

Coverlet Fringe, Part One: Warp & Weft Fringe

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The fringe on an early coverlet is an important design element. It frames the coverlet on the two sides and the bottom. Because the coverlet is a functional bedcovering there is no fringe at the top. The fringe is purely a decorative element, which adds interest and beauty to the coverlet. As the Pennsylvania Germans would say: “It is just for nice.”

I have not found any instructions for how to weave the early fringe in 19th century literature about coverlets. I have periodically found reference to the coverlet fringe in a weaver’s account book. Frederick Gutelius, a weaver in Mifflinburg, Union Co., Pennsylvania reported in his account book on February 6, 1833, “One coverled and frinch for Nicholous Millhouse \$2.00.” On March 7, 1839 he reported “One coverled and frinch for Widow Hunsecker \$2.26.” He recorded his coverlet drafts in his pattern book¹ without instructions on how to weave the fringe or what kind of fringe he wove.²

Early Coverlet Fringe

The most common type of coverlet fringe is weft fringe on the sides and warp fringe at the bottom. The weft fringe for a float work coverlet is very stable because the pattern weft forms the fringe on the two sides and the tabby weft binds the edges and keeps the side of the coverlet from unraveling. The warp fringe at the bottom starts with a band of plain weave and several inches of unwoven warp at the bottom to form the fringe. Usually, the edge of the fringe is not bound in any way. However, it is can also be secured by knotting the fringe at the base or by overcast or hemstitching at edge of the band. Tape fringe is also added to the bottom to finish off a coverlet.

Cotton Band with Warp Fringe



Close up of Cotton Fringe

Dog Paw Coverlet with Wool Weft & Cotton Warp Fringe

¹ Frederick Gutelius’ pattern book is owned by a family member.

² Frederick Gutelius’ account book is owned by the Union County Historical Society, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.

Star Work Coverlet with Wool Weft Fringe & Knotted Cotton Warp Fringe



Cotton Warp Fringe with Overcast Stitches



Close-Up with Overcast Stitches



The early weaving often used tape fringe at the bottom of a coverlet instead of leaving the cotton warp as a fringe, which I feel gives an unfinished look, but is ok if it is hidden by the bottom of the bed. Apparently, some early weavers agreed with me and used tape fringe instead.

Float Work Coverlets with Tape Fringe at the Bottom



Both of the multi-shaft flat work coverlet shows above include a tape fringe at the bottom with a similar stripe on the warp faced tape part formed by alternating the colored wool and the natural cotton in the warp. The weft for the dog paw coverlet on the left is all dark blue wool, while the weft for coverlet on the right is woven with bands of dark blue, dark blue and rust red.

Overshot Coverlet with Weft Faced Tape Fringe at the Bottom



The overshot coverlet on the left has weft face tape fringe sewn onto the bottom with wool weft fringe on the two sides. The warp for the tape fringe is three warp thread of the olive wool and it is covered with bands of rose and olive green wool.

The warp and weft for the singles coverlets is usually not bound on the edges with knots or other finishing techniques. The weaver relied on the natural felting process to keep the edges from not

unraveling too much. The same felting principles were applied for the fringe of the double woven coverlet. Besides, they could rely on less unraveling at the edge because there were two layer of cloth which provided a denser fringe.

Block Twill Coverlets with Warp & Weft Fringe



Above are two block twill coverlets. The one on the left has red, dark blue and light blue wool fringe. On the right is another block twill coverlet with red and dark blue wool fringe on the two sides and cotton fringe at the bottom. The wool weft is unraveling from the edge of the cotton warp fringe.

Gebrochene Coverlet with Knotted Cotton Warp Fringe



Close-Up



However, the cotton warp fringe on the bottom of this Gebrochene coverlet shown above is knotted to finish the edges before the warp fringe.

Twill Coverlet with Overcast Stitches on the Edge

Overcast stitches bind the edges of the diamond point twill coverlet on the right. At the bottom red wool is used for the overcast stitches and on the sides green wool is used for the overcast binding stitches.

Red overcast stitches



Two Double Woven Coverlet with Weft and Warp Fringe



Above are two double woven coverlet with thick weft fringe on the two sides and warp fringe on the bottom. Natural cotton and green, dark blue and red were used for the coverlet on the left with natural cotton, medium blue and red wool were used for the coverlet on the right.

Double Woven Coverlet with
Weft Fringe on the Sides and Tape Fringe at the Bottom



Close-Up
of Weft Fringe on the Sides and Tape Fringe on the Bottom



I am not sure why the weaver wove tape fringe at the bottom. It is another example of a narrow warp with dense weft face tape with fringe.

My Samples

While I learn a lot by studying the fringe that I have found on early coverlets, I find I learn even more when I weave my own coverlets using the traditional techniques. I learned it is important to weave a sample of the fringe I want to use for one of my coverlets before I commit to using the technique for larger coverlets.



I warped my loom with a down sized version of a pattern I had obtained from a fragment from the National Museum of the American Coverlet (NMAC). For my first sample shown on the left, I wove wool weft fringe on the two sides by extending pattern weft shot around guide threads on each side. The fringe measures 1.5". For the bottom I wove a narrow band of plain weave with the tabby cotton thread. I hem stitched the edge and left a 1.5" length of warp for the white cotton warp fringe. While I know the early weavers did not hemstitch the edge of the warp, I

chose to do so in order to make it a finished edge.

For the sample on the right, I extended the pattern weft around the guide threads at a measurement of 1.5" as I did in the first sample. The fringe at the bottom is made by creating a long chain stitch in the inside of the fold with a crochet hook.

I provide detailed direction below for my coverlet woven fringe. If you want my draft for the sample, let me know and I will email it to you.

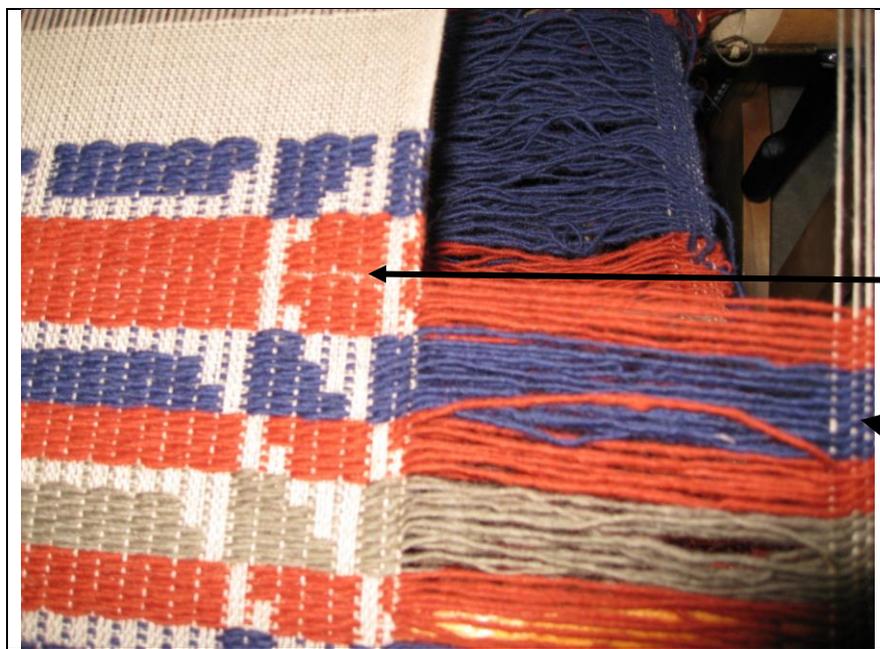


My Coverlet Fringe

I often weave float work coverlets and use the pattern weft for the fringe on the two sides, but I never use the cotton warp as the fringe for the bottom. I use a method of adding the same wool yarn I used for the side fringe, to an applied fringe at the bottom. This is not a technique I have found on early coverlets, but a method I discovered back when I was weaving coverlets in the 1980s.

To illustrate my methodology, I will include the process I used for a tied Beiderwand coverlet that I wove. To weave the pattern weft for the side fringe I add 4 guide threads threaded in plain weave 3.5" from the side edge of the coverlet I was weaving.

Photo of Pattern Weft Fringe with Guide Threads



Three plain weave shots used to mark the bottom edge of the coverlet.

4 guide threads on the right

Above is a photo showing the bottom of one half of my woven coverlet. On the right I have extended by pattern weft around the guide threads to form the side fringe.

When I weave my coverlet, I start with the bottom hem of the first half of the coverlet.

- I weave the hem
- I weave three shots of plain weave to mark where I am going to apply the fringe at the bottom.
- I weave the bottom tree border.
- Next, I weave ten repeats of the pattern and the small border at the top.
- Next, I weave two inches of plain weave with my cotton yarn after the first half and before the second half of my coverlet.
- Next, I weave the small top border of the second half of my coverlet
- I weave ten repeats of the pattern

- I weave the tree border
- I weave three shots of plain weave to mark where I am going to apply the fringe at the bottom.
- I weave the bottom hem of the second half of my coverlet Include a band a cotton plain weave.
- I cut the off the one piece with the two halves of my coverlet.
- I lay it down on a flat surface and cut the two coverlet halves from one another.
- Next, I sew the two halves together along the center seam.

Photo Showing Where I Cut
To Separate the Two Halves



Once the two halves are sewn together, I applied a fringe at the bottom of my coverlet in order to frame the coverlet on three sides. It is created by pulling out loops of yarn while making a chain with a crochet hook at the inside fold (where the three shot of plain weave served as an indicator) of the bottom hem of the coverlet.

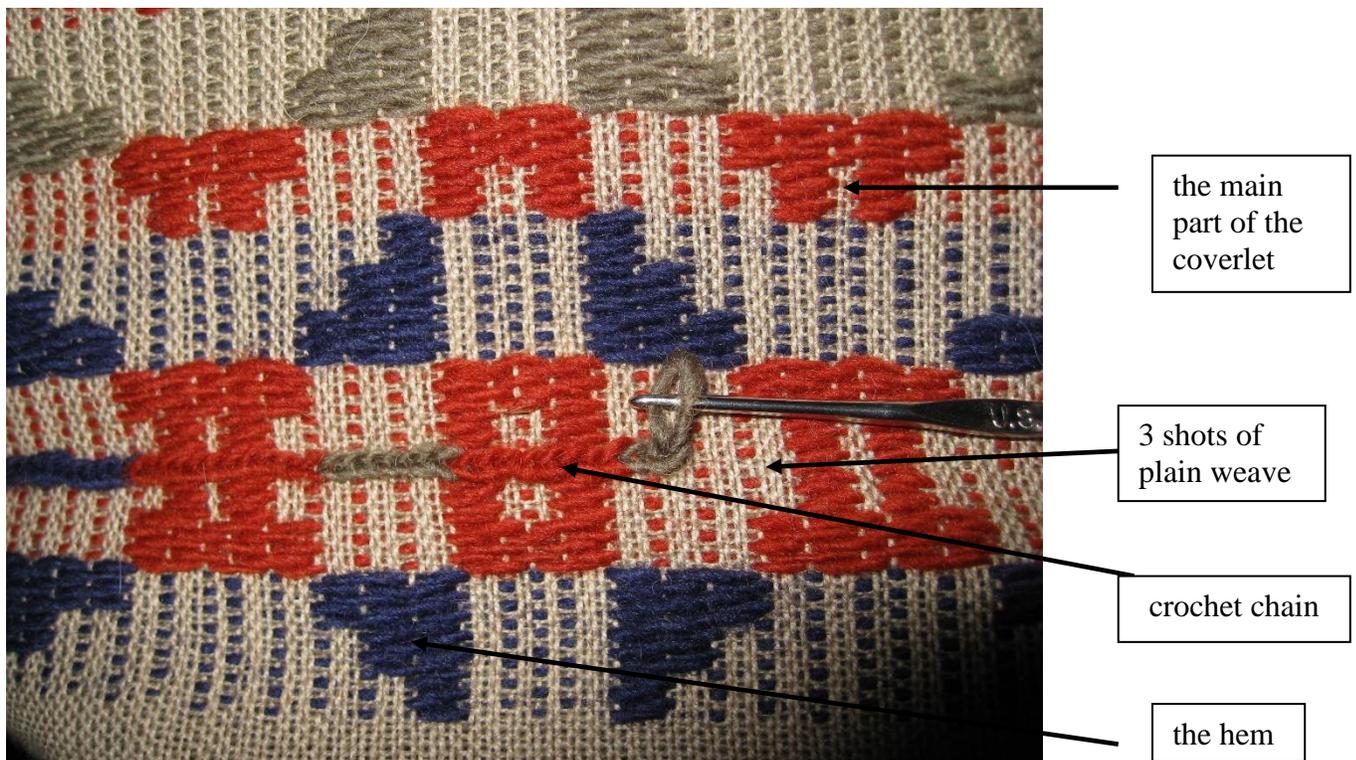
Instruction for Making the Fringe

- Sit down with the coverlet in your lap with the wrong/back side of the coverlet facing you.
- You will use a metal crochet hook (size 0-3) and a ball of yarn used for the weft.

- Place the ball of yarn in a paper lunch bag. Holding the yarn on the front side of the coverlet, insert the crochet hook into the first space between the warp threads in narrow band of three plain weave shots on the back side and pull the yarn through the space making a loop on the back side.
- Place the crochet hook through the loop on the back side and inset it into the second hole between the warp threads. With your left hand you pull out a long loop of the wool to form the fringe on the front side and at the edge grab the yarn with the crochet hook pulling it to the back side of the coverlet to form a crochet chain.
- (1) Inserting the hook through the chain loop and into every other space between the warp threads on the back side, (2) pulling out the wool to make the fringe on the front side, and (3) pulling the edge through to the chain with the crochet hook on the back side are the basic steps that are repeated over and over. You end up with a chain on the inside of the hem of the coverlet and loops at the bottom edge of the front/right side of the coverlet to form a fringe at the bottom of the coverlet.
- Once the coverlet has been gently washed, dried, and pressed, the fringe is cut to the desired length.

It is a really easy fringe to make, although the instructions may sound confusing. The fringe is very stable. It is easy to change the color in the fringe. I like it for my coverlets because along with the weft fringe on the two sides, it forms a lovely frame around the coverlet.

Close-up view of the wrong/back side of the bottom of the coverlet



The wrong/back side of the coverlet showing the chain stitch in navy, red and green



The right/front side of the bottom edge of the coverlet



the hem on the front side

the loops of wool forming the fringe

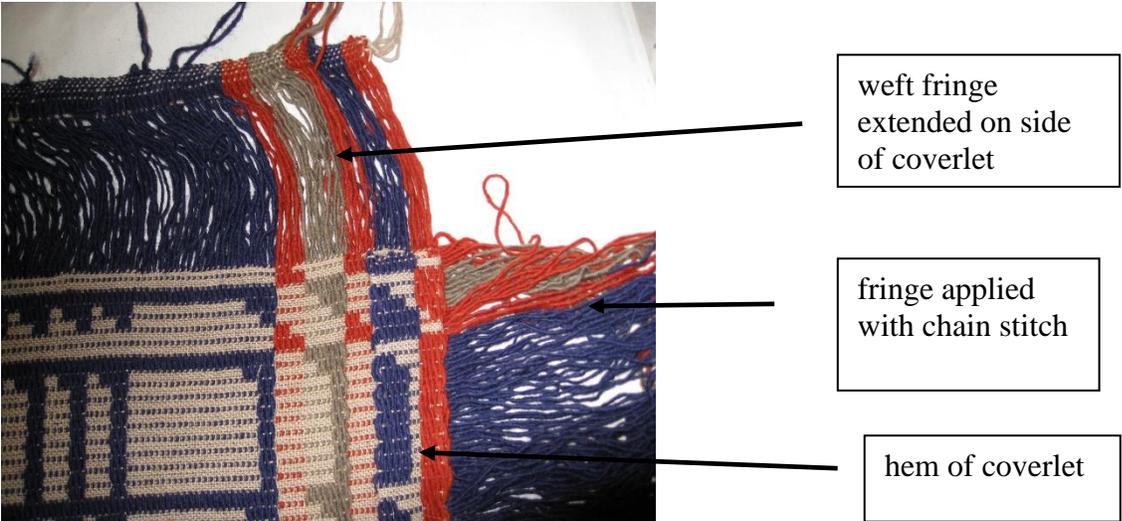
Close-up of the process of pulling the loops of wool through the previous loop to make the chain stitch.



A bird's eye view of pulling out the wool with your left hand from the front side of the coverlet to form the fringe, while inserting the crochet hook into the loop and the space between the warps on the wrong side of the coverlet with your right hand.



Close-up of coverlet after it has been gently washed and dried, but before the fringe is cut



Completed coverlet with weft fringe on the two sides and chain stitch fringe on the bottom



As weavers we can learn a lot by studying the design elements of the early coverlets such as the fringe. We can also build on that knowledge and weave our own traditional coverlets.