

TEXTILES continued from page 3

Storage & Display

The size and type of textile will determine the type of storage or display that is appropriate. There are three basic types of storage: flat, rolled and hanging. Flat storage is highly recommended particularly for fragile items because it provides even support which helps to minimize fiber damage. Flat storage can utilize drawers, trays, shelves or boxes. Wood and uncoated metal shelves and cardboard boxes which are usually constructed of wood pulp paper, should not be placed in direct contact with the textiles. Stacking and folding textiles should be avoided. If folding is unavoidable, folded areas can be padded with acid free tissue or polyester batting to eliminate creasing.

Rugs, quilts and large flat textiles are ideally rolled onto tubes with the decorative side facing out. The layers should be interwoven with tissue and the rolled textile should be covered with unsized, washed muslin or tissue.

Costumes can be hung if space is limited. Use padded, plastic hangers to

provide a wide surface of support. Rugs, quilts and costumes should be covered with a pre washed muslin. Tyvek also works as a dust cover.

Display: Small flat textiles such as samplers receive the greatest protection when they are properly framed under glass but this method should not be used on tightly woven or fragile textiles. Samplers and other loosely woven flat textiles should first be attached to a rigid support such as acid free board. It can be basted to a piece of unsized, washed muslin and then the muslin can be fastened to the support. Once the textile has been mounted it should be placed in a frame. Spacers made of strips of acid free mat board should be placed between the front surface of the sampler and the frame glass. This will provide air space between the glass and the textiles. UV filtering glass is recommended.

Heavy textiles like quilts and rugs may be hung using a Velcro support system. The aim of the Velcro is to provide even support in a variety of places on the back of the textile. Only sturdy textiles should be hung. If the textile is to

be displayed against a wooden wall, a piece of washed unbleached muslin should be sewn to the back of the textile to separate it from the wall.

Cleaning

The washing and repair of antique textiles should be done by a professional conservator. Commercial dry cleaning is not recommended. Harsh chemicals that can damage fragile textiles are often used and sometimes, the chemicals are not completely removed. Vacuuming is the only cleaning procedure for the non-specialist. However, caution should be used when attempting to clean fragile and degraded textiles. Begin by gently brushing dirt from the surface of the textile with a very soft brush. The surface should then be vacuumed using a low suction vacuum with a brush nozzle attachment. Place a nylon screen that has been edged with cotton bias tape between the textile and vacuum during cleaning. The screen will catch any loose fragments that could be detached during cleaning. Both sides of the textile should be vacuumed.



The Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation

Heritage News

c/o Don Randazzo
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Ypsilanti, MI 48197

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WANTED items for *Grandma's Trunk* call Megan McCann at 484-6548

Heritage NEWS

MARCH 2001

March
Meeting

Wednesday, March 28, 2001

7:30 p.m.

United Methodist Church
of Ypsilanti

209 Washtenaw Avenue

The life & letters of

*John
Geddes*

By Penny Schreiber



Wednesday evening, March 28, Russell E. Bidlack, University of Michigan professor emeritus and former dean of the School of

Information, will speak to the Heritage Foundation on "The Life and Letters of John Geddes." One of the earliest pioneers of Washtenaw County, Geddes came to Washtenaw County from Pennsylvania in 1824. Geddes wrote many articles in his old age recalling our county's beginnings. He died in 1889 at the age of eighty-eight.

Local historians, while grateful for Geddes's late-in-life memoirs, had often wished that his contemporary accounts, believed to have been written to family in Pennsylvania, had been preserved. No Geddes letter was known to exist until the spring of 1999 when a manuscript and postal history dealer named Stuart Goldman in Canton, Massachusetts, wrote to the Washtenaw Historical Society. He had purchased a large collection of old letters and papers found in an abandoned house in Groton, Massachusetts, pertaining to the Geddes family, including correspondence between John and his brother William Geddes. While curious about the letters' historical value, Goldman was expecting to sell them to individual postal history collectors. He declined to copy the letters for the benefit of Washtenaw County historians because it would decrease their value. Russell Bidlack stepped in and negotiated with Goldman to purchase the letters, which will eventually be donated to the University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Library.

In his talk Bidlack will read and comment on excerpts from Geddes's letters. The intricacies of a sawmill; the coming of the railroad to the county; state, local, and national political affairs; health concerns; social issues; and the lives of women are among the facets of pioneer life in Washtenaw County brought to life in the letters. Geddes's house still stands at the corner of Huron River Drive and Dixboro Road, halfway between Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor. He was a member of the Ypsilanti Presbyterian Church and he supplied the lumber to build it.

The meeting will be held at the First Methodist Church on Washtenaw at 7:30 p.m. Refreshments and informal discussion will follow Bidlack's talk.



For the next in my series of articles dealing with the care of antiques, I thought it might be useful to tell a little about caring for antique textiles and clothing. Remember, these articles are based upon a series of Care and Preservation articles developed by the Conservation Department of Henry Ford Museum.

Hank Prebys

Antique textiles and costumes can be maintained for years of use and enjoyment provided that some basic attention is given to their care. The first step is to understand and minimize or eliminate factors that cause damage. The second step is to follow basic guidelines for handling, display, storage and cleaning.

The Nature of Textiles

Most antique textiles are composed of natural fibers that may include wool, cotton, linen or silk. I'll focus on these natural fibers. Textiles that are composed of synthetic fibers may pose unique problems that may require consultation with a professional conservator.

Causes of Deterioration

There are a variety of factors that contribute to the degradation of textiles. These factors include poor environment, pollution and careless handling in addition to inappropriate storage, display and cleaning. Poor environments include locations where there are high light levels, extreme and fluctuating temperature and humidity levels, and pests.

Light

Exposure to either natural or artificial light can threaten the longevity of textiles. Both visible and ultraviolet light are responsible for damage. The Victorians didn't know what really caused damage, but they knew that light faded colors and "rotted" upholstery so they pulled the shades and inner drapes of their parlors to keep sunlight out.

Visible light is the wavelength we see. Ultraviolet light is the invisible, high energy wavelength of the spectrum. As it turns out, "UV" light is the most damaging type of light, capable of causing the greatest amount of damage in the shortest period of time. Ultraviolet light can be eliminated by

the use of ultraviolet filtering glass. These filters (either glass or Plexiglas) should be utilized in windows and picture frames if you are interested in protecting antique textiles.

Temperature & Humidity

Temperature and humidity are inter-related. In general, heated buildings have low humidity levels in winter. Conversely, humidity levels are high in summertime. Both extremes as well as fluctuations in temperature and humidity can cause damage to textile fibers. Textiles can become brittle when humidity levels are low. Permanent staining can occur from mold growth when humidity levels are excessively high. As it turns out, however, most often damage occurs due to the expansion and contraction of fibers in response to drastic changes in temperature and relative humidity levels. These changes can damage the resiliency, elasticity and strength of fibers. So, it's important to minimize extreme climatic fluctuations.

Heat can embrittle and discolor textiles (and synthetic fibers like rayon, nylon, polyester and acetate can become permanently deformed when exposed to high heat.) The temperature and relative humidity levels that are used as guidelines in museums are: Temperature 60-65 F/Humidity 50%.

Pests

A variety of pests can cause structural damage to textiles. These pests include clothes moths, carpet beetles, silverfish, firebrats and mice.

Clothing moths feed on protein such as wool and feathers. The silky white cocoon webbing of clothes moths is often found stuck to the surface of infested textiles. These moths are generally white in color.

Carpet Beetles also feed on protein material. Chewed holes, furry carcasses and small worm-like insects are an

indication of infestation. A colored powder consisting of insect excrement (frass) can often be seen near or under infested textile. Frass is generally the same color as the textile.

Firebrats and silverfish feed on starchy materials such as glue and fabric sizing. Silverfish are small, gray insects that have a scaly appearance and pinchers on their tail. Silverfish are found in dark, moist and cool environments such as basements. Firebrats are similar in appearance; however, they are somewhat darker in color and they prefer warm, moist and dark environment.

Pest Prevention

In general, good housekeeping is the best method for deterring pests. Periodic inspections and cleaning of storage areas provides the cheapest and safest method of prevention. If an infestation is detected, the textile should be isolated and sealed in a plastic bag until a professional conservator can be contacted. The use of pesticides is generally not recommended. Their residues are dangerous to humans and they can damage many fabrics.

At Henry Ford Museum, infested textiles are frozen to eradicate pests. The textiles are first placed in plastic bags. The air is then removed from the bag using a vacuum cleaner nozzle attachment. The bags are then sealed and placed in a large freezer. Since many pests have the ability to adjust their body temperatures in response to outdoor temperature, this method of eradication must be carried out during a warm time of year and the freezing process must be rapid to succeed in the eradication of pests.

Pollution

Pollution can originate from either outdoor sources or from objects in the indoor environment. Acid rain and a variety of other chemicals can weaken fibers. Cigarette smoke and aerosol sprays can deposit oily particles onto fibers causing irreparable damage. Other sources of pollution include wood, plastic, rubber, wood based paper, cardboard and newly painted surfaces.

Wood, plastic, rubber and newly painted surfaces emit chemicals that can discolor and degrade textiles. The storage and display of textiles in the

The Hidden Heritage of the

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

By James Mann

vicinity of these material should be avoided. Even rubber bands can cause problems. To control or at least minimize damage by external pollutants, the installation and regular changing of air conditioning and furnace filters is a great idea.

Inherent Instability

Antique silk textiles that were produced in the 19th and early 20th centuries are often chemically unstable because of a process called "weighting". Metallic salts were added to the silk to add weight and body to the fabric. Silk that has been treated with metallic salts containing iron and tin are particularly susceptible to accelerated degradation resulting in silk that is brittle and frayed. In order to minimize damage to these fragile fabrics, avoid physical stress during storage and display. Flat storage is recommended since it is the most effective method of providing even support for the entire textile. Acid-free tissue should be placed in between folds to give added support. Contact with water should be avoided; it can cause permanent staining.

Handling

A considerable amount of damage can be caused to textiles when they are carelessly handled. They should be laid out on a clean flat surface when being examined, cleaned, or being prepared for storage. Eating, drinking or smoking should be avoided in the vicinity. Since dirt, salts and oils from hands can be transferred to the surface during handling, clean gloves should be worn when touching textiles. If gloves are not available, hands should be frequently washed. If you want to preserve an antique costume, it should not be worn. Body oils and stresses due to modern body shapes will soon do in old fabrics. Large jewelry and belt buckles can snag or tear textiles and should not be worn when handling them. Do not use ink pens or markers in the vicinity of textiles; do not place any object on the textiles and when transporting them, the entire object should be supported from beneath. Textiles that are used i.e. rugs, drapes and costumes are also prone to rapid deterioration.

The care of Textiles

continued on page 4

The city of Ypsilanti is proud of the role played by some of its citizens in the Underground Railroad, in the days before the Civil War. The Underground Railroad was a secret network of people, who helped slaves escape from the South to Canada. Just about every old house in Ypsilanti is said to have been a station on the Underground Railroad, including some, that were built long after the Civil War. A restaurant in Depot Town once had a history of its building on the back of the menu, according to the history: "The building was built by veterans of the Civil War, and the basement was used by the Underground Railroad to aid escaping slaves."

The true story of the Underground Railroad in Ypsilanti will never be told in full, because most of the information is lost. All that is left is myth, rumor and a few facts. "Even the children of the families of those connected with the railroad knew little of what was actually going on about them," said Mary Goddard, in a paper read before the Ypsilanti Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in April of 1913. "The success of the institution depended on secrecy. So it happened that many of the leading workers died without having told even their children much, if anything, about their activities in the Underground Railroad. Some who may yet be living are unknown, and it is not easy to search them out. In these investigations many people have been visited, but few have been able to give any information, even though they were living in Ypsilanti at the time when the work of the Railroad was at its height."

"It was a railroad," noted one writer, "but with no time tables, no tickets, no fares, no president, no regularly organized company, no definitely laid out routes. Conductors it had and stations, but their names were kept a secret."

It was called the Underground Railroad because of the secret nature of its work, not because of any subterranean means of transportation. In every community that was a part of the Railroad, including Ypsilanti, there are stories of tunnels used to aid the escaping slaves. In Ypsilanti, it is said, a network of tunnels on the north side of Cross Street in Depot Town, were used to get

slaves to the Huron River, where they traveled by boat to Lake Erie.

There was in fact a network of tunnels on the north side of Cross Street, but these were most likely never used by the Underground Railroad. As late as the 1860's, there was a railroad siding behind the buildings on Cross Street, where the alley is now. This siding went to the mill that was just north of the Cross Street bridge, where Me 'N' My Sister's Country Store and the Teacher's Shop is now. It was safer to use the tunnels to move back and forth from the main buildings to the out-buildings in the back, than to risk being hit by a train.

There was a second network of tunnels, that ran throughout the east side of Ypsilanti. The trenches to these tunnels could be seen on the banks of the Huron River, as late as the 1930's. These tunnels were large enough for a small child to walk upright. The tunnels were the work of the Michigan Center Railroad, to provide drainage, and not part of the Underground Railroad. There are homeowners in Ypsilanti, who point with pride to secret rooms in their homes, where they believe, slaves hid. Some of these rooms, however, date back only to the 1920's and Prohibition.

There are some homeowners, who just might be right about the secret rooms. Every now and then, evidence of hidden rooms come to light, usually when a house is being demolished.

When the Hatch Mansion, located next to the Huron Hotel, was razed to make room for a parking lot, in July of 1950. There was rumor that there were hiding places in the house. "A false floor approximately eight by 12 feet was found by workmen while tearing down the back section of the house between the first and second floors," reported *The Ypsilanti Daily Press* of Saturday, July 29, 1950. "A space of four feet existed between the two floors. A small glassed-in square somewhat like a skylight in the ceiling of the first floor room permitted entrance to the cleverly concealed false room above."

Every now and then a hint of the Underground Railroad comes to light. It would be beneficial if it could be passed on to future generations; a lesson of what people can do for others.