

# made coverlets



A 19th century factory tour inspired by Mister Rogers

September 21, 2023 to February 29, 2024

How people made coverlets: A 19th century factory tour inspired by Mister Rogers September 21, 2023 - February 29, 2024

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Foster & Muriel McCarl Coverlet Gallery www.coverletgallery.org

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Through *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, Fred often took his television neighbors on factory tours. Those factory tours were fun to watch, but Fred made sure to highlight the people who were working in the factories, reminding viewers that it's the people who make the difference. This exhibit does the same – focusing on the people who were instrumental to creating the coverlets of the 19th century.

Dr. Dana Winters Fred Rogers Institute Executive Director

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. I like children to know that people can take pride in their work and that everyone's job is important.

- Fred Rogers



Samuel Beidler Musselman (1802-1874)

Hilltown Township, Bucks County, Pennsylvania

Client: David Benner

Coverlet, 1847. Tied Beiderwand 4:1. *Warp*: natural cotton; *weft*: natural cotton and red, green, and navy wool. Full loom width, seamless, 82 x 97 in.

Inscribed: S.B. MUS/SELMAN/COVERLET/WEAVER/HILTAUN/BUCKS.CO/No. 681 [corner block]; THIS/COVERLET/BELONGS/TO/DAVID/BENNER/1847 [corner block]; PENNSYLVANIA [borders].

## Introduction

The factory tour was a perennial favorite feature on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. Fred visited places where people made things, celebrating the interconnectedness of our communities and the people whose hard work and imagination make things possible.

From handwoven bed coverlets made and signed in home workshops to anonymous factory productions, the coverlets in the McCarl Collection embody the transition from cottage industry to factory automation over the course of the 19th century. "How people made coverlets" explores this transition through the lives of the people who made and used these beautiful antique textiles.

As the curator of the McCarl Gallery, I am delighted to celebrate our neighbors in the Fred Rogers Institute by bringing Mister Rogers' people-first perspective to our coverlet collection. Our own 'factory tour' is a tribute to the hard-working people who made and used handwoven coverlets in the course of their everyday lives. The title of the exhibit is very intentional. We take our cue from Fred himself in phrasing it not "How coverlets were made," as we might ordinarily say without thinking, but rather "How PEOPLE made coverlets" — with the emphasis where it truly belongs. So come along, and in the following pages let us tell you about the many kinds of people who made coverlets.

Emily Barth Curator, McCarl Coverlet Gallery 2023



2008.1.317

Harry Tyler (1801-1858) Jefferson County, New York

Client: Martha Fuller

Coverlet, 1845. Double weave. *Warp*: natural cotton and red wool; *weft*: natural cotton and red wool. Two loom widths joined, 83 x 90 in.

Inscribed: MARTHA. FULLER./JEFFERSON.COUNTY NY./1845 [corner block].

# Meet Your Neighbors

Who were the coverlet weavers? Home weavers in the 19th century spent most of their time making utilitarian items such as toweling and bed sheets. Although they could weave coverlets, their patterns were limited by their relatively simple looms. Those who could afford to would purchase a coverlet instead of making it. Ranging from \$3-\$10 (about \$100-\$300 today), coverlets were an attainable luxury for middle-class households.

Professional weavers of "fancy" coverlets had specialized looms capable of weaving more intricate patterns than household weavers. They were tradesmen who owned their own equipment, working from home or out of small workshops. Many were immigrants from Europe with professional training in the weaving trade.

Anglo-Scottish weavers of New York and New England, trained as carpet weavers, favored double-cloth coverlets in white and blue or red. Weavers of German heritage in Pennsylvania, trained as linen weavers, wove multi-colored coverlets in a double-sided weave structure called "Beiderwand" in German.

Coverlet weavers tended to live and work in small towns in rural areas, producing goods by special order and for general sale. Their clients came from their own communities or from farther afield. Some clients would travel up to fifty miles to have a favorite weaver do their work, bypassing other weavers along the way. Many coverlet weavers worked seasonally as farmers, doing the bulk of their weaving in the winter months. After they had saturated the local market with their woven goods, some moved on to set up shop in new areas while others eventually gave up weaving in favor of farming or other business opportunities.

#### **NANTUCKET LOOMS**

Episode 29 - March 28, 1968

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood premiered in 1968. In the same year, a small weaving shop called Nantucket Looms opened its doors on the Massachusetts island that Fred and his family treated as their summer neighborhood. Fred visits the shop in episode 29 of the very first season, where he watches people weaving cloth by hand on a loom. Nantucket Looms is still in business today, committed to representing artisan handweavers of the local community.



David P. Johnson (born ca. 1788) Orleans County, New York Client: Anna Hiesrodt

Coverlet, 1848. Double weave. *Warp*: natural cotton and navy wool; *weft*: natural cotton and navy wool. Two loom widths joined, 80 x 89 in.

Inscribed: THE PROPERTY/OF ANNA/HIESRODT/D. P./JOHNSON/WEAVER./ORLEANS/COUNTY N.Y. 1848 [corner block].



Daniel L. Meyers (born 1801)

Clark County, Ohio Client: Martha Verdier

Coverlet, 1842. Tied Beiderwand 4:1. *Warp*: natural cotton; *weft*: natural cotton and navy, red, and green wool. Two loom widths joined, 80 x 98 in.

*Inscribed:* MADE.BY/DL.MYERS/BETHEL/TOWNSHIP/FOR/MARTHA/VERDIER/1842 [corner block].



2008.1.263

Unknown weaver

New Jersey

Client: Rebecca Clark

Coverlet, n.d. Double weave. *Warp*: natural cotton and navy wool; *weft*: natural cotton and navy wool. Full loom width, seamless, 72 x 96 in.

Inscribed: Rebecca Clark [centerfield].



Daniel Isaac Grave (ca. 1803-1864)

Wayne County, Indiana

Client: M. D.

Coverlet, 1835. Double weave. *Warp*: natural cotton and navy wool; *weft*: natural cotton and navy wool. Two loom widths not joined, 75 x 87 in.

Inscribed: MD/By D.I.G./1835 [corner block].



2017.1.125

#### Unknown weaver

Coverlet, n.d. Overshot. *Warp*: natural cotton; *weft*: natural cotton and red and blue wool. Two loom widths joined, 76 x 99 in.



#### 2017.1.081

Unknown weaver

Pennsylvania (attr.)

Coverlet, n.d. Twill. Warp: natural cotton; weft: natural cotton and red and blue wool. Two loom widths joined,  $64 \times 77$  in.

## Can you tell the difference?

"Figured & Fancy" coverlets depict realistic imagery of birds and other animals, botanical designs, architecture, ornate scrollwork, and text. Weaving this kind of pattern required specialized equipment: either a draw-loom, a barrel loom, or a loom fitted with a Jacquard machine.

"Geometric" coverlets feature abstract shapes such as squares, circles, diamonds, and stars. The simpler geometric patterns could be woven by women in a domestic setting. More complex geometric patterns could only be woven on the more complex looms of professional weavers, who were nearly always men.

Both coverlets pictured on the left are geometric. Coverlet 2017.1.125 (top right detail) is woven in a style historically called "floatwork," which modern weavers know as "overshot." Although professional weavers did advertise floatwork coverlets, untrained household weavers could also do this kind of weaving with simple equipment. It is far less likely that a household weaver could have produced coverlet 2017.1.081 (bottom right detail), because it requires a significantly more complex loom.







## Who was the weaver?

Before the 1820's, coverlets had strictly geometric patterns – even those woven by professionals – because the equipment necessary for weaving figured & fancy patterns in a cost-effective way was not yet available in America.

Geometric patterns were woven on multishaft looms. A "shaft" is a harness that lifts a certain set of warp threads at a time. With more shafts, the threads can be lifted in more possible combinations, enabling more intricate patterns. Home weavers often had looms with 2 or 4 shafts. Professionals might have up to 32 shafts. This coverlet (detail, left) has a geometric snowball pattern with a pine tree border. In one corner block, an embroidered inscription reads "Rebecca Johnson August 2, 1809 170." Weaving this pattern requires a loom with 20 shafts, making it extremely unlikely that Rebecca herself was the weaver, although she very probably embroidered her name and date into the corner. The number, embroidered by a different hand, may indicate that this is the 170th sequential coverlet that the weaver produced.



Unknown weaver

Maryland

Client: Rebecca Johnson

Coverlet, 1809. Double weave. *Warp*: natural cotton and navy wool; *weft*: natural cotton and navy wool. Two loom widths joined, 62 x 73 in.

Inscribed: REBECCA/JOHNSON/AUGUST 2/1809/170 [corner block].



Josiah Sherman (born ca. 1820-1830)

Peru, Massachusetts Client: L. M. Pierce

Coverlet, 1848. Tied Beiderwand 4:1. *Warp*: natural cotton; *weft*: natural cotton and navy wool. Two loom widths joined, 70 x 83 in.

Inscribed: WOVE.BY/J. SHEAR/MAN.AT./KENDALL/MILLS.NY/FOR. L.M/PIERCE.OF/PERU/MASS/AD 1848 [corner block].

## Around the Block

When Mister Rogers met factory workers, he often asked them if they ever thought about the people who would use and enjoy what they were making. Coverlet weavers in the early 19th century certainly did. The weaver typically wove the name of his customer right into the fabric in the corner block where the borders of the coverlet meet. He could also include his own name, the date, and where he wove the coverlet. If he used a lacquard machine with punched cards to control the pattern, the weaver had to patch holes in the cards by hand and punch new holes every time he wished to use a new name or date.

Many women's names appear in the corner blocks, but they are not the weavers — they are his clients who bought and used the coverlets.

Fancy weavers were professional tradesmen, and they were almost exclusively men. When a woman's name appears, there is still a good chance she had a hand in its making. By the early 1800's, people were already using machines to mass-produce cotton thread in mills, but they still had to spin the wool by hand on a spinning wheel. It was a common arrangement for the client to provide the weaver with her own handspun wool when ordering a custom coverlet.

If his loom was not wide enough to weave a full-size coverlet in one piece, the weaver made it in two long, narrow panels. It could then be the customer's job to sew the panels together and, occasionally, to add home-made fringe. Some coverlet weavers offered to include fringe for an extra fee. Depending on the design, they could either weave it right into the coverlet or weave it separately and have it sewn on afterward.

#### SLEEPING BAG FACTORY

Episode 1719 - August 28, 1997

The modern sleeping bags in Fred's factory tour are quilted. Unlike weaving a coverlet on a loom, quilting involves sewing together two layers of pre-made fabric with batting material between them to provide loft and insulation. People used both woven coverlets and sewn quilts as bed coverings throughout the 19th century, often decorated with similar patterns and motifs. Piecing decorative quilts out of fabric scraps became more popular with American women in the latter half of the century, and they often did it together as a communal project.



Unknown weaver Berks County, Pennsylvania Client: Catharina Hottenstein

Coverlet, 1849. Tied Beiderwand 2:1. *Warp*: natural and blue cotton; *weft*: natural cotton and red, green, and yellow wool. Two loom widths joined, 92 x 96 in.

Inscribed: 1849/CATHARINA/HOTTENSTEIN [bottom border].



2008.1.225

Unknown weaver Client: Polly S. Funk

Coverlet, 1849. Tied Beiderwand 2:1. *Warp*: natural and light blue cotton; *weft*: natural cotton and navy, green, and coral wool. Two loom widths joined, 77 x 84 in.

Inscribed: POLLY/S/FUNK/1849 [corner block].

## Who was the client?

It is most common for the weaver to include his own name, his client's name, and a time and place in the corner block. Sometimes the corner block features a slogan or proverb instead of names and dates, or it may contain a logo with no text at all.

These particular coverlets follow the usual layout, but there is a conspicuous blank space where the client's name would ordinarily be. The top coverlet says "For \_\_\_\_," waiting for the weaver to fill in the blank. The bottom coverlet features a lonely apostrophe -s.

Weavers equipped with a Jacquard machine relied on punch cards to form the pattern. A weaver would re-use the same set of punch cards for many coverlets. While he might make the effort to re-punch his cards for a special order, the bulk of a weaver's business was in the form of over-the-counter sales. These two coverlets were most likely woven for general sale without a specific recipient in mind. Apparently, it wasn't worth the weaver's time to remove the generic "for" and "'s."







2008.1.371

Philip Rassweiler (born ca. 1822) Orwigsburg, Pennsylvania

Coverlet, 1844. Tied Beiderwand 2:1. *Warp*: natural and light blue cotton; *weft*: natural cotton and navy, red, and yellow wool. Full loom width, seamless, 81 x 91 in.

Inscribed: MADE BY/PH. RASS/WEILER/ORWIGS/BURG.FOR/1844 [corner block].



2008.1.299

William H. Van Gordon (born ca. 1824) Covington, Miami County, Ohio

Coverlet, 1852. Tied Beiderwand 2:1. *Warp*: natural and light blue cotton; *weft*: natural cotton and red, navy, and green wool. Two loom widths joined, 73 x 86 in.

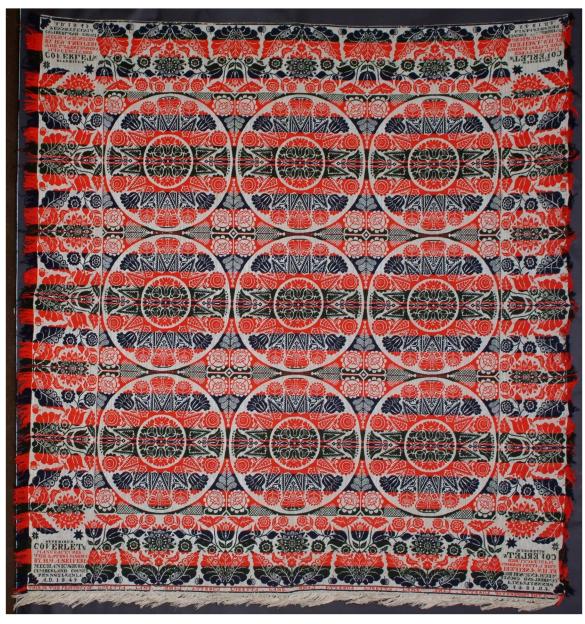
Inscribed: 'S./COVERLET./WM.H.VAN/GORDON./WEAVER/COVINGTON/MIAMI.COUNTY/OHIO.1852. [corner block].



Andrew Kump (1811-1868) Hanover, York County, Pennsylvania Client: L. Shafer

Coverlet, 1850. Tied Beiderwand 2:1. *Warp*: natural and light blue cotton; *weft*: natural cotton and navy, red, and green wool. Two loom widths joined, 86 x 94 in.

Inscribed: L. SHAFER/ANDREW.KUMP./DAMASK COVERLET/MANUFACTURER./HANOVER./YORK COUNTY.PA./1850 [corner block].



Henry & Andrew Seifert (active ca. 1843-1851) Mechanicsburg, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania Client: Lusetta Lane

Coverlet, 1849. Tied Beiderwand 2:1. *Warp*: natural and light blue cotton; *weft*: natural cotton and navy, red, and green wool. Full loom width, seamless, 90 x 102 in.

Inscribed: SUPERIOUR./COVERLETS/MANUFACTURED/THE LATEST FASHION/BY.H.& A.SEIFERT/MECHANICSBURG/CUMBERLAND COUNTY/PENNSYLVANIA /A.D. 1849 [corner block]; THIS IS THE PROPERTY OF LUSETTA. LANE. [bottom border].

## "What an Idea!"

In 1801, a French silk weaver named Joseph Marie Jacquard invented a device that used punched cards to control which threads on a loom go up or down in every row. His machine made it faster and easier to weave realistic imagery of birds, flowers, and architecture. Professional weavers in America were using Jacquard machines by the 1820's.

Jacquard deserves credit for making the machine a commercial success, but he did not invent the idea in a vacuum. He built upon the inventions of many other people, just as his work later inspired businessman Herman Hollerith to develop the precursor to IBM computer punch card technology in the 1880's.

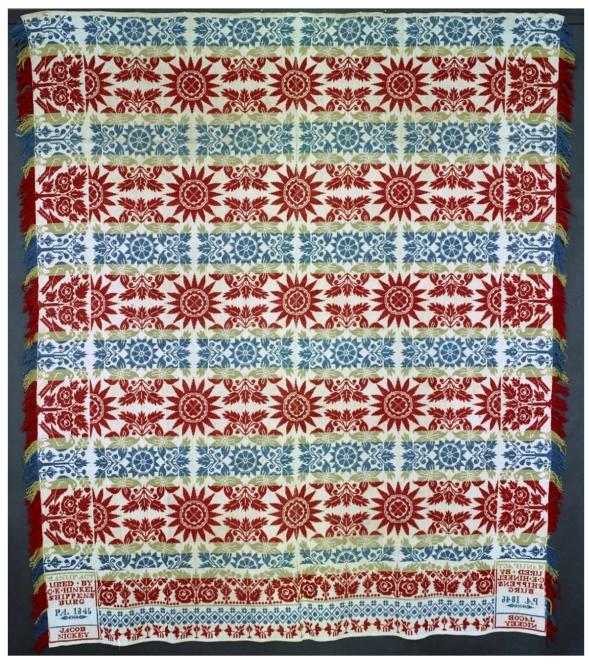
It's not a coincidence that weaving, like computer code, is binary. For every pass of a shuttle, each thread is either picked up (hole) or left down (no hole). Each punched card on a Jacquard machine programs the loom for a single row of weaving.

"Jacquard" has become a general term for figured coverlets, but it can be a misnomer since many weavers wove figured patterns using different machinery. The barrel loom, invented by Thomas Morton of Kilmarnock, Scotland, used a cylinder with pegs to control the pattern much like a music box. It was originally used to weave patterned carpets. In New York and New England, many coverlet weavers actually considered carpet weaving their primary business, but they found their carpet looms equally well-suited to meet a demand for decorative handwoven bed covers.

#### PIANO ROLL FACTORY

Episode 1491 - March 1, 1982

Basile Bouchon, the son of an organ maker, invented a draw-loom controlled by a pattern on perforated paper tape in 1725. Seeing how other people had created machines to play music inspired him to do the same thing for weaving looms. Other people later improved on his design by replacing the thin paper rolls with sturdy cards that could hold up to wear & tear. In episode 1491 of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, Fred learns how a modern piano roll works and explores a shop where people make the rolls.

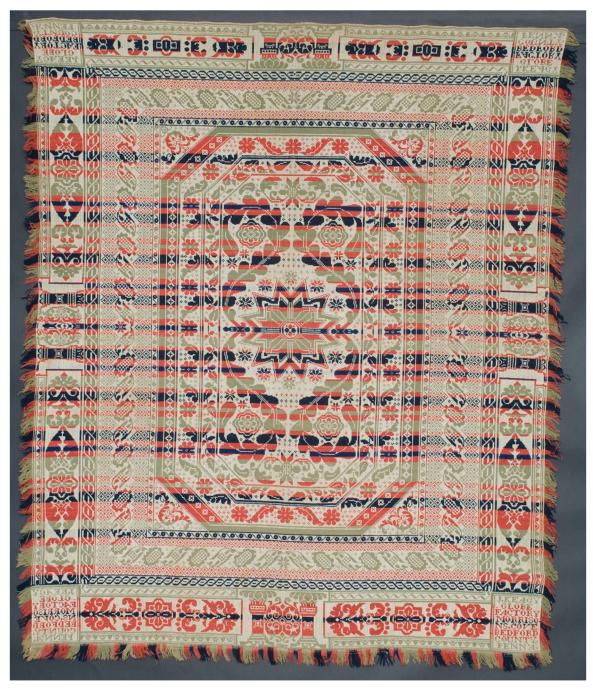


Christian K. Hinkel (ca. 1813-1899) Shippensburg, Pennsylvania

Client: Jacob Nickey

Coverlet, 1846. Tied Beiderwand 2:1. *Warp*: natural and light blue cotton; *weft*: natural cotton and red, blue, and chartreuse wool. Two loom widths joined, 77 x 90 in.

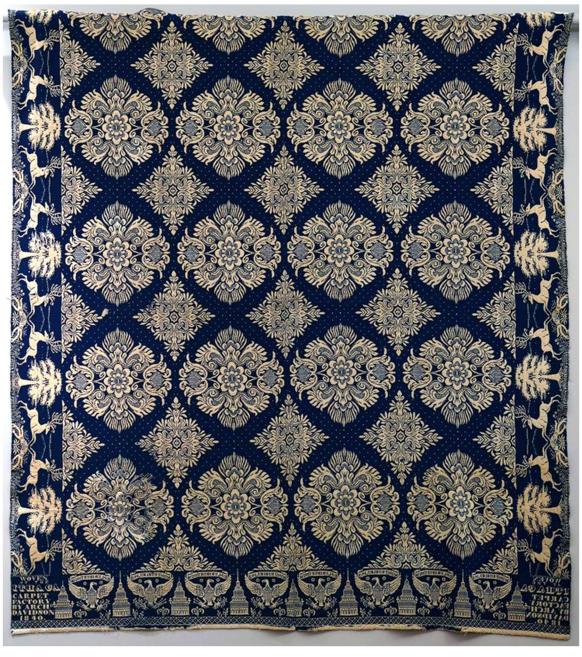
*Inscribed:* MANUFACT/URED.BY/C.K.HINKEL/SHIPPENS/BURG/PA.1846/ JACOB/NICKEY [corner block].



John Keagy (ca. 1811-1890) Bedford County, Pennsylvania

Coverlet, n.d. Tied Beiderwand 3:1. *Warp*: natural and light blue cotton; *weft*: natural cotton and navy, red, and chartreuse wool. Full loom width, seamless, 74 x 86 in.

*Inscribed:* J.KEAGY/GLOBE/FACTORY/MORRISO-/NS.COVE/BEDFORD/COUNTY./ PENN'A. [corner block].



2017.1.124

Archibald Davidson (born ca. 1771) Ithaca, New York

Coverlet, 1840. Double weave. *Warp*: natural cotton and navy wool; *weft*: natural cotton and navy wool. Two loom widths joined, 73 x 84 in.

*Inscribed:* WOVEN/AT THE/ITHACA/CARPET/FACTORY/BY ARCHD/DAVIDSON/1840. [corner block]; E PLURIBUS UNUM [bottom border].

## What did a factory look like?

"Factory" and "manufacturer" have connotations of mechanized modern industry in our 21st century imaginations, but this has not always been the case. The earliest manufactories were simply businesses with several employees to carry out the different stages of production, rather than each doing the whole process for himself. They varied tremendously in size and scope.

JOHN KEAGY'S Globe Factory near Bedford, PA produced 150 coverlets annually valued at \$600. Outfitted with three water power looms and one hand loom, the factory employed a staff of five men and two women. The factory made the bulk of its profits from other products, later including blankets for Union soldiers.

Andrew Kump, "Damask Coverlet Manufacturer," was a coverlet specialist. Using a hand powered loom and a single employee, he produced 250 coverlets annually valued at \$1600.

ARCHIBALD DAVIDSON, a Scottish weaver who came to Ithaca, NY in the late 1820s, employed at least six people at the Ithaca Carpet Factory where he advertised carpets and coverlets for sale. The business operated until the Civil War.

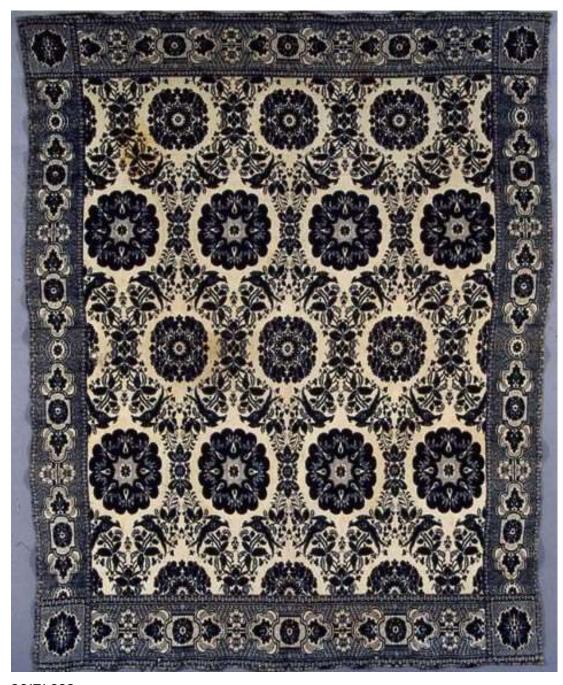
Another small factory operated out of New York's AUBURN STATE PRISON. Jacquard looms and punch cards were purchased by the prison to produce figured coverlets for sale to the general public. Incarcerated weavers, trained in coverlet and carpet weaving by a master weaver, worked together in total silence six days a week.

BOWLING GREEN WOOLEN MILL in Kentucky was built in 1866. Bills dated 1867 list the sale of jeans, flannels, blankets, fulled goods, yarn, carpets, and fancy coverlets. The woolen mill was part of a larger manufacturing company with 75 employees that also made lumber and grain products.

#### **BLUE JEAN FACTORY**

Episode 1672 February 22, 1994

When Mister Rogers visited a blue jeans factory, he saw a vacuum machine specially made to turn pant legs right-side-out. True to form, his response was to celebrate the imaginative person behind it, exclaiming "What an idea someone had to invent such a clever machine!"



2017.1.023

Auburn Prison Factory (attr.) New York

Coverlet, n.d. True Beiderwand 4:1. *Warp*: natural cotton; *weft*: natural cotton and navy wool. Full loom width, seamless, 67 x 87 in.



2023.2.001

Auburn Prison Factory (attr.)

New York

Coverlet, n.d. True Beiderwand 4:1. *Warp*: natural cotton; *weft*: natural cotton and red wool. Full loom width, seamless, 70 x 82 in.



Unknown weaver Philadelphia

Coverlet, ca. 1876. Beiderwand. *Warp*: natural and taupe cotton; *weft*: natural cotton and red wool. Full loom width, seamless, 72 x 78 in.

*Inscribed:* MEMORIAL HALL [bottom border]; CENTENNIAL [top border]; 1776–1876 [side borders].

# Into the Factory

The mechanization of weaving began with John Kay of Bury, England, who patented the flying shuttle in 1733. It allowed people to weave wider cloth at a faster speed than previously possible by removing the need for a weaver to place the weft thread into the warp by hand – now he could do it with a flick of the wrist instead. It was the crucial first step toward fully automated weaving machines by the end of the following century. The last remaining manual step in the process was eliminated by the Northrop loom, introduced in 1895, which could wind and change its own shuttles.

Trained weavers found themselves increasingly unable to compete with factory production levels as technological innovations dramatically improved the speed and consistency of textile manufacture. They found a niche market in the first half of the 19th century by

specializing in something that neither home weavers nor factory weavers could produce at the time: complex custom work, including special-order coverlets. But it was only a short-term solution. Popular fashions changed, local markets were saturated, and textile machinery continued to improve. By the mid-19th century, most skilled weavers had turned to other occupations. They were replaced by a new workforce of mechanics to operate and repair the steam-powered weaving machines.

Mister Rogers admired the skill of factory workers, often remarking how fast and carefully they worked and how well they knew their unique jobs. Although the transition from cottage industry to factory production put an end to skilled weaving as a professional trade, it created something new in its place. The booming textile industry that emerged – and the **people** who worked in it – are also worth celebrating.

#### **TOWEL FACTORY**

Episode 1511 – February 7, 1983

In this episode, Fred visits a factory where bales of cotton are turned into terrycloth bath towels. First people use machines to spin the cotton into thread, which is then woven on a loom. Then others dye the towels a certain color and use a sewing machine to finish their hems. A factory worker of the late 1800's would recognize the machines at work in the modern towel factory. The same steps are involved in making textiles, whether they're done by hand or by machine.



2008.1.035

Bowling Green Woolen Mills (built 1866) Kentucky

Coverlet, n.d. True Beiderwand 2:1. *Warp*: maroon (double) and olive wool (singles); *weft*: maroon (singles) and olive wool (2-ply). Full loom width, seamless, 81 x 79 in.

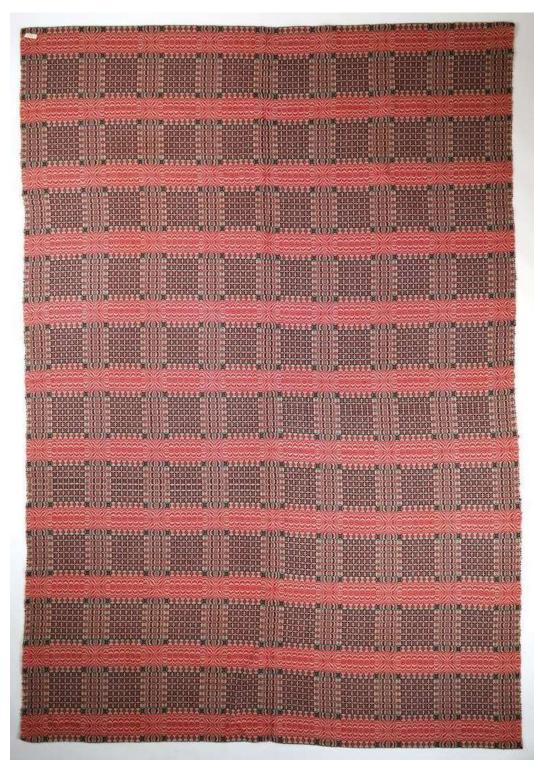
Inscribed: BOWLING GREEN WOOLLEN MILLS [centerfield].



#### Unknown weaver

Coverlet, n.d.. Beiderwand. *Warp*: natural cotton; *weft*: natural cotton and green, magenta, and lavender wool. Full loom width, seamless, 76 x 80 in.





2009.2.001

Mrs. Hollingsworth North Carolina

Coverlet, 1940's. Overshot. Warp: natural cotton; weft: natural cotton and red and black wool. Two loom widths joined, 78 x 111 in.

## The Handcraft Revival

The Industrial Revolution transformed textile production from the work of individuals in family workshops to the work of factory laborers and steam-powered machines by the end of the 19th century. Weaving as handcraft was revived around this time by individuals and institutions keen to preserve the old traditions for new generations.

In rural Appalachia, people continued to weave overshot coverlets longer than in less isolated regions, but even there the craft was dying out by 1900. Before they were lost entirely, researchers like Mary Meigs Atwater (1878-1956) collected woven items, recorded weavers' drafts, and interviewed surviving weavers for posterity.

Institutions like Berea College in Kentucky revived cottage industry by commissioning handcrafted items from women weavers in the region who wove in their homes and sold finished pieces to Berea. Allanstand Mountain Crafts of Asheville, NC similarly commissioned handwoven coverlets and rugs to be re-sold to local tourists or by mail order.

This coverlet (left) was woven by Mrs. Hollingsworth near Lenoir, NC in the 1940's. It was sold by Allanstand Mountain Crafts for \$60 in 1957 to an unknown client.



Imagining something
may be the first step in making
it happen, but it takes the real time and
real efforts of real people to learn things,
make things, turn thoughts into deeds
or visions into inventions.

- Fred Rogers





Tyler, Page 4



Johnson, Page 6



Meyers, Page 7



Unknown, Page 8



Graves, Page 9



Unknown, Page 10



Unknown, Page 10



Unknown, Page 12



Shearman, Page 14



Unknown, Page 16



Unknown, Page 17



Rassweiler, Page 19



Van Gordon, Page 20



Kump, Page 21



Seifert, Page 22



Hinkel, Page 24



Keagy, Page 25



Davidson, Page 26



Auburn Prison, Page 28



Auburn Prison, Page 29



Unknown, Page 30



Bowling Green, Page 32



Hollingsworth, Page 34

