

COLONIAL COVERLET GUILD OF AMERICA

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Coverlet Weave Structures:

OVERSHOT

The overshot weave structure was a popular type of weaving used to make towels, sheets, clothing, table linens, and coverlets. This weave has a series of weft threads (usually a thicker colored wool) that "float" (lay loose) over the plain weave background (generally cotton). The weft threads create a raised appearance. Home weavers generally wove these coverlets. The patterns are geometric.

SUMMER AND WINTER

This weave structure is believed to be of American origin. The patterns are geometric. The background is described as "honeycomb" or "brickwork". The floats of the weft threads never go over more than three warp ends. These coverlets have reversible dark and light sides.

DOUBLE WEAVE

This weave structure produces two distinct layers of fabric simultaneously by using two sets of warps and two sets of wefts. The two layers are separate but connected at points where the patterns interchange. These coverlets are heavy. Like summer and winter, these coverlets are reversible. They are usually more complex than overshot -- they were produced by a professional weaver. They can be geometric or figured.

JACQUARD

In the early 1800's, a French weaver, Joseph Jacquard, invented a sophisticated attachment for looms. It consisted of a series of cards with punched holes that activated the harnesses of the loom to create the desired patterns. A Jacquard coverlet has a more complex design -- "figured and fancy". Jacquard is not a weave structure and uses a double cloth or beiderwand weave structure. When the Jacquard attachment was used, unique designs were developed and figures of buildings, birds, urns, flowers, inscriptions and other objects began to appear. They had corner blocks, many of which included names, dates, and places.

BEIDERWAND

Beiderwand is a German term for a compound weave structure which combines warp faced plain weave with weft face plain weave. These two constructions reverse themselves throughout the woven piece. Vertically running ribs are characteristic of this weave structure. True beiderwand (uncommon) has only vertical ribs on one side. Tied beiderwand (more common) has vertical ribs on both sides of the fabric.

AMERICAN STAR WORK COVERLETS

This type of coverlet is known by other names such as "Star and Diamond", "expanded point twill" and "Germanic expanded twill". They were generally made by professional weavers, of Germanic Origins, who settled in Pennsylvania. Star work coverlets have these common characteristics: blocks formed by pattern weft shots, usually of dyed wool; light areas formed by the light warp crossed by light tabby; and single ends of warp crossed by tabby and pattern weft shots.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Weaving a Legacy: The Don and Jean Stuck Collection, by Clarita Anderson. Columbus, OH: Columbus Museum of Art, 1995.

American Coverlets and Their Weavers: coverlets from the collection of Foster and Muriel McCarl, by Clarita Anderson. Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2002.

A Checklist of American Coverlet Weavers, compiled by John H. Heisey. Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1978.