

County's 191st Barn Quilt is a Salute to Norway

The pattern for Shawano County's 191st barn quilt, called Norwegian Pride, was selected to honor the Norwegian heritage of Strom Torgerson and his ancestors who homesteaded the farm where the quilt is displayed. The quilt has been sponsored by David and Dawn Eichman who reside on the farm at W17890 Hemlock Road, Wittenberg. The colors of the quilt are traditional blues with the flag of Norway in the center. The design came from Laurann Gilbertson, chief curator at the Vesterheim-American Museum in Decorah, Iowa.

The Norwegians (in Norway) didn't make quilts, but the Norwegians in America did. And they used many of the same patterns as the Americans. The eight-pointed stars in the Eichman quilt can be found in the motifs of all kinds of Norwegian (Norway) folk art and on many quilts made by Norwegian-Americans. Today women of Norwegian heritage excel in quilting as a pastime and hobby.

"We wanted a quilt to honor the Norwegian heritage of the Wittenberg community and some of the first European settlers such as the Torgerson family, the Reverend E.J. Homme family and others," Dawn Eichman said.

The area was a dark and lonely wilderness when Reverend Homme, a Norwegian minister, settled in the area in 1880 and on February 13, 1880 founded what is now the village of Wittenberg. In 1892 he purchased 360 heavily-timbered acres of land on the Embarrass River a mile and a half from Wittenberg where he erected a saw mill. The land adjoins the Eichman farm.

Strom Torgerson and his wife, Mary Mork Torgerson, came to the area about that time and were the first European settlers on the property. The post and timber construction of the barn indicates it was probably built before 1900.

In the mid-1960s, Harold and Janet Darr purchased the property where they had a dairy herd and raised six children. In June 1994, present owners Don and Mary Schwalbach bought the property. Their daughter Dawn and her husband Dave Eichman and their children Ella, Charlie Jo and River (Strom) reside on the farm.

The Eichmans are pleased that their barn quilt was completed 100 years after a memorial was erected on the property by members of the Torgerson family to honor Strom Torgerson. The quilt faces east toward the Norwegian homeland next to a silo that bears Strom's name. Motifs and signatures in the concrete of the silo include the names of numerous members of the Jens Jacob Torgerson and John Gilbert Rosholt families.

"The Norwegian people imprinted Wittenberg in numerous ways, including religion, education, dairy farming and ethnic diversity," Mary Schwalbach said. "We want this quilt to make that statement and say 'Thank you'."

The Eichman barn quilt was painted by the Shawano County barn quilt committee and was put on display by LeRoy Raddant and Bruce Teetzen of Raddant Electric in Shawano.

Anyone who would like to participate in Shawano County's barn quilt project can contact project coordinator Jim Leuenberger at 715-524-5685 or by email at jamesmleuenberger@yahoo.com. Information can also be obtained from Patti Peterson, tourism manager at the Shawano Country Chamber of Commerce at tourism@shawano.com or 715-524-2139. A link on the Shawano Chamber Web site includes photos and information on every barn quilt on display in Shawano County. Just go to www.shawanocountry.com and click on the barn quilt icon.

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