

CHARLES PRATT

On July 21, 1940 the PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER ran a story about Charles Pratt, a resident of Philadelphia. Mr. Pratt, at the age of 89, was still making quilts and the INQUIRER proclaimed him "The Masculine Champion Quilt Maker". He had nearly 450 prize ribbons from fairs and exhibitions he had entered in the 56 years since he started his hobby.

Earlier, Hall & Kretsinger wrote about him in THE ROMANCE OF THE PATCHWORK QUILT IN AMERICA*, "He claims to be the champion quilter of the whole world, having in his possession over 200 letters which testify to his supremacy in his chosen field".

Mr. Pratt's silk mosaics were made of thousands of tiny squares and were usually of a Biblical theme. They were neither quilted or tied.

He followed the technique used in working out designs in the manufacture of carpets. "I have worked among colors and designs from the age of 13. I do not have to use glasses and I do not use a thimble, although every piece is sewed by hand. Sometimes when I have been bothered, perhaps for months, to get some shade or shades, friends have dyed silk for me. I have learned to sew four corners together so that they all lie smooth. Even if I am a mere man and a Knight Templar". **

Hall & Kretsinger place his birthdate at 1856. Numerous newspaper articles and Florence Peto, noted author, lecturer, and a meticulous researcher say he was 89 in 1940, which would place his birthdate at 1851. He was born in Manchester, England.

Mrs. Peto included a group of men quilters in her lectures and was delighted to discover "Dad" Pratt through her friend, Emma Andres. In reply to her letter, he loaned Mrs. Peto two of his "quilts", THE NINETY AND NINE and RUTH AND NAOMI. She thought so much of them she exhibited them as she lectured and wrote frequently to him of the pleasure they gave the audiences. Before she could return them, he died on April 10, 1940. Soon after that, his daughter with whom he had lived, wrote to Mrs. Peto to keep the quilts.

Mrs. Peto was thrilled and even used the picture of THE NINETY AND NINE in her lecture brochure. The following correspondence indicates how she felt about Charles Pratt's work:

We are grateful to Miss Emma Andres for the loan of this correspondence.

* THE ROMANCE OF THE PATCHWORK QUILT IN AMERICA, Hall & Kretsinger, Caxton Printers, Caldwell, Idaho, 1935

** THE N.Y. SUN, Apr 1, 1941 "30,400 Pieces"



Charles Pratt examines his collection of prize ribbons. From the PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER, July 21, 1940

Oct 23, 1940

I'm so grateful to you for telling me about Mr. Pratt and I was intending to write and tell you how he answered my letter to him promptly and so sweetly... He generously and quite without my asking he offered to send me one of his quilts. I am deeply touched at his trust and generosity. Indeed, I am availing myself of the privilege, you can bet. I've several fine engagements to lecture before nice clubs this November and I mean to show whichever one Mr. Pratt will or can spare.

You know, I believe he likes to write to us and enjoys being made something of! Well, bless his heart, he shall have all the honor and credit I can possibly bring to him.

November 17, 1940

(Mr. Pratt) had sent me two articles which appeared in the Philadelphia papers in 1930. Both of them have him born in Manchester, England in 1851. If correct that would make him 89. I now have two of his quilts - Ruth and Naomi and The Ninety and Nine. Took both of them with me to the Long Island Quilt Talk and Exhibition; kept the story a secret until I came to the part in my lecture where I speak of man-made quilts and

then announced that I had brought three items with me and they could see for themselves what they thought of male needlecrafters. I exhibited Mr. Kendig's latest (The Oriental Poppy) also. I wish both men heard the gasps of astonishment! Mr. Pratt, who wrote me that his work had been praised with so many different words, would have had a few more adjectives to add to his list. I tried to remember some of them and write them to him! He seems to enjoy being made a fuss over - who doesn't?

You said when you received the little square which Mr. Pratt sent you that you could see that the poor old man was "slipping" - that his younger work must have been lovely. He sent me a little square too, and it was the first thing that came to view out of the box. With an eye trained to recognize fine stitchery at a glance, I could not help but see that this work was extremely naive and childish. And I must tell you that the large pieces are the same. I do not know just when these two large pieces were made and whether his first work showed more skill with the needle but as there is a large place loose from the lining (there is no quilting nor are the two layers fastened together with stitches of any kind) it was possible for me to see the actual piecing together of the small blocks. The stitches are uneven and large. Truth compels me to say the needlework in competition would never have won a prize for itself alone! Both Philadelphia papers speak of the special prizes awarded Mr. Pratt, declaring his quilts to be in a "class of their own". That is the secret of his prizes and trophies I am sure. Do not mistake me; I do not mean they do not deserve what they have won but I am trying to analyze them truthfully. A judge serving in competition is instructed that "workmanship" is first consideration, that means actual needle stitchery. You see where that would put us in the case of Mr Pratt's work.

Now that's over, I'm going to say something complimentary about them. No need to disparage them when there is so much to praise!

From the standpoint of design, proportion and blending of color they are truly amazing, unique and beautiful in effect. Hanging on a wall, small irregularities are not observable and the general effect is breathtaking. Ruth & Naomi is the larger piece and it is all silk - there is a softer luster to it than The Ninety & Nine which has some cotton pieces in it. Stronger contrasts make it clearer in cut than the other but both are



THE PARABLE OF THE NINETY AND NINE

"How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?"

And is so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep than of the ninety and nine which went not astray." Matt. 18 v 12,13.



skillfully planned in proportion - I actually do not know just how he has done that.

He wrote that his designs were original. I do not know just how he has meant that. Both of these are traditional Bible Pictures. We have all seen them on our Sunday School papers many times. But his color scheme and plan for getting it together in squares must be his own technique and I, for one, am willing to concede him much applause for so splendid an accomplishment...

He must have made about 30 quilts.

Feb 5, 1941

The people from Newark Museum came yesterday. Like myself, they thought Mr. Pratt had done an amazing job; they admired his coloring and especially his fine proportions. I think they were disappointed in his actual stitchery which is so important in the quilt-making art. I doubt if they consider that his work should be classified in the oldtime folk art of quilt-making because they aren't, strictly speaking quilts, nor were they made for that purpose. Of course they are patchwork, no doubt about that. . .

Feb 25,

At the lecture in Teaneck High School the other day, Mr. Pratt's quilts looked lovely hung on the walls of the handsome library. The rooms was trimmed with flowers, the (DAR) chapter flags, and all my quilts.

April 14, 1941

You probably have heard the sorrowful news also; our beloved friend Chas. Pratt has passed on - funeral today. A postcard merely said that - time and place of funeral. It was a shock for I had had a letter from him two days before, he made no mention of being ill.

April 22, 1941

(Mr. Pratt's) daughter wrote-our friend's death was sudden and must have been a heart attack ... He died while she was reading the 23rd Psalm to him.

CHARLES PRATT DIED APRIL 10, 1941

May 12,

I got out the quilts and had The Ninety and Nine in my lap with the scissors ready to take off the tapes which I had put on in order to hang the quilts at exhibitions without harm to the edges. Just then the mail arrived and with it a letter from Mrs. Burd (Mr. Pratt's daughter) Imagine how I felt when she wrote that she had decided to give me the quilts. She said she felt that in doing so, she would be doing what Pap would have wanted her to do.

Isn't that lovely? Of course I've had myself a crying spell again. It is silly to be so foolish but I really am very touched.

Mrs. Burd said she was going to write to you so you will have heard from her by now and I'll give away no secret when I tell you that you are to have a quilt also! You like me must be rejoicing. Wasn't it fine of her to think of us? She said she thought she would give the other quilts to some Museum. Well, a Museum should be glad to get them but I do not believe there is anyone alive who will love them more or appreciate what their making meant, than you and I.

Jan 2, 1942

All my guests wanted to see the quilts; so I opened the chest and pulled them all out and spread them one by one over the the big four-poster and you should hear the exclamation. The men all go for Mr. Pratt's of course and think it is a feather in their own cap - such work done by a man.

Feb 6, '42

Poor darling old man! I look at Pap's work and feel so sad about him; I do not see why though for he lived a long life and apparently not too difficult a one. He had a hobby that made him happy and a daughter who loved him.

The Bergen Co. newspaper reviewed the Hobby Show given last week in the Englewood Field Club; Mr. Peto took the quilts over and saw to it that a choice place was given to The Ninety and Nine ... he says it was effectively hung over the mantelpiece and fireplace. I had gone to the trouble of printing the description of each quilt and tacking it to the lowest border; I had on this, "Made by Charles P. Pratt, 89 year-old quiltmaker of Philadelphia" and so forth. The reporter had it "- 8 year old quiltmaker. " I was so disappointed I could have cried. However many people admired it and I understand the show made a nice sum of money for the Red Cross... Mr. Pratt would have been delighted to have both his Ninety and Nine and his Ruth and Naomi working for the same cause, wouldn't he?

May 3, 1942

. . . I wouldn't dare have Mr. Pratt's quilt's cleaned - they would fall apart. Ruth and Naomi is almost apart now. It is all silk and fraying everywhere - it would never survive a cleaning. But "Pap" wanted people to see it and enjoy it. So I feel I do right in showing it. But hereafter I am only going to show it here in my home - I will show The Ninety & Nine for exhibitions and lectures.

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Sept 25, 1942

. . . poor old Dad Pratt did write me that he drafted his own patterns - your letter is the first I have ever heard that he had a designer. I supposed he was able to do this because he was once a carpet designer you know. Well, when you get ninety or thereabouts, you get confused. I expect to be worse than confused; I will be non-existent.

Jan 7, 1947

I think I have coaxed the curator of the N.Y. Historical Society to hang Mr. Pratt's Ruth & Naomi on the platform; the poor quilt is coming to pieces and will not last long. However I have a feeling that he would say yes - he loved to have his work shown and what good can it do packed away? I can bring it home with me after the meeting and the Ninety & Nine can stay on exhibition through the three months.

July 15, 1947

Congratulations on finishing your Ninety and Nine! Would you like any of my things for your display? Would you like another "loan" of the original Ninety and Nine?

Now about the quilts: I hope I can get them to you in time. I'll try to get them packaged and off tonight or tomorrow. I'll send Ruth & Naomi and I do not need to say to you - take good care of it. It is much larger than The Ninety & Nine and all silk. It was in tender care when I got it. I seldom take it around for exhibition because I am afraid it will burst into holes anytime. Silk will never become an heirloom - especially silk cut into such tiny pieces.

Dec 8, 1948

If (his daughter) could know the hundreds, thousands of people that have had joy from Mr. Pratt's Ninety and Nine it is always much admired and exclaimed over. I am afraid it will wear out but I keep reminding myself that he told me he wanted people to see his work - so that is what I am doing.

August 19, 1954

Lectures do not begin until October. The 90 & 9 goes with me each time of course.

**For additional information about Emma Andres and her Ninety and Nine please turn to page 16.*



"Dad" Pratt shows his technique for sewing the thousands of squares together to form his mosaic silk quilts.

Penn's Treaty is one of the few quilts that didn't have a biblical theme.



JOURNAL OF A QUILTMAKER

In 1942, Emma Andres borrowed Charles Pratt's quilt The Ninety and Nine for an exhibition. She loved the quilt so much she took a pattern from it and later decided to reproduce it. We think many quiltmakers will identify with her notes from a journal she kept while making the quilt.

1944

Feb 3 - 2685 pieces
Feb 14 - 3365 pieces
Jul 19 - added 38 pieces
Jul 20 - 76 pieces added
Jul 27 - finished rows with feet
Jul 31 - got ready 132 pieces
Aug 5 - Had been on Plaza in evening to cool off with MaMa & friends. Had patches along and got 18 ready. Figured I had 5004 pieces.
Nov 12 - snow today 10-12 am. Put a stripe of 48 pieces to quilt.
Nov 13 - put 114 on
Nov 14 - put 80 on
Nov 18 - Sunday. Had to rip some pieces in the left hand of figure and finally got enough pink to put it in instead - working later at the store and fixed right hand after a ride with Gladys Mann, her brother and her mother. We took them to the airport, etc. Had just enough pink I thought. Finally had to use 3 pieces of darker shade to save the hands.
Nov 20 - put 48 on
Dec 31 - Had 6271 pieces in quilt.



Three pictures showing the progress of Emma Andres' quilt top, The Ninety and Nine. From left to right, Miss Andres' father holds the quilt; Emma, her pattern and the quilt; Emma with the almost completed quilt.

1945

Jan 1 - sewed 89 pieces
Jan 5 - sewed 70 pieces

1945

Jan 1 - sewed 89 pieces
Jan 5 - sewed 70 pieces
Jan 15 - sewed 30 pieces
Jan 17 - sewed 115 pieces. Now have 7229
Jan 19 - Dyed a darker green for bushes and it turned out fair. 7479 pieces.
Jul 13 Father Flanagan's birthday. Put 48 pieces in breast part of sheep on it. (My problem sheep) at store. It was a cloudy day.
Took time this morning for a bit of relaxation and put 164 pieces in that I had pieced at Mrs. Wood's a few evenings ago. Should be 9282 pieces.
An Indian man was in today and asked if I was the one making a quilt with Christ in it. I showed it to him and he said, "Good" That was complement enough - Mrs. Summers saw it again this morning and said, "It's beautiful"
Nov 11 - Armistice Day Put the 100 green pieces in quilt today store that I pieced last night at Bertha Wood's - Lately have taken box of pieces along when I visit her for the evening and have accomplished quite a little. Working on the sunset now. Many folks admire and wonder at it - Lost track of the pieces now.

1946

Jan 1 - 176

Jan 9 - 181

Jan 18 - 18

Feb 21 - 141 pieced at home. Brought them to shop to sew on. It was the part where the little sheep's head is being added. Had one brown square wrong and as the ear needed two pieces instead of one, I ripped it out. Sure have had a time deciding about the grey under the chins

Jul 13 - Father Flanagan's birthday. Put 48 pieces in breast part of the right hand sheep. Did 91 later.

Jul 21 - Sunday a.m. Paper late so worked on my quilt and conquered the problem of the foot of the big sheep. Put in some parts that had been a muddle - Last night at Bertha's got the leg. Most white ready to put in. Worked some more of sheep shadow. Such satisfaction and relaxation and folks do love it too.

Jul 28 - Monday am. Put 90 pieces in sunset that I got done at Bertha's last night. Ripped out corner and wonder how many times the quilt has already been shown to wear so badly. Put another in its place

Aug 2 - Put last 9 pieces of light grey in sunset when Bobby & Betty Surratt came over to the house - Later had to rip out a few to fix the dark grey so it looked more graceful.

Aug 3 - Wanda Taylor brought her blue sailor dress for border and it's swell but I'm afraid it's not enough.

Aug 18 - My birthday. 4 years ago today I gave display with Dad's original. Marie Kuhne brought a piece of blue and it matches nicely with Wanda's dress and with a little of my original blue from the robe, I'll have the border mat'l. Was finally successful in getting the white at Penney's Had hoped to have enough cream color.

Sep 10 - sewed a bit more of the cream colored strips on border and just happened to have enough. Sewed by guess to come to the corner.

Oct 3 - Took pieces along to Carlsbad Caverns and even sewed while waiting for the flight.

Oct 5 - Almost had a fatal accident when I decided to dry clean the quilt. The dark red faded or ran

1947

Jan - Putting in the border and being too anxious later found I went too far so had to rip some white squares. Put blue where it belonged. "Ye shall rip what ye sew"

Feb 19 - When I went to the dentist I finished correcting my mistakes. Then found in the evening I had made a mistake on another side of one square so had to rip the piece off and had good luck not running in- to any cross seams. If it were not for taking my pieces along to Bertha's guess I would never get the quilt finished.

May 9 - While Mrs. Blackburn was playing a number on the organ for the Monday Club musical, I got dreaming of Dad Pratt and The Ninety & Nine. Could I finish mine by my birthday? It would be just 5 years since I had my display on my birthday showing Dad's original. This has given me more inspiration to work a little more on the quilt. The display shall be done in commemoration of the completion. Want to call it

Andres & Pratt
Tapestry Quilts Exhibit
or
Symphony in Tapestry Quilts

Jun 14 - Sat eve. "GePhiz" got the "E" on the border. Started from end of rows. The 1st shall come last and last, 1st. Ha! By working in the evening, even taking it along downtown as we sat in front of Woolworth's to see the crowds go by, I had the pieces sewed in two's. Got the lettering in besides getting the corner.

Jun 15 - Sun. Father's Day. Afternoon got out Ninety & Nine and worked on some of the letters. Have "Nine" in strips to get together. Should be writing letters but am anxious to get my work along. Started at 3:00 and got it sewed on by 4:00 and it looks like the top part is going to work.

Jul 3 - put the last letter "Y" in. Quite a coincidence as the whole making of the quilt is "Y". Had first pieced "Nine" and put in "Ninet Y" last

Jul 8 - Wed 9:45 p.m. finished!

Jul 12 - Checked and found I had failed to complete the "A". Had forgotten to put the cross bar so will rip it out and fix it before I get to the binding.

It was July 8, 1949 that the first quilting stitches were put in. By taking little rows of stitches through each square, the quilting does not seem to distract from the picture and if it can be kept from drawing it up, it will make it more durable and complete looking.

The quilting was started at the left hand corner at the bottom. No cotton to be used but the tan lining that was put on should fit with the proper basting.



Photo from Nov. 22, 1942 EVERY WEEK, a Sunday newspaper supplement supplied by Newspaper Enterprizes Assoc. Emma Andres is shown standing beside Charles Pratt's The Ninety and Nine which she later reproduced. See stories pg 5 & 16.