

May 21, 2014

TOURING SULLIVAN COUNTY'S MUSEUM

... while dusting



Look down at your clothes. Are they new or old? Are they man-made or synthetic? Are they machine or hand sewn? Were they made in this state or country? Depending on your age, the evolution of communication has become a marvel of modern ingenuity. But have you ever thought in the same vein of the evolution of clothing? Today we think nothing of taking the wet clothes out of the washer and throwing them in the dryer with some sort of fabric softener.

But, what if you had to spin animal hair or plant material to then weave into the cloth for to make your own clothing? What if those same pieces of clothing didn't get washed every time you put them on because washing was a big deal? Even a running stream could be your washer. And the soap was powdered or a bar of lye soap – made from basically ash, this wasn't the softest ingredient to wash clothes with. Nor was it good on the skin of your hands as you pounded clothes on a rock or a wash board. As things became modernized, you'd now have a wringer to squeeze the excess water from the washed clothes. Now you could use a fence, a hitching post, porch rafters or (if you were really lucky) a clothes line to dry the clothing. Along with all this modernization, we don't even want to get into the drudgery of ironing clothes – which, today is unheard of. But for all this history of clothing, we can appreciate it when looking at pieces from the past that served their wearers through all walks of life.

At this museum, we find that christening dresses are what by and large seem to be the best preserved. Very often this is the case with them because they were worn once and put away, very likely not to be seen again until the wearer was of an age to have children themselves. But other clothing within our displays will amaze you in that they've survived so long and can very likely tell you their own story.

This winter when our heating system was being replaced and plumbing connected to parts of the system already in place, new holes needed to be placed thru the walls from the Book & School Room into the Textile Room. If you've ever had plumbing or carpentry work done in your home, you'll know the headaches of cleaning up afterwards. Our predicament was no different in this regard. Covering things can only go so far to prevent the powdering of brick and mortar from finding its way into every nook and cranny. What to do, what to do? In walked Karen and Bob Heisman. They not only graciously volunteered to clean but to also change out the displayed items in the entire Textile Room! Many weeks later and countless hours of dirt and sweat, Karen announced not only success but also elation that the job was done. And, what a job it was! The changing out of displays is something we try to do every few years but in this case it was also a necessity. Changing out means not only checking for any needed repairs or further cleaning but also properly packing away an item for storage. Then there's the unpacking of what you want to put out, checking it, mounting it and choosing the location among others to now display. And as with any display, when first you plan that location – you may change your mind often, arranging and rearranging. But, if you enjoy this kind of thing, it can be fulfilling and fun. When you see this finished room, we think you'll agree that Karen did in fact have fun doing this project and can only hope that she knows how deeply appreciated are her efforts.