

Hazel Carter



Hazel Carter carried more than her administrative skills with her from Iowa to her new home. She carried her love of quilting. Her first study of quilt history began with the discovery of an article in a 1970 issue of Needlewoman and Needlecraft magazine about a 1708 English-made patchwork quilt with accompanying bed hangings and curtains. Over the next few years, Patsy and Myron Orlofsky's book, *Quilts in America* (Patsy Orlofsky), and articles in *Quilters' Newsletter Magazine* (Bonnie Leman), *Nimble Needle Treasures*, and *Quilters Journal* (Joyce Gross) would form the backbone of her knowledge of quilting history. In 1973, Hazel Carter and Jinny Beyer met at a local gathering of quilters, and together began studying old fabrics in order to learn how to date their growing collections of antique quilts. Just months before meeting Jinny, in December 1972, Carter had founded Quilters Unlimited of Northern Virginia in order to create a quilting community for those individuals desiring to quilt together, as well as to offer classes for those who wanted to increase their skills. Quilters Unlimited would one day grow into an eleven-chapter, 1,400 member, non-profit organization that would not only offer classes, but would spread good will throughout the greater community by making and donating thousands of quilts to hospitalized children, foster children, seniors in long-term care facilities, and victims of natural disasters. This was grassroots America in action. Quilters coming together to make things happen.



As the then-small group continued to discuss the approaching bicentennial, an idea began to form in Hazel's mind. Her vision was of a giant quilting bee where hundreds of quilters could come together in one place to learn, share, and shop. That dream came to fruition in 1978, when she founded yet another organization: the Continental Quilting Congress, an educational non-profit entity based in Vienna, Virginia. It was one of the earliest quilt conferences in the nation, where quilters got together to learn the art and craft of quilting from Beginner to Advanced, to participate in a Show and Tell, and to shop at Quilters Merchant Mall set up just for quiltmakers and their specialized needs. Such conferences would quickly prove to be one of the great revolutionary movements of twentieth-century quilting history. The first Continental Quilting Congress convention in July 1978 brought more than five hundred delegates to the Sheraton Hotel in Arlington, Virginia, with additional shoppers raising the final attendance total to more than one thousand quilt enthusiasts gathered under that first hotel roof. Husbands and families of quilters across the country were in shock. What had suddenly come over their wives and mothers? Why were headed for Arlington, Virginia? Why in the world would a wife/mother/sister/sweetheart pay money to stay in a hotel (sometimes five to a room) just to quilt? Couldn't she do that at home? Women had been quilting for generations without going to all that expense and trouble!

Hazel tells stories of quilters who had never spent a night away from their families in their lives, suddenly hitting the road with a quilt friend and discovering new dimensions to freedom and self-expression. Perhaps it is hard for us to contemplate today just how revolutionary this idea was for quilters at the time, but most quilting had traditionally been done at home or in church groups, with relatives or friends teaching the how-tos; not a stranger in a hotel! Freedom was in the air from women in the 1970s. Freedom was in the air for quilting in 1978. Ten Continental Quilting Congresses were held over a thirteen-year period, as well as five overseas tours to meet with quilters around the world and learn of quilting in other cultures: Australia, Japan, China, New Zealand, Scotland, and Ireland. In 1979, a milestone occurred at the Continental Quilting Congress. As Hazel digested all the comments and feedback she had received from that first CQC meeting in 1978, she realized another need existed in the quilt world that was not being met: the need to bring to the attention of her delegates the work of previous generations of quilters and to recognize and praise the individuals of the present day who were bringing the story of quilting to the fore. Many delegates appeared to be ignorant about the history of their quilting heritage, the art form and craft they obviously love with some passion. How could this be remedied? After careful exploration and discussion with her fellow quilters, Hazel's insightful solution was the creation of The Quilters Hall of Fame. The souvenir book for that first induction ceremony in 1979 stated, The Quilters Hall of Fame has been established to recognize the people behind the quilting renaissance, to pay tribute to their accomplishments, and thereby establish documentation of an important part of quilting history. A selection committee was formed from a cross-section of the quilting community to study nominations for future Honorees. That first committee consisted of: Mary Graunbaum (TX), Rachel Maines (PA), Bets Ramsey (TN), Joyce Gross (CA) and Isobel Ann Smith (Canada).and took office in July 2005.

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Immediately after the announcement of the first Honorees in 1979, the nominations began to pour in. In the early years, each new Honoree was recognized at a special luncheon at CQC and a souvenir booklet prepared that gave a brief history of the contributions of that year's Honoree(s). Sometimes the award came posthumously: Dr. William Rush Dunton, Jr., Ruth Ebright Finley, Lenice Ingram Bacon, Anne Orr, Florence Peto, Bertha Stenge, Carrie A. Hall, and Rose G. Kretsinger. At other times Honorees were present for the ceremony: Marguerite Ickis, Gail van der Hoof, Jonathan Holstein, Grace Snyder (unable to travel due to poor health), Jean Ray Laury, Bonnie Leman (unable to travel at last minute due to emergency), Cuesta Benberry, Mary Barton, Jinny Beyer, Patsy Orlofsky, Jeffrey Gutcheon, Carter Houck, and Donna Wilder. And so the tradition would continue. With each new Honoree, the CQC delegates' understanding of their quilt heritage expanded, and word of The Quilters Hall of Fame began to migrate beyond the bounds of CQC into the larger quilt world. Indeed, many changes occurred in the quilting community almost simultaneously with that first 1978 CQC gathering: Bonnie Leman (1982 Honoree), founder and editor of Quilter's Newsletter Magazine in 1969, helped compile and write the standard rules judging quilt shows in 1976; Joyce Gross (1996 Honoree) of Mill Valley, California, began publishing Quilters Journal in 1977; Quilt National in Athens, Ohio, was founded in 1979 by Karey Bresenhan (1995 Honoree) of Houston, Texas; Barbara Brackman (2001 Honoree) self-published the first version of her quilt dictionary, also in 1979, which would prove to be the guiding star of many of the State Documentation Project to follow; in 1980, the American Quilt Study Group (AQSG) was formed by Sally Garoutte (1994 Honoree) in Mill Valley, California, to promote and publish serious research in quilt history; and North Carolina Public Television produced its first-ever televised how-to series in 1980 featuring quilt teacher Georgia Bonesteel (2003 Honoree). This gives you just a little taste of the incredibly fertile, productive period in quilt history immediately before and following the bicentennial in 1976.

Dreams often converge in serendipitous ways that can change the landscape of one's own vision. In July 1991 two dreams merged at the West Coast Quilters Conference in Sacramento, California: Hazel Carter's vision for The Quilters Hall of Fame and Rosalind Webster Perry's vision concerning the legacy of her grandmother, early twentieth-century author and quilt entrepreneur Marie Webster. When Hazel and Rosalind met, the former was inducting the 1991 Honoree, Marie Webster, into The Quilters Hall of Fame, and the latter was present to receive that honor in her grandmother's name. Their paths most likely would not have crossed in life otherwise. A most unexpected event took place at that ceremony. Within thirty minutes of their meeting, Rosalind, who had only months earlier rescued her grandmother's Marion, Indiana, home from demolition, asked Hazel if she would like to use the house as the permanent home of The Quilters Hall of Fame. With Hazel's fearless yes, a whole new chapter in quilt history began. How does one create a museum out of a condemned building? With lots of elbow grease! Grassroots America swung into action once again. Hazel first took her dream to the delegates of the Continental Quilting Congress while Rosalind approached the citizens of Marion via an article in the local paper. A core group emerged out of those first efforts that have been the backbone of the restoration of the Marie Webster House all these many years. Eventually the Marion group would officially organize as the Friends of The Quilters Hall of Fame and became a non-profit organization in 1992 with a Board separate from its original parent, the Continental Quilting Congress. The significance of the Marie Webster House was officially recognized in 1993, when it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Indiana Register of Historic Sites and Structures. It has also been designated a Landmark of Women's History and declared a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service; the only one which honors a quiltmaker! In 1992, Amy Emms, M.B.E. (Member of the British Empire designating an award given by the Queen for her service to quilting) was the first Honoree to be inducted into The Quilters Hall of Fame from its new location in Marion, Indiana. The Friends of The Quilters Hall of Fame (FQHF) has raised and donated over \$35,000 through their own local Marion efforts of organizing opportunity quilts, bake sales, merchandise sales, National Quilting Day events and the fees from the annual Celebration seminar. In addition, more dollars have been garnered from quilters around the world. The FQHF has also been awarded donations from national quilt-related organization, as well as the Build Indian Fund, the Indian Department of Commerce, and Grant County businesses and community groups. But it's the countless volunteer hours of core Marion people like Phoebe Smith, Debi and Scott Shepler, Madonna and Richard Fowler, Jean and Rex Chambers, Joyce and Wilbur Hostetler, Sue and Bill Munn, Sharon Felty, Cindy Beck, Mary and Norman Cheek, Julie Spangler, Elinor Briggs, Marguerite Cox, Jean Strawser, Carolyn Goebel, Wanda Pratt, Ruth Pearson, and Ann Calland, to name but a few, that is the real success story. Fulfilling dreams can often be an uphill battle, but they kept their shoulders to the wheel and didn't give up. This is grassroots American at its best.

In July 2004 the restored Marie Webster House officially celebrated its Grand Opening as a museum. Having seen the organization reach its goal of establishing its headquarters in the restored Marie Webster House, its founder then stepped down and passed the baton of leadership on. The fulfillment of each step of this vision is reminiscent of the teamwork exhibited by Hazel Carter and her family when they made their bicentennial quilt those many years ago. Following generations of tradition, these modern-day quilters and their friends came together to plan and organize, piece their path, and add their stitches to help create a glorious finished product: The Quilters Hall of Fame Museum. The story of The Quilters Hall of Fame will never actually have an ending. Instead it will continue to be added to as new events unfold and new chapters get written as new generations of quilters step forward and leave their mark.

Orlofsky, Patsy and Myron. Quilters in America. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974.

Other sources: Archives of the Continental Quilting Congress and phone interviews with Hazel Carter and Rosalind Webster Perry in February 2003.

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Contact Karen B. Alexander: karenquilt@gmail.com write to P.O. Box 681, Marion, Indiana 46952. A version of this story first appeared in "Once Upon a Quilt" an anthology of quilt stories edited by Margaret Aldrich and published by Voyageur Press, October 2003. Karen was elected president in November 2004