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Doll lovers pass along memories at annual show

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MARION - Sarah Henry and Ginny Hittenrauch sat behind a table of doll houses and miniature dolls, surrounded by other collectors.

They talked of churches and castles, of old wooden stoves and a doll house that keeps the memory of a dead little girl alive.

Henry and Hittenrauch are regulars at the annual Doll, Doll House and Miniatures Show held as a fundraiser for the Women's Club Home. They were among 11 vendors who set up at the eighth annual show held Saturday at the historical home at 1126 E. Center St.

Their specialty is miniatures. Their tools often are quite literally anything they can find.

While Henry had built a few doll houses for her children, it was Hittenrauch who first seriously caught the bug. She had raised two children and played the roles of wife, mother and Sunday school teacher, but hadn't really had a hobby.

That changed when she got her first doll house in 1998. She started discovering her creative side as she outfitted the houses with miniature dolls and furniture. The hobby blossomed when she attended the first annual show at the Women's Club Home and saw a castle modeled after silent film star Colleen Moore's Fairy Castle, housed at the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry.

The castle she saw was built by Methodist minister Father Francisco Huber for his daughter. Hittenrauch's husband had been talking to Huber, who said he couldn't sell it but would be willing to give it to someone who would care for it.

That task turned to Hittenrauch, who with Henry's help completed the work. They created stucco walls, turned gift wrap into flooring and Christmas ornaments into wall lights. Cake separators became columns while the castle featured a functional organ taken from a music box.

"You never look at anything the same again," said Hittenrauch.

That was enough to hook Henry. She built a replica of Maranatha Baptist Church, which is now the LEAPIN' Outreach Center at 287 S. State St. Christmas cards got new lives as stained-glass windows, one of the building's predominant features. Cardboard became pews.

Her basic materials include joint compound and cardboard. She finds a majority of her items around her home. The task reminds her of growing up with nine siblings during what she called the "poor age."

She can still imagine her mom saying, "Use what you got."

As she talked she motioned to a doll house first made in the 1950s. It was built by Donald Medford, then passed on to relatives when his wife, Maxine Medford, died on Thanksgiving in 1953 and a bus struck and killed their daughter Patty Ann the following Easter.

The house went from cousin to cousin, eventually finding its way to Marsha Adams, who entrusted it to Henry.

Henry worked with the furniture built by Medford, changing colors at times to better fit her vision. It includes an old stove similar to one in her home and another on display at the Warren G. Harding Home.

There is also a red sofa and chair that she said reminds her of her own childhood home and its red velvet furniture.

While Henry added a lot of her own touches, Patty Ann still lives on in that doll house.

She can be seen in a children's bedroom, in a photo of a little girl that hangs on the wall.

She looks out at a creator who still has a little girl's heart.

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Art caption: Ivy Sedam, 11, and her mother, Tammy, both doll collectors, look through plastic containers full of doll clothes while at the eighth annual Doll, Doll House and Miniature Show. Hundreds of items were on display and for sale at the doll show Saturday at the Women's Club Home on East Center Street.

Bill Sinden/The Marion Star

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