

# NEW PATTERNS FROM OLD MANUSCRIPTS

By MARGUERITE P. DAVISON

Philadelphia holds a unique place in the history of American hand-weaving. The Swedish settlement on the Delaware, descendants of whom are numbered among her prominent citizens today, brought all the home-arts of a people accustomed to subsist by their own efforts. Also there were many Finns in the number. In their home country they knew forest life. From them Daniel Boone and other pioneers, Hanks and Lincoln families, going from near Reading to Kentucky and the middle west, took the art of making log cabins, now associated by us as an integral part of frontier life.

Without doubt the beginnings of our Colonial weavings came also from this source and from subsequent settlements in Massachusetts, South Carolina, Tennessee and western New York. It is more than coincidence that where centers of hand-weaving have been strongest, there also were Scandinavian settlers.

German settlers have left a more definite mark on our handicraft, for few if any weavings survive from the early Scandinavian weavers, though mention is made by various writers of the obvious work done by them. The Germans came in greater numbers. Their double-woven coverlets in block patterns, twill patterns both in wool and linen, and damask, as well as more simple weavings have been preserved in great quantities and were woven until civil war times. Some spinners of fine linen thread are still in existence and a movement is on foot to revive all of the crafts in Pennsylvania so nearly eclipsed by commercial workmen.

Ida M. Tarbell, in "In the Footsteps of the Lincolns," tells us that Abraham Lincoln's first ancestor to land in this country was an apprenticed weaver; also his brother. They did not weave here as the lot of clothing the families fell to the women. The struggle experienced by these heroines is one of constant wonder to modern generations. The Swedish and Finnish women doubtless passed on to them the technique of making the bright, colorful fabrics which were a relief from the woolen suitings made more for durability than for beauty. The German men were responsible for the double-woven and twill-woven coverlets and fine linens now to be found in Pennsylvania Dutch neighborhoods.

Early in the period of awakening interest in Colonial weavings, at the time when Mrs. Anna Ernberg was called to Berea College in Kentucky to perfect the work of "our contemporary ancestors", Eliza Calvert Hall gave us her "Book of Hand-Woven Coverlets," with all the romance she found in collecting her material. In the September-October, 1930, number of *The Handicrafter* she presents a problem concerning the origin of American coverlet weaving. Her idea while she was writing her book was that it was of English, Scotch and Irish descent, since the people among whom the art flourished in America were of these nationalities. She was surprised to find no over-shot work among the English weavers and no counterpart of the patterns in the British Isles. Her assumption was accepted without question

by other American writers. One element forgotten was that there were good neighbors of a different origin living near who have left their print on our life. Their log houses are the homes of our pioneer ancestors; their melon baskets are called "Cherokee Baskets" or "Mountain Baskets", according to the location in which they are found. Their hand-weaving patterns formed the basis of our Colonial patterns, many of them coming without change from their traditional designs.

In the Philadelphia museums are six manuscripts which record the patterns of old weavers. Nothing is known of the men who made them beyond the date; even that is uncertain on one of them, and the name of another is obscure. They do bear mute evidence of the careful work general among them and one has an account book with it that records the amounts paid for different kinds of work, for whom the weavings were made and whether or not the accounts were settled. Strange is the coincidence that all but one were named John or Johann. The oldest is the book of Johann Speck, dated 1723; the next has had part of the name scratched out, so all that we see is "Johann D—, 1766." Johann Michael Kirschbaum's manuscript, 1771, is in the library of The Franklin Institute. The rest are in the library of The Philadelphia Museum of Art at Fairmount. John Landes' book has been preserved to weavers through the efforts of Mrs. Mary Meigs Atwater. The date of its use is not known, but is presumed to be late eighteenth century. It is in a fragile condition and is no longer in circulation, though the photostats serve the purpose of perusal very well. William Hutchison, 1819, has his journal and cash book accompanying his pattern book and Johann Schleelein, 1820, handed his work on to Conrad Schleelein, 1844.

There is no record of the technique in which the patterns were developed. The Kirschbaum manuscript gives the skeleton draft at the bottom of each page. There are many duplicates among the designs; while the weavers were probably German and some of the manuscripts evidently came from Germany, we find counterparts in Swedish and Finnish books today. This is especially true of the many variations of our well-known "Whig Rose" design. The "Whig Rose" commonly developed in overshot coverlets, having a large rose in the center, four small roses, and enclosed in interlacing rings, with a corner of small diamonds, is found in Swedish books. In a modern German book a similar design is called "Schwedenborte mit spitzenartigen grund kleinere Musterung". The popular Monk's Belt and some kindred designs, Cat Track and Snail Trail, King's Flower, are given in almost all of these records.

The patterns recorded in the old manuscripts have little of interest for modern weavers. They are generally large and ornate. A few which have been adapted to smaller work have been selected, woven in several techniques, and the

# PLATE I

## "BARLEY CORN" OR "BRONSON WEAVE"

APPLIED TO JOHANN SCHLEEBLEIN'S No. 41.

THREADING. L	REPEAT	HARNESSES COMBINATIONS			
		x	x	x	x
			y		x
		x	x		
		x	x		

20

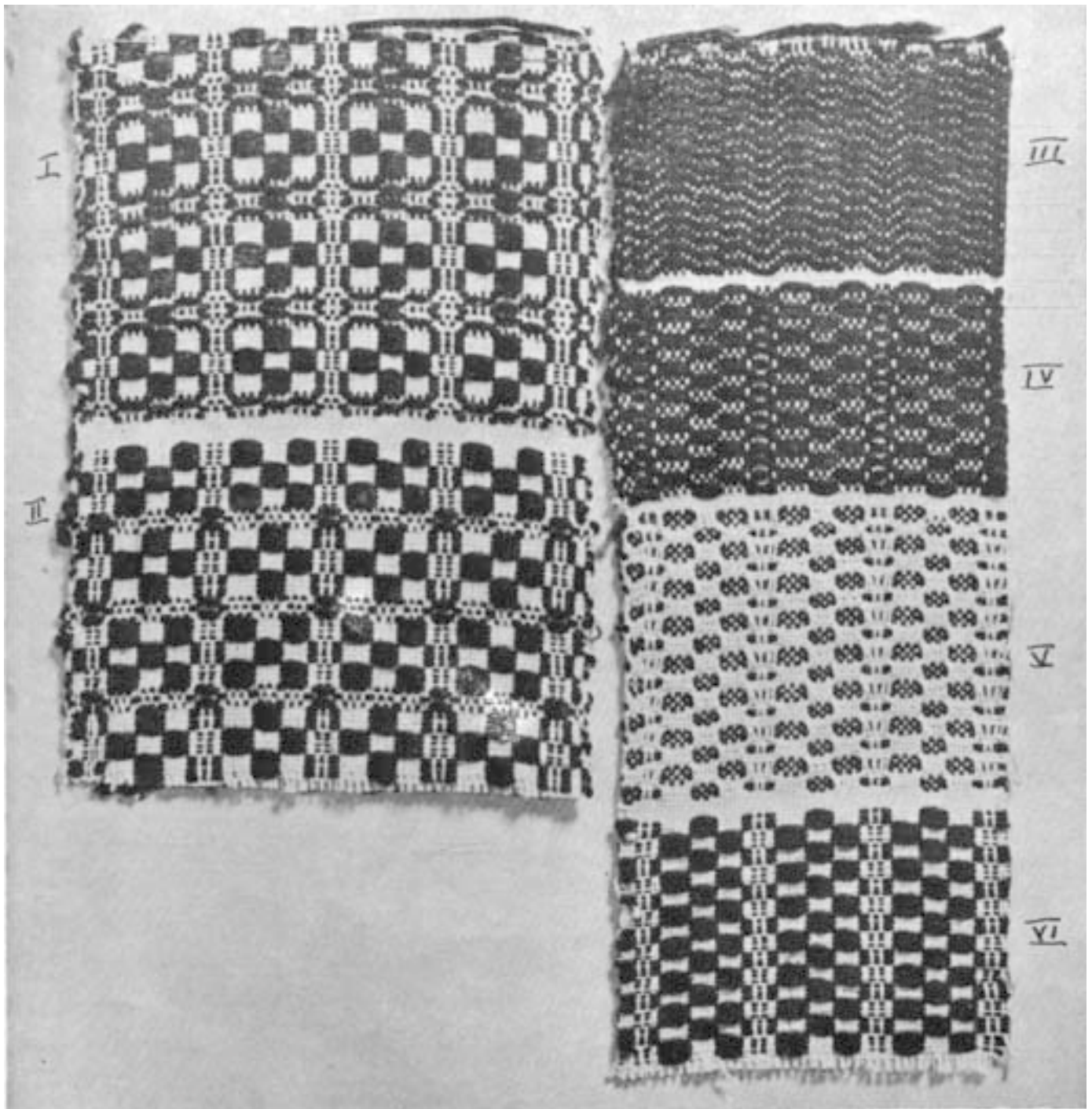
16  
PLAIN  
WEAVING



TREADING.

REPEAT





results are given here. The large dot with twill joining, Johann D—'s No. 32 and Johann Schleelein's No. 198, is very effective in overshoot work and is also developed in Jamtlandsvav by Caroline Halvorsen in her latest edition, page 147.

The manner of weaving called "Bronson Weave" by Mrs. Atwater, is a well known German technique called "Barley Corn" by them. Linen woven in a diamond pattern with a twill border has recently been seen among Pennsylvania Dutch linens, using this method of producing it.

The samples here shown were woven on a Number 12, two-ply cotton warp with weft of the same size, in the case of the "Barley Corn" weaves, and a tabby of No. 12 two-ply cotton with three-ply sport yarn in the overshoot designs. They were threaded thirty threads to the inch in a fifteen

dent reed. The design of Plate V develops beautifully in forty lea two-ply linen warp with weft of the same size or a single thirty lea linen. The small block is enlarged for corner and border. The variations of Plate III are adaptable to upholstery.

Where it would be cumbersome to indicate the use of a tabby thread, the use or absence is indicated and must be taken into account when following the treadling directions: for instance the numeral 1 or 3, etc., between the vertical lines means that the combination of harnesses indicated directly above it in the intersection of the horizontal and vertical lines is to be used that number of times with tabby between to gain the desired effect. In the case of the Barley Corn weaves, they are treadled as indicated, no tabby being used, as it is one shuttle work.



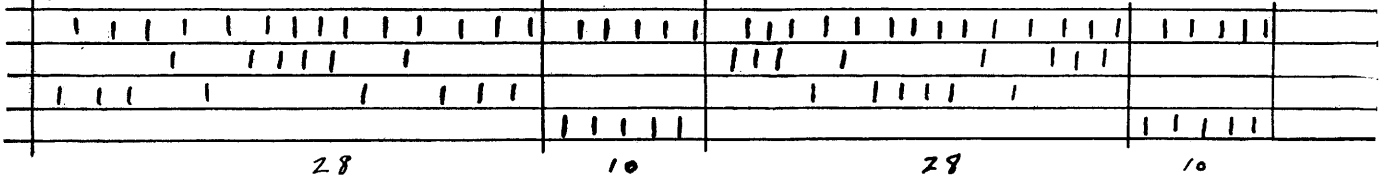
PLATE IV

"BARLEY CORN OR "BRONSON WEAVE"

APPLIED TO JOHANN D--'S BASIC DESIGN NO 27.

THREADING:

REPEAT



HARNES COMBINATIONS.

X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	X	X				X	X				X	X	X
	X		X			X		X			X		X
	X			X		X			X		X		X

PLAIN TREADING: WEAVE 1

CONT.

CONT.

BEGIN HERE

REPEAT FROM



CONTINUED

CONTINUED

JOHANN D--'s No. 32.

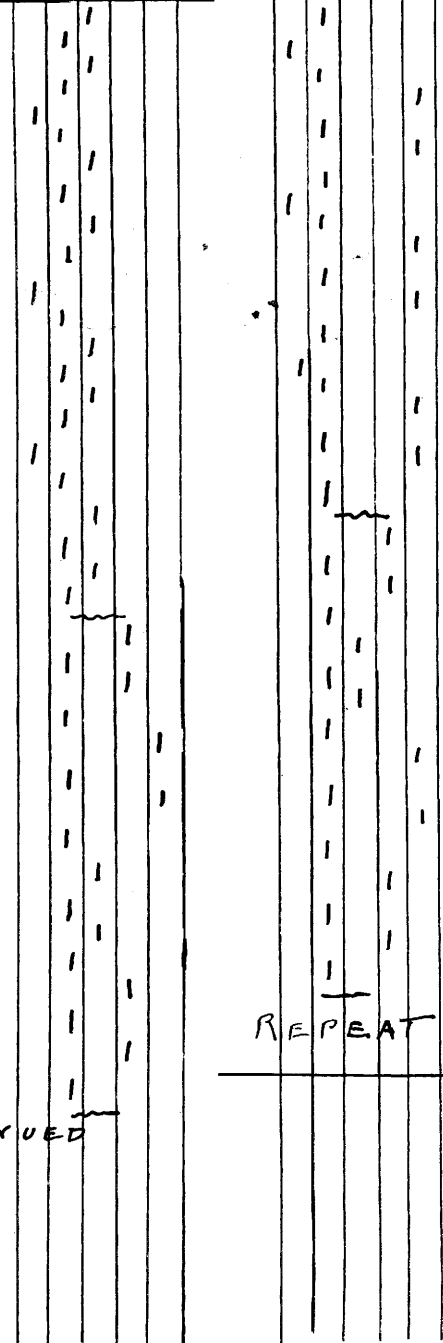
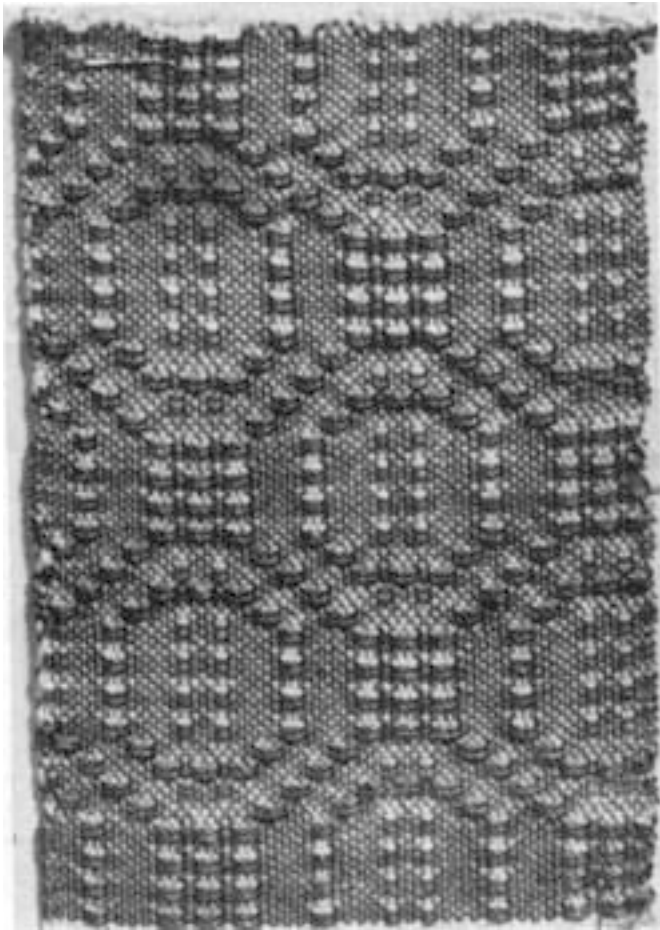
JOHANN SCHLEELEIN'S No. 198.

THREADING:				REPEAT	← HARNESS COMBINATIONS →							
				x		x		x		x		x
				x	y	x			x	x		
				x	x				x	x		
				x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
16	16	16	16	1				#				1

PLAIN WEAVING

# CONT.

TREADLING:



# CONTINUED