Uncoverings 1994

Volume 15 of
the Research Papers of
the American Quilt Study Group

Edited by Virginia Gunn

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Weaving Cloth and Marketing Nostalgia
Clinch Valley Blanket Mills, 1890–1950
Cedar Bluff, Virginia

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The story of the Clinch Valley Blanket Mills, located in southwest Virginia from 1890 to 1950, reveals an interesting aspect of the Arts and Crafts Revival in Southern Appalachia. The company, owned and operated by C. E. Goodwin and his four sons, served as model of clever marketing, crafts revival, and quality workmanship. Goodwin used local labor and materials to weave on looms powered by water, steam, and electricity. He avoided revealing his factory production capacity and focused on selling a concept of tradition. With innate merchandising skills, the Goodwin family capitalized on the demand for colonial style textiles to successfully sell products in distinctly different markets, influencing the public's attitude toward Appalachian weaving for over sixty years.

Introduction

In discussing the colonial-revival theme in American material culture, it is easy to assume that the Appalachian region was part and parcel of the rest of the country's outlook and emergence into the twentieth century. The Appalachian region, however, has always been distinctly different and must be analyzed for its own unique qualities and geographical limitations. Even after the turn of the century, much of the region remained ex-

tremely remote and rural. With a total population of over five million, more than four million lived in rural communities, and only 73 of the 255 mountain counties (in the Russell Sage Foundation defined region) contained incorporated communities of more than 2,500 people.[1] Wealthier land owners traveled, with their families, to major northern cities and abroad, buying the latest clothing and home decorating fashions. The average person had no such opportunity. It was primarily these ordinary people who continued the handwork traditions of their forefathers into the twentieth century.

Quilting was a part of life for many Appalachian women. Few could afford, or had access to, the finer fabrics used to applique and piece the more glamorous quilts featured in magazines and catalogs of the day. Most quilts were pieced from left-over clothing scraps into traditional patterns, and quilted or tied for everyday bedding. Appalachian women also wove on family hand looms, using home grown wool, flax, "bale" cotton, and inexpensive packaged dyes. They made fabric for towels, sheets, shirts, pants, table linens, and blankets. They used scraps of woven fabric to piece linsey quilts for general family use.[2] But the greatest pride of the handweaver in Appalachia has always been the "overshot" four-harness coverlet. Excellent examples of these coverlets remain in families as treasured heirlooms handed down from generation to generation. There were easier ways to keep warm and cheaper bedcoverings available, but the artistic handcrafter continued to follow the weaving traditions of her foremother well past 1900. Coverlet weaving was an art expression that took considerable time and talent to accomplish and Appalachian women never stopped weaving for their families, as did women in other parts of the country.[3]

Twentieth-century periodicals tended to feature quilts rather than focus on coverlets, although both types of bedcoverings were appropriate for fashionable bedrooms decorated in the colonial-revival style. Weaving was not something that could be done in the parlor, on a woman's lap, or at a social gathering. The woven pattern drafts and materials needed to assemble a coverlet could not be sold in a kit or explained in a "how to"

magazine article. In other words, editors looking to sell magazines were not apt to write about coverlet weaving as a new project for the homemaker.

The spinning wheel frequently appeared in pictures depicting colonial life, but rarely in association with weavers. More often, the spinning wheel was shown in pictures of women quilting or as part of an overall home scene. The spinning wheel, to this day, gives us a warm feeling of home and hearth. While not all women in the twentieth century were weavers, just as not all women were quilters, some of the same women who had an affinity for quilting were also accomplished at spinning and weaving.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Appalachian arts and crafts became a commodity to sell outside the region, a pattern influenced by the activities of the settlement schools organized by social reformers and surveyors like John C. and Edith Dame Campbell and Allen Eaton. Both the Campbells and Eaton worked for the Russell Sage Foundation, founded in 1909 and instrumental in supporting the development of an indigenous Arts and Crafts movement in Appalachia.[4] Allen Eaton's Department of Art and Social Work was also funded by the Russell Sage Foundation.[5] This type of "outsider" defined the mountain crafts revival and developed sales markets beyond the local level.[6]

In an effort to tap into the emerging markets for handmade crafts, early production weavers sold the concept of overshot coverlet weaving as "old timey" mountain cloth. Beyond the mountains, this handwoven style of bedcovering had always taken a back seat to quilts, jacquard coverlets, and imported fabrics used for bedding.[7] The Clinch Valley Blanket Mills, for one, hoped that, with proper marketing, northerners might want to purchase the woven coverlets to replicate the colonial era coming back in style.

There has always been a certain mystery about the mountain people and their unusual, "backward" way of life. This case study of one company's colorful background, woven fabric, marketing intrigue, and close affiliation to the Arts and Crafts Revival in the Southern Highlands will show how certain marketing cre-

ativity generated interest in and sales of "Colonial Reproduction" coverlets. The story of the Clinch Valley Blanket Mills is told by a community where lives were improved by their association with the mill. Brochures and newspaper articles tell the marketing tale, and family legend fills in the rest.[8]

Overview

The Clinch Valley Blanket Mills, a small weaving company owned and operated by C. E. Goodwin and his four sons, was a model of clever marketing, crafts revival, and quality workmanship from 1890 to 1950. It had a profound effect on the economic life of Tazewell County and the town of Cedar Bluff, Virginia, located in the Blue Ridge Highlands region of the Southern Appalachian mountains. Three generations of one family, working during the industrialization of the textile industry in the United States, used a marketing slant which influenced the way "outsiders" perceived mountain craftsmen and the quality of their work to the present day. Unraveling the history of the Clinch Valley Blanket Mills also gives us a broader picture of women's domestic life in this rural setting during the first half of the twentieth century. Analyzing the fabric they treasured, stored, displayed, and passed from mother to daughter helps us understand where women found employment, how they decorated their homes, and their contribution to the production of this small textile mill.This fabric provides the physical evidence of a rich textile history in southwest Virginia that is worth remembering.

The Story that became a Marketing Tool

The following tale of how the Goodwin family came to this country is a romantic story, believed to be true by the family descendents. The story is used time and again to weave a yarn of romance, intertwining fact and fiction in order to sell the fabric. To fully understand how this story was used for marketing strat-

egy in the twentieth century, we must examine the beginning of the saga.

In 1837 young James Cash Goodwin lived in Bolton, England and attended a military academy. While home for a visit, he was falsely accused of cutting his father's prized roses; and the heated argument that ensued caused James to pack his belongings and board a ship for America. During the voyage, the ship sank in a winter storm and James floated in the Atlantic holding on to his trunk of possessions. After three days, he was rescued by a ship out of Glasgow, Scotland. On this ship, James met a lass named Jane Dowee. They were young and impetuous and by the end of the crossing, they were married. James told Jane that his father was in the silk weaving business in England and that he had some training in the industry. James never admitted to contacting his family again. When he received a letter from the family solicitor in England, many years later, he burned it unopened.[9]

After his marriage, James worked in various jobs unrelated to textiles, but by the mid-1800s, he was in the weaving business in Hollywood, West Virginia. It is unclear if James held the position of owner, manager, or weaver in this first mill; nonetheless, James's son, Charles Eugene Goodwin, followed in the trade. By the late 1880s, Charles Eugene, called C. E., was running textile operations in Tennessee and in Cedar Bluff, Virginia. Wherever he lived, Goodwin ran mills for absentee owners or leased idle mills to set up his own weaving operations (see figure 1).[10]

Different Mills, Different Locations

At this point the family story becomes factual and better recorded. In 1908, C. E. Goodwin left Cedar Bluff and moved his wife and eight children to Cumberland Gap, Tennessee, to open yet another mill. The Cumberland Gap Woolen Mill wove blankets, yard goods, and coverlets priced at two for five dollars.[11] In 1911, sixteen-year-old Carl Estep worked in the mill on a

small power loom weaving yard-wide red flannel. Carl received four cents an hour for a ten-hour day.[12] Goodwin's four sons, Jim, Jake, John, and Ras, all held instrumental positions in running the various family operations. By 1914, at least three of Goodwin's sons were back in Cedar Bluff; and by 1916, Goodwin left both the Harriman and Cumberland Gap, Tennessee, mills for good, and consolidated all operations in Cedar Bluff, Virginia.

There has always been a great deal of confusion about the names and dates of ownership relating to the two woolen mills in Cedar Bluff. The Cedar Bluff Woolen Mill, a wool carding business, was owned by Thomas A. McGuire and his brother, Ed, who operated a store in West Virginia. T. A. McGuire hired various managers to run the mill equipment, but he personally signed the wool purchasing receipts and kept the books. Thomas M. Scott came to Cedar Bluff in the 1830s and founded the Scott Bros. Klondyke Cotton and Woolen Mill to manufacture blankets. After Scott's death in 1886, his brothers hired C. E. Goodwin to run the mill. Goodwin was living in West Virginia where he had already established his reputation as an expert textile mechanic. He moved his family, including his father, James Cash Goodwin, to Cedar Bluff and began his employment running the operation at the Scott Bros. Klondyke Cotton and Woolen Mill. As a result of letters recently discovered, the author believes that the McGuire brothers purchased the Klondyke Cotton and Woolen Mill from the Scott family about 1901, probably just after the 1901 flood that brought the Clinch river fifteen feet out of its banks. These same letters indicate that Goodwin worked for McGuire in the Cedar Bluff Woolen Mill at different times between 1888 and 1915. Goodwin's somewhat complicated involvement in the two textile operations in Cedar Bluff is intermingled with mill owner's personalities, wool prices, floods, death, and property bought and sold; but it is now evident that T. A. McGuire negotiated the sale of both mills to C. E. Goodwin in 1916. Even though there is no record of mill ownership by Goodwin prior to 1916, his influence was a major

Figure 1. Klondyke Cotton and Woolen Mill, Cedar Bluff, Virginia, circa 1900. Charles Eugene Goodwin, sixth from left. Personal collection of the author.

Figure 2. C. E. Goodwin's four sons, Ras, Jake, Jim, John (left to right), circa 1920. Personal collection of the author.

factor in the Cedar Bluff woolen business from before 1890 until the mill closed in 1950.

When the entire Goodwin family moved back to Cedar Bluff to take over the newly purchased mills, each son and son-in-law had a clearly defined area of expertise (see figure 2). Jim ran the business office; Jake processed the wool; John became overall production manager; and Ras dyed the wool and was in charge of maintenance on buildings and equipment. In July 1924, the smaller mill burned, leaving only a shell of the original building.[13] Goodwin moved all his equipment to his other mill just up the river, a larger facility that enabled him to expand his operation. His sons, Jake and Ras, took over the burned mill to set up a fire alarm manufacturing business, applying for a patent on their invention. Even though only one mill produced fabric, both were owned by the family, and the combined operations were called the Clinch Valley Blanket Mills. After the fire alarm business failed, this name remained, giving the impression that the company had more than one weaving mill.

In 1892, while Goodwin was working for the Scott brothers, he installed the first power looms and used the flowing water of the nearby Clinch River to turn carding-machine cylinders, propel spinning machines, and activate the looms. The use of steam and electricity followed, until a combination of all three power sources was used to increase production. At different times during the next sixty years the mill employed from 30 to 120 workers. It used factory spun cotton and commercial dyes shipped in by train, and processed, "in house," huge quantities of wool from seven surrounding Virginia counties and nearby states.

To understand the whole story of the Clinch Valley Blanket Mills, one must analyze two distinctly different aspects of the mill's production. During World War I and World War II, the mill worked three shifts a day to supply goods for soldiers. During peacetime, it marketed "colonial days" nostalgia to sell fashionable coverlets and blankets. In both cases the Clinch Valley Blanket Mills played an important part in community life and people found it a good place to work.

Community Involvement

The "blanket mill," as it was locally called, had been an important industry in rural Tazewell County since its early ownership by the Scott family. Nearly everyone in Tazewell County had a family member who worked for the mill, did the hand-finish work at home, traded or sold wool to the mill, or supplied coal to keep the furnaces going. Numerous levels of interaction between work and community deeply rooted this mill into the lives of its citizens for generations. It provided desperately needed employment for young women with husbands at war, widows trying to support a family, men getting first jobs, and farmers needing cash. The mill's need for raw materials spun its influence into the lives of farmers and their families in all surrounding states. In the Blue Ridge Highlands, families stayed on the land and helped each other during hard times. Most of the young people had a strong commitment to the land their forefathers

had settled; and family ties were honored in this close-knit, clannish society. Until World War II took the young men off the land, life had changed little, and most people liked it that way.

Employees still recall interesting and humorous aspects about day to day life working at the mill. They knew what color wool the mill was dyeing by the color of the Clinch River that day. Sons and daughters of farmers had the disagreeable job of shearing the sheep that died in the field. Since nothing was wasted, the wool from a dead sheep was too valuable to ignore. Local women used "side cut" scraps from the mill blankets to weave throw rugs on hand looms in their homes. Some employees still reminisce about Jake Goodwin's devilish pranks and silly jokes or about Ras Goodwin's time-saving inventions. Jake frequently brought snakes in the carding room during the third shift; or put fish in the bobbin box. He loved to stand in the doorway of the dye house and cast his fishing line into the river.[14] Ras invented a system of lights that flashed when the looms were running and the phone rang in the business office located on the floor above.

Today men and women still remember the excitement of riding to the mill with a load of wool, or recall their own employment running the "mule," quillers, and looms or inspecting blankets and shipping finished goods. John Ireson was the mill superintendent from 1902 until his death in 1912, working primarily on steam powered spinning machines and quillers. His daughter, Kathleen, remembers riding the quiller frame back and forth as a youngster. After Ireson's sudden death, his wife Eliza supported her two children by working in the mill making warps.[15]

Wool to Buy or Trade

Kathleen Ireson married McKinley Lambert in 1929. Lambert's father sold all his wool supply to the mill when, once a year, the company wagon came to their farm in remote Bland County, Virginia. The mill gathered wool from farms in Virginia, West

Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee by horse or ox-drawn wagon in the early days. The wagon sometimes traveled in dry creek beds to reach farms inaccessible by road. Later, trucks pulled the wagons across the region. Piled high with finished coverlets and blankets when they left the mill, the "big wool wagons" traded wool for goods or purchased the wool outright.[16] When trading for wool, Goodwin used the basis of working "one-half for the other." That is, two all-wool blankets were exchanged for twenty-five pounds of clear grease wool. The mill obtained enough wool to return two blankets to the wool seller and to dispose of two more for cash, thereby providing operating capi-

Figure 3. Wool wagon used to gather sheep's wool, circa 1912. Bill Waldron, Ras Goodwin, Nita Ascue, Ida Goodwin, Jake Goodwin, Lena Goodwin Honaker, Walter Thacker, Gladys Goodwin Harman, Jim Goodwin (left to right). Children not identified. Personal collection of the author.

tal.[17] All the wool was graded for quality and traded or purchased accordingly. In the mill, employees scoured, cleaned, carded, spun, and dyed the wool before weaving began.

It is important to understand the significance of the "wool wagon" to regional farmers (see figure 3). McKinley Lambert's ability to sell his wool to a nearby mill was typical of hundreds of farmers across the region. In all my research of woven coverlets, I have rarely met anyone over the age of forty, from Southwest Virginia or an adjoining state, who did not have a relative or an acquaintance who traded wool to the mill.

When times were hard and wool prices were low, farmers traded all their wool for coverlets and blankets to furnish bedding to their extended family or to put away for the next generation. Even in good times, many families used a little wool in trade for finished goods. The woven goods were not only functional and warm, but beautiful as well. Without the "trade," most families could not have afforded such luxurious items. The mill-woven items became prized wedding gifts and baby presents. These household linens were especially desirable since the giver usually had some association with the weaver or a worker involved in their production. Since southwest Virginians are notorious pack rats and genealogists, they rarely pass their heirlooms out of the immediate family. These coverlets and blankets still remain with owners who regard them as treasured keepsakes. Coverlets in this region, whether handwoven or mill woven, still have the same sentimental value as handmade quilts.[18]

Owners and Employees Lives Intertwine in a Mill Town

Goodwin family members built their houses on a jointly owned tract of land along the river and on the mountain above the mill. Daughters and daughters-in-law did much of the mill's finish work in their homes. In the mill and in the home, trading finished goods for services rendered was an accepted practice, and allowed all to benefit in a cash poor society. Sometimes Goodwin women traded coverlets for a permanent at the "Toots"

Beauty Shop in nearby Richlands. Kate McDilda, Ras Goodwin's mother-in-law, used mill yarn to weave colorful placemats and table runners on her hand loom, and sold her work in the mill showroom. Vicie Goodwin, John's wife, made delicious meals to feed young women working in the inspection room or charged them twenty-five cents for a hot lunch served in her home. John and Vicie frequently allowed newly hired young employees from nearby farming communities to board with them until they found housing. During the war years, local citizens made extra money by boarding young women from West Virginia and Kentucky who came to work in the mill. Often, this was the first time these young people had been away from home or held a paying job.[19]

As C. E. Goodwin advanced in age, the mill's ownership passed on to his four sons. Owners and employees worked long hours, side by side, in a trade that was arduous and dirty. Strong chemical-dye solutions and cotton dust caused health problems for some. The winter months usually saw orders decline, and the mill profits had to feed and clothe many family members.

The War Years

Under government contract, the Clinch Valley Blanket Mills wove thousands of wool U. S. Army blankets shipped overseas during both world wars. The mill wove the lining for army sleeping bags, puttees (gaiters) for World War I soldiers, maroon and navy afghans for the Royal Air Force, and wool blankets for the "Bundles for Britain" shipments used in homefront air raid shelters.[20] John Goodwin enlisted during World War I, but the military considered him too valuable to the production of army blankets and sent him home after basic training.

During World War II the mill used about 1,400 pounds of wool to turn out 320 blankets a day.[21] The government contract called for strict quality control and security measures. Jim Lacy came from eastern Virginia to be sure all government requirements were met. He had a tall wire fence erected around the mill and a guard stationed at the gate. All this seemed a little

silly to the local residents who did not think there was much danger of a spy coming to infiltrate a mill in southwest Virginia. Lacy was also instrumental in getting the first indoor bathroom installed in the mill, an improvement long remembered by the female employees.

Wives and daughters of servicemen picked the burrs out of wool blankets and used a special paint to put a big "U. S." in the corner of the olive drab blankets. The mill employed 120 people working twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week to meet the contract demands. In 1941, Thelma Lowe worked five days a week at $2.00 per day. Out of her weekly $10.00, the mill deducted 10¢ for social security tax, $1.50 for insurance, and 25¢ for a hot meal, making her weekly take-home pay $8.15. Thelma considered $10.00 a week "big money," since she could buy a beautiful dress for $2.00. She never got a raise while at the mill from 1941 to 1944, when she married and moved to North Carolina. In 1993 Thelma recalled her employment at the mill, noting, "I did work one time on the 3-to-11 shift. All of us took a turn doing our duty for our soldiers by working at night. They desperately needed the blankets." In a region that offered little employment opportunity for women, this money made farm payments and put food on the table. Thelma's father worked in the mill in the 1930s and her brother also worked there for a time. Often two generations of one family looked to the mill for employment.[22]

Peace Time Sales

In peace time, the mill wove colonial coverlets, lap robes for horse drawn buggies and automobiles, table linens, baby blankets, tweeds, and portieres. It also sold smaller items such as dresser scarves, luncheon sets and table mats, pillow covers, two-ply knitting yarn, and yardage in coverlet patterns (see figure 4). Mill brochures show this coverlet fabric yardage made into a fashionable winter coat and used for upholstery (see figure 5).

From 1929 to 1940, Virginia Wingo Dickenson, nicknamed Tommy, managed the office for James Goodwin. Tommy's husband, Rufus, also worked briefly at the mill between jobs. For forty dollars a month, Tommy kept the books, boxed coverlets for shipping to customers in the United States and abroad, and recorded the purchase of raw wool. She remembers that poorer quality wool was woven into blankets and sold as "seconds" and that in the early years, shipments of fifteen to twenty coverlets were considered large orders.[23]

The mill wove blankets in a variety of weaves including twill, basket-weave plaid, hounds tooth called "star plaid," and plain with striped borders (see figure 6). The colors and sizes coincided with the coverlets woven in the same time period.

Coverlets were woven in twin, full, day bed, and crib size, depending on the pattern. Colors varied with the fashion of the day, the dyes available, and the taste and talent of the dyer. Very strange color combinations have surfaced. They probably reflect experiments with new dyes, odd custom orders, or the use of remnant dye lots. It is interesting to note that all the Goodwin men were color blind, which may also account for some unusual color combinations. Goodwin watched home-decorating trends outside the region and dyed some goods the current fashion colors to satisfy the tastes of distant wholesalers. A 1930s mill brochure lists the colors available as "navy blue, jade, rose, red, Colonial red, orange, orchid or yellow on white: or in combinations of any two of the above mentioned colors on white."[24]

The mill produced seven coverlet patterns on a regular basis. Some designs featured an elaborate border on all four sides, some had no border. In double weave style, Goodwin chose the Lover's Knot with Pine Tree Border and Woodbury, also called Goodwin's Lover's Knot (see figure 7). Patterns woven in "overshot" (the style of weaving most common to handweavers in the Appalachian mountains) included Morning Star, Olive Leaf (sometimes called Hickory Leaf), Rings and Flowers, Snail's Trail, and Whig Rose (see figures 8-11). The company also designed

Figure 4. Clinch Valley Blanket Mill brochure, page 13, circa 1935. Personal collection of the author.

Figure 5. Clinch Valley Blanket Mill brochure, page 12, circa 1930. Personal collection of the author.

Figure 6. Star Plaid and Basket Weave blanket patterns (left to right). Blankets loaned for photography by Dorothy Spracher and Kathryn Beattie.

Figure 7. Promotional hand-out distributed to retail stores. Personal collection of the author.

Figure 8. Morning Star pattern. Collection of Historic Crab Orchard Museum, Tazewell, Virginia.

Figure 9. Olive Leaf pattern (also called Hickory Leaf). Collection of Historic Crab Orchard Museum, Tazewell, Virginia.

Figure 10. Rings and Flowers pattern. Collection of Historic Crab Orchard Museum, Tazewell, Virginia.

Figure 11. Whig Rose pattern in a two-color combination. Collection of Historic Crab Orchard Museum, Tazewell, Virginia.

Figure 12. Promotional flyer used by St. Clair & Archer, Inc., Staunton, Virginia, agents for Clinch Valley Blanket Mills coverlets. Personal collection of the author.

the Sun, Moon & Stars pattern for the "Nancy Harlow" Collection. Some of the Clinch Valley Blanket Mills patterns can be recognized by other names used by handweavers.

Coverlet pattern names remind us of quilt patterns, but, when comparing the two, it is hard to see the similarity. The Whig Rose is both a coverlet pattern and a quilt pattern. Historically, women named their handwork for the world around them and Goodwin adopted these familiar names for his weaving. It is understandable that the use of words like rose, star, sun, and wheel occurs in both coverlet and quilt patterns.[25]

The Whig Rose pattern has been copied over and over in a variety of expensive and inexpensive woven items. This single

pattern has come to be regarded by the average customer as "the most authentic pattern to buy," or "the original coverlet pattern" (see figure 12). It seems plausible to believe that this notion is primarily due to the quantity of Whig Rose coverlets sold by the Clinch Valley Blanket Mills. The mill had tremendous influence on the buying public, often uncertain of the difference between hand weaving and production weaving.

Marketing Strategy

To market the coverlets and other household linens, Goodwin avoided revealing his factory production capacity, which amounted to 12,000 coverlets annually in 1941, and focused on selling a concept of tradition.[26] While using modern equipment of the day, Goodwin marketed the nostalgic idea of old women spinning and weaving in remote mountain cabins. His logo depicted a woman dressed in colonial fashion sitting in a windsor arm chair spinning on a flax wheel (see figure 13). He told "the story" of his silk weaving background in England, using terms like "my great grandfather's weave shed" and giving lengthy de-

Figure 13. Letterhead for stationery. Center logo used for labels. Personal collection of the author.

scriptions of his faithful adherence to the handwoven coverlets of a bygone era.

Goodwin sold his production in a variety of markets, and through sales agencies located in Staunton, Virginia; Bloomfield, Illinois; and other states. The mill published a small catalog for direct mail-order sales and occasionally sent out flyers promoting new items.

In all instances, Goodwin made little mention of the commercially spun cotton yarn that he purchased from northern factories and used for his warps and as the "binding pick" in the coverlets. He did not mention the dyes, shipped in large barrels, which were made of synthetic materials instead of vegetable matter gathered locally.

C. E. Goodwin became interested in saving the art of coverlet weaving when he first came to Cedar Bluff. After he purchased the mills in 1916, he concentrated on developing reproduction coverlet patterns to weave on power looms. His son, John, kept one hand loom in the mill for "playing around on," experimenting with various pattern drafts.[27] C. E. also wove on the hand loom for personal pleasure.

Over the years, C. E. and John devoted time and energy to collecting antique pattern drafts for overshot coverlet weaving. Newspaper articles told about father and son going into the community to borrow handwoven coverlets and pattern drafts to determine size and weight and copy to the smallest detail. Numerous publicity stories about the family members and their work discuss in detail the three hundred antique pattern drafts collected over many years and carefully reproduced in the mill. Each time the story is just a little different. One article notes, "As the fame of the Goodwin project grew, people throughout the country made contributions to the collection of 'drafts'–sending small scraps of tattered coverlets, sketches extracted from horsehair trunks, and family patterns passed down like recipes from mother to daughter to granddaughter."[28]

When the Goodwin's returned a draft, they supposedly gave the owner the first coverlet woven in that pattern in appreciation. This seems unlikely, however, since only eight patterns were

ever in regular production. The mill rarely changed its designs. The only evidence of unusual patterns was the work of a weaver who mixed pattern draft chains or made a border block over and over throughout the piece. Occasionally, one of the family members wove a "one-of-a-kind" piece on a production loom, using a pattern draft already drawn in, with a different treadling pattern.[29] The collection of antique pattern drafts (still kept by the family) actually numbered less than thirty-eight.

Most coverlets woven on nineteenth-century "barn" looms were made in two or three strips and sewn together to get a piece wide enough to cover the bed. It is nearly impossible for a person to hand throw a shuttle, with any accuracy, farther than forty-five inches; and the average width was between twenty-six and thirty-five inches. Most advertising suggests that Goodwin created the first seamless coverlets, appealing to northern buyers who did not like that "unsightly" seam down the middle.

Good Publicity or Stretching the Truth

Goodwin consistently emphasized his ties to the handweavers' craft of yesteryear. One newspaper article reports that, "Such a stickler for authenticity is he that he has unwoven old coverlets to get the grain weight of the yarns used in them, and the number and kinds of twist to the inch. He puts exactly the same number of threads in his reproductions that he finds in the originals."[30] Goodwin, himself, bragged that, "The weaving is the work of our craftsmen who have spent years in the study of their art."[31] The reality is that Goodwin was a production weaver whose livelihood was based on keeping his looms running at maximum capacity with orders enough to sell his production. Goodwin set up his warps at forty ends per inch, regardless of the pattern, and hired men and women who learned to weave for the first time when they went to work in the mill.

Newspapers published articles full of information provided by Goodwin, emphasizing who bought the mill's coverlets and his personal contribution to the art of coverlet weaving. Was

the dowager Queen Mary of England really given a navy blue, red, and white coverlet in the Lover's Knot pattern by Lady Nancy Astor? When Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt came to the White Top Festival, did she order eight coverlets to use in the White House? Did Mrs. John Nance Garner, the Vice-President's wife, order two coverlets in 1939?[32] One article stated that Mrs. John Goodwin helped Eliza Calvert Hall with the research for her book, *A Book of Hand-woven Coverlets*, published by Little, Brown and Company in 1912.[33] In fact, Mrs. John Goodwin (Vicie) would have been twelve years old when Eliza Calvert Hall published her book. Over and over the fabric and the fiction seem to be so entwined that the thread of truth is forever lost, or perhaps the confusion is the real story. In time, the family story, combined with the effort to save a lost craft, became the foundation for a marketing slant that sold coverlets and blankets.

Setting the Stage for Confusing the Public

The Clinch Valley Blanket Mills marketing "story" continues to influence the way outsiders view mountain crafts and mountain craftsmen even today, more than a hundred years after Charles Eugene Goodwin came to Cedar Bluff. To clarify this mill's contribution to the textile industry, and relate it to a broad picture of nationwide perception and marketing, we must first examine the background of what was happening to the handweaver's market during the same period and analyze how the mill's marketing distracted the buying public.

For most of the nineteenth century, handmade items were the necessities and pride of the mountain people. By 1890, however, many of the craft skills had been put aside and forgotten as factory items became more available and desirable. About 1893 the stirrings of a handicraft revival began in Berea, Kentucky, and Asheville, North Carolina. The newly elected president of Berea College, Dr. William Goodell Frost, noticed the interesting woven bedcoverings used in local cabins. He believed

that the college could preserve the handwork of an earlier period and find new markets for the idle mountain looms. With few old timers to teach the new generation, it took awhile to renew the art of coverlet weaving. In 1896, the first Homespun Fair held in Berea, Kentucky, provided opportunity for young students to compare their work to the old coverlets.[34]

More than thirty years after the first revival of Southern Highlands handicrafts, the crafts centers in Kentucky, North Carolina, and Tennessee united to improve their crafts and use the marketing advantage of a cooperative effort. Weaving played an important part in the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild when it was founded in 1929 and continues to do so today.[35] The Guild established a market for unique handmade mountain products that were inexpensive and reminiscent of pioneer times. These crafts appealed to the city dwellers who knew little about rural mountain life. The renewed interest nationwide in colonial-revival decoration had made northern housewives anxious to purchase coverlets similar to the ones woven in New England fifty years earlier.

The Southern Highlands Handicraft Guild only allowed handweavers to join, but the Guild was so successful in establishing sales markets that the actual production of Guild members was not large enough to fill the demand. Using his English weaving ancestry to sell the perception of hand weaving, Goodwin took advantage of the opportunity to align the family and its weaving with the newly formed Guild. After 1930, Goodwin began to include the name Goodwin Family Guild Weavers in his company brochures.[36]

The Clinch Valley Blanket Mills could never join the Southern Highlands Handicraft Guild because it used power looms. Nevertheless, the mill affiliated itself so closely with this movement that it was perceived to be a member of the Guild. Its woven production was nearly the same quality as the handwoven production of Guild members and few buyers were knowledgeable enough to tell the difference. A 1949 *Richmond Times-Dispatch* article states, "The coverlets are sold only through the Southern Highlanders Guild, of which the Cedar Bluff industry

is an associate member." The same article told the family "story" and included four large photos of patterns currently in production. These were juxtaposed with a fifth photograph showing a handwoven, double weave coverlet with pine tree border, belonging to The Valentine Museum, in Richmond, Virginia.[37]

In 1930, Mrs. Riley Fox, Mrs. Finley Mast, and Mrs. Allie Owenby, native mountain women with long family weaving traditions, traveled to Indianapolis, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Minneapolis, Cincinnati, and Chicago to give demonstrations in major department stores. The tour, sponsored by Frank E. Rudd of Louisville, Kentucky, a manufacturer of rayon and cotton coverlets, hoped to acquaint northern women with Southern Appalachian coverlet weaving. Mrs. Mast, of Valle Crucis, North Carolina, had gained fame throughout the entire Appalachian region for her coverlets made for the Woodrow Wilson White House and her efforts to rejuvenate the art of coverlet weaving. Mrs. Owenby came from Gatlinburg, Tennessee, where she and Mrs. Fox, of nearby Walden's Creek had been instrumental in reviving interest in pioneer days through their weaving. The three women traveled by train with an ancient hand loom, spinning wheels, handmade furniture, and coverlets to illustrate various patterns. In the stores they set up a display representing a "typical" mountain cabin. Dressed in homespun and weaving in their stocking feet, these women gave the impression that handwoven coverlets were still abundantly available throughout the Southern Appalachians. In a mountain brogue peppered with many colloquialisms, Mrs. Fox told of the simple life she and her husband shared, living in a log cabin and raising eleven daughters. Mrs. Owenby explained the work being woven on the loom to the enthralled crowd that gathered at every stop. The onlookers perceived that mountain life was still as simple and backward as it had been a hundred years before. They were determined to furnish their homes with quaint handmade weaving that was inexpensive.[38]

Currently, members of the Appalachian Studies Association, and others interested in defining this region's contribution to the overall colonial-revival movement, continue research to ex-

pand our understanding of the 1895 Arts and Crafts Movement and subsequent revivals in the Southern Appalachian mountains. After reading the various accounts of early Goodwin family history and other stories of nineteenth-century handweaving, laymen are often bewildered as to the difference between handwoven and production-woven coverlets, if they even realize there is a difference. But the fact remains, while marketing colonial-style coverlets was based on nostalgia, much of the weaving had become factory production.

Handweaving versus Production Weaving

During the same time period that the aforementioned mountain women were demonstrating handweaving, the Clinch Valley Blanket Mills turned out approximately fifty coverlets and blankets per day. (The best handweaver could only weave one or two coverlets per month.) The mill introduced "The Nancy Harlow Coverlets" promotion, named for C. E. Goodwin's wife, Nancy Harlow Goodwin. Using three standard patterns already in production, the company designed a new label to sew on the coverlets and a color brochure for promotion purposes. The Nancy Harlow Coverlets were sold to mail-order customers and gift shops (see figure 14).

Rosemont, an early cottage industry of handmade mountain crafts in Marion, Virginia, became one of the mill's best accounts. The Clinch Valley Blanket Mills and Rosemont were a perfect team for selling coverlets (see figure 15). Rosemont was widely known for its hand-hooked rugs, hand-tied bed canopies, custom-made quilts, and woven coverlets.[39] Researchers write that Laura S. Copenhaver, the founder, gathered women in her ancestral home, "Rosemont", to weave, quilt, knit, crochet, and hook rugs.[40] Actually, everything sold under the Rosemont label was purchased or commissioned in the surrounding communities. In the case of hand-tied fishnet canopies and fringes, Copenhaver purchased them directly from women doing the work in their homes, typical of a cottage industry. But all the

Figure 14. Nancy Harlow promotional flyer. Coverlet patterns pictured (top to bottom), Sun, Moon & Stars in a two-color combination, Snail's Trail, and Sun, Moon & Stars. Personal collection of the author.

woven items were purchased from The Clinch Valley Blanket Mills. Her beautiful old home in the middle of town was decorated with furnishings sold through Rosemont mail-order booklets, and the front rooms were open to the buying public. Laura Copenhaver and her husband lived upstairs, using the rest of the house for offices, shipping, and storage.[41]

A Rosemont booklet addressed the issue of hand weaving versus factory weaving as follows:

> They [coverlets] are not made in a modern factory but in the original old mill in the mountains to which the farmers still bring their wool for exchange and from which the mountain women take the coverlets home for hemming and fringe-making. Our looms are not the ordinary jacquard looms of the textile mills but are specially adapted to our process.

Another Rosemont booklet stated:

> The spinning, dyeing, and weaving are all done in a primitive mountain community where living conditions are simple. Every purchaser of one of our Colonial Coverlets may be sure, not only of having an exact and exquisite reproduction of early American weaving, but also of helping the mountain people to help themselves.

A Rosemont booklet printed in 1932 acknowledged the Clinch Valley Blanket Mills:

> These old coverlet designs were not woven on power looms until 1906 when an expert weaver in Virginia, from a family of famous weavers in England conceived the idea of using power for weaving the old coverlets. He and his four sons supervise our weaving today.

The retail prices printed in that booklet were day bed/ $10.00, twin/$13.85, full/ $15.50. Double weave coverlets ranged from $16.50 to $25.80. Other items sold were priced as follows: pin cushion/50¢; wool and cotton dresser scarf/$2.60; all cotton luncheon sets, runner/$1.85 and mats/60¢ ea.; pillow cover/$2.65; and a wing chair upholstered in woven fabric/$65.00.[42]

The vast production capacity of the Clinch Valley Blanket Mills, coupled with its emphasis on quality and authentic nine-

Figure 15. Pages from Rosemont mail-order booklet. Personal collection of the author.

teenth-century designs, allowed the company to sell thousands of coverlets and blankets to customers who thought they were buying handwoven items. The mill's sales agents filled orders for northern customers who had read about or seen mountain handweavers. These customers believed they were buying the work of a woman weaving ancient family coverlet patterns on a hand loom in her log cabin. In one sense the customers were not getting shortchanged, as they were buying a quality product at an affordable price; but they were also buying into the fiction woven for marketing purposes.

While the marketing sold thousands of coverlets, it also influenced the outside world's perception of the people in southwest Virginia. At a time when the big cities used the latest equipment and inventions to speed production in all industries, the "story" of this weaving family, told through newspaper articles, sales agents, and its own brochures, led generations of people, in all

walks of life, to think that Virginia mountain craftsmen were still using old-fashioned methods of production. Goodwin carefully orchestrated each piece of mill advertising to continue this story; and yet, he was actually using modern power looms. Since the mill had such a relatively large production capacity, its coverlets were available to more customers, in more stores, both North and South, than the work of the handweavers.

The myth of simple mountain people, living simple lives, making simple crafts with simple mountain tools was a successful sales technique; but the negative stereotype of Appalachian craftsmen that this kind of marketing perpetuated is still prevalent today. Many people outside the region continue to perceive Southern Appalachians as illiterate, backward "slackers," far removed from the forward thinking, vibrant city dwellers.

Conclusion

The old production mill in Cedar Bluff is long silent. The records are scattered and only the foundation of the mill remains. The woven coverlets and blankets still cherished by families weave the story of an early mountain textile industry that intertwined with the life of a rural farm community for more than sixty years.

The volume of sales, the patterns, the fibers, and the style of coverlets manufactured at the Clinch Valley Blanket Mills set a standard of unsurpassed quality and durability in woven bedcoverings. The Goodwin family members successfully sold their products in distinctly different markets and influenced the attitude many "outlanders" still have toward Virginia mountain weavers. Their innate marketing skill was masterful and, at times, deceptive; but successful marketing, then and now, is based on perception.

The study of this mill's production helps us understand the contribution one mill in the Southern Appalachian mountains made to an industry, to mountain crafts, and to women's early employment outside the home. Recognizing the community spirit of Cedar Bluff citizens that enabled this woolen mill to prosper

gives historians and humanities scholars a broader picture of mill town life in southwest Virginia, and a deeper comprehension of the attitudes and values found among succeeding generations of textile mill workers.

The ability to recognize fabric woven at the Clinch Valley Blanket Mills, and not confuse it with the work of handweavers, is important to individuals, textile researchers, and museums trying to document and preserve the material culture of another time. As we move forward, the opportunity to look back is both insightful and reflective.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy for providing funding for this research.

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