

Australian Wild Flower Quilt (1933)

The pattern offer and competition that promised to be more unusual than the farm life quilt was first announced in late 1932 in the 'Christmas Chronicle', but which started on 12 January 1933. This was the all-Australian Wild Flower quilt of 25 images in nine inch (23cm) squares, and 24 conventional patterns, 49 squares in total, with a border of plain material. Royal Show in 1933 provided a special sub-section for the Chronicle wildflower quilt entries.

In her column 'The Woman's World', Elizabeth George promoted the *Chronicle's* initiative for all women but particularly those living on 'the edge of beyond'.²²

A *Chronicle* reader who grew up in saltbush country and by the 1930s lived in the Lower North, needed to use much imagination to choose the colours for her wildflowers, strange as they were to her. Without a car, music, electric light, or telephone, she nonetheless found time for her love of fancywork and knitting. Often, when 'stitching away at the quilt', she wondered how many others, 'perhaps hundreds of miles away from each other', were working away at the same pattern.²³

²¹ 'Quilt Competition', *Queenslander*, 6 April 1933, p.34.

²² *Advertiser*, 6 December 1932, p.8.

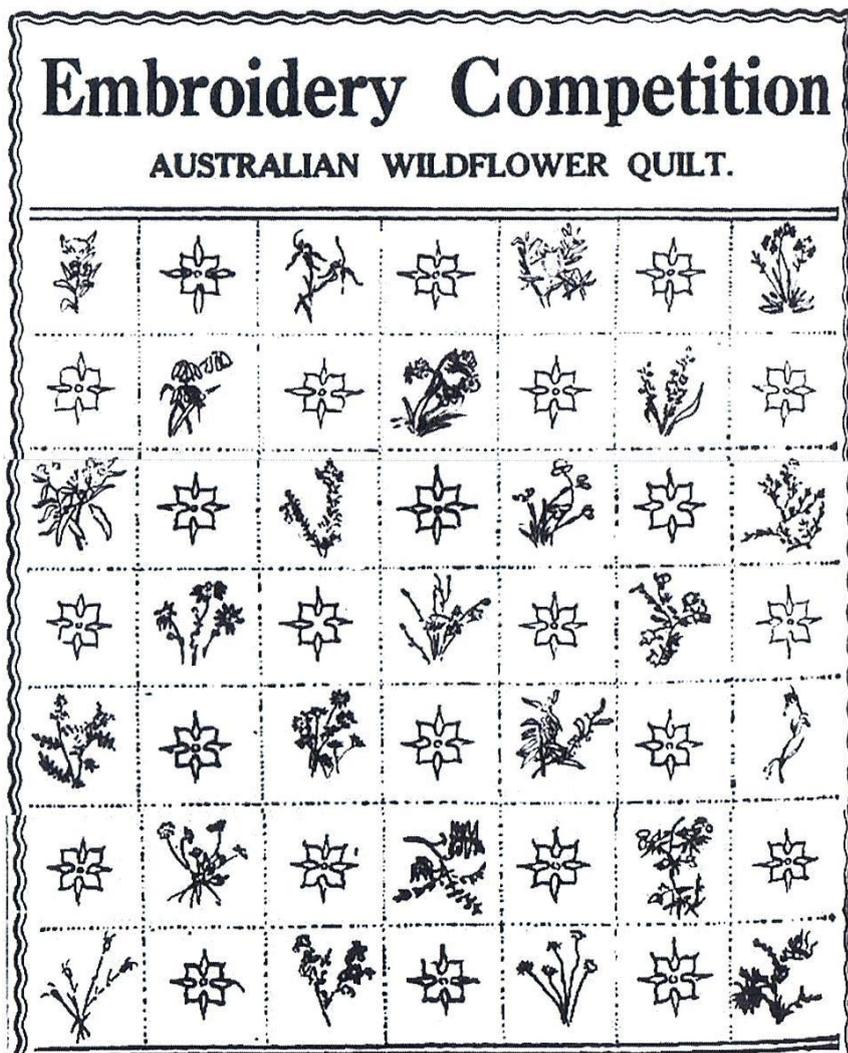
²³ 'Interest in Quilt', *Chronicle*, 2 March 1933, p.60.



Eighteen-year old Gwen Holder's (1915-1934) Wild flower quilt was awarded an honourable mention at the 1933 Royal Adelaide Show. Gwen Holder lived on the property Cortlinye, north of Kimba, Eyre Peninsula, SA. Cotton and embroidery, hand-pieced and embroidered. Backed but not padded or quilted. 184cm x 184cm (From A. Gero, 2008 p.182)

'What Is Women's Work?' asked the *Advertiser* in autumn 1933. Drive the teams during harvest, mend fences and machinery, and a girl on the Coorong who mends her father's fishing nets; recipes for cooking the yabbies living in the dam walls, to pickle olives and mutton, and they make remedial ointments. Now, the wildflower quilt will be given attention in the Women's Pages and in the country homes.²⁴

²⁴ Elizabeth George, 'The Woman's World. What is Woman's Work?', *Advertiser* 12 April, 1933, p.10.



The *Chronicle* Australian Wild Flower Quilt full pattern in a suggested arrangement (*Argus*, 19 Jan 1933, p.4; 'Design for Completed Quilt', *Chronicle*, 6 July 1933, p.61).

Quilters were advised that a single bed coverlet will use 18 squares plus the conventional squares in between, and 'a charming cot cover could be made of any six of the designs with plain squares in between.' The squares could be arranged however makers wished, so long as the conventional square divided each flower.

The 14 July was the last day to enter the quilt in the Show.

At the 1933 Royal Show, fifty-one Wild Flower quilts, that came from 'women from all over Australia',²⁵ were displayed on the north and east walls of the Hall. They came from Wentworth and Medindie, NSW, Koolunga, Peebinga, Milang, Lipson, Eudunda, Edithburgh, Broken Hill, Pinnaroo, and from more rural areas, as well as from suburban Prospect, Goodwood, and Forestville, South Australia. Only one person set the squares in a diamond design. Miss D. Hassam won first prize with a quilt of biscuit-toned tussore silk, which was outstanding for her use of many needlecraft stitches: button-hole lace filling, 'cable stitch, satin stitch, wallachian stitch,²⁶ and a fascinating use of double buttonholing for the stems of many of the flowers'. Although she was not named in the paper, Miss Ida Summers's quilt

²⁵ 'Wild Flowers in Needlework', *Advertiser*, 6 Sep 1933, p.12.

²⁶ A simple stitch like button-hole is the keynote and the primary feature that characterises Wallachian embroidery.

was described as being of white book muslin lined with buttercup yellow muslin. The conventional pattern was 'lace buttonholed' in white, and spoke-stitching defined the squares.

When Ida Summers's wildflower quilt was exhibited in 1988, it was described as demonstrating 'techniques far beyond the basic instructions issued by the Chronicle ... [and] in the finesse and subtlety of the shading, the use of shadow work and coral knots for the interpreted designs and the employment of random straight stitch for every other flower, it was a 'most extraordinary achievement.'²⁷ Another praised quilt was a green and biscuit 'wool-a-down', the wool prepared from sheep on the home farm.²⁸

A reader in Manitoba, Canada, having made the Farm Life quilt and sent it to England, wrote for the complete set of Wild Flower patterns.²⁹

Ida Summers worked her un-padded wholecloth quilt in white cotton voile with alternating designs of Australian wildflowers in multi coloured cottons and shadow work. The wild flowers are in simple straight stitches; the flower motif is in shadow work.³⁰



Ida Summers. Wild Flower Quilt. 201cm x 191cm. Embroiderers' Guild of SA Museum: 1987-039. Detail (right)

²⁷ Elizabeth Beck, *Needles and pins. South Australian embroidery and needlework, 1864-1988*, exhibition catalogue, Carrick Hill, 1988, cat. No. 59. Coll. Embroiderers' Guild. The catalogue describes the quilt as stranded cotton thread on organdie, the sections joined by spoke stitching and backed with buttercup yellow fine linen; dimensions: 200cm x 163cm.

²⁸ *Advertiser*, 5 September 1933, p.11; also in *Chronicle*, 7 September 1933.

²⁹ *Advertiser*, 12 April 1933, p.10.

³⁰ Rolfe and Moore, 1993, p.40.

Ida Mavis Summers (born in August 1908) studied at the School of Arts and Crafts in about 1924-1927: she took Object Drawing, Antique Drawing and Painting, Lettering and Showcard Writing. She later taught dressmaking and needlework at Thebarton Girls' Technical High School, and became a judge of Adelaide Royal Show needlework.³¹

Miss Ida Summers worked for Jean Mattie of Terowie S.A. in the 1930s on a sheep station. Among her duties she helped the children with their correspondence lessons. During the war she joined the Air Force. She learnt painting/pencil and wash from Ruth Tuck.³²

Ida Summers's Service number was 107547, RAAF, NCO and other ranks. She was a member of a war-time Comforts Fund unit.

Some quilters embroidered the names of the flower on the squares; others scattered petals around the sides with a floral spray at the top and bottom.³³

The judging must have been difficult. Miss D. Hassam won first in the Wildflower quilt open section; Miss E.M. Brown, won second; and Miss E.V. Wilkin, Miss N. Angas, Mrs J.M. Laragy, Miss I.M. Summers, were very highly commended; Miss E. Justin, was highly commended; and Miss L.A. Klitcher, Miss Holder, and Miss S.D. McQuold were commended.

For the under-18 section for a quilt made from any 18 of the wild flower designs, Miss H. Dempsey and Miss G. Palmer and Miss J. Marvell won the top awards; Misses E. Newell, M. Huppatz, and N. McLeod were very highly commended.³⁴

³¹ See 'Judges for Industries at Show', *Advertiser*, 16 August 1952, p.12. In 1952, for example, Ida Summers judged with Miss Delma Spencer, Mrs J.E. Auricht, and Miss Joyce Larner ('Judges for Industries at Show', *Advertiser*, 16 August 1952, p.12).

³² The Curator, Embroiderers' Guild of SA Inc., 19/1/99.

³³ *Advertiser*, 5 Sep 1933, p.11 (also in *Chronicle*, 7 September 1933).

³⁴ 'Needlework of School Girls ...', *Advertiser*, 5 September 1933, p.11.

Interstate quilt competitions

In addition to announcements in Adelaide's *Advertiser*, and the patterns published regularly in the *Adelaide Chronicle*, the *Western Mail* of Perth, and the *Queenslander*, which announced the competition on 26 January 1933 and gave pattern no. 1, advising that for the quilt satin stitch will give a charming effect', 'The Woman's Realm' of the *Australasian* published a small complete design, and Melbourne's *Argus* also published the designs in 1933. The quilts in Brisbane were shown in the Women's Industries section, Royal National Association's exhibition in August 1933. The *Chronicle's* numbering of patterns was modified in some interstate publications of what became a modest national project, although quilt exhibitions were state-specific.



(*Argus*, 14 January 1933, p.8).

Competition details were published in the weekly *Queenslander*, in January 1933. Later in that month the materials required for a full size quilt were given: 2 yards for picture blocks, 4 yards for coloured fabric for alternate squares and border, 2 yards for bindings, and 15 skeins of embroidery thread in all the colours used. The last comment of the article was, 'Cut with economy. A thrifty worker has few scraps left.'³⁵ The Wild Flower Quilt was to reach the Brisbane office of the *Queenslander* by late July for judging in August 1933 by arrangement with the Royal National Association. The judges were to be those of the Royal National Agricultural and Industrial Association of Queensland. There were six entries in August 1933 of the 'Queenslander' Wild Life Quilt in the Home Industries area.

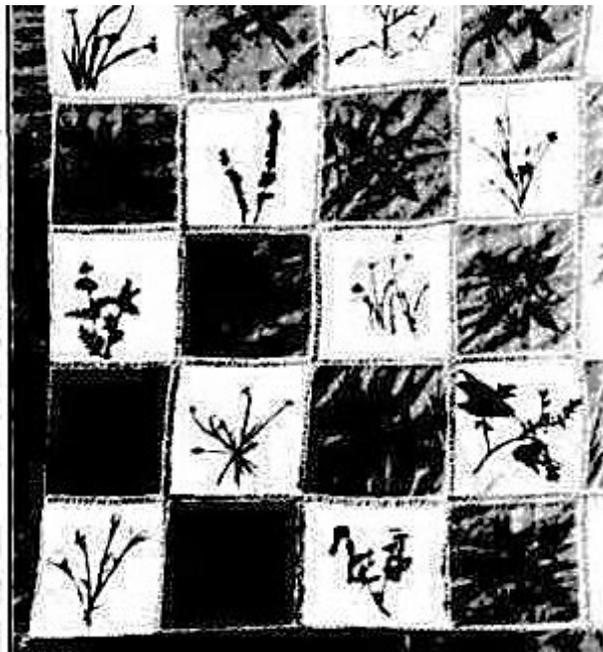
Queensland's Royal National Agricultural and Industrial Association

The National Agricultural and Industrial Association of Queensland was formed in 1875 and became 'Royal' from the early 1920s. The Association always aimed to promote the agricultural, pastoral and industrial resources of Queensland by holding an annual exhibition and trade shows, and primary industry competitions at the time of the annual event and at other times through the year.

³⁵ *Queenslander*, 26 January 1933, p.35.

In Queensland, intending competition entrants were from Brisbane, Gympie, Collinsville (Bowen District), Muckadilla, Dulacca, Booyal, Greenmount, and Wallaville among other widely separated locations.

No entries were received for the under 18 class in the Wild Flower Quilt competition. Mrs W.R. Crowley of Cleveland, won first prize (with designs on biscuit-coloured linen), Miss C. E. Buzacott of Brisbane won second prize (with alternate squares of green and biscuit ground); and the four 5 shilling prizes originally announced were combined as two 10 shilling prizes for the third and fourth winners: Miss Emily Buckley of Charters Towers and Miss M.P. Bell of Maryborough. Other notable quilts were one entirely in white linen, and one produced with alternate blue and white squares 'faggotted together with blue thread.'³⁶



Part of the third prize Wildflower competition quilt worked by Mrs Emily Buckley of Charters Towers, Queensland (*Queenslander*, 14 September 1933, p.28).