

The Chronicle Quilts – Farm Life (1932), Wild Flower (1933), Native Bird (1934), Three Little Pigs (1937), and International (1938)

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Research funded by a History SA Community Museums Program Grant 2012-2013



Known to many readers as 'Our leader'—Elizabeth George guided the *Chronicle* quilt competitions to 1937, and also conducted 'The Woman's World' in the *Advertiser*. Advertiser Newspapers Ltd produced the *Chronicle* newspaper (*Chronicle*, 22 April 1937, p.52).

THE *Adelaide Chronicle* newspaper (*Chronicle*) was issued from 1858 to 1975. During the 1930s, priced at six pence and directed to country readers, its 'City to Country' section had pages on Practical Home Advice, Of Interest to Women, What Outback Women are Thinking, Cheerful Letters from Pen Friends, Messages from Near and Far, and Mutual Help Among Women Readers. In conjunction with these, the paper ran important quilt competitions. The first appeared in the year the *Australian Women's Weekly* was first published, in June 1932, when the Great Depression had deepened over Australia. In addition to the hardships of the Depression, poliomyelitis ('infantile paralysis') emerged as another challenge first with the Victorian epidemic in 1937-1938, and Australia's involvement in a European war threatened.

It is highly likely that the Great Depression coupled with concern over European political developments turned the newspaper's choice of quilt motifs to a national focus (the wildflower and native bird patterns), and soon after to an outward-looking international theme.

The Great Depression first affected Australia's agriculture, and its effects were worsened by the State's drought of 1931, for which the Outback Relief Appeal was instituted. In the same year South Australia's Back to the Land Movement provided a greater sympathy and

understanding of rural hardships, and proposed intensive primary production through settlement by the unemployed on small holdings.

‘Making ends meet’

When the Farm Life quilt was published in 1932, the *Chronicle* offered a total of £12 in competition prizes: for an open section and one for girls under 18 years (for a single bed quilt). The first prize was £3, second prize £2, and five shillings were awarded for four very highly commended exhibits in each section. The *Chronicle* offered these prizes throughout the 1930s.

From August 1931 the government declared the weekly wage for South Australian male wage-earners with a wife and three children to be £3.3.0, for females, £1.11.6. A full-time work week could be 46 hours, a nine-hour day. The basic wage of the 1930s was reduced by some 10 per cent; in 1932, the male wage was a reduction by some £2 from the rate of five or so years earlier.¹ The *Chronicle* did not exaggerate in saying its prizes were very valuable.

‘Something out of nothing’.

The Women’s Pages of the *Chronicle* were an eagerly awaited communication. Readers wrote letters about their lives on the land, were grateful to receive recipes, sympathy, and useful advice about how to relieve chilblains or transfer the quilt patterns.

After the loan books were read, correspondence lessons completed, the crosswords finished, and arithmetic exercises in school text books accomplished, the quilt competitions presented a welcome challenge during the Depression decade, especially for rural folk. Some women could not afford the library subscription to continue their reading, and one *Chronicle* reader saved the Wildflower patterns to work a pair of curtains when she could afford the material: ‘I am all impatient to begin them now’, she wrote, ‘but when one has to carry a couple of nails in one’s purse to make a jingle, new curtains are out of the question.’ Another reader remembered the time when ‘Sunday dinner [was] a pudding made of flour and milk’, and my children ‘wondered why mummy had tears in her eyes.’

When pattern no. 16, the sweet-scented boronia, was published, a letter lamented that ‘there would be many more quilts worked if the farm women did not have to help with the cows, wash the separator, and make butter. I should love to work a quilt, but time will not allow, as I do all my own dairy work, bake bread ... and also grow most of our own vegetables.’ Had she the time, she mused, she ‘would choose white linen, and work the flowers in their natural colours’.² The published quilt patterns were also suitable to be worked as wall hangings, for cushions, and curtains.

Much helpful advice arose from the year 1932: suggestions for making hand-hooked rugs; plaiting hay-bale binder twine to make door mats; a variety of ways to cook the often staple meat of kangaroo and euro cutlets and undercut; skin treatment for the rash attending the mice plague; decorations for ‘dumpy cushions’ (poufs); soap-making hints; and how to

¹ Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*, no. 25, 1932, Canberra, p.789. The weekly wage was liable to fluctuation. By June 1932, Australia’s recorded unemployment was 28 per cent; SA.....

² “Chronicle” Reader for Thirty Years’, *Chronicle*, 20 April 1933, p.61.

fashion kitchen utensils from tin and wire, and the myriad uses for 'bagging', hessian, jute or cotton sugar and flour bags. A reader from Murray Town—like many country women, made sugar bags into towels, curtains for her bathroom door that were trimmed with cretonne, cushions for the kitchen chairs, a pad to kneel on while washing the floor, and a bag towel for oven use. 'There is always another towel down in the cow yard, and when we wash our hands between each cow, we use the sugar bag.' 'I cut scraps of material, one inch wide and two inches long, and sew on a sugar bag, which has been already bound around with cretonne, and they make nice mats for the floor.'³

In winter 1934, a country woman wrote that she had dyed sugar bags in Condys crystals, 'very good for rough wear. On some we worked the animals from the Farm Life Quilt,' but not for competition. A different kind of stitching was by Mrs P.J. Scholz from Buchanan, Eudunda, who by 1942 had collected all the *Chronicle* Women's Pages and sewed them into books which of course contained all the quilt patterns.⁴

The Royal Show home industries and crafts display in 1934 was recommended to women to lighten household tasks: 'Women with an economical turn of mind' found interest in dresses made for less than 7/6d, rugs made from wool scraps, stencilled curtains, and a tea cosy fashioned from 'petals of silk oddments.'⁵

In 1934, a reader described her home, a 'Government shed', enclosed with iron, with no lining, partitioned with iron, that was almost unbearable in summer, 'as one must cook bread and meals', and in winter so cold that she needed to cover all sorts of things to make thick rugs. She asked, 'Could someone send me odds and ends for coverings?'⁶ With her family she probably lived on government-subsidised poultry farm under the Employment Promotion Council's social service scheme instituted in 1932.

One very lonely *Chronicle* voice asked if some readers and writers could please send some recipes that don't require 'much butter, eggs and milk, as I have to buy all these ... Could some readers write again about making things not to cost more than 1/6 from a sugar bag?' She hoped she was 'not asking too much.'⁷

The 'Curiosity Quilt'—the Farm Life Quilt (1932)

The first instructions were published in March 1932. Because of the many enquiries, from Queensland, West Australia, and South Australia's country districts about the Farm Life quilt the *Chronicle* office name for this first quilt was the 'curiosity quilt', its popularity causing the Royal Show to make quilts entered for competition a special feature in the home industries section in September.⁸ The Home Industries Hall was completed at the showgrounds in September 1928

The Farm Life patterns were introduced in the *Chronicle*, 10 March 1932 (on sale on Thursday). Or, Farm Life first in *Chronicle* of 31 March 1932? The images were those of the syndicated American quilt designer, Ruby Short McKim (1891-1976), whose name was at

³ 'Sugar Bag Uses', *Chronicle*, 12 January 1933, p.59.

⁴ 'New Writer's Novel Scrapbooks', *Chronicle*, 10 September 1942, p.27.

⁵ 'Housewives Interested in Exhibits', *Mail*, 6 October 1934, p.10.

⁶ 'Dream House', *Chronicle*, 24 May 1934, p.58.

⁷ 'Mr. Catastrophe's Wife', *Chronicle*, 14 July 1938, p.57.

⁸ Elizabeth George, 'The Woman's World', *Advertiser*, 5 April 1932, p.14.

the bottom of the full quilt design but who otherwise was not credited. The dotted lines of the alternate squares outlined a horn of plenty.⁹ McKim first published quilt patterns for the *Kansas City Star* in 1916, and designed many patterns for American newspapers.¹⁰ Her Farm Life quilt patterns were originally published as a series in 1930 and 1931 in the *American Omaha World-Herald*.¹¹

Each of the twenty-six square patterns (one the conventional filler) was printed full size in the newspaper, and use of carbon copying paper was advised to transfer it on to the square of material to be worked. If carbon paper was unavailable, the pattern could be transferred by rubbing the back of the newspaper with blue pencil and tracing it onto the material with a blunt point or hard pencil. The patterns could be worked in any material preferred by the needleworker, and could be appliqued, painted, or embroidered in 'wool, embroidery thread, or silk.' The entries, for which some freedom of visual interpretation was encouraged, were for under-18 years and all others, with a prize total of £12.

A reader from Ashville who was working the donkey square hoped to catch up with the published patterns in a fortnight's time. She worked her square in 'outline stitch on linene' but as she was nineteen years, too old for the junior section and 'wouldn't stand a show among all the older people', decided not to enter her quilt in the Show.¹² A needleworker from the Flinders Ranges offered her recipe for a pigment and binder for transferring the pattern to material: one teaspoon of blue (probably Reckitt's washing blue), one teaspoon of sugar, and one teaspoon of water, mixed well and marked over the pattern with a pen, dried well, then transferred with a warm iron to the material.¹³ In that same issue of the *Chronicle*, a cheerful reader from Moonta Bay described how she 'put patterns on everything' to lighten her days: 'For my kitchen I dyed hessian and sugar bags brown, and stencilled very gay patterns on them, and I made really nice Knock-about cushions of dyed sugar bags, and worked designs in wool and raffia. My shopping bag was much admired, but nobody suspected it was a flour bag dyed and worked with raffia!'¹⁴

Four women sent Farm Life patterns to a reader in West Leederville, Perth. The *Chronicle's* quilt competitions were soon taken up by interstate newspapers.

⁹ Margaret Rolfe, *Patchwork Quilts in Australia*, Vic., Greenhouse Publications, 1987, p.109. Rolfe wrote that as quilting was not 'a well-known craft', the *Chronicle* suggested embroidery to Australians. This seems unlikely ...

¹⁰ <http://www.britannica.com/RubyMcKim>

¹¹ www.onlinequilter.com/Galleries/RubyMcKim/FarmLifeQuilt/tabid/263/Default.aspx.

¹² 'Making Farm Life Quilt', *Chronicle*, 30 June 1932, p.56. Linene was a plain weave cotton fabric finished to imitate linen.

¹³ 'Farm Quilt and Other Hints', *Chronicle*, 30 June 1932, p.56.

¹⁴ 'Gay Patterns Everywhere', *Chronicle*, 30 June 1932, p.56.

Dear Elizabeth George—

After thinking many times that I would like to write you, I am at last doing so. Like most others, who take an interest in your pages, and live in the bush or outback, I have received much help and pleasure from them, and wish to thank all for the cheery, helpful letters,

I am looking forward with great interest to the quilt patterns, and hope to be able to make one, as I am very fond of needlework and do all our sewing and the mending! It's mend, mend, mend, these times, until there is little of the original article left; yet somehow I always feel rather proud of a well-mended garment—there is something in making it last twice as long, equal to making "two blades of grass grow in place of one," don't you think?

Just an idea re mending. One gets a collection of small traycloths, runners, &c., that are past "their first youth" at any rate. I use these up by sewing them on to pillow cases when they are beginning to wear. The children love them, and it doubles the life of the slip, and uses up the other article as well.

to have a garden; I think a garden makes the poorest home look "homely," don't you? I think you are an admirer of the black and white magpie, aren't you? He is my favorite bird. Parrots and cockatoos may have gayer plumage, but the magpie is such a neat well-groomed looking fellow, and his carolling on moonlight nights just carries me away to some pleasant place where the elves do the dish-washing and breadsetting after tea.

Somebody is asking, "Who it outback?" I am, I think. No wireless, no telephone, P.O. 5 miles away, school 8 miles, and church about 20 miles. Mail twice a week.

Now could any one tell me how to make date jam, it has a packet of jelly crystals in it I think, but I cannot remember the other quantities.—Yours sincerely,

"Zanzibar."

Part of two letters from Elizabeth George's readers (left, 'Lots of Mending', *Chronicle*, 21 April 1932, p.55; right, 'Thrilled with the Farm Quilt', *Chronicle*, 21 April 1932, p.56)

The Awards

The twenty quilts entered in the Farm Life competition at the Show came from Caltowie, Bordertown, Elliston, Terowie, Naracoorte, Quorn, Milang and Narridy, among others places. Mrs J.M. Laragy from Narridy, Mid North of South Australia, won first prize and Mrs Huppatz from Eurelia won second. The quilts of Misses M. Sandow, A.C. Nitschke, and D. Hassam and Mrs A.J. Stevens were very highly commended.¹⁵ Minetta Huppatz (1915-1987) won the junior section (illustrated in the *Chronicle*, 31 August 1932, p.20). The *Chronicle* of the week of 14 September 1932 illustrated the quilts that won first and second honours.

Mrs Laragy used alternating blue and orange squares and silk for embroidery, achieving a 'deftness in shading and sheen on the animals.' Mrs Huppatz introduced 'exceptionally good quilting' in the conventional design squares, and generally a freedom for imagination and use of both outline stitchery and bolder satin stitch made the winning quilts special; 'imagination ran riot with the gay embroidery silks for the scarecrow and a garden of stitchery blooms.'¹⁶ Can't mean flowers in the garden??

¹⁵ 'Show Judging. Farm Life Quilt Awards. Mother and Daughter Win Prizes', *Advertiser*, 8 Sep 1932, p.6.

¹⁶ 'Show Judging. Farm Life Quilt Awards. Mother and Daughter Win Prizes', *Advertiser*, 8 Sep 1932, p.6.

Several quilts were sent in for the under 18 years section from Knight's Well, Buccleuch, Eurelia, Wentworth in NSW, Loxton, Alawoona, but unfortunately, only three quilts arrived in time for the judging. There were teething problems, and the time needed to complete this first quilt was somewhat experimental.

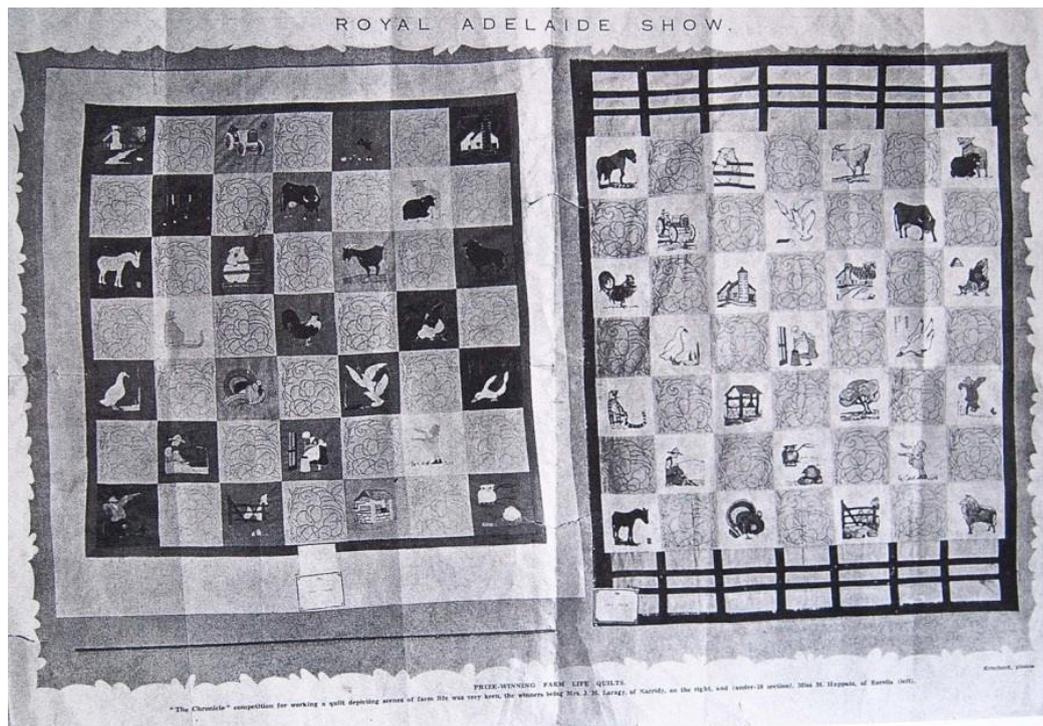
Minnie Huppatz, under 16 years, from Eurelia gained first prize for her quilt worked in darning stitch. A 'correspondence' quilt indeed, letters, stamps, and relied on others to buy her thread and post all to her. Second prize went to I. Williams of Wentworth, NSW, who worked the designs in outline stitchery and the alternate squares in blue and white Indian head.

Minnie Huppatz was a dedicated needleworker throughout her life. After her win, she became the sewing mistress at the Euralia school.¹⁷ Together with many of her show certificates, the National Museum of Australia holds her scrapbook or sewing workbook titled 'Correspondence School 1932' that contains sewing samples and illustration cuttings, and teachers' comments on her well-ordered collection (NMA: object no. 2000.0009.0027). Over many years she won prize and commendation certificates from numerous shows: at Clare, Wilmington, Orroroo, Enfield Progress Association, Royal Agricultural & Horticultural Shows, Adelaide, Laura, Agricultural Bureau of SA, Cradock and Quorn CWAs, Hawker, and many more.

The Farm Life patterns

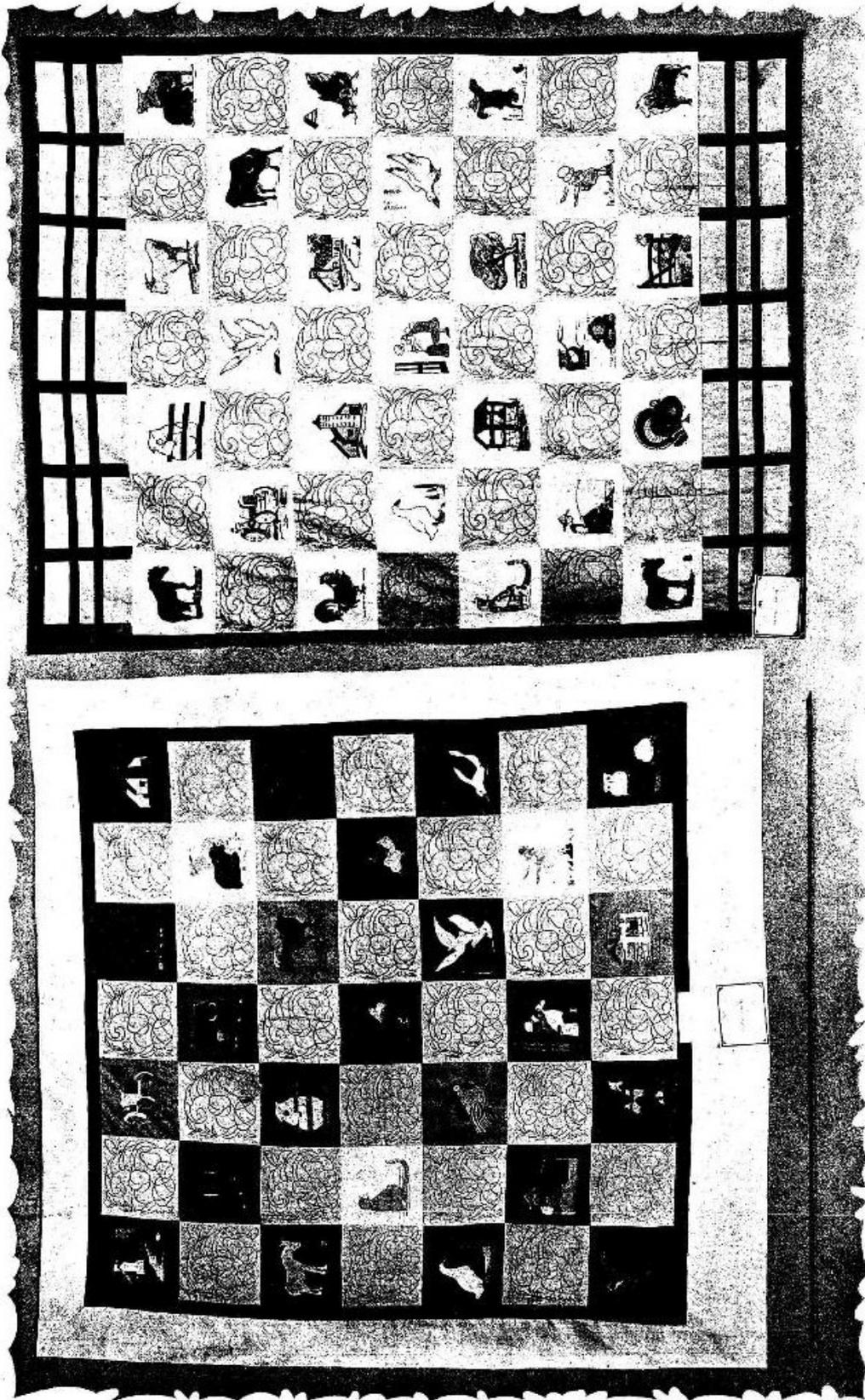
1. The Homestead (31 March 1932)
2. Tractor and farmer (7 April)
3. The Old Apple Tree
4. The Well Filled Barn
5. Dear Faithful Dobbin
The Horn of Plenty Pattern for the alternate squares was published
6. The Friendly Cow
7. Sheep for Wool
8. Donkey
9. Pig
10. Billy the Goat
11. Loyal Shep, the Dog
12. The Family Cat
13. The Rooster
14. Busy Biddy Hen
15. Goose in the Pond
16. What a Turkey
17. Barn Pigeons
18. The Greedy Duck
19. Real Fishing
20. Butter from the Churn
21. Farm Flowers
22. The Scarecrow
23. [Mice viewing harvest stooks in the field]
24. Old Oaken Bucket
25. Farm Music [owl and frog]

¹⁷ Noris Iannou, *The Barossa Folk. Germanic Furniture and Craft Traditions in Australia*, Craftsman House, [Roseville East, NSW, 1995, p.284.



Farm Life quilt by Minetta (Nettie) Huppertz of Eurelia (left), that won the under-18 section, now in the Nettie McColive Collection, National Museum of Australia (object no. 2000.0009.0001). It is backed with fine gingham in brown and bone colours. The winning quilt in the open section (right) was by Mrs Laragy of Narridy. 1932 (Gero p.181). Both were illustrated in the *Chronicle*, 15 September 1932, p.32. Second prize was won by I. Williams, Wentworth, NSW, with alternating squares of blue and white Indian head and worked designs in outline stitchery.

ROYAL ADELAIDE SHOW.



Eraddock, plover

PRIZE-WINNING FARM LIFE QUILTS.

"The Chronicle," competition for making a quilt depicting scenes of farm life was very keen, the winners being Mrs. J. M. Lenz, of Naraco, on the right, and under-13 section, Miss N. Higgins, of Burra, (left).