

Ozella's Story: An Underground Railroad Quilt Code

First Presbyterian Church in Racine celebrates its history with a display of quilts used to communicate messages to slaves headed for freedom. Thanks to Kathi Wilson for the following summary of the display. You are invited to view the exhibit!

Many slaves fled to Canada through the Great Lakes. They made their way via the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, helped by churches, ship captains. First Presbyterian Church was one of the Underground Railroad stops on their journey. A hole was discovered in a crawl space in the furnace room underneath the sanctuary floor. Many items were found including the Bible from the first pew, a very small chair, small boots, pins and buttons. We also have a letter written by a congregation member talking about "the underground railroad". These items have been donated to the Racine Heritage Museum. The quilts became a permanent part of our exhibit after a project was put together based on the book "Hidden in Plain View", written by Jacqueline Tobin. She interviewed Ozella McDaniels in Charleston, SC, where she told her family story of quilts being used to give direction on the Underground Railroad. Our exhibit is called "Ozella's Story" and displays 12 quilts with the patterns telling the story. Some of the quilt patterns are: Bears Paw - follow the bear prints in the woods and it might take you down the right path. The North Star, it will lead you towards the north. Wagon Wheel - maybe someone would hide you on their wagon. Log Cabin - look for shelter in a log cabin along the way. Many people escaped slavery and many people helped along the way. We at First Presbyterian Church are proud of our heritage and continue to give tours talking about how we helped when we could to bring people to freedom.



