

THE THREADS THAT BIND US: AN ACCOUNT OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS OF  
NINETEENTH CENTURY WEAVING DRAFTS FROM THE DAHLONEGA LIBRARY  
ARCHIVES

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## Abstract

Handwritten weaving drafts dating back to 1832 were recently found in the Lumpkin County Library in Dahlonega, Georgia. Sallie Sorohan, a local historian, found them while sorting through papers, notes, and receipts in the Lorenzo Dow Davis collection. In a collaboration of local weavers, historians, and weaving students at the University of North Georgia, the drafts were translated in order to be useful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the help of Barbra Miller and Deb Schillo. The current weaving professor at the University of North Georgia, Jo-Marie Karst, as well as the past, Tommye Scanlin, combined efforts to apply the knowledge gathered from Miller and Schillo and get the students involved. The students were able to read the translated drafts and weave a traditional as well as a modern sample of the patterns by Susan Davis. Their work was exhibited at the Hansford Hall Gallery on the Dahlonega campus in Fall 2014. This paper delves into the research of combined efforts of past and present weavers, making threads that bind together the legacy of weavers for more than a century.

## Author Biography

Laura Tuttle is a senior at the University of North Georgia earning a Bachelor of Science in Art Marketing. She is an advanced weaving and textile student currently working on her Senior Capstone Exhibition. She is currently a student in the advanced weaving course taught by Professor Karst and was involved with the beginning weaving class that was given the opportunity to weave the translated drafts from the Lorenzo Dow Davis collection. Tuttle wishes to pursue a career in textiles as well as continue her love for weaving.

Weaving was a prevalent craft during the eighteenth and nineteenth century in Southern Appalachia. Weaving drafts were traditional handwritten sequences of the threading order on the loom used to create specific patterns.<sup>1</sup> People used these drafts to weave patterned bedspreads called coverlets. Antique drafts were often written on long strips of paper using hash marks or numbers to indicate where threads would be placed on a loom for weaving. About three years ago, a collection of handwritten weaving drafts were found at the Lumpkin County Library, but were initially only recognized as slips of scrap paper with dash markings. Research for such drafts required multiple participants of the Appalachia community including local weavers, historians, and students of the University of North Georgia.

Sallie Sorohan, a local historian and Lumpkin County Library retiree, received training in the 1990s for archives at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum and worked for the library for eight years. While working for the library, Sorohan came across slips of paper with handwritten dashes on them. Sorohan had found old weaving drafts from the Lorenzo Dow Davis Collection, donated to the Lumpkin County library by Douglas and Barbara Abee Saxton.<sup>2</sup> They had obtained the drafts from Minnie Belle Patton who purchased them at a yard sale in Lumpkin County.<sup>3</sup> The drafts were originally donated to the local Historical Society, but not having a proper way to preserve them, they were given to the library. The hand-drawn weaving patterns had belonged to Susan Davis, wife of Lorenzo Dow Davis, dating from 1832 to 1893.<sup>4</sup> The Davis' were original settlers of Lumpkin County, mill owners, and gold mine investors.<sup>5</sup> Lorenzo and Susan Davis were both educated and had nine children.<sup>6</sup> Upon discovering the drafts, Sorohan contacted Anne Amerson, a local historian and writer of Lumpkin County. Amerson contacted Tommye Scanlin, a local weaver and tapestry artist, knowing that she may have some insight about the drafts.

Tommye Scanlin, weaving professor and Department Head of Fine Arts emeritus from the University of North Georgia started weaving in 1969 and first taught a high school class on frame-loom weaving. She received her MFA in weaving at East Tennessee State University and began the weaving program at North Georgia in 1972.

Once seeing the drafts, Scanlin called Sorohan to confirm that they were old handwritten weaving drafts. Scanlin then contacted Jo-Marie Karst, the current weaving professor at the university. Karst taught her first weaving class at UNG in the fall of 2008 and became the primary weaving professor in fall of 2009. Karst invited a group of weaving students to visit the library and take a look at the drafts. On Scanlin's recommendation, she then contacted Barbara Miller, a former teacher at the John C. Campbell Folk School, and Deb Schillo, a librarian and archivist at the Southern Highlands Craft Guild headquarters. The guild was chartered in 1930 and

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1. Barbra Miller and Deb Schillo, *Brown Book of Weaving Drafts* (Pennsylvania: Schiffer Publishing, Ltd, 2013), 6.

2. "Inventory of the Lorenzo Dow Davis Collection," *Chestatee Regional Library System*, 2009, [http://www.chestateelibrary.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=254&Itemid=1](http://www.chestateelibrary.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=254&Itemid=1).

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

is one of the strongest craft organizations in the country.<sup>7</sup> Today, the guild represents almost 1000 craftspeople in 293 counties of 9 southeastern states.<sup>8</sup>

Karst stated, “The drafts needed to be translated by an expert in deciphering historic weaving patterns.” Karst knew that Miller and Schillo were co-authors of a recently released book *Frances L. Goodrich’s Brown Book of Weaving Drafts*, in which many 1800s diagrams found in the Guild’s archives were published after being translated with computer software by Barbra Miller. Karst and Scanlin realized that Miller and Schillo were the experts they needed to “put loose ends together” on this project. Karst invited both Miller and Schillo to visit the university in the fall of 2014 to present a lecture, open to the local community as well as faculty, staff, and students, in the Dahlonega Library and Technology Center regarding their book as well as the history of the Southern Highland Craft Guild.

Karst made copies of the original drafts as well as the translated modern drafts to create handouts for her students. Miller and Schillo held a workshop in the UNG weaving studio with a group of Karst’s present and former students, local weavers, and members of the Chattahoochee Handweavers Guild of Dunwoody, Georgia to discuss the drafts found in the Lumpkin County Library. They showed the students how to read the original handwritten drafts as well as the translated modern drafts.

Karst began preparing her students to weave samples from the drafts found in the library. Students were allowed to weave the pattern of their choice by selecting one draft. Students chose the color for their weft yarn, two-ply Harrisville Shetland wool. All students generated their own calculations in preparation to weave their samples. The samples were woven with 16/2 mercerized cotton for the warp and tabby. The warp consists of a set of lengthwise threads that are held by the frame of the loom. The tabby, or plain weave, in which the weft, the thread thrown left to right, floats over two or more warp ends to create the design or pattern.<sup>9</sup> Many of the weaving samples were woven in this weave structure called overshot. Each student wove a traditional piece using the materials provided and were then allowed to create a modern piece with the materials of their choice.

The completed work was exhibited in Hansford Hall Gallery from October to December of 2014. The students that participated in the exhibition were Bridget Williams, Donya Kobari, Leah Westberry, Megan Whitey, Stacey Baehr, Christina Packard, and Laura Tuttle. The patterns woven were Huckey Back, Kings Diamond, Diaper, World’s Wonder, Wheel of Fortune, Snake Trail, and Unnamed World’s Wonder. The woven patterns listed correspond respectively with the listed artists. Students learned traditional methods of planning for weaving as well as used their previous knowledge to take the designs into a modern direction. The exhibition was able to combine the efforts of past and present weavers, making threads that bind together the legacy of weavers for more than a century.

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7. “What is the Southern Highland Craft Guild,” *Southern Highland Craft Guild*, 2015, <http://www.southernhighlandguild.org/pages/folk-art-center/general-info.php>.

8. Ibid.

9. Miller and Schillo, *Brown Book of Weaving Drafts*, 23.

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