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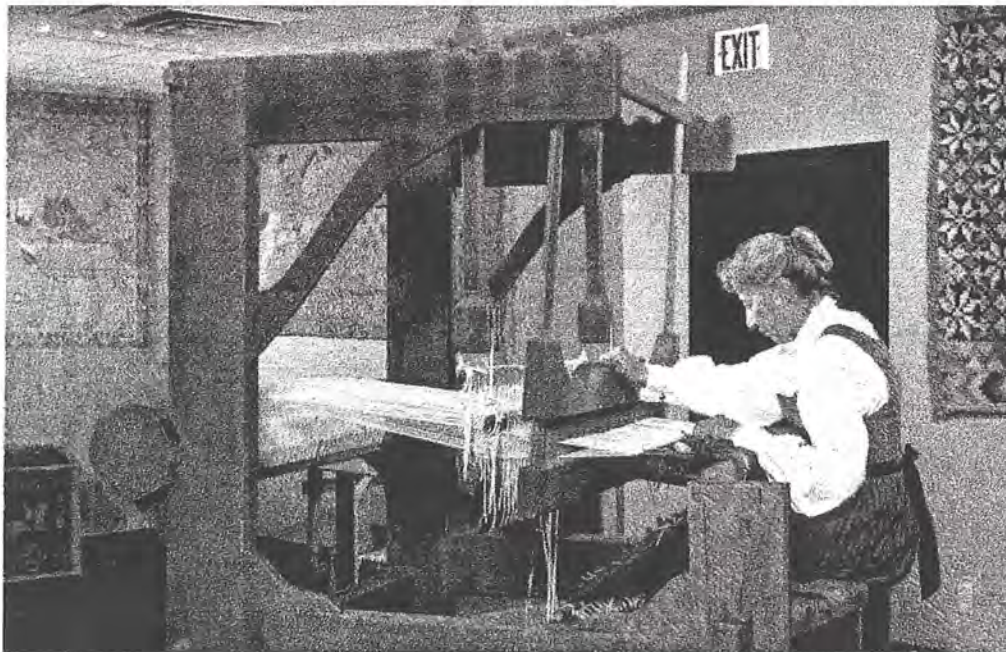
A Partial Survey of the Looms at Vesterheim, the Norwegian-American Museum, Decorah, Iowa

by Janet Meany (1998)

Part I

I am indebted to Lila Nelson, former Curator of Textiles at Vesterheim, for sharing her initial research on Norwegian looms with me. My thanks to Laurann Gilbertson, present Curator of Textiles, for facilitating this project and for opening the files of the Museum for study.

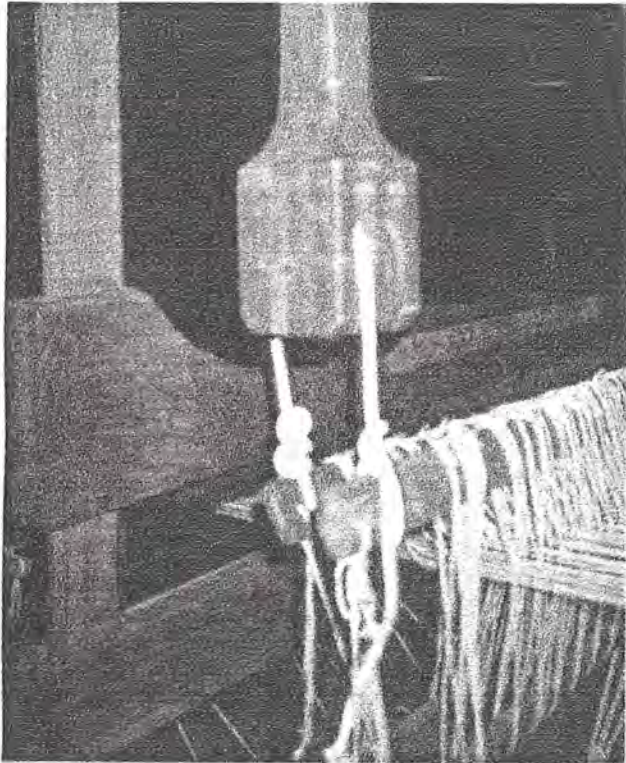
"What often distinguishes Norwegian looms are touches revealing a concern for the aesthetic qualities of these utilitarian objects, a characteristic found in all tools which Norwegians have fashioned." Lila Nelson¹



Breakfast
Club
member
Lila Nelson
working at
the loom
from the
Bjerkeng
estate.

Vesterheim, the Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah, Iowa, is fortunate to have a fine collection of Norwegian and Norwegian-American horizontal looms. On the third floor in the textile area stands a typical large and sturdy handmade floor loom from the Bjerkeng family estate, Beldenville, Wisconsin. Though the loom was made in America, it has many of the characteristics

common to all Norwegian horizontal looms. It has a counterbalanced action, in this case now using two instead of four shafts and treadles. The heavy superstructure has mortise and tenon joints² and cantilevered horizontal projections. These carry the overhead beater with notches (rests) on top, for back and forward adjustment and a hand carved set of pulleys which support shafts with string heddles stretched between



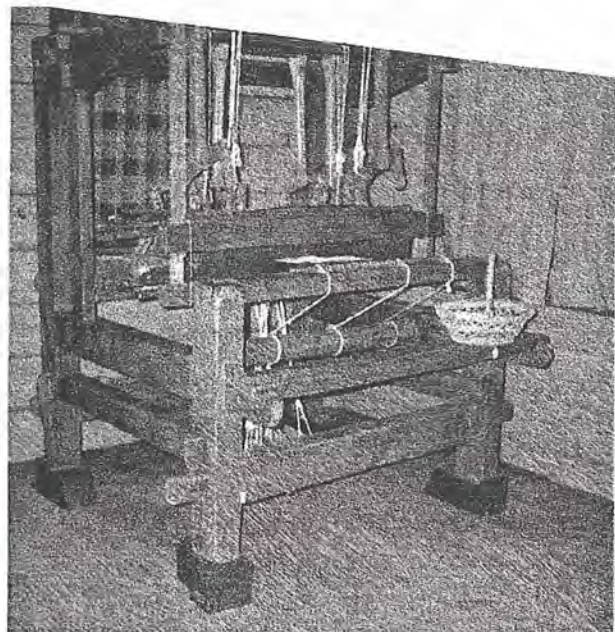
One of the hand carved pulleys which support shafts with string heddles

wooden heddle sticks. Two wheels are mounted next to each other in each pulley. The superstructure has decoratively cut braces above and below. The oak cloth beam has a handwrought iron ratchet wheel and pawl on one side. There is a single solid octagonal oak warp beam with a bore staff placed in a set of holes at the end of the beam for tensioning. A bench is secured with a mortise and tenon joint on each side. Since there is no back beam, the warp travels directly from the slightly raised

warp beam through the heddles and through the reed around a breast beam to the cloth beam below³. The warp beam is resting on projecting supports in the rear. As in many older looms, the treadles are rear mounted.

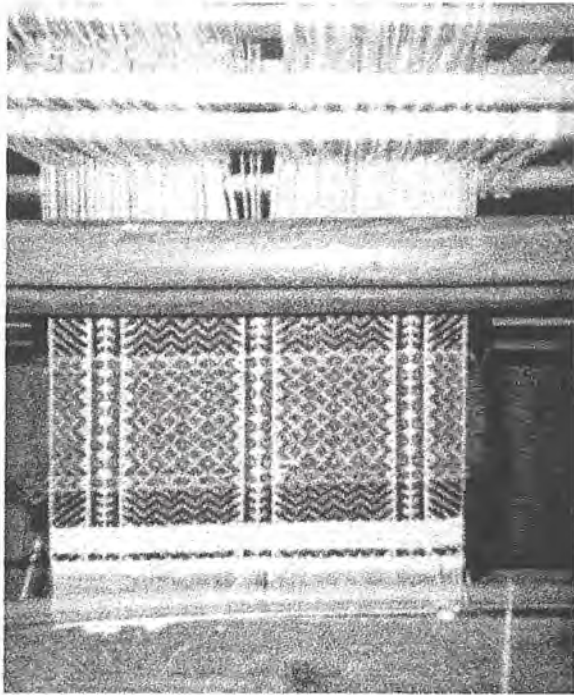
The fact that this loom came to the Museum with seven handmade reeds indicates that material for clothing and other needed textiles for the home must have been woven on it. The date "1898" is crudely cut into the right support. When commercial cloth became more readily available, a loom like this one was probably converted from a four to a two shaft loom and used almost exclusively for the weaving of rag carpeting.

On the first floor is another typical Norwegian-American loom, which was given to the Museum by St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota. It varies from the first in that it has double support posts in the superstructure and the seat is carried by braces outside the loom. Other features which are different are that the pulleys ride on a rocking, slanted, horizontal mount and therefore are able to rise or fall as



St Olaf loom, Vesterheim main floor

needed. Double horizontal rough-cut rails lock the sides together with mortise and tenon joints. There is a heavy, solid warp beam with iron ratchet and pawl. This loom has been adapted to weave *skillbragd*, a weave which has a linen

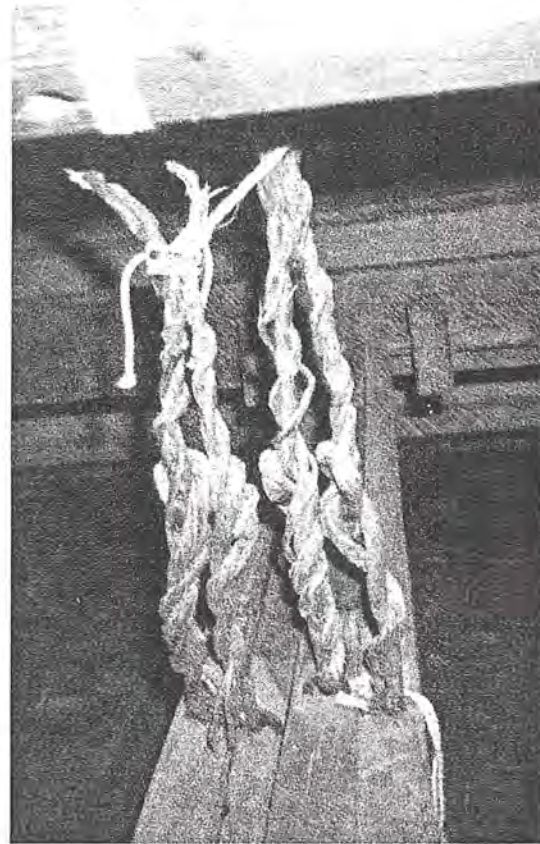


Stillbragd on St Olaf loom, 1st floor
Vesterheim

warp and ground weft. The patterns are woven in spelsau wool. In order to accomplish this weave on a four shaft loom, there must be two sets of heddles: the regular sized which carry the plain weave. (These are pushed to the rear.) and the added four shafts with the long-eyed heddles which are attached to treadles with rubber bands in a direct tie-up. These are located close to the front. Woven pieces using this pattern were used for christening blankets, coffin covers and coverlets.

It is interesting to compare the two Norwegian-American looms with the loom in Valdres House, another part of the Museum complex. This loom was built in Norway using close grained pine. It was donated by Hadelands Folkemuseum. Looms made in Norway tend to

have decorative detailing on the braces holding the cantilevered superstructure. These braces have curvatures resembling the Dutch and German looms of the 17th and 18th centuries. The loom is constructed with standard mortise and tenon joints. Its two shafts are counterbalanced from two pulley horses. The seat is attached to the frame. What is most exceptional is that it has thin willow "ropes" which bind the treadles to the shafts. This ancient method of attachment is also found on a loom from Telemark which is in the Nordiska Muset, Stockholm, Sweden⁴.



Thin willow "ropes" binding the treadles to the
shafts on the loom in the Valdres house

At the Jacobson Farm, a facility belonging to the Museum which is used for exhibits and classes, there are four excellent examples of immigrant looms on display at this time. The Flatgard Loom is the most interesting because

Continued on pg 13

UPDATE- NBClub TEXTILE TOUR TO NORWAY

Here's the latest information on the tour. Included with this update is a preliminary registration form which, when sent in with a deposit of \$100, will hold your place on the tour. Please remember, however, that not all details are firm and thus may be subject to change. For that reason, the initial deposit will be refundable until March 23rd.

DATES

The dates for the tour are tentatively set. Most people will leave the US or Canada on Wednesday, June 23rd, but the tour will officially begin with our midday arrival in Bodø on Thursday, June 24th. The tour will conclude on Monday, July 12th in Trondheim, with an arrival home date also on the 12th for those who choose to leave Norway directly following the tour.

Travel arrangements will be made by Arne Thogersen at Royal World Travel in Seattle (although you are free to use your own travel agent if you prefer for the trans-Atlantic portion of the trip). Arne will make individual arrangements for everyone from their home airports to the three main departure points, Seattle, Minneapolis and Newark, and on to Norway. He will also make individual return arrangements, and suggests that additional touring in Norway be added at the end of the trip instead of at the beginning-- a larger group heading to Norway at the same time allows the best package deals for all of us on our airfare. If you do decide to use your own agent for the cross Atlantic trip, Arne strongly recommends using SAS as a carrier, since your in-country airfare will be much more expensive if you don't!

COST

This is the most important item, and I'm afraid I can't give you firm details yet. Prices aren't set reliably until January, although they may begin to be available as early as November-December. However, Arne has estimated our airfare and trip costs as follows. Please remember these are approximate costs, and additional variation may be expected due to fluctuating exchange rates. (Trans-Atlantic airfares are listed separately since individual fares vary depending on departure points.)

	<u>Trans-Atlantic airfare</u>	<u>Tour in Norway</u>
via Seattle	\$1,200	\$2,400-2,700*
via Minneapolis	1,050	
via Newark	900	

*Please note that in addition, your cost may increase due to the choices you make: double/single occupancy (+ approx. \$300), workshop choice (fees & materials may vary; companions not charged), and possible additional airfare if you did not fly SAS to Norway. Breakfast each day is included; however, you may feel that our usual modest lunch packed at the breakfast table needs to be supplemented. Also, on 6-7 evenings you will be free to find your own restaurants for dinner in Trondheim,

Tromsø and Bodø. Meals may be as low as \$10 for cafeteria style, up to \$25-30 for a more formal setting.

WORKSHOPS

We will be offering three five-day workshops at Vågan Folkehøgskole, also known as Lofoten Sommerhotell, in Kabelvåg. Vågan FH is a boarding school, meaning we will have rooms, meals and take classes in one location. The course subjects will be: boat rya, grene on the warp weighted loom, and band weaving. You will be asked to list your preferences in order, with classes being assigned on a first come, first served basis. We recognize that while many might be happy to take any or all three of these classes, this may not be the case for everyone. As a result, class placement will be determined before final (non-refundable) payment is required.

Further information about the individual workshops will be forthcoming, although at this point we envision the rya class as working on pre-warped looms, the warp weighted loom class as emphasizing the entire process from warping to finishing, and the band weaving class as concentrating on rigid heddle and finger braiding techniques typical of north Norway. We wish to remind everyone that an intermediate level of weaving experience will be required for these courses. One final word of caution: past experience on Vesterheim tours indicates that the Norwegian teachers often have their own ideas about how the courses should be taught and what they should include. In other words, what we think we're getting and what we actually get may be slightly different.

ITINERARY

Please remember this itinerary reflects planning at the moment and may change:

We arrive in Bodø midday on June 24 (St. Hans Day) and have a welcoming dinner that evening. We will be in Bodø 2 nights, with a side trip to the rya collection at Kjerringøy north of town. On June 26th we ferry to Reine in Lofoten and take a bus to the end of the road at "Å i Lofoten" (the end of the alphabet and the end of the road, as one local put it). There we will visit the Fishermen's Museum, giving us some background about Lofoten's main industry. We then bus north and east through some beautiful scenery, stopping for one night before reaching Kabelvåg on Sunday the 27th. The next five days are taken up with workshops, and will include some evening programs of interest to the group. Our last day in Kabelvåg will be Saturday, July 3rd, available for shopping and sightseeing in Kabelvåg or Svolvær and/or finishing workshop projects. On Sunday we fly to Tromsø and bus to Samuelsen to visit the Sami grene weaving facility at Manndalen. (This part of the tour is in some doubt as yet, but will be included if practical.) The following two nights will be spent in Tromsø, and will include a visit to the display of Sami culture at the Tromsø Museum, as well as time for shopping and sightseeing. On Wednesday, July 7th, we fly to Trondheim. At that point, those choosing to visit Amy Lightfoot's studio will bus directly to Hitra, where they will spend the night before either taking her workshop the next day (the workshop will start with an introductory lecture and the video she showed in Decorah, followed by a chance to

work with the different fibers and fiber tools: wool combs, cards, different kinds of wheels) or taking a boat trip to visit the sheep islands. The boat trip could also be offered in addition to the workshop (companions are welcome on the boat trip) depending on your preferences as indicated on the registration form. Those not visiting Hitra will have an extra day in Trondheim which could either be a free day, or include some tour activities (again, depending on your preferences on the registration form). Once the tour reassembles in Trondheim, we will visit the Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum (Museum of Applied Art), which has a collection of Hannah Ryggen tapestries along with its very fine regular textile collection; take a bus tour east of Trondheim to visit a number of studios and museums; visit the Trøndelag Folkemuseum with its large open air collection; and possibly have the opportunity (for those who wish) to attend church at Nidaros Cathedral and an organ concert on Sunday, July 11th, our last full day in Trondheim. The tour concludes Monday morning, with those who choose to depart immediately arriving home on the same day.

AND FINALLY . . .

We would like to caution everyone that conditions in north Norway may be more Spartan than expected, the weather can range from quite cold to quite warm, everyone will need to carry their own baggage, and there may be some walking and probably a few long bus rides on our side trips. We have a lower limit of 24 needed to fill the workshops, and hope to have an upper limit of around 30.

Let's all keep our fingers crossed that north Norway has as beautiful a summer next year as it had this year. Apparently things were a bit soggy further south!

Best Regards!

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EDITORS NOTE: Two tour/workshops to Norway are presented in this issue of the NORWEGIAN TEXTILE LETTER. Both the Norwegian Breakfast Club and Vesterheim are sponsoring trips during the months of June and July, 1999. The Norwegian Breakfast club tour will be to northern Norway. The Vesterheim tour will be to the Hallingdal area in central Norway.

Tapestry Donated to Vesterheim



A tapestry titled **The Battle of the Horse and Bull** woven by Nancy Jackson of Vallejo, Calif., has recently been donated to Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum by Betty and Gaylord Jerde also of Vallejo, Calif. After the tapestry had completed a five-city tour with the exhibition *Norwegian Folk Art: The Migration of a Tradition*, the Jerde's purchased it and gave it to Vesterheim in honor of their son, James.

Nancy Jackson has always been interested in looking at humanity on a spiritual level. "I use abstract spatial ideas," she says, "as a metaphor for what it means to be a religious person always facing the unbounded mystery of God." Marion Nelson, former director of Vesterheim, describes **The Battle of the Horse and Bull** as "amazing" and a "fanciful version of the struggle of good and evil." Jackson, he says, builds her works on the techniques and stylization of the Norwegian pictorial coverlet tradition.

Jackson, a Master Gobelin/Aubusson Weaver, has exhibited nationally and internationally. During her 18-year career, she has received numerous awards including a Gold Medal from Vesterheim's National Exhibition of Weaving in the Norwegian Tradition in 1991. That same year **The Battle of the Horse and Bull** received a blue ribbon in the exhibition. Although Vesterheim has several pieces by contemporary fiber artists in the collection, only four textiles were woven by Gold Medalists. Jackson's tapestry joins a *rya* rug and a *krokbragd* runner by John Skare, Bricelyn, Minn., and a monk's belt runner by Rosemary Roehl of St. Cloud, Minn.

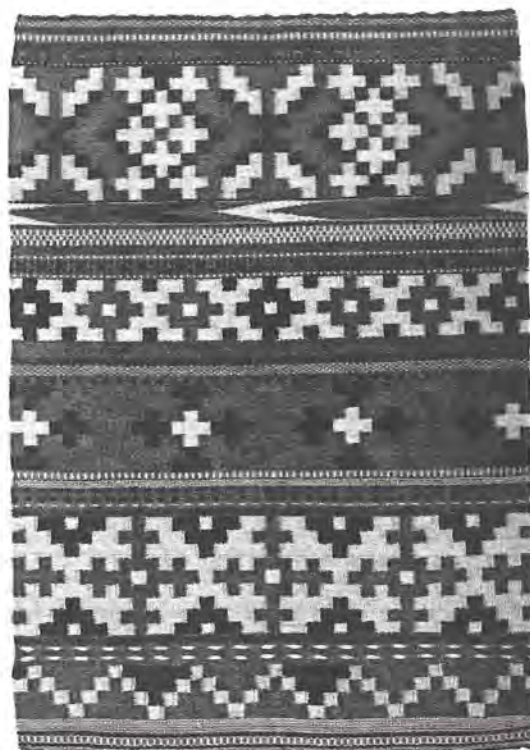
After a period of "rest," to allow the fibers of the textile to relax after several years of touring and display, the tapestry will be hung in the Maland Walker Textile Gallery on the third floor of the Vesterheim's Main Museum this winter.

Contact Nancy Jackson, Timshel Tapestry Studio, at 707-554-4128 for information on instruction in tapestry or commissions. Vesterheim Museum is open daily, call 319-382-9681 for hours and other information.

National Exhibition of Weaving in the Norwegian Tradition

Winners 1998 Vesterheim Museum's National Exhibition of Weaving in the Norwegian Tradition, held July 24-26 in Decorah, Iowa, attracted entries from 17 weavers. The judges were Håkon Grøn-Hensvold, visiting weaving teacher from Skreia, Norway, and Linda Elkins, a weaving and education instructor at Luther College in Decorah. They selected "In Praise of Norwegian Rag Girls," a small wall hanging by Christine Spangler* of Silver Spring, MD, to receive the Handweavers Guild of America ribbon for Best of Show. Spangler's piece also won a Blue Ribbon.

Red Ribbons went to Robbie LaFleur* of White Bear Lake, MN, for a wall hanging in the *rutevev* technique, and to Jan Mostrom* of Chanhassen, MN, for a wall hanging in *danskbrogd*. Wynne Mattila of Minneapolis, MN, received White Ribbons for "A Krokbragd Study" rug and "Arrow's Krokbragd Rug."



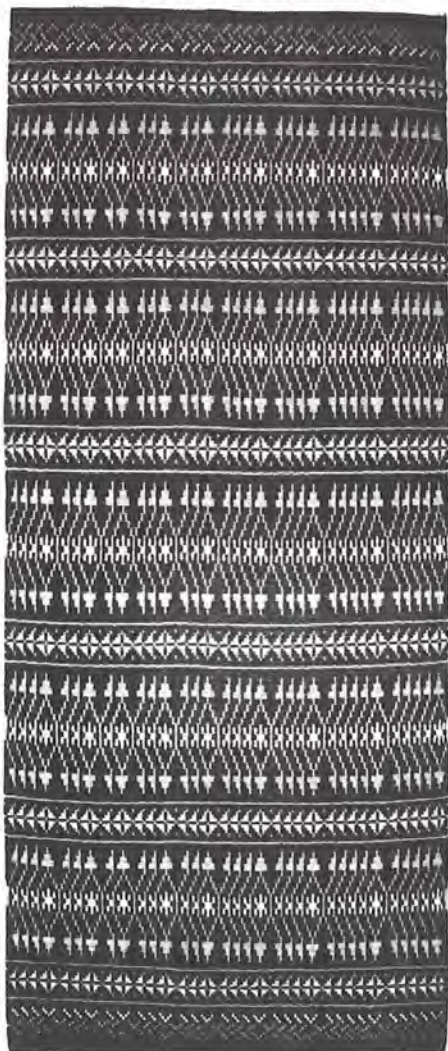
Robbie LaFleur's *rutevev* wall hanging

Honorable Mentions went to Vivian Morrison, Antioch, IL, for her "Arctic Wolf Scarf" and "Skogen" boundweave opera bag. Aletha Hay of West Burlington, IA, also received an Honorable Mention for a rug in doublebinding technique.

Visitors to the exhibition selected Jane Murphy's *skillbragd* wall hanging for the People's Choice Award. Murphy is from LaCrosse, WI. No Gold Medals were awarded this year.

New! Categories Beginning in 1999, there will be two categories for judging: traditional and contemporary. Traditional pieces should be woven in traditional Norwegian techniques with traditional colors and motifs. Contemporary weavings may depart from tradition in technique, color, or motif. Ribbons will be awarded in each category. Judges will give the HGA ribbon to the one weaving they consider to be the best of the show. The new rules will be mailed to weavers in March.

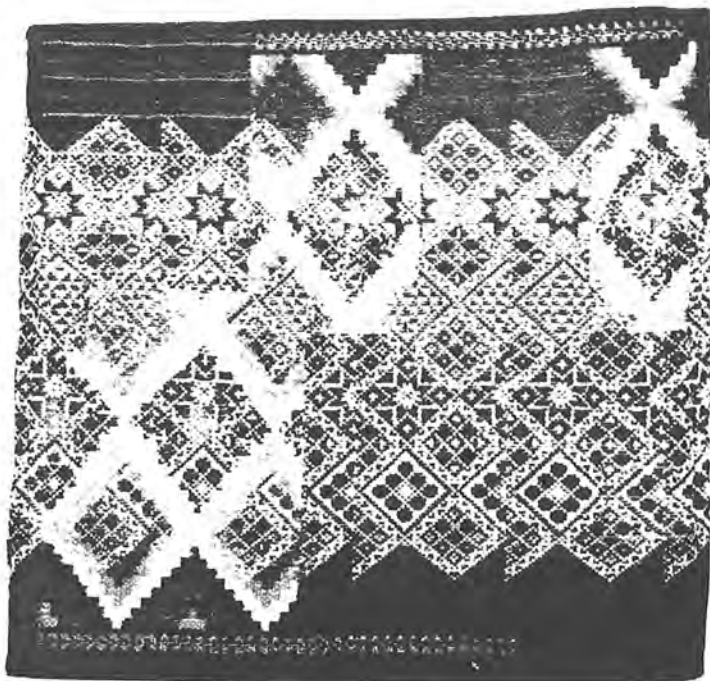
left: *Danskbrogd* wall hanging by Jan Mostrom



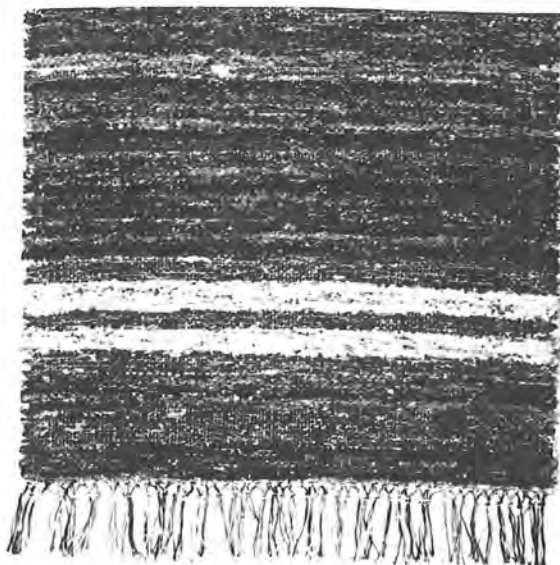
“In Praise of Norwegian Rag Girls” by Christine Spangler The name for this piece comes from an incident in Oslo in the early 1970s. The *Unge Kunstners Samfund* (Young Artist’s Association) had recently admitted women tapestry designers. Some of the men either resented their admission or just thought it would be a good joke, so they called them *fillejentene*, literally rag girls. But in Norwegian, *fillejente* is also the term for what we call “bag ladies.” I thought that in view of the rich and truly impressive tradition created and preserved by Norwegian women, that a collage of Norwegian weaving techniques is really a tribute to their skill and imagination through the generations.

The piece is woven with white cotton warp in two weights, alternating, thicker 10/2 cotton and finer sewing thread. The weft picks alternate sewing threads for tabby and *Kunstvevgarn* laid in the pattern sheds in a discontinuous manner (not from selvaige to selvaige). The structure is what I call double supplementary tied weave. That is, the cloth has two warps and two wefts. One warp and weft create a structural ground; the other warp and weft are for patterning only.

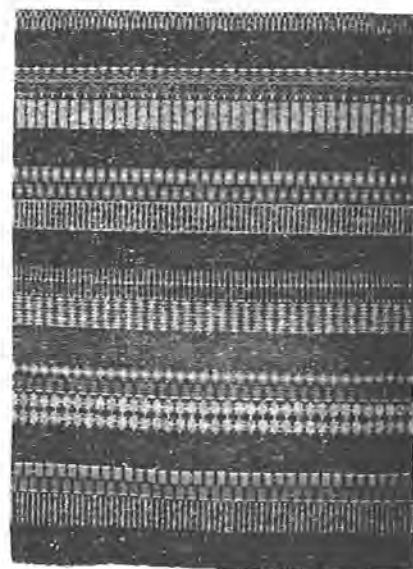
The motifs are all taken from historical textiles. In the foreground, the white warp pattern was loosely derived and simplified from the beaded breastpieces of Hardanger costumes. In the wool background, the most obvious pattern is the one of overlapping diamonds. This design is typically seen on *rutevev* coverlets from Vest Agder. The other patterns of plain color and of weft stripes are used in the Gudbrandsdal bunad. Finally, the *kjerringtenner* bands at the top and bottom are also typically used with several of the regional costumes as embellishment or on hair ribbons.



Detail of Morrison’s Arctic Wolf scarf



Detail, Aletha Hay’s doublebinding rug



Detail, “A Krokbragd Study” rug by Mattila

Doing Lichen Dyeing in Maine

by Laurann Gilbertson, Vesterheim Museum

I don't consider myself a "do-er." Rather than quilting, weaving, or sewing, I prefer to research the finished products and write about them. It is important to understand the processes that lead up to the products, so I have been attempting to "do" more. "Doing" weaving was interesting. Watching the krokbragd on the loom devour yarn gave me a new appreciation for what are often called common coverlets.

Natural dyeing was the next process on my "to do" list. I learned the basics, then was eager to learn some specifics, specifically dyeing with lichens. Ever since the day in 1994 when Karen Casselman called to ask if we had any lichen-dyed textiles in the collection, I have been curious about how Norwegians achieved powerful purples with lowly lichens. In September, I got to go to Maine to see for myself.

Karen often teaches week-long seminars in dyeing with lichens at the Humboldt Field Research Institute in Steuben, Maine. It was a wonderful week of beautiful scenery, delicious food, cozy cabins, and interesting people. It was also a very intense week of field trips, dye sessions, lectures, evening programs, and independent study. The ten students came with a variety of backgrounds. There was a professional rug designer, an expert on Faroese knitting, a textile chemist, and a mushroom enthusiast. One student had vast experience with indigo vats, and other students were still beginning dyers.

The Humboldt Field Research Institute offers a unique opportunity to learn about lichens and other natural dyestuffs, especially from a Norwegian perspective. Maine's ecosystem is similar to Norway's. Many of the Norwegian dye plants mentioned in historical and contemporary sources, *pors* or sweet gale (*Myrica gale*) for example, also grow in Maine. Coming from Iowa, a state of heavily-farmed prairie, I was most impressed with the wealth of umbilicate lichens. On several field trips we found these large lichens, which look like leaves left by the wind, completely covering rock outcroppings. We also saw numerous species of reindeer moss (*reinmose*), and trees robed with lungwort (*lungelav*).

What did I "do" in Maine? I watched the black and white pages of my notes on Norwegian dyestuffs take root and grow. It was a wonderful experience to see and dye with the plants I had only read about. Lichens are powerful. The fascinating week in Karen's seminar and my samples of vibrantly-dyed wool are proof of that.

*Humboldt Field Research Institute, PO Box 9, Dyer Bay Rd., Steuben ME 04680-0009
207-546-2821 humboldt@nemaine.com*

Mystery Coverlet

Laurann Gilbertson and Syvilla Tweed Bolson
Decorah, Iowa

In this installment, we give you "T," the fifth pattern band of the mystery coverlet. Pattern "T" is made up of "teeth," or *kjerringtenner*, but with a bit of blue, which adds liveliness and a diagonal effect. The pattern band appears just twice on the coverlet. Follow the directions and drawdown carefully, because the colors shift within the band.

Pattern		Band number
		heading cord
X		1
B		2
V		3
C		4
T		5
C		6
V		7
C		8
T		9
C		10
V		11
S		12

X - Xs

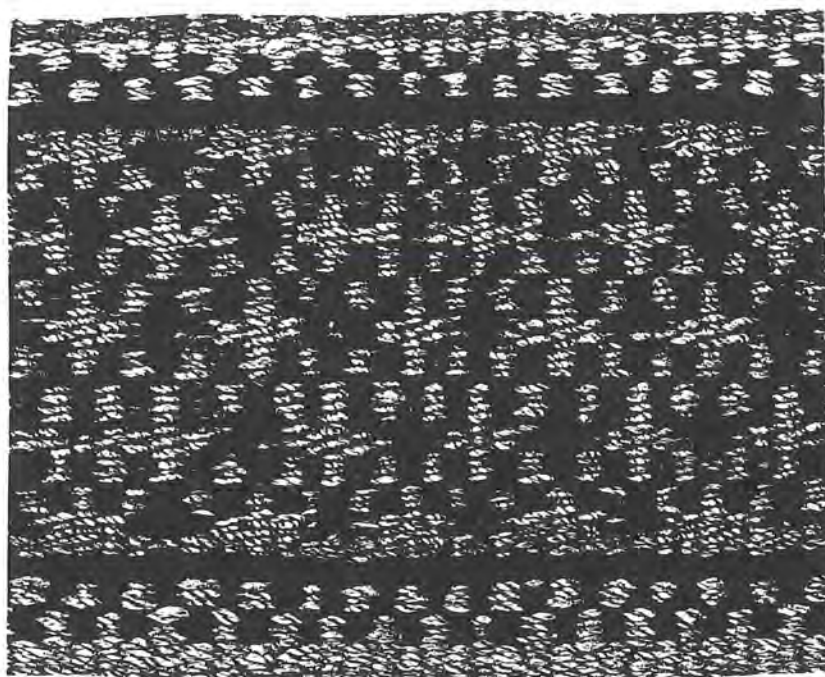
B - Boundweave / *krokbragd*

V - *Vestfold* technique

C - Crabs

T - Old Lady's Teeth / *kjerringtenner*

S - Stripes



Instructions: Pattern T - Teeth Band #5 and 9, originally 5 1/2" tall

Border (not shown on the drawdown)

- 1) Weave 6 - 8 rows of gray in tabby
- 2) Weave gray and blue teeth (*kjerringtenner*) - 3 rows each (tabby)
- 3) Weave 2 rows of blue in tabby
- 4) Weave 3 blue and gray teeth. NOTE: The color order is reversed.
- 5) Weave 4 rows of blue in tabby. Drop the blue

Part I

- 1) Weave 4 - 6 rows of gold in tabby (not shown on the drawdown).
- 2) Beginning on the left side, use a pick-up stick to go over three warps. Lift three warps, go over three, and continue to the end of the row. Throw a weft shot of blue to make the float. Follow the drawdown.
- 3) Follow with one shot of gold tabby.
- 4) Repeat float row.
- 5) Follow with one shot of gold tabby, one shot of red, one shot of gold, one shot of red, one shot of gold. This makes three red teeth and three gold teeth. Be sure that the red teeth are below the middle warp of the blue float in this area.
- 6) Weave two rows of tabby red.
- 7) Weave three teeth rows reversing the red and gold teeth. The gold teeth will be below the middle warp of the float in this bottom area.

Part II

- 1) Following the drawdown, use a pick-up stick to go over three warps. Lift three, etc. Throw a weft shot of blue to make the float. NOTE: Notice the placement of the floats.
- 2) Follow with one shot of gold tabby.
- 3) Repeat float row.
- 4) Follow with one shot of red tabby, one gold, one red, one gold, one red which makes three teeth of each color. Be sure that the red teeth are below the middle warp of the blue float in this area.
- 5) Weave 2 rows of red tabby.
- 6) Follow with one shot of gold, one shot of red, one shot of gold, one shot of red, one shot of gold making three teeth of each color.

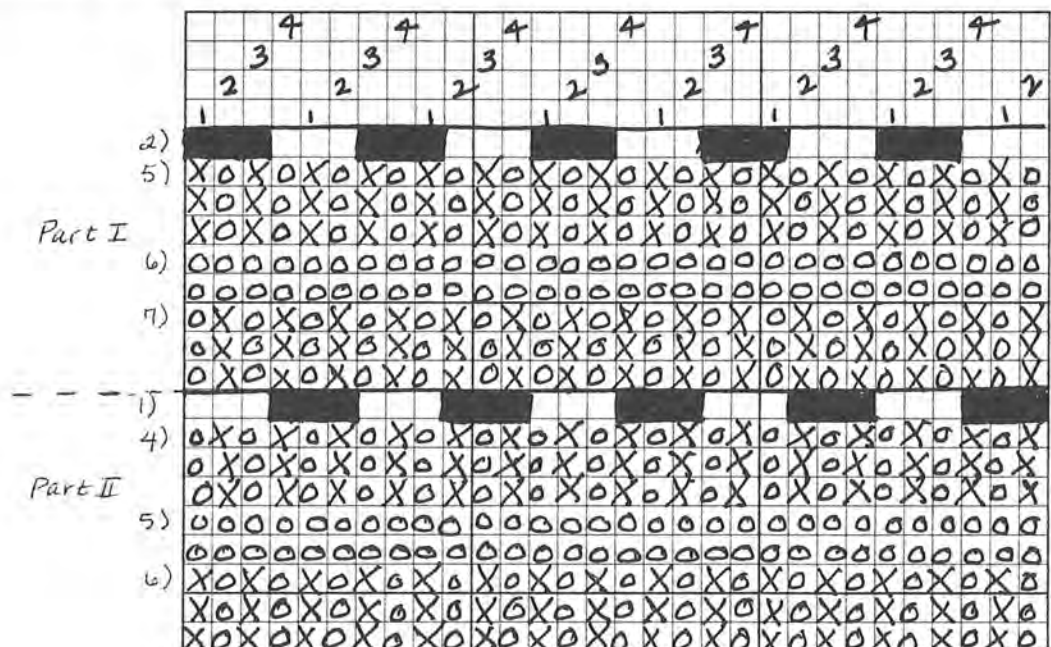
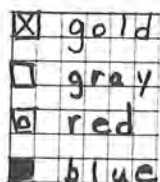
Part III Repeat Part I following its colors and drawdown.

Part IV Repeat Part II.

Part V Repeat Part I

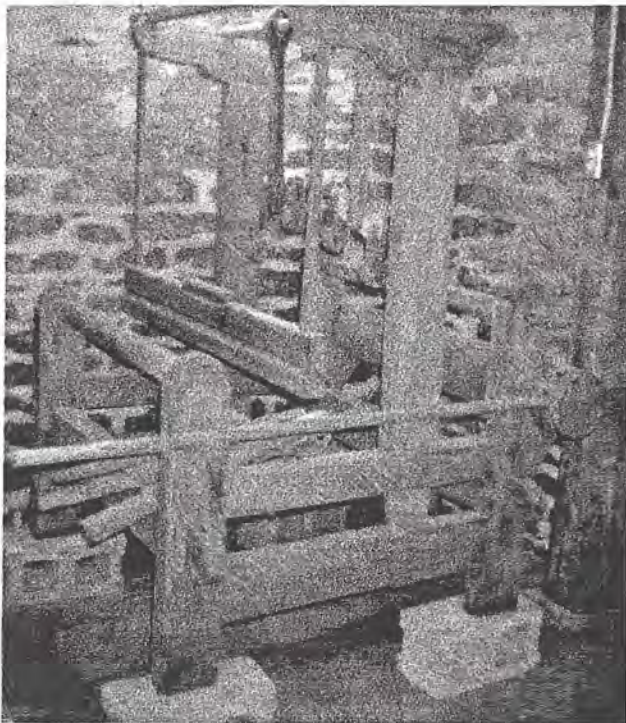
Border (not shown on drawdown)

- 1) Weave 4 rows of blue in tabby.
- 2) Weave three rows of blue and gray in teeth.
- 3) Weave 2 rows of blue in tabby.
- 4) Weave three rows of gray and blue in teeth. Note placement of the teeth.
- 5) Weave 6 - 8 rows of gray in tabby. The border is the opposite of the first border.



Next Time Next time, you will receive the drawdown and instructions for Pattern "S," the last band on the coverlet, which is a series of stripes.

the stories of the builder and weavers are known. In contrast to the first three looms in the paragraphs above, this has a central post support with two heavy horizontal side rails on each side. The beater hangs outside the superstructure. The warp beam is a large log with a reinforcing metal strip at one end. The log is held firmly by two back braces. There is a bore staff brake with one end caught against an extension on the frame. The pulley system is similar to that described above for the loom which was made in Norway.



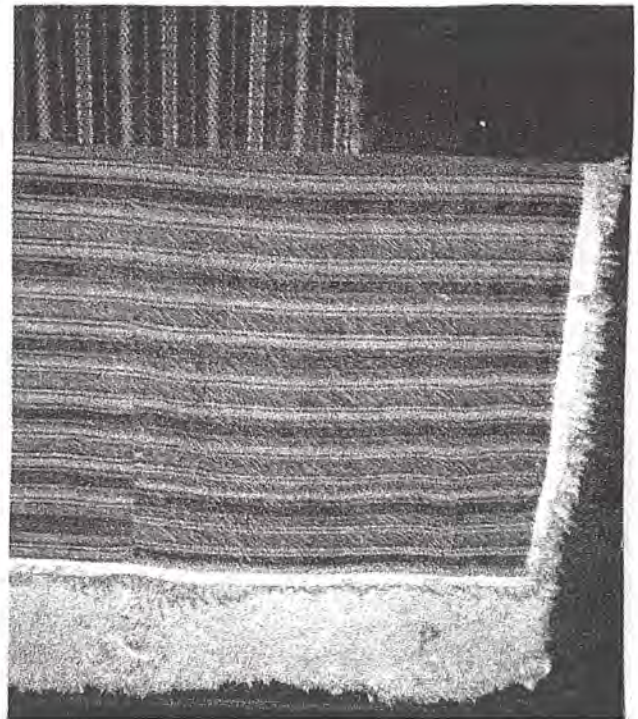
Flatgard loom

Gerda Freier, Great granddaughter, wrote this history in 1988

(skindfell=skinnfell)

"This loom was made by Thor Flatgard, a Norwegian immigrant who homesteaded in Belmont Township, Jackson County, Minnesota in 1870. Household fabrics and clothing materials were woven by Thor and his

wife, Ingeborg, from home-grown and handspun wool. As each of the nine children left for their own homes, each took along a handwoven blanket and a skindfell. In later years rag rugs were woven in each household as the loom was passed around among the children. The loom was given to the keeping of Vesterheim by its last caretaker, Mrs Josie Arntson of Lamberton, Minnesota, who is a granddaughter of Ole Flatgard, oldest child of Thor and Ingeborg. The piece of blanket is donated by Mrs Alden (Mildred) Thompson of Jackson, Minnesota, daughter of Edward, sixth child of Thor and Ingeborg. These articles were brought to Vesterheim in July, 1988 by Gerda Freier."



Skinnfell woven on the Flatgard loom

She goes on to describe the *skinnfell*:

"This is a bedcover, called a *skinnfell*, made by Thor Flatgard, a Norwegian immigrant settler in Belmont Township, Jackson County, Minnesota. He and his wife, Ingeborg (Vallen), homesteaded in the northwest corner of section 14 in 1880, having left their families

in Tolga, Norway. The Flatgard children were Ole, Peter Olsen, Maria (Ellefson), Andrew, Edward, John, Julius, Ida (Eide) and Olene (Eide). Part of their provision for this large family was to give each child a homespun and woven wool blanket and one of these heavy and colorful *skindfells* when they married and established homes of their own.

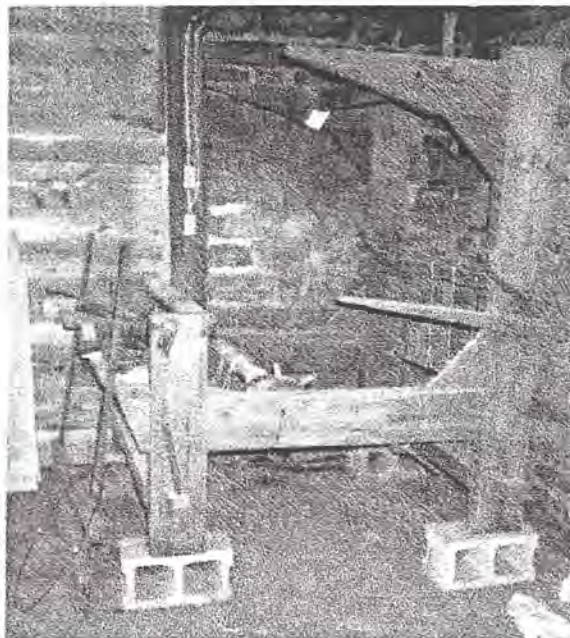
"Sheep were an important source of meat, and some of the hides were utilized as you see with the fleece on, stitched together and backed with a colorful home-woven fabric. These *skindfells* were also used as lap robes when there was winter travel. This particular *skindfell* was made for daughter, Ida, who married Peter Eide July 4, 1912. They did not have children and lived in houses where this article was not used, so it has survived after a period of use by a nephew, Elmer Flatgard, who had it in his home near Oklee, Minnesota, until 1947 and stored it after that. The *skindfell* was brought to Vesterheim by his daughter, Gerda Freier, Jackson, Minnesota, in June 1986."⁵

Laurann Gilbertson and Carol Colburn discuss this *skindfell* in their exhibition catalogue, *Handweaving in the Norwegian Tradition*, Decorah: Vesterheim, 1997. "The Norwegian term *skindfell* refers to a bed covering made of a woven coverlet which is sewn to a skin with hair attached. Here, a coverlet is sewn to white sheep pelts that have been pieced into a large square. The weaving is sewn around the edges of the skin side. It has stripes of red, purple, black and yellow-orange, with red as the dominant color. It is woven in a twill weave in two pieces. Any type of coverlet might be attached to a pelt for added warmth."

As mentioned above, the Flatgard family also made wool blankets with fine handspun yarn. One section of a blanket has been given to the Museum. It is woven in a twill weave. Later, the shafts on the loom were changed from four to two for the weaving of rag rugs.

Carol Colburn writes that carpets appeared to be the most widely used item made on hand-operated looms. They were woven at home and by professional men and women. Rags were often prepared for weaving by the customer who would pay the weaver for her labor and for the warp used. Rag carpets were woven in widths from 30 inches to a yard wide, either rug length or used to completely cover a floor. Usually only used in the winter, they were laid over a cushion of straw or cornhusks to keep them from wearing out. They were tacked right to the floor. In spring they were taken up, washed and stretched to dry, then rolled and stored until fall.⁶

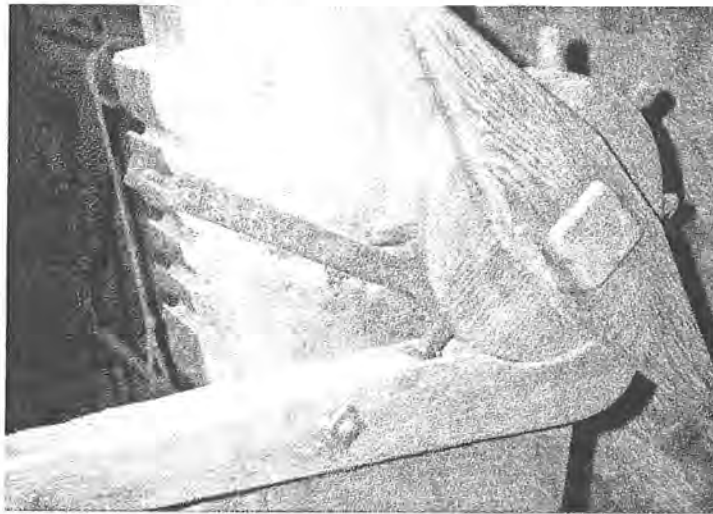
Sometimes a family would have one set of rag rugs darker in color for winter and another, lighter, for summer.



Ode family loom

Another of the looms at the farm, the Ode family loom, belonged to Pedar Gutormson Ode from Valdres, Norway. This loom exemplifies a different kind of Norwegian-American loom. Heavy back posts, braced above and below, support an extension from

which the shafts and the beater are hung. Noteworthy is the spoon brake which locks into the sprockets of a wooden wheel attached to the warp beam. Another feature which is different from the more primitive looms in the fact that there is a brace for an adjustable warp beam, trammel type⁷ for raising and lowering the warp beam. The warp beam, though rounded and solid, is not as large in diameter as on the other looms. It is about the same size as the cloth beam. The donor stated that rugs and clothes were made on the loom.



Close-up of spoon brake

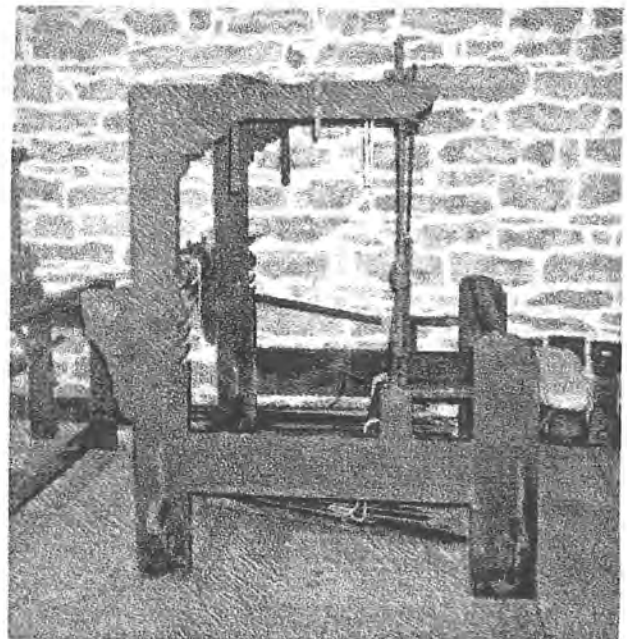
In the same display area there is another heavy counterbalanced loom which came from the Gulurd and Ekern families. Special characteristics are the decorative carvings on the beater cap and on the front and back posts. Embellishment is seen in the chamfers⁸ on the rails (horizontal side supports) and on the vertical posts. The two additional vertical supports for the cantilevered superstructure are similar to those found in some Swedish looms.

Upstairs in the barn display area of the Jacobson Farm is a large, sturdy loom which is painted dark maroon. The front and back posts resemble those found in a Pennsylvania German home loom. This example has an octagonal warp beam which is adjustable and

decoratively cut bracing of the cantilevered superstructure (articulated cyma curves on the upright wooden supports). Other embellishments include chamfers on the cross members which hold the shafts and two hand carved wooden screws which allow the shafts to be moved up or down. The round shaped nuts have incised lines for decoration. The pulleys do not look as if they were the original ones. It is unknown where this loom was made and by whom.

In storage at the farm there are a number of looms awaiting assembly and restoration. Primary source material from the Vesterheim files tells us exactly who wove on these looms and who built them.

In 1869 Per Brandlien, wife Marthe and 5 year old Margarethe left Norway on a sailing vessel named Hulda coming to Rapidan, Minnesota, (Blue Earth County). In 1871 Marthe died of typhoid fever. Per wrote to a friend in Norway, Peder Norsletten, a traveling evangelist, asking him to find him a



The "maroon" loom

wife. He sent Britt Haugen. They were married in 1872 and settled in Rapidan where a daughter was born. They moved to the Lake Hanska area bringing their log house with them because of lack of wood in the new area.

The granddaughter writes about the loom:

"It is a loom constructed along enormous lines, rather crude and cumbersome but when you consider that it was hewn out of logs with a scanty supply of tools. It is truly a masterpiece.

"This loom was built when Per married Britt. She used it at their home in Riverdale and continued to use it when they moved to Madelia. It was used for years and years to weave hundreds and hundreds of rugs. My mother remembers Per winding the rags on the shuttle and Britt weaving them. People brought balls of torn rags which were used in the weaving."⁹

Homespun blankets, shawls and other household goods were woven in this home. There is a small collection of everyday textiles from the family in the Blue Earth County Historical Society, Mankato, Minnesota.

Ole Fretheim emigrated from Norway to Iowa. The floor loom which he made was completely homemade including the metal ratchets. It has a superstructure of thick posts with large heavy warp and breast beams. In the Vesterheim collection there is a piece of rag carpeting which was woven on this loom. The rug is cleverly planned to "carpet" the whole room. The plaid is created with colored warp and weft, spaced to result in an all-over plaid effect when the widths were sewn together. The cotton rags were narrowly cut. Black double bands dominate over the neutral and brown shades of the ground weft.¹⁰

Gulbrand and Anget Hagen came to Iowa from Norway in 1854 and settled near Waterville. Gulbrand built a loom for his wife.

Disassembled at this time, it appears to have two shafts and weaving width of 44 inches. Accessories include eight reeds of natural reed, five flat shuttles, and many warping and lease sticks. The loom was later passed on to Mrs. Otto Sorenson who wove cloth selling it for \$.10 a pound. She made her dye out of walnut husks. The loom was last used for rugs in 1965 and 1966.¹¹

The massive floor looms in the Vesterheim collection are a vivid testimony to the resourcefulness of the early immigrants who built them from memory employing familiar modes of construction from the old country. They brought to the task the many skills which they had honed building houses, barns and crafting tools for agricultural use. Often, parts of the looms such as reeds, pulleys, and other small textile tools, delicately decorated shuttles and sometimes even spinning wheels were transported amongst the prized possessions in the trunks which were brought to the new land. However, it is thought that the majority of the looms themselves were built here in this country.

Besides foot power looms, Vesterheim is fortunate to have an authentic example of a vertical warp weighted loom from Norway with aklæ (coverlet) in progress. The following description is taken from the Vesterheim registration sheet:

"This loom is from Skardalen, Troms, Norway. Astrid Jensen from Troms warped the loom and began weaving on it in 1978 specifically for the Museum display. The frame is two 1X2's with nailed attachments at the top forming clefts to hold a square pole. The pole has holes at regular intervals through which the wool is laced, holding the cross cord over which the wool warp is strung. The heddle arrangement includes one shed stick and one heddle rod with continuous heddles of thick 3-ply wool. Small cleft sticks extend from holes in the frame to

hold the heddle rod when in use. The warp is natural color, thick tight twist single-ply wool set at 3 epi doubled... *Stripe* and *kjerringtann* [weaving] pattern in heavy single ply natural white and natural black sheep wool weft. About 5" is completed. The wood is warped and cracked showing obvious signs of use. Only two of the 18 stone weights are present." The loom was obtained through the efforts of Aagot Noss and Gunvor Schönning, Norway Folk Museum.¹²

1 Nelson, Lila. "Old Looms of Norway," *Handwoven*. September/October 1996, Pages 54,55 and 81.

_____. "Early Looms on the Farms of Norway," Adaptation of a slide lecture given at a pre-conference seminar in connection with Convergence, Washington, D.C., 1992.

2 Mortise and tenon joint with a wedge inserted vertically into the tenon as it extends beyond the post.

3 The raised back beam makes the warp ends higher eliminating wear on the warp and interference with the shed. See: Creager, Clara. *All About Weaving, A Comprehensive Guide to the Craft*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1984, p. 32 for diagrams.

4 Illustration is in Hoffman, Marta. *Fra fiber til tøy*, Landbruksforlaget A/S, 1991, p. 127

5 From the catalogue files of Vesterheim, Decorah, Iowa.

6 Carol Colburn. "Immigrant Handweaving in the Upper Midwest" in *Norwegian Immigrant Clothing and Textiles*. edited by Catherine C. Cole. Edmonton: Prairie Costume Society, 1990. pp. 43-64.

7 "Trammel type arrangement" a means for adjusting the height of the warp beam. Flat

metal strips drop into a series of carved wooden trammel notches.

8 Webster's Dictionary defines "chamfer n. 1. a small groove or furrow cut in wood or other hard material. 2. a bevel or slope; the flat surface created by slicing off the square edge or corner of a block of wood, stone, etc."

9 From the catalogue files of Vesterheim, Decorah, Iowa.

10 This piece of rag carpeting was displayed in the exhibition at Vesterheim, "Handweaving in the Norwegian Tradition," Gilbertson, Laurann and Carol Colburn. *Handweaving in the Norwegian Tradition*. Decorah, Iowa: Vesterheim, 1997. Catalogue reference p. 20.

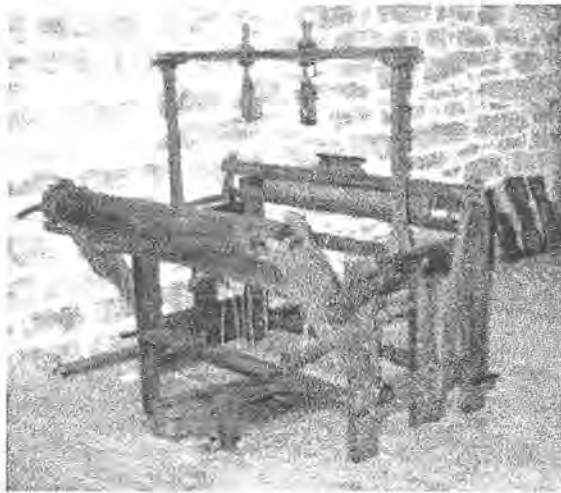
11 From the catalogue files of Vesterheim, Decorah, Iowa.

12 From the catalogue files of Vesterheim, Decorah, Iowa. For more information, see *Norwegian Textile Letter* Vol. IV, No. 2, February. 1998.

Part II

Survey of the Looms at Vesterheim The Norwegian-American Museum (continued)

There are two other looms which have been assembled at the Jacobson Farm. The first of these is a loom which appears to have similar features to a number of Swedish looms. The writing on the support for the heddles has been identified as Swedish. Made from close-grained pine, it is a four shaft counterbalanced loom with side rails and horizontal beams joined to the posts with mortise and tenon joints for easy disassembly. The underslung beater with a handcarved handle is free standing. It drops into two spaces on each side which provides for movement forward or backward. There are four lamms above eight



Swedish loom – Note the similarity between the back beam on this loom and that of the opphämta loom

back-mounted treadles which have a special flat board extension and a separate wooden cap on each one. The warp beam release is an all wooden spoon brake with a decorative curved handle on wooden cogs. The two main pulleys, each having one large wheel and one smaller one, hold four horses and are adjustable on carved wooden screws. The four shafts once had several hundred string heddles of seine twine. There is no back beam. The warp feeds directly from the warp beam through the heddles and the reed around the knee beam to the cloth beam. The exquisite workmanship on this loom sets it apart as does the added extension potential for the warp beam in the rear.

Accompanying material in the files gives the following history:

The loom was donated to Vesterheim by Ruth Gretchen Myers, daughter of Ruth Nordquist Myers who was a well known Chicago area weaver/teacher who served many years as Illinois representative for the Handweavers Guild of America. Her "Directions for Warping" is included in the booklet which was

given out with the purchase of a Structo Table Loom. The Structo Loom was manufactured during the 1930s through the 1980s in Freeport, Illinois.

Ruth Gretchen Myers' great grandmother, Olivia Melstrom Morderud (1854-1927, emigrated from North Odal Province in Norway in 1881, settling in Chicago with husband Bernt who was a cabinetry carpenter and a violin maker. Olivia taught weaving to students at Jane Adams' Hull House. Hull House was one of the first social settlements in North America, founded in Chicago in 1889. There were 14 buildings of which one remains, the original one. Olivia Melstrom Morderud may have woven on this loom, perhaps it was originally at Hull House.¹

Native Scandinavian production of the 19th century woven on a domestic basis was greatly influenced by the standardized weaving equipment gradually developed in England and Scotland. These methods rapidly spread within the United Kingdom of Sweden and Norway. The introduction of new methods was very much the work of the Ekenmark family. They were a family of seven persons active as teachers who gave travelling courses and who wrote eight publications on weaving between 1820 and 1848. The drawings in these books of loom construction, drafts, patterns were all adapted to conditions in the Norwegian and Swedish countryside and the general knowledge of weaving already existing in both countries. Essential parts were taken from a book by John Duncan, Glasgow, (1807-08). While Duncan's publications were meant for professionals, Ekenmark's were intended for non-professional women working in their own homes. Local craftsmen built looms for the "long weave" for young girls or added a damask attachment to an existing loom.¹ Lovisa Nylander also designed a simplified draw system.²

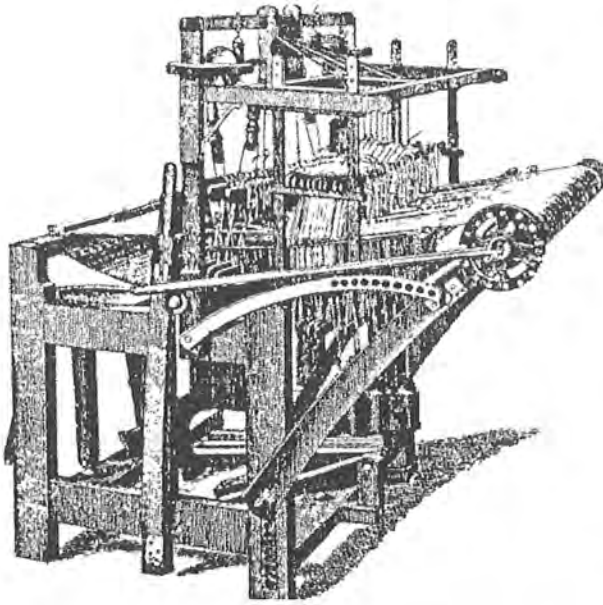
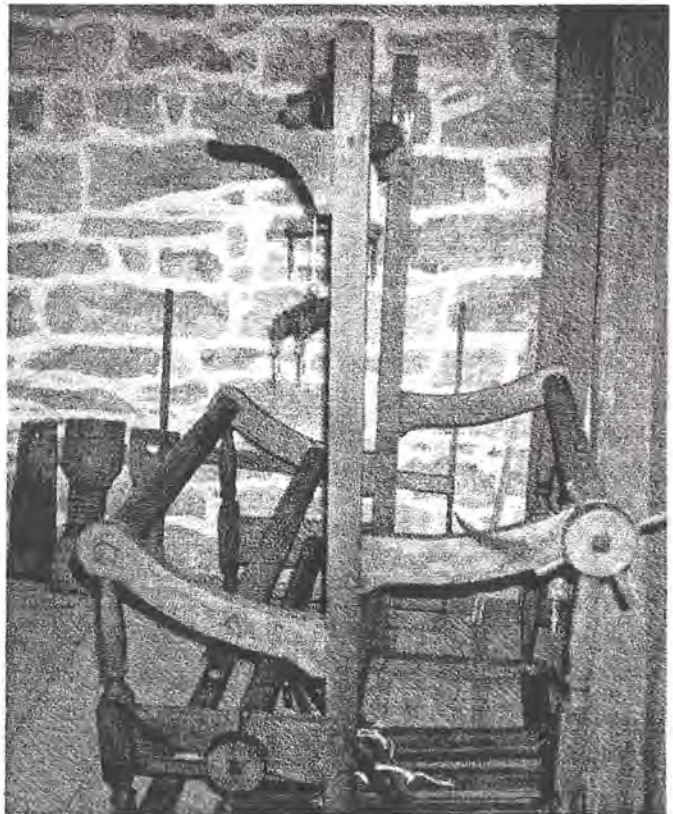


Illustration for a draw loom for *opphämta* from
Skånsk Konstvävnad

The Illustrations of a draw loom for *opphämta* (The pattern harnesses were mounted at the rear and the counterbalance shafts for tabby or straight twill mounted in the front in long-eyed heddles.) were printed in Maria Collin's book, *Skånsk Konstvävnad*, (Art Weaves from Skåne) fifth edition, Lund 1924. It shows a loom with a beater mounted at the bottom such as this one. The loom in the illustration could possibly be from Önnestad in northeastern Skåne. In 1876 the Kristianstad County Central Handcrafts School was established in Önnestad. The training of handcraft teachers began in 1881 and looms were built there until 1953.³

The other floor loom was made by Anders Lervad & Son, manufacturer of looms in Denmark starting in about 1897. An old catalogue for the company states: "Looms made from prime grade, kiln dried Danish Beech with a satin smooth finish to furniture standards."⁴

This loom was given to Vesterheim by Ruth Myers, daughter of Ruth Nordquist Myers. It was purchased at a rummage sale in Lakeside, Berrien County, Michigan for \$12 in about 1948 from a woman who made a living weaving rag rugs. These delicately constructed looms, made in the 1920s, were 30" wide, counterbalanced with attractively turned and modeled parts including a cross bar at the top holding the overslung beater. Vesterheim's model, with natural wood finish, has four shafts with string heddles suspended from four wooden horses. The six treadles are mounted in the rear with four lamms on the side. There is no back beam; the warp travels directly from the warp beam through the heddles and the reed to the cloth beam. As is often the case with Danish



Danish loom

looms there is a central castle with a cantilever supporting the shedding mechanism. Some models were painted black with incised designs on them. Some had chip carved patterns and

elaborately decorated handles on the warp and cloth beams. As evidenced in later catalogues, a majority of the looms were made with a counter-march system using two sets of lamms.

A letter exists which shows that these looms were imported from, Denmark and sold by the weaving instructor, Susanne Sorensen, at Hull House in Chicago in 1922. Cost at that time was \$100 plus \$6.00 for packing.

A quotation from the letter:

"Miss Sorensen also Imports and Sells Danish Looms and starts Weaving Departments in Schools and other Institutions." Miss Sorensen of Askov, Denmark, offered lessons every day except Monday; a course of 10 lessons was \$15.00.⁶

There are several Lervad Looms in the Chicago area. One is in the collection of the Chicago Art Institute; another, at Joliet Junior College, Joliet, Illinois. There is also one in a private collection in Cincinnati, Ohio.

1 From the catalogue files of Vesterheim, Decorah, Iowa.

2 Geijer, Agnes. *A History of Textile Art*. Bath: Pitman Press, 1979. Passold Research Fund in association with Sotheby Parke Bernet, pp. 177-178.

3 Johansson, Lillemor. *Damask and Opphämta with Weaving Sword or Drawloom*. Stockholm: LTs förlag, 1982. Translation by Susan Jones. pp. 16-24.

4 Ibid.

5 From the files of Kati Reeder Meek, Alpena, Michigan. A brochure advertising Lervad Looms.

6 From the files of Kati Reeder Meek, Alpena, Michigan. A letter and brochure dated Nov. 1, 1922.

NANCY JACKSON RECEIVES AWARD

Norwegian Breakfast Club Member, Nancy Jackson, has received an award for "Trev's Blues I/II"© 1998, Gobelin Tapestry in the exhibit shown below. She is one of 10 to receive this top award. Nancy currently teaches traditional Gobelin and Aubusson (French) tapestry methods, does commission and speculative tapestry artwork, and exhibits nationally and internationally.

NEWS FROM VALDRES - NORWAY

First of all I would like to send greetings to all my weaving friends who have attended the classes at Jacobs farm in 1991 and 1997 this was a great opportunity for me to meet weavers from all parts of the U.S. I was also very pleased to have Syvilla Tweed Bolson and her husband Martin visiting me in Valdres this summer.

In the August number of the Norwegian Textile Letter, Syvilla mentions that I am in the process of starting up a weaving school. Last year I bought an old log barn and am in the middle of converting it into a suitable weaving studio with room for about 12 looms and the necessary equipment. The "Vevlåve" is situated beside my house which is also a renovated old log house. The "Vevlåve" will be ready to take classes at the end of January 1999. I hope my weaving classes in Norway will be of interest to my American weaving friends. If anyone, yourself or friends are interested in the classes I will be happy to send you more information.

Write to: "ANNES VEVLÅVE", Anne Holden,
2960 Ron, Norway
Phone: +4761344443
Fax: +4761363359
E-mail: jholden@c2i.net

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Anne sent a few copies of the brochure describing her school. They will be available upon request as long as the supply lasts.*

VESTERHEIM PLANS TRIP TO NORWAY

Weavers interested in special national textile traditions have the opportunity of participating in a tour of museums and workshops in Norway, along with two weeks of instruction in their craft.

A Norwegian folk art workshop and tour for weavers, rosemalers, woodcarvers and knifemakers will be sponsored by Vesterheim Norwegian American Museum in Decorah, Iowa, from June 25 to July 12, 1999. Participants will be in residence in a "folk high school" in Hallingdal, a region in central Norway known for its strong traditions in many aspects of folk art. Outstanding teachers in the respective areas of instruction will be on hand for two weeks of demonstrations and hands-on experience by participants.

The cultural experience will be rounded-out through weekend travel, with visits to museums, workshops and homes in the Hallingdal, Gudbrandsdal, Valdres, Bergen, and Oslo areas.

Weaving instruction will be offered in techniques characteristic of the Hallingdal area, possibly geometric weaving and bound weave. Participants should have some prior experience in weaving; however, the teacher to whom a contract has been offered is experienced in working with weavers at all levels.

The primary workshop location will be the *Folkehøgskole* in Gol i Hallingdal. All members of the workshop will be housed and also have their classes in the *Folkehøgskole*. There are looms available, a room with workbenches for woodcarvers and knifemakers, and classroom space also for rosemalers. Breakfast, lunch packets, afternoon coffee and dinner, along with lodging, are available for a package price. Bedding is furnished, there is a sink in each room, with toilet and shower shared among 2-3 rooms. The school is located a short distance (3 km., a little over a mile) from the town of Gol, and the

school has two mini-buses which will be available to us.

The cost of the Norwegian Folk Art Workshop and Tour will be approximately \$3000 plus international travel. This will cover instruction, room and board, travel for special tours, and museum and other admissions from the opening dinner on June 25 through our final breakfast on July 12 (excepting a free day in Oslo when all participants will choose their own activities and restaurants etc.). A minimum of six places each will be held for woodcarvers, weavers and knifemakers until April 1, to maintain the viability of those classes. Persons interested in these areas are particularly urged to apply early so the class offering will be secure.

Reservations for the tour are made by filing an application blank and a deposit of \$500 at Vesterheim Museum in Decorah. The deposit may be paid via Master Card, Visa, Discover Card, or American Express card if you wish. The fee is refundable minus a 10% service charge until April 1 if necessitated by a change in plans.

Application blanks or further information may be requested from Vesterheim Norwegian- American Museum, P.O.B. 379, Decorah IA 52101; Phone 319-382-9681; FAX 319-382-8828; or e-mail vesterheim@vesterheim.com. Vesterheim Folk Art Workshop and Tour Coordinator, Carol Hasvold

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