

QUILTERS' JOURNAL

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

SUMMER 1980

VOL. 3 NO. 2



Florence Peto

Florence Peto & Woman's Day

by Joyce Gross

The following are excerpts from letters written by Florence Peto author of AMERICAN QUILTS & COVERLETS and HISTORIC QUILTS, to Emma Andres. The JOURNAL is very grateful to Miss Andres for sharing this material.

Dec. 27, 1940

There may be something cooking for me in the magazine called WOMAN'S DAY; that is the magazine which is published by the A and P and is on sale in all their stores. First I was scornful of it, did I tell you? But all the biggest writers appear in it so now I'm coming down off my high horse a little! The editors (two ladies) are coming out here to see me next week and to see my photographs and collection of quilts. They wrote me that they had bought my book and were most enthusiastic about what I was doing for quilts and the quiltmakers.

Jan. 22, 1941

Do you get (WOMAN'S DAY) out there in Arizona? I'll send you a sample copy if you have never seen it - it is a nice little magazine and I told you about offering some of my stuff to them. Well, last Monday Rose Wilder Lane came out here from N.Y. to see my quilts and talk to me about quilts. Nothing was said about purchasing an article from me; she just wanted to talk about quilts and about the series of needlework articles which the magazine will run this year. I turned myself and house inside out for her; I'm very stupid to do this and then complain for I am very sure she means to write the article herself and I do not even know if I or my book are to be given credit. She asked (me) questions about things which have taken me months of research to find out. It isn't fair but -what to do? Mostly she explained that she wanted to show that women were creating designs themselves and they want to encourage that.

Feb 5, 1941

...I don't even know if they know what they are trying to do there in WOMAN'S DAY. Sorry I ever wrote to them. They do not mean to buy anything from me nor even give me so much (as) a credit line if they use any of my quilts or designsI went over to N.Y. the other day and called on the chief editor, Miss Eileen Tighe. As near as I can make out, Rose Wilder (!) Lane is a Home Service Dept. head and she gets paid a salary for her work and, of course, is expected to write the articles which appear in

her division. This little magazine has grown from a single sheet pamphlet to a really nice looking periodical. Miss Tighe was very nice but in answer to my question about paying me for the use of my material, she said, "No." So then I said, "But if you show my quilts and publish my designs, do I not get at least a credit line - such as 'From the collection of Florence Peto?'" She said no, they didn't do that. So you see, that whole day spent with Rose Wilder Lane, when I turned myself inside out for her, is lost. Miss Tighe defended herself by saying, "Why, we went to you as an expert on the subject, just as we would use a library or a museum."

We live and learn.

Mar 21, 1941

WOMAN'S DAY still has four quilts of mine and two of my designs from the lecture chart which they did not return in time for the lectures this week in spite of promises. I do not understand what all the rush is about. They telephoned me one day and asked for the two designs out of my chart to photograph in color - had to have them right away - I must send them via Western Union. Here I am on top of a hill buried in the snow - I don't even know how to get a Western Union messenger here. On skeis (how do you spell 'em?) well, then snowshoes! Mr. Peto took the patterns in with him the next morning and I've not heard a word since. I'll give them until the first of the week and then I'll begin some pestering on my own account!

Mar 27, 1941

Yesterday, I had a phone call from Miss Tighe of WOMAN'S DAY. The article showing your quilt is planned to appear in the May number; and said it photographed nicely. It seems the April number has something in it about coverlets and shows items which have been done by the Boston Index of American Design; no credits or bylines were given and it has burned up the Index! Well, either their protest or some change of policy has decided her to give me a by-line reading "From the collection of Florence Peto." They seem to be trying to do things better anyway... She said my check was in the mail - I have not received the four quilts or the two designs! But I guess I will. Oh yes, and she said that they were going to let me do the next installment (Applique Quilts) myself! Now they are talking! I don't like this "editing" or "cooperative" arrangement. Can't tell WHAT I'm supposed to do.

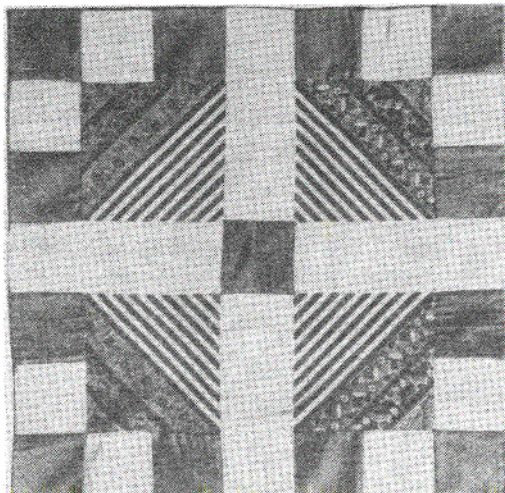
Tues April 22, 1922

By this time, you probably have received the May number of WOMAN'S DAY and are bursting with pride at the gorgeous appearance of "our" quilt.* Isn't it lovely on that maple four-poster and in that attractive setting? (see pg 3) The whole article is fine. Much of the material was supplied me to Rose Wilder Lane the day she spent here... Especially the "Lemon Star" story and the story of Lincoln's Platform and the Little Giant. (see below) The Irish Chain on the spool bed is mine - doesn't show the grand quilting, but looks nice on that kin of bed, just the same. (See photo next column) The small patterns are taken from my lecture chart. The one they have misnamed the Rising Sun and Oak Leaves is my Mary Totten, Sunflower shown in HISTORIC QUILTS.

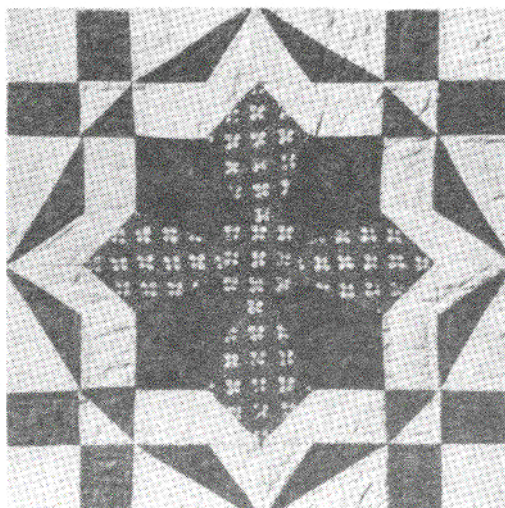


Mrs. Peto's Irish Chain. Photo from May 1942 WOMAN'S DAY

"Our quilt" refers to the fact that the quilt belonged to Mrs. Peto at the time the picture was taken but she sold it to Miss Andres soon thereafter.



(above) Lincoln's Platform. (below) The Little Giant.



Lincoln's Platform & The Little Giant Quilt Blocks

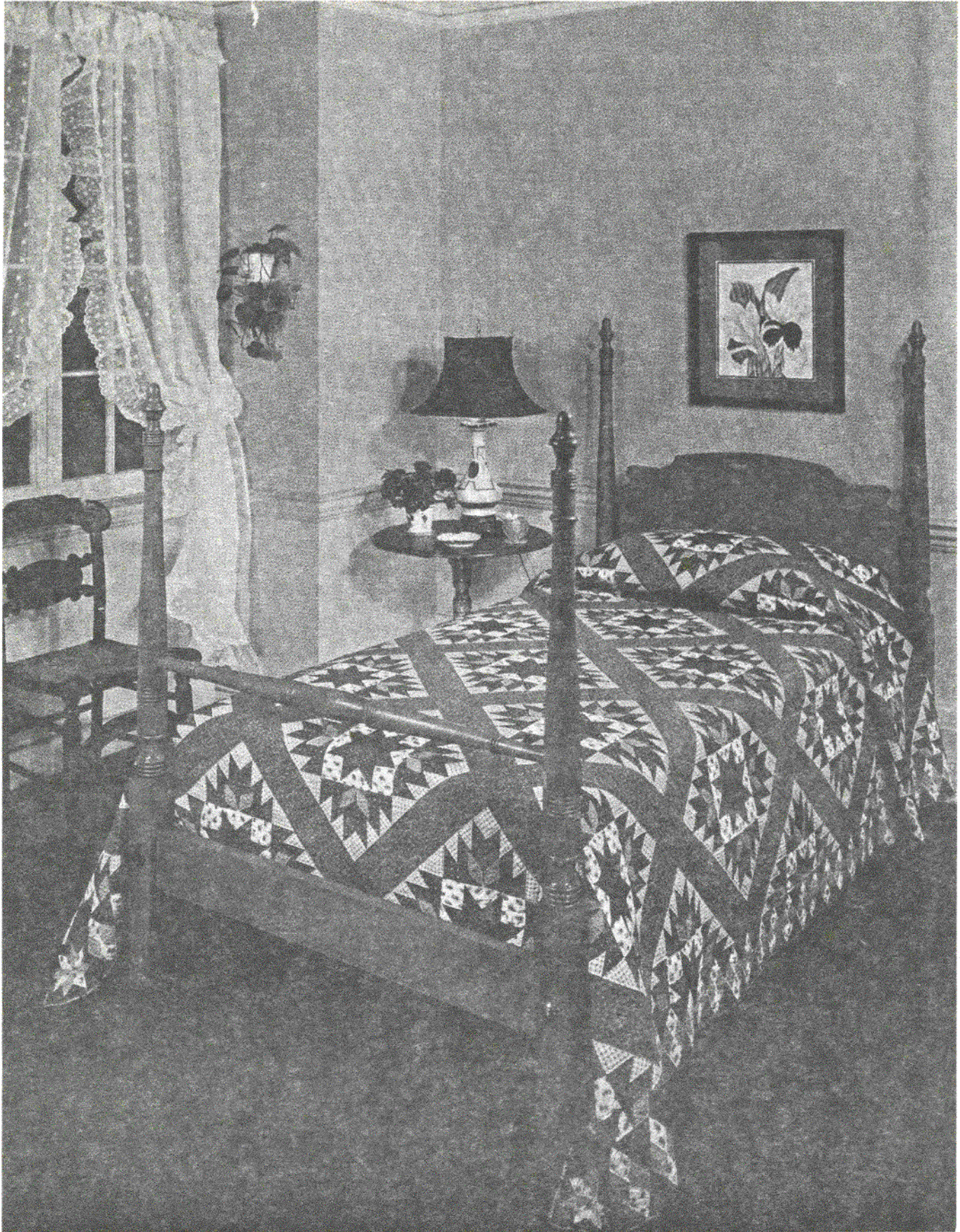
From WOMAN'S DAY, May 1980

"...When Stephen Douglas, the cultured aristocrat, was meeting Abe Lincoln in that series of debates that remain among the most brilliant in our history, the women of Illinois made a new patchwork pattern: 'Lincoln's Platform', in red, white and blue. The women of Kentucky replied with 'The Little Giant' honoring Stephen Douglas, also in our country's red, white and blue. Both patterns are simple pieced work, sewed in straight seams, but look at the difference between them.

The blunt directness of Lincoln's would be too harsh if not relieved by the stripe and floral pieces. The southern pattern is all subtle grace, equally honest, but using straight seams so skillfully that the pattern seems to be in curves"

In a letter to Maxine Teele dated June 11, 1968 Mrs Peto wrote, "The story (about Lincoln's platform, and The Little Giant) is that they were made during the time of the famous debates - by opposing factions.

Lincoln's Platform is so four-square, plain, uncomplicated it seems to me characteristic of the man and his political policies. The Little Giant is devious-complicated-not so obvious. Did I imagine more in the designs than was intended"



THE LEMON STAR, the star of Sieur de Bienville who from 1699 governed the Mississippi Valley for France, here developed into large squares set with chintz strips and bordered in diamonds. The star is repeated in corners.

Tuesday Afternoon, June 3

WOMAN'S DAY bawled the names of the quilt patterns plenty. The true Star of LeMoyne is always in the form of the one that makes the center of the block used on your pink and green quilt (See pg. 3) They called the Feathered Star a Prince's Feather (which it isn't) and said it was "from the Lemon Star" (which it isn't). And I've never heard a single quilt-maker or anyone's book call Baby's Building Blocks or Cube Work, a Jacob's Ladder. The latter pattern is too well-known and too popular all over the States to ever be mistaken. I personally think the editors were very independent not to have consulted me until after their issue was all printed... Again, the illustrations are fine. They sent me (the booklet of pattern-designs they made up) for checking and going over. They had a couple of mistakes in those too. I have not heard a word about doing the Applique article. I will never know how editors minds function.

Thursday AM 6/13/41

...It seems a shame they have balled up the quilt pattern names so terribly when they did such a grand photography job. I'm sick of the very name WOMAN'S DAY.

June 25, 1941

...Am probably not to have anything to do with the Applique article - no word from them.

Jan. 1942

WOMAN'S DAY have had me making some patterns for them; they plan a How-to-do-it number for patchwork next April. I won't have my name on it but they are paying me for the work. No, I had nothing to do with the second article in their series; that's what I was annoyed at them for. The editor called me up on the phone and told me to go ahead and do that article. My husband warned me that a phone conversation was not a contract - they would not have to live up to it unless I confirmed it in writing. So I did; wrote and asked them to write and tell me exactly what they wanted and how many quilts were to be used and so forth. They never replied and the article came out later. They even did something underhanded about the Housman Quilt; they went to Staten Island and borrowed the quilt, took it to N.Y. and photographed it; they explained to the owner that by doing it that way they would not have to give credit to HISTORIC QUILTS or Mrs. Peto. Pretty small and unethical I think. And then the story they wrote of the Housman Quilt was the silliest thing I ever read.

Jan 29, 1942

This is me again. And WOMAN'S DAY again. Said I would never do another thing for them but here I am doing it. Seems they plan a Modern Quilt series or number this spring; I've been making some designs for it.

Today they called up to say two of the needle-work editors are coming out to see my quilts again! This time - the quilts I have made or any that are modern - no antiques. They did not say they had to have original designs, they just emphasized NEW work. I promised to have something ready for them to see and I am inviting some of my friends to send in a quilt or so to me; these I will show to the editors when they come. I do not know that there is anything in it - they have made no proposition; possibly it may be like it was the way before -if they accept a quilt to show, there may be ten dollars in it for you.

Friday afternoon Feb 6th, 1942

It takes a long time to come from Arizona to New York, evidently, unless you come by plane; your quilts have just this minute arrived and I have them spread out on my beds so I can take a good look. I appreciate this chance of seeing your handiwork for myself as well as the chance to show them to WOMAN'S DAY editors when they are ready to make their inspection visit. After pestering me for several days running about patterns and wanting to come out I haven't heard from them for a week. That doesn't surprise me though - I know how editors are. They will call up some busy day for me and want to see me in two minutes.

Feb 26, 1946 Thursday morning

The Vase is still over at WOMAN'S DAY along with the others for I have not heard from them since they were here. However, the editors told me it would take them about three weeks to make their plans and then they would be communicating with me. I cannot seem to recall whether I ever sent you a picture of the Personality Quilt; I never made the quilt expecting to show it - made it for fun and just for Marjorie's fun particularly. I would hesitate to call it a work of art but it is original, for I drew every one of the blocks myself, such as they are. And it is amusing - showing her as a little girl six years old skating to school on up through the years, to about four years ago when I finished the quilt. It is prettier to look at than it is in a picture and the story should be told too or the person looking at the blocks would not know what it was all about.

Where Liberty Dwells

This description with a color photograph appeared in the McCALL'S Fall/Winter 1953-54 in an article entitled "Quilts - Then & Now" by Florence Peto. Mrs. Peto won a blue ribbon for her quilt in the 1958 Storrowton Eastern Exposition and was pictured in color on one of her Christmas cards (year unknown).



"(I) had a preservation motive when assembling the patriotic quilt Where Liberty Dwells... The name was inspired by Benjamin Franklin's saying 'Where liberty dwells there is my Country .' No precious piece of material was cut to make this crib-sized cover; the plan was made to accomodate the surviving fragments of rare and historic American prints. The Eagle chintz in the center is of the Federal period; surrounding patches are from an English toile, about 1783, glorifying Washington. There are vignettes of Washington, Franklin, LaFayette, von Steuben and other Revolutionary heroes and statesmen. There are motifs of William Henry Harrison with Log Cabin and Cider Barrel and scenes of the discovery of America from Chicago World's Fair commemorative prints.

The outer border is comprised of Centennial prints alternated with homespun squares appliqued with small bunches of cherries. The corner applique bouquets were rescued from a Friendship Quilt made for the wife of the Governor of Georgia in 1845. The quilting follows the outlines of the figures, bringing them into sharper relief.

It is quite possible to obtain materials like those in Where Liberty Dwells by delving into antique shops, antique shows and perhaps one's own attic."

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Florence Peto's Hollyhock Wreath as it appeared in June 1942 issue WOMAN'S DAY. For further information see pg 20 June 2, 1942 letter from Mrs. Peto to Emma Andres

A Visitor From Boston

Florence Peto writes to Emma Andres about a visitor.

April 25, 1947

I must tell you of the visitor I had from Boston - The lady had an appointment to come last Friday - 10 in the morning, she and her husband were driving back to Boston from Atlantic City where they had been attending a convention. I hustled to get this house spotless and all sweet with flowers and towels and floors and you know - all the things you do when you want to put your best foot forward. It was a hot muggy morning and my face was red from the effort; I just managed to slip into a clean laundered house-dress, a pretty thin one, when they came.

There stood the handsomest woman I've met in some time; she had on a violet wool suit, a violet hat over white curly hair and she had over her shoulders a priceless sable sling cape. She said, "Will you tell Mrs. Peto that Mrs. Bacon is here?" I guess I've been with the pots and pans so long, I must look like something that belongs in the kitchen to be taken for a maid! But I recovered and we had a nice visit.

It seems she lectures on quilts too -has an agent for a manager and travels all over; she had been to Baltimore and met Mr. Dunton and got my address from him. She had my book under her arm and it was almost worn out - said she used it all the time and recommended it to others. She lectures in a satin hoop-skirted gown and you should see the folder she had, with her pictures on it. There must be plenty of money there and, no expense spared.

My quilts had her gasping though; she admitted she had nothing like them. Said she had been paying women to make reproductions of old designs and then she lectures from them. I take it she didn't make quilts herself. Her name is Lenice Bacon. Her husband was nice too and they greatly admired this little house although from her description her own house in Boston would be five times as large.

She was great for stressing the word "aristocratic"; didn't I think that applique was more "aristocratic" than pieced work? And did I think the aristocrats made quilts - and so forth. She sings Negro melodies along with her programs. She was so interested in what I had to say about textiles telling the story of the age of a quilt.

Hazel Carter, Coordinator of the 2nd Continental Quilting Congress, announced the 1980 Quilters' Hall of Fame Selection Comm. Those serving the comm. to make selections for entry into the Hall of Fame are: Mary Greenbaum, Owner Great American Cover-Up, Dallas, TX; Joyce Gross, Ed/Publ QUILTERS' JOURNAL, Mill Valley, CA; Rachel Maines Exec. Dir. Center for the History of American Needlework; Bets Ramsey, quilter, teacher, Chattanooga, TN; Isabel Smith, teacher, Ontario Canada.

The Hall of Fame was established in 1978 to honor those who have distinguished themselves in the field of quilting or quilt related activities. Past or present generations will be recognized for authorship, workmanship, and/or the influence each had on the broad field of quilting. Those honored last year were Wm. Rush Dunton, Jr., Ruth Ebright Finley, Lenice Ingram Bacon, Marguerite Ickes, and Jonathon Holstein and Gail van der Hoof.

The announcement of this year's winners will be made at the 2nd Continental Congress on Oct. 15, in Arlington, VA.

San Francisco Chronicle 5
Wed., Apr. 2, 1980

Carters Give Quilt To Jordan Royalty

Washington

President Carter and his wife Rosalynn gave an embroidered crib quilt to King Hussein and Queen Noor of Jordan to celebrate the birth of their son, Mrs. Carter's office said yesterday.

Mary Finch Hoyt, press secretary Mrs. Carter, said the patchwork quilt was embroidered with the birds and flowers of the 13 colonies. It was designed and sewn by Mary Louise Brion of Bethlehem, Pa., in an Irish chair pattern.

Associated Press

Florence Peto & Woman's Day *cont from pg 4*

I do not know whether WOMAN'S DAY will use it and if they do, do you suppose they will allow me to tell the story?

March 18, 1942

I have been waiting for some news from WOMAN'S DAY so I would have something to write you; I wrote to them - indeed, I did some work for them on some designs and answered some questions, but though they promised over a week ago to call me up ... I've not had a peep out of them.

Friday

All I can think of, as I'm here sick in bed (grippe again) is how mad I am at magazines! Little while ago the phone rang and it was a long distance call from my friend on Long Island from whom I had borrowed a beautiful quilt to show the Editors of WOMAN'S DAY along with the other quilts that day they were here. She quite understandably wanted to know what was happening to her quilt - I had written her of course to tell her it had been sent in to N.Y. office of WOMAN'S DAY (special messenger, my expense).

Well, all I could tell her was what I told you in last letter, but I thought I'd get up and put on my bathrobe and call 'em up because I kept getting madder & madder at their promise to call & no call coming. So I called & was told that both editors were in the "Southwest somewhere". So I got mad & scolded & demanded action. Finally I got Mrs. Roth's secretary; she apologized for them & the delay & said she would call me back in an hour & let me know definitely what had been done about the quilts.

She has just called. They are sending four of them back to me today - not' suited to their purpose she said. They are keeping "for further consideration" my Long Island friend's and my Hollyhock Wreath. They made the selection themselves when they were here and were enthusiastic about the very things they are sending back so I don't know what it is all about I could cry with the way magazines treat me! They take up my time, put all of us to mailing & insurance & delivery expense. I suppose they think we will be crazy to be in print, so we won't care how they treat us.

April 28, 1942

Not a word from WOMAN'S DAY - and the other two quilts have not yet been returned. Ask me sometime what I think of magazines.

Tuesday morning

May 3, 1942

...Speaking of WOMAN'S DAY - The editor just this minute called me up. Says she has called

twice before... Have had quite a talk with her. Found out that the Long Island quilt has been returned to owner - "not suitable". It burns me up. Also my own is to be returned to me - guess for the same reason. Why does it take them so long to decide they don't like things? She wants to come out to see me again and "talk about quilts" Get more information for which they will not pay I suppose; certainly I will borrow no more quilts for them, nor lend them any either. It was Miss Kohl I was talking to just now and she emphasized again what they were after was "original design and fine workmanship."

That's enough of WOMAN'S DAY. Almost too much. June 2, 1942

I told you that my quilt was not returned the same time yours was. Then Miss Kohl called me up and said she was sending my Hollyhock Wreath home by express; she also said, I could swear it, that they could not use it. Well, can you imagine my surprise when I saw the quilt on a bed in their June number? Someone saw it, recognized it as my quilt, and called my attention to it. It had not been used in their applique article but on one of their how-to-make-over beds.

However they advertise on the same page that patterns for making "our Applique quilt" will be sold! Am I mad! And I'm writing immediately to find out about it. Not even a credit line and they cannot get away with that

Wednesday June 17, 1942

WOMAN'S DAY have made it all right; a nice letter came from the editor saying she had been in the southwest on a quilt quest and during her absence the Decoration Dept. had borrowed my quilt from her Needlework Dept. in order to use it on the beds. She said she assumed they would have paid me for the service. The patterns I made for the April number, she thought had been paid for. Well, considering the crazy way magazines do things, it could happen that way I suppose; ... A small check arrived this A.M.; at least it will buy another war bond. I cannot help but wonder if I ever would have had it had I not written!

Letters from Florence Peto to Emma Andres appear in the Winter 1979 and the Spring 1980 issue of the JOURNAL.