

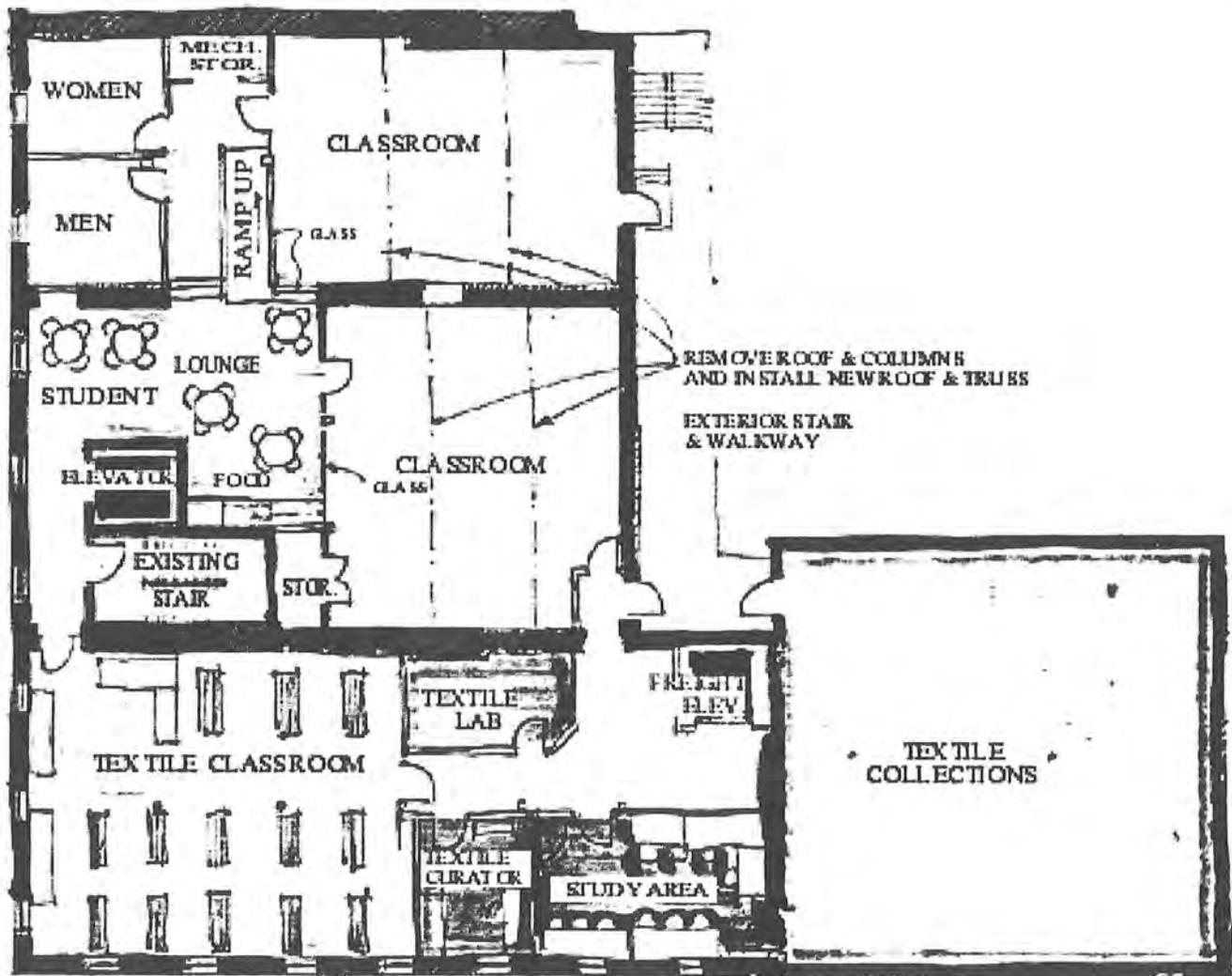
# NORWEGIAN TEXTILE LETTER

Vol. VI No. 1

November, 1999

## Vesterheim's Weaving Program Transformed

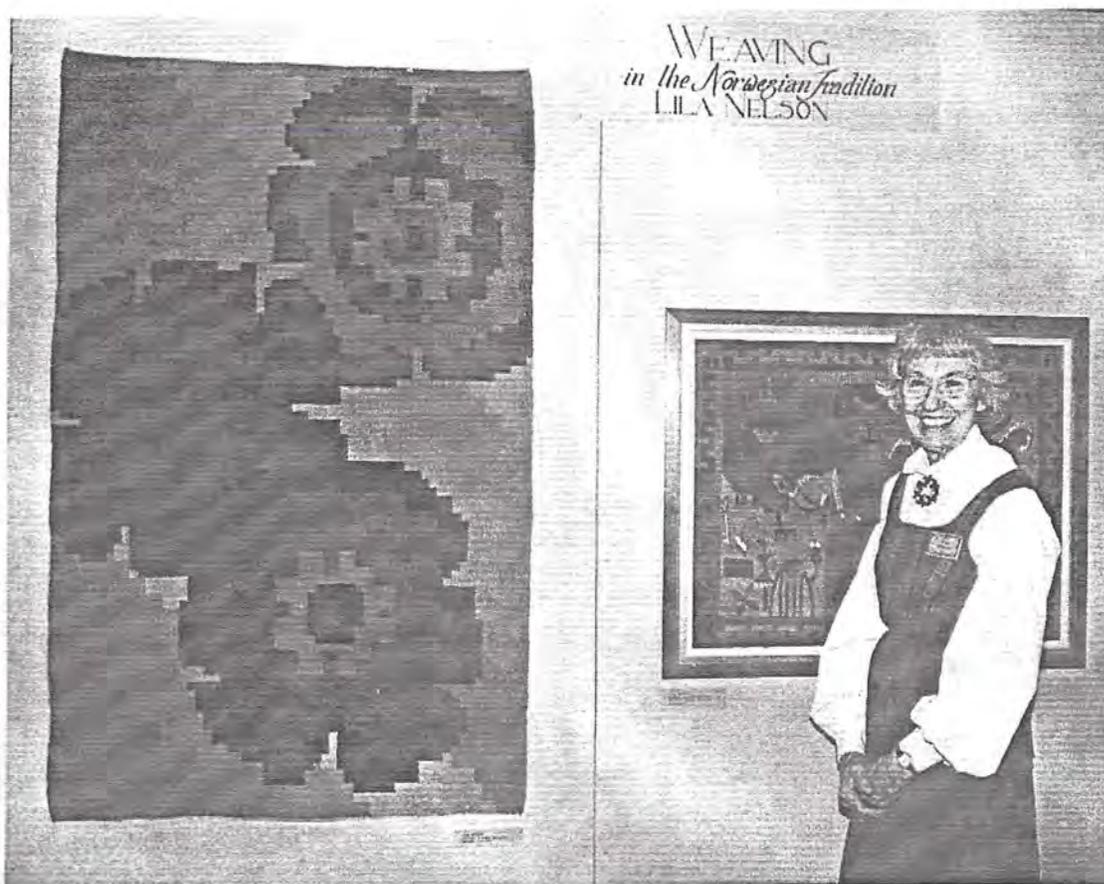
Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum's classroom building, Vesterheim Center, is being renovated into the Westby Education Center. A private donation along with funds from a grant from the state of Iowa will enable the museum to begin the process of expanding and improving facilities for active learning. There will be a hands-on history room, folk art supply store, and gallery space for student and other work on the first floor. On the third floor will be two rosemaling classrooms, a new weaving classroom and a textile study room.



WORKING DRAWING WESTBY EDUCATION CENTER THIRD FLOOR

The weaving classroom will be spacious and filled with sunlight from seven windows. The museum will continue to use the existing Macomber add-a-harness looms, but hopes to gradually upgrade the equipment. The classroom where Betty Johannesen teaches weaving at the South Bend (Indiana) Regional Art Museum was the model for Vesterheim's new space. An advisory board of weaving teachers and students met recently to provide additional guidance.

The new room will be named the **Lila Nelson Weaving Classroom** because, explains Vesterheim's Executive Director Janet Blohm Pultz, "Lila is such a beloved person and has done so much to make Vesterheim a center for textiles that we wanted to honor her in some permanent way." The textile study room will be named for another long-time friend of Vesterheim, Phyllis Leseth of Decorah, Iowa, who has served on the museum board and as newsletter editor.



Lila Nelson in 1991 with a *rutevev*-inspired floral wall hanging and an adaptation of the Adoration of the Magi *billedvev*.

Along with the new space comes some new programming. The museum will continue to offer intensive workshops, but will also add more beginning/refresher courses and once-a-week classes. "And we're very excited to offer a Weaving Workshop Weekend on October 7-9, 2000," says Education Curator Jennifer Johnston. Come for a smorgasbord of Norwegian coverlet weaves with Lila Nelson, band weaving with Jane Murphy, or felting with Nancy Ellison. The second annual weavers' banquet will be held on October 8. The complete listing of 2000 folk art classes will be in the mail by January.

For more information contact Laurann Gilbertson, Textile Curator, Vesterheim Norwegian- American Museum, PO Box 379, Decorah IA 52101, 319-382-9681, [textiles@vesterheim.org](mailto:textiles@vesterheim.org)

## **CONVERGENCE 1999**

You have perhaps noticed (although it could easily be overlooked) the brief note regarding our NBClub's meeting at convergence in Cincinnati, which gives very little information. The following is what I submitted for inclusion and what I thought was accepted:

The Norwegian Breakfast Club will break with tradition to meet Friday noon 12:00-2:00 p.m. at (location?). Bring your bag lunch plus objects, information or concerns to share. Hear reports on the 1999 Arctic Circle tour and the coming 2001 Conference at the Nordic Heritage Museum, Seattle. Non-members welcome.

Probably lack of space limited the amount of information that could be included. I hope that the above arrangements will be in effect. Cincinnati people say they will have a number of available small areas in the hotel at which carry-out lunches will be sold.

## **NORWEGIAN TEXTILE CONFERENCE 2001 - UPDATE**

Dates are now set for the 2nd Conference on Norwegian Textiles, to be held in Seattle, Washington. Hotel and meeting space has been reserved at the Seattle Center for the first week of October 2001. The Conference will begin on Thursday evening, October 4th and conclude on Saturday, October 6th. A series of workshops will be offered prior to the Conference, from Monday through Thursday, October 1st-4th.

A number of exciting speakers, seminars and workshop topics are being discussed, and plans are underway to include a commercial exhibition featuring Norwegian/Scandinavian weaving yarns, equipment and books. During the day, conference participants will attend meetings at the spacious Seattle Center. Friday evening a gala reception will be hosted by the Nordic Heritage Museum at their facility in historic Ballard. Ballard, an enclave of Norwegian settlement, is still the center of the Northwest

fishing industry. The reception will feature the Museum's renowned Dream of America Exhibition portraying the immigrant experience, the Logging and Fishing exhibitions describing livelihoods frequently chosen by early Scandinavian settlers, and displays of all five Nordic countries represented by residents of the Puget Sound area. The Museum is also especially proud to be presenting to the City of Seattle and to Conference participants an exhibition of Norwegian Textile Guild member's work (application procedures will appear in the next newsletter) and, of course, The Coverlets of Norway Exhibition.

Will there be a Norwegian Breakfast Club Banquet & Meeting? You bet! as they say in Ballard, where the high school's trademark cheer is still, 'Lutefisk, lutefisk, lefse, lefse, we're from Ballard, ya sure you betcha!

Watch the newsletter for future developments, and mark your calendars for October 2001!

## **NEW NAME FOR THE NORWEGIAN BREAKFAST CLUB**

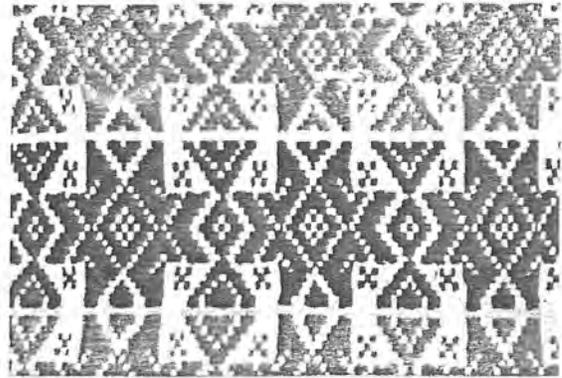
Monday, July 5th, the Norwegian Breakfast Club met at the Rainbow Hotel in Tromsø. It was decided that we needed a more appropriate name for such formal requirements as funding requests. However, since an attachment remains for the Norwegian Breakfast Club name (and since we have those attractive tote bags complete with the breakfast club logo) we saw no reason why we couldn't retain it as a nickname and use the formal NORWEGIAN TEXTILE GUILD when the occasion demands (such as for letterheads). Since the Norwegian American Museum has it's familiar name "Vesterheim" and Die Sandvigske Samlinger in Lillehammer goes by "Maihaugen", we should be able to follow these precedents.

## **NOTES FROM LILA**

Ann Rasmussen, a Danish-born weaver living in Kristiansand, Norway, has completed a

monumental tapestry for the Norwegian Seamen's Church in New York. Dedicated on October 3, 1999, the round tapestry, nine feet in diameter, lends itself to personal interpretation and gives an impression of serenity and peace. Rasmussen, who has created a number of art works for churches, schools, and other institutions, spent over two years on the Seamen's Church tapestry.

Lila Nelson has completed the registration of 23 Norwegian weavings belonging to a collector in Minneapolis, MN. Three of these are coverlets, two in skillbragd and one in single point krokbragd. While a number of the weavings in this group are purchases, the one in the photographs belonged to the owner's grandmother and probably dates in the early 19th century.



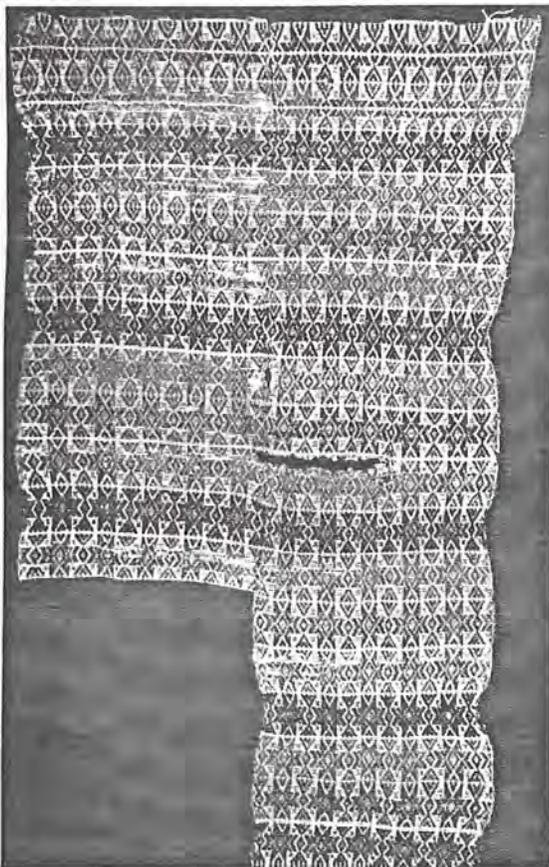
Detail of Skillbragd Coverlet

Member Helene Hernmarck's exhibition Monumental and Intimate, which was on view at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York June 22-August 28, 1999, will be on view in Stockholm, Sweden October 2 to December 5.

The book Helena Hernmarck, Tapestry Artist by Monica Boman and Patricia Malarcher is reviewed by Tommye Scanlin in the current Shuttle, Spindle & Diepot; it sounds as if it definitely merits attention. (University of Washington Press, P.O. Box 50096, Seattle, Washington 98145-5096. 1999. Hard cover. 128 pp. \$40)

In our awareness of member Ase Blake's excellent work on the tapestry exhibition for Convergence 98 in Atlanta, we completely overlooked the HGA award she received at that time for Advent/Lent pariments and stole done in the Theo Moorman technique. A photograph appears in the Spring 99 issue of SS&D.

Member Mary Colton's tapestry Twilight Kilim, photographed in the Summer 99 SS&D was part of the work which earned her a COE in Handweaving, Level II Master, in 1998. Her special study concentrated on the construction techniques of tapestry. In the article by Doramay Keasbey where the photograph appears, Mary's thoughtful comments about working toward a COE are well worth reading.



Coverlet registered by Lila Nelson

## FOR SALE

Vesterheim Museum has used weaving books for sale at \$3 per book plus shipping.

**Card Weaving** by Russell Groff (1970)

**The Art of Weaving** by Else Regensteiner (1970)

**The Art and Craft of Hand Weaving** by Lili Blumenau (1955)

**Creative Design in Wall Hangings** by Lili Blumenau (1967)

**Rug Weaving** by Klares Lewes & Helen Hutton (1962)

**Contemporary Handweaving** by Ruth Overman & Lula Smith (1955)

**Foot-Power Loom Weaving** by Edward Frost (1924)

**American and European Hand Weaving Revised** by Helen Louise Allen (1970)

**Swedish Swatches - Blue Series** by Malin Selander (1969)

**Swedish Hand Weaving** by Malin Selander (1959)

**Manual of Swedish Hand Weaving** by Ulla Cyrus (1956)

**Small Webs** by Maja Lundbäck & Märta Rinde-Ramsbäck (1959) on narrow textiles.

**Vi Väver till Hemmet** by Maja Lundbäck (1956) on household textiles. Swedish

**Yllevävar** by Hilda Tillquist & Lars Wålstedt (1956) on various weaves. Swedish

**Band** by Liz Trotzig & Astrid Axelsson (1958) on various bands. Swedish

**Flamskvävnad** by Ernst Fischer & Gertrud Ingers (1961) on tapestry. Swedish & English

**Handdukar och Duktyg** by Gertrud Ingers (1956) on table linens. Swedish

**Transmattor och Andra Maftor** by Broden & Ingers (1959) on rugs. Swedish

**Nya Mattor** by Gertrud Ingers (1959) on rugs. Swedish

**Mönsterblad - Transmattor** by the Svensk Hemsöjd (nd) on rag rugs. Swedish

**Væv Selv** by Gudrun Jespersen & Manny Jørnung (1955) on 2-shaft weaves. Danish

**Vævebogen** by Paulli Andersen (1950s, nd) on Danish weaves. Danish

**Kaunista Kangaspuissa** by Rauha Aarnio (1951) on contemporary bed covers. Finnish

**Kaunis Matto** by Rauha Aarnio (1955) on rugs. Finnish & English

**Uusia Reipumattoja** by Mary Olki (1953) on rugs. Finnish

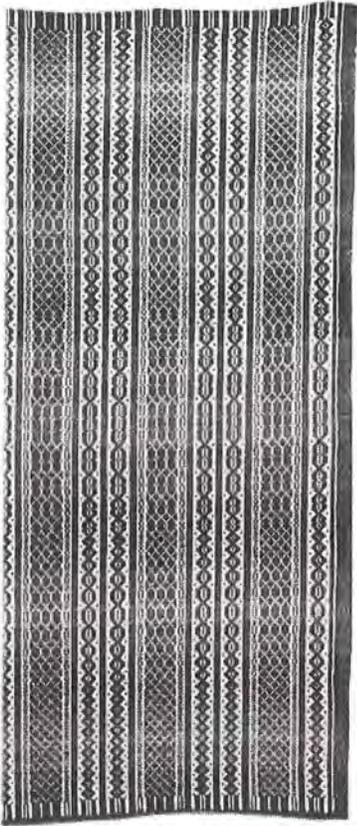
**Uusia Maftoja ja Ryijyjä** by Rauha Aarnio (1955) on rugs. Finnish & English

**Kehräten, Kutoen ja Ommellon** by Laila Karttunen (1948) on household textiles. Finnish

Contact Laurann Gilbertson, 319-382-9681 or [textiles@vesterheim.org](mailto:textiles@vesterheim.org)

## National Exhibition of Weaving in the Norwegian Tradition, Part II

Complete list of ribbon winners in Vesterheim Museum's 18<sup>th</sup> annual exhibition appeared in the August issue (Vol. V, No. 4) of the Norwegian Textile Letter.



Jan Mostrom "Midsummer's Eve"  
Traditional - Red Ribbon



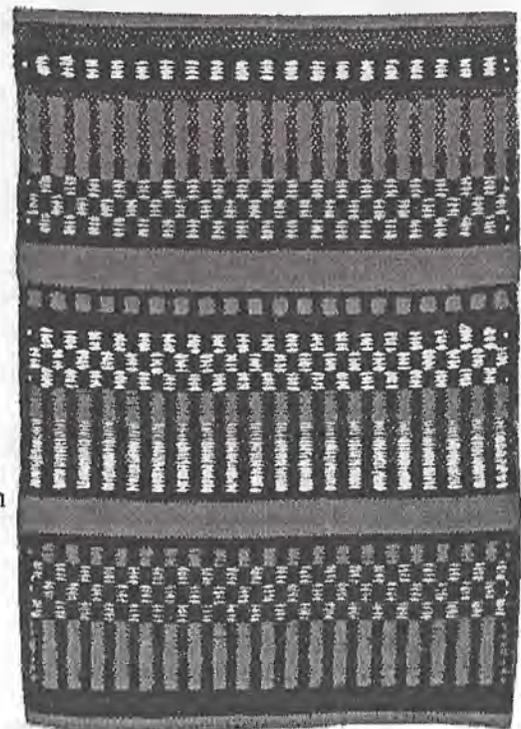
Jan Mostrom Skillbragd Runner  
Traditional - White Ribbon



Jeanine Ehnert  
Above: Krokbragd Runner  
Traditional - White Ribbon

Robbie LaFleur  
Left: Vestfold Hanging  
Traditional - Hon. Mention

Right: Monk's Belt Hanging  
Contemporary - Hon. Mention



## INDIGENOUS & ETHICAL NATURAL DYES: A RESIDENTIAL MAINE MASTER CLASS

Ecology, ethics and cultural history are the focus of this week-long seminar where participants will examine the biodiversity of the northeast. Discover which plants, lichens, fungi and marine organisms can be harvested in a sustainable manner to provide non-toxic dyes for all types of fibre. Taught by Karen Diadick Casselman, author of *Craft of the Dyer*; and *Lichen Dyes: A Source Book*, the seminar includes lab sessions, field trips, slide presentations, individual and group research offered in a residential setting with quality food and lodging. Undergraduate and graduate level university credits can be arranged. Ideal participants are mature and self-motivated individuals who have textile, but not necessarily dyeing, experience. Although class size is limited, the class generally includes learners from several countries and international guest lecturers. Location: the Humboldt Field Research Institute, Steuben, Maine (30 miles northeast of Ellsworth). Dates: August 27-September 2, 2000. E-mail queries to Karen at: [lucylichen@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:lucylichen@ns.sympatico.ca)

## NBClub TOTE BAGS

Thank you for your tote bag orders! If you placed your order before October 20th and have not yet received your tote bag, please contact Kay Larson, 9390 Miller Rd N. E., Bainbridge Is, WA 98110; (206) 842-7734; [kaylarson@hotmail.com](mailto:kaylarson@hotmail.com).

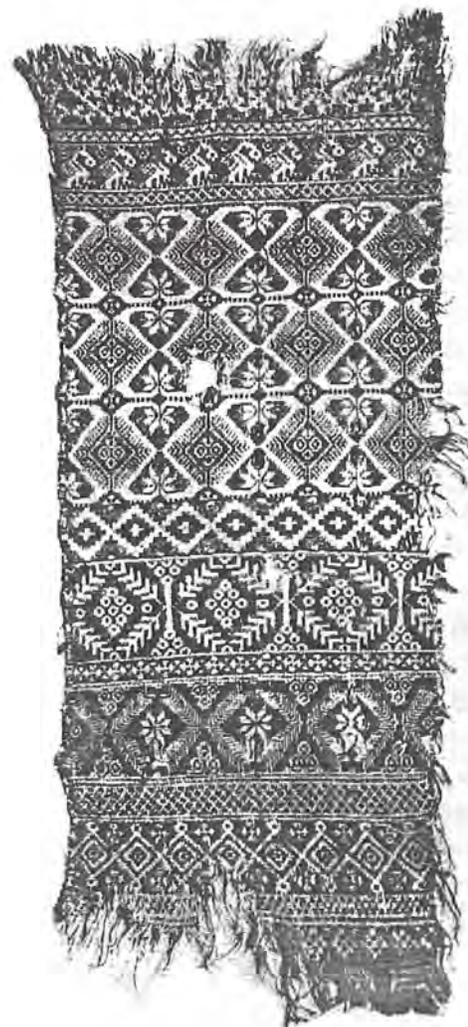
Tote bags are still available for \$10: Please make check payable to the Nordic Heritage Museum or give your MC or Visa number + expiration date and mail to Kay Larson.

## Meråkervev, A Woven Technique Rich in Tradition

No author given,

Translated by Christine Spangler, Silver Spring, MD

Patterned doubleweave is known as far back in time as textile history. Two hundred years before Christ, the Chinese wove triple cloth, a much more advanced method than double cloth. Thus, we can infer that the technique must be



Meråker-åkle from 1772

considerably older. The technique came to the west from China via India. Persian museums

have double weave fragments from before the Christian era. The technique spread north to Russia, Poland, Finland, Sweden and Norway. In Finland it is known as "Russian weave", in Sweden as "Finnish weave" or "Jamtland's weave", and in Norway as "Stugdals weave" and "Meråker weave." It is a weaving technique with many names.

"Meråker coverlet is the name I have given it," says Ingeborg Håvre. "Meråk is the community, in which I found and learned the technique. 'What is it with this Meråker coverlet? a man native to the area said to me. 'All the farms have them, and many consider them part of our cultural heritage. They belong to us as symbols of everyday life. Because of this we call them Meråker coverlet. It is right that such things as these that are not available in the marketplace should be more widely known, because they are domestic and common. I think it is strange that such things can be used within the community's borders but not be more widely known in other communities. It is an heirloom the owner receives from a master craftsman, and which he has a right to. His right to draw on traditional work should serve as a fundamental barrier to fraud and greed.'"

Ingeborg Håvre took her teacher's examination in weaving in Christiania in 1898. She spent her first year as a teacher at the folk high school in Sund. At a youth meeting at the school a coverlet in patterned double weave was displayed. It was a technique that the newly graduated weaving teacher had not seen, but she quickly decided to learn it. "I held the first Meråker technique course in 1907. I have taught many and the technique is now known in many communities in inner Tronderlag." In 1905 Ingeborg learned this technique from Ane Gilsåmo from Stordalen in Meråker. Ane learned it from Beret Bitnes, who had in turn studied with "Åkle Beret" Hilmo from Stugdals. Hilmo had learned it from her aunt in Jamtland. Stugdals, Herjedal and Jamtland are considered a common area in the weaving of patterned non-reversible double weave during the 1700's, as is

shown from preserved pattern materials of old coverlets. "Åkle Beret" wove almost five hundred coverlets in double weave.

There were no weaving books or written instructions for this complicated weaving method that could be studied, and it is not a technique that a weaver would invent herself. It was taught by one weaver to another, the pattern read directly from the old coverlet and woven without being drafted on graph paper.

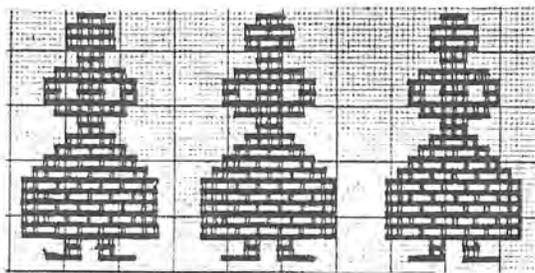
Research on Norwegian double weave was done by Helen Engelstad. *Doubleweave in Norway* was published in 1958. It is a book that illuminates the many sides of double weave in Norwegian textile art. It gives a picture of how the technique was spread from country to country depending upon local conditions and cultural connections, and how this many hundred-year-old method was preserved in a more or less closed society. We can follow the same pattern details over seven to eight hundred years and see how intimately they are tied to the technique.

*Meråker Weavings* is a collection of patterns taken from old coverlets that Beret Hilmo wove around 1800. Åse Skille, Karen Heir, Helga Svendgård, and Hjordis Halmoy Gloan compiled the work. The collection was published by North Tronderlag Craft Association (Nord-Tronderlag Husflidslag) in 1966, and it has been well supported by all of the courses in Meråker weaving that the Levanger Craft Society has given in the last twenty years.

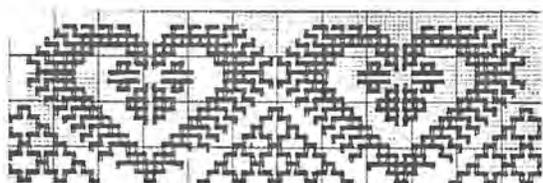
#### **Patterns, Motifs and Symbols in Old Coverlets**

Many of the oldest preserved coverlets have long inscriptions. Often a whole verse from the Psalms is woven into a cloth used as a coffin pall during funerals. There is a great deal of variation in "tree of life" and geometric figures used as symbols for centuries. Many of the symbols have mythological backgrounds. Today we have forgotten what they mean, but during the Viking Age it is believed that people read symbols as we read writing.

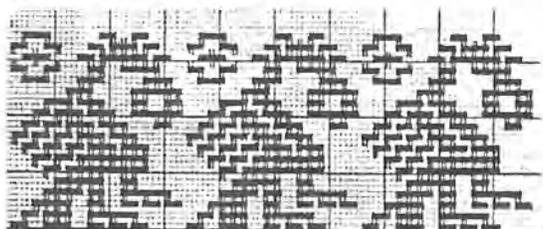
Geometric figures with crosses, knots, walnuts, and diamonds are motifs, symbols or magic signs tied to specific ideas or superstitions used in folk art through the centuries. Border built of zigzag lines, spirals, squares, meandering lines, and crosses are details used to frame the ground pattern on large sheepskin-backed coverlets. One can follow details from the ancient to the most recent ones. These are pattern elements that are well suited to this non-reversible weaving method.



*Figures of People* appear in wedding cloths with bride, bridegroom, master of ceremonies, and fiddler on horses, and long rows of dancing wedding guests. Between them fertility symbols and geometric borders fill out the design. Long frieze-like cloths were also used on holidays, for parties, and at weddings.



The *Opposing hearts* motif in which two mirrored hearts are filled with rosettes or eight pointed stars. The heart motif with radiating lines around it is repeated in all the possible combinations, as a border or in the ground pattern in many coverlets from Tydal. Originally there was actually no "heart" but rather a peacock feather motif that formed the basis of the opposing hearts design.



The *Pelican* is a motif from many early cloths from the 1700's. The pelicans stand in a long

line one after another and always face the same direction. The motif is known from pattern books of the 1500's and was used in Persian and Byzantine double woven cloths. However, the pelicans were always mirrored with two facing in each direction. During the Middle Ages the pelican was a symbol of the death and resurrection of Christ. The legend tells that the pelican killed its young because they had slain their parents with their wings. After three days the mother chopped her breast bloody to nourish the youngsters and give them life.

*Tydal's rose* or *Crescent shape* is a pattern based upon the pomegranate motif and which can be traced back to oriental silk weaving of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Because of its curved and pointed form it was called "crescent" and filled in with a diamond grid or eight-pointed stars.

*Colors and yarn* in the oldest preserved double woven coverlets have three colors, red, blue and sheep's wool brown or the three primary colors of red, blue, and yellow juxtaposed to sheep's brown. More recent cloths were woven with two colors, red and sheep's brown or red and white. The silky guard hairs of the spaelsau wool yarn were dyed with the roots of bedstraw known in Tronderlag as "fegre" (*galium boreale*), blue with woad (*Isatis tinctoria*) and yellow with juniper lichen (*cetraria juniperina*) or chervil (*chaerrefolium silvestre*). The guard hair yarn was two-ply with a tight twist in the warp to withstand manipulation with a pick-up stick.

Notes from the translator:

- First sentence—Single layer cloth is certainly older than doublewoven cloth, and archeological fragments found support this position.
- I have translated åkle as coverlet.
- The quotation from the Meråker area in paragraph 2 was in dialect and difficult for me to make sense of. The translation here is rather liberal in an attempt to make it 'somewhat' logical in English.

- Jamtland is a province of Sweden that borders Tronderlag in Norway.
- The story of the pelican makes no sense to me as it is presently written, but that is what the text says.

### **When Meråker Weaving Courses Came to Levanger Home Craft Association**

In the spring of 1963 the board of directors of the Levanger Home Craft Association met to plan the fall and winter course offerings. Among other topics a weaving course was planned. The Association had numerous old and some better looms and had hopes for larger quarters.

The extreme shortages of all types of textiles after war was beginning to be alleviated, so after some discussion that day they agreed upon a decorative woven textile course. They arranged for a teacher and honored her wish that Meråker weaving would be the topic.

At that time there were already many girls in North Tronderlag, who knew of the patterned double weave technique or Meråker weaving, as the technique was named in the province because of the many known cloths in this type of weaving made in Meråker. The girls who one thinks of here are the ones who had gone to the year's course at North Tronderlag Home Craft School with weaving teacher Åsta Aune. Most of these wove themselves a small thing such as a pillow. And for many of them that pillow was a prized possession.

The first time the yarn was not especially well made and the results could be quite clumsy. But over time the problem with the yarn was corrected as demand rose, and the factories began to spin yarn for decorative projects. Here at Levanger Home Craft Association we were anxious to see if there was enough interest in a decorative weave course, and there was.

The number of participants was also restricted by the amount of room available, because everyone

needed good elbowroom on the right and the left. The course was held at the large hall at Moan above Mo farm.

Even in 1963 working pattern drawings of Meråker weavings were scarce. The Norwegian Home Craft Association in Oslo was contacted, but no, there were none available. The State Women's Industry School in Oslo was asked, and we received two drawings of a more modern type. The weaving expert, Ingeborg Oxål of Indreroy, answered that she had used a magnifying glass to draw cloths from sources in Helen Engelstad's book *Double Weave in Norway*.

So the teacher and students got going with good cheer and open minds. Many of the students had grown up with experience in weaving, so the loom setups went well. And all who now can weave in the Meråker technique understand that it must be learned, and it is good for the beginner to know that everyone is just as blank when they begin. Surprisingly enough we used many different patterns. Some were drawn from pictures, some derived from small and large woven cloths, and some were our own ideas.

Interest in this type of weaving had a good foundation and grew from it. Many diligent women in the district have distinguished themselves with their work and with the development of patterns. Meråker weaving courses have had a long and rich life in the Levanger Home Craft Association.

photocopy from *Levanger Home Craft Association, Centenary Pamphlet, 1988. (Levanger Husflidsforening, sin 100 års-jubileums skrif i 1988)*

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