



Doll and Quilt Maker

Mrs. Lair LaCour, known as Mama Lair, is the "Official Doll Maker" of the Cane River community. She was born in the Cane River community of Isle Breville in 1915. She married at the age of sixteen and raised ten children, three of whom still live in the Isle Breville community. Mrs. LaCour learned her craft as most young women in the South did, from her extended family. Her mother and grandmother were an integral part of the socialization of their grandchildren. In this way, they were able to pass on skills necessary for a life in the South. Mrs. LaCour has passed on these skills to her own children. Her youngest daughter, Mrs. Anastasia Christophe, worked with Mrs. LaCour making quilts, dolls, and other crafts.

The dolls Mrs. LaCour made are similar to those made by her grandmother, but she added some innovations. Mrs. LaCour did most of her sewing on a sewing machine rather than hand stitching as her grandmother did. The majority of her dolls have faces made of embroidered cotton cloth, for the body; yarn for the hair and shawls; calico or gingham for the dresses and bonnets; lace for the borders; a stiff white cloth for the pantaloons, slips, and stockings; leather for the shoes; and polyester for the stuffing. Mrs. LaCour used a variety of tools including a sewing machine, scissors, sewing needles, and a stick used to stuff the dolls.

Mrs. LaCour's grandmother used to make dolls one at a time or as time permitted. The art was Mrs. LaCour's full time hobby. She made the dolls in stages. For instance, she made the bodies and dresses on one day, embroidered the faces on another day, and then finally stuffed and dressed the dolls. Mrs. LaCour made several types of dolls such as the patented "Ma-Man Dolls," "Little Mischief," "Granddaughters," "Cooks," and "Clowns".

The other part of Mrs. LaCour's enterprise was quilt making. Before the ready availability of electricity, gas heaters, and store-bought bedcovers, quilts were a wintertime necessity. Quilts are now viewed as pieces of art, which still have a practical use. The quilts fashioned by Mrs. LaCour's mother and grandmother were primarily scrap quilts made from various fabrics left over from dressmaking and other sewing tasks. Although those quilts were designed to be functional, the appreciation for beauty was always important. Mrs. LaCour began making quilts with her grandmother and other women in the community through quilting bees. She used several traditional patterns such as the nine-patch, block, or windmill patterns. She has also redesigned the traditional wedding ring pattern, which is especially popular today. When she had enough scraps from making dolls, Mrs. LaCour would make a scrap quilt much as her grandmother did.

Mrs. LaCour was continuously working with her craft. She has participated at the Natchitoches-NSU Folk Festival and was inducted into the Louisiana Folklife Center's Hall of Master Folk Artists for her doll making. Mrs. LaCour died September 4, 2008.

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