



2023 unraveled

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A Tale of Two Exhibits

After a long hiatus, the McCarl Gallery re-opened in May with an exhibit entitled "Old Glories: all-American coverlets in red, white, and blue." The nickname "Old Glory" was originally coined by sea captain William Driver of Salem, MA for his own ship's flag. There are many surprising connections between Old Glory and bed covers; one exhibit highlight was the story of how, during the Civil War, the original Old Glory was hidden inside a bedquilt to keep it out of the hands of Confederate authorities!

This was followed by another exhibit in September entitled "How people made coverlets: a 19th century factory tour inspired by Mister Rogers." Through *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, Fred often took his television neighbors on factory tours to see how people make everything from crayons to sleeping bags. In these tours, Fred was always careful to focus on the people over the product. In his words, "My father and my two grandfathers worked in factories, and I was always interested in their work. When we show factories, they certainly have fascinating machines, but I always emphasize that it takes people to make machines and to make them work."

Adopting Fred's people-first approach, "How people made coverlets" explores the transition from cottage industry to factory automation over the course of the 19th century through the people who made and used coverlets in their everyday lives. The exhibit highlights 24 coverlets, 19th century textile equipment, and excerpts from *Mister Roger's Neighborhood*. It is a loving tribute to the McCarl Gallery's neighbors both within and beyond our home in the Fred M. Rogers center at Saint Vincent College. The exhibit runs through the end of February, 2024.



Going Digital

The McCarl Collection went online in July via CatalogIt HUB. For the first time, the catalog is freely accessible to the public.

A behind-the-scenes migration to new cataloging software enabled the entire McCarl collection to be published online earlier this year so that visitors and researchers can see more than what is currently on display. The collection can be accessed through the Collections tab on the gallery's new website at www.coverletgallery.org. We are constantly making additions, corrections, and updates—especially to the pictures. To aid in the digitization of its collections, the gallery has been equipped with a small photography studio capable of shooting high resolution images from an overhead rig, which eliminates the need to sew or pin the coverlets in place for photography. One by one, the images in the catalog will be updated for the digital age. The new photography setup also makes it possible to invite the public to bring in their coverlets to be photographed and documented for posterity without relinquishing their treasured family heirlooms—a future project in the works!



The Visual Pattern Index Project

Creating a “field guide” to figured & fancy coverlet patterns

One of the most exciting current initiatives at the gallery is the creation of a database of coverlet patterns. Organized by common motifs and layouts, the intent behind the pattern index is to create a common language for describing figured and fancy patterns in a way that makes it easier to identify and compare coverlets in different collections. The database is cross-indexed with coverlets in over 70 online collections so far, and new patterns and motifs are added nearly every day. Visit www.coverletgallery.org/pattern-index to follow the collaborative work-in-progress.

New Accessions

Seven coverlets were donated to the gallery in 2023. A red and blue overshoot coverlet was donated by **Colleen Caldwell** with an unusual method of color combination. A red and white true Beiderwand coverlet in the “Bird of Paradise” pattern comes to us from the estate of **Nancy Page**; from the pattern and style, it was possibly made in Auburn State Prison loomhouse. **Margaret Krill** donated a red and white Samuel Stinger doubleweave coverlet and a red, white & blue Beiderwand coverlet with a 13-star logo in the cornerblock, whose maker has yet to be identified (in upper left picture). Nancy Baughman donated two coverlets on behalf of **Lois Betler**: a 5-color PA German coverlet by J. Denholm and an unusual all-wool red and blue figured twill coverlet woven by H. Fess. Finally, a red and white “Memorial Hall” centennial coverlet joined the McCarl collection as the gift of **Kent and Vicki Ackerman**. Also underway is the accessioning of nearly 150 coverlets that were donated or on-loan prior to the current curator’s arrival, notably including the collections of **Br. Sixtus Roslevich O.S.B., Dr. Susan Sommers**, and **Brian McCarl**.

The curator would like to extend heartfelt thanks to our generous donors and supporters, without whom the gallery’s ongoing work would not be possible.

One loom, two looms, old looms, new looms!

Exploring the McCarl Gallery's collection of textile tools & equipment from the American Textile History Museum

In 2017, the American Textile History Museum in Lowell, MA permanently closed its doors and relocated its extensive collections to other institutions. McCarl Gallery received a large collection of nearly 300 coverlets along with over 100 pieces of textile and weaving equipment including looms, spinning wheels, a jacquard attachment, and many tools for processing linen, cotton, and wool fibers. Many of these items are available to view in our online catalog, although the work of cataloging continues with more items still to be added. Several of the larger items have been in storage ever since their arrival 2017 – until now.

Halloween was the big day. The curator had been contacted by a researcher creating a database of Pennsylvania Dutch cantilever looms. She was interested in taking measurements from the two (then disassembled) PA Dutch looms at the McCarl, and October 31st was set as the date for pulling them out of storage. It was quickly determined that one of the piles of parts was intact enough that it could be rebuilt, and so it was. It now features in the center of the gallery—because there's no room to put it anywhere else!

In fact, there are currently not just one or two but a full six looms on display in the McCarl Gallery. One is a modern loom that is being used for demonstrations and historic pattern reproductions (see p. 4, bottom). Two smaller antique looms feature in the current exhibit to demonstrate two methods of weaving fringe (it's called "How People Made Coverlets," after all!). The three remaining antique looms are semi-permanent fixtures in the gallery space due to their size. One is the newly rebuilt PA Dutch loom, another is a New England four-post loom, and the last is a passementerie loom designed for making fancy trims ("passements" in French). None of these three is currently operational, but it is quite possible that one or all of them may be restored to working order in the future.



Guests in the Gallery

Amidst the hustle and bustle of inventorying textile equipment, the gallery starred in an unexpected television cameo during Steelers Training Camp. The inventory promptly went on hold as a camera crew moved in to film an interview with Kwon Alexander, which aired during the pre-season. The TV spot had coverlets and spinning wheels in the background—with no explanation for the incongruous setting!



Meet the Curator

The gallery welcomed Dr. Emily Barth aboard as the new curator in April of 2023. A native of Western Pennsylvania, Barth earned her Ph.D. in historical linguistics from Cornell University in 2018 and worked as a Latin teacher and as a museum interpreter with the Ligonier Valley Historical Society prior to joining Saint Vincent.

It was during graduate school that she began spinning and weaving with the Black Sheep Handspinners Guild in Lansing, NY, which kindled her interest in historical textiles and their production. In 2022, she channeled this interest into an exhibit entitled "The Fiber of Our Lives: 1000 Years of Textile Innovation" at the Compass Inn Museum in Laughlintown, PA.

In addition to her academic interests in ancient languages and textiles, Barth enjoys canoeing, bird watching, juggling, and 18th century English Country Dance. She also volunteers every year at the Stahlstown Flax Scutching Festival as a weaving demonstrator and runs the Wild Ginger Handweaving channel on Youtube.

Out & About: My Coverlet Travels

A busy summer was in store as I set about introducing myself to the world of coverlet enthusiasts. I took my first trip in June to the annual meeting of the Colonial Coverlet Guild of America, held this year at the Alling Coverlet Museum in Palmyra, NY. It was my first opportunity to put faces to the well-known names of some major players in the coverlet world. In July, I attended the Textile History Forum at the Marshfield School of Weaving in Vermont for a weekend packed with fascinating talks about weaving technology, social history, and experimental archaeology. Two weeks later, I joined renowned textile expert Rabbit Goody for a workshop at Historic Eastfield Village entitled "Vernacular vs. Fancy: The Family Weaver and the Fancy Weaver in the Rural Northeast." We pored over textiles and counted threads under microscopes to determine the difference between homespun and factory-made textiles from the 18th and 19th centuries. I purchased a microscope for the Gallery not long after my return! In September, I finished off my textile touring with Coverlet College at the National Museum of the American Coverlet in Bedford, PA.

This year I have been a spectator, eagerly taking it all in. In years to come, I hope and plan to be on the other side of the podium. Later in autumn, I dipped my feet into those waters with two presentations: a layperson's introduction to coverlets at the Chestnut Ridge Historical Society, and an update on the state of the McCarl Gallery delivered via Zoom to the Coverlet Study Group organized by Marty Schlabach.



Putting the texture in textiles

Hands-on demonstrations within the gallery space make the collections come alive to visitors. Having rescued a 20-shaft loom from the Saint Vincent Gristmill attic, Dr. Barth plans to weave historic patterns in all of the common coverlet weave structures starting with Tied Beiderwand (above) and True Beiderwand.



Highlights from the collection of Brian McCarl

Upcoming Spring/Summer exhibit will showcase new coverlets in the Foster & Muriel McCarl Coverlet Gallery donated by Brian McCarl, the son of our original benefactors

It all started with the generous gift of Foster and Muriel McCarl, our namesake, who donated their collection of over 350 coverlets to the College in 2008 along with funds for the care and preservation of one of the premier coverlet collections in the country. Brian McCarl, one of four sons of the McCarls, had managed the collection for his parents, and spoke for the family at the announcement. "After careful consideration," he said, "we decided that Saint Vincent would be the best home for what we believe is a very special collection which we have enjoyed for many, many years. We are confident that Saint Vincent, with its demonstrated respect for history, will be a good steward in preserving, protecting, and educating the public about this collection." Brian has been a collector of coverlets in his own right for many years, and his own collection of 115 coverlets will soon join that of his parents as the latest addition to the McCarl Gallery's permanent collection. We are thrilled to receive this gift, and to honor it in a special exhibit that will be on display throughout the spring and summer of 2024.

2024 PREVIEW

January 10

Ring in the New Year! The student Handbell Choir from Valley School of Ligonier performs in the Gallery

February 29

Closing day of the current exhibit, "How People Made Coverlets"

March TBA

New exhibit opens featuring the collection of Brian McCarl

July/August

Steelers Training Camp on campus

September TBA

Opening of new exhibit, TBA

Follow us on Facebook and bookmark **WWW.COVERLETGALLERY.ORG/EVENTS** to keep track of what's happening in the McCarl Gallery throughout the year



LOCATION

Saint Vincent College
300 Fraser Purchase Road
Latrobe, PA 15650

HOURS

Wednesday – Friday
10am – 4pm
and by appointment

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