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## Homemade Bear Made With Love

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Dale Rhoads

I made my first teddy bear 13 years ago when our youngest daughter, Lee, was in third grade. I made her a Garfield costume for Halloween and then she picked out a beautiful teddy bear at a toy shop to be her Garfield's Pookey. I explained to her that if she got that bear it would be for Christmas and it would not go Trick or Treating. It was much too nice for that. She didn't handle disappointment well. While trying to solve this problem I remembered a teddy bear pattern in a magazine I'd had for several years. I'd never attempted to make one because I was intimidated by how the joints were made. The head, arms and legs are movable because the joints are made with cotter pins and fender washers. I didn't know what a cotter pin or a fender washer was so I assumed I couldn't do it. I finally decided to make her a bear and thought if it falls apart at midnight—so what. It would have served its purpose.

I bought fake fur, cut it out, sewed it up and stuffed it. My bear parts and I went to Lewter's Hardware, and I naively asked a clerk if he knew what cotter pins and fender washers were. He knew. I pulled out the magazine, pattern and bear parts and showed him where the joints went. He helped me pick out the right sizes, showed me how to turn the cotter pin, and I went home feeling triumphant. I finished putting the bear together. I admired my handiwork not believing I'd really made something so appealing. Lee loved it. She couldn't believe her mother had made it. Neither could Lawren and Liz, but they wanted bears, too. For Christmas that year I made seven more bears as gifts for some very special children.

That was the beginning of a very satisfying hobby. Since then I've made between 125 and 150 bears ranging in size from 1-1/2" to 30".

Even though I use the same pattern for all my bears (it has been reduced and enlarged to meet my needs), each one looks different and has his own personality. I have quite an inventory of fake furs. The choice of fur and the tilt of the head gives each bear his own charm.

To keep this hobby interesting I've diversified a bit. Several years ago I made a Crazy Quilt bear that led to my teaching that bear to quilting classes in Huntsville and Birmingham. Occasionally someone will ask me to make a bear resembling one she had when she was a little girl. This usually requires a particular kind or color of fur. More recently a friend in Birmingham asked me if I'd make teddy bears for her and her children from her aunt's old mink coat. I'd never worked with skins or leather but told her I'd try. I agreed to make one and if she liked it, I'd make the others. Once again I was intimidated by a bear. After two weeks of stalling, I finally cut into the mink! I did it! It was the most exquisite bear I'd ever made. My friend thought so, too. I made four other mink bears for her and they are, without a doubt, the most elegant teddy bear family I've ever known.

I don't sign my bears with my name, but every bear I make wears my logo, an embroidered heart that says "HOMEMADE BEAR, MADE WITH LOVE" because they are.

I'm sure I learned to sew because my mother sewed beautifully, I grew up wearing smocked dresses she made. I learned to embroider in 4-H in elementary school. Although I wasn't interested in quilts or quilting at the time, I remember playing house under my grandmother's quilting frame while she and her neighbors quilted. Yes, an old-fashioned quilting bee! I grew up sleeping under her quilts, too. My great aunt Martha talked a great deal about the beautiful needlework my other grandmother and my great grandmother did. The desire to do needlework must be in-born and comes to me from both sides of my family.

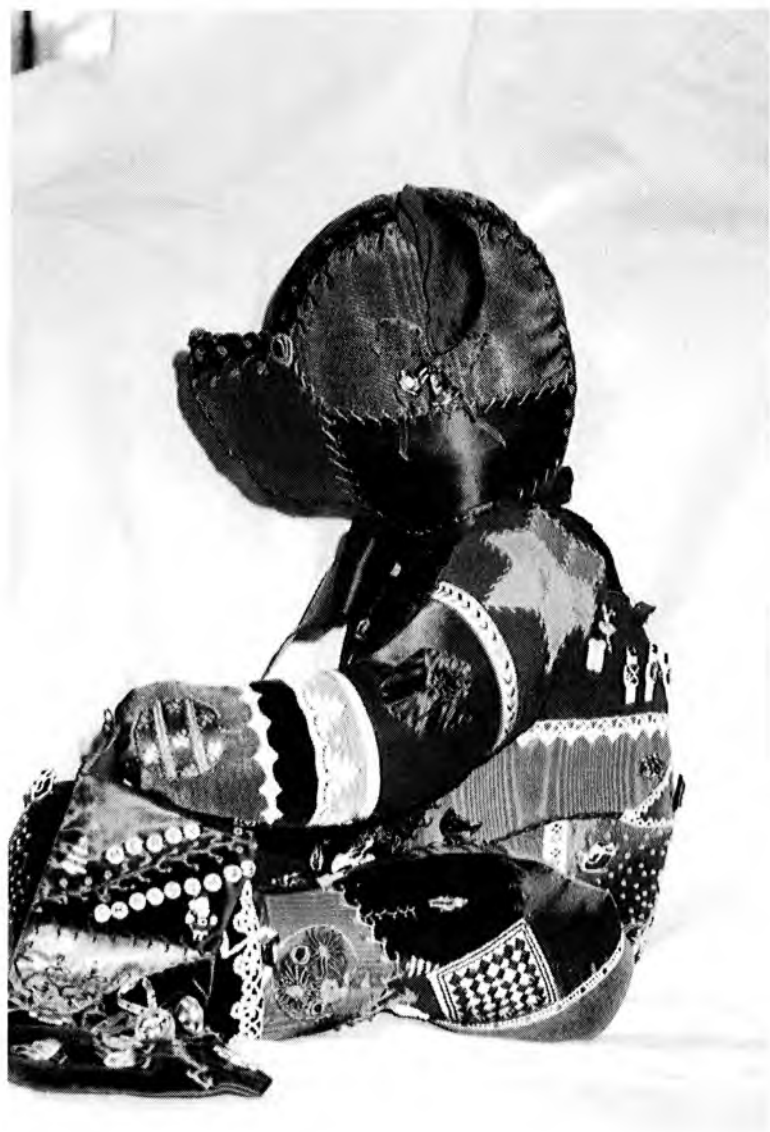
Our three daughters grew up wearing smocked and French hand-sewn dresses and bonnets. I occasionally sew for my granddaughter, but she is now wearing the dresses I made for my children and have saved

for this very purpose. When our girls outgrew these fancy things. I was well into teddy bears. Next I took quilting classes, joined the Embroiderers' Guild of America, and then the Heritage Quilters of Huntsville.

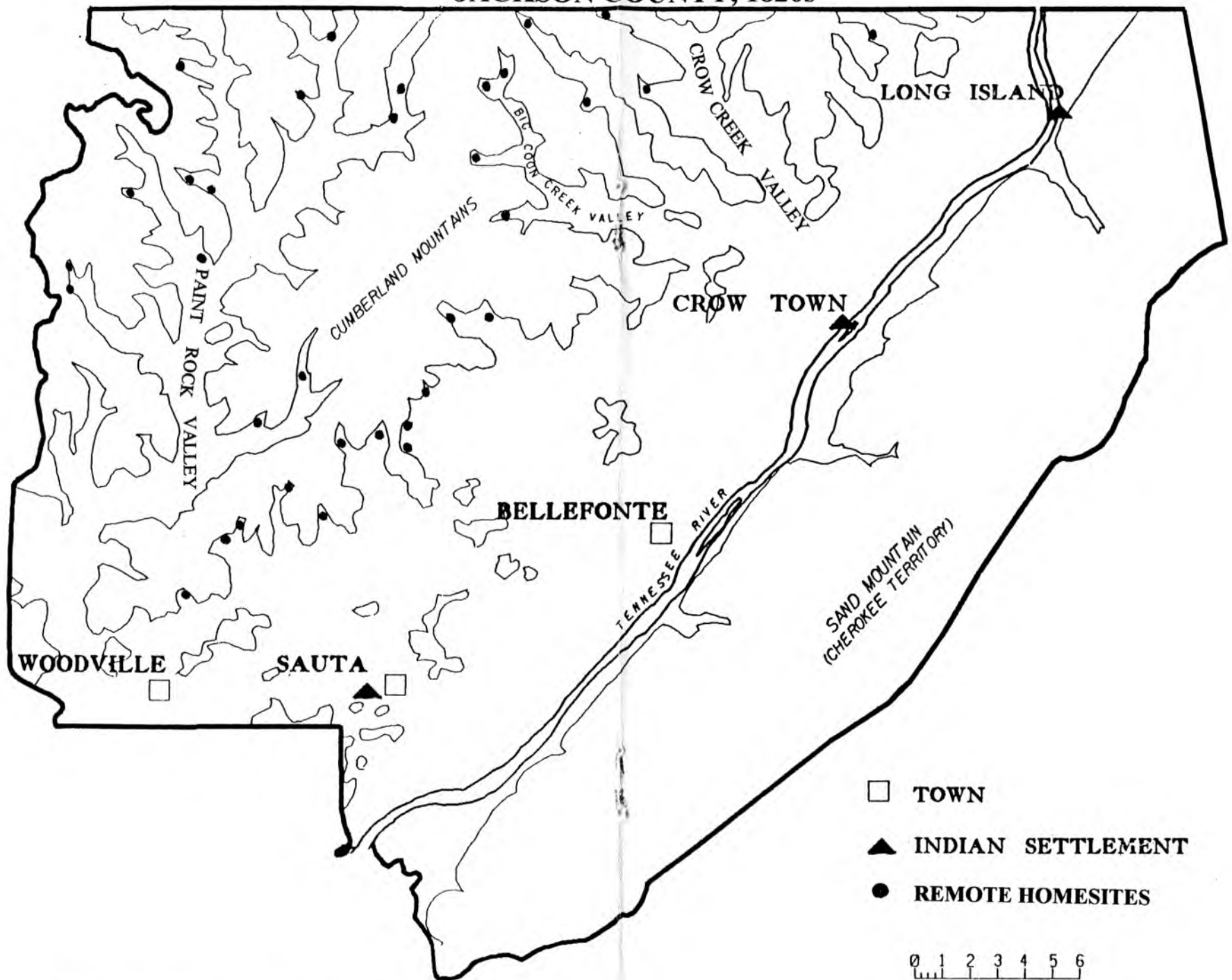
All our children are grown and away, and after having been a full time, stay-at-home mother, I now have the time to pursue all my passions: my house, antiques, needlework, and working as a volunteer at Harrison Brothers. Lawren is an LPN, is beginning an new job with the Red Cross, and is mother of our only grandchild, Shelby. Liz graduated from Duke last year and is now at the University of Michigan working on her Ph.D. in biophysics. This fall Lee begins her first year of graduate school at Wake Forest working on her Master's degree in accounting. Shelby will go to kindergarten at Farley this fall.

The needlework thing I've done of which I'm the most proud is to have co-chaired the Signature Quilt Committee with Lynn Jones, and to have pieced the quilt that was made a few years ago as a fund-raiser to pay off the mortgage on Harrison Brothers. We were successful and retired the debt. My longest lived interest outside home and family is my volunteer work as Harrison Brothers. I've been a volunteer for 12 years, since the Historic Huntsville Foundation opened the store in October of 1984. I'm beginning my third term on the HHF Board and have the pleasure of delivering books for the Publications Committee.

All the things I do come down to my having the time to do the things I love to do and the desire to fill my new house with things that mean something to me.



# JACKSON COUNTY, 1820s



SOURCE: GLO SURVEY NOTES

