

NORWEGIAN TEXTILE LETTER

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Vesterheim's Norwegian-American Museum's 2007 Textile Study Tour to Norway and Sweden Part II - Sweden

by Lila Nelson

On Saturday, June 30, we depart for Östersund, Sweden, heading east on a main highway. After sending around chocolates to all passengers, Laurann presented an entertaining and instructive report on Gerhard Munthe, focusing on his love-hate relationship with tapestry weavers who wanted to reproduce his water colors in yarn. The much admired results were definitely part of the rebirth of interest in tapestry weaving in Norway.

We pass through heavily wooded areas interspersed with farms, and see snow on some mountain peaks to the south.

About 9:30 we cross the border into Sweden with no stops or fanfare. We are not required to declare anything at the few buildings marking the country change.

A line of low mountains with some snow are in front of us; a very few farms are tucked among heavy forests of aspen, birch, and some pines. The mountains are comparatively low, and trees are growing among the snow patches. Some of the forested areas reveal misshapen evergreens with long areas of bark removed to limit the outward spread of branches and allow closer replanting as trees are cut down for lumber. The effect is disturbing and ugly.

Some flattened areas reveal where the glacier has leveled the ground, making possible larger farms than in most areas of Sweden. In the bustling town of Östersund, we are taken through the Jämtli museum by Gunilla, a guide in female Viking dress.

The Överhogdal tapestries offer more questions than answers and were found originally sewn together like a blanket. It is believed they were woven between 800 and 1100 A.D. and were sewn together in the 14th century, when it might possibly have been used as an altar cloth. It may have been removed during the 16th century at the time of the Reformation. Figures appear to represent Freya, Thor, the eight-legged horse Sleipner, the Tree of Knowledge, and other pre-Christian deities. The major colors--blue, red, and green--appear to show experience with madder and woad. The museum's lighting of the tapestries varies from low and flickering to standard, giving an impression of how it might have appeared to people in its own day.

The large museum is visitor and child friendly, offering possibilities to touch reproductions of Viking clothing and including unexpected animal sounds in the areas where animals might have been kept.

The next day, Sunday, July 1, as we travel to Överhogdal Kafe, we pass a heavily tree-lined area but one in which clearing is constant and obvious. Small communities lie surrounded by trees. A large sawmill with huge piles of cut lumber and a mountain of sawdust are indicators of the inroads, as are some larger farms with herds of Jersey cows.

At Överhogdal we are met by Ellinor Sydberg, a former high school teacher who decided to reproduce the entire process involved in the Överhogdal tapestries. That meant she also had to start with growing the flax to

produce the linen, find the sheep to get the right kind of wool, reproducing the colors in the same way as in the original, weaving on the upright looms which would have been used, and arriving at the sett and beat which would approximate the originals. The process, she related, took three years of full time effort, half of which was devoted to the weaving. She says that she is still searching for the wool with the right thickness and feel.

Our afternoon drive to Mora is marked by mile after mile of trees, rocks, trails into the woods and scrub growth. There are occasional small farms or clusters of houses. This is said to be moose country but, to the relief of the bus driver, none appear.

Many houses in Mora seem to have additional small log structures nearby, perhaps a reflection of the painter Anders Zorn's strong desire to preserve the history of the area. He noticed the changes returning to the village of his birth and he established Gammelgården, collecting fine examples of textiles, ceramics, and other objects. (Someone commented on an excellent web site, which I haven't visited.)

On Monday, July 2, we visit Oxberg for a guided factory tour of Gunnar Andersson's Vävsksedsfabrik, where the exacting production of metal reeds takes place with only seven employees. A large machine produces shuttles. The profusion of tools other than reeds and shuttles used in weaving and other textile activities--pick-up sticks, winders, bobbins for lace and tapestry work, umbrella swifts--and all in various sizes --made for long lines of buyers among our group.

A next stop at Insjön and Sätergrähtan, the Swedish College of Handicrafts, introduced us to the school started in 1932 by two women who in a ten-year period moved in all the buildings, developed both the school and hotel, and then left it to relax in Majorca. It offers one and two-year courses in weaving and also short courses on a variety of subjects--all in Swedish. Sixteen students can be accommodated at any one time. The Swedish weaver well known and represented in America, Helene Hernmark, teaches here. The school is furnished with hand made objects. It now has an extensive library. It has plans for growth but it

progresses only as there is enough money to cover; the school is out of debt and plans to continue that way. Some government support is provided.

During five weeks in the summer they welcome young children (when accompanied by an adult family member); we saw a group of children of 7 to 10 years of age carving efficiently, and apparently bloodlessly, with sharp carving knives.

New adult classes include embroidery, blacksmithing, one and two-year sewing courses, and woodworking for women.

All classes are in Swedish only, a challenge that has been successfully met by some American students.

On Tuesday, July 3, arrangements have been made for us to make a lunch packet at the breakfast in Hotel Delacarla, where we have spent the night. The hotel rooms are provided with large bottles of shampoo and lotions, no doubt because they are filled with the products used in the spa that is part of the hotel complex. Their giant size discourages their being taken by visitors, and it makes me aware of the untold amount of waste generated by the countless numbers of one-ounce bottles of shampoos and lotions provided in hotel rooms all over the world.

On the bus en route to Leksand, we stop to sing Happy Birthday greetings in Norwegian and English to our leader Laurann, who is today one unspecified year older.

Another impressive stop was the tour of Wälstedts Tekstilverktad spinnery, where Helene Hernmark gets her weft. The spinnery was started with the effort to find a breed of sheep producing a certain quality of shiny wool. When they found it in early breeds like spelsau that have long guard hairs mixed with the wool, they also had to learn how to card and spin the different product. They now have a Swedish source for the wool and they have learned the equally complex art of sorting it. The father of the present owner was evidently an ingenious inventor; he showed us an impressive but extremely ugly wheel which spun with incredible speed and which was a product of the father's mind. For

Helene Hernmarck wool is dyed before spinning and then mixed to her requirements. Sometimes she has used a hundred colors for one weaving, with as little as just one kilo for some colors. They judge colors by looking at the wool in natural daylight and from the north.

Since a major concern is to treat the wool as gently as possible, they wash the wool with ammonia, which is gentle to the fiber; the last process is washing again after dyeing to keep the dye from bleeding.

A pre-carding machine gently pulls apart the wool for mixing and opening. It fluffs up amazingly. Then it is fed into the carding mechanism, which the present owner's father invented in 1936.

The other tour for this day was in Leksand at the Leksands Hemslöjd, started in 1904, the original Hemslöjd having been organized earlier in Stockholm and this one the second to follow. The original object was to help the Dalarna economy, in which it succeeded. In the 1950's the present big shop was built. About ten women weave reproductions of old patterns, working in their own homes.

Leksand's bunader are popular and are worn often. Variations have been developed based on different church holidays. Each farm devised its own apron pattern, and blackwork embroidery continues to be a popular choice.

Interestingly, early photographs reveal that boys wore skirts until the age of five, at which time they graduated to trousers. I didn't inquire, but I doubt that this custom continues today.

An excellent museum next to husflid provided many example of early folk dress.

Two interesting tours filled July 4, beginning with the Dalarnas Museum at Falun, where curator Kerstin Ankert covered the extremely complex and varied bunader customs in the area. Around 1900, it appeared that the churches in Dalarna became interested in developing a distinctive dress for each parish. How well they succeeded can be judged by a map which pictures over 50 different bunader at various parishes in Dalarna. Some idiosyncratic customs appeared, such as areas in which men wore

a kind of apron only to church, and a mercifully brief interlude where knitted jacket sleeves were attached to a heavy woven body.

Falun was a center for copper mining from 1000 until 1992, which made the town important; but it was said that over 800 people have died through the years in the mines.

The second tour, at Sundborn, included a guided visit through the home of the popular painter Carl Larsson, his talented wife Kari, and their seven children. Carl applied his talents to many parts of the home, and Kari was an equally talented textile artist. The family evidently remained cohesive through the years since family members still visit the home and actually stay in it, restricted to areas not available to the public.

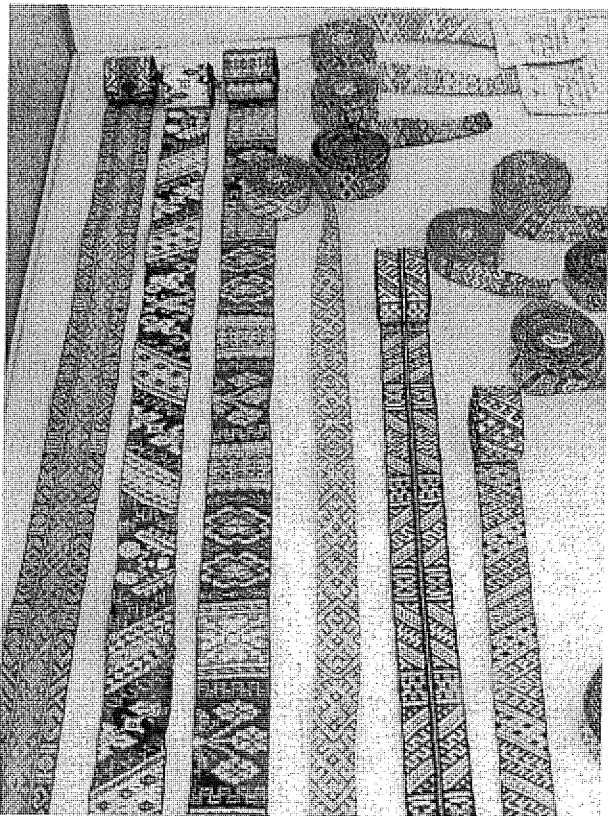
After leaving Sundborn and a brief coffee break, Kay leads a bus meeting of the Norwegian Textile Guild, which we will cover elsewhere.

The end of the tour is approaching as we reach Stockholm and settle in the Scandic Hotel Sergel Plaza for our last two days, July 5 and 6.

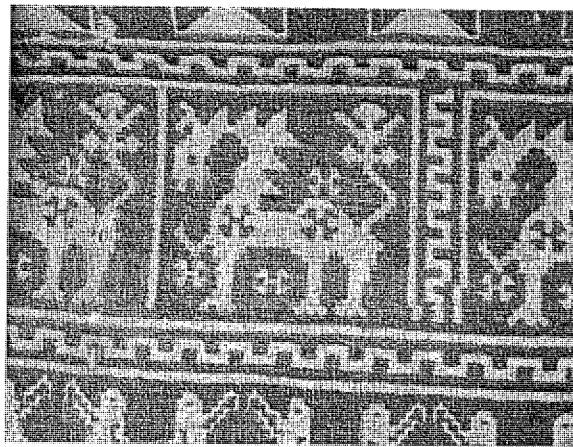
On July 5, a guided tour of the "Traditions" exhibit at Nordiska Museet was a fine introduction to this tremendous collection, where we spent much time looking at study examples available in glass-covered drawers and generally accessible.

In the evening designer Elsebeth Lavold gave a presentation of her "Viking Knits" and talked about the inspiration which she got from the Viking period, particularly interesting in that knitting was not introduced until well after that time.

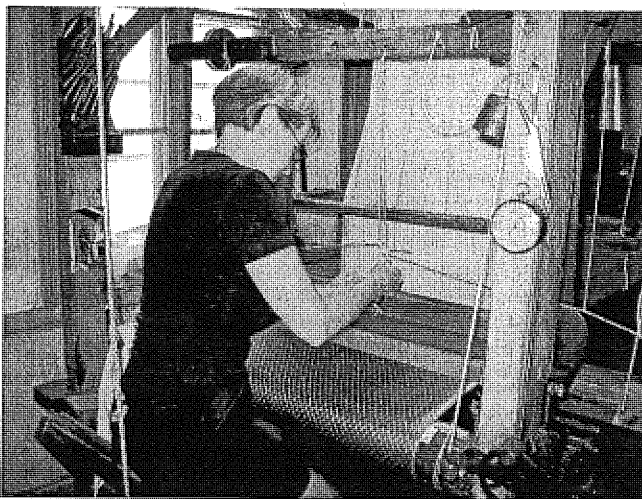
On Friday, July 6, we have a guided tour of K.A. Almgrens Sidenväveri, northern Europe's last silk weaving mill. Knut August Almgren, born in 1806, at the age of 16 entered the service of Mazer and Company, the largest silk manufacturing company in Stockholm, where he travelled around selling. At age 22, suffering from tuberculosis, he went to France and learned about silk, going in 1828 to Lyon to study Jacquard looms. In 1833 he started his own company in Sodermalm, using the Jacquard system and prospering, moving to the present location around 1846. At its peak in 1874, the mill had 196 looms and 288 employees. In 1884, only two looms were left; and the



Traditional bands on exhibit at Leksands Hemslojd (Husfliden).



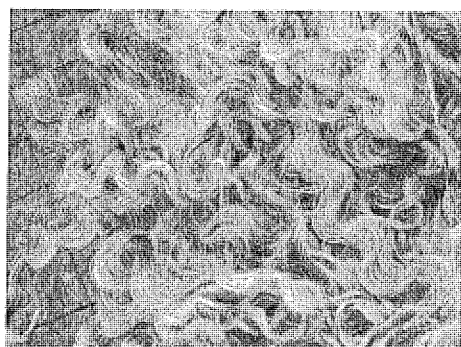
Very old doubleweave at Historiska Museet in Stockholm.



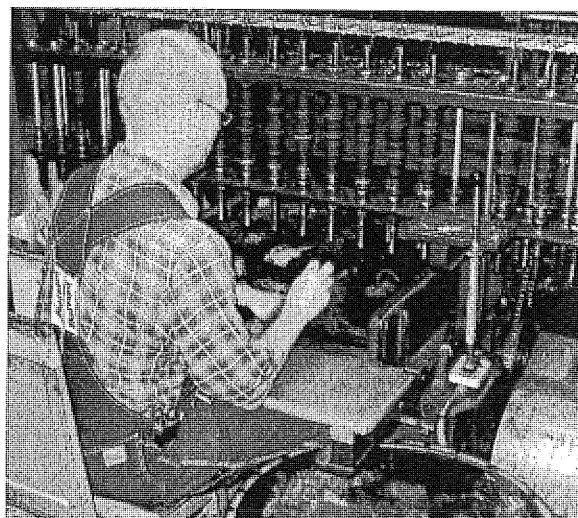
Demonstrating on the jacquard loom at Almgrens.



Sample books on exhibit at Almgrens (silk mill museum).



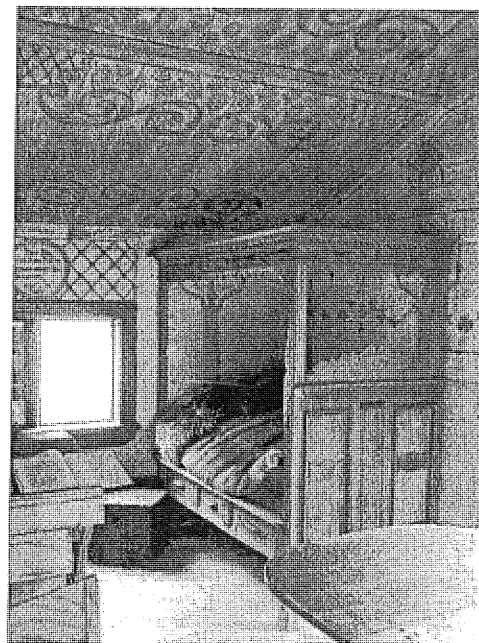
Walstedts Spinnery – Step one, Swedish fleece.



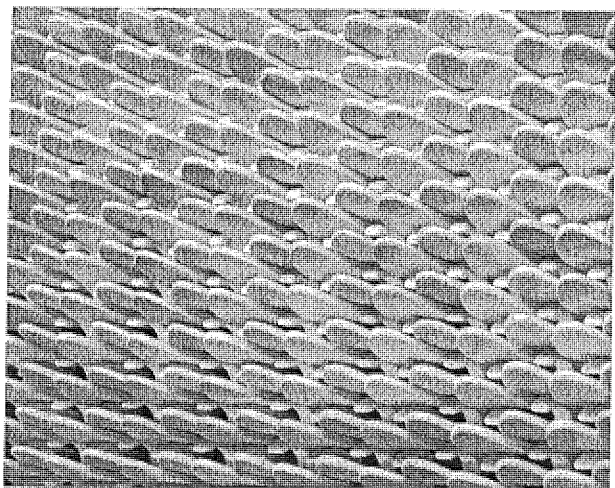
Hand-blending dyed fleece before spinning at Walstedts.



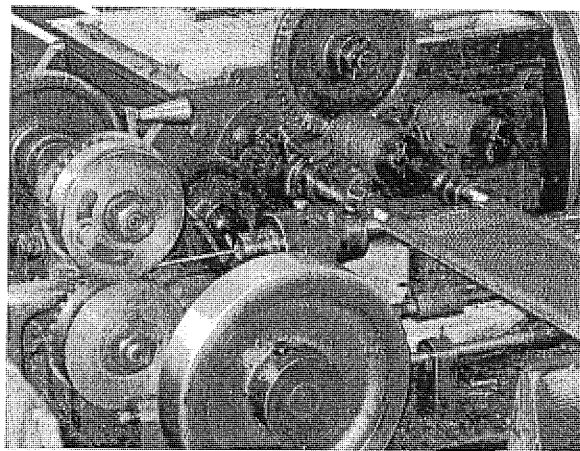
Participants of the 2007 Textile Study Tour to Norway and Sweden.



An overshot coverlet in the 1785 sheriff's house at Jamtli Museum.



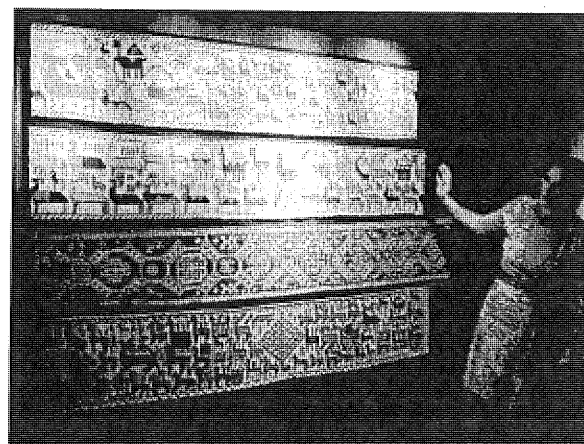
Gunnar Andersson / Glimåkra shuttles.



Reedmaking at the Gunnar Andersson / Glimåkra factory.



"Fearless leaders" and guide Ingebjørg Monsen with knitting projects designed by Sandee Jaastad and Susan Kolstad-Onken.



Ellinor Sydberg with her copies of the Overhogdal tapestries.

plant closed in 1974. The present third floor is a museum. At present, a machine makes the cards necessary for each pick. A flying shuttle is used in the actual weaving process. Four looms are presently set up in the Jacquard system.

Our last guided tour was in the Textile Chamber of the Historiska Museet, the Museum of National Antiquities, by textile curator Mari-Louise Franzen. We view a dizzying number of Medieval chasubles, a late medieval coverlet in a complex double-weave pick up, cushions and cloths in intarsia embroidery, known in Sweden from the 14th century, and other later embroideries in gold and silk. I spend a brief time walking through the Viking section, which cannot really be encompassed in days. The entire museum is one of the greatest of our time.

Several of us walk through Gamlestan, or old town Stockholm, which is now a tightly packed area of one tourist shop after another.

A farewell dinner at the Scandia Hotel marks our final activity. Our thoughts are now turned toward home, but our memories of another satisfying, enjoyable, and thought-provoking tour with Vesterheim will always remain with us.

Art Tapestry (*Kunstveging*), instructor Kristen Lindberg

by Pamela J Davis

Well-known and energetic Kristen Lindberg was the instructor for our workshop called Art Tapestry. The term *art tapestry* is used to differentiate Kristen's style of weaving from the traditional techniques of *rutevev* and *billedvev*. Kristen's art brings newness to an ancient craft.

In our 3 day workshop, the 8 of us were fortunate to experience the energy and creativity Kristen Lindberg¹ readily exhibits in her work. We were

¹ (Reworded from the Weaving Teachers and Classes description created by Vesterheim). Kristin Lindberg trained in teaching and textiles at Statens Håndverks- og Kunstindustriskole in Oslo and

shown techniques to help our tapestries look new, different, and alive through the use of unusual colors combinations, mixing different yarn textures, and using a weaving technique called *soumac*. (Soumac is a warp wrapping technique that has as many uses as there are weavers who use it!). For example, within a shape woven primarily with wool, we added rayon and silk yarns. The shiny rayon yarn woven next to a matt wool yarn gave the shape a 3-dimensional quality. Instead of restricting ourselves with familiar color combinations, we combined pink and orange or kelly green and turquoise. Soumac was used to weave a solid area as another textural surface and to produce lines vertically and horizontally, even to switch the shed when needed. Kristen taught us it is important for our work to look different and unexpected.

The size of our rectangular student wooden loom was 44 cm x 34cm (18" x 14"). Most of our finished products were approximately 6" x 6". The portable looms were warped using 8/3 linen yarn rug warp. With this rougher warp vertical ridges can be seen in the weaving, a characteristic Kirsten enjoys. Our spacing of the warp was a sett of 6 EPI. We used wool, rayon, silk, and cotton weft. The weft yarns varied in size which gave a richness of texture in the weaving and allowed changes in how many threads we could weave together in a row. Kristen provided some samples of designs she had created. We were encouraged to use her design pattern as a base, but to explore the weaving process with various colors, patterns, and textures.

Kristen use to weave only with wool. Eventually she became unsettled. Her designs didn't seem to work with a solid wool surface. She started combining wool with mercerized cotton, rayon, and silk. Granted, mixing the textures can yield uneven rows, but when an artist is using natural products Kristen believes the product need not be exact. Thus, honoring the materials and letting them rest in their own way allows the tapestry to breath. Instead of beating a pass of weaving onto the passes below

Statens Lærerskole i Forming in Notodden. Her work has won numerous prizes and she has exhibition all over the world. Currently she heads up the organization of Norwegian textile artists (Norske Tekstilkunstnere).

we used our fingernails (if we had any...) to gently push the pass into place. "Let the yarn move the way it would naturally" Kristen suggested as we struggled to shove the mixed yarns together.

The versatility of tapestry weaving allows freedom from the constraints of traditional tapestry techniques or honors those traditions through reproductions or slight pattern alterations. The diversity provided by the relatively simple weave structure supports complex as well as more straightforward designs. Art Tapestry encourages the artist to explore different textures in yarn, an unusual mixing of colors, and a manipulation of patterns normally not seen in traditional pieces.

Straying from traditional tapestry weaving isn't an excuse for poor technique. Perhaps understanding how to weave a structurally sound tapestry is useful before variations are attempted. Once the technique is grounded then the creative energy can emerge. The artist develops a freedom to explore the true meaning of life. Handcrafts are life. Kristen's enthusiasm and sense of adventure were contagious.

This activity is made possible in part by a grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board, through an appropriation by the Minnesota State Legislature and by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Halvfloss with Ingbjørg Monsen

by Solveig Storvick Pollei

When these elements combine: an intimate class of eight, picturesque Lillehammar, a playful weave structure, a teacher filled with knowledge and great enthusiasm – how can you help but have a wonderful time!

Halvfloss, a voided pile weave, has been found in Gudbrandsdalen Norway, Skåne Sweden and the Schleswig and Holstein areas of Denmark. This weft-faced weave dates from the 1700's to the mid 1800's.

While found in combination with many weave structures, its main use was as a beautiful way to sit

in comfort during church services, at home on benches or chairs and while riding in the sleigh.

As we entered the classroom, we were greeted by the sight of 8 "laptop" looms in red and black. In cooperation with Norsk Vevråd and Inge Rune Fanebust, this loom has the advantage of folding flat without putting stress on the warp and fitting under an airline seat. Working in pairs, we prepared the last 4 looms with a wool warp and learned to create the right tension. A few shots of plain weave, a row of soumak and we were ready to begin.

Designing can be done on the loom, but we were encouraged to graph our designs. Before we proceeded too far along the design road, the tour was able to view an incredible collection of halvfloss at Maihaugen. The curator, Kirsti Krekling, gave us a fact-filled, story-filled presentation. After the lecture, we were able to view and photograph the pieces at some leisure.

Enthused by the midsummer celebration at Maihaugen and their textile collection, we began graphing our designs and choosing colours from Ingebjørg's Norsk kunstvevgarn collection. As we designed, it became apparent that the "Tree of Life" was a popular subject, whether stylized, romanticized or beamed from another planet. Ingebjørg was always ready with helpful hints, more history, a story or two and reminders for us to breathe and have fun with the weave. She also helped with our vocabulary of Swedish and Norwegian tapestry terms.

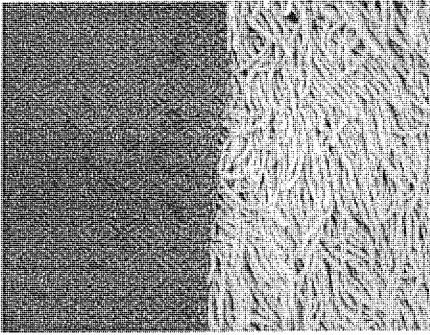
The more we wove, the more we understood how to graph our designs more effectively for this weave structure. We also gained an appreciation for blank spaces and the importance these spaces have in making a halvfloss design "pop". All of us noticed a buildup around our knots with some areas of the warp showing through a background which wasn't level with our knots. Adding short segments of additional background to raise the area to the knots is not in keeping with the history of the weave. Ingebjørg taught us how to "thin" the solid area of knots. With this technique, the overall design is not changed, but the knots and ground weave begin to build at the same rate.

Our class was given a great deal of information and attention from Ingebjørg as we continued to weave. Conversations included ideas for use in our homes and more thoughts toward designing the next piece.

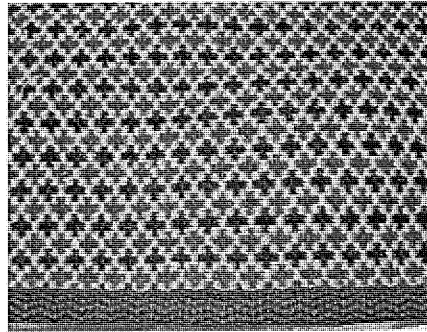
Obviously, a successful class and one which we would recommend to anyone interested in playing with a weave.

New at Vesterheim Museum

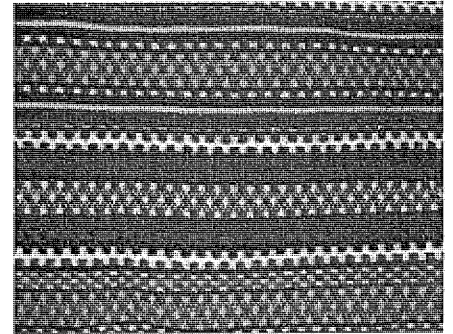
by Laurann Gilbertson, Textile Curator



Rya (2007.21.1a)



Krokbragd (2007.21.2a)



Rosepath (2007.23.1a)

Vesterheim has recently received three Norwegian woven coverlets. All three are newsworthy. One is in a weaving technique that we have not had represented in the collection. One is the only one of its kind at Vesterheim with provenance. And one is almost unique.

From Ruth Matson of Portland, Oregon, comes a coverlet woven in rosepath technique. Rosepath was more commonly used in Sweden than in Norway for coverlets. The Matson family coverlet was woven in Grimsedalen, Nordfjord. It was brought by Maria Davidson Monsen in about 1879 to Belview, Redwood County, Minnesota. The coverlet is in excellent condition. It was woven in two pieces and the ends are hemmed. The colors are primarily black, white, and red, with a small amount of gold and jade green.

When Dorothy Johnson of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, offered two coverlets, she probably didn't realize how excited we would be. One coverlet is a *rye* (pile weave) coverlet. The pile is natural white and the ground is diamond twill in olive green and red. It was woven in two widths and the ends are hemmed. What excited us most was the history. Vesterheim has four *ryer* in the collection, but none have history – no history, at all, whatsoever. The Tokheim coverlet was probably brought by John Tokheim from Odda, Hardanger, in the late 1880s to Thor, Iowa. Or it could have been brought by Senva Eide, also from Odda, who met John in Chicago; they later married. John Tokheim, by the way, invented the gasoline pump. You can read more about John and his inventions in the spring 2005 issue of *Vesterheim*.

The second Tokheim coverlet that Dorothy Johnson donated is woven in *krokbragd* (boundweave). Norwegian *krokbragd* coverlets typically show a variety of patterned bands made up of various smaller motifs. The Tokheim coverlet, however, has just one motif - even-sided crosses. The red and black crosses are outlined in white. The coverlet was woven in two widths and the ends are hemmed. Look closely at the hemmed ends. The weaver switched to twill, which gives some extra spark to the overall textile. A *krokbragd* coverlet done entirely in crosses is unusual, but we do already have one in the Vesterheim collection that was woven by Magdelle Eikesdahl of Eikjedalen, Hardanger, in the late 1800s. It has rows of white and red crosses outlined in olive green. Perhaps the all-over cross patterned coverlets were special to Hardanger. What is certain is that these three coverlets will add a lot to the Vesterheim collection for exhibition, research, and inspiration!

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