Historic Quilt...continued from page 3

quilt was an important piece of the county's history and would be a very valuable addition to the museum's collection, but there was still the problem of figuring out how to raise the necessary funds, and fast - the bidding would close in just 10 days.

Luckily, the very next meeting of the historical society's board of trustees was four days later, at which time Burke presented both the find and the financial bind. It turns out the board members were heavily in favor of obtaining the quilt, even if it meant digging into their own pockets.

At someone's suggestion, a single piece of paper was passed around the room for Society members to sign along with their individual pledges, which, in the end, totaled more than $1,500.

Then, there was only one thing left to do: let the eBay bidding tug-of-war begin. From a starting bid of $300, the price of the quilt took a quick hike to $500 and rose from there in increments of $20 to $30, until it was finally "sold!" to the highest bidder, the Ocean County Historical Society, for $830.

The cloth was shipped from Missouri and arrived in New Jersey the same week, no worse for the wear. The whole of it measures approximately 65 by 78 inches and consists of 30 13-by-13-inch squares. The term redwork refers to both the color and the dye process of the thread used in the stitching, which might be described as "Turkey red" (named for the country, not the bird).

A lengthy discussion involving many of the issues relevant to the quilt and its historic significance, including speculation about the Good Luck church and guesses as to why and how the quilt was made, had taken place on eBay's discussion board in the week prior to the auction, with 33 posts from an online community of needle arts and vintage textiles enthusiasts.

So, perhaps the Ocean County museum owes its gratitude not only to the antiques dealer who brought the treasure to Burke's attention, but also to the women the dealer had consulted, who had given her advice and encouraged her to see the quilt safely back to its birthplace.

"I have sold a few friendship quilts directly to museums and historical societies, so you might want to try that route if you can locate them," wrote one user, calling herself, appropriately, "patches". "It's always nice to send a piece like this back home where it started."

"Patches, I may take your advice," replied the dealer, going by the handle "Doverhilldiva". "Will look tomorrow."

Lucky for Ocean County folks, she did.

In another exchange, the dealer remarked on how fast and effective a resource the Internet is, and continues to be – truly a global village.

"I start out with something I know nothing about... You not only hand-feed me information, but (also) point me in a direction I didn't know existed and, within a day, it's clear."

Ironic, how something so modern can be so integral in piecing together the past.

That quilt and many others, belonging to the museum and from private collections, can be viewed from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the first and final days of the exhibition and from 1 to 4 p.m. on the days in between (October 14-20). Admission for historical society members is free, and $5 for the general public.

For further details, contact the museum at (732) 341-1880 or take a virtual tour at www.oceancountyhistory.org.

-Victoria Ford

Historic Quilt is a Stitch in Time



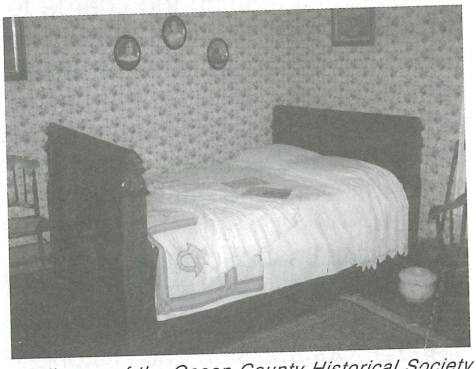
The presentation square of the Ocean County Historical Society's recently acquired redwork-embroidered quilt, which dates back to 1888.

For one week this fall, from October 14 to 20, a one-of-a-kind signature/friendship quilt will serve as the centerpiece of a special quilt exhibition on display at the Ocean County Historical Society Museum in Toms River. For the quilt at the heart of it all, the show is a homecoming of sorts, as it was lovingly created by the hands of Ocean County women almost 120 years ago and, just this past summer, returned to its place of origin from the Missouri estate where it had ended up.

The story of how the quilt came home to Ocean County is an interesting one, in which everything seems to have come together like...patchwork.

Near the end of June, museum curator Patricia Burke received an email from an antiques dealer in Missouri who said she had something she thought might be of interest to the historical society: a redwork-embroidered quilt with a center block, or presentation square, indicating it had been made and given as a Christmas gift to one Rev. James B. Dare by the ladies of the Good Luck and Forked River M.E. Churches in 1888.

Intrigued, Burke wanted to know more. Upon further inquiry, she learned the quilt, which bore the hand-stitched signatures of 504 Ocean County churchgoers, was made of muslin and in unused, unwashed condition; with the exception of a few light storage stains, the quilt was otherwise pristine with its original polish intact.



A glimpse of the Ocean County Historical Society Museum's interior.

The dealer had purchased the quilt from the estate of a collector in St. Louis who had been amassing antiques for some time with the apparent intention of opening an antiques shop but left her intention ultimately unfulfilled. So the dealer pointed Burke in the direction of eBay, where the quilt would be auctioned and could go, she said, for as much as $1,000.

"We simply didn't have that kind of money," according to Burke.

Not yet, anyway.

The museum's acquisitions committee enthusiastically agreed that the

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