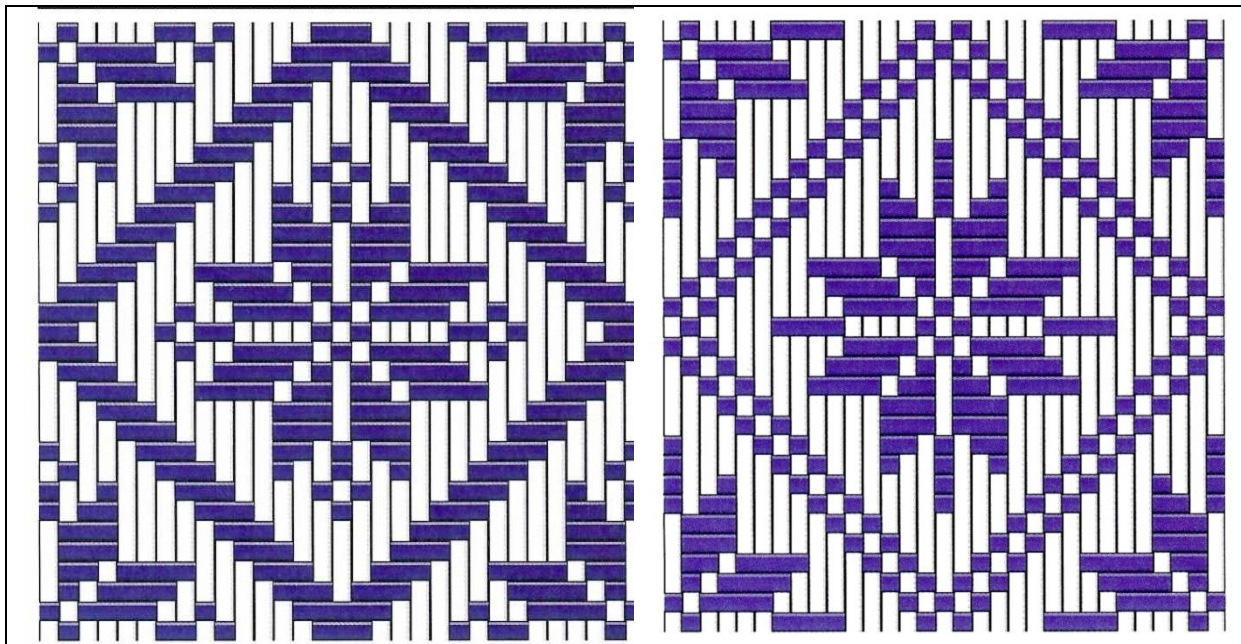


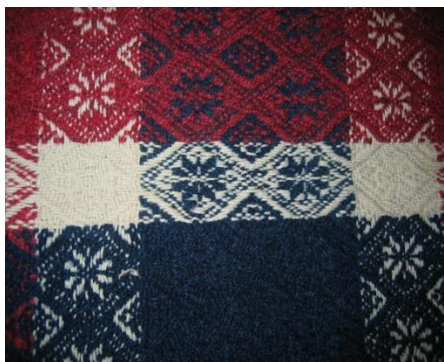
## A Gallery of Stars

Gay McGeary

Christian Frey and other nineteenth century Pennsylvania German weavers took the Hind un wieder patterns used for linen weaving in Germany and adapted them for their unique handwoven coverlets. They took the single star patterns and used stripes of color to make the pattern appear larger and more interesting. But the most common adaptation of the point twill star motifs was to create a grouping of nine stars which were separated by a decorative table motif. In this article I will share my research of early star coverlets and the pattern manuscripts of the weavers who wove them.



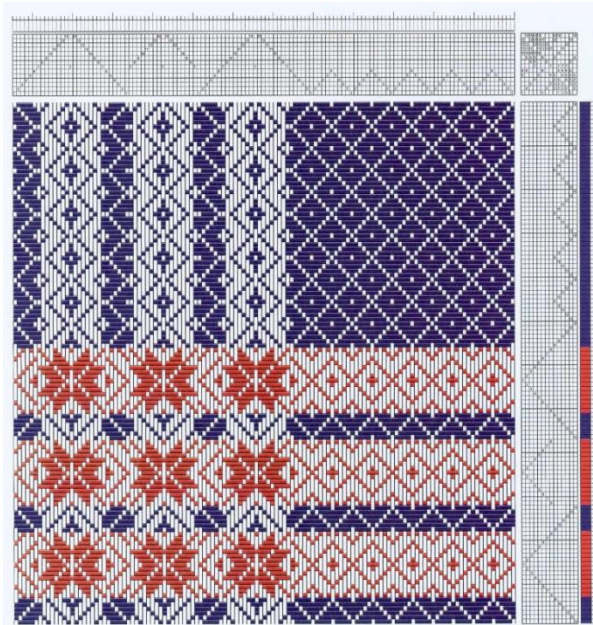
First I will start with a brief quiz. Which of the two star motifs shown above appeared in Marx Ziegler's *Weber Kunst und Bild Buch* in Germany in 1677 and which appeared in Christian Frey's *Coverlits Book* from Adams County, Pennsylvania from 1834? The one on the left is from the Frey manuscript<sup>i</sup> and the one on the right was used by German linen weavers in the seventeenth century<sup>ii</sup>.



Max Ziegler's tie-up could have been used for the singles coverlet shown on the left, which belongs to the National Museum of the American Coverlet. Here the pattern is enlarged by using bands of color to create grouping of stars. But this is only one way the point twill star is adapted by the nineteenth century weavers. Let us take a look at a few of the weaver manuscripts to see how the stars were used.

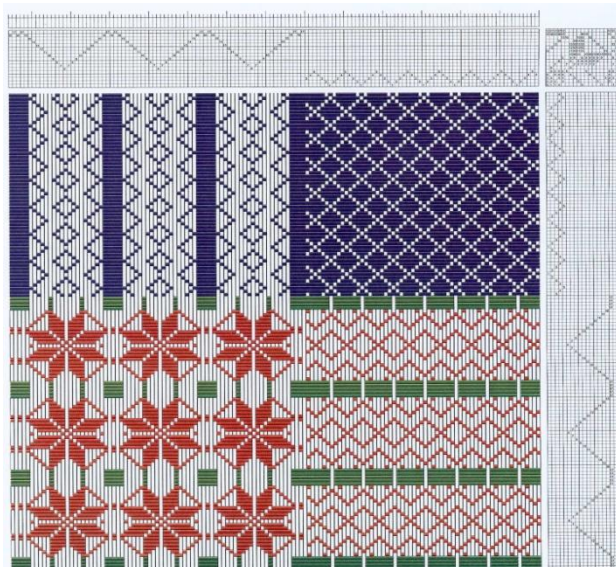


First, I will start with Christian Frey, an Adams County weaver, who included several drafts in his manuscript that group 9 stars together and separated the grouping by a decorative table. He wove his 9 star coverlets in both singles cloth (twill with no plain weave foundation) and half-double cloth (one warp and two wefts). He called his single cloth pattern "Single Coverletz" and only used 14 shafts instead of the typical 16 to 19 shafts. The star motifs used 8 shafts and the diamond table in the bird's eye pattern



used 6 shafts. The individual stars were separated by small blocks with diagonal lines. See above. On the left is a drawdown of Frey's "Single Coverletz" and on the right is an early coverlet in a similar pattern, but the coverlet is a half double.

Frey, unlike most Pennsylvania German weavers, named his patterns. For his "The Nine





"Small Stars" pattern he used 17 shafts to create this half double cloth pattern. The star motifs were formed with 11 shafts. Each star is separated from the next with a floatwork block that used one shaft and borrowed a shaft from the star motif. Five shafts were used for the diamond lattice table and the table was framed by the same floatwork shafts used to separate the stars. See above for the drawdown of "The Nine Small Stars" pattern and early coverlet in a similar pattern.

For Frey's "The Old Star Pattern" he created a little fancier 9 star pattern by using 18 shafts. Ten shafts were used for the stars and 8 shafts were used for the more elaborate table. Each star was also separated not just with a plain block like "The Nine Small Stars" pattern, but a block with a diagonal line running through it.



See above for the drawdown of Frey's "The Old Star Pattern" on the left and the early coverlet using the pattern on the right. I was particularly please when I analyzed this coverlet, because it is an exact match to the Frey draft. While I cannot say that Frey wove this coverlet or that his mentor Joseph Kittinger woven this coverlet, I can say they might have woven it and that it was probably woven by a Pennsylvania German weaver.

Jacob Biesecker, another Adams County weaver who wove from the 1830s to 1850s included a 9 star coverlet draft in his manuscript<sup>iii</sup> similar to Frey's "The Nine Small Star", but not exactly the same.

Moving further east to York County, Abraham Serff included several star coverlet patterns in his 1858 pattern manuscript.<sup>iv</sup> Like Frey, Serff included one single cloth pattern and two half double cloth patterns, but he did not name his patterns or include



information about color selection as Frey did. His singles pattern used 10 shafts for the stars and 6 shafts for the multi-diamond table. His half double patterns were similar to Frey's "The Nine Small stars" and "The Old Star Pattern."

Finally, I found an interesting twist to the nine star patterns in the Cyrus Uhler 1830's manuscript.<sup>9</sup> Cyrus wove in Lebanon County. See below on the left for the drawdown of the Uhler draft and on the right for an early coverlet. Single half tones form a frame around the stars on the left and the right. The early coverlet is only similar to the Uhler pattern.



I have not found a draft in a weaver's nineteenth century manuscript for some of the



more unique examples of the nine star coverlets, but I will keep looking for a reference and share them with you now.

On the left is one of my favorite nine star coverlets. The stars are joined, not separated to form the central point of the pattern. There are two blocks on opposites in each corner that are framed by half and quarter stars. It requires 19 shafts. Fifteen shafts are used for the stars and 4 for the two



blocks on opposites.

The early weaver changed stars to flowers and also used a table of two blocks on opposites for the coverlet on the right. This is a great pattern to weave if you only have 16 shafts.

The tulip motifs shown in the coverlet below are a variation of the star motifs. Usually variations of the main pattern are included in the border, but not for this pattern. Rows of tulips alternate with rows of nine stars throughout the coverlet. Twelve shafts are used for the stars and tulips and four shafts for the two block on opposite tables for a total of 16 shafts. Bill Leinbach was kind enough to share this coverlet with me.





Last but not least we come to two of my favorite coverlets. The nine star coverlets with soldier borders. The first time I saw this coverlet, it was shown in a coverlet show at Old Economy Village, Ambridge, Pennsylvania in the late 1970s. I drafted the 18 shaft



pattern, but I could never figure out how to draft it down to my 16 shaft loom. The coverlet was part of the McCarl Collection, most of which is figured and fancy and was recently donated to St. Vincent College. Now that I have a 20 shaft loom, I could not find

the draft and the original photo of the coverlet shown above was not clear. Thanks to the help of Ron Walters I have a clear photo of the coverlet and have figured out the treadling for the soldiers. Ron took pictures of the coverlet when it was auctioned at a Pook and Pook Auction in Downingtown, Pennsylvania in 2006.

While I was searching for the McCarl coverlet, Trish Herr shared photos with me of her soldier border coverlet.<sup>vi</sup> Check out the use of the half star for the soldier's uniform.

I hope you find my collection of nine star coverlets interesting. I had fun completing the research and am continuing to look for the next variation. Send me photos if you know about similar coverlets. I also have drawdowns of all the coverlets shown in this article and am glad to share them with you.



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<sup>i</sup> This tie-up was created by Gay McGeary with the Fiberworks program using Christian Frey's Diaper tie-up No. 8 reproduced in Tandy and Charles Hersh's Book *Rural Pennsylvania German Weaving 1833-1857 and the Christian Frey and Henry Small, Jr. Pattern Books* (2001) 141.

<sup>ii</sup> This tie-up was also created by Gay McGeary with the Fiberworks program from Marx Ziegler's *Weber Kunst und Bild Buch* (1677) as reproduced per Patricia Hilts "The Weavers Art Revealed" in *ARS TEXTRINA* 13 (Dec. 1990) 220.

<sup>iii</sup> The Jacob Biesecker manuscript is privately owned; a copy can be found at the Lancaster County Historical Society.

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

<sup>v</sup> The Cyrus Uhler manuscript is owned by Lebanon Valley College, Annville, Pennsylvania; a copy can be found at

[http://www.cs.arizona.edu/patterns/weaving/manuscripts/uc\\_manu.pdf](http://www.cs.arizona.edu/patterns/weaving/manuscripts/uc_manu.pdf).

<sup>vi</sup> Don and Trish Herr's soldier coverlet photographed by Don and Trish Herr.