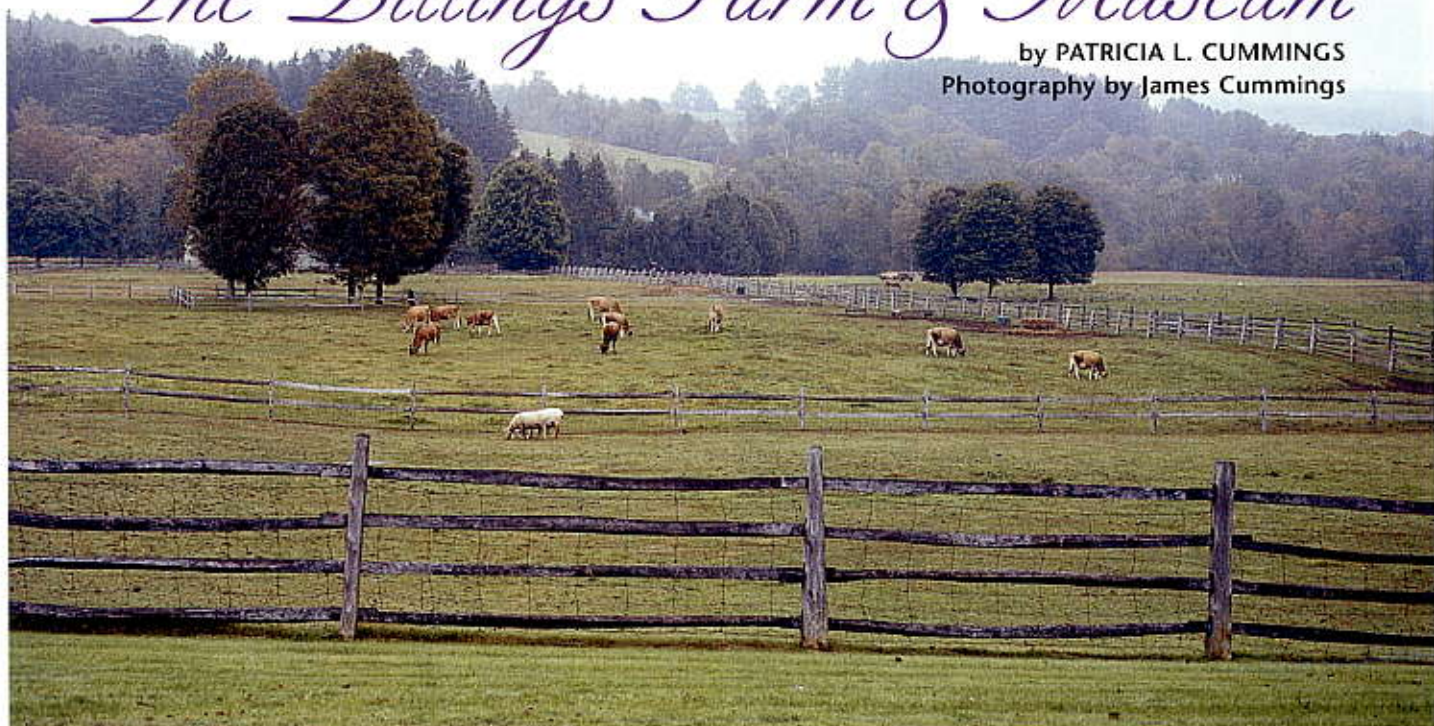


A Place in the Land: The Billings Farm & Museum

by PATRICIA L. CUMMINGS
Photography by James Cummings



Farm pasture on a misty day

There are many different dairy cow breeds in the world, but one of the most famous is the Jersey cow.

Bred for more than six centuries on the Isle of Jersey, a small island in the English Channel off the coast of France, this cow's milk is so rich in fat and protein that it can easily be turned into smooth creamy butter.

In 1869, Frederick Billings, a wealthy lawyer and real estate developer who made his fortune in San Francisco, purchased land in Woodstock, Vermont, and subsequently established a dairy farm—stocked with imported Jersey cows. Billings' venture paid off. By the 1890s, the farm was selling more than five thousand pounds of butter per year! Even today, the Billings Farm continues to produce cows' milk, which is picked up daily and transported just "up the road a piece" to be processed into the famous Cabot cheese of Vermont.

As for the cows, they have been entered in shows for more than one hundred years of the farm's operation! The herd won more prizes than any other farm at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, Illinois. Over a century later, one exceptional cow by the name of Roseanne won the title "Best Cow of North America 1988-89."

Billings himself eventually gained quite a reputation as a land conservator. He and his farm manager George Aitken, whom he appointed in 1884, planted thousands of spruce, pine, and larch trees on Mount Tom, the summit of which overlooks the town of Woodstock. Today, this area is accessible via trails through the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historic Park, which is located across the street from the farm.

Aitken's Farmhouse

Billings commissioned a state-of-the-art farmhouse to be built for Aitken. The Victorian structure, finished in 1890, still stands on the property and consists of three sections: downstairs creamery (for making butter), living quarters for the family, and an office with windows so Aitken could view any part of the operation.

The house was updated in 1989, and written records were helpful in choosing wallpaper and duplicating the original room settings. Thirty-five houseplants, of the same varieties that were present in the house in 1890, thrive there today. The house also contains gas lights and indoor plumbing (Billings owned both the local gas company and aqueduct). A large cistern, located inside the house, collects rainwater for re-use. In the kitchen, there



Example of an early farmhouse kitchen, located in the Farm Life exhibit

are three faucets: hot, cold, and "soft" (the soft water is good for laundering clothes). An indoor bathroom has the latest amenities that were available at the time of construction—tin tub, flushable commode, and a sink with hot and cold running water and a lovely floral-painted sink bowl insert.

Farm Life Museum

In 1983, an old barn at the farm was set up with exhibits that reflect the rich history of Vermont's agricultural practices, from tilling the land to cutting timber and producing maple syrup. Old farm implements show how much agriculture has evolved and how much it has remained the same.

The museum is also dedicated to ongoing educational programs for people of all ages. To this end, they offer

and ice cream and butter making events.

Time Travel Tuesdays (July 10 through August 28) will afford visitors the opportunity to experience what it was like to prepare a meal in a farmhouse kitchen during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Of special interest to quilters, the twenty-first juried quilt exhibition to be held at the farm will take place from August 4 through September 23 (see more about the show below). Also scheduled are: Harvest Weekend (September 29 and 30), A Family Halloween (October 28), Thanksgiving Weekend (November 23 through 25), and Christmas at the Farm on December weekends and December 22 through January 1 (excluding Christmas day). Wassail Weekend (December 7 through 9) offers ornament making, a visit to an authentically decorated Victorian farmhouse, sleigh or wagon rides, and traditional music in the parlor on Saturday at noon.

Quilt Exhibition

Each year for the past 20 years, a quilt exhibition has been held in the old barn,



Percheron horses, Jim and Joe, with Alex Greer at the reins



Jersey calf in the barn nursery



*Ribbons and Stars by Kathi Moreno
of White River Junction*

with entries restricted to quilts submitted by residents of Windsor County, Vermont. Large quilts are suspended from brackets on the exposed barn beams and smaller ones are displayed on panels that are custom-made for each year's entries. Donna Miles, a museum interpreter, explained that one reason the show is so unique is that it lasts for seven weeks.

In all, 57 quilts were displayed in the 2006 show, 14 of which were made for a challenge issued by the Heart of the Land Quilters of Windsor. The challenge, titled "A Wintry Mix," required participants to incorporate at least two of the following blocks: Log Cabin, Snowball, Split Rail Fence, Ohio Star, Flying Geese, Bear's Paw, and Drunkard's Path.



Rainbow Fans, by Deborah King of Woodstock, uses a variation of the traditional Grandmother's Fan block.

Of Special Interest

Prior to assembling a leaf motif quilt titled "A Journey of Leaves" (page 71), Charlotte Croft of East Barnard collected a wide variety of leaves during a cross-country trip in September 2001. She planned to present the quilt to her husband, a forester, on his 65th birthday—five years later, the quilt is still not quite finished, but Charlotte decided to display it before more time passes.

Darsie Riccio of Woodstock assembled a seasonal quilt called "Batik Thanksgiving" (page 71) by combining motifs from Lois Krushina Fletcher's first book, *The Quilter's Home: Fall*, and a turkey pattern designed by Helen C. Thorn of Pinetree Lodge Design in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota.

Deborah King of Woodstock hand pieced and hand quilted a very colorful wall hanging that she titled "Rainbow Fans," a variation of the Grandmother's Fan design. It was duly noted that Deborah, who is in her eighties, is the oldest quilter to have entered the show.



The Jockey Cap, by Roberta Luss of Springfield, uses a Kaffe Fassett pattern and some of his designer fabrics

"An Appliqué Sampler" (page 71) is a beautifully executed quilt by Susan Hall of Windsor. Susan states that the designs are traditional appliqué patterns and that most of them can be found in the book *101 Appliqué Blocks* by Nancy Brenan Daniel.

"Ribbons and Stars" was designed by Kathi Moreno of White River Junction using Electric Quilt software to plan the intertwining ribbon borders. The wall hanging features nicely coordinated jewel-tone stars juxtaposed against a subtle print background.

Roberta Luss of Springfield created "The Jockey Cap" after receiving the gift of a Kaffe Fassett pattern and some

of his designer fabrics. She used the bright contemporary fabrics to create a medallion-style quilt that is hand quilted with gold metallic thread.

Space does not permit us to mention all the quilts that were entered, but they were lovely nevertheless, as were the friendly museum volunteers and quilters, who were demonstrating hand quilting at a quilt frame.



Batik Thanksgiving by Darsie Riccio of Woodstock



A Journey of Leaves, by Charlotte Croft of East Barnard, was made for Charlotte's forester husband.

history and a reading library are also available. Visit www.nps.gov/mabi/ for more information.

Patricia L. Cummings, a resident of Concord, New Hampshire, is an avid quilt history researcher and quiltmaker. She and her husband Jim own Quilter's Muse Publications. Their collaborative efforts have been widely published. For more information, visit online at www.quiltersmuse.com or e-mail Patricia at pat@quiltersmuse.com. ❖

Family Fun

Billings Farm & Museum is administered by the Woodstock Foundation, Inc., a charitable non-profit group founded by Mary French Rockefeller (granddaughter of Frederick Billings) and her husband, the late Laurance Spelman Rockefeller. Located on Route 12 just one half-mile north of the quaint village of Woodstock, with its artisan shops, antiquarian bookstores, upscale restaurants, early New England homes, and village green, the museum is a nice destination in any season—be sure to bring the family! For days and hours of operation, as well as a complete listing of events, call (802) 457-2355 or visit www.billingsfarm.org.

Across the street from the farm is the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historic Park, where you can tour a mansion that contains the personal artifacts of previous residents, along with some very fine landscape paintings. Twenty miles of trails are provided for hiking, which are used exclusively for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing in winter. Special programs are presented and a visitor center has been created in a nineteenth-century carriage barn, where an exhibit of conservation



An Appliqué Sampler by Susan Hall of Windsor