

FRANCES ABELL BRAND, QUILTER

Frances Abell Brand was destined to be a remarkable quilter. Born in Milton, Massachusetts, in 1913, she possessed the genes for discipline, vision and invention. She developed a love of sewing at an early age and this, coupled with her mastery of a variety of early American decorative art techniques, has inspired her to create 108 quilts. Though she made a quilt in 1939 to commemorate her marriage, and a few more as the family grew, the time for her most accomplished work was not to begin for many years.

In the 1950's Frances began taking classes and perfecting her skills in the painting and stenciling styles of the 17th and 18th centuries that had traditionally been applied to home furnishings such as chairs, chests and tinwork. Her natural abilities and enthusiasm allowed her to quickly advance. She submitted her work for judging and was awarded membership in the Historical Society of Early American Decoration.

In 1947 Frances and her husband Howard acquired an old farm property and moved their young family to Connecticut. The barn was restored and converted into a studio where Frances taught classes in these decorative arts and did work for nearby furniture restorers and private clients. At the same time, she became increasingly fascinated with quilts, their place in history, and their assembly and design. Quilts lay on many beds in the old New England homes she visited on tours. She attended museum and private exhibits which featured breathtaking collections. Frances writes, "I love to look at and examine antique quilts. They create warmth and a sense of comfort. I appreciate the artistry, creativity, and workmanship demonstrated by the early quilt makers. They created beautiful quilts by doing much with little."

In 1981, Frances and Howard retired to Cape Cod where Frances directed her artistic energies totally to quilting, taking classes with local teachers. Starting with traditional designs and gradually applying more of her own original choices, Frances has created, steadily and modestly, a daunting spectrum of work. Perhaps her most significant achievement and contribution has been her masterful blending of other early American design elements into her quilts. Throughout a period of strong influences by contemporary designs and techniques, Frances has remained true to her traditional origins, including the quilting of all her quilts by hand. Frances says, "My favorite part of making a quilt is the hand quilting which I feel is my therapy. It soothes and relaxes me."

Frances' quilts are well known at the Vermont Quilt Festival, which she entered for twenty-six consecutive years, bringing home numerous awards and ribbons. She writes, "I feel competition is important because it gives your work substance. It is stimulating and makes you grow and improve." In 2000, Frances was honored as one of the two featured quilters for the Vermont Quilt Festival exhibit, "Two Visionaries: Frances Abell Brand and Molly Upton." Three of Frances' quilts are part of permanent museum collections: "Bountiful Baskets," a stenciled quilt and "Vitamin C Plus," a

theorem painted quilt, are in the New England Quilt Museum in Lowell, Massachusetts, and "Fruitorama," a multimedia quilt, is in the National Quilt Museum in Paducah, Kentucky.