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Gilbertson, Laurann and Olsen, Karen, "Piecing Together a New Home: Needlework in *Kvinden og Hjemmet* Magazine" (2004). *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*. 429.

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Piecing Together a New Home: Needlework in *Kvinden og Hjemmet* Magazine

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Introduction

Kvinden og Hjemmet was a magazine for women published in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, from 1888 to 1947. “The Woman and the Home” contained patterns for clothing and fancywork, as well as household hints, recipes, serialized novels, short stories, and poetry. Everything was written in, or translated into, Norwegian.

“Wherever we women turn, we are facing something new, which we must learn to understand as fast as possible if we are to feel at home in this country. Language, which many believe is the most important matter to learn, is hardly as important as understanding the customs in the new society. And to understand it in such a way that is only possible if the information is transmitted in our own language,” wrote Ida Hansen, editor of *Kvinden og Hjemmet*.¹

Ida Hansen had emigrated from Norway in 1870. She knew first-hand the trials of adjusting to a new way of life and she wanted to ease the transition for other Norwegians by providing information on how to make clothing and household textiles in the American style.

Between 1825 and 1980, nearly one million Norwegians immigrated to the United States. The greatest numbers came, seeking economic opportunity, in the years between 1866 and 1873, 1880 and 1893, and from 1902 to 1910. A small percentage of these immigrants were urban dwellers who would have been quite familiar with the latest European fashions and fancywork. For the majority, who left a life that was rural and traditional, immigration to the United States dramatically transformed their clothing and household textiles.²

Rural Norwegian women produced most of the textiles used by their families including handwoven fabric for garments and bedding. They reserved decorative techniques, like crochet, tatting, crewel embroidery, and hardanger embroidery, for colorful garments worn on festive occasions. They were not familiar with doilies and pen

¹ *Kvinden og Hjemmet* (June 1908): 228, translated in Åse Elin Langeland, “Adjusting to America. A Study in *Kvinden og Hjemmet*: A Monthly Journal for the Scandinavian Woman in America, 1888-1947” (Masters Thesis, University of Bergen, 2001), 31.

² Odd S. Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1948), 8-9. Lovoll notes that in 1801, shortly before the period of mass emigration, only 9% of Norway’s population lived in rural areas.

wipes and lambrequins, nor were they familiar with quilts. *Kvinden og Hjemmet* provided patterns for New World textiles in the language of the Old Country and for a significant number of women. The magazine's readership peaked in 1907 with more than 82,000 copies sold in North America and abroad.

***Kvinden og Hjemmet* Magazine**

Ida Hansen was born Idda Hermanna Jensen in 1853 in Ringsaker, Hedmark, Norway. In 1870 she immigrated with her parents and three sisters to America, probably to Chicago, Illinois. At age 22 Ida married Niels Frederick Hansen, a 23-year old immigrant from Flensborg in Slesvig, then part of Denmark. In 1884 the couple moved to Iowa. They had seven children, several of whom became involved with the family business.³

Niels Frederick Hansen had tried publishing several magazines in the Midwest. In 1884 he started *Fra Alle Lande* (From All Countries) from his home in Kenwood Park, now part of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Ida Hansen wrote a column for women. Ida's sister, Mina Jensen, helped set type. The magazine ended after a few years, but with all of the printing equipment still in the family's home Ida and Mina decided to start up their own magazine. One that could "help the hardworking Scandinavian women, of whom very few could speak and understand much English at that time, in their daily work in the house and home."⁴ Ida organized the contents and Mina set the type. Niels Frederick printed 1,000 copies of the first issue, May 1888, then the two sisters folded and sewed together the eight pages with needle and thread. They hand-addressed the issues then took them to the post office in a wheelbarrow.⁵

By *Kvinden og Hjemmet's* tenth anniversary in May 1903, the magazine boasted a fully mechanized operation and a staff of 40. Niels Frederick and Ida's work expanded in other ways. In September 1893 they added a Swedish-language version of *Kvinden og Hjemmet* (*Qvinnan och Hemmet*) that continued until 1947. They even tried an English-language version, *Woman and Home*, from April 1906 to May 1907. Theirs was very much a family business. Two of Hansen's sons, the daughter, and a niece helped with writing, editing, and publishing the magazine. The young Hansens took more active roles when Niels Frederick and Ida moved to California in 1900. Following their deaths in 1935 and 1938, respectively, the young Hansens took over the magazine.⁶

The role of *Kvinden og Hjemmet* in acculturating Norwegian immigrants has been studied by several Norwegian scholars from the perspectives of gender roles, childrearing, suffrage, and temperance.⁷ But the authors did not consider fashion or needlework. Our study will focus on the patterns published for hardanger embroidery and

³ Langeland, 13; *Kvinden og Hjemmet* (December 1937): 5-6.

⁴ *Kvinden og Hjemmet* (December 1937): 5, translated in Langeland, 15.

⁵ Langeland, 13; *Kvinden og Hjemmet* 1937: 5-6.

⁶ Langeland, 13; *Kvinden og Hjemmet* 1937: 5-6.

⁷ Langeland; Elisabeth Seip, "Ida og Mina: Ringsaker-søstre med Blad-suksess i USA," *Norsk Utvandreremuseet Newsletter* 2 (1987); Lilly Setterdahl, "Kvinnan och Hemmet: A Women's Journal Written in Swedish, Edited by a Norwegian, Published by a Dane," in *Scandinavians in America: Literary Life*, ed. J.R. Christianson (Decorah, Iowa: Symra Literary Society, 1985); and Sigrid Brevik Wangsness, "Kvinden og Hjemmet: A Magazine for Scandinavian Immigrant Women, 1901-1910," in *Norse Heritage Yearbook*, ed. Hans Storhaug (Stavanger: The Norwegian Emigration Center, 1989).

quilts to describe how Ida Hansen and *Kvinden og Hjemmet* magazine successfully facilitated the transformation of Norwegian needlewomen into American needlewomen.

Kvinden og Hjemmet is available at several institutions, though none have issues from the first five years. The earliest issue we examined was July 1893. For our research we focused on 30 years of hardanger embroidery and quilt patterns in *Kvinden og Hjemmet*: 1900 to 1930 for hardanger embroidery and 1893 to 1923 for quilts. We used extant copies at Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah, Iowa, and Saint Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. For the same time periods, we also surveyed national American women's magazines such as *The Modern Priscilla*, *Home Needlework*, and *Needlecraft*.

We can learn about immigrant needlework and *Kvinden og Hjemmet's* Americanization efforts from two types of sources in the magazine: advertisements and columns. *Rundt Huset* (Around the House) was a semi-regular column advising readers how to furnish and decorate all the rooms of their homes in the American style.⁸ Unfortunately specific textiles and techniques are rarely mentioned. More useful for our study was the column called *Haandarbeide* or Handwork.

Hardanger Embroidery

Hardanger embroidery is a type of cutwork embroidery that was traditionally worked in white linen thread on white linen ground fabric. This was used to decorate the collar, cuffs and apron of the festive folk costume in the area around Hardanger on the west coast of Norway. Many immigrant women would have known how to do the technique because Hardanger and Hordaland county experienced high levels of emigration to the United States.

A regional Norwegian needlework became a Victorian craze. German pattern book companies were the first to promote the technique. American thread manufacturers began to publish patterns for Norwegian drawn work, as it was then known, after representatives toured Norway around 1895. In 1900 a lavishly embroidered apron made by a Norwegian woman, Brita Skåltveit, was displayed at the International Exposition in Paris. And the broad popularity of hardanger embroidery was further ensured after an article written by Sara Hadley appeared in the May 1901 issue of *Ladies Home Journal*. Americans used the embroidery to create decorative textiles typical for the late Victorian and Edwardian home, as well as stylish garments and dress accessories.⁹

The first hardanger embroidery patterns in *Kvinden og Hjemmet* appeared in the August 1898 issue. Instructions were given for three doilies. Later issues offered patterns for more doilies plus patterns for tablecloths, runners, lamp rugs, tea cloths, tray covers, pillows, and trims. The March 1904 issue featured a beribboned toiletry box.

⁸ Each *Rundt Huset* column focused on a type of room (guest room, parlor, closet, veranda) or a type of furnishing (flooring, bedding, lamps). *Haandarbeide* offered several needlework projects in each column. Drawings or photos often accompanied the patterns for garments, clothing accessories, and decorative household textiles. Techniques included crochet, tatting, knitting, embroidery, hardanger embroidery, and piecing for quilts.

⁹ Carolynn Craig Gustafson, *The Hardangersom of Vesterheim, Vol. 1* (Fargo, ND: Nordic Needle, 1987), 3; Gudrun Stuland, *Hardangersaum* (Oslo: Fabritius & Sønners Forlag, 1960), 8; Sara Hadley, *The Complete Hardanger Book* (New York: D.S. Bennet, 1904), 1.

Hardanger embroidery also ornamented contemporary clothing. The October 1903 issue of *Home Needlework* magazine stated that the winter fashion for shirtwaists “are almost without exception decorated with some form of fancy needlework. For something decidedly novel you might use the new hardanger embroidery.”¹⁰ *Kvinden og Hjemmet* subsequently printed patterns suitable for shirtwaists. Both *Kvinden og Hjemmet* and national women’s magazines printed designs for collars and cuffs and aprons using hardanger embroidery, but in a decidedly Victorian or Edwardian style.

The materials suggested for working such patterns were also worldlier than the traditional white on white linen. For example, a lamp rug in the September 1901 issue required: “ground fabric of fine white Grenadine (28 double thread) and embroidery of light and dark lilac Filofloss silk together with fine gold thread (2 strands).”¹¹

Patterns were often given as portions, such as corners, of the complete designs. Instructions were basic and would require that the reader to have some experience with hardanger or other embroidery.

Supplies for hardanger embroidery could be initially purchased by mail order from *Kvinden og Hjemmet* and later from three different Chicago businesses that advertised in the magazine. The Norwegian Shop was the most frequent advertiser for patterns, imported cloth and yarns.

It is interesting to note that in the August 1898 issue, *Kvinden og Hjemmet* used the Norwegian term for doilies, *tallerkenservietter*, with the American word in parentheses.¹² Other issues combined American and Norwegian terms in describing the textiles that might be decorated with hardanger embroidery, as in the August 1904 issue. The words centerpiece and pillow shams, in English, are used in the same sentence as the Norwegian words for tablecloth, bedspread, and collar.¹³ This may have been a way of teaching immigrant women the American words or it may have been a nod to the women’s ever-broadening understanding of English.

To know how well *Kvinden og Hjemmet* was Americanizing Norwegian needlewomen, we must look at how the magazine compares to English-language women’s magazines at a similar time period. We compared available issues of *Kvinden og Hjemmet* and *The Modern Priscilla* from 1900 to 1930 noting the number of patterns printed, the type of textiles the patterns were for, and the elaborateness or simpleness of the designs.

The thirty-year time period can be divided in half, the first half representing the peak and the second half representing the decline of hardanger’s popularity. During both periods, *Kvinden og Hjemmet* offered a similar number of patterns as did *Modern Priscilla*. During the peak years, 1900 to 1915, 23% of the *Kvinden og Hjemmet* issues examined and 18% of *Modern Priscilla* issues contained patterns and/or advertisements for hardanger embroidery or supplies. From 1915 to 1930, 7% of *Kvinden og Hjemmet*s and 6% of *Modern Priscilla*s contained hardanger embroidery patterns or ads.

¹⁰ *Home Needlework* (October 1903): 374.

¹¹ *Kvinden og Hjemmet* (September 1901): 281.

¹² *Kvinden og Hjemmet* (August 1898): 236.

¹³ *Kvinden og Hjemmet* (August 1904): 277.

Kvinden og Hjemmet offered more patterns throughout the thirty years than did *Modern Priscilla*, perhaps because hardanger embroidery was, simultaneously, fashionably American and traditionally Norwegian. Our previous research and that of scholar Susan Torntore found that immigrant women recognized the duality and used hardanger embroidery to look stylish while showing ethnic pride.¹⁴

Comparing the types of textiles the hardanger embroidery patterns were for, it is clear that *Kvinden og Hjemmet* was in step with the American-style textile patterns printed in national needlework magazines. Not only did the magazines offer similar patterns, they shared patterns. The original source is rarely mentioned, but we could see that the three doilies from the August 1898 *Kvinden og Hjemmet* reappeared individually in *Modern Priscilla* in September 1900, April 1901 and May 1904. *Kvinden og Hjemmet* borrowed a colorful cloth from the December 1904 *Modern Priscilla* for their March 1905 issue.

Kvinden og Hjemmet remained in step with national American magazines as hardanger embroidery went from finely and elaborately detailed to simpler and more open over time to nearly extinct by 1930.

Quilt Patterns

Quilts were relatively unknown in rural Norway in the nineteenth century, because the customary bedcoverings were sheepskins and handwoven wool coverlets. Immigrant women learned how to make quilts at church in Ladies Aid and at work for those who were domestics in American households.

The American word quilt was used in *Kvinden og Hjemmet* patterns along with, in earlier years, several different Norwegian words (*teppe, sengeteppe, lappeteppe, lappearbeide*) meaning spread, bedspread, patch spread or patch work. Advertisements always used quilt.

October 1894 was the first issue in our sample to offer a quilt pattern. The magazine noted this first as well. “We have many times received requests to illustrate samples of pieced quilts in *Kvinden og Hjemmet*, and finally we are in a position to fulfill your wishes. These quilts, which our grandmothers made so many of, now have come in fashion again and *Ladies Home Journal* has precisely illustrated a few blocks which we have been permitted to copy.” The issue continued by offering instructions for quilting. “One begins by taking a piece of stiff paper as large as one needs for the finished block, and with pencil and ruler take the diagram shown and cut out the various pieces with sharp shears. One can now use the paper pieces and cut the cloth a little larger. Follow the pattern as accurately as possible.”¹⁵

According to scholar Åse Wettre, *Kvinden og Hjemmet*’s Swedish sister-magazine often borrowed piecework patterns from *Ladies Home Journal*.¹⁶ But the two blocks from

¹⁴ See for example, Susan Torntore, “Blending Identities by Hand: An Immigrant’s Fusion of Norwegian Ethnic Traditions and American Style in a Hardanger Lingerie Dress,” *Ars Textrina Proceedings* (St. Paul: University of Minnesota, 1999), 32.

¹⁵ *Kvinden og Hjemmet* (October 1894): 233.

¹⁶ Åse Wettre, *Old Swedish Quilts* (Loveland, CO: Interweave Press, 1995), 11.

October 1894 were the only quilt patterns formally credited by the Hansens to *Ladies Home Journal*. Patterns were likely borrowed from other magazines.¹⁷

Some things were sent in by readers, like the woman who provided *Kvinden og Hjemmet* with samples of embroidery stitches for crazywork in February of 1898. She hoped, she said, that others would send in other sorts.¹⁸ The suggestion to share was followed six months later by a subscriber who offered more embroidery stitches.

The next piecework patterns, sent in by Mrs. H. Helseth of Lawndale, Minnesota, were offered in July of 1902. There were no accompanying directions nor were there any for the pattern sent by Jonette Johnson of Newman Grove, Nebraska, in September of the same year. “Thanks for the submitted sample” was all the magazine wrote.¹⁹ When Mrs. Charles Bergeson sent in two quilt patterns, published in the May 1903 issue, she shared her opinion that red, white and blue calico were best suited for both blocks.

The September 1904 issue illustrated three blocks sent by Mrs. O. L. Halvorsen. The American names were given for two of the quilt patterns: “New Double Four Patch” and “Wandering [sic] Lover”. The third pattern was simply identified in Norwegian as a star.

We found no directions or hints related to crazy work except for examples of embroidery stitches. There were a number of patterns for fancywork, like a spread of cigar-box bands in the September 1906 issue. The spread was made of cigar bands that were woven, backed, then topped with embroidery and ribbon trim.

Advertisements offer another revealing glimpse at the quilt information available to readers of *Kvinden og Hjemmet*. Ladies Art Company of St. Louis, Missouri, considered to be the first mail-order quilt pattern company, advertised regularly in *Kvinden og Hjemmet* for pattern blocks and books. In fact, Ladies Art Company ads appeared in 40% of the 268 issues we examined.

The Eddystone Manufacturing Company of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, sold cotton fabric for clothing, which could work well new or used for quilts.²⁰ They advertised in 1908 and 1909. Silk scraps, silk floss, and silk ribbon could be had from a variety of sources including mail-order businesses in New York, Chicago, and Topeka.

Finally, there were just a few ads for batting. Both the Albert Lea and Litchfield Woolen Mills in Minnesota advertised wool batts for quilts. We saw no ads for cotton batts.

¹⁷ Barbara Brackman, *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns* (Paducah, KY: American Quilter’s Society, 1993). Brackman identified the first-known published source for some of the patterns printed in *Kvinden og Hjemmet* as *Hearth and Home*, *Orange Judd Farmer*, and *Farm and Fireside* magazines and the *Ladies Art Company* catalog. For example, *Kvinden og Hjemmet* offered “Wandering [sic] Lover” in September 1904. “Wandering Lover” first appeared in *Hearth and Home* in 1895 (215). “New Double Four Patch” from the same 1904 issue of *Kvinden og Hjemmet* appeared as “New Four Patch” in *Farm and Fireside* in 1884 and as “Double Four Patch” in *Household Illustrated* some time later (177).

¹⁸ *Kvinden og Hjemmet* (February 1898): 43.

¹⁹ *Kvinden og Hjemmet* (September 1902): 282.

²⁰ Eddystone’s fashion cottons included Solid Black Prints, Black & Whites, Silver Greys, Fast Hazel Brown, Zephyrette Gingham, and Shepherd Plaids.

Was *Kvinden og Hjemmet* a good source of American quilt information? Our survey of national women's magazines is supplemented by the findings of quilt scholar Barbara Brackman who says, "the standard magazine format [for quilt patterns at the turn of the century] was a sketch or photo of the finished pieced block with a short paragraph containing color suggestions, the pattern name and the hometown, name or initials of the contributor."²¹ *Kvinden og Hjemmet* followed the standard format, both when they were borrowing patterns from other magazines, and when printing subscribers' submissions.

Names of piecework quilt patterns were not usually given in the early years of English-language magazines, nor were they in *Kvinden og Hjemmet*. The emphasis on fancywork over piecework in early years is certainly proven with the ads in *Kvinden og Hjemmet*. The popularity during that time of red and white and blue and white color schemes in American quilts is reflected in the colors suggested for our sample of patterns.²²

In addition to the fashion of color, *Kvinden og Hjemmet* seemed to follow the fashion for the Colonial Revival, a decorating style that began in the 1890s, inspired by a romanticized history of America. Copywriters liked to embellish the history of quilts and individual patterns, which is quite evident in the words borrowed from *Ladies Home Journal* accompanying *Kvinden og Hjemmet*'s very first quilt pattern.²³ In 1894 when *Kvinden og Hjemmet* pictured its very first quilt, the magazine said "these quilts, which our grandmothers made so many of."²⁴ *Kvinden og Hjemmet*'s readers' grandmothers would have been weaving coverlets in Norway, not piecing quilts in America. Yet the Hansens kept *Ladies Home Journal*'s cozy rhetoric.

Finally, *Kvinden og Hjemmet* was typical in that by the late 1920s they had switched to syndicated columns for quilt patterns. Helen Kaufman was *Kvinden og Hjemmet*'s first American syndicated columnist followed by Grandmother Clark through the 1930s, and Aunt Martha starting in August 1941 with her "New Ideas for Handcraft" in a new language - English.²⁵

Conclusion

It is not known how many other published sources Norwegian-American women used for needlework patterns. Probably many read a combination of English- and Norwegian-language periodicals, but for recent immigrants *Kvinden og Hjemmet* may have been the primary source and certainly the most accessible source of information on how to make themselves and their homes look American.²⁶

²¹ Barbara Brackman, *Clues in the Calico: A Guide to Identifying and Dating Antique Quilts* (McLean, VA: EPM Publications, 1989), 28.

²² Brackman, *Clues in the Calico*, 26-27.

²³ Brackman, *Clues in the Calico*, 31.

²⁴ *Kvinden og Hjemmet* (October 1894): 233.

²⁵ Brackman, *Encyclopedia*, 6. After October 1945 the number of quilt patterns in *Kvinden og Hjemmet* dropped off dramatically. There were no quilt patterns printed in 1947, the last year of publication.

²⁶ One of the few references to periodicals is in Knute L. Gravem, "Pioneering in Alaska," *Norwegian-American Studies and Records* 20 (1959): 137. An immigrant family in Alaska in 1900 subscribed to *Scribner's*, *World's Work*, *Review of Reviews*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *Literary Digest*, *Scandinaven* [a Norwegian-language newspaper published in Chicago], *St. Nicholas*, *American Boy*, and *Youth's Companion*.

We conclude, after comparing *Kvinden og Hjemmet* magazine and national women's magazines, that Ida Hansen and *Kvinden og Hjemmet* provided patterns for American-style hardanger embroidery and quilts that helped transform Norwegian women into American women.

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