

Overlooking The Overshot Coverlets

This is the second donation of a large number⁴⁶ of overshot coverlets to the Mississippi Valley Textile Museum. The first donation of about 50 jacquard coverlets, etc. happened in 2018 and were exhibited at the museum in Oct.-Dec. of 2023.

I believe the decorative arts of the nineteenth century have been overlooked over the past thirty years. My collecting of handweaving began more than 50 years ago and began with the exhibitions at the Royal Ontario Museum in 1973 when I lived close by while attending the University of Toronto. Handweaving, especially coverlets, was highlighted when Dorothy and Harold Burnham were the curators in the Textile Department. They published Keep Me Warm One Night at the same time - 1972. That publication and the subsequent The Comfortable Arts by Dorothy in 1981^{for National Gallery Tour.} became "my bible" as I began to build the collection. I did not set out to try and replicate the ROM collection but I have come close in all categories of textile collecting. Good examples have become increasingly rare.

With the exception of a few overshots that I have kept, I pass the majority on to the Museum collection. Additional overshots in carpet, tableclothes and other examples will follow in the future.

Such collections are both a blessing and a curse. Manageable groups will assist in exhibitions in context. As a collector I was often frustrated when I was denied access, receiving only poor photos from Museum. I hope researchers and collectors will have access for more rewarding experiences in the future.

Overshots have been produced throughout the nineteenth century (an early 20th) in the Maritime Provinces, Quebec and Ontario. They are probably the

best represented in private and museum collections today. Some spectacular examples have been preserved and feature weaving on a four harness (or more) loom. Many examples are linked to Scottish, Irish and English settlements in Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia (Cape Breton in particular).

My personal focus has been collecting examples in excellent to good condition. Rarely one in fair condition was added when the weaver's name and location made it an exception. Research over the years has made this a difficult task, visiting local museums and archives to search census records and old directories.

I have been blessed to collect excellent overshot coverlets by the "big four" notably Samuel Fry from the Loyalist, Bermann Niagara, John Campbell from Komoka, Middlesex County (London area), Charles Herin of Mount Charles, Peel County (Mississauga) and

Peter Fretz Selby Richmond Township (Napane). This helps to illustrate a regional focus, often overlooked.

Some have the overshots have been exhibited previously in Mississauga, Toronto, and Lanark Co., but for the most part they have been celebrated publicly. Some have been used at lectures I have done for conferences and workshops.

I am pleased to entrust them to your care for the future. I will continue to add rather information as things come to light in the future.

Until I get the next group of handover coverlets gets catalogued - good luck

I have provided a free copy of my catalogue to assist you.

Dennis Mills
May 9, 2024