

# Uncoverings 1985

Volume 6 of  
the Research Papers of  
the American Quilt Study Group

Edited by Sally Garoutte

## Bed Coverings, Kent County, Maryland 1710–1820

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### *Introduction*

Textile furnishings made during the eighteenth century and used in southern homes are today very rare. Only a few examples, which were very costly or had a ceremonial or personal significance, have been preserved. These were usually the possessions of the upper classes. Estate inventories extend our knowledge of eighteenth century textiles beyond the holdings of the wealthy. They record the possessions of a large socioeconomic cross section of society from the very wealthy to the reasonably poor. An analysis of three hundred sixty estate inventories, recorded between 1710 and 1820, reveals considerable information about the textile furnishings of residents of one small southern community—Kent County, Maryland.

### *Setting*

By the end of the first decade of the eighteenth century, Kent, the second oldest county in Maryland, had been reduced in size to its present boundaries.<sup>1</sup> Located on the Eastern Shore, the county totaled 223,163 acres of primarily tillable land with considerable water access from tributaries feeding into the Chesapeake Bay. The population of 2,750 people was essentially native-born and stable. The vast majority of the people were descended from British immigrants and followed the Anglican religion. Plantations were strung out along the waterways rather than clustered around village settlements. The agrarian economy was originally based on tobacco, but

by 1750 a diversified agricultural system placed Kent County at an advantage over other Maryland and Virginia counties still dependent upon tobacco as their primary source of income. Active export trade with the West Indies became centered on the Eastern Shore, particularly at the county seat of Chestertown, a port of entry with authority to collect customs. In return for exports of tobacco, corn, wheat, lumber and naval stores, Chestertown received manufactured goods from the West Indies, Azores, Europe and England. Brisk trade stimulated agricultural production and fostered related industries in the form of flour milling and bread making. Ship building, ship refitting, ship stores, and the manufacturing of cordage and rope were also important to the economy of Kent County. A ferry system provided access to imported luxuries from Annapolis and later from Baltimore, and the post road, which passed through Chestertown, was a link with the port of Philadelphia.

Prosperity continued up until the 1770s when increasing restrictions, resulting from hostilities with Britain, finally curtailed trade in the network of waterways forming the Chesapeake Bay system. After the Revolution, Chestertown never regained its former prominence as a port and customs clearing house. Commerce in the Chesapeake region became centered in Baltimore with its accessible harbor and expanding inland trade.

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### *Economic Background of the Chesapeake Region*

The Chesapeake region is part of the Atlantic community, and in the eighteenth century it was closely linked with the economy of Britain. Starting in the seventeenth century and continuing through the eighteenth century, a significant change took place in the ability of people to acquire consumer goods. During the second half of the eighteenth century there was a dramatic increase in the purchasing power of the middle class.<sup>2</sup> The opportunity to accumulate additional money for purchasing goods beyond those required for subsistence paralleled increased production of goods and diversification within a specific classification of manufacturers. The trend towards conspicuous consumption and the new ways of using available goods were contributing factors to the industrial revolution. In

Maryland and in other English colonies, consumption patterns followed at a slightly later date those of England.<sup>3</sup> More people were able to acquire more goods regardless of their wealth or social standing. By the close of the eighteenth century, the greater availability of manufactured goods contributed to a "common standard of refined living" where everyone could aspire to own what had once been confined to the elite.<sup>4</sup>

Textiles constituted a major category of consumer products. With technological innovations, increased selection, graduated pricing, better marketing and improved communications, more textiles became available to more people. The rapid increase in the use of textiles and textile furnishings can be confirmed by the findings from Kent County. Between 1740 and 1780 there was an increase in both number and variety of textile goods as well as democratization of ownership. Liberal extension of credit contributed to expanded use. However, this steadily increasing demand varied with specific furnishings and with fashion, and it was temporarily curtailed during the Revolution.

### *Probate Records and Methodology*

The analysis of probate records for evidence of consumption patterns of textile furnishings is an interdisciplinary study touching on areas of social and economic history as well as decorative arts and its subspecialty of textile history.


Probate records provide a wealth of information about the nature, use and assemblage of material possessions owned by a broad spectrum of society. They contain evidence of the daily existence of the inarticulate who made up the majority of the eighteenth-century population. Probate records also provide evidence of the consumer preferences and financial means of a vast group of people who left no artifacts or written documents. These records are, therefore, valuable sources of information for many aspects of historical study from various geographical areas, but they are especially valuable for areas where documentation about all classes including the upper class is scant or where archaeological evidence is almost nonexistent. Kent County, Maryland is such an area.

Probate records consist of estate inventories, wills and administration accounts.<sup>5</sup> Inventories are both fascinating and frustrating,

but unquestionably they are invaluable historical documents in which ordinary people describe the ordinary objects of daily living. Inventories list and value goods and chattles or all property which could be physically removed from the premises. Objects attached to the architectural framework were not included because, in theory, they were considered part of the real estate. In Maryland, inventories also did not include land holdings or improvements, but they did include crops in the field or recently harvested, all livestock, and all bonded labor. Maryland law did not require that an inventory be taken at the time of death, but it was customary to have one made to protect the interests of the legatees and to satisfy the creditors.

This study of bed coverings and other textile furnishings spans the time period from 1710 to 1820. The beginning date of 1709-1710 corresponds to the earliest available volume of Kent County inventories. These early inventories reflect consumption at the end of the seventeenth century and in the first years of the eighteenth century. The terminal date is arbitrary, but was selected to include inventories which would reflect post-war consumption. The Kent County inventories from 1710 to 1820 are compiled in sixteen volumes, each of which contains several hundred entries. It was therefore not possible to study all of the inventories recorded during the time period.<sup>6</sup> Instead, sixty inventories from six time periods were carefully analyzed: 1709-1711, 1738-1742, 1759-1762, 1781-1783, 1798-1800, and 1819-1822, for a total of 360 inventories.<sup>7</sup> In each volume the inventories were studied in order of appearance, eliminating only those which fell outside the time period. Otherwise all inventories were included whether they contained textile furnishing, or whether they had an estate value of £2 of £2000. All of the estates were assigned to six wealth groups of under £50, £51-£125, £126-£225, £226-£500, £501-£1000, and over £1000.

For each inventory, all bed coverings, their descriptive adjectives and values, were recorded onto take-off sheets. The number of each item as well as color, texture, condition, etc., was noted under the appropriate category on an analysis sheet for each time period. From these sheets, the totals of all bed coverings were tabulated. The use of bed coverings was then analyzed in relation to wealth and to time. The inventory evidence was further manipulated to study textiles in relation to bonded labor, to sex, and to religion.



*Coverlet, white cotton and blue wool, Frederick County, MD, 1810–1820.  
Courtesy the Maryland Historical Society.*

The results from this or any other inventory study must be viewed with caution. Although inventories are especially useful in areas like Kent County where little material culture remains and archaeological excavations are unsystematic, they do not provide evidence of the consumption patterns of the total community. In Maryland, unlike some of the other colonies, inventories do not include real estate holdings, but only goods and chattles or personal property. In an agrarian society, this omission can cause considerable distortion in total wealth or in a comparison among members of different

wealth groups. Inventories are biased towards the wealthy while the poor are often overlooked. Since inventories were not required by Maryland law, the more affluent, with more property to protect and more money to spend on the probate process, and the more educated, who had some knowledge of estate laws, were more likely to be inventoried than men or women with negligible estates. Freedman inmates and small landowners fell into this category. Slaves and indentured servants never had estates to be inventoried. Therefore, the low end of the economic spectrum was generally underreported.

Inventories favor the older, free adult male population which had had many years in which to acquire wealth and material possessions. Women's possessions were included in the husband's estate unless the decedent was a widow or spinster. Widows were also underreported because many had minimal estates and were in reduced financial circumstances after their husband's death.<sup>8</sup> Children's estates were almost never inventoried. A survey of the living population, which would include young people in the beginning stages of wealth and material acquisition, would produce different results.

Inventories reflect past acquisitions. In dealing with changes in consumption patterns, the data is distorted by an inability to determine when goods were acquired. The textile holdings of one decedent might have been purchased within a few years prior to death, while those of another might represent acquisitions over a long lifetime.

Inventories are further biased by the experience and interests of the appraisers. Although the appraisers generally came from the same socioeconomic background as the decedent and were knowledgeable in the terminology of farm, craft and household equipment, some listed objects by generic names such as "bed furniture" or "bed cover," without attempting specific descriptions. Others lumped goods into parcels or pieces. Still others may have overlooked some items completely. And since it was not customary to list nonportable items, one can only speculate about how many looms or quilting frames, which might have been attached to the wall or ceiling, were also omitted.

In spite of their shortcomings and biased reporting, inventories are important to the study of material culture. Although they do



not encompass the total population of a community, they provide detailed information about the possessions of a far broader economic segment than that which is possible to obtain from viewing the preserved heirlooms of the affluent in museums or from reading the personal and business documents of the literate. For an area like Kent County, Maryland, inventories are a valuable resource which must be tapped in order to broaden our knowledge of a particular locality and to understand its place in the historical development of the pre-industrial Atlantic community.

### *Bed Covers*

The original study encompassed all aspects of textile furnishings in Kent County, but this paper focuses on the outer bed covers, that is—rugs, quilts, coverlets and counterpanes.<sup>9</sup> Outer bed covers were owned by 85% of the total surveyed population. The percentage of ownership remained fairly constant from a low of 75% in 1710 to a high of 88% in 1760 and 1820. Bed rugs accounted for 46% of the bed covers used in Kent County during the survey. When use of specific bed covers is analyzed over time, it can be seen that the majority of covers used before 1780 were rugs, and that the lighter weight quilts, coverlets and counterpanes accounted for the majority used thereafter. The number of rugs in use peaked in 1740, although rugs were more widely distributed in 1760. Quilts increased in number and distribution up to 1820, while coverlets were more widely held in 1780, but in fewer number than in 1820. Counterpanes, like bed covers in general, peaked in use in 1760 and 1820.

Outer bed covers were expensive and usually imported or made from imported textiles. A rug was valued at about twice the cost of a pair of wool blankets or a simple wooden bedstead, but was comparable to a pair of linen sheets. Quilts were even more valuable. Averaging between twenty and thirty shillings, depending on fabric and condition, they were nearly equal in worth to bed hangings and they were considerably more valuable than window curtains, bed sheets or table linens.

### *Rugs*

The rug was a wool pile outer bed cover which had great popularity in England and in the colonies in the seventeenth and



eighteenth centuries. The origin of the word "rugg" is somewhat obscure. It may come from the Scandinavian word, "rugga," which means a coarse coverlet. "Rug" or "rugg" was defined in the 1730 edition of Bailey's *Dictionarium Britannicum* as a "shaggy coverlet for the bed." In Kent County the number of rugs increased up to 1740 and then sharply declined. Between the 1740s and 1760s there was an average of three rugs per household, while in 1820 there was a total of only three rugs in the entire county survey. Rugs were owned by 57% of the inventory population in the 1710 study, 87% of the 1760 population, and only 5% of the 1820 population.<sup>10</sup>

The use of rugs was not related to wealth alone even though rugs were imported and more expensive than a pair of blankets. Forty-seven percent of all the decedents with estates valued below £125 had rugs, and 45% of all decedents with estates valued over £500 also had rugs. In looking more closely at the changes over time in use of rugs by the lowest and highest economic groups, it becomes apparent that when rugs were losing their appeal, they were used for a longer period in the households of the lower classes. In 1710, 100% of the decedents with estates over £500 had rugs while 51% of those with estates under £125 had rugs. In 1780, 65% with estates over £500 had rugs, and 47% of those with estates under £125 had rugs. By 1820, no one in the higher wealth level owned rugs while 14% of the lower group still owned them. Therefore rugs, which had been fashionable in middle and upper class homes, were found only in homes of people in the lowest economic group in the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> It is surprising that such a popular bed cover could peak in use in 1760 and almost totally disappear from households sixty years later. It is not a question of rugs being put aside in storage in favor of lighter weight quilts and coverlets, but rather, it appears that rugs were totally removed from the premises.<sup>12</sup>

The Kent County inventories provided evidence about the appearance of bed rugs. The eighteenth and early nineteenth-century type of rug, found extant in New England, especially in Connecticut, was made from wool sewn in a running stitch through a coarse linen backing. These rugs were usually worked in muted multicolored patterns. It is apparent from the descriptive evidence that the majority of the rugs listed in Kent County and other southern inventories were manufactured professionally in England and exported to the colonies. These rugs were woven on a loom.

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*Wholecloth quilt, mordant painted and dyed cotton from India, 1700–1760. From the Augustine Boyer family, Kent County, MD. Courtesy the Henry Francis duPont Winterthur Museum.*

They probably had a linen warp and a coarse wool weft drawn up in loops to create a shag.<sup>13</sup> The wool was of an inferior quality, possibly wool clips left over from weaving. The rugs that were used in Kent County were imported from several areas of England. They were variously described as “4 West country ruggs,” “2 Cadow rugs,” “2 Wiltshire rugs” or “1 worsted shag.”<sup>14</sup> In the more than 500 references to rugs in Kent County inventories, there was only one which would indicate that rugs were made locally. In 1740 the Catholic

farmer Daniel Flynn had "1 country rug 7/." <sup>15</sup> With one exception, bed rugs were listed as "rugs" in the inventories, not "carpets." <sup>16</sup> The value of rugs changed little during the period of the study, and color or pattern had little effect on price. The bed rugs used in Kent County were available in a variety of monochrome colors. <sup>17</sup> The appraisers were more apt to note the color of rugs than of other furnishings. The preferred colors were green, blue and red, in descending popularity. Although the green dying process was more time consuming, green rugs dominated the inventories. <sup>18</sup> Most of the households with rugs, had rugs in different colors, and some had one in each of the three colors, green, blue and red. <sup>19</sup> White or undyed rugs were uncommon, but the 1738 inventory of widow Mary Dunn listed "1 white shag rug." <sup>20</sup> The only indications of pattern were the frequent references in the 1760s to "spotted" or "mottled" rugs. George Copper's inventory listed "2 spotted" rugs in addition to "2 Wiltshire rugs, 1 worsted shag." <sup>21</sup> Differing from the Connecticut rugs, the ones in Kent County were without personalization, names, initials, dates, or added decoration. <sup>22</sup> Only in the inventory of Michael Miller was there an unusual reference to "1 old gallen do." <sup>23</sup> This probably referred to a rug with a galloon or braid trimming.

An unusual type of bed rug was itemized in several wealthy inventories between 1740 and 1780. Ten references to silk rugs appeared in connection with bedding. A silk bed rug is difficult to imagine. Did it have a heavy texture like its wool namesake or was it a silk quilt? <sup>24</sup> The 1740 inventories of Dr. Alexander Adair and Dr. Thomas Williams referred simply to silk rugs, but the inventory of Captain Thomas Smyth listed "1 silk thrumd" rug at £1.5 <sup>25</sup>

### *Light Weight Bed Covers*

There was considerable imprecision among the appraisers of Kent County estates in listing lighter weight bed coverings. They used such catch-all words as "bed cover" and "spread" as well as the more precise "quilt," "coverlid" and "counterpane." The words "bed cover" and "spread" were uncommon before 1800. From the descriptive adjectives used in the inventories, these objects were variously described as woollen or yarn, cotton or calico and were probably masking covers which might have been more precisely defined

as coverlets, quilts or counterpanes. Collectively, the lighter weight bed covers rose in popularity as bed rugs declined.

Appraisers used the terms "quilt," "coverlid," and "counterpane" somewhat interchangeably. All three terms were occasionally found in the same inventory indicating that a distinction was made between three-ply, woven, or single weight bed covers, but more often, when descriptive adjectives were used, the terminology was contradictory. Appraisers listed such objects as "7 coverlids quilted," "1 counterpane quilt," "3 cotton coverlids patchwork" and "1 double woven counterpane."<sup>26</sup> Of these contradictory terms only the coverlid with patchwork brings to mind a recognizable object.<sup>27</sup> In the Baltimore area in the 1830s chintz motifs were occasionally applied to woven coverlets or Marseille spreads and left unquilted.

### *Quilts*

Quilts are mentioned in the earliest Kent inventories from 1709–1711. Their number increased slowly during the eighteenth century with a dramatic increase in number between 1800 and 1820. Of the 311 quilts identified in the inventories, two-thirds were found in inventories dated 1800 or later. In 1710 quilts were used by less than 10% of the decedent population, in 1760 by 28% and in 1820 by 63%. In addition to replacing rugs for warmth, quilts served a decorative or sociotechnic function as display pieces. Their dualism of purpose suggests that their use was subject to wealth. This theory is borne out by the evidence from 1760 which indicates that only 6% of the decedents with estates worth less than £125 had quilts compared with 56% with estates over £500. By 1800 these extremes had modified somewhat, and 19% in the lower group had quilts compared with 50% in the upper wealth group. This democratic trend continued into the 1820s when 50% of the lower group had quilts compared with 79% of the upper group. Therefore, by the second decade in the nineteenth century, quilts were in popular use by a wide economic segment of the population.

The wealthier estates were generally those with the largest slave holdings. When ownership of quilts is compared to ownership of slaves, 82% of all quilts were owned by men with slaves and of that number 75% owned by men with four or more slaves. All of the quilt frames found in the survey, with one exception, were owned by

slave owners. The evidence suggests that slaves may have been involved in making quilts, or that there was more time available for the white women in the household to pursue needlework when slaves assumed many of the household chores.

Ownership of quilts in Kent County can be further broken down by sex and religion. Women, who made up 9% of the decedent survey, owned 13% of all the quilts in contrast to only 5% of all rugs and 3% of all coverlets and counterpanes. Clearly quilts, which symbolized women's accomplishments, were valued possessions and frequently retained in female households.

Quakers in Kent County were conspicuous consumers especially in terms of their household textiles. In almost every category of furnishing textile as well as textile yardage and textile production tools, they owned more than their non-Quaker neighbors of approximately the same wealth. Although they only made up 9% of the population, they owned 16% of all the bed hangings found in the survey, 13% of all sheets, 12% of all blankets and 10% of all bed rugs. Paradoxically they owned only 8% of the quilts. Although many Quakers in Kent County owned slaves, by 1800 they were divesting themselves of slaves through manumission. There appears to be a correlation between a lower percentage of ownership of quilts by Quakers and their declining ownership of slaves.

The inventories provide some evidence about the appearance of eighteenth century Kent County quilts. Almost no Maryland quilts survive from that period to give dimension to the written descriptions. The earliest quilts probably had a top layer made from a whole cloth or large pieces of matching cloth as indicated by descriptive references to calico, India chintz, silk, calamanco, worsted and linsey. Rarely mentioned colors included blue, yellow and green. The adjective "patched" was not used before 1760. When it was used it probably referred to quilts or coverlets with decoration formed by appliqueing large-figured printed textiles or chintzes. It may also have referred to whole cloth quilts made from boldly printed textiles. The term "piece work" was not used in Kent County inventories, yet quilts pieced from small areas of textiles were made in Maryland in the eighteenth century.<sup>28</sup>

Inventories suggest that the fabrics used for Kent County quilts were imported, and extant early nineteenth century quilts support

*Pieced quilt, block printed linen, probably made in Baltimore County, MD, 1800–1820. Courtesy the Maryland Historical Society.*

that conclusion. However, a 1780 reference to a “new Linsey quilt country made” indicates that quilts were also made from domestically woven cloth.<sup>29</sup>

It is generally assumed that the assembling and stitching of quilts were done in the home. However, the number of quilt frames found in Kent County inventories was in no way compatible with the number of quilts. Only two frames were listed before 1800, and only fifteen in all. Usually frames were in pairs. To explain the large number of quilts, one can speculate that quilting was done without a frame, that the frames were attached to the walls or ceilings and therefore omitted by the appraisers, or that quilting was done outside the home. In 1749 Anne Griffith advertised in the *Maryland*


*Gazette* that she did "Plain or Figured Corse or Fine quilting in the best and cheapest manner at her house" in Annapolis, and in 1751, Mary Anne March, an Annapolis teacher of needlework, also advertised that she took in quilting or needlework.<sup>30</sup> In 1794 a Mrs. Polk offered her services in drawing patterns, perhaps for quilts or needlework.<sup>31</sup> Ready-made quilts may also have been available from England. The September 24, 1753 edition of the *South Carolina Gazette* advertised that "mattresses and bed quilts" had just been imported from London. Similar merchandise could have been shipped to Annapolis or the Eastern Shore port of Chestertown. Quilted fabric was also available in Kent County. Quilted cotton and Marseilles quilting were sold by local merchants from the 1760s on, and Baltimore merchants advertised "plain or bordered" Marseilles quilting and Manchester quilting during the 1780s and 90s.<sup>32</sup> However, Kent County appraisers did not record any "Marseilles quilts" in household inventories.

The cut-off date for this research of 1820 corresponds to the beginning period of extant Maryland quilts. From the 1820s on quilts made in Kent County and elsewhere in Maryland can be found in increasing numbers. A study of estate inventories from 1820 to 1860 should be undertaken to determine if descriptions in inventories conform to extant quilts.

### *Coverlets*

The term "coverlid" (coverlet) first appeared in Kent County inventories recorded in the early 1740s. In seventeenth-century English inventories, coverlets were listed frequently, but quilts and counterpanes were rarely mentioned. In England, coverlets were used in conjunction with rugs until around 1715. After that time they were used as an outer covering over blankets.<sup>33</sup> It is therefore surprising, with the strong English heritage of the residents in Kent County, that coverlets were not used in the county until the middle of the eighteenth century. Perhaps coverlets were woven in England for local consumption and not exported. A number of weavers resided in Kent County throughout the eighteenth century, but they may have lacked skills or equipment necessary for complicated pattern weaving.






*Applique Quilt, 1825–1830, made by Elizabeth Deardorf Smith, Avalon, Carroll County, MD. Private collection. Photo courtesy of the Daughters of the American Revolution Museum.*

After coverlets first appeared in Kent County inventories, they increased in number up until 1780, declined after the Revolution, and then regained popularity in the nineteenth century. Only in 1780 did coverlets surpass quilts in total numbers, but their overall total of 191 was considerably lower than that of quilts or rugs. The popularity of coverlets at the time of the Revolution suggests that domestically woven coverlets replaced quilts and counterpanes made from imported fabrics. In 1740 coverlets were used by 2% of the decedent population, in 1780 by 42% and in 1820 by 35%. A continuation of this survey through the 1840s would probably show increased usage.<sup>34</sup> Like quilts, the use of coverlets can be correlated

with wealth and slave ownership. In 1760 5% of the decedents with estates under £125 owned coverlets compared with 28% with estates over £500. By 1800, 19% of the lower group owned coverlets compared with 40% of the upper group. In the 1820s when coverlets increased in usage, they were only used by 7% of the decedents with estates below £125, but by 50% with estates over £500. Therefore coverlets in Kent County were more frequently found in houses of the wealthy in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in contrast to jacquard coverlets which were owned by middle-class people in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup> When the ownership of coverlets is compared with slaveholdings, it is found that 80% of all coverlets were owned by slave owners. The production and use of coverlets, as well as quilts, in Kent County may have depended, in part, upon bonded labor. Coverlets were most frequently described in inventories as "country" which indicates they were woven by local weavers. A number of weavers in the county can be identified from their estate inventories, but many of the plantations may also have had a slave or indentured servant who was trained as a weaver. Newspapers frequently advertised runaway servants and slaves. In 1755 Alexander Garvey lost an "Irish Servant Man and Weaver by Trade," and in 1791 John Beal Bordley advertised for the return of "Jim, a dark mulatto . . . a good weaver."<sup>36</sup>

A study of ownership of coverlets by special groups indicates that women did not usually acquire coverlets for bed coverings. They owned only 3% of the total number, far fewer than their 9% share of the population. Quakers owned 10% which was consistent with their 9% share of the population.

After 1780 Kent County appraisers occasionally noted the fiber content of the coverlets, thus providing clues about their composition. The majority of those described were cotton or a combination of wool weft with cotton or linen warp. These coverlets were variously listed as "2 cotton and yarn coverlid," or "2 old cotton and wool coverlid."<sup>37</sup> Descriptions like "1 lincy coverlet," "1 yarn coverlid" and "4 yarn bed covers" may refer to coverlets made totally from one fiber, but it is more likely that coverlets were woven from a combination of fibers, using linen or cotton for strong warp threads and wool yarn for the warm weft filling.<sup>38</sup> Since many inventories listed several pounds of thread (linen) and yarn (wool), it is



*Quilt signed EW 1796 on back in cross stitch, attributed to the Webster family of Jarrettsville, MD. Privately owned. Photo courtesy of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts.*

likely that clients provided the prepared fibers for the weaver to weave into coverlets or other textiles. Because color and pattern were never mentioned in connection with Kent County coverlets, it is not possible to determine their appearance. One 1780 reference to “1 double wove woolen counterpane—£1.5.9,” may indicate that some coverlets were of the double cloth type with geometric patterns rather than “overshot” with a floating pattern weft.<sup>39</sup>

*Counterpanes*

The term "counterpin" or counterpane appeared in Kent County inventories throughout the period of study and appears to have been a catch-all for a variety of different kinds of bed covers.<sup>40</sup> Although never very numerous, counterpanes increased, declined, and increased again in number during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In 1710 only two households owned a grand total of two counterpanes while in 1760 and in 1800, households with counterpanes averaged three apiece. In 1820 there were more counterpanes in use than ever before but they were more widely distributed at the rate of two per household. In 1710 counterpanes were owned by 3% of the decedent population, in 1760 by 18%, and in 1820 by 32%. But in 1780, during the Revolution, counterpanes were only owned by 7% of the surveyed population. Ownership of counterpanes, like quilts, was a function of wealth. In 1740, no one with an estate valued under £125 owned a counterpane, but 40% with estates over £500 did own counterpanes. In 1820 counterpanes were only owned by 14% in the lower wealth group, but 54% of the upper wealth group. Eighty-five percent of all the counterpanes in the survey were owned by slaveowners. Of this group, 75% were owned by families with four or more slaves.

Women preferred quilts to counterpanes. Paradoxically only two out of the 117 counterpanes in the survey, or less than 2%, were found in estate inventories belonging to women. Quakers, on the other hand, had a preference for counterpanes over quilts. They owned 18% of all the counterpanes in the survey, twice their 9% share of the population. Two-thirds of the Quaker-owned counterpanes were listed in inventories recorded in 1800 and 1820. The evidence suggests that since Quakers did not own as many slaves as non-Quakers and therefore have slaves available to help with the quilting, they used decorative but unquilted bed covers.

A few counterpanes were listed as being "country made," but some were available ready-made from local or near-by suppliers. "Cotton counterpanes" were advertised as early as 1748 by Philadelphia merchants, in 1784 by Baltimore merchants, and in the 1790s by various Easton merchants.<sup>41</sup> The earlier counterpanes used imported printed cottons or linens variously described as "flowered," "stampt cotton," "stampt linen" or "calico." These were

probably light weight mono-layer bed covers. After 1780 counterpanes are simply described as cotton, linen, calico or white. A 1760 reference to "1 figured cotton napt counterpin" and an 1800 reference to "1 knotted do" (counterpin) may refer to candlewicking or needlework, but the references could also refer to woven bed covers.<sup>42</sup> Counterpanes described as "yarn," "wool and linen" and "wool," were probably coverlets. White was the only counterpane color mentioned. Counterpanes described as diaper and calico may also have been white. In the 1820s there were four references to "white" compared with one earlier one. In a small way, these findings indicate a growing preference for white textile furnishings during the neoclassical period.

### *Conclusion*

The findings for Kent County do not significantly contradict the modernization theory of rapid social change and an emerging consumer culture in the eighteenth century. As textile furnishings were becoming more readily available and more economically accessible, the community of Kent County was moving towards greater prosperity. In Kent County most textile possessions increased over time. With the exception of bed rugs which went out of fashion, other bed covers slowly increased in number up until the Revolution, leveled off and then increased again at a more rapid rate of consumption. The wealthy had more bed covers in all time periods, but certain coverings, which at one time had only been affordable by the wealthy, were eventually affordable by almost all. Some groups had more bed covers than others due to greater financial means, wider opportunity or personal preferences.

The inventory evidence from Kent County has provided specific information about the bed coverings of a particular group of people. The findings suggest regional and temporal variations, but it is hoped that these variations will contribute to an understanding of the whole and add credence to a larger historical view of consumerism in the pre-industrial Atlantic community.

*Notes and References:*

1. In 1642 when Kent was established, it encompassed all of the Maryland Eastern Shore. The modern boundaries date from 1706 and include the area of land south of the Sassafras River, north of the Chester River and west of the state of Delaware.
2. Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "Inventories and the Analysis of Wealth and Consumption Patterns in St. Mary's County, Maryland, 1658-1777," *Historical Methods* 13 (Spring 1980), p. 29.
3. Barbara and Cary Carson, "Styles and Standards of Living in Southern Maryland, 1670-1752," paper delivered at the Southern Historical Association meeting, Atlanta, GA, 1976.
4. Richard D. Brown, *Modernization: The Transformation of American Life*, (Hill and Wang, New York, 1976) p. 89.
5. The originals of the probate records cited in this report are located in the Maryland Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.
6. All of the material is in original manuscript form. None has been transcribed or computerized.
7. There are approximately twenty-year gaps between each time period with the exception of the first where the gap is almost 30 years. It would have been preferable to read inventories from every decade or from 1710, 1730, 1750, 1770, 1790, 1810, but the sequence was established by an earlier study. Volumes consulted were: Volume 1, 1709-1720, 1730-1732; Volume 2, 1732-1740; Volume 3, 1720-1730, 1740-1741; Volume 3[A], 1728-1749; Volume 5, 1759-1767; Volume 8, 1776-1788; Volume 11, 1799-1807; Volume 16, 1820-1822.
8. Of the 33 women in the survey whose estates were inventoried, the majority died after 1800. There were probably just as many widows earlier in the century, but they were not inventoried. Estates of low value were not worth the cost of probate.
9. The original study was "Textile Furnishing: A Case Study of Kent County, Maryland, 1710-1820," thesis, George Washington University, 1983.
10. Schoelwer's study of Philadelphia furnishings shows that rugs declined substantially in the eighteenth century, from 43% of the households with bedding in 1700-1704 to 20% in 1775. Susan Prendergast Schoelwer, "Form, Function, and Meaning in the Use of Fabric Furnishings: A Philadelphia Case Study, 1700-1775," *Wintherthur Portfolio* 14 (Spring, 1979), p. 80.
11. Rugs lost their popularity in England at an earlier date. From inventories recorded by Steer, it is evident that after 1715 there was greater use of blankets with coverlets and quilts than with rugs. Francis W.

Steer, *Farms and Cottage Inventories of Mid-Essex, 1635-1749*, (Phillimore, London, 1969). Samuel Johnson's dictionary of 1755 defined rugs as "coarse nappy coverlets used for mean beds" thus indicating that rugs were held in low esteem.

12. One can only speculate about the disappearance of bed rugs. When wool was scarce during the war years, rugs may have been used for other functions like burying the dead. To aid the depressed woolen industry and discourage the importation of foreign linen, the Parliamentary Acts of 1666, 1678 and 1730 required that the dead in England and in the English colonies be buried in wool clothing and wrapped in wool shrouds. Failure to comply with the law was punishable by a substantial fine. The shroud may have dispensed with the need for a coffin. Perhaps, for lack of a bay or flannel winding cloth, an old woolen rug or blanket was used to conform to the law. A 1690 court accounting for the estate of John Culle, formerly of Albermarle County, N.C., included the following item—"To the Trubell of my House and the Lone of my bedding: and a Ruge he was buried in." (*North Carolina Higher-Court Records 1670-1696*), pp. 15-16. After the colonies established their independence from England, the tradition of burying in wool may have continued. Even though woolen imports were scarce until the early nineteenth century, the unfashionable woolen rugs were readily available.
13. A 1634 letter from John Winter on the coast of Maine to his factor in Plymouth provides evidence that rugs were woven on a loom—"2 dozen of Barnstaple rugs wove without seam." quoted by Sally Garoutte in "Early Colonial Quilts in a Bedding Context," *Uncoverings—the 1980 Research Papers of the American Quilt Study Group*, (Mill Valley, California, 1981), p. 20.
14. West country rugs probably continued to come from around Barnstaple in Devon. The county of Wiltshire was known for its pure white sheep; and the "worsted" rugs may have come from Worsted, a town near Norwich. Florence Montgomery, *Textiles in America* (Winterthur, DE, 1984). Thornton also notes that in the seventeenth century the word "caddow" was a synonym for "rug." Peter Thornton, *Seventeenth-Century Interior Decoration in England, France and Holland* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1978), p. 112.
15. Inventories, vol. 2, p. 316 (1740).
16. Inventories, vol. 2, p. 337 (1740).
17. The local merchant, William Bathurst had red, green and blue rugs in his shop inventory, and merchants in Annapolis advertised Torrington rugs, while one in Baltimore listed 3/4 x 9/4 yarn and worsted rugs. *Maryland Gazette*, March 22, 1764.



18. The red dye probably came from madder or cochineal and the blue from indigo or woad. Green dying required that the yarn first be dyed in yellow and then overdyed in blue. Yellow rugs were not mentioned.
19. Late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century inventories from Essex in England also contained numerous references to "green," "blue" and "worsted" rugs.
20. Inventories, vol. 2, p. 290 (1740).
21. Inventories, vol. 5, p. 12 (1740).
22. Refer to J. Herbert Callister's introduction to *Bed Rugs, 1722-1833* (Hartford Wadsworth Atheneum, CT, 1972).
23. Michael Miller was a gentleman and wealthy slaveowner with many unusual possessions such as a monogrammed beadstead. Inventories, vol. 3, p. 363 (1740).
24. References to silk rugs have been found by Barbara Carson in St. Mary's County inventories from the 1740s. Florence Montgomery and Linda Baumgarten were also familiar with the term, but not the appearance. Peter Thornton found at Ham House "quilted silk blankets" which may have been similar to silk rugs (p. 113).
25. Inventories, vol. 3, p. 350 (1740); vol. 2, p. 323 (1740); vol. 3a, p. 324 (1740). "Thrumd" refers to the warp ends left over from the weaving process.
26. Inventories, vol. 8, p. 165 (1780); vol. 16, p. 194 (1820); vol. 11, p. 56 (1800), and vol. 8, p. 209 (1780).
27. "Patch" was used in England and America as a synonym for chintz. Elisabeth D. Garrett quoted two uses of patch in connection with chintz in "The American Home Part III: the bedchamber," *The Magazine Antiques*, March 1983, p. 617. A bedchamber in Newburyport, Massachusetts was described as "elegant with gay patch (chintz) hangings to the square post bedstead. . .," *Reminiscences of a Non-agenarian* (Newburyport, MA, 1879), p. 32. Caroline King described her bedroom in Salem "By the side of the bed was placed a high-back so-called easy chair . . . covered with gay colored chintz ('patch' it was called then) where very long tailed birds sat upon impossible trees surrounded by gorgeous flowers, never dreamed of in our philosophy or botany," *When I lived in Salem 1822-1866* (Brattleboro, VT, 1937) p. 185.
28. A Maryland quilt from a private collection was recorded by the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts. The quilt is dated 1796 and is composed of a large central square surrounded by smaller squares cut from small-figured, block printed textiles.

29. Inventories, vol. 8, p. 209 (1780).
30. *Maryland Gazette*, December 27, 1749 and March 27, 1751.
31. *Maryland Gazette*, July 28, 1774.
32. *Maryland Journal*, December 12, 1784, and 1791.
33. These conclusions are based on material presented by Steer and Machin. Robert Machin, ed., *Probate Inventories and Manorial Excepts of Chetnole, Leigh and Yetminster* (University of Bristol, 1976).
34. The jacquard apparatus was used by weavers in Maryland by the 1830s but jacquard coverlets are only known from three western counties with German populations.
35. These findings are suggested by the research I have done concerning owners of New York and Pennsylvania coverlets owned by the DAR Museum. See *The Magazine Antiques* January 1985 and February 1986.
36. *Maryland Gazette*, December 4, 1755 and *Maryland Herald*, May 10, 1791.
37. Inventories, vol. 8, p. 171; vol. 8, p. 211 (1780).
38. Inventories, vol. 8, p. 186 (1780); vol. 11, p. 81 (1800); vol. 16, p. 20 (1820).
39. Inventories, vol. 8, p. 209 (1780).
40. In inventories from affluent seventeenth-century households, "counterpanes" referred to highly decorative covers which were placed over quilts or coverlets. Thornton, p. 179.
41. *Pennsylvania Journal*, January 5, 1748, *Maryland Journal*, December 9, 1784 and the *Eastern Shore Intelligencer*, various.
42. Inventories, vol. 5, p. 139 (1760); vol. 11, p. 50 (1800).