

The lively needle

Coverlets are valuable

Colonial Americans had a hard time obtaining patterned cloth. When it was imported from England, it was very expensive and available only near coastal ports.

The thrifty and those far from the Atlantic were normally clothed in plain, sturdy, home woven textiles. For those special occasions when something more was indicated, embroidery and weaving provided the designs—but at the cost of much labor.

Perhaps pattern was so cherished because it was difficult to obtain. Those who could decorated not only their persons, but their living quarters as well.

The typical early home was a cabin with one or two rooms and perhaps a sleeping loft overhead for the children. The master bed, placed in the main living room, was usually the most important piece of furniture in the house.

Whenever possible, the bed was decorated. Canopies, valances, curtains, and dust ruffles lent themselves to crewel embroidery. Curtains were usually heavily lined to keep out cold drafts. "Bed furnishings" were considered of such value that they were often mentioned in wills.

ONE UNEXPECTED result of these legal settlements is that only

one full set of American bed furnishings exists today in its entirety. The curtains would go to one daughter, the back cloth to another, and so on. Bed covers fit into this decorative picture. Their patterns could be embroidered to match the bed hangings, elaborately quilted, or woven.

A tradition of woven woolen coverlets was already hundreds of years old in Europe when the first colonists set foot in America. As soon as they could, they sheared sheep, built looms and began weaving coverlets here.

Early looms were large, box-like affairs and home made. At first they were set up in the one room where all living took place. But as soon as circumstances gave her the chance, the housewife got the loom out of her living room. It took up too much space and its noise must have driven her to distraction.

WEAVERS WERE usually men whenever "odd spells and rainy seasons" freed them from their chores. It took muscle to operate those primitive looms.

Women didn't escape work though. They carded fleece, washed and dyed wool, and spun yarn. It took eight full-time spinners to keep up with one full-time weaver. Because the lady of the house was preoccupied with cook-



By
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ing, sewing, and child raising, it usually fell to the younger or older females in the house to do the spinning. They were therefore called "spinsters."

Many pounds of yarn were needed to warp the loom. A woman might walk up to 20 miles a day while spinning wool on a large spinning wheel. Not surprisingly, these were called "walking wheels."

Early coverlets woven of such home-produced yarns on a home-made loom were called "overshot." They were geometric, usually indigo blue and white, and always had a seam up the middle.

Overshot coverlets were cherished, not only for their color and pattern, but for the hours of hard work they represented. They were well made and some have lasted until today. Check your attic—you may own a treasure.

Consumer mailbag

How to learn of solar energy

Where can I get information on solar energy and how it relates to heating and cooling my home?

M.V., Redford Township
The National Solar Heating and Cooling Information Center, established by ERDA and HUD, will be happy to answer your questions about applications in solar energy home-building. They welcome inquiries from homeowners, builders, contractors, community planners, zoning officials, architects—in fact anyone concerned with housing. Write to them at P.O. Box 1697, Rockville, Maryland 20850.

Can you recommend some reading material on solar energy that the average non-technical individual can understand?

Lynn P., Livonia
Several good books on solar energy are available, either for purchase or through your library. The list includes "The Coming Age of Solar Energy," by D.S. Halsey, Jr., Harper & Row publishers; "Direct Use of the Sun's Energy," by F. Daniels, Ballantine Books, Inc.; "Solar Homes and Sun Heaters," by G. Daniels, Harper & Row, Inc.; and "Your Home's Solar Potential," by I. Spengler & M. Wells, Edmund Scientific Co.

How can I locate reputable manufacturers of solar energy equipment?

M.M., Troy
"Buying Solar" is a booklet offered by the president's office of consumer affairs. Write to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Consumer Affairs, 330 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, D.C. 20201. For a list of manufacturers in your area, write to Solar Energy Industries Assoc., 1001 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20036.

For Eco-Tip No. 7, Part III, Solar Energy, send 25 cents and a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Concern, Inc., Detroit, 1 Northfield Plaza, Troy, MI, 48068.

Concern welcomes your questions on consumer and environmental issues.

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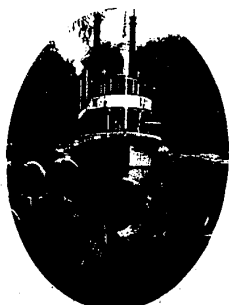
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