

A Star & Window Coverlet

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A large part of the knowledge I have gained about early geometric coverlets comes from dissecting the extant examples that I am fortunate to find. But I must admit my research process starts with finding a coverlet that is pleasing to my eye. The design, use of color and/or fringe must speak to me. This is exactly what happened in October 2006 when I found my first star and window coverlet at the National Museum of the American Coverlet (NMAC), Bedford, Pennsylvania.



NMAC Star & Window Coverlet

I had just returned to my research and weaving of coverlet in August 2005 and I admit I was not sure about how this coverlet was woven, but I knew I found it very interesting. So I started by identifying the parts of the coverlet.

Analyzing the Coverlet

First, I could tell it was woven with a natural two-ply cotton with 24 ends per inch (epi) for the warp and similar two-ply cotton weft to form a piece of plain weave cotton at 24 picks per inch (ppi). Two-ply wool in dark blue, red and olive green floated over and under and in between cotton weft shots to create the pattern. The pattern consisted of two main motifs: (1) a grouping of nine stars; (2) a nine pane window. The star and window motifs were diagonal to each other. To the right and left of the stars were three columns with diamonds etched into the blue weft. The background besides the windows consisted of three bands of red indistinguishable floats separated by small bands of olive green.

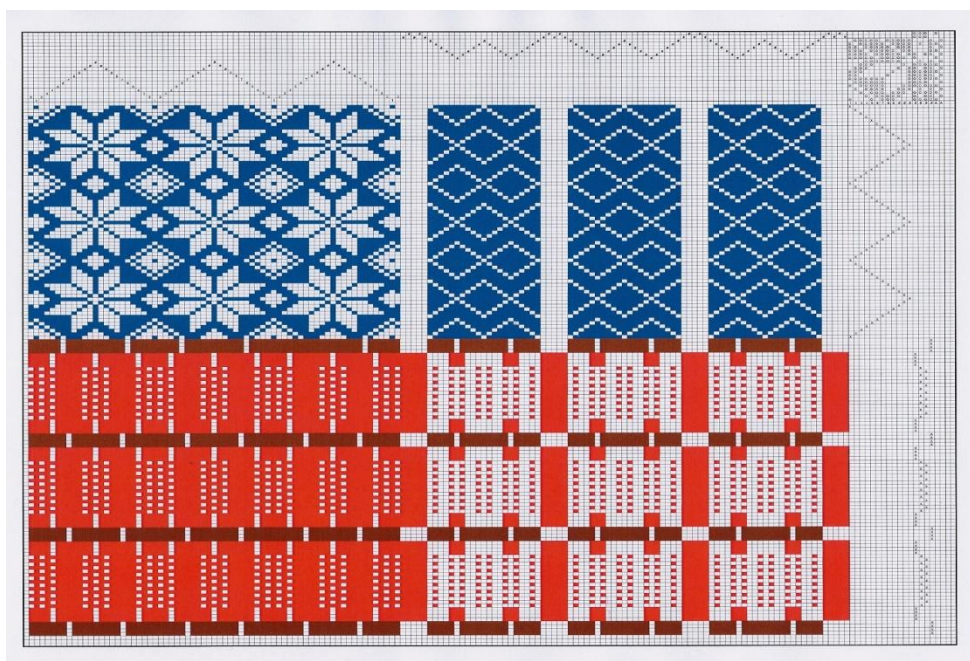


Nine Star motif
photograph by Ron Walter



Window motif
photograph by Ron Walter

I determined the draft for the pattern by first recording the wool weft floats on graph paper. Next I determined the draft/threading system that would create the pattern. In 2006 I had not yet found the Fiberworks software, so I recorded my analysis on a worksheet grid I created in Excel.



Above is my final analysis where you can see 12 shafts are used for star motifs, 6 for the individual windows with 2 shaft used for the columns separating the windows. While

the threading draft is a point twill, the tie-up and treadling reveals the window pattern which is created with red columns of floats and window in relief floats.

Related Coverlets & Their Weavers



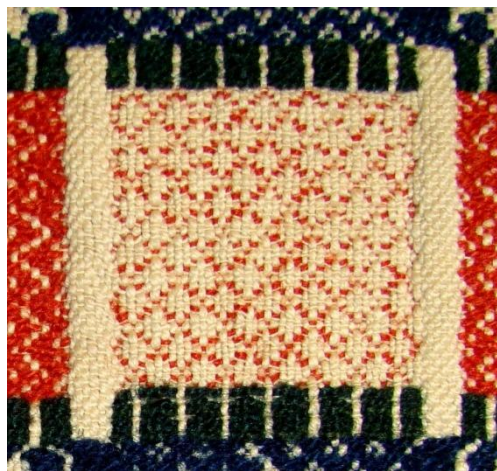
Nine Star Coverlet

Since I came back to weaving I have found some interesting point twill related coverlets with multi-shaft star motifs. Two of the groups I have researched and documented relate to the star & window coverlet. First is the nine star and the second is the window pattern.

On the left is one example of a nine star coverlet. The early weaver grouped stars together and used lattice-like table to separate the groups.



Nine Star motif
photograph by Ron Walter



Lattice-like Table
photographed by Ron Walter

From my research I have learned that the nine star coverlet draft was included in the manuscript by four Pennsylvania German weavers including manuscripts for Christian Frey, an Adams County weaver dated 1833-34; Jacob Biesecker another Adams County weaver in the 1830-1850s; Abraham Serff, a York County weaver dated 1858; and Cyrus Uhler, Lebanon County dated August 19th, 1830.

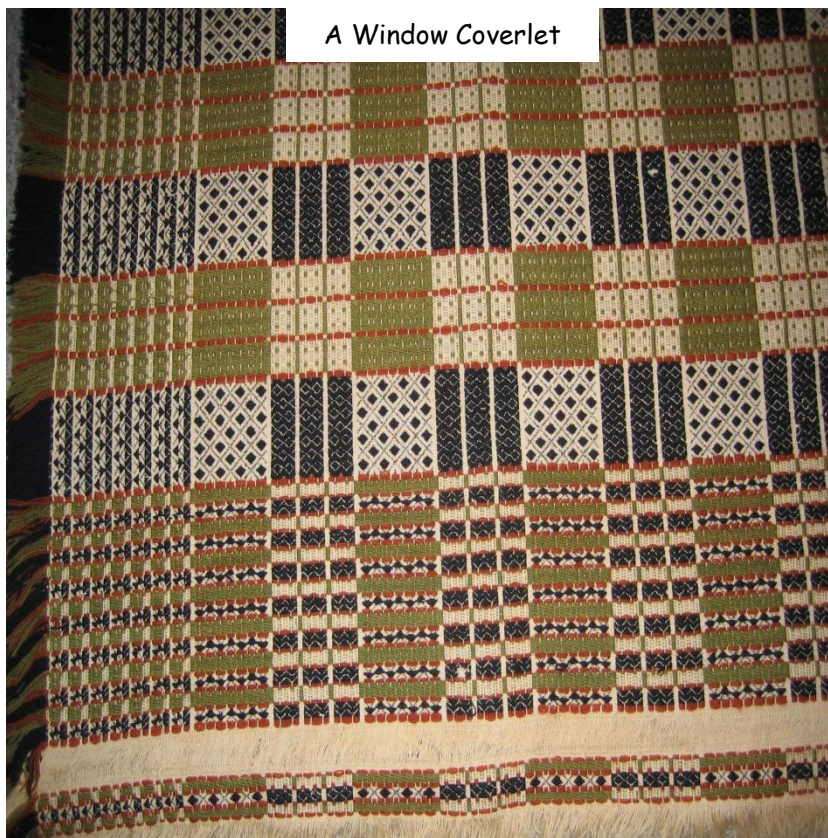
The second group that I have labeled "window" coverlet is designed with nine square motif and, like the nine star, it has diagonal lattice like tables. I chose the window name since Jacob Biesecker used it for his draft.



Window motif



Lattice-like Table

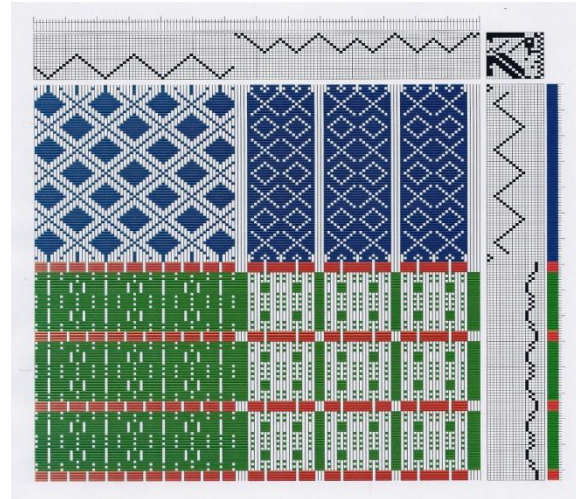


To the left is a window coverlet that I photographed at National Museum of the American Coverlet.

I found 13 weavers who included window coverlet drafts in their manuscripts. One worked in the western part of the state, eight worked in central Pennsylvania and four worked in the eastern part.



Drawdown for Nine Star Coverlet



Drawdown for Jacob Biesecker's
Window pattern



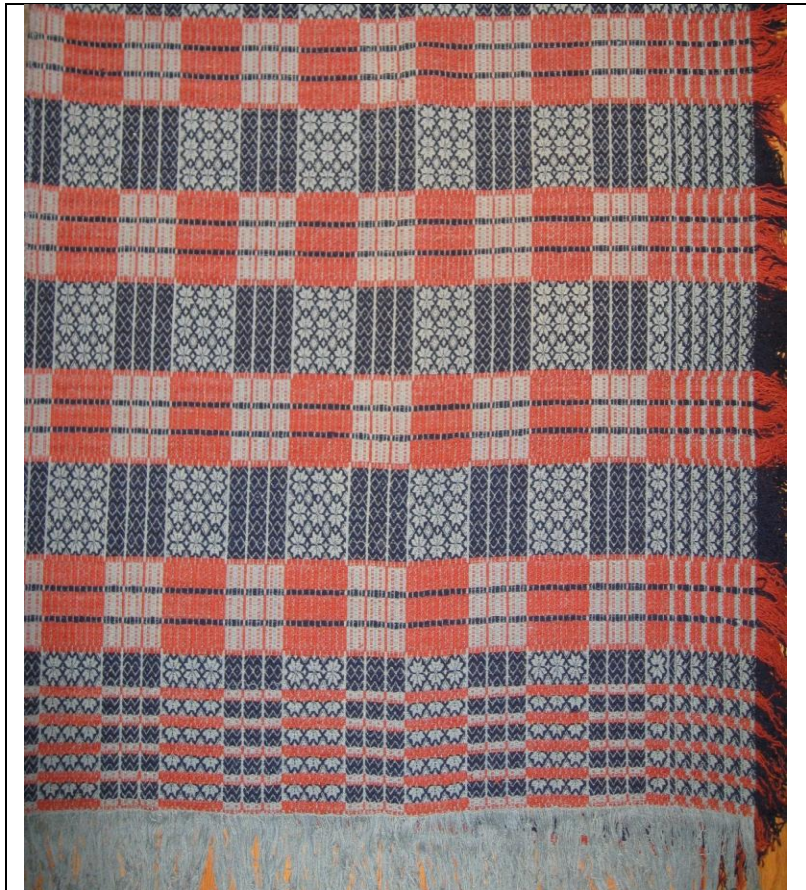
Joseph Capp's Star and Window Pattern

In only two weaver's manuscripts, Joseph Capp and John Smith from Lebanon County was a draft recorded that took the nine star motif and combined it with the window motif and dropped the lattice-like table. To the left is a drawdown of Joseph Capp's star & window pattern.

What can I deduce from my research? The star and window coverlet at the National Museum of the American Coverlet may have been wove by Joseph Capp or John Smith in Lebanon County in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Other Examples of Star & Window Coverlets

I have found several other examples of the star and window coverlet. In the summer of 2011, while I was still working, I found that a star and window coverlet would be auctioned at a Virginia auction in the middle of the week.



My husband was kind enough to drive from central Pennsylvania to Virginia to attend the auction and successfully purchased the lovely coverlet shown to the left. Notice the blue cotton warp and tabby weft.

In December of 2011, I found another star and window coverlet at a local antique show. The colors were similar to the one owned by the National Museum of the American coverlet.

The coverlet shown on the right from the Sue Barrett's Star & Window Coverlet for the windows and dark blue for the stars. The green bands separating the windows is a different color green than the museum coverlet.



Sue Bassett, a member of our study group, received the coverlet shown at the right for her birthday one year. She was kind enough to send me photos. For her coverlet a rose color wool was used for the window, with gold bands separating them. The traditional dark blue wool was used for the stars.



The coverlet on the left is part of Ron Walter's collection. For this coverlet the weaver did the opposite of the Star & Window. Instead of eliminating the lattice like table, the weaver used the table as the main motif.

I have not seen a draft in a manuscript for the lattice-like table pattern

Learning from the Masters

I spend many hours determining the drafts of early Pennsylvania German coverlets I find as well as researching drafts found in nineteenth century manuscripts. I compare the coverlets to the drafts to determine possible provenance and to see if I have drafted the coverlet correctly. However to truly walk in the shoes of the nineteenth century coverlet weaver, I weave as many of the patterns as I can. Once I purchased my 20 shaft Macomber loom in 2008, I wove the star and windows pattern. I started by putting on a 10 yard warp for weaving throw size coverlets. I played around with the star pattern and created a tree border at the bottom.



My Star & Window Coverlet

Once I was satisfied that the pattern was working with my draft and the single ply wool yarn from Briggs & Little, I wove a double width size coverlet.



My Double Width Star & Window Coverlet

I use my research as inspiration for my weaving. For the nine star pattern I have woven two very different throw size coverlets. For the first one I designed



My Nine Star & Soldier Coverlet



My Nine Star & Tulip Coverlet

my pattern to include the soldier motif in the main pattern instead of the border as was done with the early coverlet. For the second coverlet, I used the tulip variation one of the repeating motives as well.

Conclusion

In conclusion, with this article, I shared with you one of my exploration of several motifs including the nine star, the window, the soldier and the tulip motif, all point twill related patterns woven by Pennsylvania German weavers. When I started my research in the 1970s not many books had been written about geometric coverlets, so I analyzed the coverlets I found. When I returned in 2005, I found many interesting books on coverlets, but there were still new avenues to explore. In particular, I realized little has been written on the point twill coverlets I was finding in central Pennsylvania. Therefore I continue to keep looking for interesting early coverlets. I recommend that you should not be afraid to try weaving the patterns you analyzed. Then you will truly walk in the shoes of the weaver.