

## History of the Quilts Made for Family Medicine Conferences

Many of you are already familiar with the beautiful Appalachian quilts that have been on display at our annual conferences to help raise money for the Foundation's scholarships. These hand-stitched quilts have been pieced and quilted by Virginia Schiefer, who has lived near Flatwoods, West Virginia her entire life.

Her ancestors were among the first settlers to Braxton County and contributed greatly to its development. Her great-grandfather owned the property on which the Flatwoods Outlet Mall and other businesses are now located, and the property on which the fast food restaurants and Days Hotel are located was once the home place of her great uncle John D. Sutton, the founder of Sutton, West Virginia. Another great uncle, H. E. Engle, wrote the music to our state song "*The West Virginia Hills*".

Like many early settlers in our state, her ancestors taught their descendants the value of hard work and being productive. Consequently, Virginia was never idle during the time she and her husband Frank reared their six children on a farm near Sutton. Frank, a Purple Heart World War II veteran, passed away April 9, 2011 a few months prior to their 70<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Commitment to marriage was another value deeply instilled in both sides of their families.

Virginia was much too busy during the time her six children were growing up to make any quilts, so this task was left for her mother and mother-in-law to do. After her children were older, Virginia began to learn the art of quilting from her mother-in-law, Maude Schiefer, who was crippled with arthritis and needed Virginia's care.

Quilt pieces were cut from the left over fabric of handmade aprons or clothing and then carefully hand pieced before putting the quilt top, batting and backing together onto the quilting frame. After the quilt was carefully secured on the frame, it took several weeks of hand quilting to complete it. Virginia soon became very proficient at cutting and stitching the quilt pieces together and then quilting them on the old quilting frames that had been in the family for several generations. As queen size and king size beds became more common, her quilting frames for double beds would not accommodate the larger quilts, so her husband hand made an extension for the frames.

Virginia began making quilts in 1973 to use as a door prize at the WVAFP's Hospitality Suite when Dr. Carl B. Hall was running for the national Board of Directors of the American Academy of Family Physicians. The practice of giving away a handmade quilt each year drew a large crowd to the WVAFP Hospitality Suite at the national conferences. In 1975 Dr. Hall ran successfully for the President of the AAFP and took office in 1976, the only West Virginia physician to hold that honor.

Virginia continued to make two quilts a year for the WVAFP - one to give away at the national conference and the other to be raffled at the April Annual Scientific Assembly. The Academy and Foundation were blessed for many years to have Alice Jo Hess, Dr. Bob Hess's wife, selling the quilt chances. She was a wonderful addition to the conference with her friendly smile and willingness to share the history of quilt making, the pattern, and the labor that went into each one.

In 1982, the Family Medicine Foundation of West Virginia was founded as the philanthropic arm of the WVAFP to help fund charitable projects throughout the state. Accumulating funds was very difficult until 1987, when Dr. Jose I. Ricard, a Huntington family physician, and Bill Ferrell, the Foundation Treasurer, initiated the Annual Family Medicine and Sports Medicine Conference in Huntington, West Virginia. Now in its 26<sup>th</sup> year, the conference takes an enormous amount of work, but it is a huge success and the Foundation's greatest source of income.

Adding the November conference meant another quilt needed to be made each year, which Virginia did until 5 years ago when she was close to death from open heart surgery and a stroke. Since then she has cut the number of quilts for the Foundation to one a year. In addition, she still makes a double wedding ring quilt for each grandchild as they get married and a baby quilt for each great grandchild. As the grandmother of 12 grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren with two more on the way, keeping all of them in quilts is a major undertaking. She will be 90 years old in September and is still able to live alone and take care of her home. She thoroughly enjoys having all of her children, grandchildren, spouses, and great grandchildren together (58 total) for holiday dinners.

*By Chris Ferrell, daughter of Virginia Schiefer*