



Embroiderers' Guild of Peterborough

The Embroiderers' Guild of Peterborough was started in 1976 by an enthusiastic group of women with knowledge of embroidery and a strong desire to spread the word in the community. Dorothy Banks (trained in England) had a wealth of knowledge of embroidery techniques, collaborated with Cauleen Viscoff-Bird (taught students privately, primarily traditional crewel work in stranded thread and fine wool) to bring together like-minded individuals in, probably, the first group of its type in Peterborough. Other founding members were Pat Legh-Jones, Susan Marshall, Seanagh Murdoch, Sue Smith, Billie Wallbridge, and Evelyn Wishart. When the group formally joined the newly established Embroiderers' Association of Canada (EAC) as the 10th chapter in 1979, the Guild had grown to fifteen members with the addition of Evelyn Andrews, Lou Bark, Kathleen Copeland-Nyberg, Joan Manuel, Marilyn Milne, Anne Moore and Grace Sager. Cauleen Viscoff-Bird served as the first president from 1979 – 1981.

At that time the Guild grew quite fast, with several younger working ladies, so meetings were always in the evening. The emphasis was on learning traditional needlework - black work, white work, canvas, smocking, counted thread, linen and crewel. The Guild met monthly.

Being part of the national organization EAC created opportunities for a broader exposure to needlework education and expertise. One of those was taking part in the annual EAC Seminar, where teachers from around the world came together to offer courses over a six-day period. EGP stepped up to host Seminar 1987 and this endeavour became one of the busiest undertakings in its short history. At the time, the Guild was a small group, not much more than 20 ladies and, although a huge amount of work, it was a great experience under the graceful guidance of Evelyn Wishart. EGP repeated the experience in 2016, cohosting "Inspiring Threads" in Toronto with four other small guilds across southern Ontario. (Simcoe County Embroidery Guild, Quinte Needlearts Guild, Tulip Tree Needlearts, and York Chatelaines).

EGP has been a good 'corporate citizen' over the years, actively participating in the opportunities afforded by the national organization. In addition to planning two Seminars, the Guild has hosted Atlantic/Central Regional Meetings, sent representatives to Board Meetings, taken correspondence courses, attended Seminar, submitted articles and project designs to Embroidery Canada, organized the 2013 Artist Trading Card exchange, and guided a youth guild (Lazy Daisy Stitchers) for ten years. Long-time EGP member Deb Blackmore also served on the EAC Board of Directors for 12 years as Youth Director, Vice President, President and Past President.



Embroiderers' Guild of Peterborough

Locally, EGP has been equally busy. Since the early 1980s, there has been teaching outreach into the community. During summer months, the Guild hosted day-long classes in collaboration with Hutchison House Museum teaching embroidery, knitting, and sewing to children. The Guild also designed a cross-stitch kit for HHM to sell in its shop, based on the designs from the museum's extensive sampler collection. More recently there has been collaboration with the New Canadians Centre teaching handwork to Syrian refugees, as well as offering 'introduction to embroidery' classes in the community.

There have been displays of Guild work annually at the Peterborough Public Library and Hutchison House (the next one in September 2023). A retrospective juried show of our embroidered work at the Peterborough Art Gallery netted the Gallery's highest visitor numbers in their history. Members have participated in activities at Lang, the living history museum in Peterborough County, demonstrating 19th century embroidery techniques. For the past ten years, the Guild has taken part in Fibre Fest, an annual gathering of guilds and individuals involved in all things fibre as an active demonstrator and seller of embroidered works.

In a further effort to broaden the scope of the Guild, a newsletter 'Sew What' was developed and offered for several years. This was replaced by our own website (www.egpstitch.ca) which now serves as a vehicle to showcase our work to the wider world.

On a broader, but still local, basis EGP is a founding member of the Ontario Network of Needleworkers, an organization of fibre-related guilds across southern Ontario who meet annually to share knowledge and expertise in fibre art techniques.

Underscoring all the activities the Guild takes part in is fact that they have always been a teaching guild. The 'beating heart' of the group is helping members maximize their personal expertise in whatever needlework technique they are interested in. To that end, the Guild presents a new program each year, using the strengths and skills of our own members as well as bringing in outside teachers. Over the years this has given us a balance of maintaining traditional techniques while at the same time embracing other aspects of the art world that enhance embroidery like fabric dyeing, fabric manipulation, borrowing skills from quilting, collage, beading etc. The Guild also has an extensive lending library of current books and magazines related to the embroidery world.

We continue to have a good strong core of members with numbers ranging between 25-30 and our hope is that the Embroiderers' Guild of Peterborough will continue its role to encourage and preserve the art of the threaded needle for many years to come.

Compiled with thanks to the following for their reminiscences: Deb Blackmore, Seanagh Murdoch, MaryAnne Hammond, Wenda Mortlock and Linda Vassiliadis.