

ANNE HOPKINS BURNHAM



DEDICATED NOV. 11 1904. KNIGHT FINE ARTS CTR.

NEEDLEPOINT RUG DESIGNED BY HUDSON ARTIST

THE BLAIR HOUSE RUG
DEDICATION
WESTERN RESERVE ACADEMY

A History of the Blair House Rug

by Priscilla Graham

From 1970 to 1987 this handmade rug was used in a bedroom in Blair House, the guest residence for the White House in Washington, D.C. Heads of state, foreign and domestic dignitaries, friends of Presidents Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan have all enjoyed its understated beauty. Mrs. Barbara Bush became especially fond of the rug and needlepointed her own version which took her eight years to complete.

The idea of the rug was first conceived in the late 1960s when Mrs. Jane Fitch of Hudson, Ohio, was commissioned to decorate one of the bedrooms in Blair House. With period furniture built by local craftsmen, crewel bed hangings and curtains sewn by a team of Ohio women, and this needlepoint rug, designed and stitched by Ohio volunteers, the Ohio Room achieved a distinction that was unique in the guest residence.

The rug, twelve feet four inches square, was designed by Mrs. Anne H. Burnham of Hudson and took over two years to complete. More than fifty needleworkers stitched eighteen inch squares which were matched and sewn together to form a woodland scene. Mrs. Burnham, Mrs. Fitch, and Mrs. Theodora Tasker of Hudson oversaw the entire project from the choice of the yarn colors, to the joining of the squares, to the blocking and backing of the completed rug.

Mrs. Burnham's original watercolor drawings, lightly painted on graph paper, were meticulously planned and carefully outlined so that the squares blended into each other without any interruption in the

pattern. This meant that every square had to match the surrounding squares perfectly, a feat that could never have been achieved with painted needlepoint canvases. With hundreds of yarn colors used in the rug, this was painstaking work.

Many of the needlepointers met at Seymour House on Prospect Street in Hudson (then the residence of Anne and Bradford Burnham) every Tuesday morning for several years. The dining room was given over to this project, and a pot of stew was kept simmering in the kitchen to fortify the diligent workers.

After serving as the focal point of the Ohio Room for almost two decades, the rug was put into storage in Washington in the late 1980s when Blair House was again redecorated. Through the efforts of Mr. Burnham and Mrs. Fitch, it was returned to Hudson in 1993 to be the centerpiece of a retrospective on the late Mrs. Burnham's artwork.

In the summer of 1994, the Blair House rug was installed in the John S. Knight Fine Arts Center at Western Reserve Academy. This is a particularly appropriate home for the rug, since much of the work was done in Seymour House, and many of the volunteers, including Mrs. Burnham, Mrs. Fitch, and Mrs. Tasker, had children who attended the Academy.

- November, 1994