

# Coverlets Weave History With Beauty

**BETH MILLER**

Adams Co. Correspondent

LITTLESTOWN (Adams Co.)

—For more than 10 years, weaver Peg Mearns has been working with yarn and history at the looms in the studio of her old farm house.

At the same time she is making coverlets and napkins and runners, Mearns is thinking about the people who made those same treasures long before she was born.

"It is a great curiosity to me," she said of her craft. "It helps you think back and personalize things."

Mearns said she began weaving in 1980, after retiring from a career working for extension services in New Jersey and Maryland.

One of her looms was given to her when she retired from the extension service, she said.

Mearns said she weaves three to four hours every day in the studio at the back of her house, which dates from the time of the Civil War.

She said she makes about 10 full-sized coverlets a year, as well as napkins, placemats, towels, pillow tops, stoles and scarves, lap robes, and tablecloths.

Mearns said she had been interested in weaving for a long time, at least since her college days, but never pursued her interest until she retired.

Some of the proudest moments in her weaving career have been at the South Mountain Fair, she said. Her prizes there include twice achieving the Best of Show award for a twin bed coverlet and a king-size coverlet.

Mearns said she uses cotton warp and wool weft in her works, and weaves in colors from moss green to baby pink to all types and shades of blue.

She markets her items from her home, where people can see her selections and works in progress on her two looms and order what-



Peg Mearns practices weaving in the studio of her Civil War era home.

ever catches their eyes.

Recently, Mearns said, she has gotten more involved in the stories behind the names of the weaving patterns she works with.

Some of the patterns look like their names, but the majority do not, she said.

She said many patterns were named for historical or Biblical events. For example, she said, there is "Lee's Surrender," "The Star of Bethlehem" and the "Maltese Cross."

One very old pattern that is still very popular is the "Whig Rose," Mearns said. That one is named

after a political party that was popular in the early years of the country, but has since disappeared.

She said some patterns have flowery or leafy names, like "Wandering Vine," or "Catalpa Flower."

Many others have sentimental meanings, like "Love Knot" or "Soldier's Return," she added. Still others have names of states in them, such as "Kentucky Snowball" and "Virginia Snowball," she said.

A lot of other patterns have the words "beauty" and "fancy" in them, Mearns said.

Mearns said many of the patterns have several names. For instance, the pattern "Cat's Paw" is also called "Wandering Vine" and "Rattlesnake," she said.

In the old days, weaving patterns were like recipes and were handed down from generation to generation, from family to family, and shared between friends, she said.

The patterns travelled across the country as settlers headed west and their names changed in the process, she said.

The journey sometimes caused slight variations in their designs also, Mearns said.

She said of the patterns she has investigated date back before the Civil War. That is when people had to weave out of necessity, she said.

Cotton and wool were used by weavers back then because the cotton thread was manufactured and most farms had sheep to provide the wool, Merans said.

In the 1700s and 1800s both men and women were weavers, she said. They had to weave out of necessity, she said, but out of necessity they came up with beautiful patterns to add some beauty to their homes, Mearns said.

So, it seems that Mearns is following tradition by making works that are just as beautiful to decorate modern homes.



Peg Mearns displays some of her favorite coverlet patterns, Cats Paws and Snails Trails; Whig Rose, and Catalpa Flower.

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