

# Pillow Talk with Jane Nylander



# C ONCORD, MASS.

— Experts on early New England domestic life Jane and Richard Nylander want you to know some of the fascinating historical tidbits that arise from the fact that people spend approximately one-third of their lives in bed. That simple fact is reflected in the wide variety of objects related to that innermost sanctum — the bedroom.



Above: Jane and Richard Nylander

Previous page: Bed, New England, 1820–1840, grain-painted wood, 54½ by 54 by 79 inches; trundle bed, New England, 1820–40, maple, pine, 14 by 44 by 57 inches. Concord Museum, gifts of Stephen MacDougall in memory of Allister MacDougall.

It also compelled the couple to share their research in an exhibition currently on view until March 22 at the Concord Museum, Concord, Mass., titled *Behind Closed Doors: Asleep in New England*. Jane Nylander was a curator at Old Sturbridge

Village and later director of both Strawberry Banke and Historic New England. Richard worked for 40 years at Historic New England. Jane also wrote *Our Own Snug Hearth: Images of the New England Home, 1760-1860*.

Cradle, Barnstable or Yarmouth, Mass., 1665–85, red oak, white pine. The first function of a cradle is to protect its little occupant, but this elaborately joined and turned example goes well beyond the functional. As overtly as a throne on a dais, this masterful work of art proclaims the veneration the occupant's family wanted any visitor to know they felt. Gift of Dorothy Armour, Elizabeth T. Acampora, L. Hope Carter, Guido R. Perera, Henry C. Thacher, Louis B. Thacher Jr and Thomas C. Thacher. Courtesy of Historic New England. Peter Hardholdt photo.



Nylander said the idea for the exhibition came from Peggy Burke, the Concord Museum's director. "Richard and I agreed to do it together, drawing on our combined 80-plus years of research," she said.

Asked about how the bedroom habits of our ancestors conform or

don't conform to our conventional understanding of the room's purpose, Nylander replied, "I'd say the availability of separate bathrooms made a huge difference. Also, what goes on behind the closed doors of the bedroom raises interesting questions of privacy, comfort,

Coffin, New Hampshire,  
early Nineteenth Century,  
white pine, 15 by 24 by 83  
inches. Courtesy of  
Hancock Historical  
Society.



A Record of the family  
of  
Amos Melven who was born June 13<sup>th</sup> 1751  
& Married to Anna Flacc Jan 16<sup>th</sup> 1782 who was  
born Sept<sup>th</sup> 1753.

Amos Melven Jun was born Oct 16<sup>th</sup> 1782  
Charles Melven was born Nov 9<sup>th</sup> 1789  
Anna Melven was born Sept 5<sup>th</sup> 1786  
James S Melven was born June 21<sup>st</sup> 1798  
John Melven was born July 16<sup>th</sup> 1790  
Joshua Melven was born Dec 28<sup>th</sup> 1792  
Emerson Melven was born March 16 1794  
Mary Melven was born June 14<sup>th</sup> 1797  
William Melven was born Dec 5<sup>th</sup> 1800  
Phebe Melven was born Dec 30 1802.

Mr Amos Melven died Aug 6<sup>th</sup> 1806 age 55  
Miss Anna Melven died Feb 25<sup>th</sup> 1805 age 18  
Mrs Mary Melven died Dec 27 1816 19  
Unhappy he who loses fools the blow  
Whose eyes have wept o'er ev'ry friend laid low,  
Dread lightning on from partial death to death.  
Full dying all his own reason is breath.

intimacy and  
fashion. These are  
of great interest to  
visitors, and there's  
usually a lot of  
giggling going on.”

Melven Register - Courtesy  
Concord Museum. Register made  
by Phebe Melvin, Concord,  
Mass., 1816, silk embroidered on  
linen, 18 by 17½ inches. Concord  
Museum, purchase funded by the  
Dolores Lyon bequest.

Quilt, sampler pattern, Charlestown, Mass., 1837-38, cotton, muslin. One of the purposes of a quilt is to provide warmth and its construction accomplishes this. A woven outer covering, often colorful, and a woven inner covering sandwich between them a layer of loose insulating batting. A network of stitches — quilting — holds the three layers together and keeps the batting from bunching up. Concord probate inventories first use the word “quilt” in the 1724 listing of Isaac and Anne Brooks Biscon’s household goods. Along with a “Best Bed and Bolster,” a featherbed and a pair of large green serge bed curtains with a double valance (also protection against the cold), Isaac and his wife owned an “old callico quilt with a blanket lining.” Concord Museum, gift of Mrs Louis A. Sohier. David Bohl photo.

Objects on display include the bed itself, a setting for the many milestones in one’s life — including child-birth, nursing, sexual intimacy, sickness and death — represented by the



Massachusetts Thacher family's  
Seventeenth Century cradle, a  
trundle bed, a parents' bed, an  
adult cradle — even a coffin.  
There are dressing tables,  
necessary chairs, washstands, high

chests, a bathing tub and so on.  
There are also some wonderful  
paintings of New England bed  
chambers, ranging in date from  
1780-1875.

"Grandfather Emerson's Bedroom" by Edward  
Waldo Forbes, Concord, Mass., 1945,  
water-color. Ralph Waldo Emerson often  
worked in the privacy of his home. His wife,  
Lidian, made a blue quilted robe for him to wear  
over his clothes indoors for added warmth. It  
was a joke in the literate Emerson family to call  
the robe "the gaberlunzie," meaning beggar's  
coat, an archaic word revived by Walter Scott in  
the first of his Waverly novels. Emerson's  
grandson, Edward Forbes, founder of the  
conservation lab at the Fogg Museum, painted  
the gaberlun-zie on the bed in the Emerson's  
bedroom. The robe itself is also exhibit in  
"Behind Closed Doors." Concord Museum.  
David Bohl photo.



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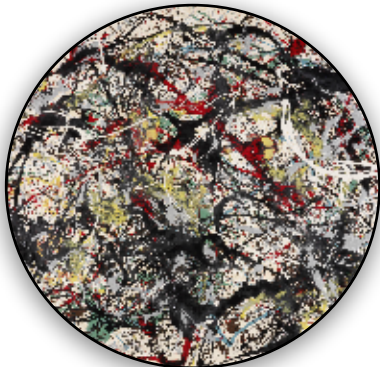
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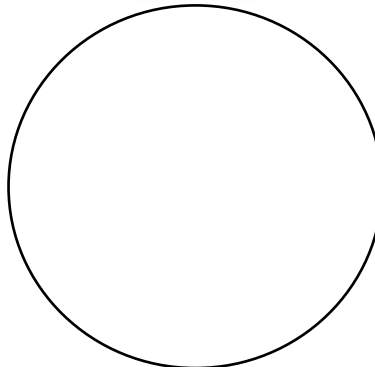
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