

VAN DOREN COVERLETS

There were approximately 850 identified coverlet weavers in the United States working between 1820 & 1870. There was only one, however to work in Michigan. Abram William Van Doren wove in Stoney Creek from 1844-1854.

The first Van Doren came from Holland in the 1600's, settling in Long Island, New York. Generations of Van Doren family weavers were trained in Millstone, New Jersey. Abram's grandfather owned the largest home in Millstone during the Revolutionary War. He could actually claim that "Washington slept here". These professional weavers included Abram's father and 3 brothers.

Millstone was a town very much like Stoney Creek in size, having many farms & water powered mills. At this point in time, only men were trained as professional weavers. As you can imagine, the area really couldn't afford to support 5 professional weavers.

Abram married in 1831, having two boys before moving to Michigan in 1838. It was in 1838 that the Clinton Kalamazoo canal was built as far as what is now Yates Cider Mill. Anyone traveling west from New York by way of the Erie Canal would have to begin traveling overland when they reached the Clinton River.

Land in Michigan was good for farming and raising sheep. The area around Stoney Creek was busy with a grist mill, saw mill, flour mill, carding mill and woolen mill. The stagecoach ran between Royal Oak & Romeo twice a week. The tavern in Stoney Creek served as a way station. A corduroy road of logs laid side by side had been built in 1824 by the Pontiac and Paint Creek Turnpike Co. It followed the route of what is now Woodward Ave from Detroit to Pontiac with a branch from Royal Oak to Rochester. Today, this route is known as Rochester Rd. The trip from Detroit to Rochester took two days with a team of oxen.

The supply of wool, the ability to process it and the accessibility to customers made Stoney Creek a great place for Van Doren to settle.

The 1845 Avon Township census lists Van Doren & his family living along Romeo (Tienken) road. The Stoney Creek School records, School district #1, list him as assessor for the School Board. From 1845-47, he served in this capacity along with Joshua Van Hoosen who was listed as the president.

From 1844 until 1851, Abram Van Doren engaged in an active & prosperous weaving trade in Stoney Creek. During this period, he wove the "Double Rose" and the "Double Lily" design Jacquard coverlets his family in New Jersey had woven since the 1830's. Coverlet designs were passed down in a weaving family and it was rare that two weavers ever wove exactly the same designs.

Van Doren advertised his arrival in the Avon Township area by sending out a flyer and posting broadsides which stated:

FANCY COVERLET WEAVING—

A. W. Van Doren respectfully announces to the citizens of Oakland and Macomb counties, that he has commenced the latest styles of Fancy Weaving in the village of Stoney Creek, 1 ½ miles from Rochester and 11 miles from Pontiac. He respectfully solicits the patronage of the public. From long experience in the business, he does not hesitate to warrant all work entrusted to his care. In preparing the yarn for his coverlets, the cotton must be No. 10, three threaded; the woolen yarn, spun in the grease, 50 knots to the pound and doubled. Seven runs of each will weave a coverlet. The names of the owners will be woven in the margin of their coverlets. Stoney Creek, January 1, 1845. A. W. Van Doren.

A "knot" was wound on a "niddy-noddy" or hand reel and is equivalent to today's skein. Van Doren's clients brought their own wool to him & they purchased cotton yarn available from the General Store. At the time Van Doren was working in Stoney Creek, the General Store & Post office was located in what is now the Eberline house on Tienken. All the people who had coverlets made by Van Doren lived within 10 miles of his shop.

Professional weavers such as Van Doren wove their fancy Jacquard coverlets on a Jacquard Loom. Although called a "loom", it was merely an attachment to be added to the top of

a regular multi-harness loom. This attachment was developed in 1801 by Joseph Marie Jacquard of Paris, France. When it first appeared, the French handweavers thought Jacquard's invention would rob them of their jobs. They destroyed the looms & refused to learn to work on them. By 1820, however, the loom became widely used. Joseph Marie Jacquard died in poverty in 1840, never to see the success of his invention.

The loom with a Jacquard attachment took up 36 square feet of floor space or a six foot square section of floor. A 10-12 foot vertical space was necessary to accommodate the loom. Standing 12 feet high, the heddles of the loom hung down from hooks with weights on the ends. The elaborate designs were accomplished by the use of punch cards, the forerunner of original computer cards. Each card represented a single row of woven weft, so it often took several hundred cards to compose the most elementary design. Because of the size, weavers who wove with a Jacquard loom did not travel. They may have traveled to take orders but had a permanent shop where they worked. A professional weaver would weave mill cloth, horse blankets, clothing material, cotton sheeting, blankets and carpet in addition to Jacquard coverlets.

The record book of a New York weaver indicated it was possible to produce about 2 fancy coverlets a week in addition to plain weaving and farming. The average career span of a weaver was slightly over five years and they rarely wove more than two to three designs in their career.

One of the earliest A. W. Van Doren coverlets found, dated 1844, was made for Cerepta A. Axford, daughter of Abram and Peninnah Swayze Axford. It is of a plain weave double cloth, producing a "summer" or light side and "winter" or dark side, in indigo blue wool and white cotton in the "Double Rose" pattern.

The same design was chosen by Cerepta's cousin Abby Axford in 1845. This coverlet is on display at the Moses Wisner home, the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Museum. I photographed the Axford home on Rochester Road just before it was torn down.

Using the madder red wool, natural cotton and indigo blue wool, a "Double Lily" design coverlet was woven in 1846 for Mary Ann Jones. This coverlet is at the Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm.

Amelia & Peter Brewster had a blue and white "Double Lily" coverlet woven for themselves with both their names in a signature panel of the coverlet. Peter's name is readable on the predominately blue or "winter" side while Amelia's is readable on the predominately white or "summer" side. Amelia was Peninnah Axford's sister, mother of Cerepta.

Two lovely sisters, Elizabeth Jane Skidmore and Angeline Skidmore had identical blue wool & white cotton "Double Lily" coverlets woven in 1847. Elizabeth Jane was 18 at the time and Angeline twenty-one. Elizabeth Jane never married & died in Pontiac in 1911. Angeline married Lewis Smith of Macomb County in 1877. Lewis's mother also owned a Van Doren coverlet.

It is assumed the coverlets belonging to the Skidmore sisters were woven of the same warp setup and would have been the same size when originally woven. Three coverlets could be woven of the same design on the same warp, which meant they would be cheaper than an individually woven one. The account book of Benjamin Crissman, owner of the Buckhorn Tavern in Romeo indicates he paid Abraham Van Doren \$9.50 for three coverlets in 1851. Comparative pricing indicates that \$2.50 was charged for a plain coverlet, \$3.00 for two colors of wool and \$3.50 for the name of the purchaser woven into the corner. Today, if you can find one of these coverlets, you can expect price increase of 2000%.

The 1848 coverlet of Roxana Shaw shows a "weft float face weave" which was made with less wool and more cotton than the regular double weave. Mr. Shaw owned 3000 acres of land between Oxford and Romeo. This coverlet is in the Northeast Oakland County Historical Society Museum in Oxford.

To locate all the Van Doren coverlets, I advertised in newspapers & antique magazines and wrote letters to museums. Of the 29 coverlets located, more than half were made for a ¾ bed. They all had a center seam and identified with "A.W. Van Doren, Weaver, Avon" and the date woven. Absolutely none of them are the same size, or exactly alike even if the design was similar. Since each client grew, carded, spun & dyed their own wool, every client's yarn was different. Ten of the coverlets are in private collections, seven are still with the original family and 12 are in museums. 11 coverlets never left the 10 mile area within which they were originally located. 8 of the original owners were found to be related. 19 "Double Rose" pattern coverlets

with an "Oakland County" border were found and 10 "Double Lily" pattern coverlets with "Michigan" borders were found. "Double Rose" pattern coverlets were never found with "Michigan" border, nor "Double Lily" with "Oakland Co" border.

After 1848 when gold was discovered in California and the Civil War was threatening, the golden age of the hand weaver began to decline. Mechanized fabric production increased and fashions were becoming more sophisticated. Coverlets of the early days were relegated to the barn for the horse or dog, the hired hands bed or even rags. Part of a Van Doren coverlet was found cut into 12" x12" squares in a bale of rags in 1980.

Van Doren attempted to keep up with the times as indicated by an article from the "Pontiac Gazette" newspaper of 1854.

Coverlets—We were shown by Mr. A. W. Van Doren of Stoney Creek, a specimen of his own manufacture—a coverlet of large size, and beautiful design. Mr. V. D. is an excellent workman and executes his coverlets in taste and neatness. See his advertisement in another column of our paper.

Van Doren's ad was found on the following page in the same issue.

EXCELSIOR COVERLET WEAVING

A. W. VAN DOREN

Having purchased the looms and weaving fixtures of J. J. Davidson, New York, would respectfully inform his customers and the public generally that he is prepared to

WEAVE COVERLETS

Of the latest and most improved styles being wove whole and composed of one flower only. It is the only Loom of its kind in the United States. He will warrant all work entrusted to his care, if prepared according to his directions.

7 ½ runs of cotton yarn, No. 11, three ply will weave one coverlet; or 14 runs of woolen and 14 runs of cotton will weave two.

CARPET WEAVING

Yarn intended for Venetian or striped carpet should be spun thirty –two knots to the pound and doubled, sixteen knots will weave one yard. Cotton yarn furnished for coverlets. Yarn for coverlets and carpets dyed for customers; also silk dresses, shawls, etc.

Residence-Stoney Creek, Oakland County, Michigan—Address- Rochester, Michigan. All communications post paid will receive prompt attention.

A.W. Van Doren—Rochester, Michigan May 6, 1854

Unfortunately, these new style coverlets with no seam and of one flower were not signed or dated by Van Doren. I can only assume from the note attached to two coverlets belonging to the same family that they were indeed both woven by the same weaver. One blue and white coverlet is a signed and dated Van Doren, the other, woven for the same person in the same blue and white has no markings whatsoever. The double weave coverlet has a center medallion with a Greek key design border. Two of these style coverlets were found, but no positive proof exists for the second coverlet.

A.W. Van Doren had retired from weaving and joined his two sons farming in Ionia, Michigan by 1870. In 1880, the whole family was living in Nebraska, in the process of moving to California to seek their fortune in gold. Abram died in 1884 & is buried in Nebraska.