

Old Historic Houses

PortScenes

Captivating crafts at Athenaeum

By Anne Edwards
Packet Art Columnist

Art

Craftwork, somehow, implies a simplified mode of living. Even with the sophisticated shapes and tones that characterize fine handmade items today, craftmaking still relates a sense of being drawn closer to the land and farther away from the rigid restraints of technology and mass-production.

Life eases naturally with the advent of summer and now is the perfect time to appreciate "The Crafts Collection" at the

Crafts have broken away from monotonous tones and incorporate now both beautifully subtle and strikingly bright hues.

Athenaeum, 201 Prince St. This biennial exhibit is sponsored by the Creative Crafts Council, comprised of eight different craft guilds from around the Washington Metropolitan area. It is a beautifully orchestrated show, primarily because of the variety and quality of the objects on display.

The council was able to get Joan Mondale, who is almost better known for being a strong advocate of contemporary crafts than for being the wife of a former vice-president, to give out the prizes to the award-winners of this show. This fact helps indicate the council's professionalism and the high calibre of the works chosen by the three jurors for exhibit.

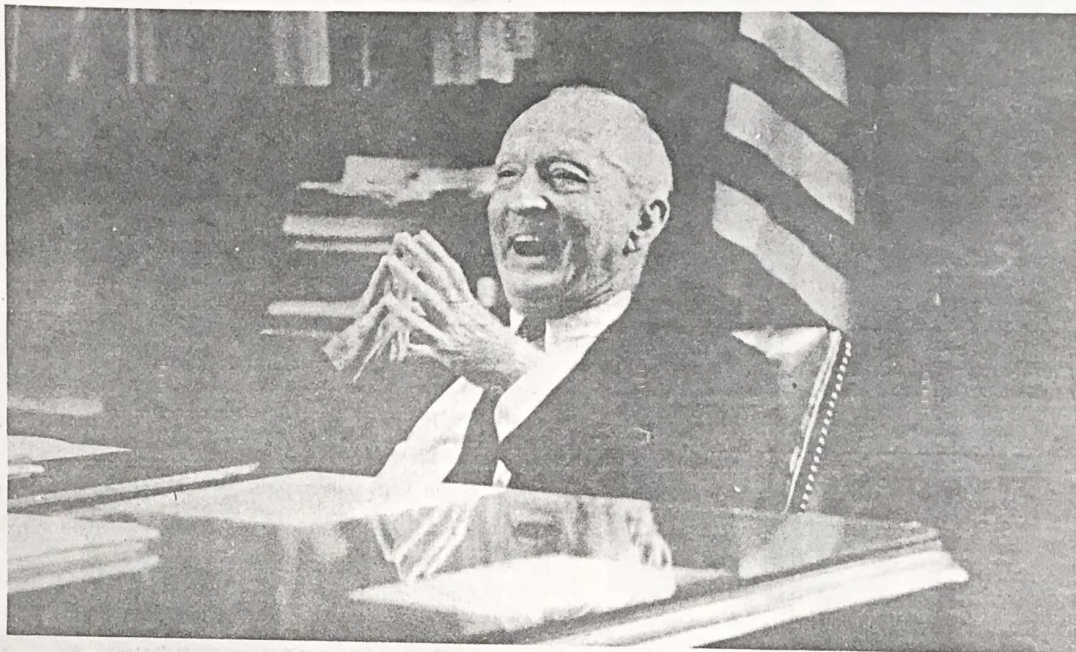
It used to be most craft shows were dominated by the dull, earthen-brown color of the majority of the objects. As this exhibit illustrates, crafts have broken away from monotonous tones and incorporate now both beautifully subtle and strikingly bright hues. A large, irregular-shaped basket made of dyed rattan by Jill Romanoke shows how delicate and soft-tinted a handmade object can be. The colors woven into this basket bring to mind a sun-bleached beach rimmed with tall, pale-green grasses.

Bonnie Holland won a second-place prize in fiber for her silk banner, "Night Skies II." Here colors and abstract patterns are ablaze. Staring at this living, creative work makes one wish that Halley's Comet had been able to spark the dark night sky with such explosive magic.

Winner of best in show, another fiber piece, is a woven wool tapestry by Mary Burton. The colors and images are stur-

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Justice Black, remembered



Justice Hugo Lafayette Black

An Old Town institution is seen from the distaff side

By Anne Edwards
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"The Judge's house, 619 South Lee Street in the old port section of Alexandria, was mellow and beautiful, bearing its two hundred years almost regally."

Elizabeth Black, "Mr. Justice and Mrs. Black"

It is still Justice Black's House. And the woman who penned the above lines, Elizabeth Black, is keeping the "almost regal" sense of her husband's memory alive in her new book, "Mr. Justice and Mrs. Black."

February 27 of this year marked the centennial of his birth. His widow published on that day this combination of memoirs written by both her late husband and herself.

Hugo Lafayette Black purchased the brick house on Lee Street in 1937 when he first became a Supreme Court judge. Previously, he had served as an U.S. Senator from his native state of Alabama.

The justice brought the property, according to his second wife and widow, Elizabeth Black, because he wanted more space for his young family. He lived here, and loved this house, throughout his prestigious, 34-year career on the Supreme Court and until his death in 1971.

In the brief, first portion of the book, Justice Black describes his rural childhood in Alabama, his education and early law practice. The bulk of the book is



Elizabeth Black

Photo by James Corrie

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Mr. Justice and Mrs. Black

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then devoted to Elizabeth Black's diary, starting in 1964.

The justice's first wife, Josephine, the mother of his three children, died in 1951. Elizabeth Seay DeMeritte, also from Alabama, came to work for the justice in 1956 as his secretary. It was her first day on the job when he asked her to his house for dinner, and when she recorded her first impressions of his home, quoted above. Less than 18 months later, she became the second Mrs. Black.

Mrs. Black was about to turn 50 when they were married and the

justice was 71. Because he had suffered a dark, lonely period after his first wife's death, she says it was hard for him to let his new wife out of his sight. The diary is an open, warm and affectionate account of their 14-year marriage.

Mrs. Black now lives in a large apartment complex, River House, in Arlington. She sold the house on Lee Street in 1973 to David Ginsberg, a former law clerk to Justice Douglas, with an easement that the property could not be divided and that the exterior of the house could not be changed. "When we lived there," Mrs.

Black recalls, "it was like a country home. We had lots of fruit trees and Hugo would go out every morning and beat the birds to the figs. He loved figs," she says. "But the fig tree died the year after he did."

When the justice was not engaged in making decisions on the Supreme Court, he was at home on his own court, playing tennis. Next to law, his passion was tennis. He taught the game to his wife and they played almost daily when the weather permitted. The tennis court is still there, surrounded by a high fence which at this time of year is draped with great fragrant tassels of wisteria.

The book reveals that the justice was demanding of his wife's time and energy. Yet, Mrs. Black responds, "I didn't feel resentful. He needed companionship."

The pages of this diary suggest, too, that he could be rigid and overbearing at times. He required that his wife watch her weight. Whenever she ate too much, he would cast his disapproving, "Mona Lisa" smile in her direction. Mrs. Black, now extremely trim and petite, remarks good-naturedly that at dinner parties her friends began to seat her behind flower arrangements so that her husband couldn't see when she had dessert.

It is very clear, though, that this couple lived one for the other. Almost 80 years old, Mrs. Black states in a quiet, slow tone of voice, "Hugo was so good at communicating, he could express himself so clearly, we never had a lasting disagreement. He was so charming," she adds smiling, "he would react so funny to certain things. I guess I had a little bit of



Building on a close, 14-year relationship, Elizabeth Black has brought her husband's memory to vivid life in her new book, "Mr. Justice Mrs. Black."

Photo courtesy of Elizabeth

Athenaeum crafts

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dier, more traditional here than those just observed above in the silk wall-hanging. This work is so accomplished that it seems as if the artist must have been weaving tapestries, based on symbols inspired from the East, for centuries.

The show includes not only pieces in fiber, of course, but in glass, clay, metal and in some mixed-media as well. Works stand out in each of these categories and are a delight to view.

The exhibit will continue through June 8. The Athenaeum is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and on Sun-

day from 1 to 4 p.m.

Just a short walk from the Athenaeum is a gallery, The Gadfly, 215 S. Union St., that specializes in selective, handcrafted articles. Currently, the gallery is featuring a collection of sculptured, papier mache figures by North Carolina artist Philip Dusenbury. The pieces are formed from newsprint that is hardened with wheat paste and plastercloth. The resulting human forms are gaunt and in their seemingly whimsical caricatures can be haunting. The sculpture is worth discovering—the gallery is open Monday through Saturday from 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. and on Sunday from 1 to 5 p.m. ■

hero worship for him."

The justice would wake her nightly to discuss with her what was going through his mind concerning Supreme Court cases. "He would tell me everyone on the court that was going to disagree with him," she says, "then I would start to worry about the country

and he would fall back asleep. Justice Black's careful, thoughtful deliberations over each court case mentioned in this book make the reader believe brought meaning to the justice. And when walking past South Lee St., one feels his imposing, formidable presence.

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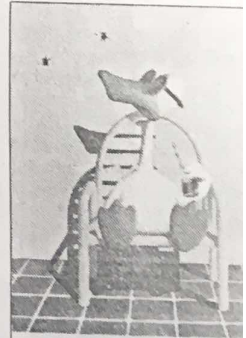
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