

# Quilt History Tidbits -- Old & Newly Discovered

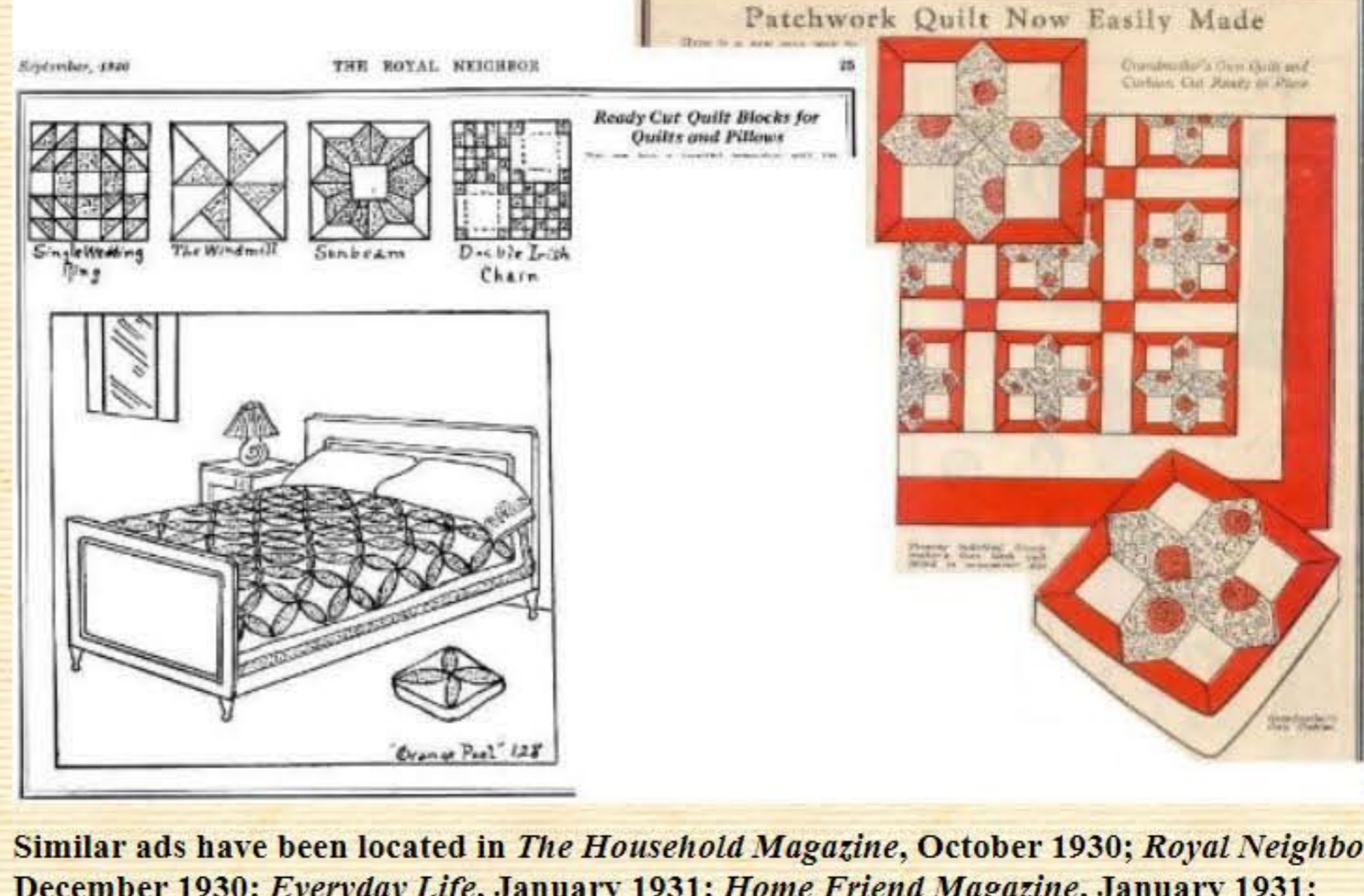
- Home
- Remembering New York City
- Carol Aimes
- Jane Alan
- Aunt Martha
- Winifred Avery
- Miss Clara R Brian
- Nancy Cabot
- Cappers Weekly, Wide Awake, and The Queen
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## Colonial Ready Cut Quilt Block Company

Although short-lived and lasting only a matter of months, the Kansas City, Missouri, business we know as "Aunt Martha" began as kits marketed by the Colonial Ready Cut Quilt Block Company in the summer of 1930. Sometimes referred to as "Ready Cut Quilt Blocks," the ads are quite distinctive in their overall design. The name was shortened to the Colonial Company by the time information was gathered in 1931 for the 1932 Kansas City city directory.

Early pre-Aunt Martha kit ads, often printed in color, typically display a completed quilt or a quarter section of one, a quilt block, and a box pillow.

Illustrated on the left is the earliest available ad from the September 1930 *Royal Neighbor* magazine for an Orange Peel quilt, pattern No. 128. Another ad was published the previous month but has not been located. The January 1931 ad from *Royal Neighbor* for Grandmother's Own, pattern No. 15, is pictured on the right. (The text has been omitted from both ads.)

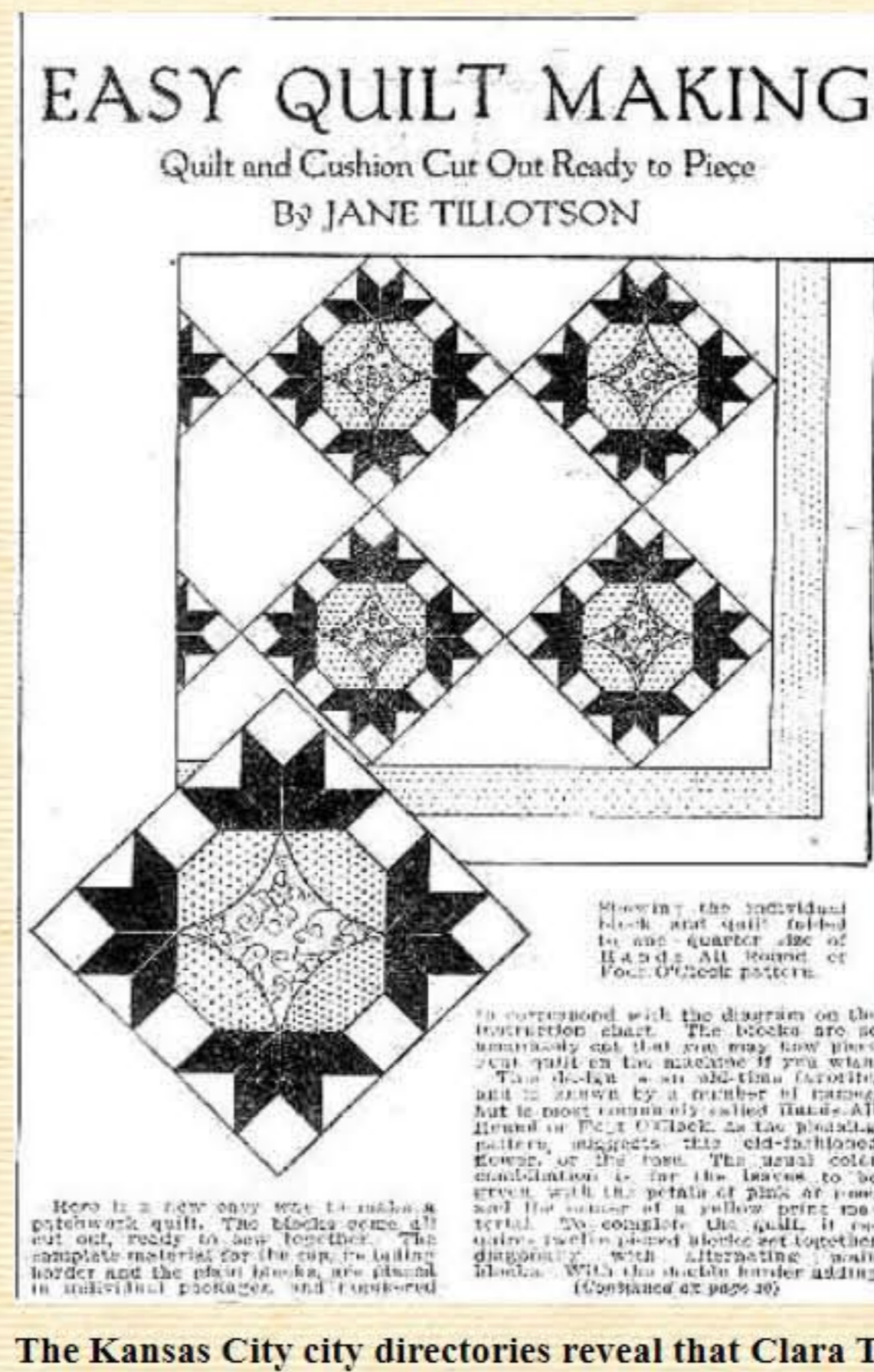


Similar ads have been located in *The Household Magazine*, October 1930; *Royal Neighbor*, December 1930; *Everyday Life*, January 1931; *Home Friend Magazine*, January 1931; *Missouri Ruralist*, January 15, 1931; *Royal Neighbor*, February 1931; *Modern Woodman*, ca. February 1931; *Nebraska Farmer*, April 18, 1931; *Modern Woodman*, ca. May 1931; and *Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead*, ca. 1931.

(Easily confused with the Tillotson's business is another Kansas City, Missouri, quilt kit company with a similar name, the Red-E-Kut Quilt Patch Company, 210 West 8th, but the identity of its owners has not been discovered.)

Founded in 1930 by John E. and Clara (Staads) Tillotson in partnership with Ralph H. Patt. John Tillotson, also known as Jack, had been the advertising manager for Mission Laboratories, a food products company, and Ralph Patt was President and Treasurer of the Walter E. Durham Insurance Agency, professions that would serve them well in their new endeavor as masters of promotion. Mrs. Patt's given name was Clara Maude.

Before the Aunt Martha byline was adopted, *Everyday Life* in Chicago published a typical Colonial Ready Cut Quilt Block Company ad minus the usual illustration of a box pillow for the Hands All Round kit, January 1931, under the **Jane Tillotson** byline and is the only ad known to carry this name. Also identified as Four O'Clock, the kit does not have an inventory number in *Everyday Life* but was sold as No. 235 in other publications.



The Kansas City city directories reveal that Clara Tillotson was indeed the powerhouse behind the pattern business. City directories generally list married couples under the husband's name with his wife's name in parenthesis, then the husband's occupation, place of employment, and their residence address.

However, the 1935 Kansas City, Missouri, city directory lists:

Colonial Company (Mrs. C. S. Tillotson, Ralph H. Patt), mail orders, 3030 Main.  
Mrs. Clara S. Tillotson (Colonial Co.), home 5716 Cherry.  
John E. Tillotson (Clara S.), advertising, home 5716 Cherry.  
Ralph H. Patt (Clara M.; Colonial Co.), home 5005 Walnut.

The 1936 directory lists:

Colonial Company (Mrs. Clara S. Tillotson, Ralph H. Patt), mail orders, 207 Westport Rd.  
Mrs. Clara S. Tillotson (Colonial Co.), resides 5716 Cherry.  
John E. Tillotson (Clara S.), salesman, Colonial Co., home 5716 Cherry.  
Ralph H. Patt (C. Maude; Colonial Co.), home 5005 Walnut.

and the 1937 directory lists:

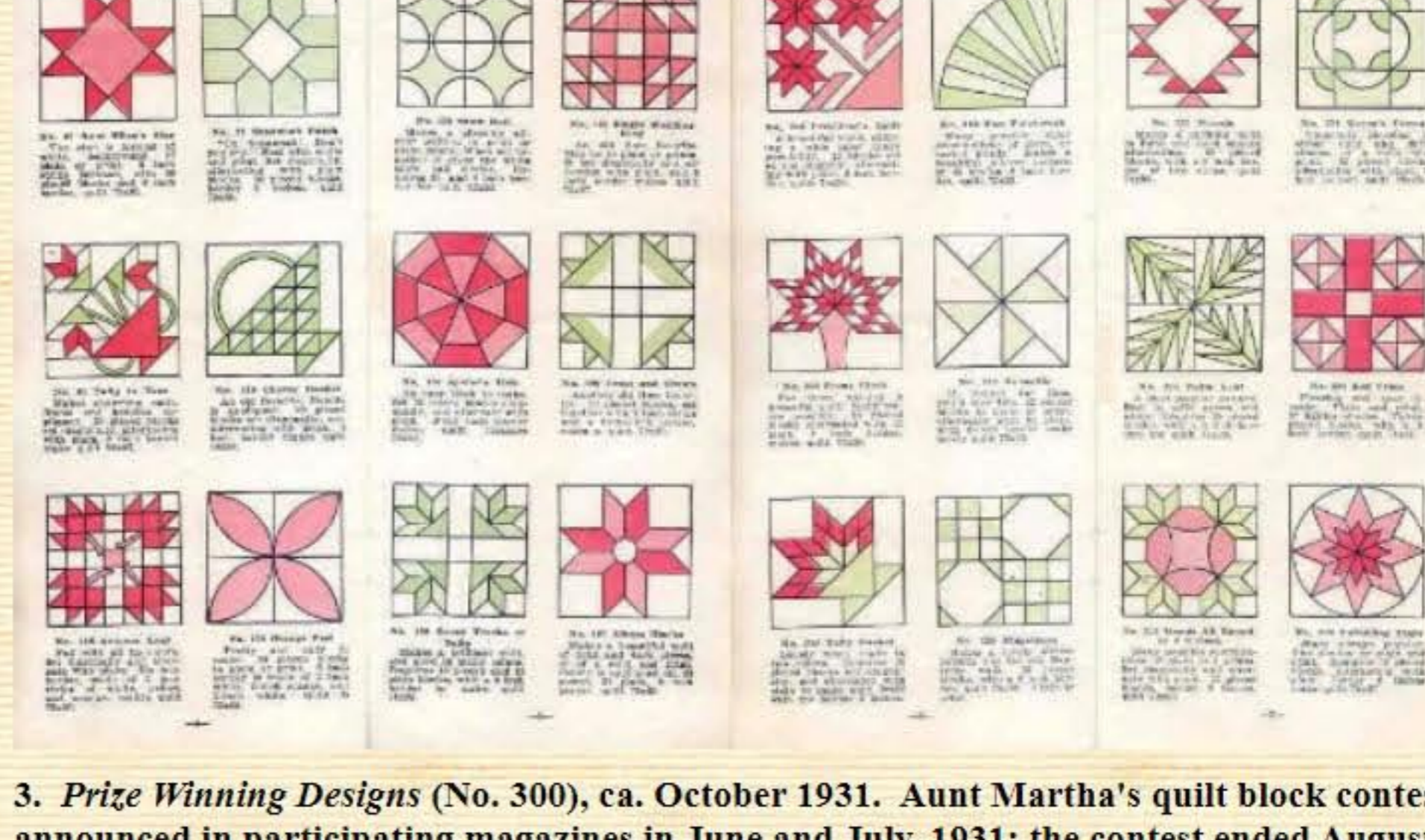
Colonial Company (R. H. Patt; C. S. Tillotson), mail orders, 207 Westport Rd.  
Clara S. Tillotson (Colonial Co.), resides RD 1, Stilwell, Kansas.  
John E. Tillotson (Clara), sales manager, Colonial Co., resides RD 1, Stilwell, Kansas.  
Ralph H. Patt (Clara Maude) (Colonial Co.), home 5005 Walnut.

## Aunt Martha's Pattern Books and Catalogs

There are 16 known "Aunt Martha" quilt pattern catalogs and pamphlets; dates are based on the earliest known ad for each one:

1. *A New Easy Way to Make a Quilt* (no number), ca. January 1931. Contains 50+ patterns.
2. *A New Easy Way to Make a Quilt* (no number), ca. April 1931. Contains 75+ patterns. *Royal Neighbor*, May 1932: "The small 15c booklet, 'A New Easy Way to Make a Quilt', is no longer available."

The company began its pattern numbering from One, and the sequence of the numbers roughly date the patterns. The first 236 or 237 quilt patterns were taken from, or were based on, Ladies' Art Company patterns. In fact, 36 engravings in *A New Easy Way* are replicas of Ladies' Art engravings, 24 of which are shown here from pages 4, 5, 6, and 7 in the booklet.



3. *Prize Winning Designs* (No. 300), ca. October 1931. Aunt Martha's quilt block contest was announced in participating magazines in June and July, 1931; the contest ended August 31, 1931, and the winners announced in the September, October, or November's magazine. The winning designs were illustrated in *Prize Winning Designs*, a 24-page booklet that the printers promised to have ready by October 1, 1931. From the thousands of quilt blocks received through the contest, Aunt Martha was able to greatly increase her inventory of quilt designs with "new ones, old ones, perfectly gorgeous ones, traditional Colonial ones, and entirely original ones."

"My recent folder" *For the Bride* (No. 5510), ca. 1932, and illustrated in the May 1933 *Royal Neighbor*, includes a pattern for the Bride's Quilt that was probably No. 441.



4. *Favorites--Old and New* (No. 5511), ca. June 1932.

5. *Aunt Martha's WorkBasket* (No. 5512), ca. January 1933. A 24-page catalog including two quilt patterns (one pieced, one applique) and "dozens of patchwork and applique quilt designs that I have never before shown you." Edition of 1,000 copies; advertised in *Royal Neighbor*, January, February (illustrated), and March, 1933. This is a predecessor to the *WorkBasket* published in later years.

Get This Gift FREE

This 24-page, colorful book gives two actual quilt patterns, and shows dozens of pieced and applique designs, and many gift and novelty ideas—all things you can make at home at small expense. Aunt Martha's Workbasket, No. C5512, 10c—or use this coupon and if your order from this page amounts to 30c or more, this valuable book will be sent you FREE.

6. *The Quilt Fair Comes To You* (No. 5514), ca. August 1933.

7. *Star Designs* (No. 9450), ca. 1942.

In 1949, the Tillotsons sold Aunt Martha's Studios / Colonial Pattern Company to Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Swenson along with the rights to all the quilt patterns, but retained and continued *WorkBasket*. Quilts were not published in *WorkBasket* for the next fourteen years. (Barbara Brackman in *Uncoverings* 1980.)

8. *Quilt Designs; Old Favorites--& New* (No. 3175), ca. January 1952.

9. *Aunt Martha's Favorite Quilts* (No. 3230), ca. January 1953.

10. *Quilts; Modern--Colonial* (No. 3333), ca. October 1954.

11. *Easy Quilts* (No. 3500), ca. August 1958.

12. *Quilt Lover's Delight* (No. 3540), ca. January 1960.

13. *Quilts* (No. 3614), ca. February 1963.

In 1974, the business was sold to Edward Price. (Barbara Brackman in *Uncoverings* 1980.)

14. *Bold and Beautiful Quilts* (No. 3778), ca. February 1977.

15. *Patchwork Simplicity* (No. 3779), ca. February 1977.

16. *Quilts; Heirlooms of Tomorrow* (No. 3780), ca. February 1977.

## Aunt Martha's Quilt Patterns

Beginning in July 1931, the company generally issued a C prefix with its numbers, but a few periodicals replaced this with another prefix, most notably N (*Progressive Farmer*) and Z (*Comfort*; and the *Temple* (OK) *Tribune*).

Recently discovered clippings from the *Des Moines* (IA) *Register* reveal that Aunt Martha's quilt patterns were distributed under the **Aunt Matilda** byline from December 1932 through April 1933.

Aunt Martha patterns were distributed by NEA Service, Inc. (Newspaper Enterprise Association), 1200 West Third Street, Cleveland, Ohio,\* about 1935-1938 as the Make It Yourself Needlework Pattern Service. One of five major newspaper feature syndicates that represented patterns, NEA's logo (NEA enclosed in a circle) appears in the corner of several Aunt Martha illustrations including this ad clipped from the *Rochester* (NY) *Times-Evening* (an enlargement of the logo is displayed on the right).

**AUNT MARtha'S FAVORITE QUILT**

Oil Calico Print Gives Antique Effect

From the very beginning of quilts, there have of course, been favorites. But as a steady regular in this popularity contest, Aunt Martha's Favorite Quilts stand out. Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the designs, or the fact that they are in a package of all colors, with each piece marked with the number, they are available for you to be obtained.

The order asks for No. 1274 or your own illustration and send with it one check for \$1.00. Patterns only 25 cents! In Make It Yourself! Pattern Bureau, Rochester, Times-Tribune, Box 100, Kansas City, Mo.

C 749

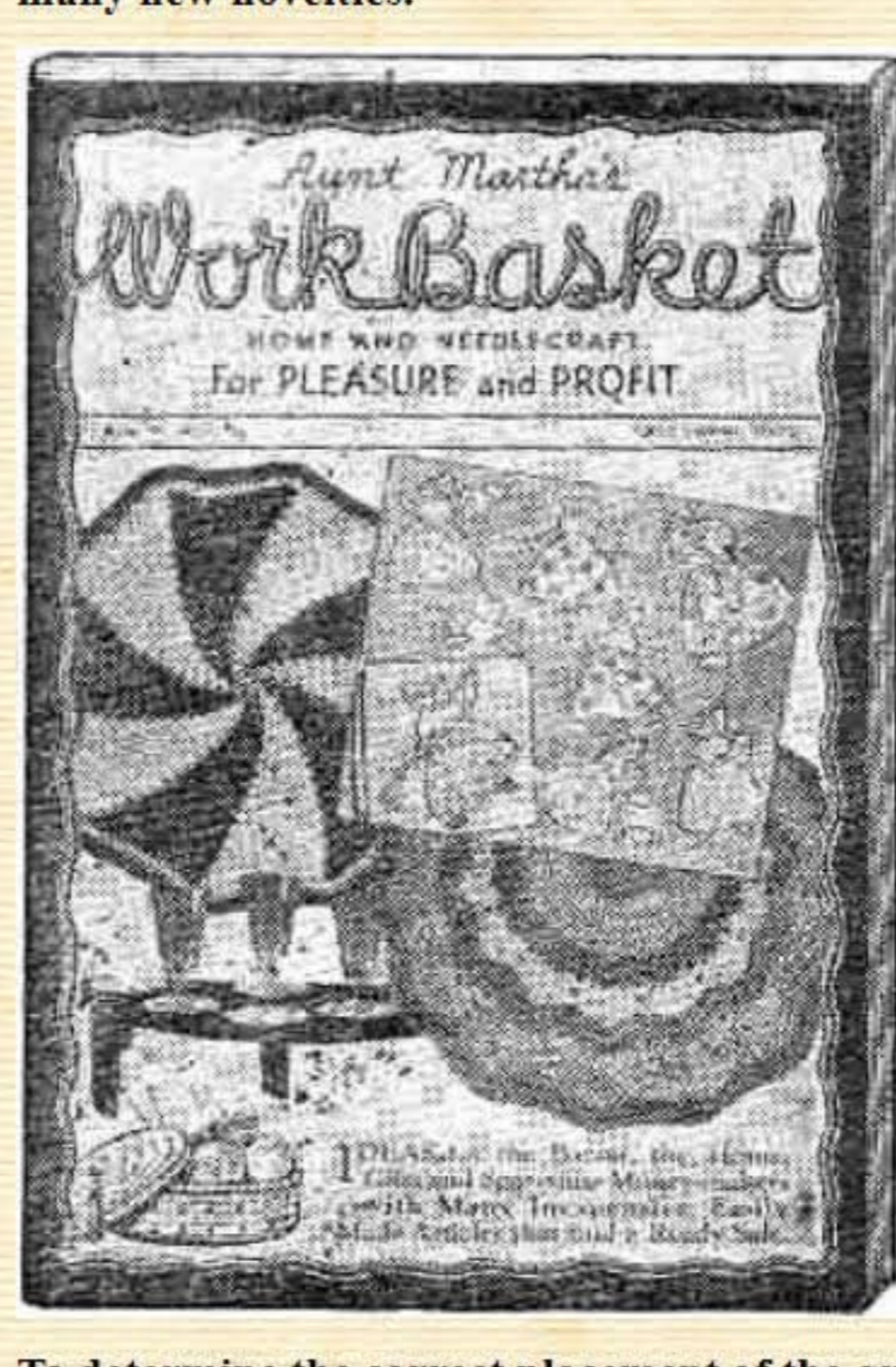
NEA's features were distributed in Canada by Dominion News Bureau, Montreal, Quebec. It's not known how Aunt Martha was distributed outside the 1935-1938 period.

\*The Ohio State University Libraries in Columbus holds a nearly complete run of NEA Post Books, 1903-1977. See OCLC WorldCat search, <http://www.worldcat.org/advancedsearch> for details. NEA also distributed Famous Features patterns.

## Aunt Martha's WorkBasket

*Aunt Martha's WorkBasket* began as a sales sheet mailed to established customers to test the popularity of new designs. An undated [circa 1933] example of these: "Here is another advance showing of Aunt Martha's quilt and needlework items. Only a very few of these are being mailed. . . . [Designs] proving the most popular to the largest number of my readers will soon appear in the magazines. . . . A few showings of Aunt Martha's Workbasket items are mailed from time to time. This gives a selected list of readers an opportunity of seeing these things months in advance of the general public. If you have written me in response to other advance showings, I'll continue to send these to you. If you have not written me before, you will not receive more of these unless you request them. . . . Very truly yours, Aunt Martha."

The first formal issue of *Aunt Martha's WorkBasket*, No. C900, was advertised in *Home Friend Magazine*, September 1935. The announcement illustrated the front cover and described its contents -- a crocheted pajama bag, a crocheted refreshment set, a cutting guide for making coasters from odds and ends of material, along with a hot iron transfer, and many new novelties.



To determine the correct placement of the quilt patterns in the early issues it is necessary to acquire both the *WorkBasket* and the transfer for the first six volumes.

As near as I can determine, a quilt pattern was not included with the first five issues (C900-C904). The next issue, C905, contains the 48 pieced state patterns (these were reprinted in the 1980s). Beginning with C906, either a quilt or a quilting pattern was printed in nearly every issue until the mid-1940s when they became sporadic.

After January 1941 (v.6, #4), and prior to April 1943 (v.8, #7), the title changed from *Aunt Martha's WorkBasket; Home and Needlecraft For Pleasure and Profit* to *The WorkBasket; Home and Needlecraft For Pleasure and Profit*. The title changed again to *The WorkBasket and Home Arts Magazine*, July 1964.

Beginning in 1912, Congress required all newspapers and magazines to publish a notarized Statement of Ownership in their pages twice each year. *WorkBasket's* statement in 1948:

Statement of ownership, management, circulation, etc., September 7, 1948: Mrs. John E. Tillotson, publisher; Mary Ida Sullivan, editor; Modern Handcraft, Inc., owner. Stockholders: John E. Tillotson, C. S. Tillotson, John E. Tillotson II (all of Kansas City, Missouri), and Mary Elizabeth Roskam, Santa Monica, California.

After the sale of Aunt Martha's Studios to new owners in 1949, quilts were not published in the *WorkBasket* for fourteen years. (Barbara Brackman in *Uncoverings* 1980.) The 1965, 1972, and 1976 articles are based on pre-cut kits sold by Aunt Martha's Studios. The 1969 article is general information about quilting illustrated with a Turkey Tracks quilt from Mountain Mist. In 1981, *WorkBasket* resumed the publication of quilt patterns. Except for the 1981-1982 Sampler series, most are reprints from earlier issues. However, quilt patterns were often featured in full-page ads by Homecraft Service / Colonial Company (Aunt Martha's Studios) in the *WorkBasket* from January 1960 through 1976.

For more history about Aunt Martha, see <https://colonialpatterns.com/about-us/>