

Stars and Flowers - Stretching the Limits

Gay McGeary

Stars & Flowers is by far the most obscure twill derivative of the five types in my series of explorations of point twill coverlets. In addition, it illustrates the ingenuity of the Pennsylvania German weavers to stretch the limits of their looms. Basically, it is a 16 shaft point twill draft which uses 22 treadles for the pattern to create the stars and flowers and two treadles for the plain weave. I have found drafts in four Pennsylvania German manuscripts from the mid-nineteenth century and woven examples in eight coverlets.

Normally, star and flower point twill patterns use the same number of shaft and treadles to create the pattern. Two additional treadles maybe added depending on whether the coverlet was woven with or without a plain weave foundation. The main characteristic of this group of patterns is the addition of six treadles to weave the pattern. The pattern consists of single stars and flowers combined with groupings of stars and flowers. In some patterns the groupings have overlapping figures, but in other they do not. In addition, some use repeats of rows of trees and soldiers in the main part of the coverlet, which are derived by varying the treadling of the star motif. This is not a common practice. Usually, variations of the main motifs are relegated to the borders as a means to create interest in the coverlet design.

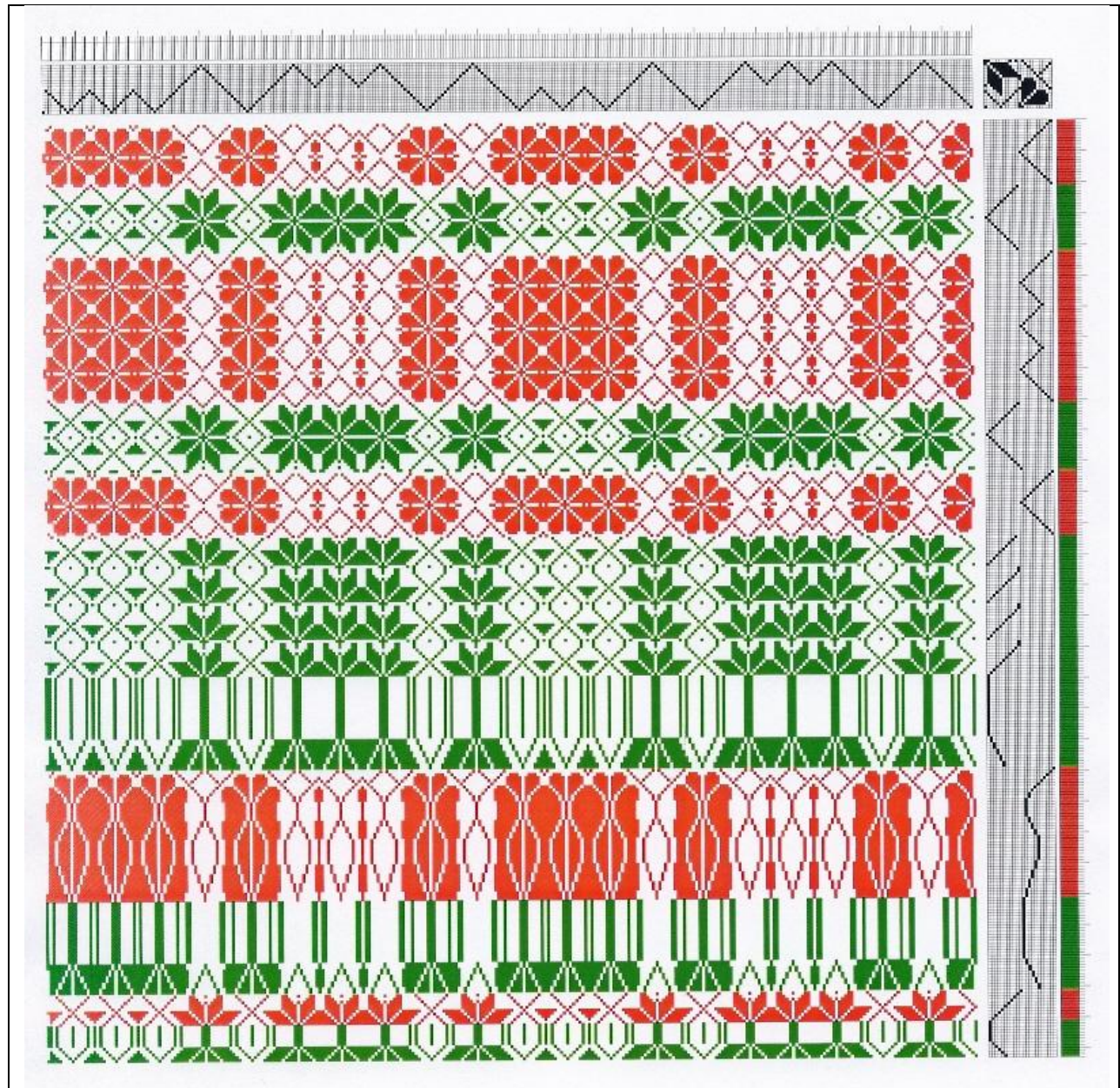
For further details of this interesting, but not often seen type of coverlet, I will share with you my explorations of the related drafts I have found in early weaver's pattern manuscripts. South central Pennsylvania is the weaving locale for three of the weavers in whose manuscripts I have found this type of draft. Jacob Biesecker and Christian Frey both wove in Adams County and Abraham Serff worked in York County, while the fourth weaver, David Bender, worked in Westmoreland County, a county in western Pennsylvania.

I first saw this type of draft in the 1970s when I was doing drawdowns of the drafts in the Jacob Biesecker manuscript. I was particularly interested in this pattern, because it appeared to be a way to expand the use of my 16 shaft Macomber loom for coverlet weaving. So many of the patterns I was finding for point twill stars and for star work pattern needed more than 16 shafts and required that I draft them down to 16 shafts. But it also required that I buy additional treadles for my loom, so I never wove the pattern.

Several years after I returned to weaving in 2005, I purchased the additional treadles I needed for my current 16 shaft Macomber loom and decided to weave a similar draft from Christian Frey manuscripts. The Frey draft included detailed treadling for the main pattern as well as additional treadling for large and small trees based on the star motif

and interesting trees created from flower motif. Frey also indicated which colors to use for the various motifs. Unlike many of his drafts, he did not give it a name. He labeled it "Half Double Coverlet No. 8."

Drawdown of Christian Frey's Half Double Coverlet

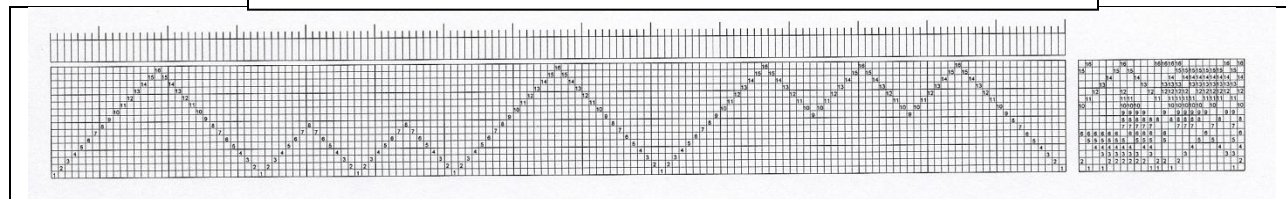


As you can see, Frey included single stars and flowers and a grouping of three by three flowers. However, he did not include treading for the grouping of the stars, which I thought might be an oversight, so I wove them into the small coverlet I wove using Frey's pattern. While I only used the tree figures for the border of my coverlet, I realize now

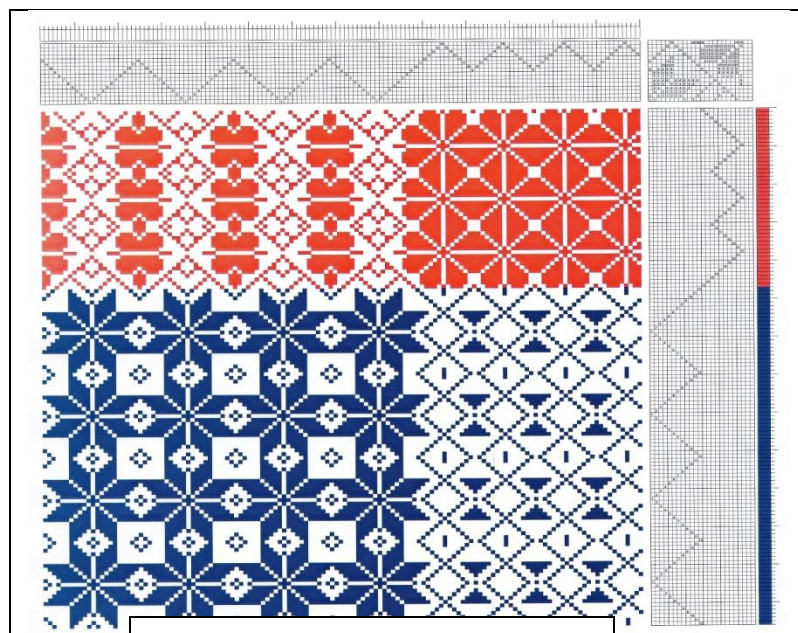
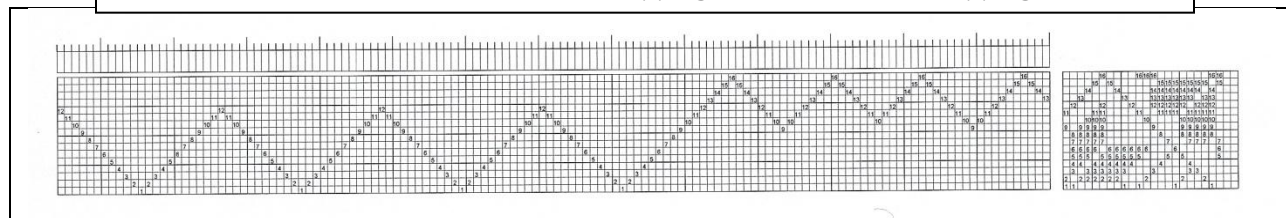
they may have been repeated throughout the coverlet, as I will illustrate with the woven examples I found.

Jacob Biesecker, another Adams County weaver, included two types of drafts for this type of point twill. The first draft shown below is exactly like the Christian Frey draft and forms overlapping groups of motifs with a grouping of three stars and three flowers. Shafts one through eight are used to create the stars, while shafts nine through sixteen form the flowers.

Jacob Biesecker Draft - Overlapping Stars & Flowers



Jacob Biesecker Draft - Non-Overlapping Stars with Overlapping Flowers



Biesecker Drawdown

For Biesecker other version shown above and to the left, the flower motifs are still formed by shafts nine through sixteen which results in overlapping flowers, but the stars are formed completely by using shafts one through twelve. I assumed it was woven as drawn in since Biesecker did not supply a treadling draft. He did supply a treadling draft which he market "shoulger", but the figure did not produce a soldier that made sense.

Abraham Serff, the York County weaver, includes the same drafts for a grouping of four overlapping stars and flowers on two pages. The only difference is that, the one draft includes a sinking shed tie-up and the other a rising shed tie-up.

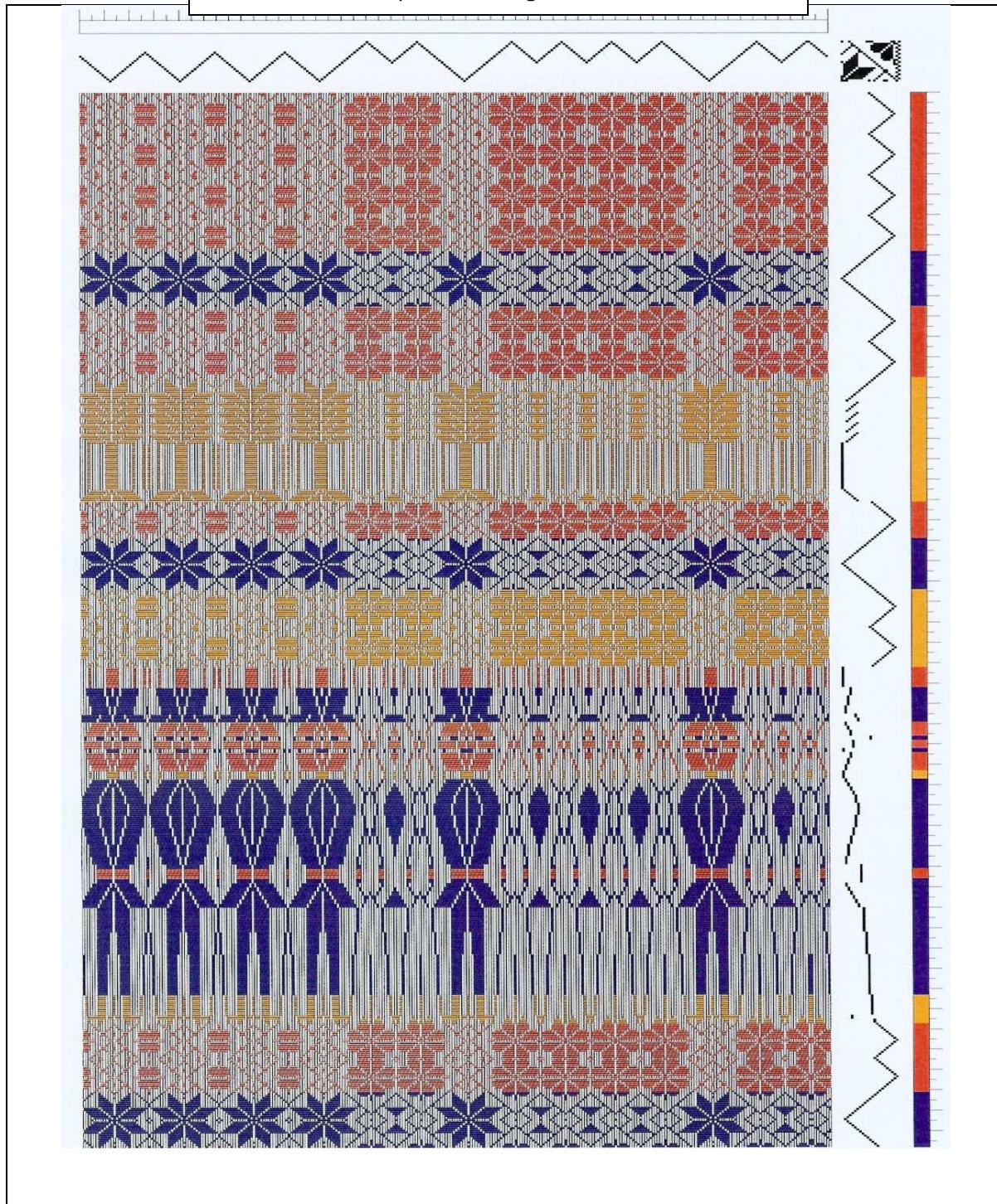
David Bender, the western Pennsylvania weaver, turns Biesecker's second draft upside down. He uses shaft one through eight for the overlapping grouping of five by five stars and shafts five through sixteen for the non-overlapping six by six grouping of stars. He includes two similar drafts for the same tie-up. They vary only by the number of motifs in each group. Bender includes a treadling draft for a soldier similar to Biesecker's and it also made no sense to me. He did include a detailed written description for the treadling as follows:

*the border is drawn 5 times
this is the pattern
1 row of green trees
1 red rose
1 blue star
1 red round spot over 8 treadles
1 row of blue soldiers
1 green rose
1 blue spots over 8 treadles
1 red star
1 blue rose
1 row of green soldiers
1 star Tulip the stem red the top green
1 rose Tulip the stem green the top red.
1 row of green trees the pattern once over
the above is you gide to go by this is the pattern
and tred. for the old and new draft*

I discovered four examples of this type of coverlet when I was researching coverlets that included repeats of rows of soldier motifs throughout the coverlet for an article for the newsletter for the Colonial Coverlet Guild of America (CCGA). I found the first coverlet with rows of soldiers while looking at coverlet photos in the book entitled *Coverlets at the Gilchrist*. This book includes photos of coverlets in an exhibit presented by Melinda and Laszlo Zongor in 2005. When I contacted Betty & Jim Doig, the owners of the coverlet who are also the presidents of the CCGA, they informed me they owned another coverlet similar to the one in the *Gilchrist* book. They offered to bring both coverlets to the National Museum of the American Coverlet so I could analyze the pattern. When I analyzed the two coverlets I realized why I had been having trouble determining the draft from the photos. Instead of 16 shafts, the early weaver used 20 shafts to create the pattern. Shafts one through 15 create the stars and shafts 10 through 20 create the flowers. The coverlets are almost exactly the same except one uses mustard with red and

dark blue, while the other incorporates green. The coverlet using the green pattern weft has a grouping of flowers with four repeats in the threading draft and only three repeats for the treadling draft. Otherwise they repeat the pattern as shown in my drawdown shown below.

Drawdown - Betty & Jim Doig's Soldier Coverlet



See below for the photos of the two Doig coverlets. My guess is that they were woven by the same weaver. While the main pattern draft is the same, the weaver varied the border slightly and the number of repeats treadles for the overlapping grouping of the flower motifs.

Betty & Jim Doig's Coverlets

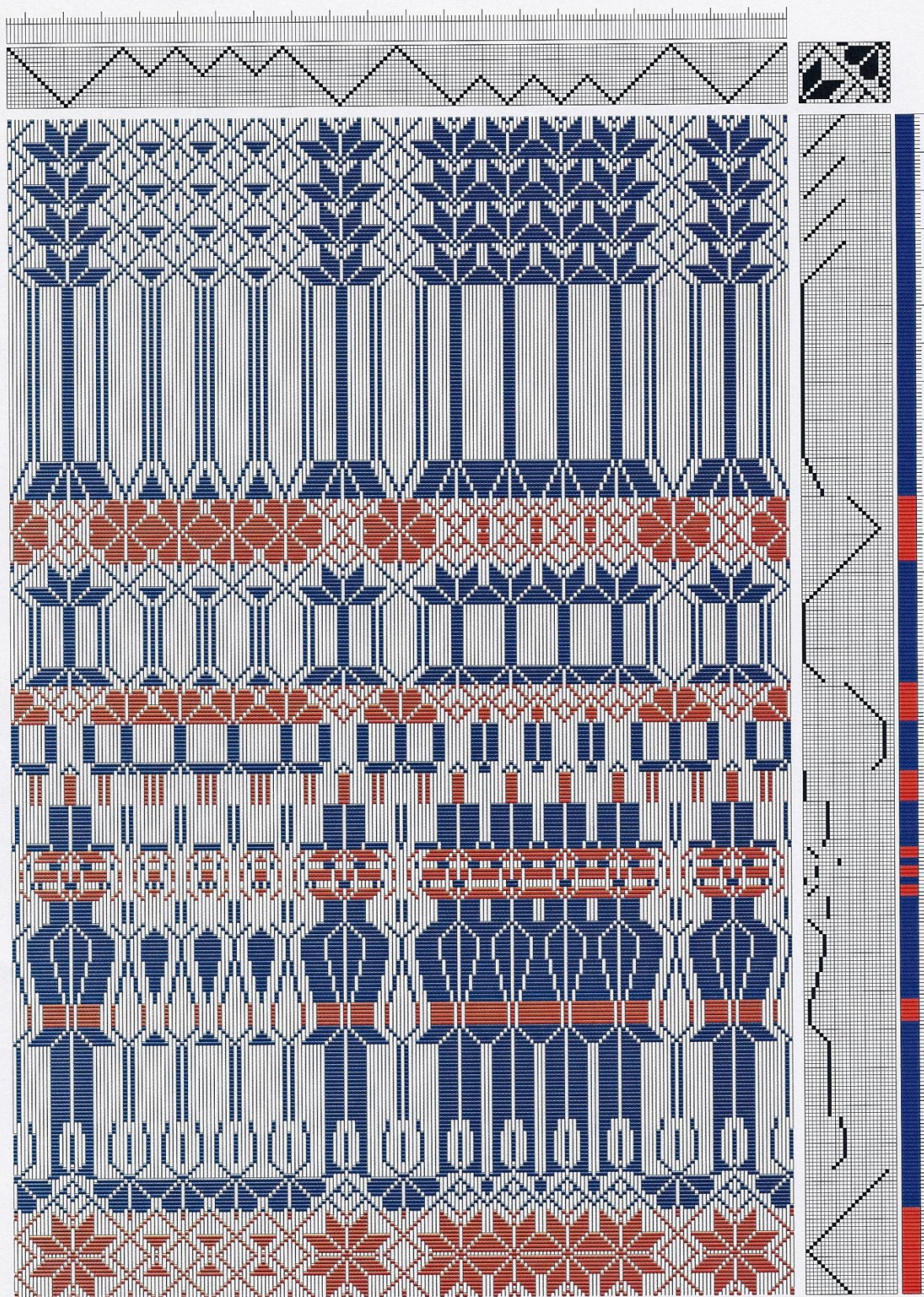


Ron Walter's Soldier Coverlet



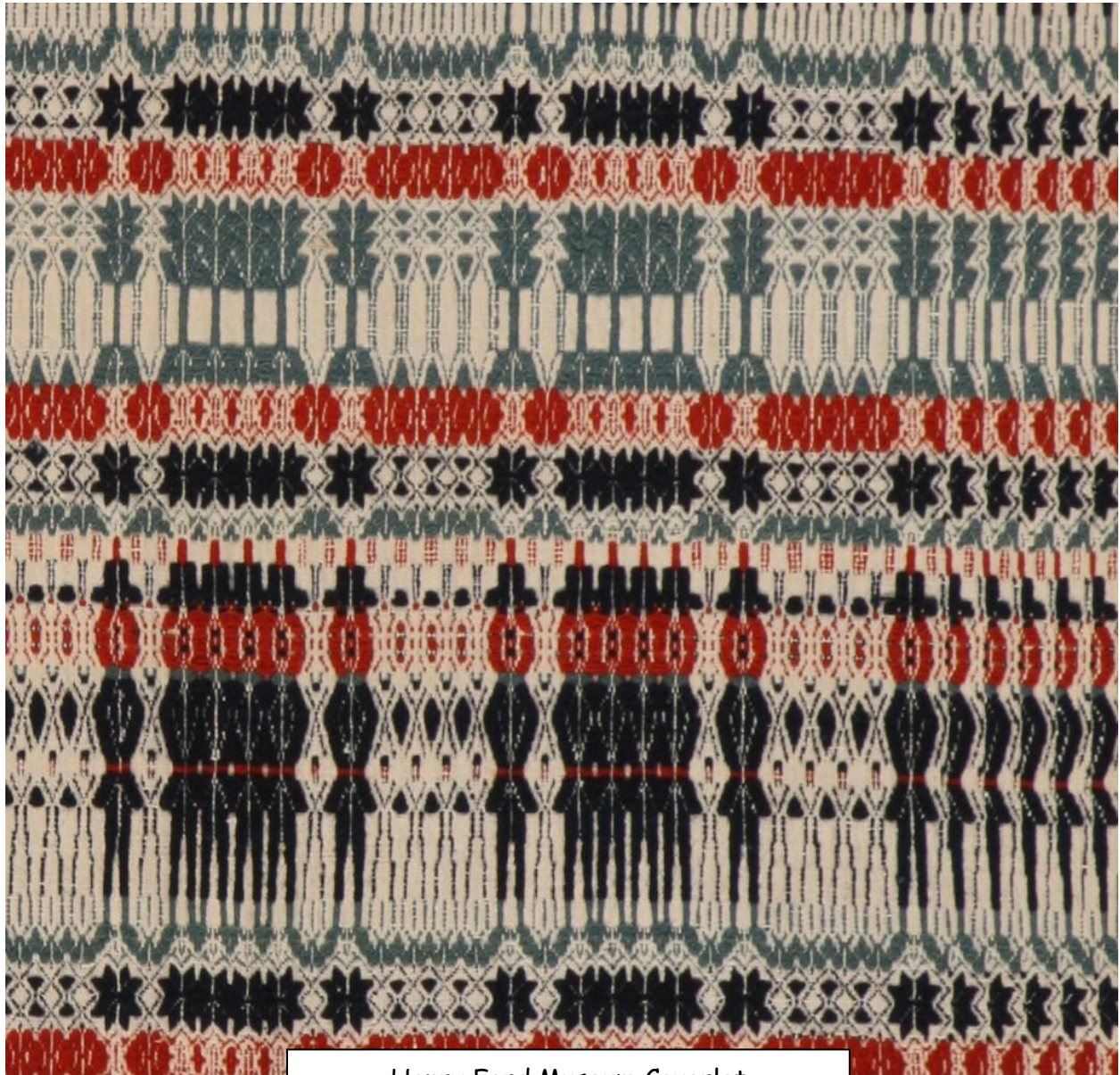
Ron Walter, a trustee at the National Museum of the American Coverlet heard about my research of soldier coverlets and showed me photos of his soldier coverlet. His coverlet is woven with a sixteen shaft draft with twenty four treadles like Christian Frey's draft which yields overlapping stars and flowers. See below for the drawdown of Ron's coverlet. The weaver wove a variety of trees including large and small trees derived from the star motif and small tree treadled from the flower motif.

Drawdown of Ron Walter's Soldier Coverlet



I also found an example of the soldier coverlet on page 130 in the book *Heirlooms from Old Looms* published by The Colonial Coverlet Guild of America in 1955.

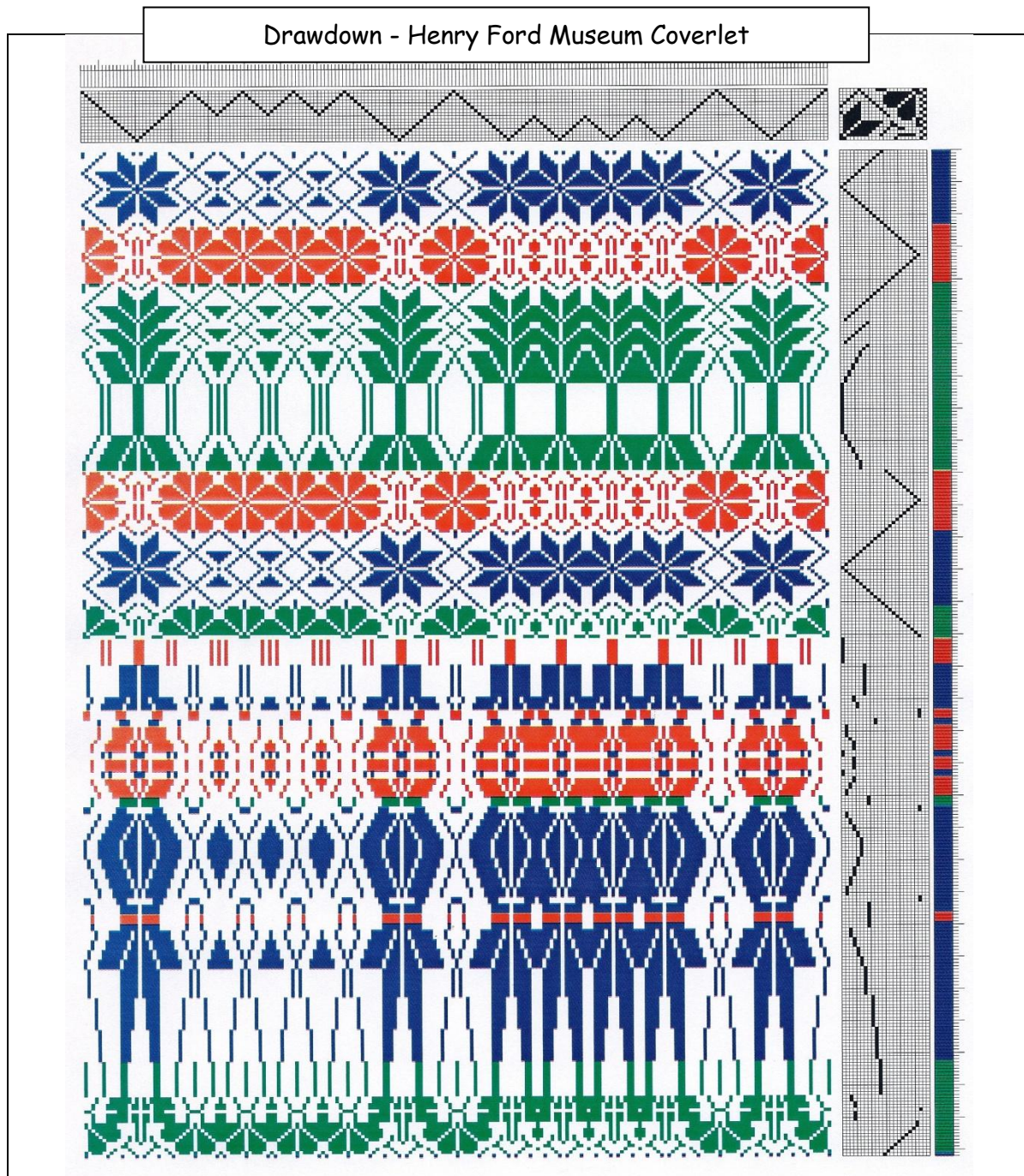
As I was writing the final parts of this article, Melina Zongor told me about another coverlet with rows of pine trees and soldiers repeated with the stars and flowers throughout the coverlet. It took me a couple of week to obtain the photos, but it was worth the wait. See below for a photo of one repeat of the pattern for the coverlet, which belongs to the Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan.



Henry Ford Museum Coverlet

Like Ron Walter's coverlet, this coverlet is woven with 16 shafts, 22 pattern treadles and two plain weave treadles. The head of the soldier is different than the other coverlets,

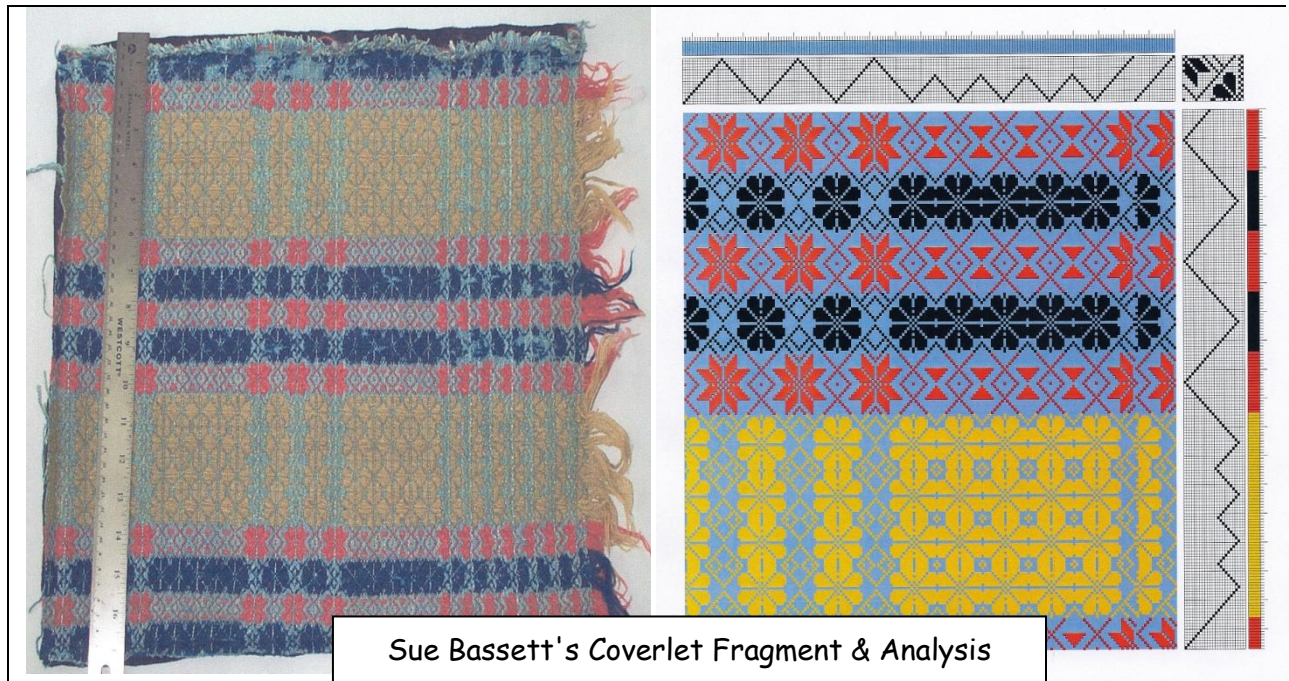
but the body is very similar. One pattern repeat includes a blue star, red flower, green tree, red flower, blue star, half green flower, soldier, and half green flower. Six repeats of the pattern are used for the coverlet.



The other three coverlet examples of the stars and flowers type do not include soldiers in the coverlet. One does include trees in the body of the coverlet, but the other two do not. The first one with the trees can be seen on page 105 of volume 2 of Helene Bress's book entitled *Coverlets*. The draft is exactly like the Christian Frey draft with

overlapping groupings of three stars and three by three flowers along with single stars and flowers. The small tree woven into the body of the coverlet is a duplicate of the small tree shown above in my drawdown of the Frey draft.

Two members of our study group have provided the final two examples. The first one is a fragment which Sue Bassett shared with our group as her contribution to the Fabric Analysis Exchange in 2008. See her drawdown below. The pattern is formed by nine stars, which are separated by four flower motifs. Five overlapping flowers are used to complete the pattern.



My final woven example comes from Sharon Stovall. The pattern in her piece shown above uses the traditional 16 shafts, but it cuts out 4 pattern treadles from the center of the tie-up and only uses 18 pattern treadles and two plain weave treadles. The pattern is formed with a grouping of nine stars and four flowers with another grouping of four by four overlapping flowers.



Gay McGeary's Stars & Flowers Coverlet

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, I wove the pattern from Christian Frey's manuscript in 2010. I used the treadling provided by Frey, which included the treadling for the tree border shown at the bottom of this small coverlet. After more research I realize I should have also woven an example with repeats of the trees throughout the coverlet. I will have to weave this pattern again and explore the various soldier motifs and the use a pattern variations repeats in the body of a coverlet.

Hopefully I have not overwhelmed you with too much detail in this article on the Stars and Tree variation. The purpose of my description of the drafts and examples is to show how a basic type of a point twill draft with extra pattern treadles was developed by various weavers. Each one took the pattern which they derived from a master weaver and made it their own. As weavers in the 21st century, we also have the opportunity to learn from the early master weavers and use their work as inspiration for our own weaving.