Smithsonian.

Pictures of the quilt may be seen on the website of the National Museum of American History under the name "1847 Mary Hill's Album Quilt" but don't plan a special trip to Washington. Only a small fraction of the Museum's holdings are

ever on display, and the last time the “The Ladies” were seen in public was in 1991.

The old church had an unusual history also. The congregation was organized around 1800 and the church building was dedicated in 1806. Although founded as a union congregation, the church shifted between Presbyterian and Congregational affiliations depending upon which denomination had the majority of members. When last used, it was under the supervision of the Methodist. The building was taken apart in 1903, and the lumber was used to erect a barn on a nearby farm.

Paul Perreault

Town of Malta Historian

