

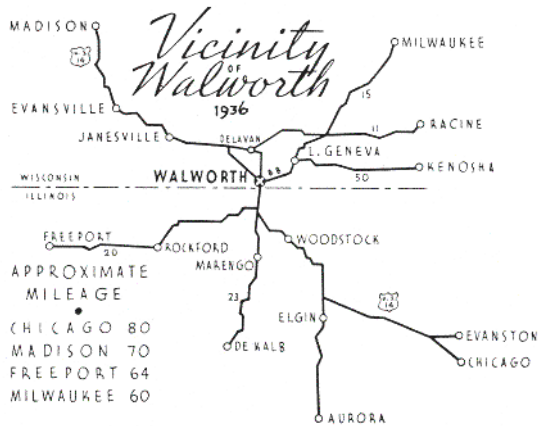
QUILTERS' JOURNAL

P.O. Box 270 · Mill Valley, Ca 94942

NO. 24



MARY A. McELWAIN *Mary McElwain (pictured at right) was one of the judges at the 1933 World's Fair quilt contest in Chicago. She is shown with the winning quilt. Photo courtesy of Sears, Roebuck & Co.*



MEMORIES OF MARY A. McELWAIN QUILT SHOP by Ruth W. Peterson

Ruth Peterson of Hat Creek, Calif. was sharing her lovely quilt with your editor one day and mentioned her mother had purchased it at the Mary A McElwain Quilt Shop in Wisconsin.

In the following article, Mrs Peterson reminisces about her many visits to the popular quilt shop.

My childhood home in Rockford, Ill was only a pleasant drive of 40 miles from the Mary McElwain Quilt Shop in Walworth, Wis. My mother and I often visited the shop.

Walworth was a small town, indeed one could probably refer to it as a "village". It is near Lake Geneva, a fresh water lake, which brought many summer residents to the area. In the summer time the shop was always crowded but there were visitors even in the off season.

As I remember the shop, it was a quiet place on a side street, rather spacious with at least two large rooms. The quality merchandise was neatly arranged in an uncluttered manner. In addition to the quilt items there were many items unrelated to quilting which could be purchased and sewn.

In one corner was a bed piled high with quilts. When it was time for a showing of the quilts, someone from the shop with the help of a visitor, would turn back the quilts slowly and make some comment about each quilt. **

**a booklet entitled THE ROMANCE OF THE VIL-LAGE QUILTS was published by the shop in 1936. It is now out of print.*

Mrs McElwain was a tall woman and when you were in her presence you felt she was someone special whose first love was quilts and quilting. Mrs McElwain and her daughter, DeEtte, as well as all of the helpers were all lovely people. Sometimes when we visited the shop, she was not there but we always had a nice chat with DeEtte. One time when we were there, the daughter told us that several of the quilts had been purchased by well-known Hollywood people.

In the 1930s people did make quilts but it was not as popular as it is today. My mother belonged to a quilting circle in our church. There was another church group and we sometimes asked her why she didn't belong to it. She always smiled and said she enjoyed quilting with her own group.

One day, sometime between 1935-39, when we were in the shop my mother told me I could choose a quilt which she would then make for me. I chose "Pride of the Forest" a tiny blue print on a large white block.

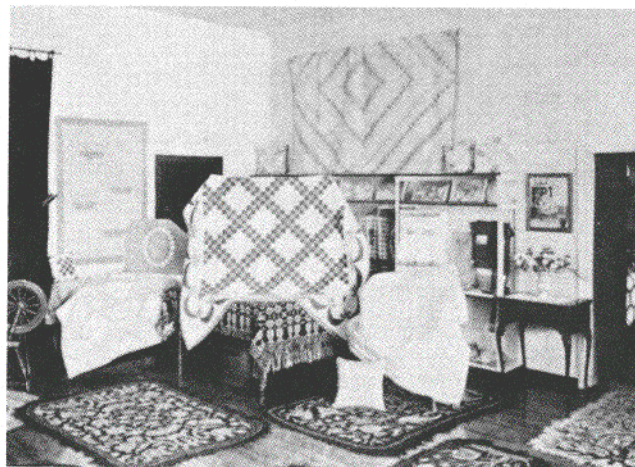
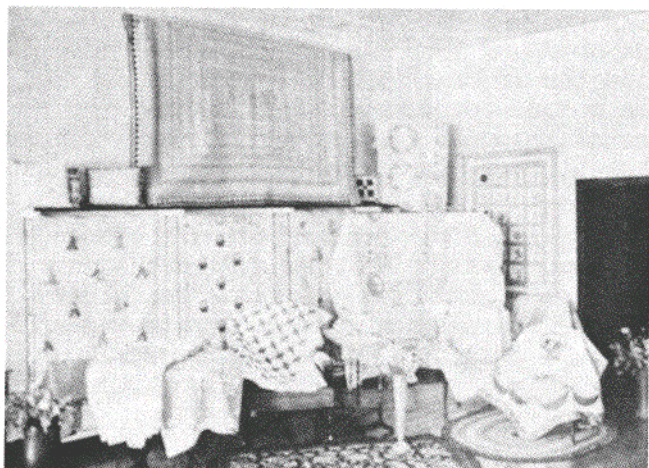
About 1942, after my mother's passing, I brought the completed quilt blocks to the shop to be quilted for me. At that time there were 80 women quilters working for the shop and the cost of quilting was \$40.00 plus the filling (cotton), the backing and the binding. When it was finished Mrs McElwain suggested that I have an inscription cross stitched on one side which would read, "Alice Ring Olson to my daughter Ruth W Olson 1939." The cost was \$2.00 extra.

I have many lovely things from my mother but I believe this quilt is my most cherished possession.

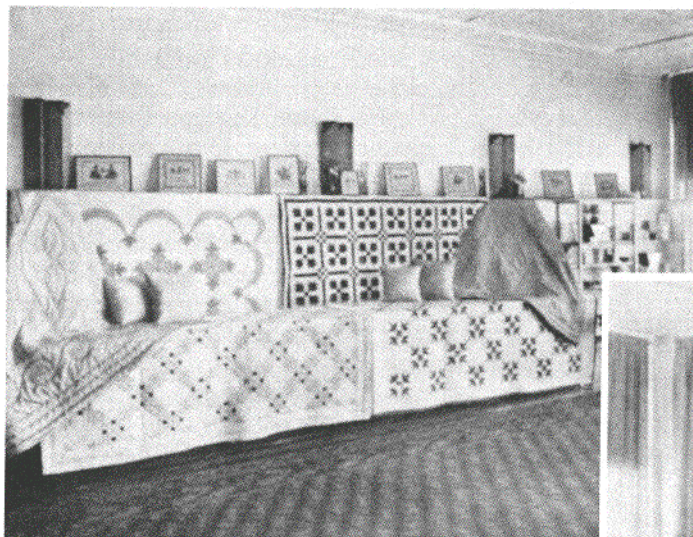
*** Mrs Edward Ashley of LaGrange, Ill wrote in QUILTERS' NEWSLETTER MAGAZINE Nov 75, pg 14, "At regular intervals the quilts were turned back, showing each quilt more beautiful than the last. She would give the history of each quilt... One time I even had the honor of helping her turn back the quilts."*

Mary A McElwain Quilt & Gift Shop has been known as a popular shop in the 30s & 40s. However, new research has found that it was established in 1912 and was still in existence in 1952. The JOURNAL would welcome additional information

VIEWS IN OUR SHOP



Quilts have a quaint and appealing call in piecing and patching fabrics for decoration. The idea is not how many quilts can be produced, but how well they can be made, and into each quilt putting the best of materials, making them masterpieces and heirlooms of tomorrow.



Everyone has a grandmother, and at some time almost every grandmother has made a quilt, sampler or an afghan. The family history is written into the quaint prints and what a wealth of memory clings to the patchwork, which is a symbol of the American home.



THE ROMANCE OF THE VILLAGE QUILTS

I was wandering idly through a village
On a glorious autumn day,
Musing on Life's sun and shadow,
Dreaming of lands so far away,

When suddenly I was attracted,
Something drew me to a door,
Bid me enter, with gracious welcome,
Ne'er such a place had I found before.

Quaint old samplers—rare and dainty,
Dolls that breathed of days gone by,
But the best of all I found there
Was a bed with quilts heaped high.

Graciously, the quilts were shown me
And as one by one they were turned o'er,
'Twas like a memory book unfolding
Tales of beauty, travel and days of yore.

The AMERICAN TAPESTRY was quite intriguing,
Five thousand pieces sewed one by one,
And one never could realize all of its beauty
Until the last stitch was done.

"Just as in weaving the web of life
Each for himself his fate,
We may not know how the right side looks,
We can only weave and wait."¹

Then the MAY BASKET comes, in all of its beauty,
And June with its brides and its WEDDING RING,
The MUSCATEL GRAPE suggests fall with its harvest,
The SNOW-FLAKE—it is such a dainty thing,
So there we have the four seasons,
And each a story might bring.

Here is Nature's most beautiful symphony,
Why—it's "Nothing but LEAVES," you say,
Did you ever think how bare the flowers would look,
If you took the leaves away?

"Oh, a poem every flower is,
And every leaf a line,
And with what wonderful memories
They fill this heart of mine."²

The IRISH CHAIN takes me to Erin,
With the SPANISH FAN I am right in Spain,
The TULIPS transport me to Holland
With the HUMMING BIRD I fly back again

To GRANDMOTHER'S FLOWER GARDEN, fair as a dream,
A garden that all sweetest sweetness holds,
With its quaint little paths, its old fashioned flowers,
Pinks, zinnias, Sweet Williams and marigolds.

"The kiss of the sun for pardon,
The song of the bird for mirth,
But you are nearer God's heart in a garden
Than anywhere else on earth."³



France may be proud of her LILY,
England is welcome to her ROSE,
But the DAISY white, with the heart of gold,
Is the daintiest flower that grows.

A bit of blue and a pink and white cloud
Taken right from the sky, goes the story,
All anchored to earth with a vine of green,
So God fashioned the MORNING GLORY.

And now the gorgeous one of POPPIES,
With hues so brilliantly red,
They used to suggest sleep and the Orient
But now we think of our dead.

"In Flanders fields the poppies grow
Between the crosses, row on row,
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high!
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields."⁴

"We know joys come with sadness
And pleasure will follow pain,"⁵
And we never see a RAINBOW
Without both sunshine and rain.

"Did Grandma ever tell you about the PATCHWORK QUILT
That lays across the sofa in her room?
It is made from scraps of dresses
That she wore when she was young,
And some of them were woven on a loom.

It isn't just the dresses that Grandma tells about
It's things that happened when she had them on,
And almost every piece that's in that dear old patchwork quilt
Holds the memory of a sorrow or a song.

There are red ones for the roses, and blues for 'don't forgets,'
And yellow ones for sun-flowers of pure gold.
There's one she calls sweet lavender that smells like baby clothes,

And one of purple like the sun-set skies,
We never ask about these or the gray one like the rain,
For when we do dear Grandma always cries.

My Grandma told me once that life is just a patch-work quilt,
Of births, and deaths and marriages and things,
And that sometimes when you're looking for a lovely piece of red,

You only find a knot of faded strings.
But she says the red is redder when it's by a piece of brown,
And gray is not so gray by sunny gold,"⁶
Oh, I hope you have enjoyed the story of the quilts
That they told me in that quilt shop, quaint and old.

1 Chester, Anton G., "The Tapestry Weavers."

2 Author unknown.

3 Gurney, Dorothy Frances, "God's Garden."

4 McCrae, Lieut. Col. John, "In Flanders Field."

5 Author unknown.

6 Price, Natalie Whitted, "The Patchwork Quilt."



Poem "written and compiled by Jennie Howard Friend as a Tribute to Mary A McElwain and her Beautiful Quilts" Published originally in a "Souvenir" and the catalog THE ROMANCE OF THE VILLAGE QUILTS.

LIST OF MARY McELWAIN PATTERNS

compiled by Cuesta Benberry and Edna Ford

1. A B C CRIB QUILT
2. AMERICAN TAPESTRY
3. BABY BASKET
4. BABY STAR TULIP
5. BASKET OF FLOWERS
6. BEAR'S PAW
7. BEAUTY, THE (down filled)
8. CLARA BARTON ROSE
9. CONTINENTAL (down filled)
10. CONVENTIONAL MEDALLION
11. DAISY CHAIN
12. DESERT FLOWER
13. DOUBLE IRISH CHAIN
14. DOWNY, THE (down-filled)
15. DREAM SHIP
16. EMELINE BASKET
17. FLOWER BASKET
18. FLOWER GARDEN
19. FRIENDSHIP WREATH
20. GARDEN SYMPHONY WITH 10 SONG BIRDS
21. GRANDMOTHER'S FANCY *
22. GYPSY TRAIL
23. HORN OF PLENTY **
24. HUMMING BIRD
25. INDIANA WREATH ***
26. JERSEY TULIP
27. JEWEL BOX
28. LAUREL, THE
29. LOG CABIN
30. MALTESE CROSS
31. MODERN ROSE PANEL
32. MUSCATEL GRAPE
33. NELLIE'S CHOICE
34. NINE PATCH
35. OAK LEAF & ACORN
36. OCEAN WAVE
37. OHIO ROSE
38. PAINTED DAISY

39. POSTAGE STAMP
40. PRIDE OF THE FOREST
41. QUAKER BRIDE'S QUILT
42. QUILT OF A THOUSAND PRINTS
43. RAINBOW CACTUS
44. RAINBOW STAR
45. ROMANCE
46. ROSE OF 1840
47. ROSE OF SHARON
48. SHASTA DAISY
49. SHELL (down-filled)
50. SHOO-FLY
51. SHIP QUILT
52. SNOWBALL
53. SPINNING TRIANGLES
54. SPRING BOUQUET ****
55. TRIPLE IRISH CHAIN
56. TURKEY TRACKS
57. VICTORIAN ROSE *****
58. WESTERN STAR
59. WREATH OF DAISIES
60. WREATH OF LEAVES

* Original design by Lillian Walker
(see *JOURNAL Spring '81*)

** pattern "used by permission of the
HOME ARTS NEEDLECRAFT MAGAZINE."

*** Design.. copied with permission from
the frontispiece in the Marie D Webster
quilt book *QUILTS: THEIR STORY & HOW TO MAKE THEM.*"

**** Same pattern as Marie Webster
"Rainbow" quilt pattern.

***** Same pattern as Charlotte Jane
Whitehill's "Victorian Rose" made in
1942 in the Denver Art Museum Quilt Collection.



MARY McELWAIN REFERENCES:

Aug '08, "Patch Quilts and Philosophy" *THE CRAFTSMAN MAGAZINE.*

July '09, "Kentucky Mountain Patchwork Quilts" *LADIES HOME JOURNAL.*

Feb '12, "The Kentucky Mountain Quilt" *LADIES HOME JOURNAL.*

Benberry, Cuesta, "The 20th Century's First Quilt Revival" Part 2, *QUILTER'S NEWSLETTER MAGAZINE, #115, Sept '79, pp 25-26*

Webster, Marie D, *QUILTS, THEIR STORY & HOW TO MAKE THEM, Doubleday, Page & Co, N.Y. 1915 pp 96-97*

QUILTER'S NEWSLETTER, #36, Oct '72, "Old Time Quilting: The Kentucky Mountain Quilt by Elizabeth Daingerfield" p 4.

Compiled by Cuesta Benberry

STUDY CENTER

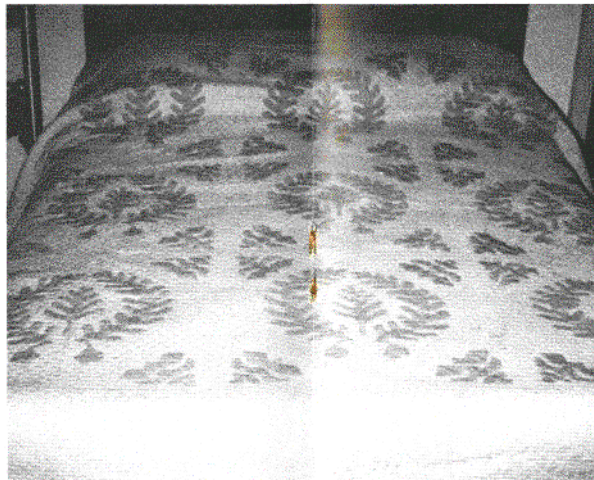
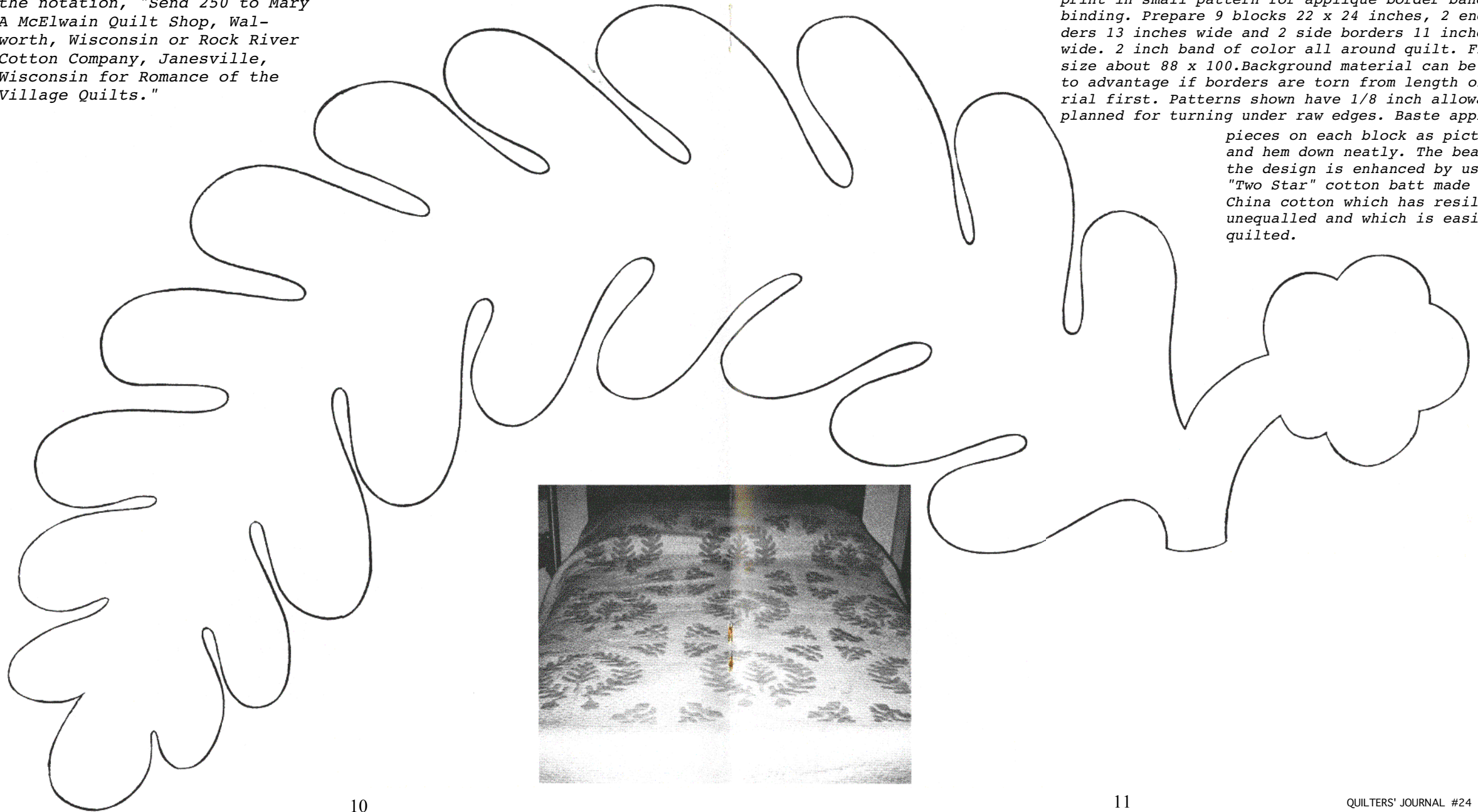
Mary Barton has agreed to take part of her fabulous collection* to the Continental Quilting Congress in Washington D.C., to be held Sept 27-30 '84 for a Study Center. She will have on hand for study purposes approximately 40 muslin panels with mounted blocks, 5 quilts, 10 quilt tops, scrapbooks of published patterns and boxes of textile samples. For info: write Hazel Carter, P 0 Box 561, Vienna, Virginia 22180.

Study Centers have also been scheduled at the West Coast Quilter's Conference in Portland, July 18-21 and the East Bay Heritage Quilters' Symposium in Oakland Calif July 25-28. These Centers will contain material from Joyce Cross' collection. Information may be obtained for the West Coast Conference from DeLoris Stude, 3335 N E 53rd Aye, Portland, OR 97213 and for the EBHQ symposium from Janet Shore, 715 Gelstone Pl, El Cerrito, CA 94530.

See: *JOURNAL #23 pg 15 for the review*

PRIDE OF THE FOREST

Reproduced from a Mary A McElwain tissue paper pattern with the notation, "Send 250 to Mary A McElwain Quilt Shop, Walworth, Wisconsin or Rock River Cotton Company, Janesville, Wisconsin for Romance of the Village Quilts."



A strong distinctive design inspired by the oak leaf. Blocks are quilted in a tailored manner in contrast to the elaborate quilting design used in the border.

Quilt requires 8 1/4 yds background, 6 yds quaint print in small pattern for applique border band, and binding. Prepare 9 blocks 22 x 24 inches, 2 end borders 13 inches wide and 2 side borders 11 inches wide. 2 inch band of color all around quilt. Finished size about 88 x 100. Background material can be used to advantage if borders are torn from length of material first. Patterns shown have 1/8 inch allowance planned for turning under raw edges. Baste applique

pieces on each block as pictured, and hem down neatly. The beauty of the design is enhanced by use of one "Two Star" cotton batt made of fine China cotton which has resiliency unequalled and which is easily quilted.

