**A beautiful vintage Signature Quilt made in 1892, usually at home in the Old**

**Mission Dougherty Rushmore house, is now on display in the Community Room**

**at the Peninsula Community Library. We invite you in to see it. It is the story of a quilt, a family and a church – all a part of our shared Old Mission heritage!**

**The quilt is on loan from the Archer/Sargent/ VanBrocklin Family.**

**The Signature Quilt**

**By Connie Archer Sargent (2/2024)**

**THE QUILT:**

Friendship quilts (or Signature quilts) originated on the east coast around the 1840s – 1850s.

They were made up of single squares where one could sign their name. Originally these were

signed with ink, but later the signature would be signed and embroidered with Turkey Red

work thread (more later). The squares would be sewn together to make a quilt. These squares

imitated many of the small signature albums that were popular at the time, where friends, family or

classmates would sign their name on a page and perhaps draw a design.

These types of quilts eventually lost favor out East, but grew in popularity

in the Midwest in the 1880s and 1890s as people moved westward. Frequently these

were given as gifts to newlyweds, special community members, and to celebrate milestones.

Quilts were shared with those moving further out west, knowing they would seldom return home.

There are also reports of quilts being sent to missionaries and to raise money for war veterans.

Because they were designed, organized and put together by women, they frequently had

women’s signatures, but this quilt on display includes both women and men’s names.

The squares could be sold for a few pennies and used as a money maker for an

organization such as a church or a social group, in this case the Ladies Aid

Society. These quilts would be further divided by quilter historians into Album

Quilts, Signature or Friendship Quilts with many different subcategories. This particular quilt

was entered into two quilt shows as a vintage quilt by my mother (Nellie Archer) in

Traverse City many years ago. Sometimes these quilts would have a signature,

and many would include fancy designs that would be embroidered onto the

square. This quilt has several examples of this. These designs were so

popular that companies even made traceable designs out of them.

Well-known names that can be seen on the quilt are Edgecomb, Fowler, Helfrich,

Holman, Jamieson, Johnston, Kroupa, Lardie, Marshall, Tompkins, Wilson and more.

A list of names is attached. The display at the library includes a framed list of the names on the quilt.

Some names were hard to read so if a mistake was made, please let me know.



Included in the names of local residents are a few people from Fife Lake and family

members that did not live here (my great uncle).

The deep red thread used on this quilt is called Turkey Red. It was the first thread

that was colorfast and was frequently used to embroider towels, sashes, napkins,

dresser scarves, sofa pillows and later bed covers. Their popularity had

designers making a variety of designs for children, and decorative designs for

the home. The cost was higher, as it was the first thread made that did not fade.

In 1910, a new color blue was introduced that had these properties. The Dougherty

Rushmore house has on display some tea towels with this Turkey Redwork thread.

**MY FAMILY:**

The Gilmores were living here in 1892 when this quilt was made. Among the relatives

mentioned on this quilt were my great grandparents, Thomas and

Mary Jane Gilmore. They came from Ireland to New York where they resided for a few

years, before moving to Old Mission Peninsula in 1882. They had 11 children, 7

boys and 4 girls, 2 of which died under the age of one. On a letter recording the family

history, it is reported they lived in a small shingle-covered log house that had been built

by a Mr. William Ayers. This is verified by plat map (1856—1861) that “Willis S. Ayers”

owned the land just south of 2 Lads, where there is an open field. They came to Old Mission

with their children and among them was their fourth son, my grandfather, Miles Gilmore.





In 1888, Thomas built a new residence just up the hill, a white house that is

on the north side of the steep hill on Smokey Hollow, between Smokey Ridge and

Whispering Pines, north of Ladd Road. The Grand Traverse Herald reported the

housewarming to have been an outstanding success, as some thirty young people

joined to celebrate the occasion, dancing to music by John Dohm.



The Gilmores purchased 80 plus acres on Center Road where they farmed. This

was across from the present-day location of Old Mission Flowers. My grandfather

Miles Gilmore, married my grandmother, Bertha Marshall after his first wife passed

away. He built a large home on the corner of Ladd and Center Road, which is presently

owned by Lou and Ginny Couture.





One of the names on a square of the quilt was my great uncle, Joseph Irving (J.I.)

Gilmore, and there was a circle with his name and the initials I.O.O.F - Napa,

California. Research led me to find out that he had moved to California and

was a member of the International Order of Odd Fellows. This organization provided

a helping hand to those in need, and supported the men coming back from wars

and their families. During this time there was very little government assistance.



According to the book, *Odd Fellows: Rediscovering More Than 200 Years of History,*

*Traditions and Community Service* by Louie Blake Saile Sarmiento (2019),

“The Odd Fellows were the forerunners of homes for the aged and

orphanages. They are also the predecessors of the Social Security System

and National Health Insurance. At that time, Odd Fellows literally touched

the lives of millions of people, following its tenets to “visit the sick, relieve

the distressed, bury the dead, and educate the orphan.”

My grandfather, Miles Gilmore passed away in 1922 when my mother and her

brother, Miles Gilmore were very young. This was a hardship for my grandmother

(Bertha Gilmore) to maintain an 80-acre farm with two young children. My grandmother

had to sell the farm and move into Traverse City until a house was purchased on

Mission School Road, where my mother and her brother enjoyed many glorious

summers. This area is very dear to me, as it was very dear to my family.

In fact, the land for the replica log church was donated by my grandmother

(Bertha Gilmore), so that the Township could build the replica log church.

My mother, Nellie Gilmore, married and became Nellie

(Verlo) Archer and my parents inherited the property from her cousin, Jessie

Gilmore Hicks, on Swaney Road where I now live.



I began to track how the quilt came into our family, which led me to

research the Gilmore genealogy, which I continue today. I know it was

given to my mother by Jessie Gilmore Hicks, her cousin and the youngest

daughter of Andrew and Estella Gilmore, who grew up on Old Mission Peninsula.

Jessie later moved to California where she met her husband (Arthur Hicks) who

served in the Army. She had 2 uncles and a favorite aunt (my grandfather’s siblings)

who had also moved to California. After Arthur ‘s retirement from the Army,

they purchased land in Old Mission on Swaney Road. I believe Jessie got the quilt

from her favorite aunt, Jessie Gilmore Tatman. But that leaves me to question where

her Aunt Jessie got it from. Perhaps one of her brothers who had previously

moved to California had received it as a going away gift. The quilt is currently on display at the

Peninsula Community Library and will eventually return to the Dougherty House.

There is a lesson here: Ask your parents and grandparents many questions while they are

still alive - they definitely have stories to tell!