

Pennsylvania German Ingenuity - Point Twill Related Coverlets

Gay McGeary

The Pennsylvania German weavers demonstrated their ingenuity with their production of coverlets which used many different patterns and weave structures. Their coverlets were woven in a wider variety of weave structures and color than the coverlets woven by their counterparts to the north and the south of Pennsylvania. Their creativity is particularly evident in the point twill related coverlets I have found during my research of Pennsylvania German coverlets woven in the first half of the nineteenth century. For discussion purposes, I have categorized them into five groups: (1) Nine Stars, (2) Large Star and Rose, (3) Stars and Flowers, (4) Window, and (5) Dog Paw. While I plan to write an individual article for each of the types listed above, I wanted to start by providing you with an introduction of what is to come.

All five categories are written with point twill drafts in part or for the total draft. The first three appear similar, because they include point twill star motifs in various forms, the latter two appear quite different, but do share the common thread of the point twill draft. I have recreated an original draft that I found in an early Pennsylvania German manuscript for each category so you will get the flavor of the early form of drafting and see the similarities of the point twill drafts. I also have photos of coverlets which were woven using similar drafts to illustrate what the early weavers were producing.

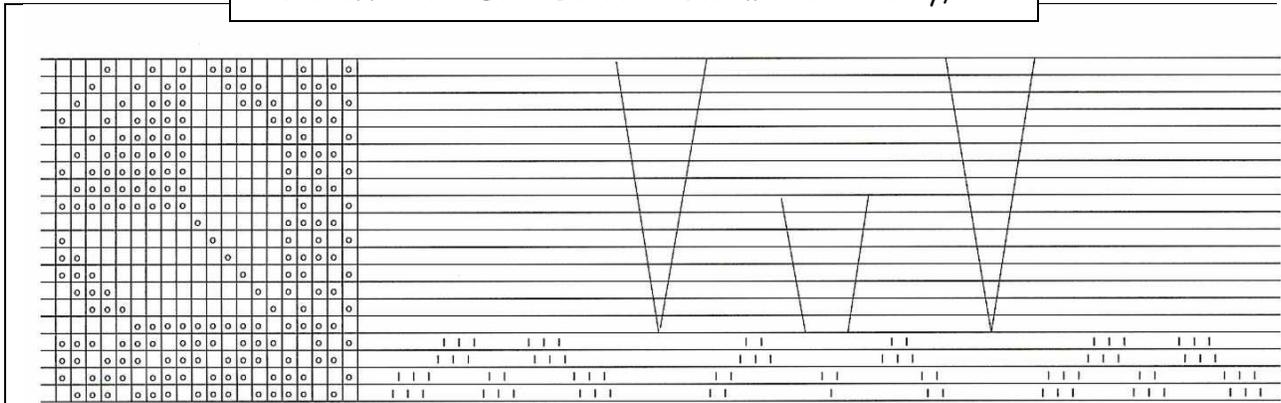
Nine Stars Coverlet from York, PA Antique



Nine Star coverlets were designed by grouping nine point twill stars together and separating each group with a lattice type table. In Abraham Serff's draft found in his 1848 manuscriptⁱ we can see that nine stars are created by a point twill draft, which uses eleven shafts and appears as 3 large

The second group is characterized by large point twill stars which are combined with a two block float work figure. Usually the float work motif is the classic 2

Star & Flower - David Bender - Westmoreland County, PA



block rose motif found in rose fashion overshoot patterns, but they can be extended to form a table. This Star & Rose coverlet is one of the many examples I have found in which the motifs are designed the same way a "whig rose" pattern is



Star & Rose Coverlet -

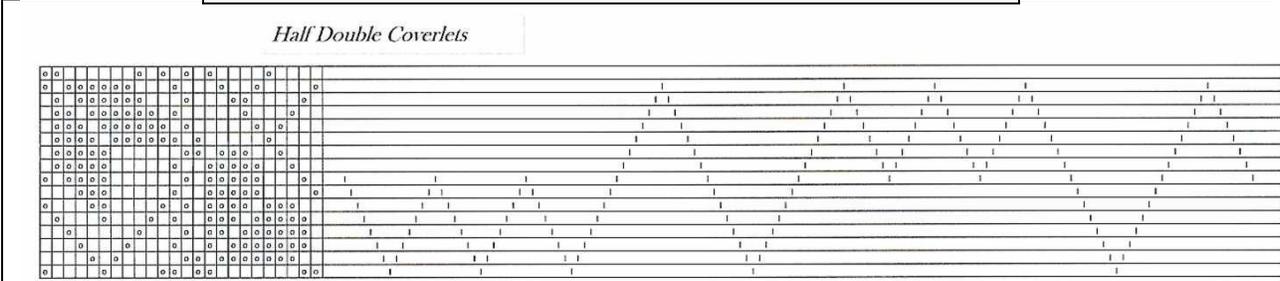
is created. There is a large star in each corner and a rose motif in the center. The pattern is framed by varying the star and rose block formations. As you can see in David Bender's draftⁱⁱⁱ, the draft combines the point twill threading on fourteen to sixteen shafts for

the stars and uses two shafts for each of the two blocks in the rose motif for a total of eighteen to twenty shafts. Tree motifs are created by varying the star and/or the rose for the border on three sides of the coverlet. The tree in this beautiful example used the rose motif to create the trees. I do not find examples

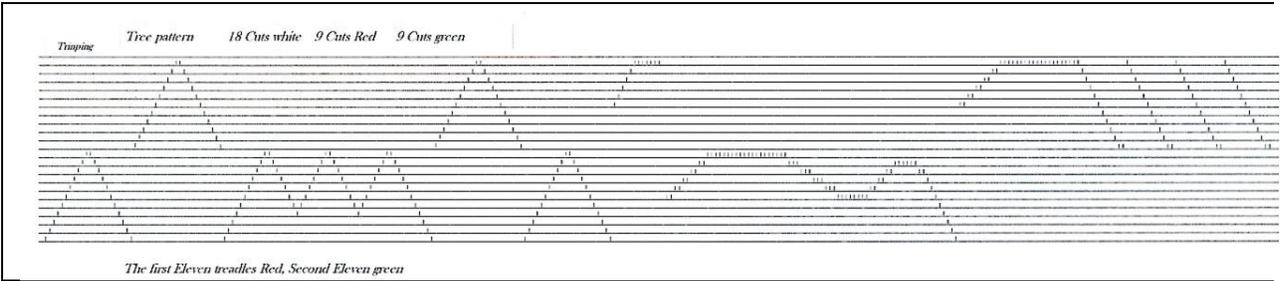
of this type of coverlet very often. I found this coverlet at an antique show in East Berlin, Adams County, Pennsylvania, but unfortunately it was very expensive.

The third group also includes stars, but the star motif is used singly and as groups along with single flowers and groups of flowers. The drafts typically use sixteen shafts, but what is unusual is that they add six additional treadles to weave the pattern. The Christian Frey manuscript^{iv} has a complete draft which not only includes the threading draft and tie-up, but it includes a detailed treadling draft.

Frey's Stars & Flowers Tie-up & Threading Draft

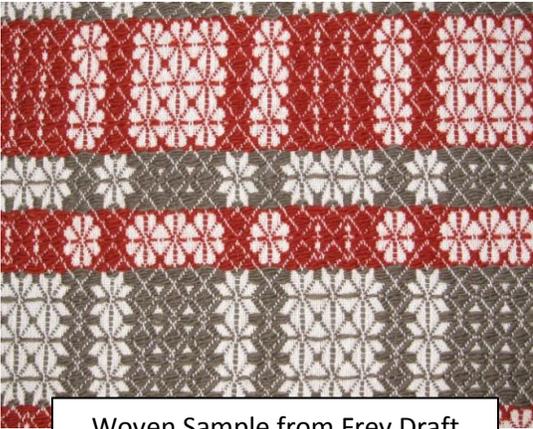


Frey's Treadling Draft



Frey even provides us with information about the choice of color to use.

Unfortunately I have not found coverlets in this pattern except when soldiers were incorporated into the main pattern except for the fragment Sue Bassett analyzed for our Fabric Analysis Exchange in 2008. To illustrate the draft, I have included a photo of the sample using Frey's draft, which I wove for Marjie's Early Weaving Books and Manuscripts sample exchange this year. I used red and green wool as recommended by Christian Frey. I

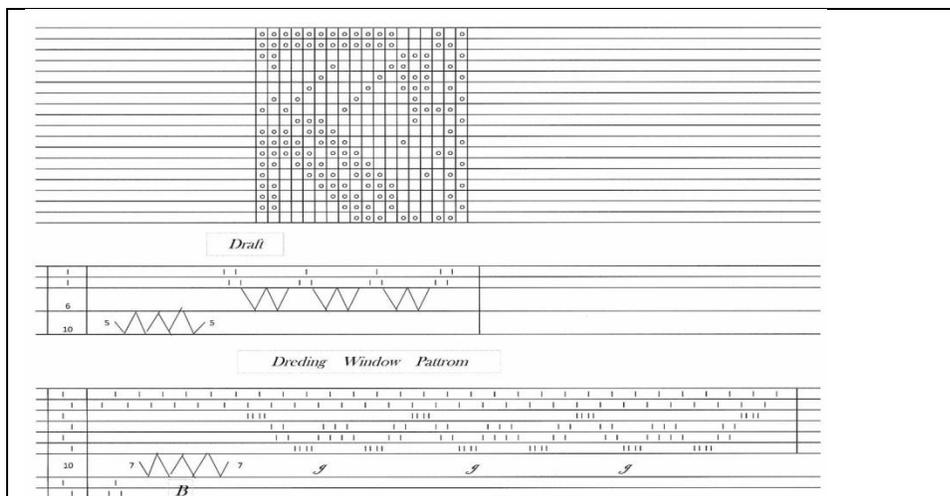


Woven Sample from Frey Draft

had to purchase 6 extra treadles in order to weave the pattern, but it was worth the expense.

For the fourth category in my study, the threading draft is very similar to the nine star coverlets. In this category the nine stars are replaced with nine square motifs, dotted with smaller squares. This draft is a staple in Pennsylvania German manuscripts from the first half of the nineteenth century. Usually it goes unnamed. However, my first exposure to the draft in the 1970s was with the Jacob Biesecker manuscript^v which Janet Crosson shared with me.

Biesecker's Window Pattern Draft

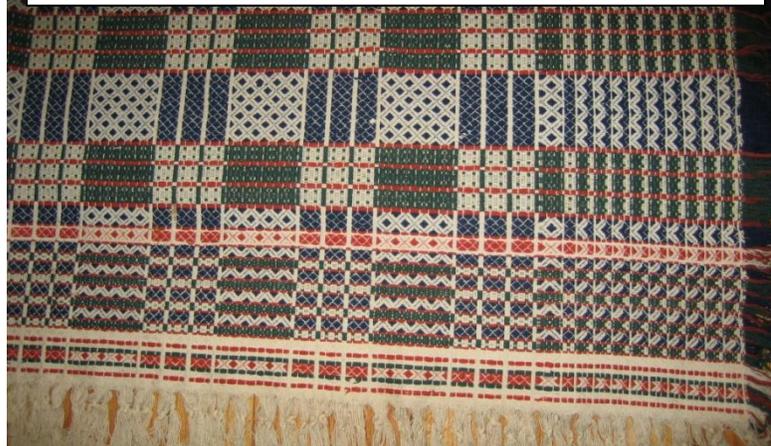


Biesecker labeled the pattern "Window." I have included my recreation of the Biesecker's draft. The nine squares do look like nine windows and the float work blocks

created the appearance of individual panes. When I did my original research in the 1970s and 1980s and lived in western Pennsylvania, I did not find window pattern coverlets. Now that I live in central Pennsylvania I see them on a regular basis.

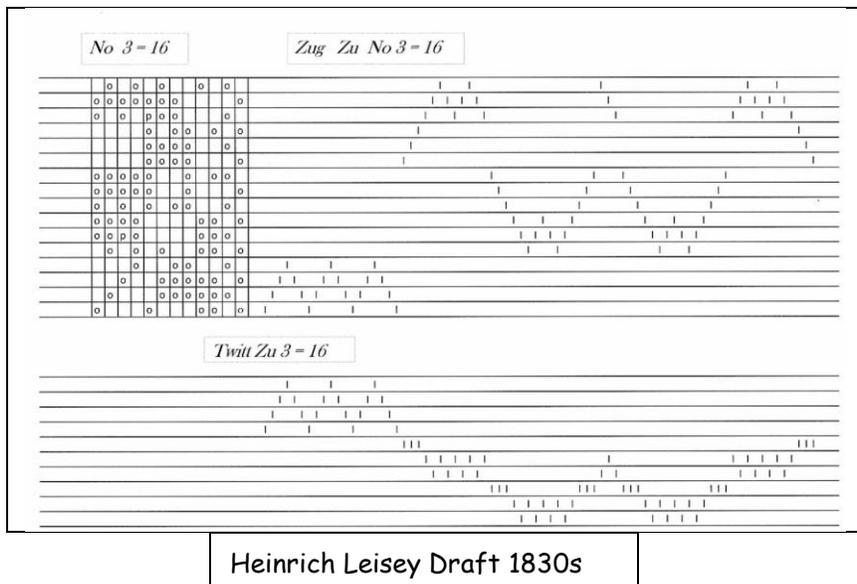
The window pattern drafts use six shafts for the window motif. Like the nine stars, two shaft are use to create float work blocks, which forms columns to separate the windows. The lattice like table uses ten shafts for a total of eighteen shafts. Before I

Window Coverlet from Lancaster County Auction



acquired my twenty shaft loom, I did my usual removal of a couple of shafts from the table to weave it on my sixteen shaft loom. I wove my version of the Biesecker window pattern draft for Marjie's group in April 2008. In May 2008 I purchased a window pattern coverlet at a Lancaster auction. I was pleased to see that my sample, while only on sixteen shafts, appeared almost identical to the coverlet I purchased when I placed the two side by side. The color and weight of cotton and wool used in my sample were also similar to what was used in the early coverlet.

I have labeled my fifth category, "Dog Paw." This is the name used for this type of draft in the Jacob Angstadt manuscript from Lewisburg, Union County, Pennsylvania as interpreted by Ruth Holroyd.^{vi} I see this category as a transition



between point twill weave and tied Beiderwand. In my recreation of the early draft in the Joseph Leisey manuscript^{vii} from Lancaster County you can see that the draft appears to be point twill.

Once you look at the photograph of a coverlet in this pattern, you can see that the center section of the cross motifs are very similar to tied Beiderwand. Four shafts are used to weave the small point twill table motif, while twelve shafts are use to weave the grouping of cross motifs. I have also found this same pattern in coverlets which are woven using all tied Beiderwand. While the table motif has the same shape as the Dog Paw coverlets it is not as interest since it lacks the diamond lines within the table. Another version of this grouping of



cross motifs is found in classic "Sorrel Blossom" double woven coverlets. The grouping of the cross motifs was also used in the corner of the figured and



fancy coverlets by Pennsylvania German coverlets weavers. The coverlet on the left was woven by John Brosey, a Lancaster County, Pennsylvania weaver. The coverlet is part of the McCarl Collection at St. Vincent's College, Latrobe, Pennsylvania

In later issues of our newsletter, I will discuss each of the five categories in detail. I want to include both the coverlets I have found and the sources of the

drafts in Pennsylvania German manuscripts. If you have also found coverlets similar to the ones shown in this article, please email me photos and information about the coverlets.

ⁱ The Abraham Serff manuscript is owned by the York County Historical Society; a copy can be obtained from Marjie Thompson, via the Early Weaving Books and Manuscript Study Group of the Complex Weavers.

ⁱⁱ Pat Hilts connects the patterns used for the German linens to their nineteenth century adaptation for American coverlet patterns. Patricia Hilts, "Seventh and Eighteenth Century Twills: The German Linen Tradition," *ARS TEXTRINA* 3 (May 1985) 146.

ⁱⁱⁱ The David Bender manuscript is owned by the Museum of American Folk Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico; a copy can be obtained from Marjie Thompson, via the Early Weaving Books and Manuscript Study Group of the Complex Weavers.

^{iv} The Christian Frey manuscript is privately owned; a copy is included in Tandy and Charles Hersh's book entitled *Rural Pennsylvania German Weaving 1833-1857 and the Christian Frey and Henry Small, Jr. Pattern Books*.

^v The Jacob Biesecker manuscript is privately owned; a copy can be found at the Lancaster County Historical Society

^{vi} Ruth N. Holroyd and Ulrike L. Beck, *Replica of an early 19th century manuscript with interpretations* (Pittsford, N.Y.: Ruth N. Holroyd, 1992) 82.

^{vii} The Heinrich Leisey Manuscript is owned by Landis Valley Museum, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.