

Quilt History Tidbits -- Old & Newly Discovered

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Wonder Package

The Wonder Package containing twelve large 24" x 36" sheets of embroidery patterns that includes a few quilt designs, both pieced and applique, was distributed through American and Canadian newspapers and magazines in the 1930s. January 1, 1931, is the earliest ad verified so far and there's no obvious evidence in the ads to identify the company responsible for the patterns. Instead, the package was often identified by the name of the newspaper that advertised the patterns to their women readers. For example, the Progress Wonder Package sold through the *Clearfield (PA) Progress*.

The full price was \$1.00 for the box of twelve sheets, but newspapers usually sold them for less (with a coupon and picked up in person) as did the *Times-Herald* in Olean, NY. Another ad touts: *An Exclusive Service to Women Readers.*



This image combines three excerpts from perhaps the most amusing of the ads, some of which were full page, or nearly full page, and illustrates the box containing the patterns. The headline continues . . .

Women Crowd The Times-Herald for The Wonder Package.

Talk about a vote of confidence! It is a literal landslide. The Wonder Package of hand-embroidery transfer patterns has proved an overwhelming favorite among our women readers. Immediately after the first announcement of the Wonder Package hundreds of coupons were received by mail. Women came flocking to our offices to secure this unique offer. Every day they are coming in increasing numbers. And no wonder! When a woman gets the Wonder Package, she is so delighted with it she can't help showing it to her friends. And when you see this embroidery triumph—you will not be able to resist it either. . . . Remember, we bring you this history-making set of patterns in recognition of the revived interest in the embroidery art and at a mere nominal charge that is so low it sounds almost unbelievable.

Another ad tells readers: Beautiful patterns of full size squares for patchwork and applique quilts are included. Here is the opportunity for any family to create and hand down to future generations the most prized of all heirlooms.

Although the newspaper ads fail to identify the source of the Wonder Package, a Google search reveals its creator as Donald F. Duncan, Inc., in Chicago, the same Donald Duncan who successfully marketed the favorite childhood toy, the yo-yo. First advertised in 1931 newspapers, the box of patterns reportedly carries a 1933 copyright notation. (Many thanks to a website reader for alerting me to this information, September 8, 2011.)

Chicago quiltmaker Mary Gasperik had a Wonder Package and used the alphabet letters provided in the package on two of her quilts pictured and detailed in The Quilt Index:

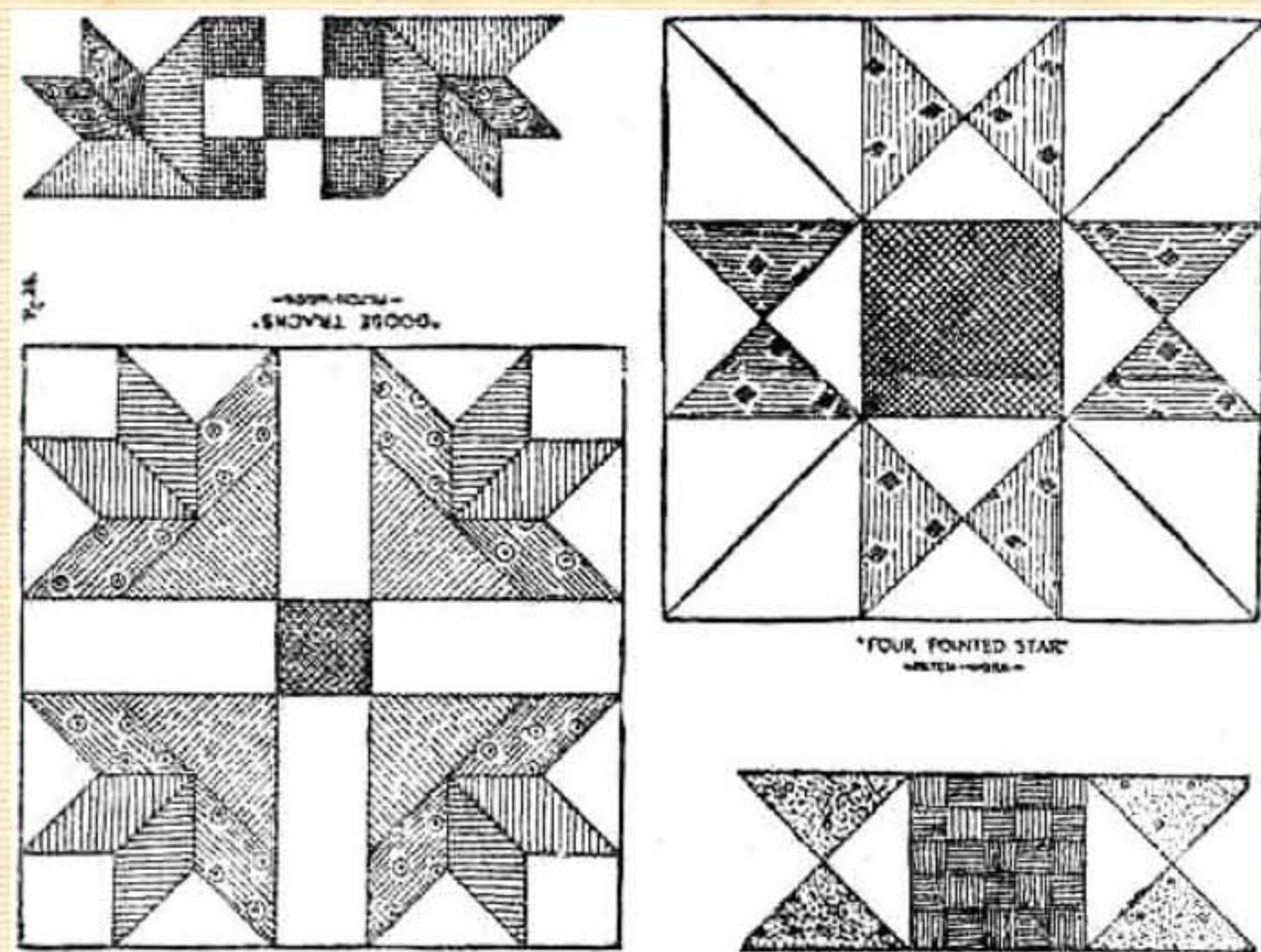
<http://www.quiltindex.org/fulldisplay.php?kicid=48-7C-28>
<http://www.quiltindex.org/fulldisplay.php?kicid=48-7C-54>

Mary also made use of a fish in the Package for a third quilt:

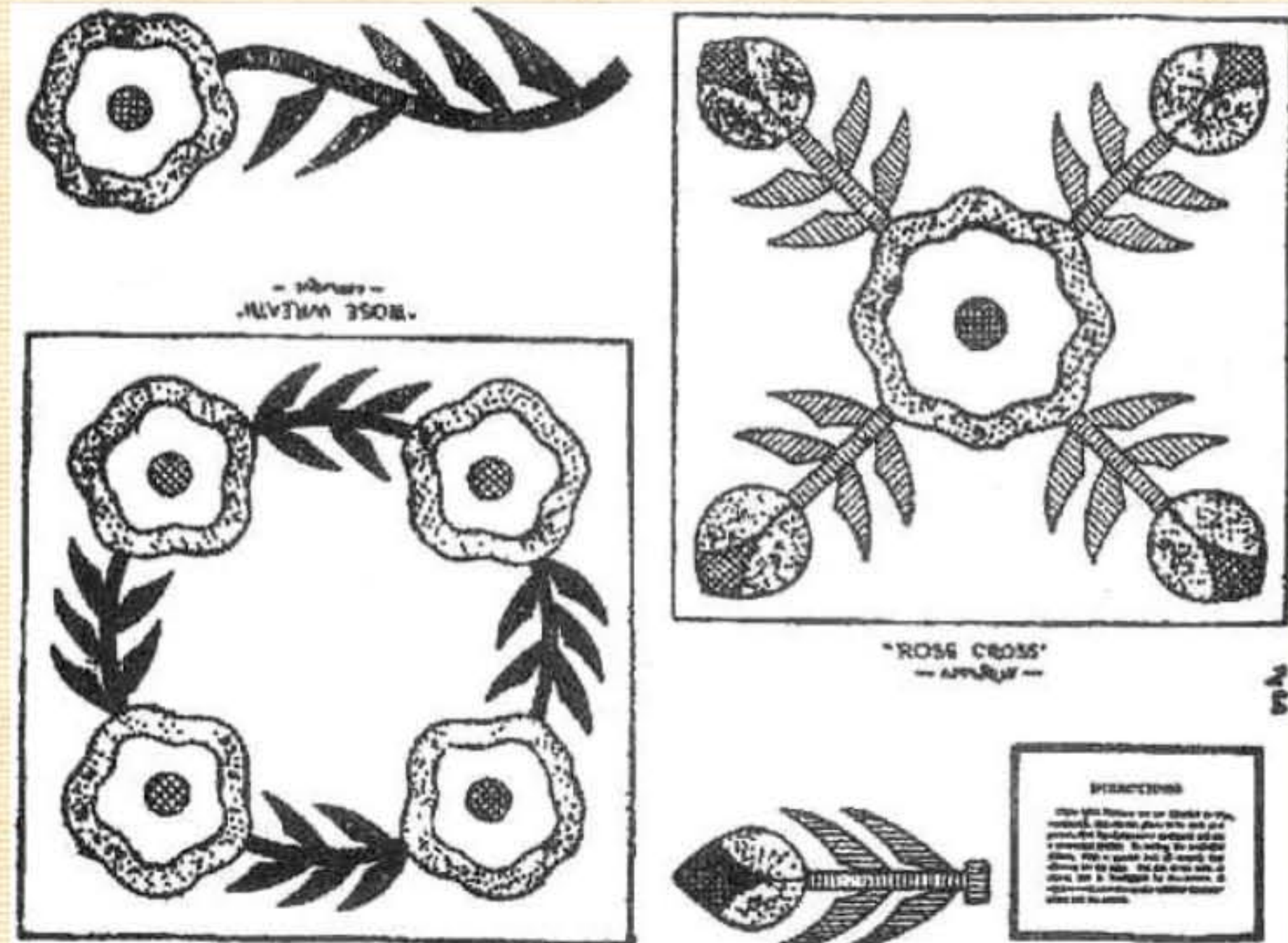
<http://www.quiltindex.org/fulldisplay.php?kicid=48-7C-4F>

Few quilt designs are known. One of the ads explains: Out of over 800 patterns . . . the quilt patterns are the only ones which are not to be transferred but instead cut out and used for patterns. This method is much easier for quilt making than transferring for too many kinds of material are necessary and a "wholesale transfer" idea would be impossible.

The first image shows Goose Tracks (illustrated upside down on the left) and Four Pointed Star.



The second image shows Rose Wreath (upside down on the left) and Rose Cross.



I remember seeing two to four more designs and will illustrate them later.