

1940 N.Y. World's Fair Quilt Contest & Exhibit

One of the many quilt contests in the 1930's & 1940's was the "America Through the Needle's Eye" Contest and Exhibition sponsored by the N.Y. World's Fair in 1940. Preliminary contests were conducted locally by sponsoring department stores in the East and mid-West. Information about entrance requirements and rules were obtained by writing or visiting one of the thirteen stores. The opening date of the exhibition was August 1940.

R.H. Macy & Co. of New York awarded a total of \$1075 in prize monies and was the largest single contributor. A total of over \$3000 in awards were contributed by the stores to the prize winners.

The contest had two divisions: New Work (work completed for entry into the contest) and Old Work (old work previously completed) There were five categories within each division: 1) Crocheting, 2) Knitting and Tatting, 3) Embroidery, Applique & Patchwork, 4) Rugs, 5) Wool Afghans.

Top awards of \$500 each (plus \$100 as first prize winner in their category) went to Bertha Stenge* of Chicago who entered a Palm Leaf Quilt in the Old Work division and to Mrs. E.N. Noble of Minneapolis, MN who entered a crocheted tablecover in the New Work Division. Awards were made by Grover Whalen, Pres. of the Fair Corp. in Mrs. Thorne's Miniature Rooms Exhibit at the Fair where all entrants were displayed.

Only two other quilts were awarded prizes in the contest: Third prizes of \$25 were awarded to Mrs. F.E. Lourette of Rochester, N.Y. in the Old Work division and to Mrs. P. Dormont of Bronx, N.Y.

Serving on the judging committee for the contest finals which took place Aug. 13 were: Eliz. McRae Beykin, of the NEW YORK SUN; Mrs. Eliz. McK. Roth, Needlework Editor, WOMAN'S HOME COMPANION; Miss Marietta Battles, Heirloom Needlework Guild; Mrs. Georgiana Brown Harbeson, designer & author AMERICAN NEEDLEWORK; Miss Cecilia Vanek, designer of handiwork; Mrs. Michelle Murphy, of the Brooklyn Museum; Mrs. Osabelle Green, Ass't Professor of Education, Hunter College N.Y.; Mrs. Mary Reynolds, Assoc. Editor, FARM JOURNAL & FARMER'S WIFE; Mrs. Wm. W. Hoppin, Founder & Pres. of Amateur Needlework of Today; and Miss Lucille Schlemme, Pres. of the Decorators' Club.

* On the News Release and the list of prize winners released by the Fair, Mrs. Stenge's name is misspelled "Stengi" and Mrs. Lourette's name is misspelled "Laurette".

On Sept. 14 Olive M. Lyford, coordinator of the Art's Exhibit for the Fair, wrote Mrs. Stenge to inform her that she had tied Mrs. Glasgow of Nashville, Ark. in the voting for the Popular Award. She enclosed a check for \$125 (one half of the Popular Prize) bringing Mrs. Stenge's total for the Palm Leaf quilt in this one contest to \$725.

It is interesting to note that in the same letter, Miss Lyford thanks Mrs. Stenge for sending the Bible quilt for her to see. She wrote that Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., Miss Eliz. May Blondel, and Miss Sally Dickson, members of the Ballot Comm. had also seen it and were very much interested in it. They felt that the craftsmanship and creative design, for which you (Mrs. Stenge) have such talent, were unique and extraordinarily fine."

Miss Lyford thanked her for sending a box of California fruits in the package and promised to mail the quilt back the same day.

The Fair closed in the middle of October, 1940.

The material used for this article was obtained through the courtesy of Mrs. Frances Traynor, daughter of Bertha Stenge.

Prizewinners Correspond

Mrs. Florence E. Lourette, Third Prize Winner at the quilt contest "America Through the Needle's Eye" sponsored by the N.Y. World's Fair wrote to Mrs. Bertha Stenge, First and Grand Prize Winner.

Oct. 12, 1941

My Dear Mrs. Stenge --

I went to the "World's Fair" in New York last year and saw your "grand prize" winner. That was a beauty. For several years I have been wanting to make the Palm Leaf quilt but I cannot find 3 shades of green print that harmonize.

My Garden quilt took 3rd prize at the World's Fair and I was quite surprised.

Congratulations to you and yours.

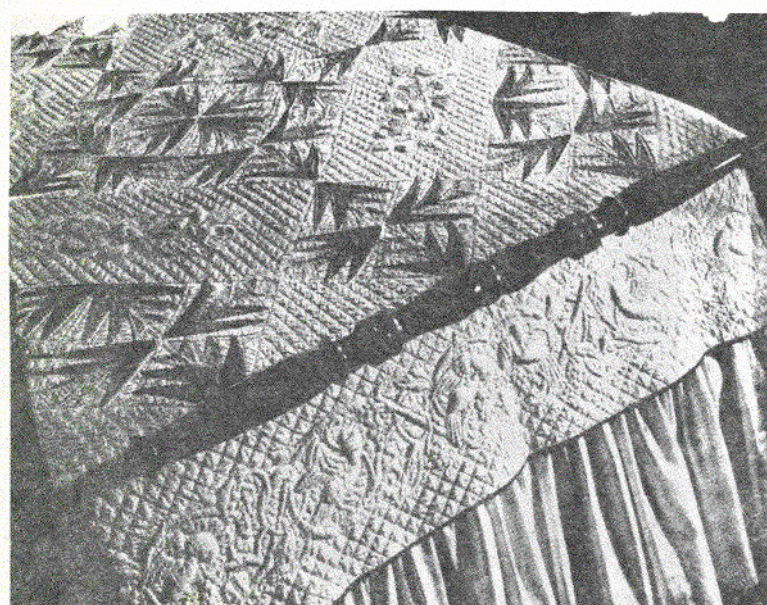
Sincerely,

Florence E Lourette

Nov. 16, 1941

My dear Mrs. Stenge,

...I was not at the Fair when they gave the prize winners the party. We were away on our vacation and the telegram came the first Monday after we were gone. The neighbors did not know where to



(left) Palm Leaf quilt shown in *AMERICAN HOME* Sept. 1947. (right) Mrs. Walker Lee and Mrs. Florence Lourette, members of the Genessee Valley Quilt Club hold Mrs. Lourette's prize winning quilt.



My quilt was an applique - a copy of The Garden quilt in Ruth Finley's book. My quilt took 1st prize in all the entries at the E. W. Edwards store and the p quilt (the other prize winner) took 2nd prize here.

I am enclosing a picture from the *DEMOCRAT & CHRONICLE*. We are holding my "Prize quilt". Mrs. Lee is President and I am Vice President. Next year I go in as President.

Piecefully yours, Florence Lourette

AMERICAN HOME, Sept. 1947 advertised the Palm Leaf quilt "an original arrangement of the traditional Palm Leaf with trapunto border and insets... handsomely executed in green on white background, has won coveted prizes for its originator and owner, Mrs. Bertha Stenge; first prizes at Illinois and Kentucky State Fairs, Macy's New York store. At New York World's Fair it won First and Grand Prizes and split for the popular prize. It has been displayed at the University of California and the Art Institute in Chicago - unmistakably destined for a great future. This is Mrs. Stenge's first attempt at trapunto work*. Note the interesting combination of diamond stitchery and trapunto Love Birds on the top and border. This type of raised quilting, showing realism in design was elaborately stitched, heavily padded and often combined with cording on white spreads.

*For information about Trapunto see Jean Federico's article "White Work Classification System" Spring 1980 *JOURNAL*.

find us as we were on our boat somewhere in the 1000 Islands. The second week we were gone there was a piece in the local paper about the winners. We were in Peo's Harbor at Cape Vincent waiting for the Lake to calm down before starting to cross. We got our local paper that day and I read all around the piece about the prize winners and did not see it. This was on a Wednesday. On the following Saturday we were still there in the harbor and it was awfully cold (it was in August) and I didn't feel very good, so I told my husband and son I would have hot soup for dinner to try and warm us up. I told them that as how we were going to have soup for dinner, I was going to put a newspaper on the table instead of a lunch cloth - then if a boat came into the harbor and rolled us while eating it would spill on the paper instead of the lunch cloth. I sat down and at the top of my plate was the item about the World's Fair Winners -

I read it and let a yell out of me - "I won 3rd prize at the World's Fair". My husband says "NO." Well - I said that it said so in the paper.

So on our way home across the Lake my son and I planned our trip to the Fair in September. And when I got home - the telegram, letters and check were in the mail box waiting for me. I am very sorry I missed meeting the quiltmakers and others in the contest.