

COVERLET SAMPLERS

by MARGUERITE P. DAVIDSON

Every weaver knows how difficult it is to form new patterns for over-shot weaving, just as it is almost impossible for a musician to compose new melodies. This comparison is an apt one, because both have a limited base upon which to work, weaving drafts appear similar to a music score and the pattern of each is arrived at in much the same way. It might be interesting to try the sampler idea in music. It has produced some unique results in weaving.

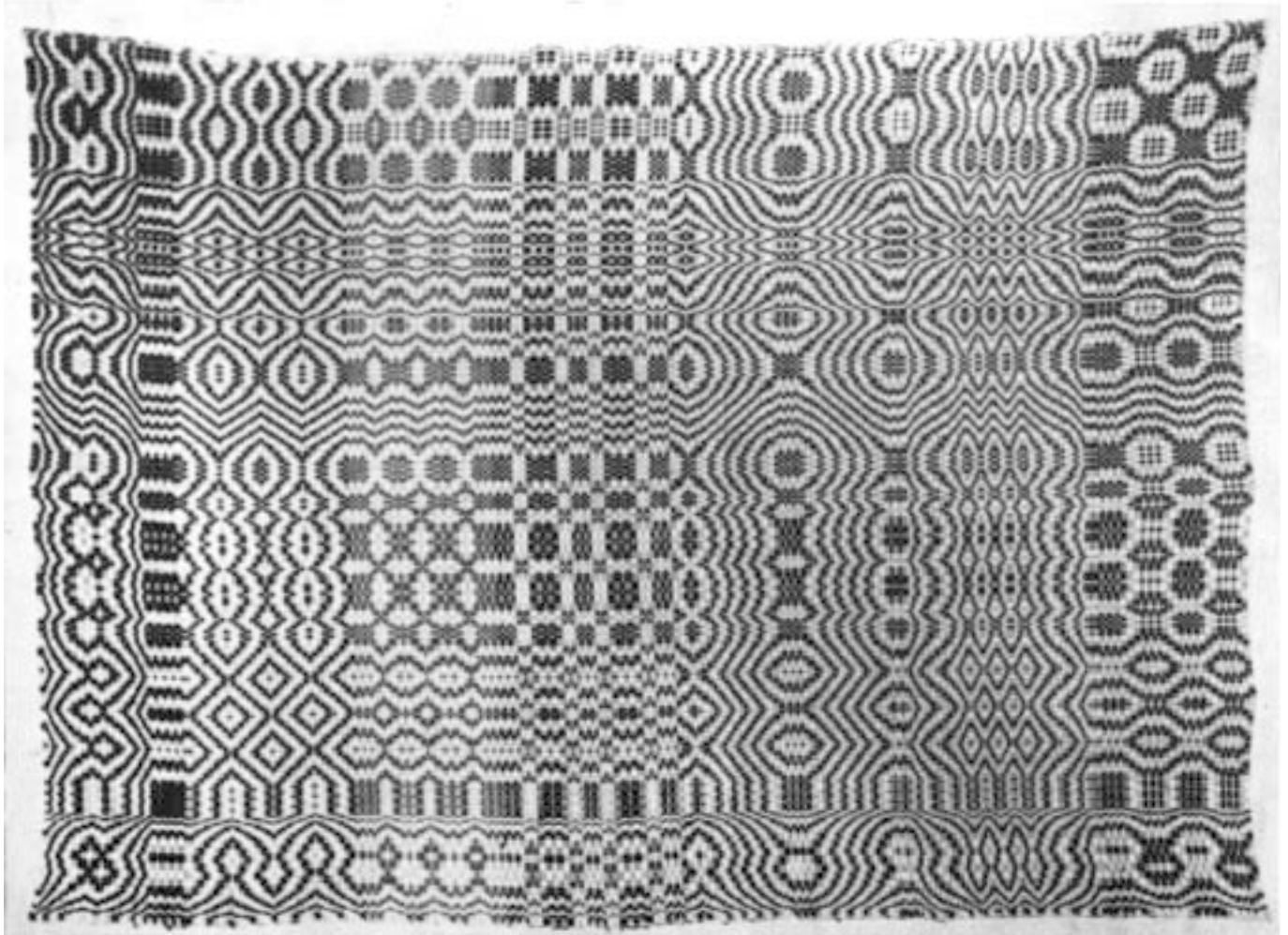
The suggestion for making these samplers came from a friend who is studying weaving in Switzerland. I have not seen her work, and when she wrote that she was setting in a number of designs and weaving them at the same time I did not see how it was possible, nor of what use it could be.

About this same time I received Lou Tate's Kentucky Coverlet Book, with its sixty beautiful old patterns. Coverlets have always fascinated me. I love to weave them and record the drafts; I like to study the combinations of borders and field and to work out irregular ones. I wonder that so many interesting combinations can be made with a few squares, and four combinations of treadles, aside from the personal story and romance in each one. They are a

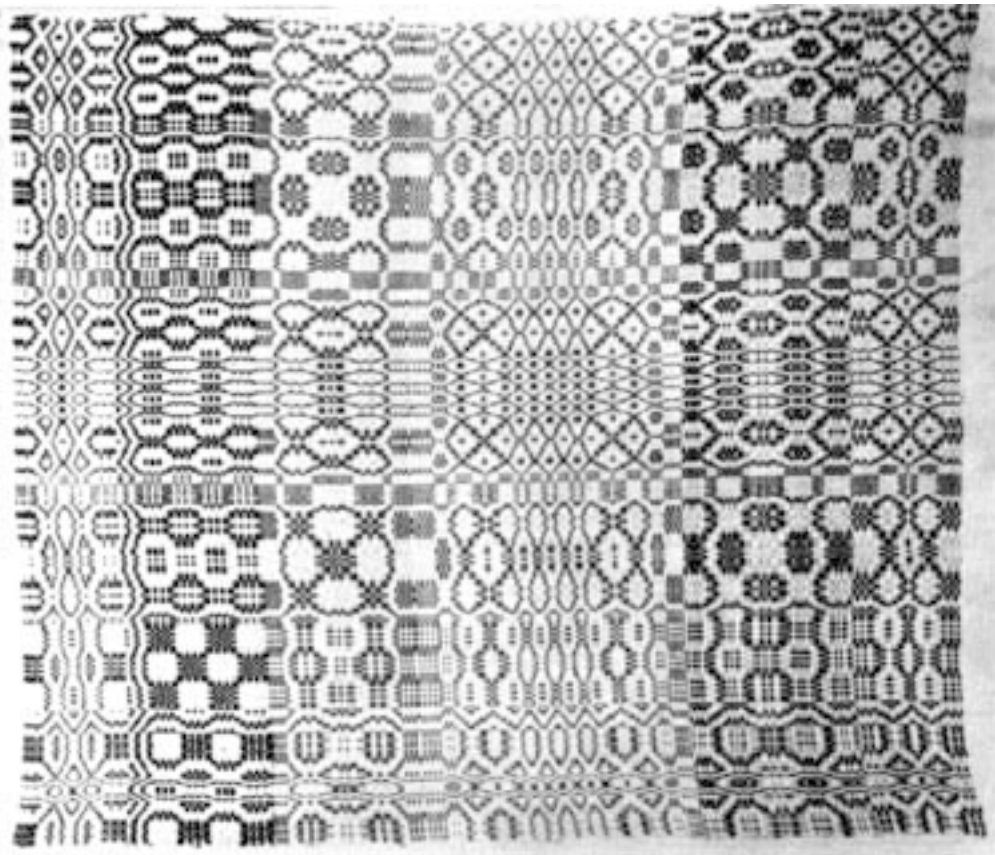
record of the innate beauty in the souls of those old weavers, whose lives held so much that was drudgery and sadness.

There never seems to be time to do all the coverlet weaving I wish and Lou Tate's book made me long to do them all and to see them before me in color. Then my friend's method came to mind, and I suddenly saw how I could do a number of them at once, using her sampler idea at the same time.

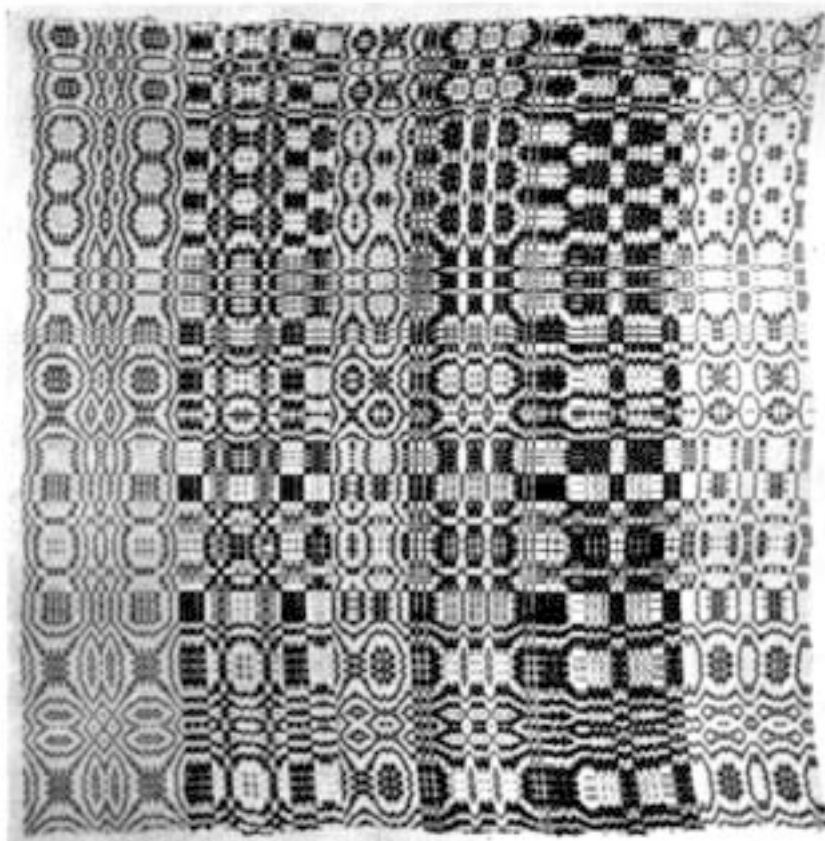
In looking over my "Weaver" and "Handicrafter" magazines, I now find the sampler idea is not a new one. Fred L. Copp, in the December-January number of 1932-33, gives some interesting variations of well known patterns developed "by drawing in three or four patterns, and then weaving them in order." He, however, developed whole blocks; weaving none of them as drawn in, but giving an original variation to each in turn, as I understand his article. In weaving my samplers, I did each as drawn in, and let the hybrid turn out as it would, starting with only the true draft of each, and having no idea what the result would be. Mr. Copp developed some very interesting squares and complete patterns. In my work, I seem to have more accidentals; so I am presenting the accompanying samplers for what they may be worth.



FIRST SAMPLER



SECOND SAMPLER



THIRD SAMPLER

I had on my loom a coverlet warp of a thousand and sixty odd threads. I divided this into six parts and it gave a hundred and seventy-six threads for each pattern, with some for selvages.

Selecting six typical patterns that would be complete in this number of threads, was a tantalizing task in itself. I finally took, first a quarter of the "Flourishing Wave" design, as I have woven many "Blooming Leaf" variations, and this was an addition to that collection. Then I used a section of the "Double Diamonds", as it does not appear among coverlet patterns, as often as one would expect from its simplicity. Next, I took a detail from the many "Snowball" patterns, using the two weavings of this draft. I selected "Wheel of Fortune" because I wanted a record of this draft, yet I doubt if I shall ever weave a coverlet of that "wheely" pattern. It seems too much of a good thing, except in a collection of many coverlets: I had just finished a "Governor's Garden"; because I admire this pattern, though I already had a record of it, I put it in my sampler, because the one illustrated had a different leaf corner design. Last I wanted a small block design, so I selected the unnamed simple pattern on page eighteen.

With these six designs threaded, and a selvege on the left and right, I wove first the "Flourishing Wave" according to its draft. The other five patterns had to follow this treadling, of course, and the illustration shows the outcome of this. Next I wove the "Double Diamonds" pattern according to its draft, and the remaining patterns assumed that treadling—and so forth with all the drafts in turn, giving two weavings to the "Snowball" pattern.

Before weaving this cross section of Lou Tate's collection, I had no idea I would get more than a weird jumble with a streak of sanity where each draft received its own treadling. The proving of these drafts was to be my reward for labor done. But as I proceeded, combinations kept popping out at me so fast, and were so fascinating that I could hardly work fast enough, and I forgot the world and family and duties, until I had finished all the designs and cut the sampler off and hung it where I could gaze upon it, and wonder at the outcome. I can see combinations there I am sure do not appear in any coverlets. The "Flourishing Wave" adapted itself to every treadling and will make a beautiful border. The "Double Diamonds" make interesting patterns to be used in stripes and borders.

I had used a different colored yarn for each pattern, so as to distinguish them from one another, yet I made selections that would harmonize;—brown at the top and bottom, soft green, rust, grayblue, and a dark oatmeal tan, with a combination of brown, rust and green in one of the "Snowball" treadlings, so the sampler is also pleasing as a panel on my weaving room wall, besides being a study in treadling.

The success of this experiment made me immediately turn to my book of unproven drafts, which I have collected for years in my wanderings, some of which I have forgotten what the weavings were like. From this sampler I did not get as many usable patterns, but it did put into tangible shape these doubtful ideas in my file, and it was a satisfaction to be able to work out six at once.

The first pattern was the "Queen Ann's Lace", which is unique and may be used for small all-over work. Next

was a block design from an old coverlet which my mother got in Berea, and proves to be almost the same as the small pattern from Lou Tate's book. The Berea coverlet had a variation of the twill border. Next was an extract from another coverlet of my mother's, which proves to be something of a "Single Chariot Wheel". It had a "Blooming Leaf" border, and was very well balanced, yet different from any of the wheel series that I can find in my books. I had recorded the draft of a coverlet, owned by the Hancock family of Hancock County, Kentucky:—a very good one that has been in their possession for over a hundred years. I find a similar one among Lou Tate's collection. It is unnamed by her but belongs to the "Governor's Garden" "Double Muscadine Hulls" family. While in Oklahoma, I saw a coverlet eighty-one inches wide without a seam, made from wool grown by a wealthy Indian living near Eufala, and sent to Ohio to be spun, dyed and woven. It was in two shades of brown and I was unable to name it at the time, but recorded the draft. It has the "Chariot Wheels" and roses of "Whig Rose" and a joining field. It is just the pattern I need for a two color coverlet, exceedingly good in seal brown and rust. Last, I put in a section of "Sun, Moon and Stars" to get the cross joining.

The colors of this panel are the same as the first, to separate the patterns, but in different sequence, and the same method of weaving was employed as in the first sampler.

The little "Queen Ann's Lace" makes most interesting variations, but I am sorry I did not include a border design to see how it would adapt itself to the different treadlings. This I would do another time.

Living as I do near Philadelphia, where the fine collection of coverlets and the John Landes and Speck designs are in the Museum of Art, it is only natural that I should put extracts from these coverlets into my next sampler. These coverlets are merely numbered, no attempt being made to name the patterns. Many have no counterparts in books, "Star of the Sea" is one of the exceptions, so I am merely calling them by numbers. Number Five is one of the designs in the John Landes book, and Number Six is the "Star of the Sea". The rest are self explanatory and each has a story of its own. I wished that my warp was wider so that I could show all of each of them, but will develop more than one as time passes and I have opportunity to do so.

The first sampler, which had the same number of threads for each pattern, was most successful, but in the other two I had patterns in each one which were difficult to divide.

At least I have proven to my own satisfaction the worth of this way of recording a number of drafts as painlessly as possible, and in addition have received a number of hints of new patterns for upholstery and borders both wide and small. Also from these proofs the drafts for coverlet weaving can be enlarged, being sure that the combinations are right.

I offer them as a suggestion to other weavers who may not have used this method and who have the same problems of accumulated ideas, and lack the time to prove their practicability.