

early folk art form. Color, pattern, and texture⁴ were utilized to not only create a warm bedcovering but were used to create a decorative piece of cloth to enhance the room in which the bed was found.

Main Pattern, Border, and Fringe

It is clear that function plays an important part in the planning and the design of the coverlet. The coverlet consists of repeats of the main pattern starting at the top and continuing to the bottom. Variations of the main pattern are used as a border for the left, right and bottom sides. When the coverlet is placed on the bed the main pattern is on the flat surface of the bed and the border hanging over the three sides of the bed. There is no border at the top of the coverlet.

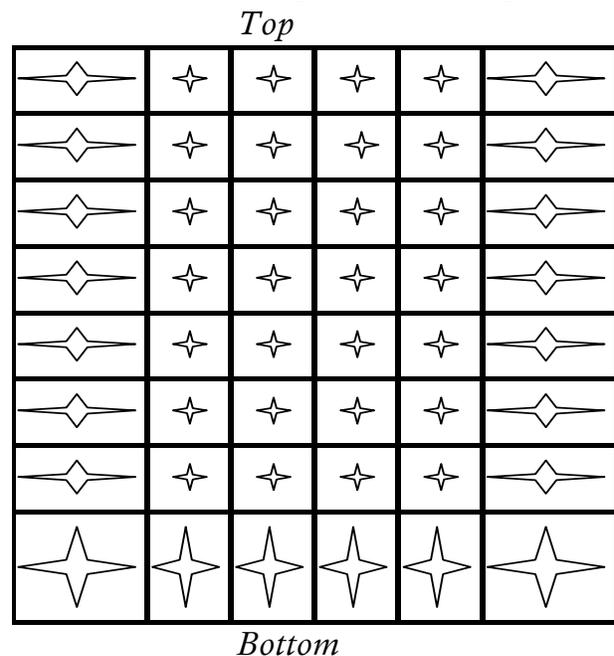


Figure 2

The early weavers wove their coverlets in two strips. The two halves were sewn together with overcast stitching to form a coverlet wide enough and long enough to cover the bed. The early weavers wove one half of the coverlet with the border at the bottom of the first strip and wove the second half with the border at the top of the woven strip. The second half was placed next to the first half while the weaver carefully matched and stitched the two halves together. Figure 1 illustrates the pattern and border placement for each half of a coverlet. The left hand side is rotated clockwise to match the right half. Figure 2 illustrates the pattern and border placement for the final coverlet after the two halves are sewn together.

The three sides of the coverlet with the border were further enhanced with a decorative fringe. The fringe was usually woven with the coverlet, but more elaborate fringe was woven separately and added once the two halves of the coverlet were sewn together.⁵

While all coverlets were designed with a main pattern, not all coverlets have borders and fringes. Not all coverlets were woven in two strips. To increase the width of the coverlets, three strips were also woven and sewn together. Inclusions of border motifs and fancy fringe depended on the proficiency and skill of the

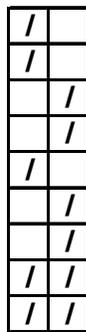
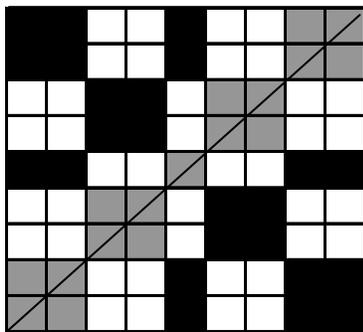
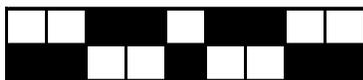
weavers. Variation of the use of the borders and fringes abound. Other variations include borders on all sides, two sides or none at all. Fringes are not found at the top or head of the coverlet, for purely functional reasons. The occupants of the bed would find it uncomfortable. However, variations of fringe include only fringe at the bottom and foot of the coverlet, on two sides, or none at all.

Block Design

Patterns for early coverlets were created by using blocks to form the designs or motifs. At least two blocks are required to form a pattern design. The star motif and the rose motif are two basic two-block patterns used in early coverlets. See Figure 3 for the profile draft at the top, the tie-up in the upper right hand corner, the treadling draft on the right side and the profile drawdown in the center for a star motif.

Figure 3

Star Motif
Woven As Drawn In



To create the star motif, block 1 is formed by the darkened squares in the upper right hand corner of the motif, which are placed in the same horizontal rows and vertical columns. Block 2 is formed by darkened squares running diagonally to the left of block 1. Repeats of block 2 are found on the same horizontal row and vertical column. Following the diagonal line to the left and down in the star motif illustrated in Figure 3, the remainder of the star motif is created with one square of block 1, two squares of block 2 and two square of block 1.

Drawdown

In the profile threading draft at the top of Figure 3, each darkened square or unit represents several warp threads. As stated before, the tie-up is found in the top right with the profile treadling draft on the right

below the tie-up. Each block or unit of the treadling draft represents several weft shots. The star pattern is created by weaving the motif on paper using the threading draft, tie-up and treadling draft. A "drawdown" on paper of the pattern is a tool used by weavers to visual show the pattern the weaver will weave on the loom. As mentioned earlier, drawdowns or drawings of the pattern were often shown to prospective customers as well as a means to plan a pattern by early coverlet weavers.

Woven As Drawn In

The star motif is "woven as drawn in" which means the pattern is created by using the same treading sequence for the weft threads as the threading sequence for the warp threads. In other words, the treading draft is obtained from the threading draft. For example in Figure 3 the treading draft for the star motif is obtained from the profile threading draft. To read the profile threading draft, start from the right. The threading or warp draft is two units of block 1, two units of block 2, one unit of block 1, two units of block 2, and two units of block 1. The treading draft is exactly the same with two units of block 1, two units of block 2, one unit of block 1, two units of block 2, and two units of block 1. The pattern is "squared" and "woven as drawn in" because starting at the upper right corner of the drawdown the warp threads for block 1 are woven with the treadle 1 to create the pattern for block 1. Next the warp threads for block 2 are woven with the weft thread for block 2. When the treading draft is completed each block starting in the upper right hand corner and moving diagonally to the lower left hand corner is squared which means the height of the block is the same as the width. The diagonally line runs through blocks which are woven as drawn in and squared.

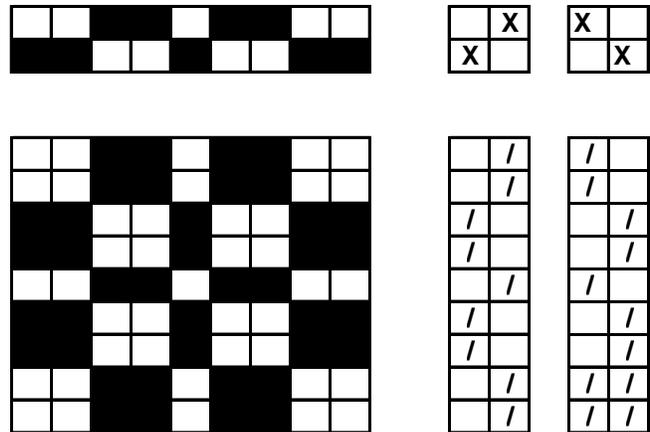
Rose Fashion

In Figure 4 is the two block rose motif with the same profile threading draft and tie-up as the star motif, but the rose is created by reversing the blocks for the treading draft.

This type of treading is called "woven in rose fashion." The blocks used to form a rose motif are not connected to form a diagonal line, but create a block design, which stands alone and is not connected to the other motifs. Instead of reversing the treading order, the blocks can be reversed by changing the tie-up. The tie-up is reversed and the treading draft remains the same as the treading draft for "as the woven as drawn in" for the star motif in Figure 3. In Figure 4, the tie-up on the left is the same as Figure 3 but the treading draft reverses the blocks. On the right, the tie-up is reversed, while the treading draft remains the same as Figure 3. Both methods result in the same drawdown of a rose fashion pattern.

Figure 4

Rose Motif
Woven In Rose Fashion

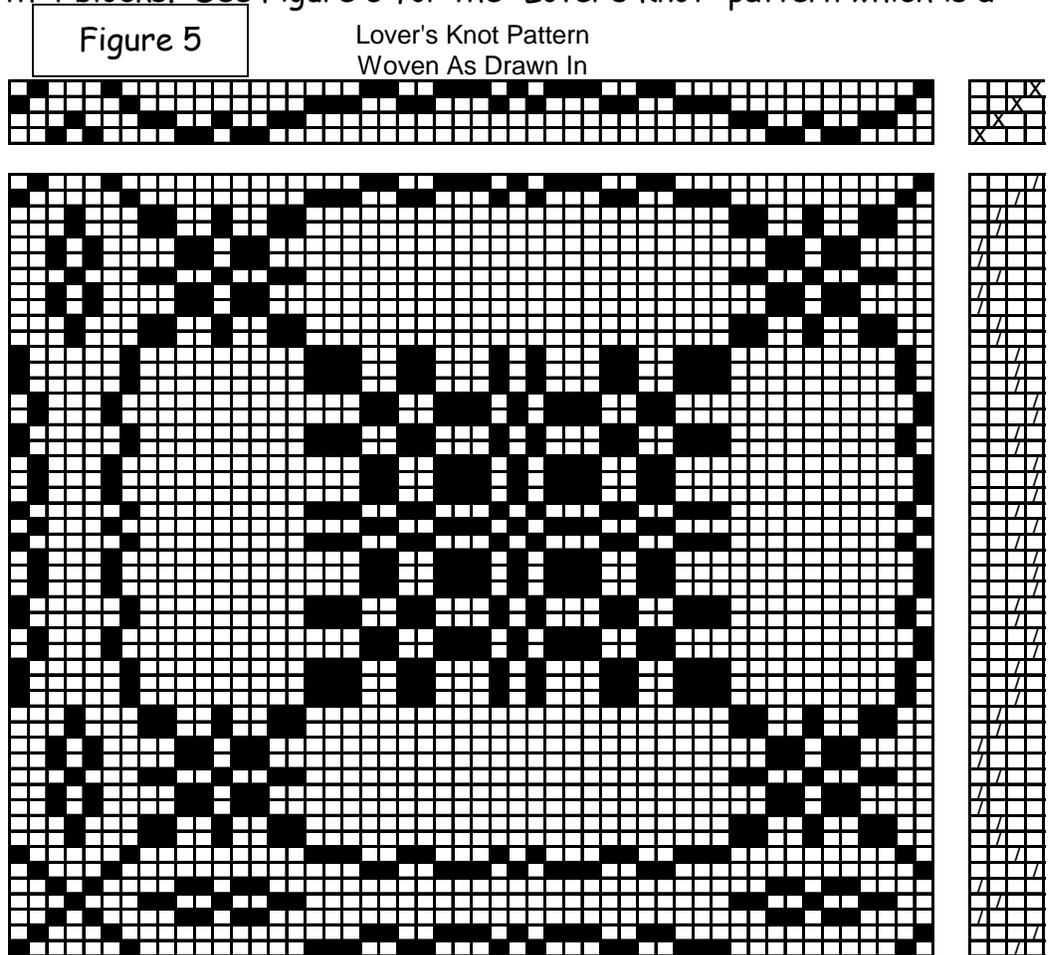


Lover's Knot and Whig Rose

More complicated patterns are formed by using more blocks to create the pattern. Star motifs are combined with a larger table motif. Many of the coverlet patterns are formed with 4 blocks. See Figure 5 for the "Lover's Knot" pattern which is a four block

pattern and is one of the most well know coverlet patterns. The drawdown of the threading draft and treading draft reveals a pattern, which is "woven as drawn in". Figure 6 illustrates the same

profile draft but uses the rose fashion treading draft to form the equally well-known pattern called "Whig Rose."

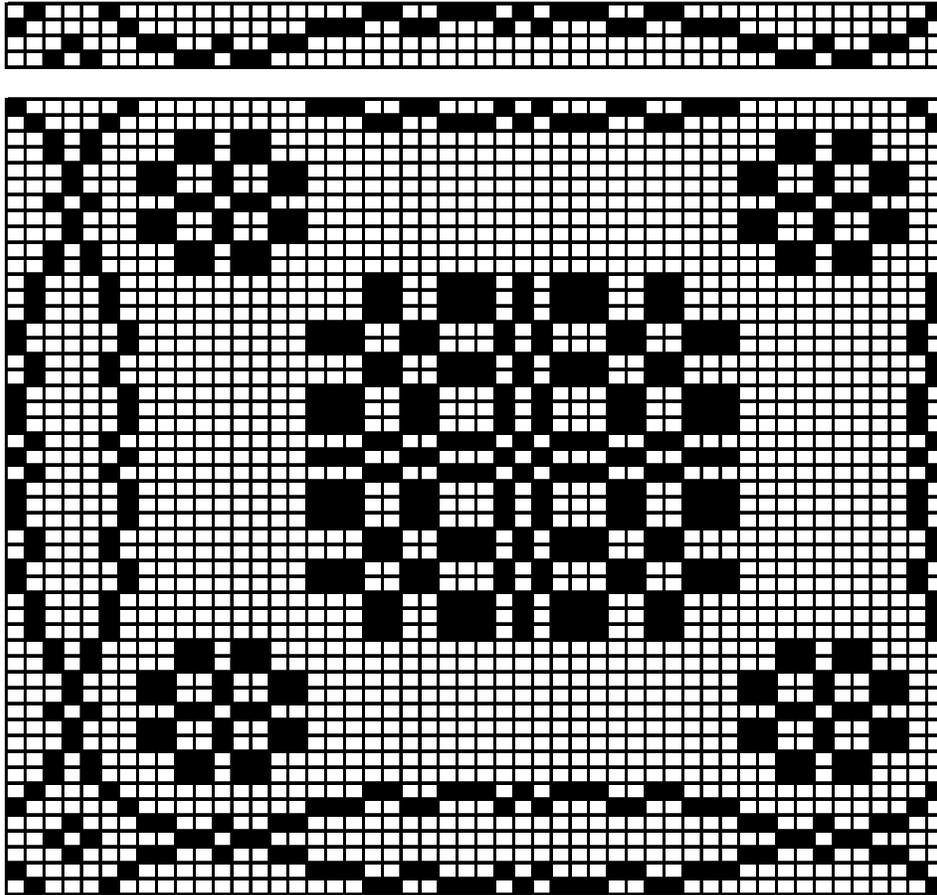


The 19th century weaver used variations of the star, rose, table, snowball and slate motif to form the early coverlet patterns. The Lover's Knot pattern is formed with the star and table motifs, while the Whig Rose is formed with a rose and table motif. In the Whig Rose pattern two blocks are used to form the rose motif and two different blocks are used to form the central table motif for a total of 4 blocks.

Figure 6

Whig Rose

Woven In Rose Fashion



Tie Up



Snowball Motif

Unlike the star or rose, a snowball motif requires 3 and sometime 4 or more blocks to form the motif.

To form a 3-block motif, 2 or more of the blocks are tied to one treadle to fill in the appearance of the motif. See Figure 7. The snowball motif is woven by first weaving block 3. To

Snowball Motif

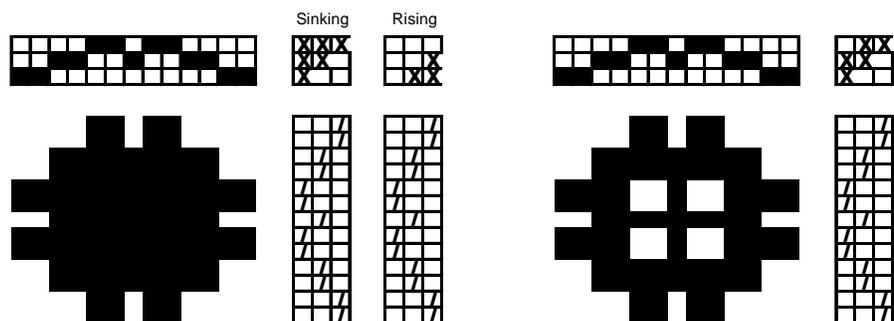


Figure 7

weave the next row of the motif block 2 and block 3 are both tied up in the tie-up. Next block 1, block 2, and block 3 are combined to form the motif. In the whig rose pattern, blocks were only treadled alone, while in the snowball motif blocks are combined. See the snowball on the right in Figure 7 for a different tie-up to

form a variation of the snowball. Block 3 is not filled in for the center of the pattern. Snowball motifs are used with tables or stars to form coverlet patterns.

Leinbach Collection



Borders

Border patterns are created by varying the use of the blocks in the main pattern. The most popular border pattern is a tree motif, which has taken on a contemporary name of "pine tree" border. The tree motif varies from coverlet to coverlet, because it is formed by modifying the block design of the main pattern. In the double woven coverlet on the left, the pine trees are formed from

the star motif.

Tie-ups

The tie-ups used in Figures 3-7 are sinking shed tie-ups. The tie-ups for the sinking sheds are used for counter balance looms. In Figure 7 on the right, a rising shed tie-up has been included. It is the opposite of a sinking shed and is used for jack type looms. Unless noted, the tie-ups in this article are sinking shed tie-ups.

As discussed earlier, tie-ups can be reversed for rose fashion designs when the weavers want to keep the woven as drawn treading draft.

Weave Structures

The weave structure is the manner in which the warp and weft thread intertwine to form the cloth. The basic weave structures used for coverlets include: overshot weave, summer and winter weave, turned twill and turned satin weave, double weave, point twill weave, expanded point twill (star & diamond) weave and Beiderwand. Usually only one weave structure is used in a coverlet but sometime a point twill weave will be used with an expanded point twill weave where the point twill stars are enlarged with the expanded point twill. Another popular combination is turned twill and point twill for a combined weave.

- Overshot - For the overshot weave the cotton warp intertwines with the cotton weft to form a plain weave foundation while the pattern wool weft skips over and under the plain weave to form a pattern. The woven coverlet is



Overshot Weave - Whig Rose

distinguished by areas of plain weave, blocks formed by long floats skipping over the plain weave and half tone created by the pattern weft running over one warp thread.

- Summer and Winter - The summer and winter weave also has a cotton plain weave foundation but the wool floats only skip over three warps or one warp thread to form the

pattern. The result is a clearer geometric pattern but the float area is not as rich in appearance.

- Turned Twill and Turned Satin - For turned twill and satin there is no plain weave foundation. The weft skips over the warp to form a warp block design in twill weave or satin weave on one side and a weft twill or satin design on the other side.
- Double Weave - The double weave structure is exactly like the name sounds. The block design is formed with two layers of plain weave intersecting and changing side where the block design changes. See below for a double woven coverlet with star and table motif in a lover's knot type pattern from William Leinbach's Collection.

- Point Twill - Coverlets woven in point twill can have plain weave foundation or not. When motifs of stars or flowers are created from the point twill threading draft, the tie-up reveals one fourth of the pattern. Block designs are also created with blocks of point twill to form the design for another type of point twill coverlet.



Double Weave - Leinbach Collection

- Combination Weave - Areas of pattern created with turned twill or turned satin are combined with areas of pattern created by point twill. ⁶

- Expanded Point Twill⁷ or Star Work⁸ - For expanded point twill, often called "star and diamond", each thread in the point twill pattern is expanded to two or more threads to form an enlarged block of the pattern. A point twill tie-up can be used for an expanded point twill tie-up by adding the tie-down harnesses to the pattern treadle.
- Beiderwand - This weave structure is used in two basic forms. The first type has areas of double weave and areas of tied weave, while the second or tied variety has no areas of double weave and is all tied. Ribs appear for the tied areas

The use of color along with the type of weave structure results in a very different appearance and texture. The profile draft for the "Lover's Knot" and "Whig Rose" patterns have been used by the early weavers for coverlets woven in the overshot weave, the summer and winter weave, the turned twill and double weave. Often the two patterns are used together in one coverlet. While the appearance of a turned twill weave is muted the same pattern in double weave is clear and vibrant.

Beiderwand - Leinbach Collection



In conclusion, to thoroughly understand the early American handwoven coverlets, the coverlet must be dissected to see its unique features. Each feature should be examined separately to understand how it was used. Once this is done, it is important to analyze how the elements were combined to form this unique folk art form. Many early coverlets are still available for study and can be found in museums, antique shops and private collections.

¹ Clarita Anderson, Judith Gordon, and Naomi Whiting Towner, *Weave Structures Used in North American Coverlets*, Anderson, Gordon, Towner (Olney, Maryland) 1.

² Helene Bress, *The Coverlet Book, Volume One*, Flower Valley Press (Gaithersburg, Maryland 2003), 8.

³ Such as handwritten manuscript of Abraham Serff's *Weaving Books*, Property of the Historical Society of York County (York, Pennsylvania).

⁴ John Heisey, *A Checklist of American Coverlet Weavers*, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (Williamsburg, Virginia 1978) 1.

⁵ Gay McGeary, "Fancy Coverlet Fringes," *Handwoven*, Vol. II, number 5 (November 1981) 38-40.

⁶ Bress, *The Coverlet Book, Volume Two*, 173 – 177.

⁷ Gay McGeary, "Expanded Point Twill," *Interweave*, Vol. IV, number 3 (Summer 1979) 37 – 39.

⁸ Judith Gordon, *American Star Works*, Design Works (New York, NY 1995) 11.