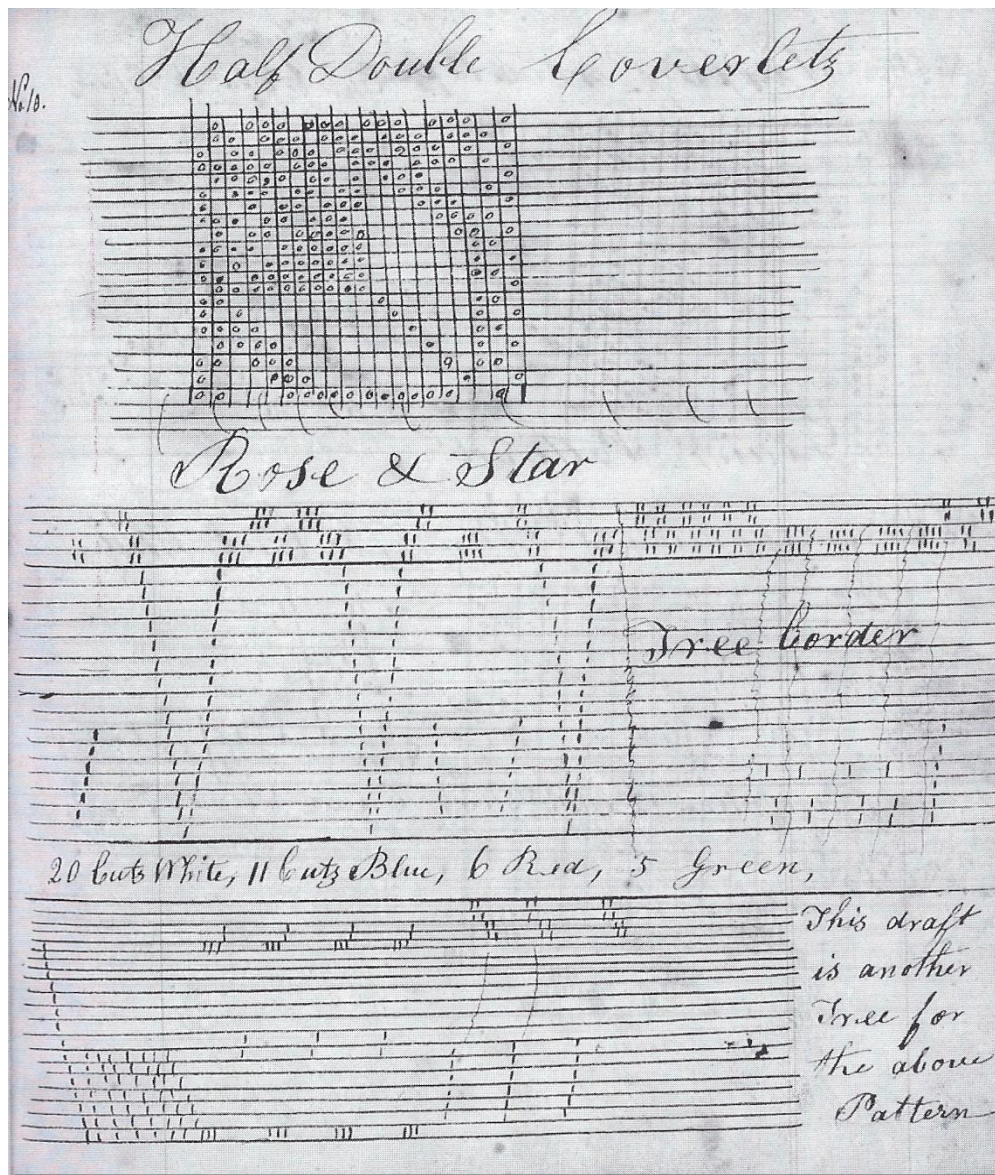


## Rose & Star Coverlets - "The Eligent ...Starr Patron"

Gay McGeary

"Rose and Star," this is the name I assigned to the second group in my point twill coverlet study. It is named after the two motifs used to create the pattern. While this group of coverlets has captured my imagination, it apparently has not caught the attention of many early weavers. I have only found five woven coverlets and seven drafts in four Pennsylvania German pattern manuscripts.



Christian Frey's 19<sup>th</sup> century draft includes the name "Rose and Star" for his pattern which he name after the two motifs.

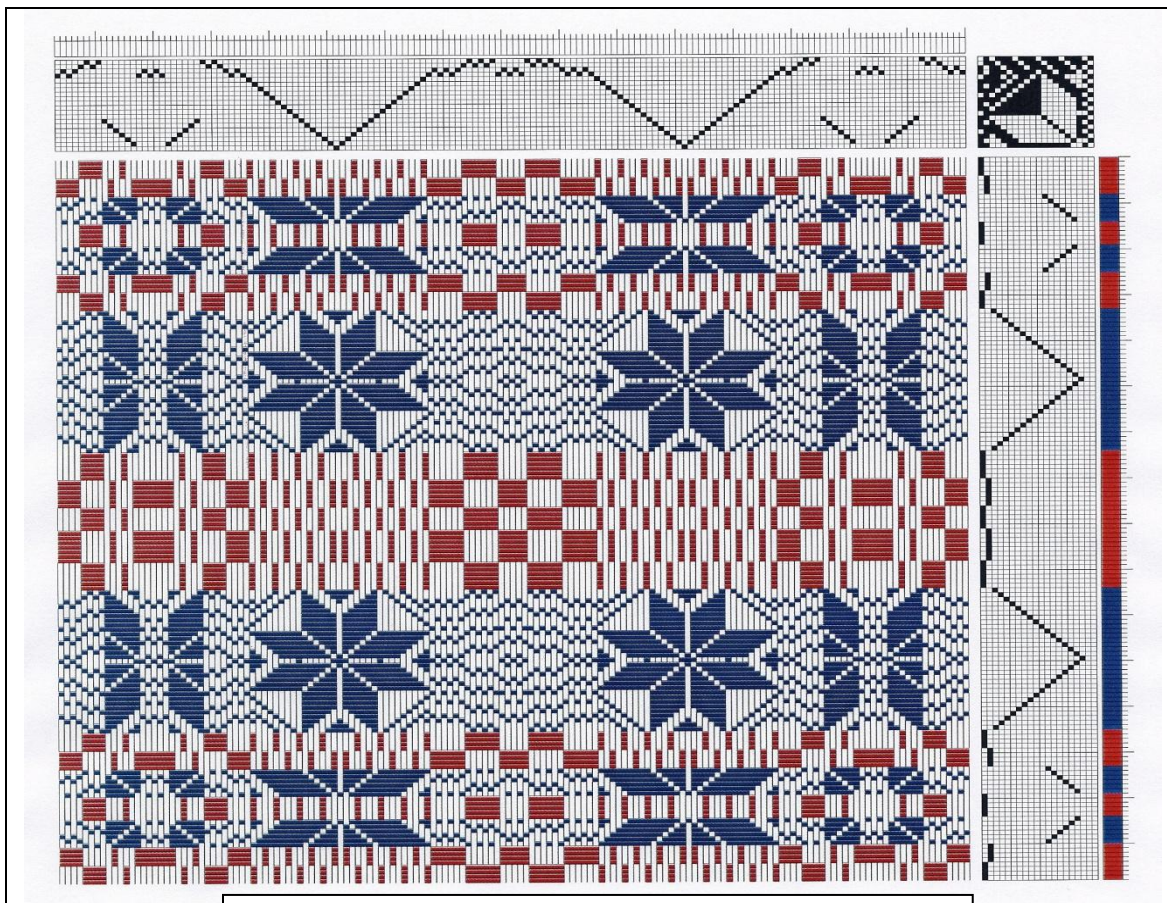


While my research pool may be limited, I agree with Henry Small's name of the pattern which he labeled "The Eligent Ring Starr Patron" in his 1834 manuscript<sup>1</sup>. The pattern is intriguing and three of the members of our study group must agree, because you each own examples of this style of coverlet.

My first introduction to the Rose and Star coverlet genre was a black and white photo that was sent to me years ago when I lived in western Pennsylvania. I analyzed the pattern from the photo and then found a similar draft in an early manuscript. When I returned to my research and weaving of coverlets six years ago, I was pleased to find coverlets woven in this pattern and decided to expand on my earlier limited research.

First, I will share with you my research of the drafts found in early pattern manuscripts. Second, I will elaborate on my examination of the patterns in the coverlets I have seen so far. Third, I will describe the information I have gleaned from early weaver's account books. Finally I will summarize my research.

### Drafts in Early Manuscripts



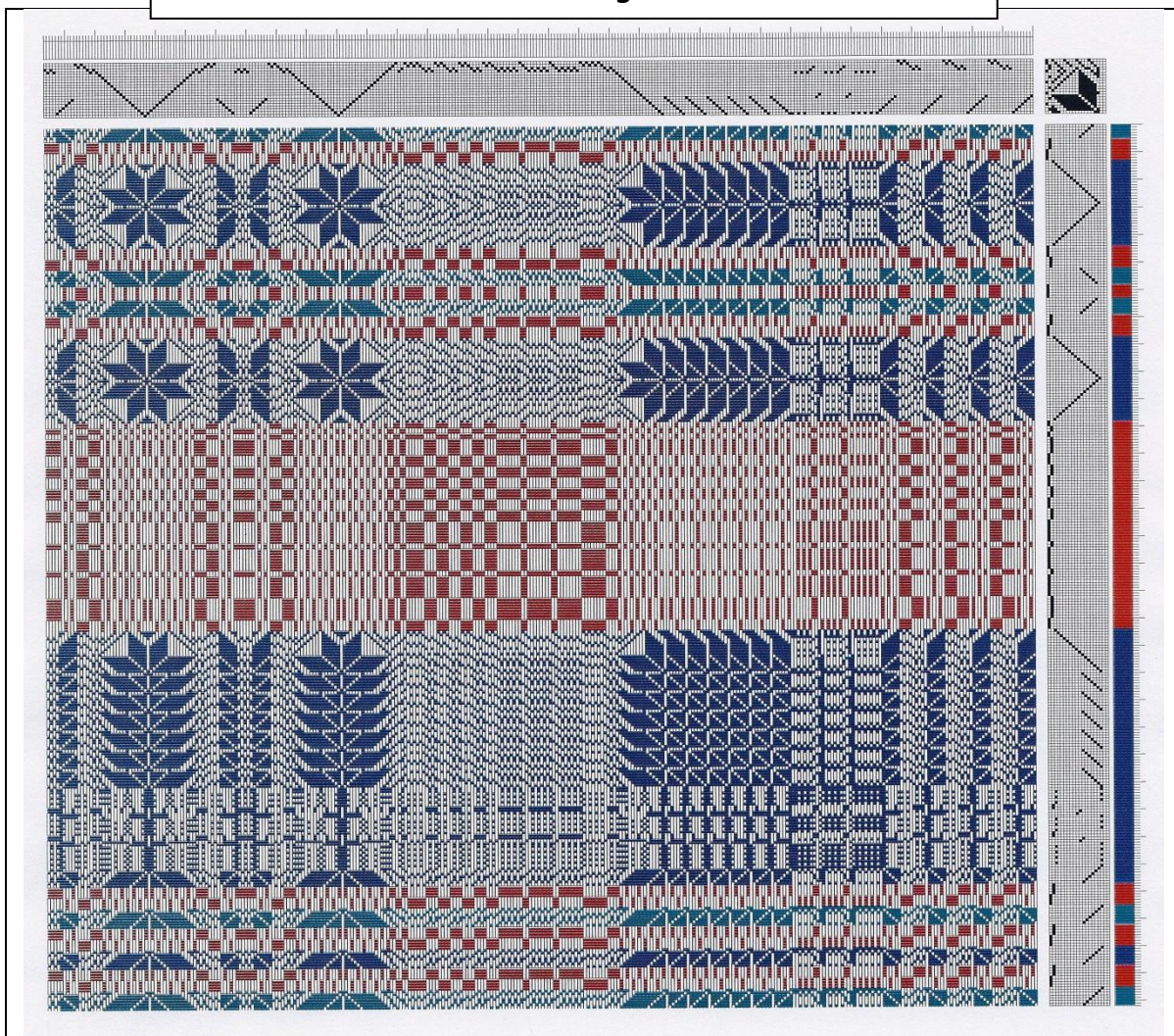
Drawdown of Henry Small's "Eligent....Starr"



I chose to start with Henry Small's manuscript, because it includes both of the two types of Rose and Star coverlet drafts. He calls the more elaborate of the two patterns "The Eligent Ring Starr Patron." A rose motif resides in the center of the pattern. It is formed with two pattern blocks that require two shafts on opposite sheds for each block. Four stars, one in each corner, are placed around the rose. Sixteen shafts are needed to create the large stars. Variations of the rose and star motifs surround the central rose and stars to create the "Eligent" pattern. Small also included the draft for a double tree border. One tree was formed from the rose motif and one from the star.

Henry Small labeled his second pattern "Ring & Starr Patron by Henry Small" followed by a second name, "The New Ring and Starr Patron."<sup>2</sup> This name insinuates

Drawdown of Small's "New Ring & Starr Patron"



the "Eligent" star is the pattern he obtained from the master weaver, but this pattern is one that he developed himself. He simplified the pattern by eliminating the large rose figure, but he used the same tie-up as is found with the more elaborate pattern. Now we see that the large stars are separated by the two blocks on opposites and a narrow version of the star. Small's pattern kept the same elaborate double tree border. The overall result of the "New" pattern is an effective combination of a simple pattern surrounded by an elaborate border. However, Small was not the only weaver to use this pattern configuration as you will see later. Unfortunately I cannot ask the weavers who designed it first.

While Henry Small worked in Franklin County, which is located in south central Pennsylvania, Christian Frey and Jacob Biesecker worked as weavers in Adams County, which is located on the western border of Franklin County. Both Frey and Biesecker included Rose & Star drafts in their manuscripts. First, I will take a look at Christian Frey's contribution to the pattern design.

Similar to Small, Christian Frey was working as a journey man when he hand wrote his manuscript. He told us this at the beginning of his manuscript when he wrote "Coverlet book for which I Workt 10 Months and got 20 dollars for that time by Joseph Kittinger on the year 1833 from Aug. til June 1834."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, I can conclude his Rose and Star pattern was one he obtained from Kittinger, but I do not know where Kittinger obtained the pattern. I can see that the one draft Frey included in his manuscript is the more elaborate version. In fact, his No. 10 Half Double "Coverletz", "Rose and Star"<sup>4</sup> pattern and tie-up are identical to Henry Small's "Eligent...Star" pattern. He also included a draft for a double tree border. The tree, which is formed by the star, used the same draft as Henry Small's. Frey varied his draft for the tree based on the rose motif, which I see as an improvement. The colors: blue, red and green, used for the pattern weft are also shown in Frey's draft.

The other Adams County weaver to include the pattern in his pattern book is Jacob Biesecker. I do not know much about his background except that he is listed as a weaver in Franklin Township in the 1850 census at which time he lived with his father and was 40 plus years old. He is also listed as a weaver in the 1860 census. I have also found two of his Figured and Fancy coverlets that are dated 1840 and 1846 and include the place they were woven as "Franklin T. + Ad + Co" for Franklin Township, Adams County. Biesecker included two Rose and Star drafts, which he called Buffalo star.<sup>5</sup> Both his patterns are a less developed version of Small and Frey's "Rose and Star." The only difference in his two patterns is that one



included a rose pattern made up of even sized blocks, while the other draft varied the size of the blocks making up the rose. The same tie-up was used for both drafts and the detailed treadingling draft for a tree border can be used for both drafts, since it is a variation of the star motif. His tree can only be used in

### Drawdown of Biesecker's Buffalo Star



the bottom border, since the floats would be too long for the trunk of the tree if the pattern is turned 90° for the side border.

David Bender, another weaver with Rose and Star drafts in his manuscript lived in western Pennsylvania. He wove in Greensburg, West Moreland County and later, as many weavers did, moved west to Iowa where he stayed for the remainder of his weaving years. Like Small and Biesecker, he included two drafts. The first is the classic developed pattern like Small and Frey and the second is a less ornate pattern, similar to but not exactly like Small's "The New...Patron." He called the developed pattern "Compafs star pattern No 5",<sup>6</sup> but he did not give a name for the other pattern. He used the same tie-up for both drafts. No tree border draft is included.

All four of the weavers used 16 shafts to create the star and four shafts for the two blocks on opposites to create the rose for a total of 20 shafts. The three central Pennsylvania weavers included instructions for tree border. Small and Frey from Franklin and Adams County, included a warp draft for the double tree border with trees created from the rose and the star motifs, while Biesecker, the other Adams County weaver, only used a single tree border at the bottom. Finally, David Bender, from the western part of Pennsylvania, did not include a tree border.

### Early Coverlets

Next, I will describe the Rose and Star coverlets that I have been fortunate to find and ask the questions: How do they compare to the drafts? Can I theorize who, when and where they might have been woven?

All five of the early coverlets in this pattern used the more elaborate version of the pattern, four are owned by member in our study group and the fifth coverlet is owned by the State Museum of Pennsylvania.

In 2006 I met Kathy Rug at a coverlet workshop and she was kind enough to lend me her Rose and Star coverlet so I could analyze it. I kept it for several months, because I could not figure out the tree border. Finally, I returned it to her without completing the border draft. It is only half a coverlet, but it is a fine example of the genre. Three colors of wool were used to create the pattern floats. Red was used for the stars, dark blue for the roses and a medium blue for the narrow variation of the star motif. The coverlet has a double tree border framing it on three sides. The first tree border was created from the rose motif, while the second was derived from the star motif. I included my analysis in the 2006 Study Group Exchange.





Sue Bassett sent in her analysis of a Rose and Star coverlet for the July 2007 Fabric Analysis Exchange. Her pattern is unique because it requires only 15 shafts



to weave while the other coverlet patterns require 20 shafts. Eleven shafts were used for the star and four for the rose. Only two colors were used for the



pattern floats with red for the stars and dark blue for the roses. A single tree border, a variation of the star, is found on three sides of the coverlet.

Deborah Whitehead and I were exchanging emails a couple of years ago and she mentioned that she had just purchased a coverlet from Pennsylvania. She was kind



Deborah Whitehead's Coverlet - Photo taken by  
Deborah Whitehead

enough to share photos with me. I was pleased to learn that she had a Rose and Star coverlet almost identical to the drafts for the more elaborate pattern in Bender, Small, and Frey's manuscripts. Her coverlet used three colors for the pattern floats with red for the roses, dark blue for the stars (the reverse of Kathy and Sue's coverlets), and green for the variation of the rose that separates the repeat of the

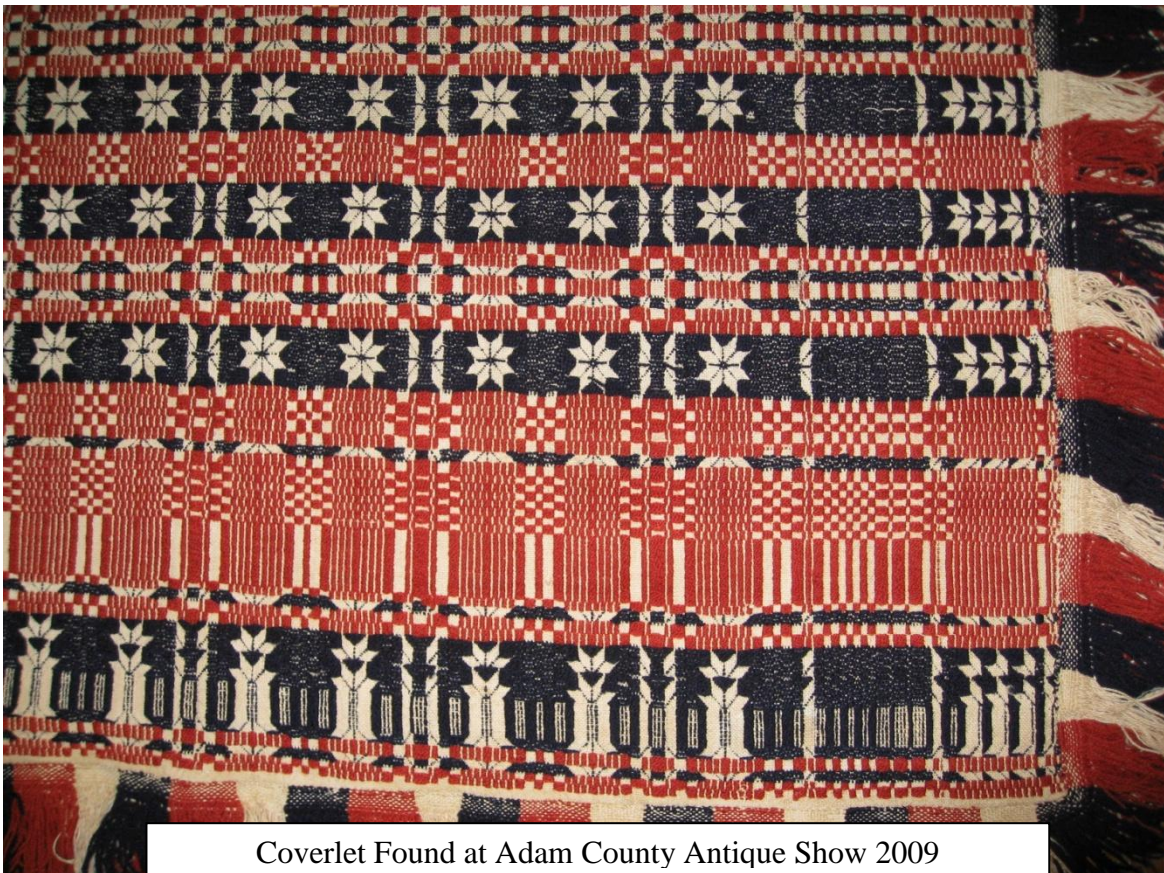
main pattern. These are the same colors that Frey lists for his pattern. Deborah's coverlet has a double tree border on three sides of the coverlet. The first set of trees was designed from the rose pattern and the second set from the star motif.



Last, but not least, the weaver wove and attached a tape fringe in stripes of red, blue, and green wool with stripes of natural cotton to frame the tree border.

When I visited the State Museum of Pennsylvania in Harrisburg in the fall of 2006 I also found a Rose and Star coverlet. I included pictures of the coverlet in my article on my visit to the museum in our May 2007 Newsletter. This coverlet is similar to the other coverlets. The weaver used red wool floats for the stars and dark blue wool floats for the roses similar to Kathy and Sue's coverlet. However, it differs from the other three coverlets, because the central rose motifs are larger. It also does not have a tree border like the other coverlets. Instead the coverlet has a wide border consisting of repeats of half stars.

Last, but not least, is the Rose and Star coverlet I saw at an antique show in Adams County a couple of years ago. Like the other coverlets, it is woven from the



Coverlet Found at Adam County Antique Show 2009

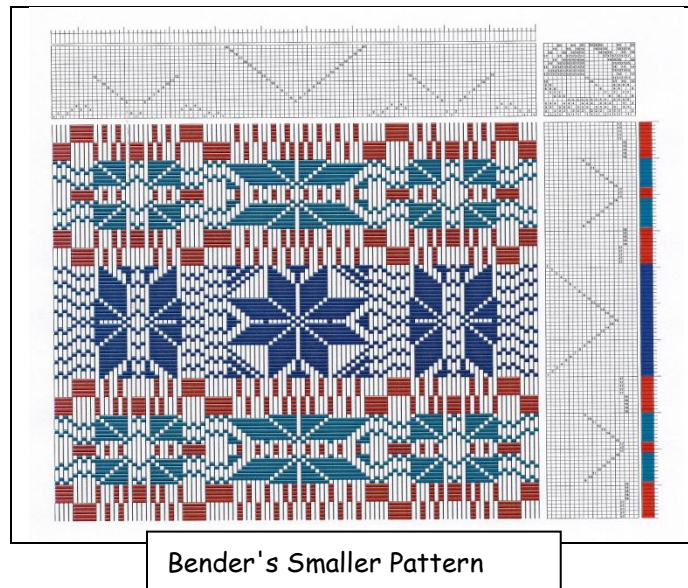
more elaborate form of the pattern. Like Deborah's coverlet, the stars were woven in dark blue and the roses were woven in red. It has a single tree border on three sides that was designed from the rose motif. On the two sides half star motifs were placed at the base of the tree. On the bottom is what appears to be a tree designed from the star motif. It is very different from the other trees and



almost looks like a human figure, maybe a soldier. What do you think? I contacted the owner of the coverlet as I was writing this article to see if she still owned it. I was please to learn she still had it, and decided to buy it so I have an example of the Rose and Star genre.

Since all five examples of the coverlets I found used the more elaborate of the patterns found in the manuscripts and since weavers did not weave all the patterns in their manuscripts, I was beginning to think that it was a possibility that the smaller patterns were not used by the early weavers. I decided to check out Helene Bress's *Coverlet Book* to see what she had found. She included two coverlets in the Rose and Star pattern,<sup>7</sup> but both coverlets used the smaller pattern. The first coverlet is similar to Bender smaller pattern. The coverlet is an

excellent framing a simple with an pattern using a border. The formed with floats. Red wool two blocks on the same found in Kathy's used to create the star motif. both the first



example of main pattern elaborate double tree stars were dark blue wool was used for the opposites and medium blue coverlet was the variations of In this coverlet and second tree

border were formed from the star motif. The first is woven in dark blue and the second in red, with a row of stars, woven in medium blue, separating the two rows of trees. The border was completed with three rows of the blocks on opposite which form a final narrow band. I cannot decide if I like the dark or the light side of the coverlet better. Both are very pleasing.

The second coverlet found in the Bress book is not a well designed coverlet. The pattern just blends together into a vague combination of motifs. Helene Bress agreed with my assessment of the design.

### Account Books by Early Weavers

This past summer I started to expand my research of early coverlets to the account books or day books in which early weavers record their customer's name



along with the date of the sale, the type of weaving done, the yardage woven, the amount charged for each entry in the book. Unfortunately the name of the weave structure and the pattern usually are not included in the brief entries.

The accounts books for three of the weavers (Small, Frey and Bender) in our study have survived. Tandy and Charles Hersh include detailed descriptions of the accounts for Henry Small and Christian Frey in their book *"Rural Pennsylvania German Weaving 1833 - 1857"*. They report that Small did not label the pattern for his coverlets, but Frey did.<sup>8</sup> Based on the Hersh's research of the two account books, I learned Henry Small wove 33 coverlets from February 1838 to February 1840.<sup>9</sup> They report that 14 of his coverlets have a cotton warp, wool pattern weft and cotton tabby, which describes a float work type coverlet. It is possible one of them was his "Eligent...Star Patron." Christian Frey wove 52 coverlets. Hopefully I will get to see Rose and Star coverlet in his Account Book when I visit the York Historical Society to see his weaving records.

I learned from Marjie Thompson's article entitled "What Remains Doesn't Necessarily Tell the Whole Story" in the June 2011 *Complex Weavers Journal* that David Bender also provided some information about the patterns he used for his coverlets. Unfortunately when I obtained a copy of Bender's Account Book from the Mennonite Society of Iowa, I did not find a reference to his "Compafs star pattern No 5."

### Conclusion

Based on my research I learned that in the nineteenth century a small group of Pennsylvania German weavers included the Rose and Star type of point twill drafts in the handwritten pattern manuscripts. They created two types of drafts: one more elaborate, than the other. Both types were used to weave coverlets in this period. However, the larger pattern appeared to be more popular based on the examples I found. The majority of the coverlet drafts in the manuscripts and the surviving woven examples included a tree border in one form or another. The use of the elaborate style of the pattern in the four coverlets I examined indicates Small, Frey, or Bender could have woven one of the coverlets. Since the border patterns used are different from the drafts in the manuscripts, I cannot say with any certainty that either of them wove the coverlets. However, the border threading and treadling drafts were usually left up to the imagination of the weaver and were not included in the draft. Therefore, there is still a possibility one of these weavers wove one of the existing coverlets. I can also say that Small or Bender might have woven the coverlet described in *The Coverlet Book*. Once



again there is a match to the main pattern, but the double tree border does not match Small's draft and since Bender did not include the border, there is nothing with which to compare it.

My exploration of the drafts and coverlets created with the Rose and Star pattern reinforces the individual nature of each coverlet. Handwoven coverlets are not cookie-cutter products of the loom. Each coverlet is unique, because each weaver took a basic draft and made it his own. For example, Henry Small took the elaborate Rose and Star pattern and simplified the pattern and declared it his creation when he labeled the pattern: "...Patron by Henry Small." The choice of color, the repeats of the main pattern, the design of the border, the type of fringe are all the design elements that an early weaver considered when creating a coverlet. A coverlet is a combination of artistic choices for the design elements of the coverlet, while the craft is the execution of those choices.

My study of Rose and Star coverlets is not concluded with this article. I will continue to look for other examples of the pattern in coverlets I find at auctions, private collections, and museums. I will also search for examples of other drafts when I find additional pattern manuscripts. It is my desire that this article will stir more interest and other members will find other coverlets in this genre and share them with our group.

Coverlet at the State Museum of Pennsylvania



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<sup>1</sup> A copy of Henry Small's draft "The Elegent Ring Starr Patron" is on page 80 of Tandy and Charles Hersh's book *Rural Pennsylvania German Weaving 1833 - 1857* (2001). A copy of Henry Small's pattern book is included at the end of the book

<sup>2</sup> A copy of Henry Small draft "Ring Starr Patron by Henry Small" is on page 83, Hersh.

<sup>3</sup> Hersh, 106.

<sup>4</sup> A copy of Christian Frey's draft "Rose & Star" is on page 129 along with his entire pattern manuscript in the Hersh's book.

<sup>5</sup> A copy of Jacob Biesecker's draft "Buffalo Star" pattern is on page 17 of his pattern manuscript. The Jacob Biesecker manuscript is privately owned. A copy can be found at the Lancaster County Historical Society, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

<sup>6</sup> A copy of David Bender's draft is in his pattern manuscript. The original manuscript is owned by The Museum of American Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

<sup>7</sup> Bress, Helene. *The Coverlet Book Volume Two*. (2003) 106-109.

<sup>8</sup> Hersh, 22.

<sup>9</sup> Hersh, 21.