

QUILTERS' JOURNAL

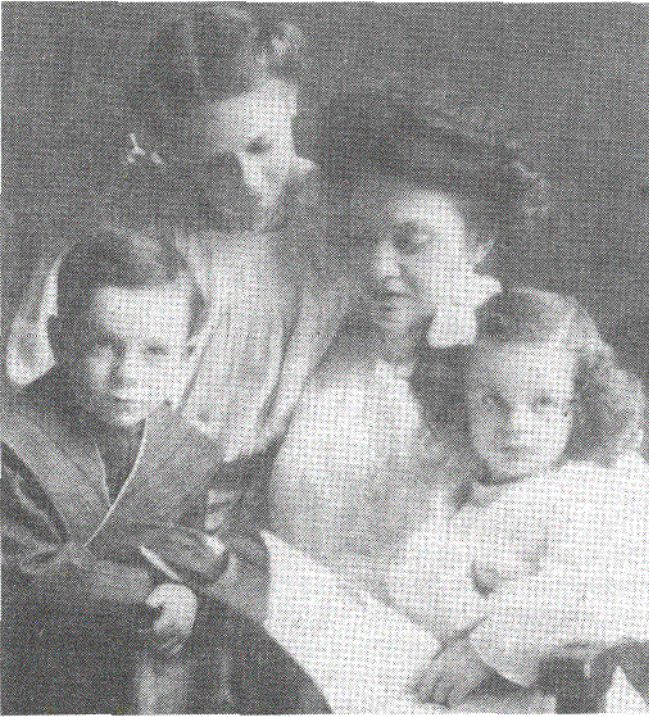
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Dorothy Bartle Bettis



Left to right: Stanford, Helen, Laura and Dorothy Bartle. All photos courtesy of Dorothy Bettis.

DOROTHY BARTLE BETTIS by Joyce Gross

The name Dorothy Bettis is well known to Oregon quilt lovers. She has received 25 blue ribbons since she started quilting in earnest in 1964 and more in other colors. She probably would have received many more if she were not so generous with her time and talents.

Recognized as one of the finest quilters in that part of the country, she is not as well known to the rest of us because she is a modest, retiring lady who resists publicity.

But the Pioneer Quilters of Eugene Oregon are not a bit reticent! They are an enthusiastic PR team for their beloved friend and mentor. Indeed, this story of Dorothy Bettis would not be complete without introducing her group. (See pg 2) On more than one occasion, Louise Smith (see interview on pg 2) reminded me of Mrs Bettis' talents. Suzi Blucher (see pg 13) and others dropped broad hints about using her as the subject of the cover photo and feature article. I had known her for many years so I'll admit I was looking forward to doing the article.

I spent two delightful days in Oct '82 with Dorothy Bettis and we talked non-stop for most of the time. The rest of the time she dazzled me with her quilts and mementoes.

To tell her story, I have used many of her own words obtained from the tape recorder used in our interview.

Dorothy Bettis is a delightful person with a lilt to her voice which is effective and charming. Her sense of humor and timing made her stories unforgettable. All too soon it was time to go home and I left with a strong feeling of envy for the Pioneer Quilters who have such a special person as part of their group

On March 29, 1906 Dorothy Nola Bartle was born in Eugene, Oregon. Rumors to the contrary, Dorothy was not born with a thimble on her finger. In fact she didn't take up quilting seriously until 1965 but since then the thimble has been her constant companion. She says, "I wear my thimble all the time. I expect to wear it in the life hereafter as I want to be happy. I wear it cooking, reading and cleaning. I haven't slept with it yet, but I wouldn't be surprised if I woke up with it on one morning.

Her mother, Laura Belle* Gilbert was originally from Kansas and her father Dr Ira Bennett Bartle came from New York. The couple were married in Kansas and lived there for a short time before moving to Oklahoma which was just opening up for settlement. Their two oldest children, Stanford and Helen were born in Oklahoma. In 1905 or '06 the family moved to Eugene where Dr Bartle and his brother Dr Philip Bartle started a practice together.

Dorothy was born shortly after the move to Oregon. When she was only 14 months old, her mother and father divorced and her father moved to Coos Bay on the coast.

As a child she frequently wondered what it would be like to have a man around the house. She used to have difficulty explaining to her friends that she had no father near. Once she found a man's handkerchief in a drawer. She looked and looked at it before deciding, "Why, that is what a man would use - it is a great big man's handkerchief."

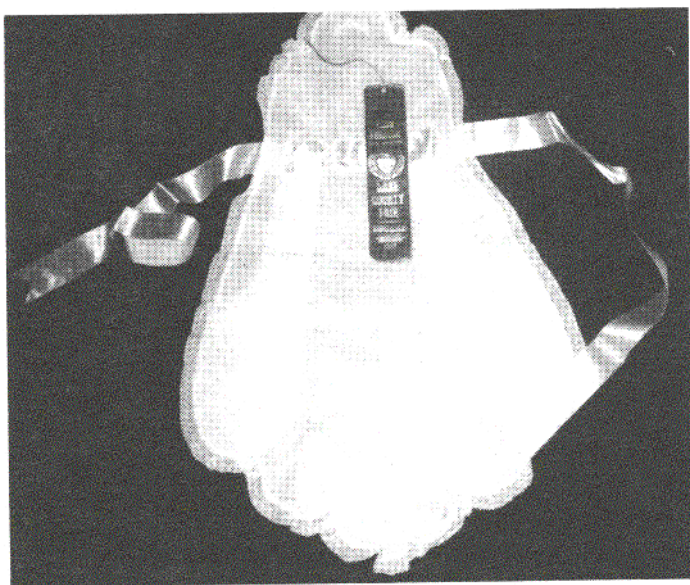
When she was about six years old, her father's mother took her to Coos Bay to visit her father and his wife. She says, "I was crazy about him," but she didn't see much of him after that until she graduated from high school and moved back to Eugene.

Dorothy Bartle was happy as a child. "I don't remember having any problems and I doubt that my mother had any problems with me. She had to work most of the time when I was growing up so her mother took care of us children. Neither my mother or father had much family.

**The children teased their mother by; saying it was pronounced "Bell y"*

"When I was four I had a neighbor who started me out with a doily. Even then my mother always encouraged me and was behind me in everything I did. As time went on I made doll's clothes and learned to crochet, embroider, tat... all those things... even hemstitching. In my generation we were expected to use a needle. We didn't have outside activities and distractions. This was our play.

"My mother worked as a receptionist for her brother-in-law, Dr Phillip Bartle. In spite of the work, she made all of our clothes, sometimes sewing late into the night. I was always eager to stay up so I would say, 'If I can stay up I could thread your needles.' I was almost always allowed to 'thread the needles'.



The embroidered apron that won a prize for Dorothy Bettis at the Lane County Fair when she was eight years old.

"I remember one girl when we were nine years old starting her hope chest. Our mothers all encouraged us to go to the dime store to purchase a printed dresser scarf or something similar. It was from these that we learned the embroidery stitches. They are the stitches everyone is so excited about these days. It is true they are combining stitches in interesting combinations, but they are still the same little stitches we learned long ago.

"When I was older there was another neighbor who took in some of the girls in the neighborhood and gave us sewing lessons. We called her an old maid though I am not sure she was. She taught us to make a french seam, a felled seam and a hem, so when we got to junior high we already knew these things.

"I remember making a doll dress for a contest in 3rd grade with some of the techniques she taught us. I knew better than to use satin - I knew the cotton material would make a better garment. I used all the seams she taught us and won the prize; all because that neighbor took the time to teach us little girls how to make seams."

Louise Smith letter dated 4/1/82

Dorothy Bettis is my special quilting friend. When I started quilting 10 years ago, she loaned me a quilting frame and gave advice and encouragement. This special lady has won many blue ribbons and friends over the years."

In answer to the question as to whether she was a tomboy, Mrs Bettis thought for a moment before answering, "Maybe I was a tomboy... I loved to climb trees and ride bicycles. I really loved to go barefoot. One day I begged Mother to let me go to school that way. Though she was reluctant I kept begging and finally she said 'Yes, only for one day'. 'Only one day' was

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DOROTHY BETTIS & THE PIONEER QUILTERS

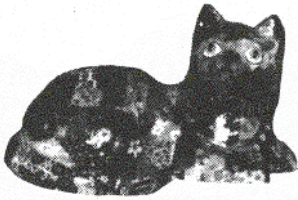
Since Dorothy Bettis began quilting in earnest, she dreamed of having a quilt show with museum quality quilts to show fellow quilters "the importance of fine quilting". She felt it couldn't be done without a quilt group and that a quilt group would have a better chance of survival with a quilt shop in town. When Louise Smith and Belva Greenleaf opened their quilt shop, she felt the time was ripe.

In 1975 Mrs Bettis, Louise Smith and Martha Allwander phoned all of their quilting friends and acquaintances and asked them to come to a meeting. About 20 showed up and the Pioneer Quilters was born.

They pay no dues, have no officers and have no by-laws. What they do have is a weekly, friendly get-together at someone's home to work on quilts and quilt projects. About 20-25 show up at the meetings with some regulars coming every time.

According to Suzi Blucher, prominent member of the group, "Dorothy Bettis is one of the glues that stick us together."

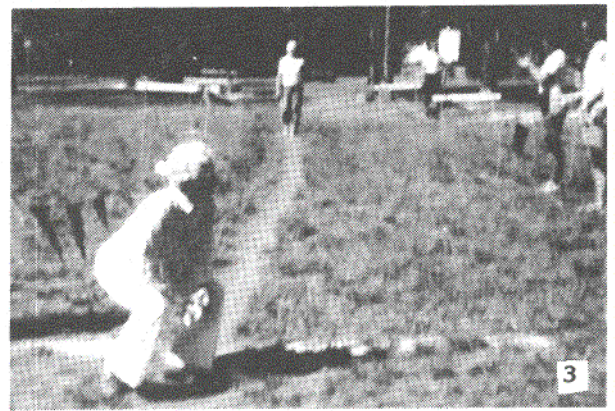
The group has produced an unusually large number of fine quilters such as Donna Andrews and Suzi Blucher. They feel it is due in no small part to their mentor, Dorothy Bettis, who "encourages fine quilting" at every opportunity."



1) Dorothy Bettis and husband Kenneth assist in the setting up of a quilt show and demonstration at a shopping mall sponsored by the Pioneer Quilters. 2) DB with Pineapple quilt which was made from a Mountain Mist pattern #108 ca 1969. It took a first place

ribbon at the Lane County and Oregon State Fairs and was shown at the invitational Mountain High Show at Mt Hood in 1979. 3) DB at the Sisters, Ore "Quilter's Run" held in July '82. She walked the three miles of the "run" and broke into a run just before the finish line. Dorothea Kincaid brings up the rear. 4) DB at the quilting frame with her Lotus which was finished this year. 5) DB sewing room. "A place for everything and everything in its place".

The Patched Cat of real fabric on a mold is used as a door stop just to the right of the sewing machine and gazes in constant adoration at her mistress.



enough because I -was the only one in the whole school with bare feet.

"The school seemed big to me. It was only around the corner so I could walk. I wasn't a spectacular student but I loved school Anyway I always passed. Mostly though I loved the kids.

Jean Wells - letter of 7/25/82

"You... radiate a warmth and sincerity that is very reassuring."

"Mother let me take piano lessons which I liked. I stayed with it all the way through school. Then I didn't touch it again until after I was married and we got a piano for our little boy. When I began to play my husband said it was pretty terrible - which it probably was - but what he said hurt me too much and I never tried again. My son became quite good and I helped him when I could.

"Frank Bass, my step-father, had been married to one of mother's good friends in Oklahoma. They kept in touch when mother and papa moved to Eugene. When the friend died, Mr Bass came courting mother. I was 12 and the only one of the children who watched her get married. I went with mother and her new husband back to Oklahoma.

Dorothy Kincaid interview 10/22/82

"I call her the Grande Dame of quilting"

"We lived in Carmen, a little town in Oklahoma where there was little to do outside of school. We didn't even have dances, but we did have movies on Saturday night.

"I remember the first time I went to a movie in the town. I went with a neighbor girl and when I said something about a person we saw in the audience, she nudged me and whispered, 'Shhhh, their relatives are right behind us!' I learned very quickly that in a small town everyone knows everyone and almost everyone is related. One couldn't talk about anyone until you knew who was who.

"My stepfather had made the Cherokee Run* so he had a farm. The farm was rented out so we lived in town during the school year. In the summer we had to go out to his former home to cook for the harvesters. That was quite an experience! My mother and I did it all. We had thrashing machines... horses were before my time.

* *The Cherokee Strip was opened for the Cherokee Land Run by the federal government to homesteaders.*

"The school was small and everybody was popular." Mrs Bettis feels small schools are best because it is important for teenagers to feel they are participating and in small schools every student can have a part in a play, sing in the chorus or do something.

"After we moved to Oklahoma, mother did not work anymore. She loved to see what I could do and always encouraged me. She never denied me anything I needed or even thought I needed. I did a lot of embroidery. I designed some dresses.

"Mother always gave me a feeling I could do anything I wanted to do. She didn't brag but she let me know she felt I was 'pretty good'.

"When I was 18, I graduated from high school in Oklahoma in a dress I designed. I decided to attend the Univ of Oregon in Eugene where my sister lived. My father, uncle and cousin were all doctors and I wanted to be a doctor too.



"After a short time with my sister, I went to live with my uncle. I worked at the hospital switchboard for two years to pay for my education before realizing I just couldn't afford to continue.

"My uncle and cousin suggested that if it appealed to me, I could go into the hospital as an X-ray technician. I worked there for sometime learning about the machines. Eventually the technician who was teaching me resigned, so I took her place with the hospital's promise that they would increase my wages as I became more proficient. My wages started at \$10. a month, went up to \$20. the next month and so on until I eventually received full wages.

-cont on pg 12

"It was a wonderful opportunity for me. The hospital paid a man from the company who made the machines to come for a full week to train me. In those days there was no school where one could learn to be a technician. One had to do it on one's own. That's why it was so exciting and wonderful to have this company man train me on my own machines. I was lucky.

"One had to work for two years before being registered. I worked my two years and became registered right there. Then I was offered a job in Pasadena, Calif - a good job at the Pasadena Hospital (since named the Huntington Memorial Hospital). I chose Pasadena for the simple reason I had been in Eugene a long time and I felt it was time to 'go somewhere'. I wanted to see 'something else' and I could have a job there.

"I met Kenneth Bettis, my future husband, in California. I had known his aunt and uncle in Eugene. When I moved down to Pasadena they asked me to come over to meet their nephew. My first reaction was, 'Isn't that a funny little old man? He was really only a year older than I but he was quite small.

"We were married in 1930 just nine months later. Our first baby George Ira (called Joe) was born in 1932.

Unknown friend at Quilt Colorado '82

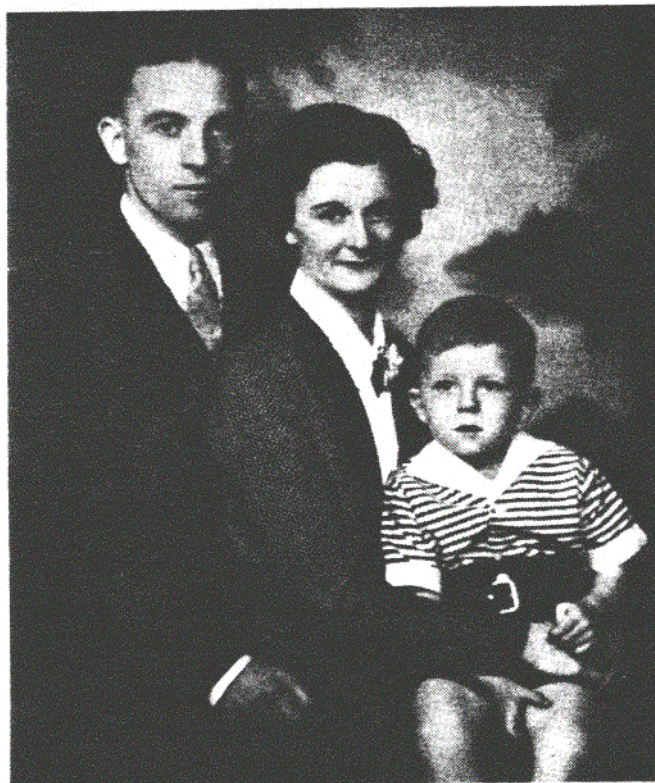
"The first time I went to a meeting of the Pioneer Quilters, the others all knew each other and didn't have time to speak to me. Dorothy Bettis came right over to talk to me. She is such a warm, accepting person. She makes one feel right at home and thoroughly approved of."

"This was during the depression when jobs were very difficult to find so when Kenneth was let off at the service station I supported the family by working fulltime as an X-ray technician.

"Eventually Kenneth was able to land a job in a paint store as a delivery truck driver. He worked up to be a clerk, then got a job in another paint store and was transferred to Long Beach. Joe was about six when we moved.

"Joe was a tiny little baby, allergic to many things and would never eat. He also had a rare disease known as pigmented hives which medical books call a semi-tropical or tropical disease. His allergies caused the hives which in their first stage must have itched

badly. Later they turned dark or became pigmented. The many doctors who examined him prescribed sun and fresh air on the pigmented skin. This was difficult." If he were dressed they didn't show, but if his mother followed the doctor's advice the other mothers saw the ugly blotches and would take their children away for fear whatever he had was catching. Though Mrs Bettis could understand their fears it was still a difficult situation. Fortunately they disappeared at puberty.



The young mother had missed the "joy of being a mother" with her first born and was eager to have another baby. Probably because of her long exposure to X-rays she was not able to have any more. The Bettises applied to an adoption agency where they were told because they already had one child they couldn't adopt another. They began telling everyone they knew they wanted a baby. It wasn't long before their minister heard of a pregnant woman in the neighborhood who couldn't keep her baby.

The woman's doctor interviewed the family and was quite indignant when he heard why the adoption agency felt the couple shouldn't have a baby. He felt Joe needed a brother and the new baby would need a brother. The family should have the baby!

"The baby was born Feb 15, 1941. We went to pick him up at the hospital when he was only a few days old. We allowed Joe to stay

home from school so we could all go to bring our new family member home. We named him Stanford Neal for my brother and cousin. He is called 'Stan' though he has always wished he had been named 'Bartle' so we could call him 'Bart'. On the way home the baby cried to beat the band and Joe, who was about eight, laughed and laughed. He thought that was really funny. He was always good to his little brother."

This time Mrs Bettis did not work. She enjoyed being with the boys and spent a great deal of time on the beach in Long Beach near their home.

"My husband may have objected to my piano playing, but he never objected to my sewing. I made all of the boys' shirts. Some children don't want to wear clothes their mother made for them, but I made them just the way they wanted so they loved them. They thought they couldn't wear shirts made by anyone else. They wore them for years and years. Maybe there is some of that material from those little shirts in some of my quilts."

Kenneth Bettis worked swing shift for Cal Ship during WW II which meant Dorothy was alone with the boys in the evening. He really didn't like the work because he felt everyone seemed to want every bit of money they could get for the least amount of work they could get by with. They seemed to take advantage of every situation, which was not the way he had been raised. It made him uncomfortable.

Ada Moldofsky interview 10/22/82

"Dorothy Bettis has always been nice and so supportive. She quilts more than most in the group... the rest stop and talk but not Dorothy. When we are sitting around the frame, she will gently remind us "ladies, we should be quilting."

The young couple finally decided to rent their houses in Long Beach and Pasadena and return to Oregon. Mr Bettis applied for a job with the railroad and became a fireman.

Housing in Eugene was difficult but a house owned by Mr Bettis' sister became available so the family moved in. Joe was in sixth grade while Stan wasn't yet school age.

As a fireman with the railroad, Kenneth Bettis was on call at any time night or day. When called he would be gone from home for several days. He hated to be away from his family so when the war was over he became a paint contractor. He was fast, clean and knew paint and painting from his early job with the paint stores, so he did quilt well.

Kenneth Bettis passed away in May 1982 after a long and exhausting illness. Their bachelor son, Joe, who lives in Eugene helped his mother through this very difficult period.

Mrs Bettis recalled, "Kenneth and I did a lot of traveling over the United States. Wherever we stopped we would always look in the phone book to see how many Bartles and Bettis' there were in town. In the US there were all kinds of Bettis' and no Bartles. In Australia there were all kinds of Bartles and no Bettis'. We figured that Bartie must be English, but we really don't know where they come from that far back. I guess we're just plain American.

Donna Andrews: Interview 10/22/82

"I've known Dorothy Bettis for 7 years. I met her while she was working at the County Fair where I also saw her quilts. She really inspired me to take tiny stitches. She is very generous with her time and is forever wanting to help someone. When the Club is demonstrating, she is the first to encourage people to sit down with us and try quilting."

"In our marriage he let me go my way and I let him go his. He loved to go hunting and fishing. I liked to go with him, but I didn't like to kill animals. After I became hooked on quilting that was 'my way'."

Suzi Blucher interview 10/22/82

"Consciously and unconsciously, Dorothy Bettis has started many people on "fine quilting". To have her as part of the group is like having what the Japanese call a "National Treasure" always available for consultation."

Mrs Bass, Mrs Bettis' mother, came to Oregon to be with her two daughters after her husband died. "She made quilts after I left home. Occasionally she quilted with her church group but she preferred to send her own quilts out to be quilted.

There was one quilt in particular she loved... a Lone Star she had made in pastels. She had others but that was the one she loved. Neither my sister nor I cared for it. Do you know after she died we couldn't find that quilt. I suspect she gave it to someone who would appreciate it because neither of us liked it. To this day we don't know where it is. You can bet we would love to have it now... maybe we would even like it."

Later Mrs Bass enjoyed making quilts for "the needy" on an old treadle machine from fabrics and scraps supplied by her church. After she pieced the tops, her two daughters would make the "innards" by piecing some of the donated fabrics or sometimes using old blankets. (Batts were too expensive.) When they had them all ready she would set up the card table and tie them. She wanted them to be pretty. Mrs Bettis says, "They were pretty and bright. I would say she was good."

Mrs Bettis treasures the quilts she has inherited. A Turkey Track made during the Civil War by her great-grandmother has been handed down from daughter to daughter. Her grandmother made a 4-Patch variation which she gave to her daughter as a wedding present. Mrs Bettis acknowledges, "Some-day I'll pass them on to my sister's daughter."

In a telephone conversation (Dec 3 '82) Horty Reed's comments about her good friend Dorothy Bettis, seem to sum up the depth of feeling friends have her.

"Dorothy Bettis is always willing to help anyone, anytime, anywhere. She not only makes beautiful quilts herself but she encourages everyone to make beautiful quilts. Her life is an example to me."

Mrs Bettis' large collection of pigs (it numbers nearly 500) is also proof of her friends' devotion. She has pigs made of fabric, ivory, ceramic and wood... even one made of coal from Appalachia. They hang from the ceiling, stand on shelves and have even taken over the organ. Indeed, she may have to move out of her house if her friends continue to bring or send pigs for her collection. No matter, Dorothy Bettis loves them all and the givers too.

* * * * *

Dorothy Bettis and Donna Andrews were finalists in the 1977 GOOD HOUSEKEEPING QUILT Contest. They have been looking for other Oregon finalists without success. If you have any information, they would appreciate hearing from you. Please address them c/o QUILTERS' JOURNAL, Box 270, Mill Valley, CA 94942

DOROTHY BETTIS SAYS

"I always need a quilting block on each quilt. Most patterns sew the blocks together so there is a seam down the center of every adjoining block. I have to change that unit because I want a smooth block for that quilting. I don't have those seams"

I never use a print on the back of the quilt because all of the work I put into it would be lost."

"I always sew a printed label 'Handmade by Dorothy Bettis' on the back of the quilt. I wish I had purchased the fancy embroidered labels because the labels on my early quilts have faded considerably."

"My borders are always original. I work them out full scale to decide what and how to quilt it. I use a large roll of wrapping

paper. I find that when I am trying to decide how to finish a quilt, if I pick the hard way, it is invariably the right way."

"Double Wedding Ring, Dresden Plate, and Grandmother's Flower Garden are three patterns I don't care for. I've seen too many of them. They were made during the 30s Women needed something to do and when the country gets into a jam and can't spend the money going out, one finds oneself doing something at home. One can make a quilt out of the scrapbag and at that time many women were making quilts out of flour sacks so they didn't cost much."

"When someone wants help, I like to work one-to-one in my own home. I hope I might inspire someone to quilt and to do fine work. To spur someone on to do lots of quilting is what pleases me most."

DOROTHY BETTIS - QUILT AMBASSADOR



In 1976 while the Bettises were on a trip to Australia they had three days stop-over in Fiji. They hired a little native boy to take them to several of the native "villages". At the "craft village" they met Maria Rawaci who was in charge of the crafts being made in her village.

She showed them through her house where they could and did buy some things. Mrs Bettis noticed a colorful cover on a cot, done in squares with yarn which appeared to be quilt blocks. She offered to buy it but it became apparent they didn't wish to sell it. The Bettises left without it but it gave Dorothy Bettis an idea.

"When we returned to the hotel, I decided to finish a quilt block I was working on and embroidered an inscription on the back, "To Maria from Dorothy, U.S.A.". Then I wrote out instructions on how to make a quilt and urged her to try to make one. We entrusted them to our guide and set out for the airport. As we were passing the market, we saw Maria! We had a little visit during which she expressed interest in making a quilt and told us she read English. I promised to send her books and I thought she might be able to do it with the help of my block and instructions plus the books.

"When I got home, I told the Pioneer Quilters all about Maria and suggested we make a friendship quilt for her. It would be something she could learn from and it might help cement relations between our countries. Well, the group really went for the idea and that's how we made Maria a quilt."

Now they had a problem of how to get it to her. If it were mailed she might never get it and it was too large to be carried around for long. Finally a professor from the college and his family who wanted to get away from the cities and into the villages



A few years ago, the Northwest Quilters phoned Mrs Bettis to ask her to come to Portland and bring some of her quilts with a few friends and their quilts. They wanted her to meet Mr Kuzui Nihonmatsu and a group of Japanese students from a quilting school in Tokyo who were in America to study the quilting scene.

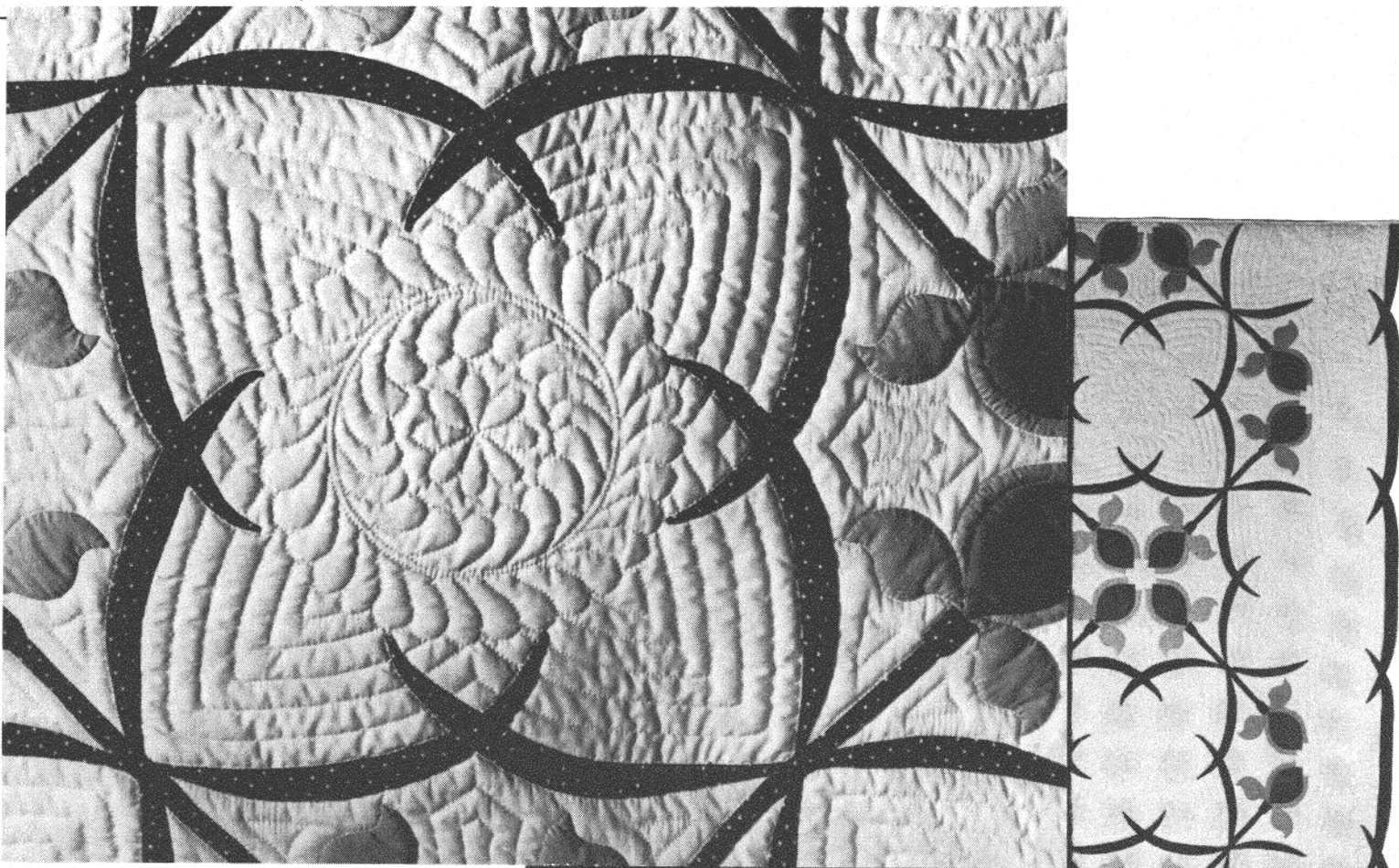
She and her friends went -to Portland to meet the group and everyone enjoyed a grand Show-and-Tell. On their return from China the next month, the Bettises stopped in Tokyo and spent the day at the school with Mr Nihonmatsu. The next year, when the Japanese group returned to Oregon, the Pioneer Quilters rented a hall on campus and served them luncheon. It has become a yearly occasion.

Two years ago when the group of students were turned loose for the afternoon, everyone had a grand time buying 1-shirts and more 1-shirts. Last year the quilters gave each one a Pioneer Quilters T-shirt much to their delight. This year each member gave them one half yard of American yardage, (something they probably couldn't get in Japan). And so Dorothy Bettis continues to spread the word of "fine quilting and lots of quilting."



agreed to take it to Maria on their way "down under". (See QNM #90) Not long ago my nephew went over to see her. Though I had hoped she would hang the quilt on the wall, he discovered she had it carefully folded and put away in a closet.

"I still correspond with Maria and share my letters with the club. She always calls me 'My Dorothy.'"



IRIS BED

Made by Dorothy Bettis

Notice the amount of fine quilting in the detail photograph. The iris in the center of the quilt are in two shades of blue; those on the outer edge are in two shades of purple. The border, which is Mrs Bettis' original design, repeats the leaf motif from the center.

