

# Uncoverings

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## *Eighteenth-Century Indigo-Resist Fabrics: Their Use in Quilts and Bed Hangings*

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*Printed textiles played an important role in decorating eighteenth-century beds and displaying a family's pecuniary status. Among the fabrics popularly used for bed furnishings and curtains were indigo-resist prints, distinctive because of their blue designs on a white ground. Extant examples today include lined hangings, quilted hangings and bed covers, and yard goods. The designs of these rare textiles share a rich Indian and European heritage. They are very distinctive and amazingly similar on all the existing indigo resists. The authors analyzed and photographed thirty-eight indigo-resist textiles including six indigo-resist quilts housed in several east coast museums. An eighteenth-century pattern book in England, which includes patterns for some of the indigo-resist fabrics, was examined and photographed as well.*

American indigo-resist prints in American museums and private collections, are textiles patterned with blue designs on white cloth. Printers produced these resist prints in the eighteenth century by applying a chemical resist paste to a white fabric to create the white ground of a design. They then dipped the resisted fabric into an indigo dye vat to produce the blue design. They repeated the process to produce two shades of blue. The indigo-resist designs used large motifs representing



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arborescent vines, leaves, large fantastic flowers, and exotic birds such as peacocks, pheasants, and parrots. Because of the large-scale designs of the indigo resists, extant examples indicate that the textiles did not serve as clothing material but instead existed as bed hangings, curtains, and bed coverings.

This is a study of indigo-resist fabrics housed in museums, historical societies, and private collections in both the United States and Bermuda. We explored the origins of the designs of the blue resists, including an English pattern book containing patterns of some of the indigo-resist prints found in this country. Included in the study were a number of quilts made using indigo-resist fabric. Many of the textiles examined, including one of the quilts we will discuss, incorporated a unique indigo resist-printed binding. Quilts as well as bed hangings used these bindings as a narrow edge finish. These unusual indigo-resist quilts incorporated various quilting patterns, both geometric and figural designs. This paper discusses these quilts; however, first how the indigo-resist fabrics used in these particular quilts fit into the interior decorating scheme of colonial homes is important to understanding the historic context of the blue resists.

### *Fabric Furnishings*

Fabric furnishings and wallpaper were essentially the “clothes” of the home.<sup>1</sup> These fabrics provided cushioning for comfort—pillows, upholstery, floor coverings; insulation from the cold—bed hangings and bed covers; and privacy—bed curtains. Fabric furnishings also had a “civilizing function—they ennobled their possessor and elevated the activities for which they were used.”<sup>2</sup> Fabrics also provided color and pattern to a room. Since decorative fabric furnishings were not essential to life, their use represented a living standard above meeting basic needs.<sup>3</sup>

The eighteenth century was the age of reason, order, and control.<sup>4</sup> An emphasis on individualism, privacy, and order may have been the reason for the fashion of the fully-curtained bed, which suggests a desire for more privacy.<sup>5</sup> In the seventeenth century, rooms often were multifunctional. A family entertained company in the parlor, but the head of the household also slept in that room as evidenced by probate inventories



listing the decedent's clothes in the parlor. The parlor contained the most expensive bed, the "best bed" or "great bed." Francis Little wrote that "the presence of the bed in the parlor was not an accident of the moment, but a custom of long standing. The houses of the early settlers were built on the plan of the cottage in England."<sup>6</sup> The family displayed their wealth in the parlor. According to probate records, the best bed, with its hangings, coverlets, and pillows, was often the most valuable piece of furniture in the house.<sup>7</sup>

The high-post bed was a fashionable piece of furniture from 1650 to 1850 in America and represented a large investment. An expensively-dressed bed not only provided warmth and privacy but also set a measure of wealth and stature.<sup>8</sup> Bed furnishings were more visible than silver, more valuable, and more difficult to steal. They often were bequeathed in wills to others.<sup>9</sup> Textiles required so much labor to produce that they were used until they degraded. Often seamstresses incorporated fragments of imported fabrics in pieced bed coverings or quilts.<sup>10</sup> The fact that families throughout three centuries carefully saved these bed hangings is evidence that they were highly prized possessions during the eighteenth century. Many households owned fabric furnishings several years old or from a previous generation. Apparently style was not as important as the status of having bed furnishings.<sup>11</sup>

Evidence in inventories indicates that the popularity of bed hangings increased throughout the 1700s.<sup>12</sup> Wealthy city dwellers more likely owned sets of bed furnishings than their less affluent rural counterparts.<sup>13</sup> An analysis of probate records of the Philadelphia area from 1700 to 1775 shows that the urban merchants and tradesmen who owned the greatest number of fabric furnishings had the least amounts of textile tools and raw materials needed for textile production. Those most likely to have the production materials, the rural yeomen, had a limited number of fabric furnishings. Schoelwer concluded from this analysis that "relatively few fabric furnishings were homemade."<sup>14</sup>

Bed hangings began to spread to the less affluent segments of society and so became less desirable as status symbols. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, fine wooden furniture began to replace textiles as an indicator of wealth. The bedstead showed instead of being covered with fabric. The style of bed changed from the four-poster to a low-post bed.



House construction allowed for heating bedrooms so the rooms were less drafty and cold.<sup>15</sup> By the 1860s, with bed curtains out of vogue, elaborate head and foot boards became fashionable.<sup>16</sup> Textile upholstery and floor coverings replaced bed hangings as the new status symbols.

Bed coverings in colonial America consisted of woolen blankets, woolen bed rugs, quilts, and coverlets. Quilts, rarely mentioned in inventories of the early colonial period (seventeenth century), were the highest valued item when mentioned. These bed quilts generally were whole-cloth, not pieced quilts.<sup>17</sup>

Colonists used imported Indian painted and block-printed calicoes as bed furnishings throughout the eighteenth century, as well as English block prints, which generally cost more than the Indian fabrics.<sup>18</sup> Since only the wealthiest could afford silk draperies and bed furnishings, many purchased less expensive fabrics. In the early part of the century, colonists used white linen, calicoes, and blue and white checks made from washable linen or cotton. Half-silks, silk mixed with wool or linen, were less expensive than pure silks; then came the finer grades of woolen cloth, followed by printed cottons in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The least expensive textiles included cheaper grades of woolen, linen, and cotton fabrics.<sup>19</sup>

Blue was a popular color, but the use of indigo in textiles may have been based more on its ease of use, availability, and durability than on color preference.<sup>20</sup> Blue resist-prints served as fashionable bed furnishing fabrics from about 1700 to 1810, according to Abbott Cummings and Florence Pettit.<sup>21</sup>

Copperplate-printed fabrics became available in the last forty years of the eighteenth century. In Boston, imported copperplate prints advertised in 1761 were appropriate for bed hangings and bed coverings due to their large-scale patterns. By 1780, Philadelphia papers advertised blue and white cotton copperplate bed curtains, with window curtains to match.<sup>22</sup>

Colorful Indian fabrics called calicoes or East Indian chintzes had a tremendous effect on the textile industry in Europe. The first calicoes brought back were printed with dark backgrounds, which were not to European tastes. Company officials influenced the designs and colors used, so manufactories produced fabrics with a white background that



better suited European aesthetics. The term *Indiennes* came to be used synonymously with chintz and referred to “painted and printed cotton cloth imported from India from the early seventeenth century; the term was later applied to designs with meandering vines, composite blossoms, flowering trees, and exotic birds.”<sup>23</sup>

During the period 1790 to 1815, cotton chintz became popular as bed hangings. Block-printed cottons with indigo and madder colors predominated. Also popular were drab-style colors—brown, green, and yellow as well as the “lapis” style with a red motif on a blue background. After 1820 the use of the power loom, cylinder printing, and improved dye technology changed the styles popular for bed hangings although block printing continued to be used for floral chintzes. Popular printed designs included floral stripes, trompe l’œil designs, shells, coral branches, birds, and pillars.<sup>24</sup>

Textile historians come to varying conclusions about furnishing fabrics and the names in the probate inventories. Many textile terms have changed in meaning through the years. This makes knowing just what fabrics are being described in diaries, inventories, and newspapers difficult. For example, Linda Baumgarten stated that the calico bed curtains mentioned in seventeenth century inventories probably refer to cotton fabrics from India. They were occasionally described as “painted calico” curtains. Frances Morris pointed out that in many instances “calicoes” in early documents referred to “unprinted cloth.” Cummings came to a different conclusion about the word calico. Cummings felt that the word calico, when used in inventories, meant blue resist.<sup>25</sup>

Florence Montgomery pointed out that no “old name” for indigo resist fabrics existed, so that identifying them in lists of fabrics is impossible. She cited a 1754 broadside from Boston that advertised textiles including “one ps blue and white Chints . . . Two ps superfine China blues . . . One ditto (Callico) blue & white Cotton.” She also described how English printers and merchants deliberately did not mark their textiles to distinguish them from the Indian cottons, and this makes identifying goods listed in mercantile records as Indian or British difficult.<sup>26</sup>

The popularity of the painted and printed Indian textiles caused great concern to the silk and wool industry in France and England. The cottons were lightweight, colorful, and washable—characteristics limited in silk



and wool fabrics. Bans on importation and use of the imports began in 1686 in France and 1700 in England.<sup>27</sup>

These bans on Indian-printed textiles only made the fabrics more popular and stimulated the domestic production of these products. As soon as these Indian calicoes were prohibited, English and French printers and dyers began learning to make imitations. In 1711, English printers produced one million yards of calico, although they had a sizeable excise tax on these goods. Cotton textiles of almost every description were banned from England in 1721. Both the use and sale of painted, printed, flowered, checked, and most other vibrant Indian textiles became illegal either in dress or furnishings. Fines from 5 to 20 pounds were levied against the violators.<sup>28</sup>

Several important exclusions to the bans allowed some cotton fabrics to be printed in Great Britain. The English allowed production of blue calico, muslins, neckcloths, and fustians—a fabric with a linen warp and cotton weft. The Manchester Act of 1736 specifically allowed printing on fustian. Smuggling of the forbidden painted and printed fabrics was rampant, and the bans difficult to enforce. The French lifted restrictions in 1759, and the English by 1774.<sup>29</sup> The craze for calico had not been diminished by the bans, nor did the lifting of the limitations lessen consumer demand for printed cottons.

### *Fabric Designs and Patterns*

Indian painted and printed calicoes clearly influenced the designs of the indigo-resist prints. The indigo-resist designs use large motifs that are reminiscent of the *Indiennes* with arborescent vines, leaves, and large fantastic flowers. Exotic birds such as peacocks, pheasants, and parrots also reflect the imported printed cottons.

This “oriental style” is really a hybrid of both Indian and Asian elements, a European concept of style that never existed for the eastern markets. The designs have a European connection, too. Officials sent English sample patterns to India after 1662 on a regular basis.<sup>30</sup>

Some of the motifs that the British East India Company officials sent to Indian manufacturers had abstract patterns inside natural leaf forms that are more common to Elizabethan and Jacobean embroidery than to Indian tradition. Indian painters often rendered adaptations of English



designs sent to them rather than make exact copies. The Dutch were highly successful in the trade of Indian-painted fabrics. English designers plagiarized their successful designs; sometimes the actual fabrics made for the Dutch were acquired by the English traders and sent to India to be copied for shipment to England.<sup>31</sup>

Scholars have speculated on the inspiration for the patterns that were sent to India. Many of the designs found in chintz fabrics made for the European market were based on brocaded silks, English embroideries in crewel work, or French-block prints. Printers sold engraved embroidery designs in the seventeenth century. Flemish tapestries and imported Chinese wallpapers may have provided still other design inspirations.<sup>32</sup>

The European imitation of the *Indienne* style remained fashionable on fabrics for both costumes and fabric furnishings for two centuries. A lace-pattern design, first seen in figured silks consisting of “a central floral motif surrounded by a frame of some diaper-pattern which often resembles lace or net,” was particularly popular in the 1690s and then again around the 1720s and later.<sup>33</sup> In the 1760s and 1770s, free-flowing floral designs decorated patterned silks as well as printed cloths. Thick arborescent stems and birds were typical of wood-block prints in the 1780s and were popular motifs for furnishing fabrics during this time. The technique of using fine dots to highlight certain design elements came into use and would continue until the 1820s and 1830s when copper cylinders began to be mechanically engraved.<sup>34</sup>

Ribbons in the design and dark backgrounds first became popular at the end of the eighteenth century. Floral stripes and flowers suggesting columns with capitals began to appear in prints of the 1790s—the beginnings of the pillar prints so popular in the 1800s. Small-scale patterns and the drab style became stylish about 1800 as the Indian-style chintzes, so popular for a century, evolved into the lighter treatment of flowers and vines.<sup>35</sup>

### *Patterns and Pattern Books for Fabric Designs*

Textile printers collected samples of fabrics and designs on paper in scrapbooks and pattern books. Designers drew wood-block print designs on paper, and after the blockmaker cut a design in a block, he tested the print on paper. Often the patterns were suitable for both textiles and





wallpapers.<sup>36</sup> Montgomery showed wood-block impressions printed on paper for fabrics in her book on printed textiles.<sup>37</sup> Competitors copied other designers' patterns for their own products. When a textile printing firm went out of business, it sold its blocks and pattern books to other printers.

Such a scrapbook currently owned by G. P. & J. Baker, a textile firm of the Parker Knolls Group in England, is housed in the archives of the Baker Collection and contains many different designs for textiles and wallpaper from the latter half of the eighteenth century. One of the designs, colorful floral sprays in an Indienne style, has the name "John Munns" followed by the design number "709" written on the pattern. Many of the wallpaper samples have a duty stamp on the back marked "paper stainer," with a crown and the letters GR, indicating that a British duty was paid on these wallpapers. The scrapbook contains designs, all on paper, which have been glued to the pages of the book. The book's pages that have designs glued to them are similar in color and texture to modern-day brown grocery bags. The designs have neither inscriptions, other than the one ascribed to John Munns, nor any written indication of the origin of the patterns. "BT" is printed on the back binding of the book. This book has four original designs of the blue resist prints (see figures 1 and 2). The designs show evidence of pencil outlines colored in with paint rather than having been printed.

The scrapbook originally belonged to Baker Tuckers (presumably the BT), a handkerchief-printing firm in the London area in the nineteenth century. Henry and John Baker, not known to be relatives of George Baker of G. P. & J. Baker, were silk handkerchief manufacturers in 1809, according to London directories. Joseph, Henry, and William Tucker joined the company in 1842, and the firm then was called Baker, Tuckers & Company. This company was the largest hand-block silk printing, dyeing, and finishing business in England and, when it collapsed and was sold in 1895, had a collection of 90,000 blocks, many pattern books, and samples. The firm of G. P. & J. Baker acquired a group of pattern books from Baker, Tucker & Company at this time. The designs in the pattern books of Baker Tuckers included more than just the designs made for that firm. Patterns that had been purchased by Baker Tuckers from earlier



Figure 1. Baker Tuckers Pattern Book (Baker Collection, pattern book no. 2).  
Courtesy of G. P. & J. Baker Limited, Bucks, UK.



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Figure 2. Baker Tuckers Pattern Book, tax stamp and name (Baker Collection, pattern book no. 2) Courtesy of G. P. & J. Baker Limited, Bucks, UK.

firms that had gone out of business were also in their collection, so some designs dated from the 1760s.<sup>38</sup>

John Munns began a printing establishment in 1768 or 1769 where he manufactured calicoes in the Crayford area, outside of London. He went out of business in 1784 and sold his assets, including 1500 blocks. At that point Munns began a new partnership at a printworks at Merton called Fenning, Vaughan & Halfhide. Munns made designs for blocks and copper plates.<sup>39</sup> The presence of the design with the name of John



Munns on one of the designs suggests that it is from the late eighteenth century.

Jane Nylander asserted that the presence of the blue-resist designs in the pattern book in the Baker Archive, along with the British excise mark on an indigo resist print found at the Albany Institute of History and Art, confirms that indigo-resists are “British goods, however popular they may have been in pre-Revolutionary America.”<sup>40</sup> The author of the catalog for the exhibit *From East to West* states the same opinion but adds that the blue and white resist prints are found only in America.<sup>41</sup>

The authors do not believe that the same person or group of people made all of the indigo-resist prints due to the varied expertise evident in the samples examined in this study. A discussion of how the indigo-resist prints were made is in “Indigo-Resist Prints from Eighteenth-Century America: Technology and Technique.”<sup>42</sup> The existence of a pattern book with four American indigo-resist patterns cannot provide proof of provenance for the whole group of textiles. The Baker Tucker pattern book examined in London did indeed have patterns that matched those found in extant indigo resist textiles (see figures 3, 4, 5, and 6). The pomegranate cluster pattern seen in the pattern book matches that of a textile examined at Winterthur (69.3380) shown in figure 3. The drawing of the pineapple motif seen in figure 4 matches the design in the seat cover at University of Rhode Island (1991.05.01), and the pattern of a flower motif in the pattern book matches a flower motif in a quilt (1956–681)

Figure 3. Pomegranate cluster motif in pattern book (left) and textile (right) (Winterthur, 69.3380). Courtesy of Winterthur Museum.



Figure 4. Pineapple motif in pattern book (left) and textile (right) (URI 1991.05.01).  
Courtesy of University of Rhode Island, Historic Textile and Costume Collection.

at the Shelburne Museum (see figure 5). One pattern in the scrapbook is the same as a textile from the Winterthur collection that was not photographed. This motif can be seen in a different textile pictured in *America's Indigo Blues* on page 133.<sup>43</sup>(see figure 6).

The presence of indigo-resist patterns in a scrapbook owned by the G. P. & J. Baker archives in England does suggest that some of the resists could have been printed in England, although no indigo-resist fabrics with the scrapbook patterns could be located there. While the patterns in the book cannot be identified definitely as English-drawn, other items in the scrapbook—the name John Munns on one of the patterns, the British tax stamps on many of the wallpaper samples in the book, and the method the book was acquired through textile company bankruptcies—all point to an English provenance for the scrapbook and likely the patterns. This indicates that the patterns for these particular resists are probably English-made. No pattern books with patterns that match any of the blue-resists have been found elsewhere. However, the authors suggest that the question of provenance of the blue resists cannot be answered merely by the presence of a pattern book in England. In fact, the St. George's Historical Society Museum in Bermuda has a group of indigo-resist printed fabrics reputed to have been printed by two local



Figure 5. Flower motif pattern in pattern book (left) and in textile (right).  
Shelburne Museum 1956–681, © Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vermont.

Figure 6. Starflower motif in pattern book, two parts of the same pattern on two different pages of the book.

printers in the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>44</sup> Further investigation of the origin of the blue resists is warranted.

### *Indigo-Resist Quilts*

While many examples of indigo resist-printed fabrics exist as fragments, curtains, and panels a number have survived as quilts. Good examples are in collections at Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, DE; Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, VT; and Historic Deerfield, Deerfield, MA. The researchers examined six whole-cloth quilts or quilted counterpanes in four of the collections visited. In some cases the quilts incorporated



Figure 7. Whole-cloth quilt. Shelburne Museum 1956–581, © Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vermont.

fabric used originally for other purposes. These quilt tops were pieced together, not in a patchwork design, but simply as a means to produce a large bed cover. Other examples appeared to be made originally as a quilt. Some of these quilts even had a specially printed coordinating binding to finish the quilt edges.

The Shelburne Museum in Vermont owns several quilts made with indigo resist-printed fabrics. One of the whole-cloth quilts has a design in the fabric that matches a design found in the Baker Tucker pattern book (see figure 7). This particular quilt (catalog #10–223, acc. #1956–681) whose maker is unknown, was purchased from a New York textile dealer and is 84 x 78 inches. The quilt top fabric is a cotton/linen blend. Museum records indicate that the back is made from cotton, and the batting is cotton.<sup>45</sup> Vertical panels of two different fabrics, both with a large fantastic flower on a vine motif, are hand-sewn together to form the top of the quilt (see figure 8). The panels alternate fabric “A” with fabric “B.” As in most of these quilts, no border exists. The edge is finished with a separate binding of the same fabric, cut on grain. The quilt is hand-quilted and the stitches, 7 stitches per inch, are in diagonal, crosshatched



Figure 8. Whole-cloth quilt. Shelburne Museum 1956–683, © Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vermont.

lines. The design of the fabric is very finely executed with two shades of blue, picotage dots, white lines, and finely detailed floral, leaf, and stem forms. The flower in one of the fabrics used in the quilt, shown in figure 7 on the right, matches the flower motif from the pattern book shown in figure 5.

Another indigo-resist quilt at Shelburne (catalog #10–224, acc.





#1956–683) is shown in figure 8. Museum records indicate that the quilt is from the northeast region of the United States: the maker is unknown. The quilt measures only 65 x 54 inches. The top fabric is a cotton/linen blend; the batting is thick cotton with seeds, and the backing is linen. The quilt top is constructed with two vertical panels hand-sewn together. Sewing thread used throughout the quilt was 2-ply linen yarn. The hand-quilting, 3 stitches per inch, is done in a crosshatch diagonal pattern. The edges are finished by folding the back and front inward and stitching them together. The fabric has a dense pattern of pomegranates and leaves and is dramatically different from the other blue resist prints because the proportion of the dark blue design is higher compared to the white background. The design uses only one shade of blue and white picotage dots. At least two sources have shown photographs of quilts made from the same pomegranate-patterned fabric and indicate that this fabric is French in origin. Berenson showed a quilt with the pomegranate design, identified it as printed in Provence, and stated that it reflects the Provencal taste for strong colors.<sup>46</sup> A resist-printed whole-cloth quilt with the same design of dense pomegranates and leaves was found in an abandoned house in France.<sup>47</sup>

Another quilt (catalog #10–058) at the Shelburne Museum was acquired from the New Jersey area and was made by an unknown quiltmaker, probably between 1770 and 1800. The quilt has a top of cotton/linen blend and is backed with an off-white linen fabric. The 80 x 74 inch quilt top was constructed by joining two panels vertically at the center. It was hand-sewn seamed and hand-quilted, 4 stitches per inch, in a clamshell design at the edge with a floral quilted design on the inner field. The quilt's edge is finished by folding in the front and back and stitching the edges together. The sophisticated fabric design features large fantastic flowers and leaves. Both light and dark blue is incorporated into the design, and dots of varying sizes delineate the design in both the flowers and on the stem. A diaper pattern of dots is visible on some stems. The fabric motif, seen in figure 9, is very clear and well preserved.

The Rhode Island Historical Society owns a whole-cloth quilt, probably made in the late eighteenth century by an unknown quiltmaker. The quilt top is a cotton/linen blend; a light wool batting is used, and the quilt is backed with a blue and white hand-spun linen furniture check.



This quilt is 95¾ x 92½ inches and hand-quilted in a diamond pattern, 6 stitches per inch. The top is hand-pieced from different-sized rectangular pieces of resist-printed fabric. Unevenly faded sections of the fabric indicate that this quilt probably was made from fabric originally used for something else—likely bed furnishings. Other evidence of prior fabric use includes holes from old stitches that had been removed. Since printed fabrics were so valuable during this time period, reuse of fabrics was very common. The fabric design features the same large fantastic flowers and leaves found in the Shelburne Museum quilt 1952–581 (see figure 9), but the color of the fabric is much more faded.<sup>48</sup>

The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C., also owns an indigo-resist quilt. Smithsonian records indicate that the quilt was made by Clara Harrison of Middlebury, Connecticut, in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. Records indicate that the quilt top is made of cotton, the filling is wool batting, and the backing is linen. Sewing and quilting thread is 2-ply linen. The 93% x 82% inch front of the quilt is formed by eight different pieces of fabric, all of different sizes, and likely parts of bed hangings. The hand quilting, at 5–6 stitches per inch, is done in a pattern of an eleven-inch square with diagonal lines radiating from a central point about ¾ inches apart. Binding is made from straight ½-inch strips of white cotton folded over the edge and stitched to the front and backing. The fabric design on this quilt was apparently produced by a much less skilled printer than most of the other indigo-resists examined (see figure 10). The large rather crudely formed flower in the motif is attached to a craggy arborescent-like vine. While two shades of blue and picotage dots are incorporated into the design, it has much less detail in the design compared to other blue resist motifs examined. This pattern also is on a seat cover in the St. George's Historical Society Museum where it is called "Night blooming Cereus."<sup>49</sup>

The Daughters of the American Revolution Museum in Washington, D.C., houses a beautifully preserved quilt made by a member of the Vedder family of New York. The museum dates the quilt from the second half of the eighteenth century. Museum records indicate that the quilt has a cotton top and a linen back. The quilt is 94 x 83½ inches and shows no evidence of uneven fading. The quilting stitches form a plain



Figure 9. Whole-cloth quilt. Shelburne Museum 1952–581, © Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vermont.

grid, set on the diagonal, forming one-inch squares. The even coloration and excellent condition of the quilt suggests that the fabric's original use was in that quilt. The fabric features a design of a pheasant perched on a branch from which large flowers and leaves grow. The quilt is bound with a resist-printed tape  $1\frac{3}{8}$  inches wide. This quilt is unusual in its good condition and the use of a coordinating printed binding to finish the edges.



Figure 10. A quilted “counterpane” (277125) housed at the Smithsonian Institute. Courtesy of National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Eight of the bed furnishings examined in this study had bindings of resist-printed tape with similar simple vine-like motifs. Quilts as well as bed hangings and remnants retain these edge finishes. The bindings are approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide. Construction varies: in some cases the narrow fabric folds over an edge; in other textiles, it lies flat on the surface along the edge. The designs of the bindings are always simple—often a meandering vine, sometimes with dots (see figure 11).

While the quilts described here are a small subset of textiles examined for this study, several interesting similarities can be noted. None of the quilts use any type of border in the overall design. Three of the quilts examined were probably made from bed hangings and were being reused in bed quilts. Four of the six quilts have quilting stitches in a crosshatching pattern, which does not follow any portion of the design on the quilt top.

Further research is needed to more comprehensively study other collections of indigo resist-printed quilts. Winterthur Museum, Historic Deerfield, Shelburne Museum, and others house collections of these fabrics, including many quilts. A recent article in *Early American Life* (2003) indicates a continued interest in these intriguing fabrics.<sup>50</sup>



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Figure 11. Example of indigo-resist binding, shown on accession 73.66. Courtesy of Strawberry Banke Museum, Portsmouth, NH.

Indigo-resist printed fabrics were a valuable commodity in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They frequently appear in bed furnishings that played a very important role in decorating parlors and demonstrating a family's wealth. The large motifs made them perfectly suited for whole-cloth quilts and bed hangings. The blue and white resist fabrics' value is further supported by their owners' incorporating pieces



from worn or faded bed furnishings in new ways such as pieced quilts and counterpanes. Fortunately, later generations continued to treasure these fabrics and have preserved quilts, parts of bed hangings, fragments, and yard goods that have found their way into many American museum collections. Appreciation of the color and the motifs continues today as interior fabric designers are using many of the indigo-resist designs in window coverings, upholstery, and bed coverings.

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31. John Irwin, "Origins of the 'Oriental Style' in English Decorative Art," *Burlington Magazine* 97 (1955), 106-14.
32. Beer, 32.
33. Thornton, 109.
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35. Montgomery, *Printed Textiles*, 126-36.



36. Brédif, 83–5.
37. Montgomery, *Printed Textiles*, 30–33, 102.
38. Storey, , 27–28; *From East to West: Textiles from G. P. & J. Baker* (London: G. P. & J. Baker Ltd, 1984), 27–28.
39. Storey, 12; S. D. Chapman, “David Evans & Co., The Last of the Old London Textile Printers,” *Textile History* 14, no. 1 (1983): 35–37.
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41. *From East to West*, 46.
42. Mary Gale, “Indigo-Resist Prints from Eighteenth-Century America: Production and Provenance” (Master’s thesis, University of Rhode Island, 2001); Mary E. Gale and Margaret T. Ordoñez, “Indigo-Resist Prints from Eighteenth-Century America: Technology and Technique.” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 22(1/2), 4–14.
43. Pettit, 133.
44. E. A. McCallan, *Life on Old St. David’s Bermuda*, (Hamilton: Bermuda Historical Society, 1986), 223.
45. While many museums allowed fiber samples to be taken and analyzed, some would not, and the fiber identification was not always part of the museum record. Historic textile collections often are missing important background information that would be helpful in the interpretation of the holdings, especially for eighteenth-century objects. Where a textile was made, date of manufacture, and the original owner often simply are not known. Some of the museums were founded as private collections of wealthy Americans. These collectors, as well as museums, can acquire their textiles from textile dealers, who were unable to provide documentation of the items they sold. Twentieth-century donors commonly have no information about family items that they donate or only stories based on oral history.
46. Kathryn Berenson, *Quilts of Provence: The Art and Craft of French Quiltmaking* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 45.
47. Deirdre McDonald, *Quilt Treasures: The Quilters’ Guild Heritage Search* (Milan: Deirdre McDonald Books and The Quilter’s Guild, 1995), 167–68.
48. A picture of this quilt can be seen in *Down by the Old Mill Stream*, page 128.
49. McCallan, 223–25.
50. Peter W. Cook, “In Quest of the Blues,” *Early American Life* 34, no 6 (2003), 16–20.