

by Mrs. Harry Yost

This article was published in *HOBBIES*
Oct 1953. We are grateful to Mrs. Yost
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Mrs. Yost in
front of her
mother's Petit
Point quilt.
Photo by jg

In recent
years Mrs. Yost
has enlivened
Quilt Symposiums
and guild meet-
ings with lec-
tures about her
mother and her
quilts. She trav-
els by air and
the quilts have a
seat to them-
selves.

When only five or six years of age, my mother took up the pastime which was to become her life-long hobby. She began coaxing scraps of calico from her mother's "piece box", from which she pieced little four-patch quilts. She used these to cover her dolls.

At that time, about 1887 or '88, the family lived on their homestead on the prairies north of Cozad, Nebr. The country was new and raw and times were hard for the pioneer families struggling to gain a foothold and establish homes on a new frontier, but newly claimed from the Indians.

The dolls my mother and her sisters played with, though only corncobs dressed in colorful scraps, nevertheless needed suitable quilt covers; like any others. Of course my mother's little 90-pound pioneer mother was also a busy piecer of quilts for her increasing family of real children. Mother was the second daughter in a family of nine children, there being six girls before there was a boy in the lot, consequently Mother became Grandfather's "boy" and worked outside with him, while her older sister helped their mother with the housework and the babies.

Mother's main summertime chore was herding her father's small herd of cattle on the unfenced prairie surrounding their little sod house. Every morning the little girl drove the cattle out to graze and followed them all the long summer day, keeping them out of the scattered little fields, and bringing them home

at milking time in the evening. Occasionally she had a horse to ride (whenever that faithful animal could be spared from field work) but mostly she followed the cattle afoot, carrying her lunch box and her "work box". The latter held her quilt pieces, and while the cattle grazed she worked on her little doll quilts.

Her love for quilt piecing grew with the years. Mother finished country grade school (she has always regretted that circumstances prevented her going on to gain a higher formal education, for she loved to study) had two summers of normal school and taught school for two years. The first year she was a private teacher in an isolated Nebraska ranch home, teaching two small boys. Able to visit her own home only once during that long school year, she employed most of her lonely spare time hours piecing quilts for her "hope chest".

In October, 1903, she married a young ranchman, A.B. Snyder, and went to live on their own isolated ranch in the beautiful sand hills of Nebraska. Their home was 30 miles from a town or railroad, nearly half that distance to the nearest ranch home post office, and traveling was mostly done on horseback. Mail was received only a few times a year and neighbors seen but little oftener. When the first child was two weeks old she took the infant home on horseback, over the prairie from her sister's home where the baby was born.

Those were busy years, building a pleasant home in a raw new country and raising a family of three daughters and a son. Through the long snow-bound winters mother kept busy and happy in her spare time with her beloved quilt making. She was ever on the look-out for new patterns, although she stayed faithfully by some of her favorite old ones. Thus she pieced dozens of Lone Stars that beautiful bed size eight pointed star that had also been a favorite pattern of her own mother's. Some very lovely color schemes can be worked out with this design, either in plain colors or prints, and mother had a lot of fun with it. Others of her favorites of those early ranch days, now 50 years behind her, are Wild Goose Chase Necktie Post Card and variations of the versatile star pattern

In 1927 the family leased the ranch to a neighbor for a five year period and moved to Salem, Oregon, to put the two younger girls through high school. It was then that mother, relieved from her endless ranch chores, seriously began making fine quilts for

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fun. Until then her quilts had mostly been made of scraps left over from her endless sewing for girls, but at this time she began to buy materials just for her quilts, searching through a dozen stores, and eventually through the stores of that many states, just to find the exact shade of a color she needed. She has a wonderful talent for blending colors and rarely makes mistakes in that line.

Two of the quilts she pieced at that time were popular patterns of the day, the Sawtooth and Double Wedding Ring. Hers were so beautifully executed and quilted that they took numerous prizes over others of the same design. At almost every quilt show for a while there were several Wedding Rings displayed.

The two youngest girls were soon gone from home and mother would have found herself with time on her hands except that she promptly put it all to quilt making, each new triumph in her art only spurring her on to make another quilt better than the last. She then began to vision a large collection of outstanding quilts, all entirely her own work, and, toward that end, began to study old quilts and quilt history.

Thus the first quilts in her now famous collection were mostly from old patterns (although none are true copies; as she has varied the colors or quilting designs to suit herself) of beautiful old originals. So, through the '30's, she turned out the lavender Wind-blown Tulip the red McGill Cherry and the lovely yellow and white Lincoln quilt; the last a copy of the patchwork and applique quilt which Abraham Lincoln's mother originated.

Her Grandmother's Flower Garden of very small pieces, is different from most of that popular pattern because of its deep watermelon border. Her Broken Star is a masterpiece of color blending, a veritable misty, sunset cloud. Her Irish Chain is different and outstanding because of the purple chains dividing the main body of colorful prints.

As she became more and more interested in the use of very small pieces mother made her lovely Cross Stitch Bouquet and Flower Basket Hexagon both of much smaller pieces than those used in the originals.

In the late 1930's an article on quilt hobbies caught her eye; a Mr. Small of Ottawa, Ill., was pictured with his Mosaic Hexagon quilt into which he had pieced over 65,000 dime sized pieces. Mother wrote Mr. Small, asking for a pattern of his mosaic piece and a close-up picture of the quilt. He kindly obliged

by sending a half dozen of the tiny colored hexagons and a small black and white snapshot of the quilt. mother had the snapshot enlarged, bought yards and yards of pretty colors in Peter Pan cottons, and went to work.

She used Mr. Small's pattern but must have sewed narrower, smaller seams than he did, for her quilt reached bedspread size before she had used as many pieces as he did or included all the intricate designs, so mother had to quit with only 50,000 pieces in her quilt.

In 1941 in North Platte, Nebr, mother displayed 17 of her quilts, including the Mosaic Hexagon at a large hobby exhibit. Although many other quilts were shown, she was awarded blue ribbons in every class and, in addition, won the bronze plaque sweepstakes award, given to her mosaic quilt as best entry in the entire hobby show.

Her appetite for working with small pieces whetted by this triumph, mother began to look about for other designs in which to use tiny pieces. While keeping an eye out for something suitable in that line she decided to do an outstanding piece of applique work. A series of quilt blocks called The Covered Wagon States and depicting the faces of such famous western characters as Buffalo Bill, Sitting Bull, Calamity Jane, Gen. Custer, Father DeSmet and others, was then appearing in the Omaha WORLD-HERALD. These pictures were designed to be done in outline embroidery but mother thought they would be much more effective in applique. It was for this quilt that she searched through the stores of several states looking for just the right shades of various colored cottons; the proper color for an Indian's skin being especially hard to find.

Since her husband was an old-time cowboy by the nickname of Pinnacle Jake, mother put in a block for him too, showing him riding full speed after a realistic old longhorn. The face she drew on the cowboy is very like Pinnacle Jake's of 60 years ago, mustache and all, so we call this quilt Dad's Quilt and it is becoming famous under that name.

Eventually mother found the tiny pieces pattern she sought - on a china plate, showing a most colorful basket of flowers done in painted petit point. Done in tiny triangles, a great many pieces could be used and the color blending made almost as delicate as in painting. It took mother a month to work out the first six sided block, with more than 3,000 pieces

cont on pg 13

cont from pg 8

in the basket of flowers alone. Making 13 more of the basket blocks, she then worked out a design for setting them together and completed the quilt with a lovely border featuring a rose vine twining all the way around the outer edge. The result - a quilt of 85,789 pieces was breathtakingly beautiful. The pieces are so small that eight of them sewed together make a block less than 1" square and 5,400 yards of thread were used in the piecing.

A few months after finishing the Flower Basket Petit Point mother took it and two others, the Mosaic Hexagon and Dad's Quilt to the Nebraska State Fair. Each quilt was entered in a different division and each won the blue ribbon for its class, while the Petit Point won the sweepstakes ribbon for that year.

Mother was still living on the ranch at the time she made all of the foregoing quilts and she credits her isolated living quarters with some of the unusual designs she has originated. Living so far from town, with so many miles of bad roads between her and a store, if she ran out of a needed material she had either to wait (sometimes for many weeks) until they could go to town again or else make do with something in its place. Usually she used something else, and the result was the new and original quilt, one different from any other because of that old ancestor - Necessity.

Although mother and her quilts have been featured several times in the past few years at women's club shows in nearby towns, the wartime traveling conditions and an interval of poor health kept her more or less at home until the fall of 1950. However, she was not idle meanwhile, but made several of her loveliest quilts in this period, most of them entirely original. Her exquisite new applique Grape and Basket Work and her vivid Tiger Lily quilts are in this class. She went to her garden for her pattern for the latter, taking it directly from the living flower. Her attention to careful detail, such as the wee tendrils on the grapevine and the tiny bulblets in the leaf axles of the lily plant, give her quilts a natural and living quality.

Mother has ever been generous with her art, many of her quilts having gone to aid worthwhile causes. During World War II she made a clever quilt, using connecting colors of red, white and blue, which she called The Rocky Road to Tokyo and sold at auction for over \$100. There was exactly 12,000 pieces in the quilt. All of the auction money went to the Red Cross.

A year ago a friend gave mother an old vegetable dish picturing a gay Bird of Paradise in simulated petit point. Working the bird and the flowering branch on which he perched out in the tiny triangles, she made a bed-sized section and added a lovely garland floor-length border, the whole quilted with the closest and most intricate quilting designs.

Some months ago mother flew to New York City for the week of the Women's International Exposition, where she showed her 84,789 - piece Petit Point Dad's Quilt the Grape and Basket work and the Bird of Paradise quilts Dad's Quilt was entered in the international division and won a special ribbon, the Grape quilt won a blue ribbon in the applique division, while the two quilts of the tiny pieces were placed in a class by themselves; as there was nothing else like them in the exhibit, and took the two highest ribbons for their special division. Dad's Quilt and the Petit Point proved to be the high lights of the quilt division of the exposition, there being a crowd constantly about the booths where they were exhibited, and the ladies in charge of those booths grew almost weary answering the endless questions asked about the unusual quilts.

After completing her Petit Point quilt, mother wrote a letter to the Salem China Co. of Salem, Ohio; that being the name imprinted on the back of the plate from which she had taken the pattern, explaining that she had "lifted" the design and made it into a quilt, and also asking the origin of the design.

Very shortly she received an enthusiastic letter from Floyd McKee, president of the company. Mr. McKee was much interested in the work and asked for a good photo of the quilt, offering to pay for same, and stating that the design was the original work of a German artist, Wendelin Grossmann, of Berlin; but since the beginning of the war they were no longer in touch with him. Mr. McKee said the design had proven unusually popular and they had sold carloads of the dishes in that pattern.

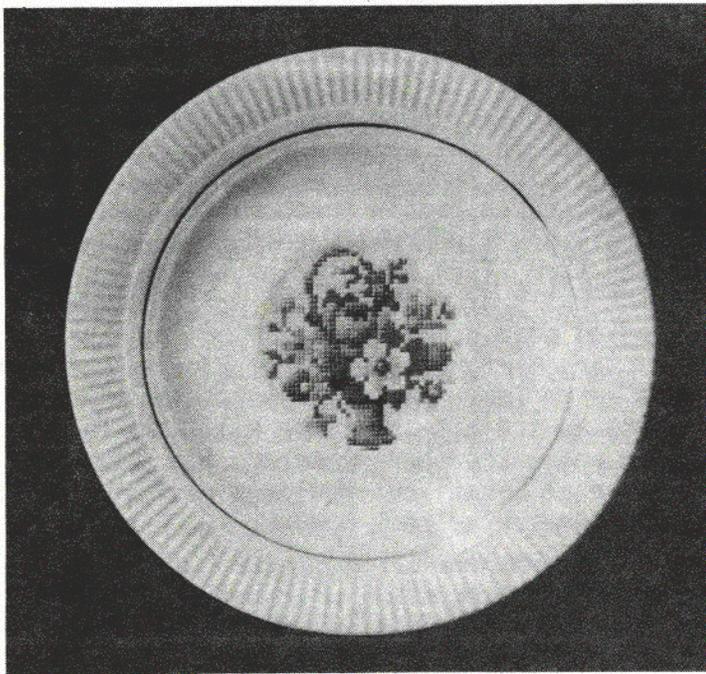
Mother sent the photo. Mr. McKee then made her a gift of a complete set of the Flower Basket dishes in a service for six. The gift china was very fine quality and each piece was banded in 23 karat gold. Since then Mr. McKee has sent mother other gifts of china in the same pattern until she now has a service for 18 in the Flower Basket Petit Point design. At the end of the war Mr. McKee wrote mother that he had

cont on pg 18

cont from pg 13

located Mr. Grossmann in the American zone in Berlin and sent his address. Mother wrote to the artist, telling him about her quilt and sending him a picture of it. Mr. Grossman replied with a letter, beautifully written in quaint English, describing some of their desperate experiences of the war years and enclosing pictures of himself and wife. They have continued this friendship across the seas and Mr. Grossmann thinks there could be nothing in the world so wonderful as life on a quiet ranch, far from strife and war, with time to pursue one's art in peace.

As mother returned from New York, she and her daughter stopped over for a day in Salem, where Mr. and Mrs. McKee entertained them right royally with lunch and dinner and a personally escorted tour through the china plant and over the fine little city of Salem. Mr. McKee, now retired from the presidency of his company, is mayor of his city. The McKees enjoyed seeing the real quilt, whose inspiration had been the pattern on their china.



Petit Point china from the Gross collection. Photo by Ed Gross.

All of mother's quilts have a personal and original touch which makes them so peculiarly her own. Something of current history is often incorporated into them; as when, a year ago, she was quilting her gorgeous Tiger Lily and the papers were full of flying saucer news, so she worked several rows of tiny continuous circles into her design, her "flying saucers." In an embroidered historical quilt, depicting the

history of the United States from Columbus' day on down to the date (nearly 20 years ago) when she made it, mother substituted airplanes, which were then coming into practical nationwide use, for the cannon used in the original old design. She has also quilted the current date into most of her quilts so, if you know your history, you can usually read what was happening at the time she made her quilt, just from the designs quilted into it: It is attention to such detail as this plus her artistic ability to blend or contrast color and the exquisite delicacy of her needlework which gives her collection of quilts their consistent "best of show" quality.

At present she is working out a design using the cattle brands of her own family and dozens of their neighbor's. Some of these brands are very old and quite historic, so this quilt, too, will have a wealth of history incorporated into its millions of stitches.

One thing sure, mother will never run out of ideas for quilts. She says her only regret is that she will never live long enough to use all the ideas she has in her head for quilts.

Mrs. Harry Yost is also known to quilt historians as Nellie Snyder Yost, author of NO TIME ON MY HANDS, a biography of her mother, Grace Snyder. It may be ordered from Mrs. Yost, 1505 W "D" St., North Platte NE 69101. Enclose \$15.00 plus \$1.25 postage.

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QUILTING WITH PENNY McMORRIS

QUILTING WITH PENNY McMORRIS: a Guide to accompany the television series. Distribution of "Quilting" to public Television stations is made possible by a grant from the Stearns & Foster Co., the Mountain Mist Product Group. If you are watching and listening to this series you will by all means want this book. Paper back with spiral cover.

Each chapter supplements one of the programs from the series. It pictures some of the quilts shown and gives some patterns.

The part I particularly liked was the list of the quilts shown with the name and addresses of the quiltmakers and a bibliography for each chapter.

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