Section C
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HICKORY DAILY RECORD

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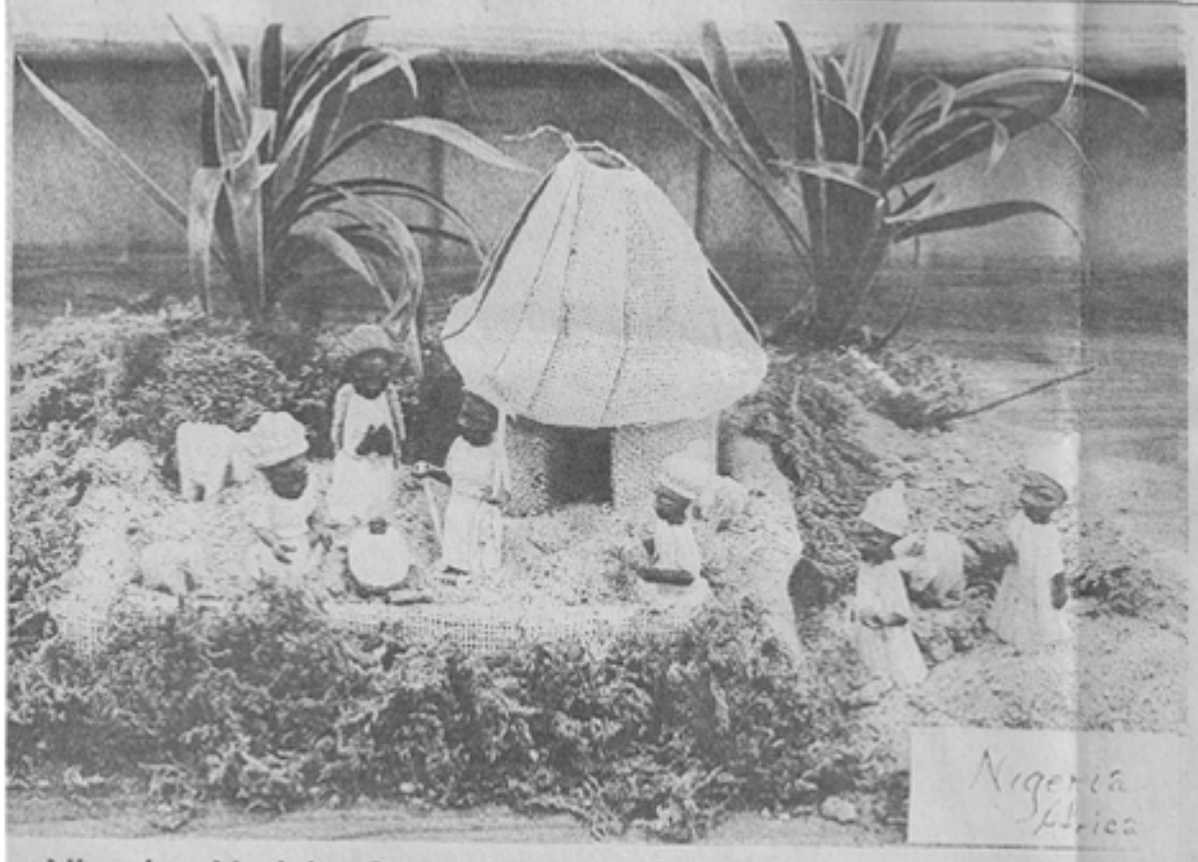
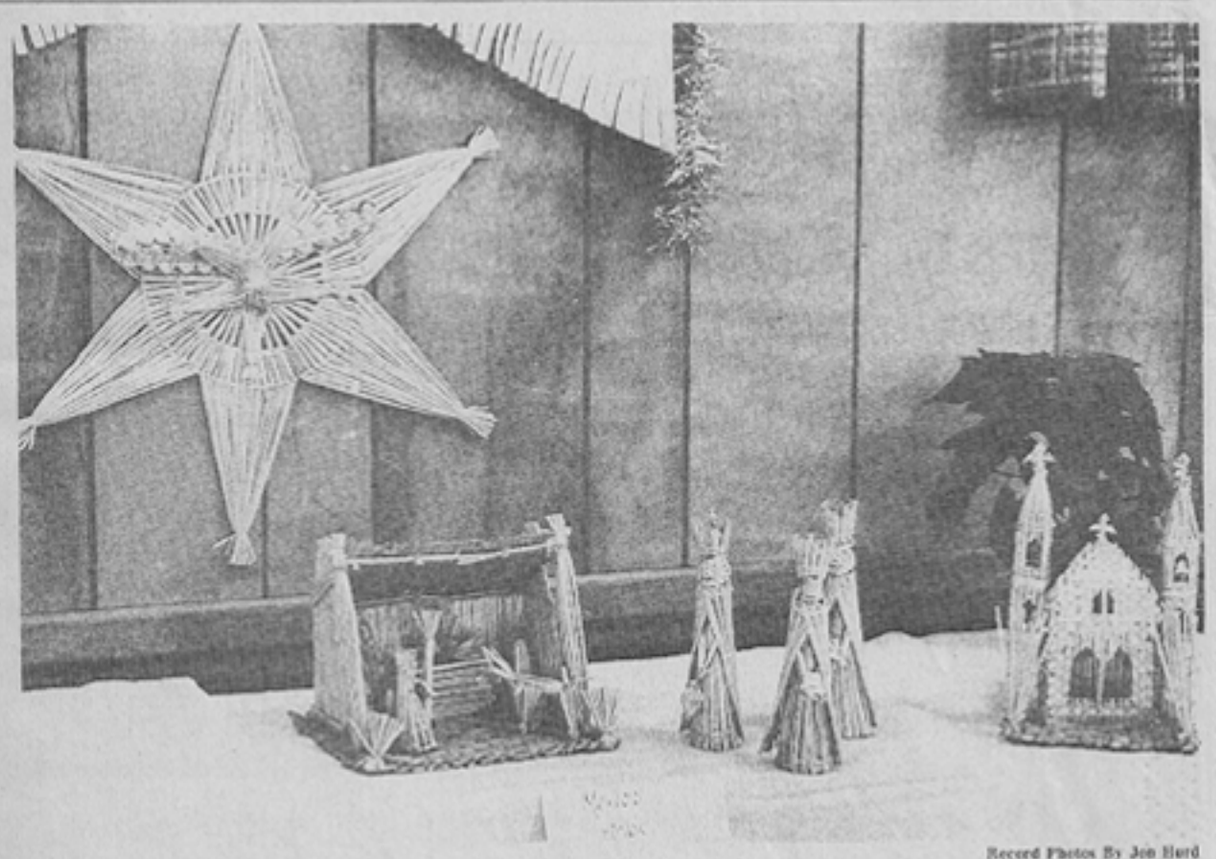
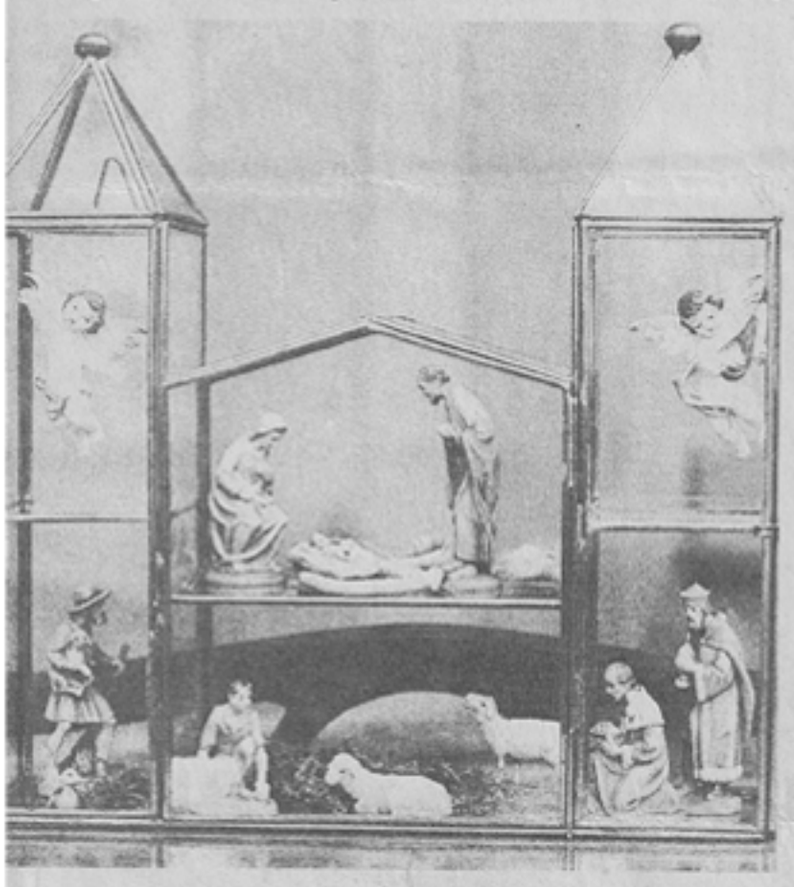


Nigerian Nativity Scene Mirrors African Culture, Artistic Styles

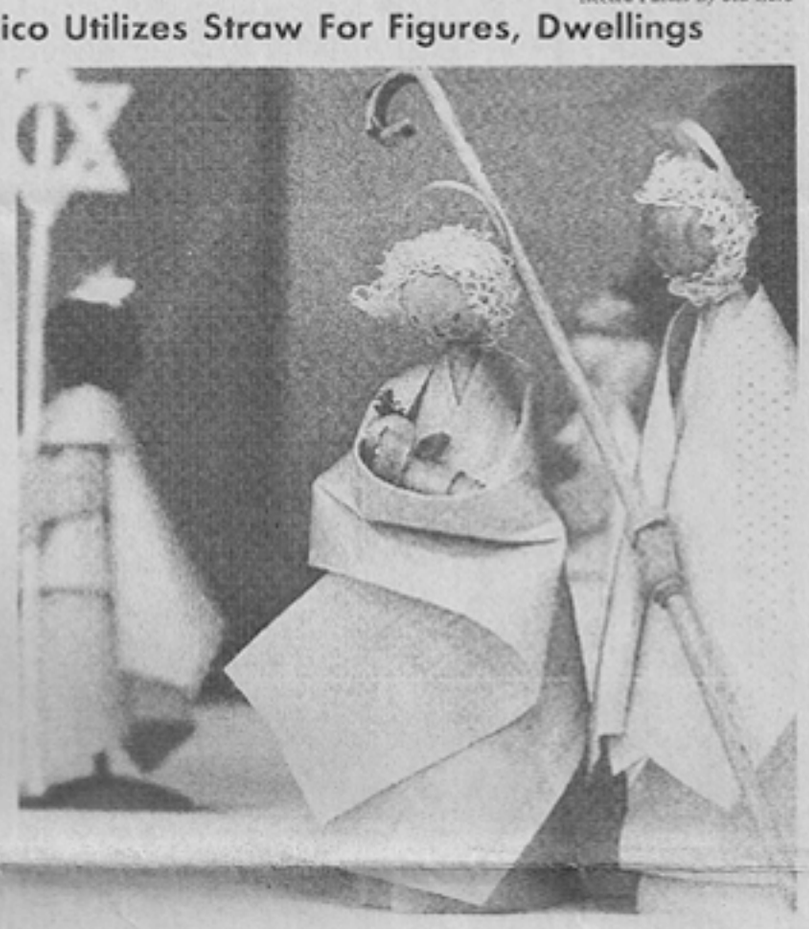


Record Photos By Jon Herd

Display From Mexico Utilizes Straw For Figures, Dwellings



Italian Nativity Scene Enclosed In Glass



Scenes From Oberammergau (Left) And Stuttgart, West Germany, Use Different Mediums

Nativity Scenes Show Similarities Of Cultures

By REG MOORE
Record Staff Writer

CLAREMONT — Bringing the real meaning of Christmas to the Piedmont with Nativity scenes from around the world has been a mission of a Claremont pastor and his wife for the past 20 years.

The Rev. and Mrs. Stanley Stiver of St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church have been sharing their collection of manger scenes with approximately 1,500 area schoolchildren for the past two days in the church parish hall.

They also have been sharing the spirit of Christmas at the Southern Christmas Show in Charlotte for more than a decade.

Stiver estimates that 40,000 people passed through the exhibit there this fall.

Ranging from hand-carved olive wood figures from Bethlehem to straw figures from Mexico, each scene is a mirror of the culture in which it was created.

"I find it fascinating," said Robert Johnson, an 11-year-old sixth-grader from Blackburn Middle School, who viewed the display Thursday.

"Learning about other countries helps us understand their cultures. Therefore, we can get along with them better," he said.

His social studies teacher, Debbie Carmack, said she brought her two classes to see the scenes "because different countries have different art forms.

"A lot of times the art form represents what their lives are like," she added. "I'd kind of like them (the students) to see the differences and similarities in our culture and other cultures."

Ms. Carmack said when her classes study the Soviet Union in depth, they start out thinking "we're a totally different animal, but by the time we finish, they realize they're (Soviets) just like we are."

She said people in all the countries have the same basic needs — food, clothing, shelter, and the love of other people.

"We are much more alike than different," she added.

Aside from the religious message, Ms. Carmack sees a value in the Nativity scenes which goes beyond religion. She understands the need for expressing beauty through art, and she said she wanted her class to see that aspect of the scenes.

"Every culture sees Jesus as their person," she added.

For example, the Nigerian Jesus is black. Stiver pointed out that the characters in the Nigerian scene are tiny, but the eyes are extremely pronounced.

The scene from Equador features some of the brightest colors of the 50 Nativities in the collection. It includes camels and donkeys and people dressed in a vivid array of reds, greens, oranges and yellows.

"The poorer the people, it seems, the brighter the colors," Stiver said. "They try to brighten their lives."

Substitute teacher Mary Phillips said she found it interesting to see how people from each country compensate for their economic mood with colors.

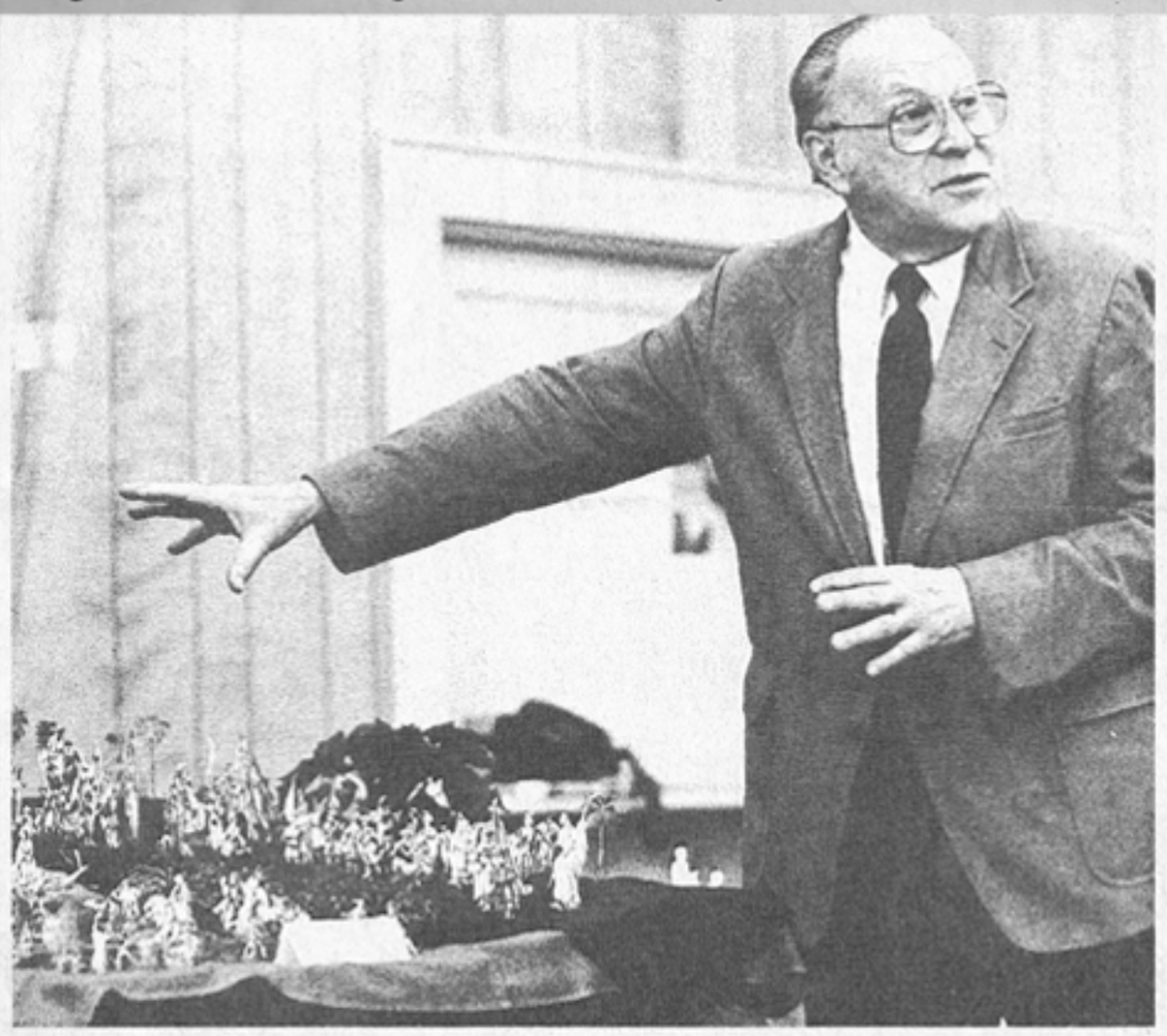
According to Stiver, the collection was started when his congregation sent him and his wife to Europe and the Holy Land as a gift.

Almost every year since that time, they have traveled abroad and increased their awareness of other cultures.

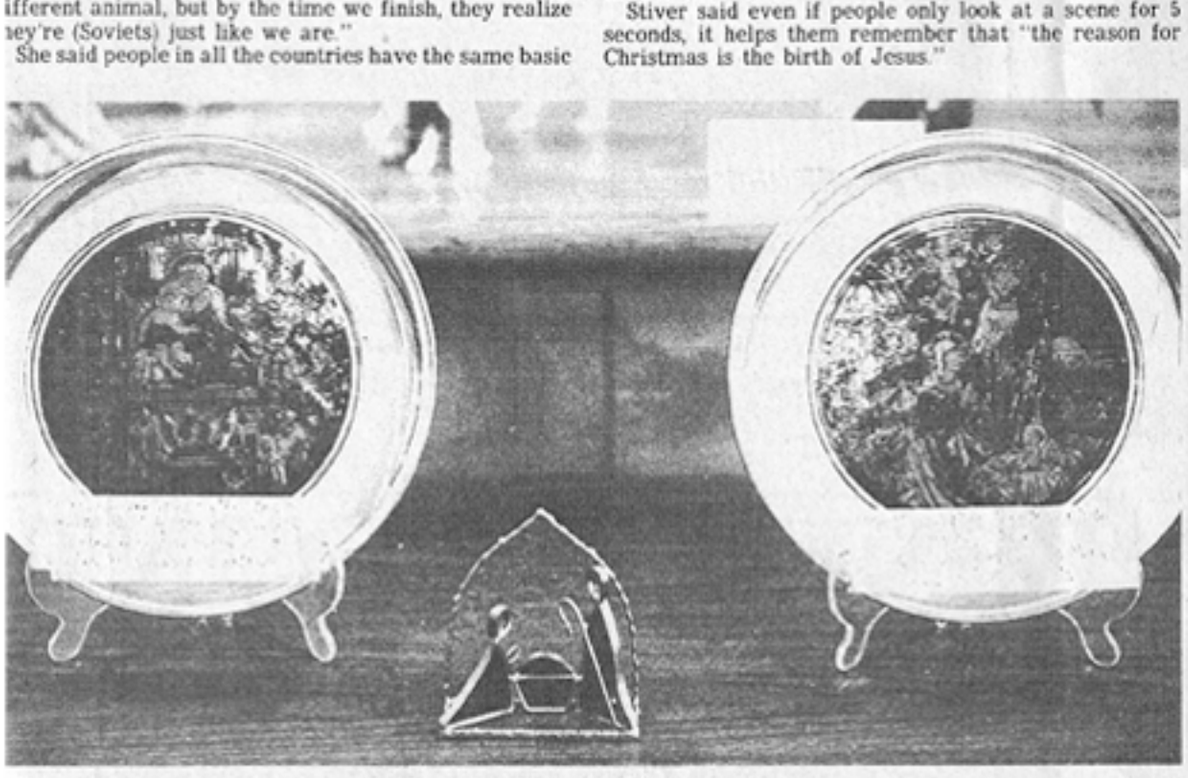
When he visited the Southern Christmas show in the mid-1970's and observed that the show included only crafts — nothing to point to the Christ — he became involved.

He spoke with the person in charge of the show, and was invited to show his collection of crosses. That invitation evolved into the showing of the manger scenes from around the world.

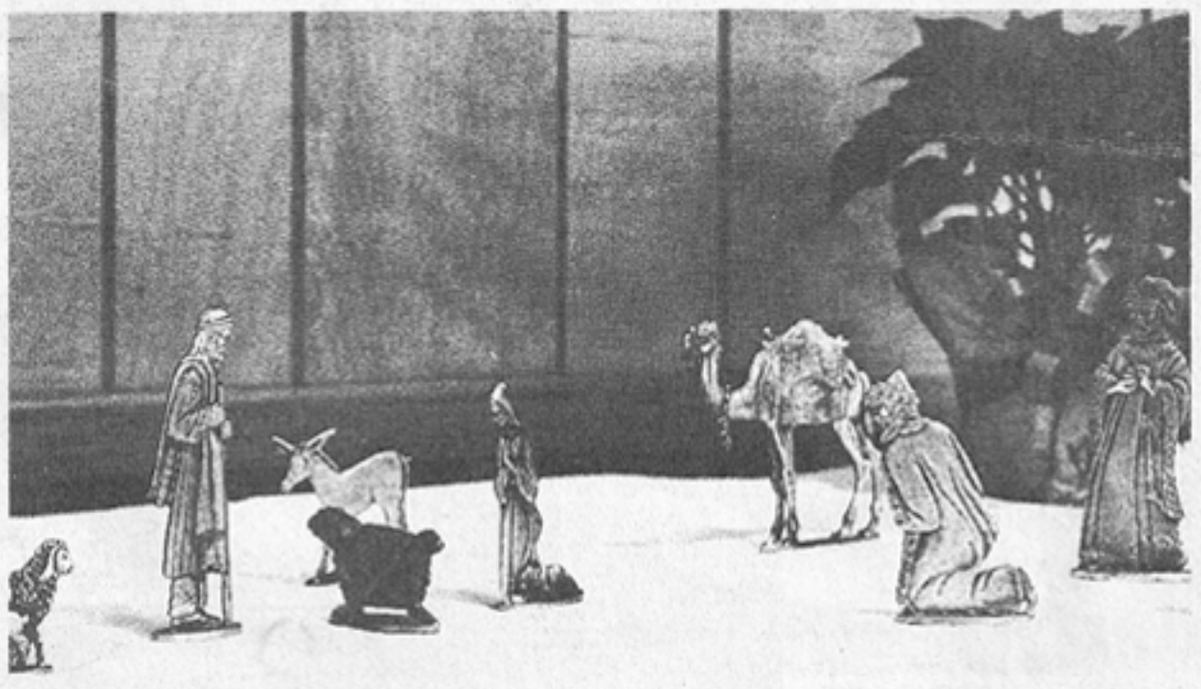
Stiver said even if people only look at a scene for 5 seconds, it helps them remember that "the reason for Christmas is the birth of Jesus."



The Rev. Stanley Stiver Gives 'Tour' Of His Collection



Stained-Glass Christmas Design Plates By U.S. Historical Society



Intricate Pewter Figures From United States Arranged In Scene