BELMONT — There’s a mystery that local historians are hoping to solve at Saturday’s Old Home Day, as several names from families in surrounding towns are being scrutinized for their history and stories.

On display will be a “Friendship” quilt, crafted by 25 local women in 1882, which was found by former Belmont business owner Blanche Sleeper, a longtime member of the Belknap Mill Quilters Guild, said local historian Linda Frawley.

She found the quilt at a second hand store in Ashland in 1986, and spent years researching the signatures on many of the 64 blocks. The quilt was authenticated in 1988 as part of the first phase of the New Hampshire Quilt Documentation Project.

Among the names on the quilt’s cotton squares were several from Laconia, Gilford, Gilmanton and Pittsfield, including Julia Bickford, Mrs. Hannah Leavitt, Annis Randlett, Mrs. Hattie Wright, Mrs. Sarah Roberts, Mrs. Warren Farrar, Clara Britten, Mrs. Lizzie Lane and Mrs. W. P. Varney.
Frawley said.

“We are looking for the people who know who these people were, and who can give us their stories,” Frawley said. “We’re curious as to what might have brought these women together.”

Belmont historians are hoping that people in the surrounding towns will recognize the names and come to Old Home Day Saturday morning downtown. Heritage Commission volunteers and the Belmont Library will host the quilt from 10 a.m. to noon, and the quilt may be viewed until 3 p.m.

Vintage photos from the Belmont Historical Society will also be displayed at the Main Street library, and town historian Wallace Rhodes will be on hand for information and reminiscences.

The quilt is on loan from the Laconia Historical and Museum Society, after Sleeper first gifted it along with her research to the Belmont Heritage Commission.

“Without a local museum or space in the library, we were concerned for its preservation as a fragile textile,” said Priscilla Annis, an officer of the group.

Public display and access was also important, Frawley said, so the Belmont group donated it to the Laconia Society’s permanent collection. dseufert@newstote.com