

Nebraska History Museum-on-the Move Exhibit “Homefront & Battlefield: Quilts & Context in the Civil War” opens at Great Plains Art Museum February 3, 2015

An army may march on its stomach, but textiles are almost as important as food in military success. And in America’s Civil War, fabric was at the center of political and economic as well as military conflict.

“Homefront & Battlefield: Quilts & Context in the Civil War,” takes an intriguing and absorbing look at the most divisive period in American history through a unique lens. Brought to Nebraska by the Nebraska State Historical Society, the exhibit will be displayed at the Great Plains Art Museum, 1155 Q Street, Lincoln since the Society’s Nebraska History Museum is closed for renovation.

Quilts and textile-related artifacts tell deeply personal and powerful stories. From the noose reportedly used to hang abolitionist John Brown to a quilt made by a wounded soldier from hospital blankets, as well as Confederate gray and Union blue uniform fabrics, textiles are combined with images, quotations, and historical data to offer a new perspective on this critical period.

Organized by the American Textile History Museum (ATHM), in Lowell, Massachusetts, guest curators Madelyn Shaw and Lynne Zacek Bassett use quilts, clothing, personal and household articles, flags, needlework, and military equipment to “explore why political tensions over import tariffs, the expansion of slave labor, and the control of shipping and commerce finally erupted into secession and war. We will examine how textiles communicated political beliefs and embodied nationalist feelings. We will discover how the struggle to keep the armies clothed, sheltered, and healthy brought the war into the everyday lives of non-combatants. We will learn how the production and consumption of textiles reflected the daily realities of wartime scarcities and hardships, both for the soldier at the front and the workers behind the lines. We will examine why, after the fighting ended, textiles were used to memorialize people and events and symbolize defiance, heroism, mourning, bitterness, and reconciliation. Through textiles we can recognize the deep bonds between soldiers and civilians, see the differences and similarities in how the war was experienced across sections, genders, and occupations, and understand how those experiences were processed and remembered.”

The exhibit at Great Plains Art Museum, 1155 Q Street, Lincoln, runs through June 27, 2015 and is open to the public free of charge. School group tours of “Homefront and Battlefield” will be led by Nebraska History Museum docents if booked in advance. Contact NSHS Museum Educator Judy Keetle at 402-471-4757 or judy.keetle@nebraska.gov for more information or to book a tour.

Other public programs will include a February 6 First Friday Opening event from 5:00-7:00 p.m. and additional family fun days. UN-L history professor and Lincoln scholar Dr. Ken Winkle is scheduled to present a special lecture on April 15, 2015, the 150th anniversary of Lincoln's assassination. Specific dates and times for additional programming will be forthcoming. Please check www.nebraskahistory.org or www.unl.edu/plains/great-plains-art-museum for details.

"This exhibition gives 'voice' to people who are often unheard and unnoticed in the din of war, as well as strengthens the American understanding of the complex issues at the center of the conflict, and humanizes the war through objects that carry culture and meaning beyond their surface value," said Jonathan Stevens, ATHM President and CEO. "By focusing not solely on the homefront or the battlefield, but on how the two were inextricably linked—by affection, experience, material goods, ideology, sacrifice, or toil—our visitors will better understand the war's lasting hold on American culture and memory."

The national tour of the exhibit began in 2012 at the American Textile History Museum. The New-York Historical Society, New York, NY, and the Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, VT were earlier stops. The Nebraska State Historical Society's presentation offers the only venue west of the Hudson.

Funding for Homefront & Battlefield was provided in part by grants from The Coby Foundation, with additional support from the Stockman Family Foundation and Mass Humanities. For more information about the exhibit, contact NSHS exhibits curator Tina Koeppel at 402-471-0321 or tina.koeppel@nebraska.gov