

Deb Durkin woven wool blanket and catalogue, ca. early 20th century

MCC-00381

Finding Aid

**Prepared by
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Fort Kent, Maine**

Title: Deb Durkin woven wool blanket and catalogue, ca. early 20th century

Creator/Collector: Debra Durkin

Collection number: MCC-00381 Shelf list number: AX-381

Dates: Early 20th century

Extent: 1 box (.6 cubic feet)

Provenance: The 2 blankets were bought at a tag sale in the St. John Valley and brought to the Acadian Archives in the February 2012.

Language: Not applicable.

Conservation notes: The 2 blankets were wrapped in acid-free tissue paper and placed in an archival box for preservation.

Access restrictions: No restrictions on access.

Physical restrictions: None.

Technical restrictions: None.

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Citation: Deb Durkin's woven wool blanket and catalogue, MCC-00381, Acadian Archives/Archives acadiennes, University of Maine at Fort Kent

Separated materials: Not applicable.

Related materials: Not applicable.

Location of originals: Not applicable.

Location of copies: Not applicable.

Published in: Not applicable.

Biographical information: Debra Durkin grew up in a household where sewing and knitting were common place activities as her maternal grandmother was a trained tailor who passed the skills onto her daughter who in turn taught Debra. There were always special projects to work on during summers and the holiday season. Her introduction to spinning and weaving in 1980 was a seamless transition – just more hand work.

Primarily self taught in this area, Debra was the founding president of the River Bend Fiber Arts Guild in Chattanooga, TN 1983-1986. During that time the Guild, in partnership with the local history museum, refurbished a 1700's era loom and created a spinning/weaving exhibit in the museum.

Upon moving to the St. John Valley, Debra taught spinning and weaving through MSAD #27 from 1991-1994. Her weavings can be found at the Harraseeket Inn in Freeport, ME.

Inventory:

1 woven baby wool blanket with pink trim measuring 33 in. x 39.5 in.

1 woven white catalogue blanket measuring 82 in. x 66 in.

Scope and content: This collection consists of 2 woven blankets bought at a tag sale in the St. John Valley; a woven baby wool blanket with pink trim and a woven white catalogue.

Description:

The **baby wool blanket** (1900-1950): This wool blanket with pink trim measures 33 in. x 39.5 in. and uses a 2/2 twill weave structure, characteristic of several blankets found in the St. John Valley. The warp is a commercially produced cotton singles, the weft is a handspun wool singles. As per Deb, the wool is characteristic of the type of hand spun yarns found in the Valley. The areas of puckering in the body of the blanket is caused by different possibilities: 1) different people spun the wool creating a yarn with slightly different characteristics; 2) the same person spun the yarn over a period of time so a different fleece was used; 3) improper washing techniques exasperated the inherent irregularity of the spun yarn.

The vibrancy of the pink yarn is an indicator that cochineal was the dye material used, although without testing, it is difficult to determine. (Cochineal is a natural dye derived of the dried bodies of the female cochineal insect). Harold and Dorothy Burnham reference the use of cochineal as a dye material in the Acadian settlements of Nova Scotia. They also note the bands of color at the ends of the woven blanket as indicative of an Acadian blanket style.

Commercial dyes became available for domestic use in North America at the beginning of the 20th century (more common in the 1920s). Domestic production of woven blankets in the Valley began to decline in the 1920s when commercial materials became more readily accessible. However, the practice remained well into the mid century in the more isolated areas of the "back settlements" of "concession". (This information is from Deb Durkin)

Catalogue wedding bedspread (1900-1950s): This bedspread is woven in a 2/2 twill weave structure and measures 82 in. x 66 in. Traditionally and regionally, this rag weave style is referred to as "catalogue". Rag weaving is a common form of weaving used in many European based communities and adapted for use in immigrant populations of North America.

In this blanket, a cotton singles warp is used and is a characteristic of this region. Very fine strips of cloth are used as the weft material (hence the term rag weave). The set of the warp is the same

as one used in weaving a blanket of woolen yarn. Harold and Dorothy Burnham reference the all white catalogue as a wedding bedspread. In a household, all the white pieces of scrap material were collected and saved over time. The material would be used later in the weaving of this special wedding blanket called catalogue.

For this blanket, the weaver uses the weft repeat of three rows of white material then four rows (or about ¼ in) of white cotton thread. This gives a slightly different surface design to the texture of the blanket and offsets some of the need for gathered scraps. As per Deb, she thinks the warp and weft threads are the same white cotton singles. The center seam of the blanket indicates the width of the loom used. Two strips of the same length were woven then placed side by side and stitched together to create an end product of sufficient width. (This information is from Deb Durkin)

Processing action: The 2 blankets were wrapped in acid-free tissue paper and placed together in 1 archival box.