

STEARNS and FOSTER - Part III

by Cuesta Benberry

"Stearns and Foster - Part I" was published in the Winter 1981 JOURNAL and was written by Joyce Gross. "Part II" was written by Cuesta Benberry and appeared in the Spring 1981 JOURNAL. "Part II" contained news of the recent discovery of a 1928 Mountain Mist batting cover and the long missing Stearns and Foster #C quilt pattern. In writing about the background of pattern #C, Mrs. Benberry referred to a Mountain Mist batting cover from 1928 which had the missing pattern.

After my initial excitement at locating the missing Stearns and Foster #C quilt pattern on Annette Amann's old 1928 Mountain Mist batting cover, I began a serious study of the cover. It's surprising the amount of information that can be garnered from one item, such as an old batting cover.

One can explore the development of Mountain Mist's publishing practices. The 1928 batting cover is printed only on one side. Colored quilt block pictures arranged in alphabetical sequence, the company logo, and the copyright date are shown on one side of the cover. However, on the reverse side there was no full-size quilt pattern printed. That side is blank. So it seems safe to assume that Stearns and Foster instituted the policy of printing the full size pattern on one side of their covers between 1928 and 1931.

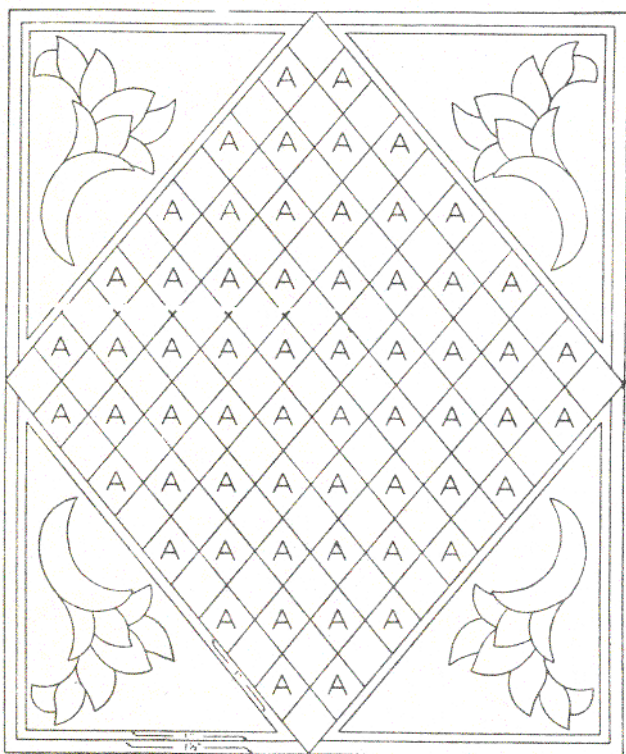
Another surprising development I found was the extensive revision of patterns by Stearns and Foster between 1928 and 1931. Not only were the aforementioned patterns #C and #E deleted from the company's inventory, but some 1928 patterns that were retained were changed by 1931. Some changes were radical; other changes were moderate.

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MISSING STEARNS AND FOSTER QUILT PATTERNS

For many years Mountain Mist patterns #C and #E have eluded the detective work of quilt pattern collectors. About 1968 Cuesta Benberry was given a 1930 Mountain Mist batting cover by the late Lena Moses and found pattern #E or "Cornucopia". Earlier this year Annette Amann of St. Louis gave her a 1928 batting cover. A detailed study by Mrs. Benberry disclosed that it not only contained pattern C as reported in Spring 1981 JOURNAL but #E as well. #E was deleted from the 1931 catalog and not returned until the late 1970's.

All patterns pictured in this article are from the 1928 and 1930 Mountain Mist covers from Mrs. Benberry's collection.



Pattern #E



Pattern #C

An example of a radical change is pattern #R, later called #R Iris. (The 1928 batting cover supplied no printed pattern names, just the letter designations.) The 1928 #R is not the same pattern as the 1931 #R Iris. Not only does the Iris motif have a different configuration, the two patterns are entirely different.

An example of a modern revision is pattern #K. The 1928 #K is simply a pieced basket, with two plain border strips. The 1931 #K Basket of Flowers retained the pieced basket design, but inserted in the basket were two flowers. A pieced "Wild Goose Chase" border was substituted for two plain borders.

A minute change is evidenced in pattern #G Chanticleer. The original 1928 design is exactly like the 1931 pattern, but the angle of placement is different. The 1928 #G figure is placed upright, and certainly does seem to fit the image of a chanticleer. It has more of the "Cock O' the Walk" appearance due to the upright placement.

Considerable revision was done on pattern #F. The 1928 #F is a large six-pointed star of diamonds. The 1931 #F Lone Star is now the familiar eight-pointed star of diamonds, and it does have a different center.

The 1928 #D block is exactly like the Ladies Art Co's #513 Navajo. This #D has a saw-tooth border. The 1931 #D Zig-Zag has an added pieced square in its center, not shown in the 1928 version. Zig-Zag has a plain border.

A sort of "cleaning up the design" was done on the 1928 #P. The sunflower half blooms were omitted, the number of leaves were reduced and the stems widened in the 1931 #P Sunflower. The resultant effect is of a less crowded substantially strengthened design.

A minute change is apparent in the #J Windblown Tulip. The 1928 #J block had cut centers in each tulip blossom. The cut out centers were omitted in the 1931 version.

(Note: Both patterns of Mountain Mist Sunflower (1928) and Windblown Tulip (1931) seem to have been strongly influenced by Marie D Webster's patterns of the same names. Especially note and compare the border of Windblown Tulip with Webster's)

Perhaps one might wonder what are the benefits of such a concentrated study comparing the patterns on the 1928 batting cover with the later patterns of Mountain Mist. One immediately apparent benefit is the tremendous help in quilt identification. Surely there were quilts made from the now obscure designs of the 1928 #R, or the rather crowded

sunflower design of #P, or the large six-pointed star #F. If one of those quilts turned up today, the question would certainly be asked, "Do you know the source of that pattern?" We can reply, "Yes, that pattern was published by Mountain Mist in 1928."

Another benefit to quilt scholars is the widening of knowledge about Stearns and Foster, one of the potent forces in 20th century quilts. Stearns and Foster was a constantly growing and changing operation. We know now the Mountain Mist quilt pattern inventory was subjected to extensive revisions and substitutions. And most important of all, we can trace with reasonable accuracy, the pioneer quilt pattern publishing policies and efforts of the Stearns and Foster Company of Cincinnati Ohio.

References:

Batting cover - Mountain Mist Quilting Cotton, The Stearns and Foster Co. Lockland, Cincinnati, Ohio 1928

Catalog: QUILT PATTERNS - OLD and NEW, The Stearns and Foster Co @1931

Catalog: QUILT PATTERNS - PATCHWORK and APPLIQUE, Ladies Art Co, St. Louis MO @1928

Webster, Marie D - QUILTS, THEIR STORY and HOW TO MAKE THEM, Doubleday, Page & Co N.Y. @1915

Note: In a letter dated May 28, 1981 Mrs. Benberry wrote, "The old batting cover raises as many questions as it gives answers. For example; since there was no printed full sized pattern on the reverse size like later covers,

1) Were there patterns on separate sheets included in the batting roll?

2) Was there a coupon in the batting for ordering patterns?

3) If a coupon was in roll, what was the cost of the patterns?

4) Or were patterns sent free for the written request?

5) No names appear on cover, so were the names listed elsewhere - perhaps in an auxiliary leaflet, or on a coupon?

6) Or were people to order just by letter designation #C or #J etc with no names formally assigned at this time?

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Stearns and Foster Co, makers of Mountain Mist quilt batting will sponsor the 13-week series "Quilting". The show is produced by Penny McMorris of Bowling Green Ohio.

For broadcast times in your area check with your local PBS station. We should all be grateful to Bonnie Leman, QUILTER'S NEWSLETTER for alerting us to this series and to Stearns and Foster for bringing it to us.

