



In 1941, records show a Mrs. Nicolls had brought in a quilt top, "presenting it to the hospital in aid of the building fund and wished to sell tickets on it and also asked the help of the ladies to quilt it." And so began a long tradition of quilt making for the West Parry Sound Health Centre Ladies' Auxiliary that has stood the test of time over the last 66 years.

Today, the quilting group meets weekly to stitch together quilts. Margaret Morden, Lynn Mauser, Margaret Nash, Sieja Verglund, Peck Walsh and Shirley Gilbert work together on a colourful pattern called "Grandma's Garden Path", stretched on a room-sized frame. Sieja and Peck smile as they ply their needles,

"We're just helpers," Sieja insists, with a nod to quilt convener Margaret Nash and other members of the group who are long time quilters. "We're still learning."

This dedicated group of ladies stitch together quilts for a price. If you have a quilt that you've been unable to finish, these ladies will complete it for you! Funds raised support the West Parry Sound Health Centre. These ladies literally have their work cut out for them, as there is a waiting list of quilts to be finished. In addition, they also create their own quilts, which are auctioned off. Recently, a star-patterned quilt garnered in excess of \$3,000.

When long-time quilt aficionado, Shirley Gilbert was asked what got her interested, she laughed.

"I was 15 years old and busy complaining to my mother that I was bored," she said. "She handed me some material and put me to work. I've been quilting ever since!"

At her home, she pulled back layer upon layer of beautiful quilts, handstitched and bright with colour, each quilt representing hours of work – a queen-sized quilt can take up to 1,040 hours to complete. Shirley not only belongs to the West Parry Sound Health Centre Womens' Auxiliary quilters, but several other quilting groups in the area.

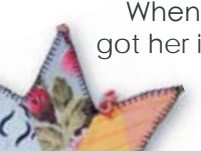
"We even quilt online," one group member confides with a laugh. Apparently, fanatical quilters can select names online and then send blocks of quilt back and forth, a completely new twist on an old craft.

Marion Ferris is all too familiar with the hold quilts have on people.

"There are an untold number of quilts hidden in closets, unfinished," she said ruefully, "It's one thing to put the pattern together, it's another to actually sew all the layers together by hand. Many people just don't have the time anymore."

A talented seamstress herself, Marion discovered that a specialized machine would rapidly quilt together the layers of fabric without the intensive handwork.

"The machine can use dozens of different stitching patterns," she said, demonstrating how the arm of the machine moves smoothly across the surface of the quilt. Although a machine-stitched quilt is not as intimate as the hand-stitched variety, it offers an attractive alternative to quilters who just can't seem to get around to stitching together their handiwork.



Below, Shirley Gilbert displays one of her quilts at her Parry Sound home.

