

15

# QUILTERS' JOURNAL

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

SPRING 1981

VOL.4 NO.1



LILLIAN WALKER



*Photo: courtesy Eastern States Exposition*

## STORROWTON: The First National Quilt Contest

*by Joyce Gross*

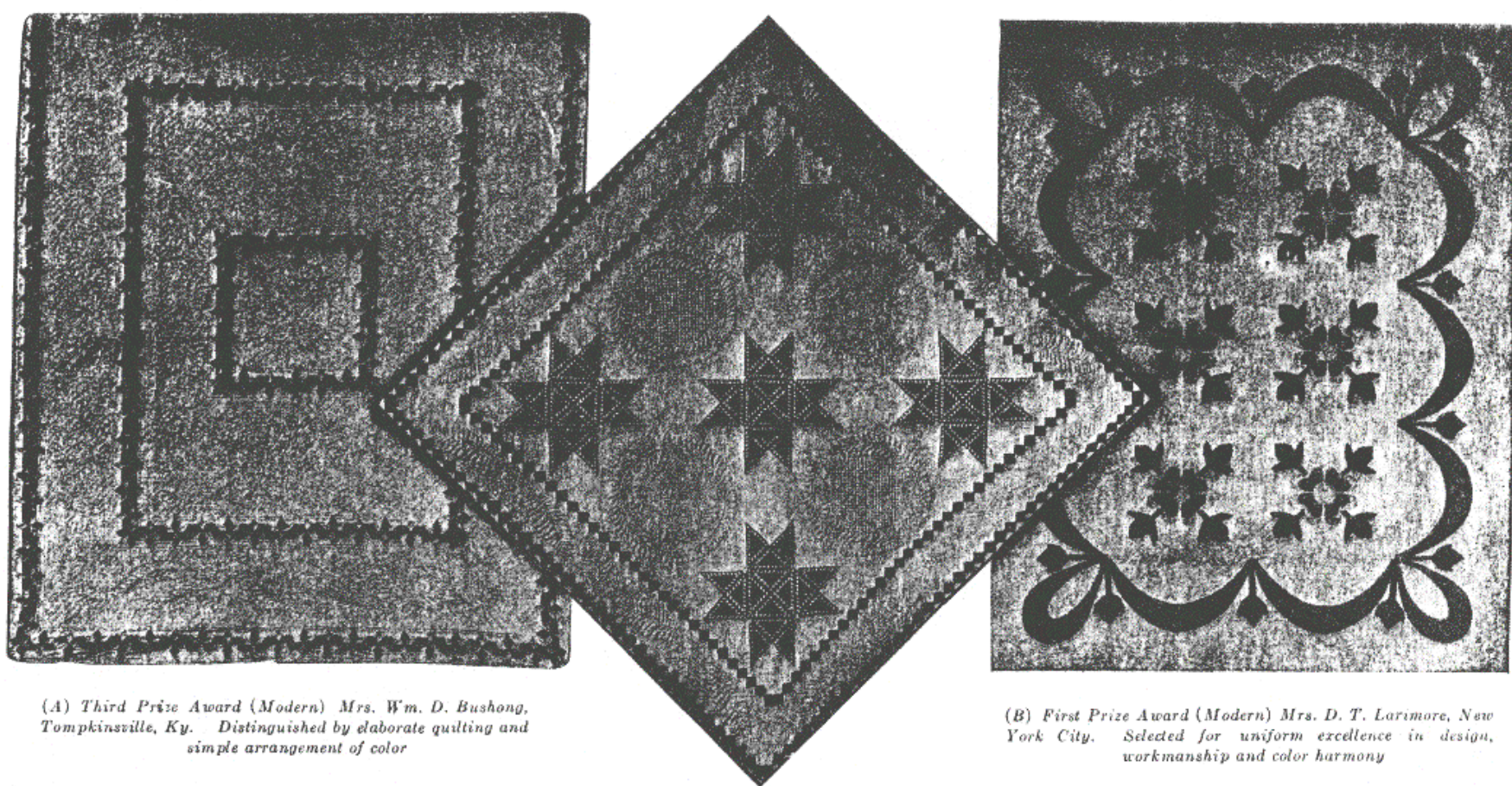
*Not many people have heard of Storowton, Mass. but as far as we know it was the site of the first national quilt contest ever held. For that reason we thought you would be interested in the history of that small, restored New England Village. It is on the grounds of the Eastern States Exposition, known affectionately as "The Big E". The Exposition is one of the largest permanent State Fairs in the country and opened its doors for the first time under that name in 1917.*

Mrs. James J. Storow of Boston, for whom the village was named, was the chairman of the Home Department. She tells the story of the beginning of Storowton in the October 1931 NEEDLECRAFT. 'For ten years the Home Department of the Eastern States Exposition was housed in small temporary building which increased in number from time to time as more space was needed, until they looked as if a large pepper-box had sprinkled them about. These buildings were easy of access and exhibits could be fairly well displayed in them, but they were not especially attractive to the eye. In 1927 it was determined to fit up one of the buildings as an old New England kitchen, and another as a living room of the same period. When plans were under discussion, somebody said she did wish we could have a more appropriate setting for the furnishings a really old house. Those present looked at each other and said, "Why not? We need a permanent building. Why not

move an old house here?' And it was done. No longer is the Home Department the poor Cinderella of the Exposition, housed in a temporary building. From that one old farmhouse as a beginning in 1927, buildings have been added from year to year - always buildings that were falling into decay or doomed to destruction - until there stands a village such as our forefathers built on the hills and along the rivers; first the scattered farmhouses, then the meeting house, followed quickly by the schoolhouse, the store and the blacksmith's shop."

All of the buildings were gifts of Mrs. Storow between 1927-31, and were the result of a search throughout New England for typical old buildings in need of restoration. They were purchased, disassembled and carefully numbered in order to be sure they could be reassembled, brought to the Exposition grounds and put up on the picturesque green. The article describes the buildings and closes with the announcement that application blanks for the national quilt contest could be obtained by writing to the Home Department.

The March 1932 NEEDLECRAFT published a follow up article entitled, "The Quilt Contest of the Eastern States Exposition". Mrs. F.S. Herron, head of the Home Department was quoted "The story of Storowton in the October issue...brought us applications for further particulars regarding the quilt contest ... from forty-one different states." The magazine editorialized "This display is sure to prove of



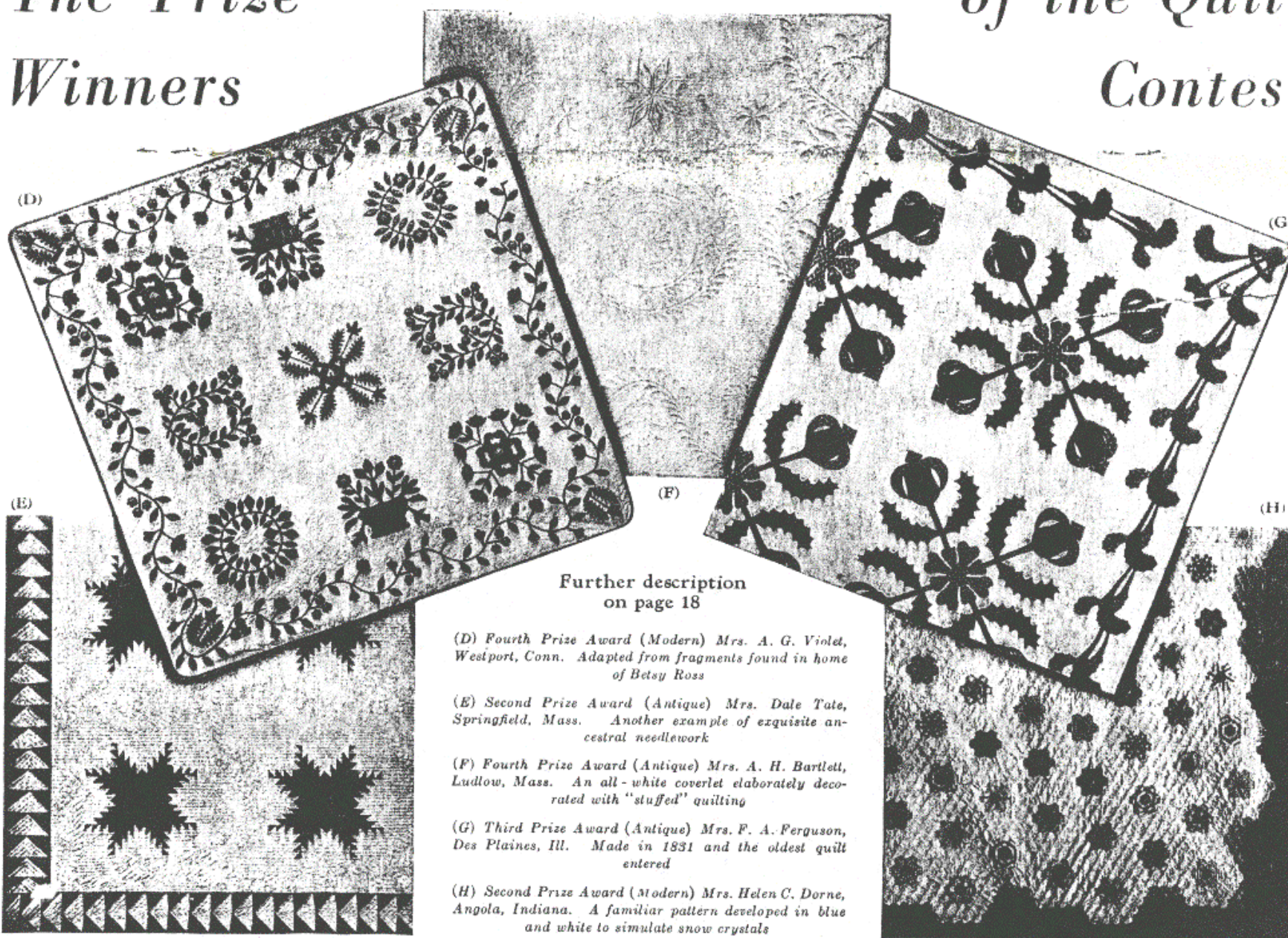
(A) Third Prize Award (Modern) Mrs. Wm. D. Bushong, Tompkinsville, Ky. Distinguished by elaborate quilting and simple arrangement of color

(B) First Prize Award (Modern) Mrs. D. T. Larimore, New York City. Selected for uniform excellence in design, workmanship and color harmony

(C) First Prize Award (Antique) Mrs. Georgia Lewis, Pedora, South Dakota. Made in 1847. The ranking entry in this class

# The Prize Winners

# of the Quilt Contest



### Further description on page 18

(D) Fourth Prize Award (Modern) Mrs. A. G. Violet, Westport, Conn. Adapted from fragments found in home of Betsy Ross

(E) Second Prize Award (Antique) Mrs. Dale Tate, Springfield, Mass. Another example of exquisite ancestral needlework

(F) Fourth Prize Award (Antique) Mrs. A. H. Bartlett, Ludlow, Mass. An all-white coverlet elaborately decorated with "stuffed" quilting

(G) Third Prize Award (Antique) Mrs. F. A. Ferguson, Des Plaines, Ill. Made in 1831 and the oldest quilt entered

(H) Second Prize Award (Modern) Mrs. Helen C. Dorne, Angola, Indiana. A familiar pattern developed in blue and white to simulate snow crystals

Reprinted from Jan 1933 NEEDLECRAFT

The prize winners from the First National Quilt Contest held at Eastern States Exposition (Storrowton) Story on page 4.

cont from pg 4

phenominal interest because of its extensive scope, practically every section of the country being represented; and it may be counted an honor simply to be numbered "among those present!"... We shall have good reason to be proud of the wonderful collection sure to result from this friendly competition -every one of us."

The aim of the contest according to the Exposition managers was "To encourage the revival of Early American handicrafts, and to stimulate interest in good design and carefully executed handiwork."

Entry blanks were to be received by June 1, 1932 and the quilts received not more than two months later. The judges met for three days on August 15 and the exhibit was September 18-24.

There was no entry fee and the rules were quite simple: 1) All quilts were to be made entirely of cotton fabrics, of a size for either a standard single or double bed, and were to be completely finished and in good condition. 2) They were to be modern or old fashioned and there was no restriction as to design. If the owner wished to sell the quilt or make a duplicate the price was to be marked on it. All inquiries were referred to the owner.

The judges were Anne Orr, Needlework Editor, GOOD HOUSEKEEPING from Nashville, Tenn.; Christine Ferry of NEEDLECRAFT from Boston; and Mary Reynolds of Philadelphia. Anne Orr, reported on the contest in the January 1933 GOOD HOUSEKEEPING, "Almost 600 quilts were entered and eight cash prizes were given as well as forty blue ribbons awarded. This task required that the judges have a comprehensive knowledge of old and new designs in quilting." Cash awards of \$50. for 1st prize, \$25. for 2nd prize, \$15. for 3rd prize and \$10 for 4th prize were given in antique and modern categories.

In 1933 the quilt contest was repeated and this time there were 1,000 entries. Word spreads quickly in quilt circles! The rules and prizes were the same as the 1932 contest except no one winning a prize the previous year was eligible.

The third national quilt contest arranged by the Home Department of the Eastern States Exposition was held in 1936. 372 quilts were entered from 39 states. Again the quilts were divided into two classes, modern and antique. The prizes were the same. Judges were not mentioned by name but according to the catalog "were selected from the

home economics staff of the Mass. State College, the Conn. State College and would include women who made a life time study of quilts and quiltmaking."

In 1936 the Village also suffered severly in a disastrous flood. Books and pictures were lost, many pieces of furniture were beyond repair and even worse, records were lost.

It was not until 1954 that another quilt contest was held. The cash prizes were considerably reduced: 1st) \$6. 2nd) \$5, 3rd) \$4. A loving cup was given for "Best of Fair". The quilts were judged on workmanship, beauty of design and harmony of color and divided into seven classifications: A) Quilts made before 1900 (cotton) B) Silk quilts (antique or modern) C) Modern quilts (quilted) This classification was subdivided into applique, pieced, and original design with a 1st, 2nd, and 3rd cash award in subdivision. D) Modern quilts (tied) E) Crib quilts, F) Embroidered quilts G) Novelty quilts.

In 1957 "the Big E" held a nationwide Pillow and Chair Pad contest with over 400 entries. Some of the prize winners were shown on pg 99 of the Spring/Summer 1958 issue of MCCALL'S NEEDLEWORK & CRAFTS. Of the twelve prize winners only two were in a quilt-related category. Anna Hannes of Morristown N.J. won a 1st in the quilting category for "a posy ring and a gay peasant couple dancing on the green," and the late Bertha Stenge of Chicago, Ill (won a 1st in the applique category) for an interesting study of the Holy Family on a creamy textured background. From a Christmas card design."

**A FUTURE ANTIQUE**  
**SOLID OAK QUILT HOLDER KIT**



This solid oak ten piece quilt holder kit is designed and constructed by a single craftsman in his one-person shop.

Dimensions:  
24" wide, 28½" high, 16" deep.

Easy assembly instructions are included with each kit. You supply glue and finishing materials

Send \$82 plus \$3 for handling and shipping; allow 6-8 weeks for delivery—orders are made as received.

(Iowa residents add 3% sales tax)  
Satisfaction Guaranteed.

**Available only from**  
**A DAY'S WORK**

**38 Regal Lane      Iowa City, IA 52240**

The quilt contest returned in 1958 -the result of many inquiries to Storrowton. The cash awards were increased slightly -1st - \$10, 2nd - \$7, 3rd - \$5. The quilts were judged on workmanship 50%, design 15%, color 15%, suitability 10%, appearance (neat and clean) 10%. In original designs an additional 10% could be added in consideration of the designer's ingenuity. All of the first prize winners were eligible for "The Best of Fair" and MCCALL'S NEEDLEWORK & CRAFTS awarded it a \$50 cash prize. Stearns & Foster gave Mountain Mist batting to all the prize winners and American Thread Co. gave prizes of material to all 1st prizewinners.

The Best of Fair award went to Marie Frolander of South Minneapolis, Minn. for her Irish Chain pattern made with a green print.

Jean Ray Laury entered a quilt in the 1958 contest. She didn't win a prize, but Roxa Wright, Creative Skills Editor of HOUSE BEAUTIFUL, was one of the judges. She was so impressed with Jean's entry she wrote a letter of congratulations. This resulted in Ms. Laury's first magazine article which appeared in HOUSE BEAUTIFUL in Jan. 1960. Ms. Wright later became Needlework Editor of WOMAN'S DAY. (See JOURNAL Fall 1979)

Florence Peto, another well-known quilter, entered the contest on at least two occasions. She comments on her entries in a letter to Lillian Walker dated Dec. 5, 1959, "Four of my latest quilts have come home from Springfield, Mass ... with blue ribbons. All of my quilts are made from antique fabrics of which I have a collection." On May 11, 1967 she wrote to her friend, Maxine Teele, "...I am entering two quilts again this year in the Eastern States Exposition in West Springfield, Mass. We may go to the Show for it is outstanding in the craftsmen field. I already have many ribbons taken in that show for my own work."

By 1967 the Eastern States Exposition Quilt Contest had become the Eastern States Creative Crafts Adventure. The Crafts Adventure included hooked, braided, vestmayd, shirret, and rya rugs as well as canvas embroidery. Class VII was quilts and included Group A) patchwork quilts with and without quilting. Group B) applique quilts with and without quilting. Group C) patchwork and applique quilts with and without quilting. Group D) Embroidered quilts with and without quilting. Group E) Miscellaneous types. Group F) Antique quilts. Cash awards were the same as in 1958.

The Craft Adventure continues to be held every year and Helen Bardwell, Director of Creative Crafts says, "Quilts are a very large part" of this contest. It will be held this year Aug 29-30 and contest brochures and entry forms will be available from Mrs. Bardwell, Eastern States Exposition, 1305 Memorial Aye, West Springfield, MA 01089. Entries are welcome outside of the New England area.

The Storrowton Village Museum and Suzanne Ashe, Piecemaker's Quilt Store inaugurated "The Great Quilt Festival" in 1980. It was so successful they plan to make it an annual event. This year it will be held Oct 18-21 and will include a display of new and old quilts, a fashion show, demonstrations, etc. Inquiries may be directed to June Cook, Director at Storrowton.

By sponsoring the 1st National Quilt Contest, the Eastern States Exposition and Storrowton became an important part of our quilting heritage. It paved the way for all of the other contests such as the Chicago World's Fair 1933, the New York World's Fair, 1939 and the WOMAN'S DAY Needlework contest 1942. At each exhibit more and more women were exposed to the art of fine quilting and became inspired to try new, different and more difficult designs and techniques. This all contributed to more interest in producing fine quilts and culminated in the golden age of quilting in the post World War II era. It was the post World War II era that brought us Rose Kretsinger, Bertha Stenge, Florence Peto, Pine Eisfeller and Dr. Jeannette Throckmorton who produced quilts as lovely and elaborate as those of the 18th and 19th centuries.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

*ROMANCE OF THE PATCHWORK QUILT IN AMERICA* Hall & Kretsinger, Caxton Printers, Caldwell, Idaho , 1935 pg 35

*HANDICRAFTS OF NEW ENGLAND*, Allan H Eaton, Harper & Bros, New York, 1949, pg 200

*NO TIME ON MY HANDS* Grace Snyder/Nellie Yost, Caxton Printers Caidwell, Idaho 1963 pg 527.

*QUILTING AS A HOBBY* Dorothy Brightbill, Sterling Pub Co N.Y. 1963, pg 93.

*MCCALL'S NEEDLEWORK & CRAFTS S/S* 1957 pg 6, S/S 1958 pg 18.

*CATALOGS from Eastern States Exposition* 1932, 1933, 1936, 1954, 1958, 1967

*We are grateful to Cuesta Benberry for the Bibliography*