

QUILTERS' JOURNAL

P.O. Box 270 • Mill Valley, Ca 94941 • (415) 388-7578

SPRING 1980

VOL. 3 NO. 1



Florence Peto

Florence Peto

by Joyce Gross

The following are excerpts from letters written by Florence Peto to Miss Emma Andres. They were loaned to the JOURNAL by Miss Andres.

Mrs. Peto was the author of AMERICAN QUILTS & COVERLETS, and HISTORIC QUILTS as well as numerous articles in ANTIQUES, McCALL'S NEEDLEWORK & CRAFTS.

Part I of this series and a bibliography were published in the JOURNAL, Winter 1979.

Feb. 26, 1941

"The check is received and the quilt is yours; do exactly as you please about it*. (I am) so delighted to have someone own it that sees the beauty in the nice old colors and fine stitchery. Yes, it is a big one: that's one of the reasons for thinking it is pretty old. You are right - it must be nearly a hundred. That Victoria green began to be used shortly after the young queen came to the throne in 1837, wasn't it? Unfortunately I cannot get any history on this piece. I am sure of where it came from, but nothing else.

(I will tell you something that happened) to me at the last Quilt Talk; there was no platform and we (the janitor of the school and myself) had to rig up something on which to stand my chart of designs where the audience could see them comfortably. So a small butterfly table was placed on top of a library table; over this I draped one of my old quilts and onto the small table stood my chart. So far, so good; now something had to be done with me so I could reach the chart, for I have to turn the designs as I tell their stories. The janitor found a small platform but it was not high enough; so he found another wooden stool, hardly large enough for my two feet. My feet are tiny or I could never have got them both on it but it gave me the required height. I gave the whole lecture hoping in the back of my mind, that I would not get excited and do a fancy dance step off into thin air. Remember I told you all the dignified state officers of the D.A.R. sat in the front rows; what a scandal that would have been! But all went well - only my feet went to sleep and when I finished I could hardly walk!

**This quilt is pictured in WOMAN'S DAY, May 1941 in the article "This is Patchwork". It is the Lemon Star pictured on the maple four-poster bed.*

March 21st, 1941 Friday morning

You are right; they keep me talking and talking. It is a wonder someone hasn't popped me into the U.S. Senate - the only place where there is more talking than I do!

Next week, I give two more lectures and again on the 26th. So when you do not hear from me, picture me with my mouth open.

April 7, 1941

"Week ago Saturday Mr. Peto and I went to the Newark Show; it was held in a big hotel but it was a disappointment. Mostly buttons; what a wave of popularity there is for collecting buttons! There are some fascinating ones and I enjoy looking at them but as for collecting. What does one do with them, after you get them? Not truly worthwhile, like collecting other antiques, I think. I have some lovely things now for my home. Did I tell you about the old glass paperweight I bought the other day. There goes my Easter outfit! I'll have to be content to carry the paperweight in my hand - my Easter.

May 9, 1941

"Sometime ago a manufacturing concern in S.C. wrote me and asked permission to reproduce three designs shown in my book in their modern chenille bedspreads of the better sort. It took me unawares for I had never viewed my things from the commercial angle and I wrote them that I thought I had no such right - to grant them the privilege of reproducing family heirlooms. But I said I would give them the names and addresses of the owners and if they got permission from them - all right with me. I never heard any more but in this morning's mail I have a letter from the manufacturer and a handsome blue folding card

cont.

This biographical sketch of Mrs. Peto is an updated version. The dates are correct by official documents.

PETO, FLORENCE M. COWDIN: born Nov. 25, 1881 N.Y., died Aug. 29, 1970 N.J.; author, quilt collector, lecturer, consultant to Newark Museum of Art, Shelburne Museum. One of four children and oldest daughter of Ella & Jasper Cowdin; married Joseph Peto Feb. 4, 1900.

cont. from pg. 1
which reads:

Authentic Reproduction
in Chenille
of the famous
BARBARA FRICK QUILT

Made in Baltimore during Revolutionary Period. This spread made and displayed by special permission of present owner per plate No. I in Florence Peto's very interesting book "Historic Quilts".

The manufacturer's letter to me says they obtained the owner's permission to use design and have presented her with one of the new spreads! They want now to reproduce the President's Wreath and want me to send them address of owner. They tell me they have advertised the name of my book on every label sent out and on every spread - that ought to be worth money to me. Yours with lots of ideas and little time.

Tuesday afternoon
3rd June

"For two days before Memorial Day, I gave out and lay flat on my back in bed; suppose I was overdoing it with all that work in such awful hot weather. Well, I was determined to join the family in our yearly pilgrimage to the Cemetery. Quite a ride from Jersey especially in all the holiday traffic and all the parades and so forth which held us up. Thought I stood the ride very well but spent Sat and Sun again in bed. Was enough better yesterday to hobble over to town and get my hair done -because I had decided that even if I was going to die I could not die with hair in such a mess as mine was! I felt very sorry for myself. Got a new permanent - a short hair cut and now I have curls all over my pate and look as nearly like Shirley Temple as I ever will!

Friday afternoon
6th June

"Maybe it is to pay me back for the Shirley Temple hair-do that I have been ill in bed most of the time since.

I've meant several times to speak of the buffalo mattress; no, I never heard of one but should think it would be clean and cool, like horsehair. Were they generally made in the west during buffalo time, or were always a novelty? Here in the east a horse is almost as scarce as a buffalo -our mattresses are made of God-knows-what now.

Thursday A.M. 6/13/41

"You are the fellow who is going to decipher

handwriting this time for here I am still flat on back, ill in bed.

My husband is funny: he can cook fairly well and clean up pretty good but there won't be a dish left if I don't get around soon! He comes upstairs like a small boy after I've heard a crash and tries to say that he didn't do it - it slips from some place or bounces without anyone being near it - so help him!

June 25, 1941

"Hope you do not think I've passed away! though it is true I have been ill ever since last I wrote. This week I am much better and have had two motor rides.

Yes, you should put dates on all your quilts. Listen to me - I haven't got around to doing it to mine though one was finished in '37 and another in '38.

Have you ever seen pictures (rather small) made out of cut pieces of postage stamps? A woman who makes them had a booth in the Antique Show yesterday. I found them very clever and so pretty. I bought only two cards. I've got an idea to make at least one pretty quilt pattern with the pieces cut from the different colored stamps, just for fun.

July 9, 1941

"Indeed, the typing was the first thing I noticed when I opened your letter; good for you! Keep it up because you will find it so much more convenient and faster for expressing your thoughts than trying to get them all down with a pen. Now: on the few social occasions when a letter written by hand seems to be indicated, I find it

cont. on next page

A FUTURE ANTIQUE

SOLID OAK QUILT HOLDER KIT



This solid oak ten piece quilt holder kit is designed and constructed by a single craftsman in his one-person shop.

Dimensions:
24" wide, 28½" high, 16" deep.

Easy assembly instructions are included with each kit. You supply glue and finishing materials.

Send \$82 plus \$3 for handling and shipping; allow 6-8 weeks for delivery—orders are made as received.

(Iowa residents add 3% sales tax)
Satisfaction Guaranteed.

Available
only from

A DAY'S WORK

38 Regal Lane Iowa City, IA 52240

difficult to do - it seems slow and cumbersome and the pens scratch and my fingers cramp and my head itches. The pen doesn't seem to get the thoughts down fast enough and I get nervous.

Somehow I feel discouraged today, maybe reaction from the terrible heat through which we have gone. I am discouraged at trying to sell my designs, have a sure feeling that manufacturers will use the idea and forget me; I am discouraged because club program chairmen write in that they have no money in their budgets this winter. I get \$25. for my lecture now, and to play fair with clubs who have contracted to have me, I cannot do it for less for others. Maybe it will be like last season -everything pile up in the springtime! I am discouraged with magazines and the way they do business and I am discouraged with Japanese beetles and the way they have descended upon my beautiful flowers. Heck! There's always a Japanese beetle in life, isn't there? Affectionately (signed Florence P).

Oct. 31, 1941

'If this isn't a busy week to stop all busy weeks, I'd like to know! Not until three days before it opened did I know I was to have a booth at the Women's Exposition of Arts and Industries at the Grand Central Palace in N.Y. The National Chairman of American Needlework called me up one night and begged me to come and put on a show of my quilts. It was an international show - all the foreign nations, except the Axis powers, have exhibits of things their women make! Princess Martha of Norway has been there every day - she and our Mayor, LaGuardia opened the show. There has been a performance going on almost all the time - folk dancing, fashion shows, Chinese children and women singing and acting. I am exhausted but I've had a fine time. My part was to show the antique spreads and I was allowed to exhibit my books and give out lecture and book folders. It cost me nothing and should be worth much in publicity.

Dec. 8, 1941

"The fun of Christmas is halted with the awful news over radio last night; we were visiting friends in Brooklyn and we all sat as if stunned when we heard the news and realized the perfidy of Japan. Who knows what may be ahead?

If I do not get another chance before the holidays to write, this is to wish you a happy holiday season, in spite of everything: My best wishes and deep affection for you.

Must go and make a pudding now - we have to eat no matter how sad and worried. Maybe I'll get out my nine-patch quilt and try to finish it - practice what I preach. Good to keep busy when you are in trouble or worried.

Monday morning Jan 1942

It is a gloomy, snowy day and I am possessed of nothing but gloomy thoughts, no time to write a friend I suppose but here I go. We are so worried about our beloved girl; at last the orders have come from Washington and she goes to Camp Meade, near Baltimore on Feb. 1. There, the Presbyterian Hospital Unit is to get its equipment and uniforms before sailing for destination unknown". She seems cheerful and even gay about it. She is the head of the nursing staff and will have the rank of Army Lieutenant - probably a Captain as soon as they are established. It is all very well to say no good worrying - I know all that and worry anyhow. Well, I suppose I must be grateful that we had nearly two years of joy in being together again in such a lovely new home. Somehow, it will lose all interest for me if anything happens to her.

Wonder if I will ever be interested in quilts again. I am fulfilling all my lecture engagements but no more are coming in and, in fact, no apparent interest in next year's program.

Thursday morning

Feb 26, 1942

"After I put my aunt on her train yesterday in New York I wandered into the stores; it was fatal for I bought two new dresses and a red, red hat! I was feeling rather 'down' and thought it might cheer me up to have some new clothes. I'm usually very conservative about what I wear on the platform but the next group listening to me is going to have to look at a red bonnet! I hope there will be no bulls among them.

March 18, 1942

"I've been ill for three days with an awful cold - my chest goes buzz-buzz as I breathe.

The AMERICAN HOME has about twenty photos and my books of two hundred drawings and when I wrote to ask how about it they said I would be hearing from them in a few days - that's three weeks ago! Your prayers for more and more patience: (signed)

Florence.

cont. on pg. 12

Noah's Ark Quilt

Reprinted from DORCUS: A Magazine for Woman's Handiwork, Aug. 1886; publ by Dorcus Publishing Co. N.Y.

"One of the fashionable little 'fads' of the day in fancy work is a Noah's Ark quilt. The quilt can be of serge, cloth, satin sheeting or plain cream sheeting, and is designed and commenced by the lady who starts it. If she is a good worker she embroiders or appliques the Noah's Ark which is near the centre of the quilt, but placed high up. The animals are all in couples and form a long procession round the entire quilt, marching round towards the Ark. Sometimes the procession is curved so as to form a design over the entire surface, but this depends on individual taste and fancy. The lady asks her friends and neighbors to work the pairs of animals, usually giving them some choice in the matter. Some of these quilts are very amusing, and really worth keeping. At a recent starting of one, a lady volunteered to work two fleas, which she eventually did, with wonderful care and dexterity. In cream sheeting, the animals may be all in Turkey red twill worked with red ingrained thread, or in various colors. This may be an idea for many busy fingers... The animals are generally cut out in paper first, and then in whatever material they are to be worked in, and are copied from a child's colored picture book. In the Noah's Ark collection, scraps of fur and skin are used, to represent the specimen as true to nature as possible. It is occasionally all worked by one pair of hands, on a foundation of double width diagonal serge, with the various animals portrayed in wools"

Florence Peto mentions a Noah's Ark quilt in a letter dated Feb. 4, 1966 to Maxine Teele, well-known Iowa quilter,... "I have a charming Noah's Ark quilt - old. The ark in center is surrounded by big circle of every animal, bird, & insect, two by two - all to get into the ark, you understand."

Mrs. Teele refers to the quilt in her article about Mrs. Peto "In Partial Payment" in NIMBLE NEEDLE TREASURES, Winter 1973. "At one point in our correspondence she gave an off hand invitation to visit her if we should ever find ourselves in Tenafly. Though this seemed completely unlikely, family obligations did take us to New Jersey. After a phone call, we stopped by her home. For the next two hours, she pulled quilts from closets and chests. She showed us (my husband says) ninety-five of her eighty five quilts. One that I recall dis-

cont.

Huge Quilt Custom

The following is an excerpt from the Feb 26, 1941 letter from Florence Peto to Emma Andres:

"When I give my lecture, I speak of the custom of making huge quilts, and this is about the way I tell it. Before the Revolution, houses were small and the families were large; there were seldom more than one or at the most two sleeping rooms. This does not apply to the great mansions occupied by representatives of the Crown, but rather to the average citizen and patriot whose house was tiny. Take Paul Revere's home in Boston as an example. The little house is preserved as a museum now and pilgrims flock to it every day. When I was there, standing in the one large bedroom, gazing at the immense four-poster bed, the lady who stood beside me voiced my thoughts; she said, 'What on earth did they do with all the children! For Paul Revere, the gifted man, fathered some 16 children and as far as I have been able to find out, they were all born and brought up in the tiny house. Well, what to do with your extra children was solved in the olden days by the trundle bed; at night, father, mother and all the youngest infants slept together in the big four-posters, while the other children crowded together in the trundle or feather beds placed on the floor. They slept close together to keep warm -especially in Boston, I imagine, where it is very cold in the winter. Then, in the daytime, the trundle was pushed under the four-poster which stood high to accommodate it, and a valance about the bed hid it from view; all the feather beds and pillows from the trundle and the floor were piled high on the mother bed and of course it took a counterpane of noble proportions to hide the whole from sight or cover them properly"

The Nat'l Quilting Assoc., Inc announces the establishment of a certification program for teachers of BASIC QUILTMaking. This program will be operative 1/1/80. Teachers wishing information please send SASE to
N.Q.A. Teacher Certification Program
Box 272
Glassboro, NJ 08028

NOAH'S ARK QUILT - cont.
tinctly was the Noah's Ark quilt now pictured on pg. 146 of Safford & Bishop's AMERICAN QUILTS and COVERLETS. I recall just as clearly the twinkle in Mrs. Peto's eyes as she pointed out the impossibility of getting all those large animals into the tiny ark."

cont. from pg. 3

Friday afternoon

Feb 6, 1942

"Well, the lightning has struck; daughter Marjorie goes away next Tuesday. I cannot imagine my life without her gay and loving personality about. She has been such a good child; how I hope she can be of service to her country and yet not have to undergo too many cruel hardships herself.

Sunday afternoon

Feb 15, 1942

"More dead than alive after a week of the most emotional upset; my daughter finally got away this morning on the nine o'clock train for Baltimore. I did not go over to New York to say 'Goodby' for I felt one more Goodby would finish me. Well, that's that; I simply cannot cry anymore. My heart is so leaden you could make bullets out of it. We didn't cry when we parted here though - we laughed - she is the grandest girl to have laughs with! Hope this war doesn't take it out of her.

Friday

"I was to have gone to Baltimore today to spend the weekend with my daughter and here I am in bed coughing my head off!

Too bad you cannot see the fine quilting on Plate No. I in my book; there is the thinnest layer of cotton but the quilting, though flat, is like lace or stippling.

Easter Sun. morn

Presbyterian Hospital

"Was so sick so long with miserable cold which I tried hard to take care of myself. Then, I got so bad, I had to have the doctor. Finally I got so bad they had to bring me in Teaneck ambulance.

Know what's worrying me? I have an engagement to lecture to the N.Y. Hist. Soc. next Sunday afternoon and my doctors know it and have promised to help me get well in time to do it, but I'm scared they are kidding me. The society has three hundred engraved invitations out for the affair.

April 28th

"Although we have had some warm sunshine and I've been able to sit out in garden, my progress seems very slow and I am much discouraged. (I) feel so guilty at being so ill and such an expense to my poor husband. What a hospital bill! I'll never be able to buy another quilt.

June 17, 1942

"Two ladies were here from the Spool

Cotton Co. yesterday; the company plans getting up a handsome folder to encourage women to make quilts. They want both quilts and designs to show in color. Guess they plan to sell patterns and the cotton for quilting - maybe for padding too. They may buy the designs from me - said they would and I may write an Introduction or short sketch for the folder.

Thursday afternoon

July 2, 1942

"All day today I've been trying to get that article written for the D.A.R. magazine. The editor specified only two photographs and 1000 words; I've done pretty well - three photographs and 1200 words.

I found the swatch of silk which I thought lost when we moved; I speak of it (in the ANTIQUES article) but could not show it for I couldn't find it; it is the piece of necktie silk woven in gold U.S. money - gold coins. Supposedly the manufacturer was forbidden to sell the silk after he had made it!

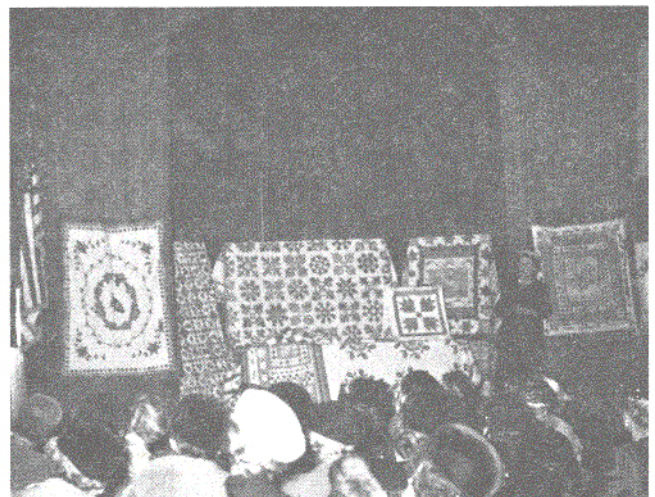
The Spool Cotton Co., seem to really mean business and telephoned me again today about my drawings which they mean to buy for their folder on quilting. They are coming out here again next Tuesday to see quilts.

Monday, July 27, 1942

"One storm follows another barely a half hour apart. The cocker tries to hide under the sofa and I'd hide there with him if I were slim enough!

Sunday morning July 28

"(An antique dealer pulled an old quilt out of a chest and said - 'Here's one we cont. on next pg.



Florence Peto lectures to an appreciative audience. Photo courtesy of John Peto.

have been using to cover furniture but would you care for something in this order if I come across a fine one in good condition?' It turned out to be a quilt of twenty applique blocks, all different and each made by a different person and signed. When new it must have been a handsome thing. Then my husband discovered my own grandmother's name on it - Matilda Vanderbeck! Was I excited! So I said - 'How much?' -and bought it for \$5. It was made here in Bergen County, N.J. and all the names are prominent ones of early Dutch families; names like - Bogardus, Westerveldt, Doremus, Brinkerhoff and Vanderbeck.

Sunday morning

I'm very proud to have had a big hand in the making (of the new Spool Cotton Company booklet QUILTS) for I think it is a lovely book. Only one mistake and that was in a name and not my fault - we tried to be so careful The President of the Company said it was the nicest booklet they had ever gotten out, much thanks to me.

Now for the kitchen artistry! My last party for the duration. Unless they bring their own rations - too expensive. Love to you (signed Florence).

Nov. 25, 1942

My birthday too

This week I've been working on the article for Miss Blondel and the NEEDLEWORK BOOK. Such a time finding a photographer. It was delaying me so, Miss Blondel finally wrote and asked - where was the article. Finally this morning (the pictures of the two bedrooms showing our four-poster beds dressed in the New England Clam Shell and the Wild Goose Chase quilts, both of which I made myself arrived.

June 4, 1943

"Our girl has been made a Captain! Both articles made from her letters will be published in July - WOMAN'S DAY and the AMERICAN JOURNAL OF NURSING.

Sunday Morning

"You want to know what a cotton converter is: Cotton converters buy the cotton goods before it is either printed, shrunk or finished. Mr. Peto makes the designs for it and gives out the printing work and finishing work to mills which specialize just in that. They buy this Greig goods, pronounced gray goods, in great quantities if possible and then plan its decoration as the market seems to demand. It is something of a gamble to guess right what the public wants.

Mr. P. only deals in goods specially designed for men or sports wear - no women's material at all - unless for sports wear.

Jan 18, 1944 News: I finished the Nine-Patch quilt-top yesterday; now, the border and then I shall send it away to be quilted. It is so pretty.

April 24, 1944

"You will be disgusted with me, but here I am back in bed again with a relapse! I asked the doctor the other day when the pain was so bad how long it took to die with this thing. He laughed, 'Lord! It's like the seven-year itch. You never die with it and never get rid of it!' So I don't think I am comforted much. However after a week of awful pain, I am better again today. Did I tell you I have an intestinal condition known as diverticulitis? And you don't get it diving, though I used to be a diver!

June 15, 1944

"I resolved not to write any more letters until I was able to sit at typewriter; my bed scribble must have been trying. I am scared to say it, because I have had so many set-backs, but I have been better this week. Will always have to keep on this rather puppy diet - but I guess I can do it. No more glamour foods for me!

Well, we've had our excitement of D-day! I listened to radio & wept nearly all day. Had a letter from M(arjorie) dated May 29. She enclosed a photo showing marching in front of columns of nurses all dressed for invasion.

Nov 26, 1944

"Physically I am not very well; I get so discouraged. However, we intend to ride to White Plains tomorrow to the Antique Show. I suppose I will spend the day after in bed.

Feb 13, 1945

"My friend in Ohio, who gave my ninepatch out to be quilted, wrote that it is done all but the binding! I am so surprised for she told me I was third on a waiting list.

Sept. 11, 1945

"Had another attack of 'pain in side' which sent me to bed for awhile.

We have had such thrilling news: Margie is on her way home! She is to sail from Marseilles on Sept. 15. The house is being scrubbed until the paint comes off!

cont on pg 16

Recipe

For scouring Thick Cotton: As Counterpanes,
Quilts, Etc.

by Donna M. Schutt

I have just received my first issue of QUILTERS' JOURNAL and am pleased to learn that there is an audience of quilt enthusiasts like myself, interested in more than duplicating quilts. Altho I am a quilt-maker, I would like to consider myself a bit of an historian also.

My husband and I have recently moved to Bloomington, Indiana. My biggest discovery so far has been the Indiana University Library, where I have been exploring the upper levels in rather a patchwork manner, for materials on quilts. So far I have come across little of note except perhaps the article I have enclosed which I would like to share with the readers of QUILTERS' JOURNAL. It should interest us how they might have taken care of quilts and coverlets in their own time. I found it in LADY'S BOOK, March 1832.

Cut a pound of mottled soap into thin slices; put it into a pan with a quarter of an ounce of pearl-ash; then pour a pail of boiling water on it: let it stand till it is quite dissolved; then pour hot and cold water into your scouring tub, with a bowl of your solution of soap. Put in your counterpane, and beat it well with a doll, often turning the counterpane over in the tub. When this is done, wring it across a gallows or a hook, which is done by turning the two opposite ends round each other, and putting a small clean stick between them. By this method you may wring it as dry as possible, the harder, without injuring it, the better. Having given it this first liquor, you may pat in some old cottons or woollens that the liquor may not be thrown away, and then give your counterpane a second liquor as before. Wring it out again, and rinse in clean cold water; then pour a sufficient quantity of boiling water into your tub, with a small quantity of the solution of soap, so that you will reduce it to a very thin lather. Put three teaspoonfuls of liquid blue into the tub, whence your goods were taken, and the acid of the liquid blue and the alkali of the pearl-ash and the soap lye will cause a slight fermentation or, effervescence: stir this thin blue liquor with a stick, and put in your counterpane: beat it out with the doll about five minutes, which will colour the counterpane of a fine azure blue of the lightest shade; but as it dries in the wind, the blue mostly goes off, and leaves a brilliant white.

N.B. In some cases where the cottons are very brown and bad, it is necessary, instead of the last of these three liquors being poured into the tub, that it should be thrown into the copper, and the cottons put in and boiled an hour. When taken out, return them into the tub with some cold water and add the before mentioned quantity of chemic blue; and dry the articles in the air.

ED. NOTE: This is very rough treatment for a quilt and not to be recommended. Patsy Orlofsky, director of the Textile Conservation Institute, South Salem, New York, suggests that you will have easier and better results with the product "Ensure", made by The Stearns & Foster Co. Be sure to follow the directions.

Florence Peto... cont.

Where am I going to put all these quilts when Margie comes home and fires me out of her closet?

Sunday Dec. 2, 1945

"Since Marjorie came home this house has been in such a whirl I've had no time for my own affairs and, indeed, owe everyone I know a letter.

Margie's 'welcome home' party was nice - 80 guests! My caterer lady turned out to be a treasure and luckily took all the refreshment problem off my hands.

(Let me tell you about) the Quilt Exhibition at East Orange; it was a County Fair and there were 115 quilts on display - old and new. The exhibits were far above average quality and it made the judging very difficult; I worked nearly three hours on them. One thing is always obvious - sorry to say - the old work far excels the modern! In my opinion there was only one modern piece of real distinction - of course I awarded it the first prize. That is, the prize for the modern class.

Dec. 29, 1945

In the news clipping, I'm the little fatty on the left; I'm not so far, either, just small - 125 lbs.

Several days ago a letter from Washington informed Marjorie that she had been promoted again - she is now a Lt. Col. We laugh at this; Jan. 9 she gets her final discharge papers.

In the next group of letters, Mrs. Peto has a visitor from Boston, publishes HISTORIC QUILTS, and visits the White House. We think you won't want to miss them.