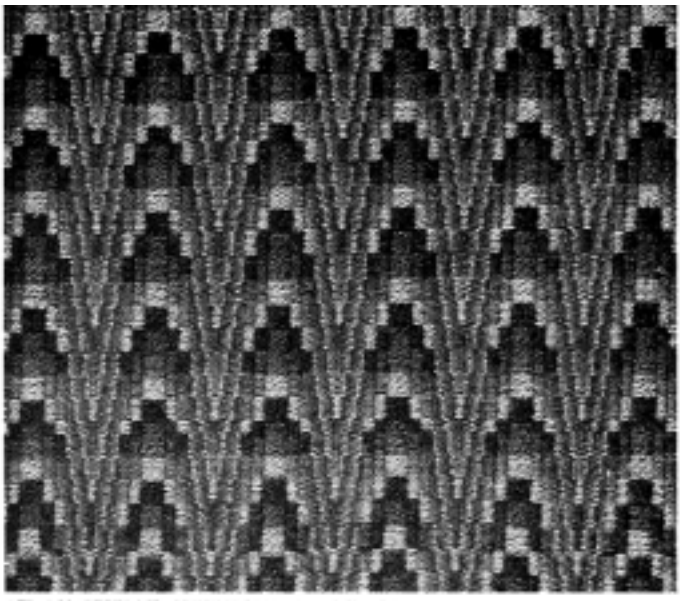


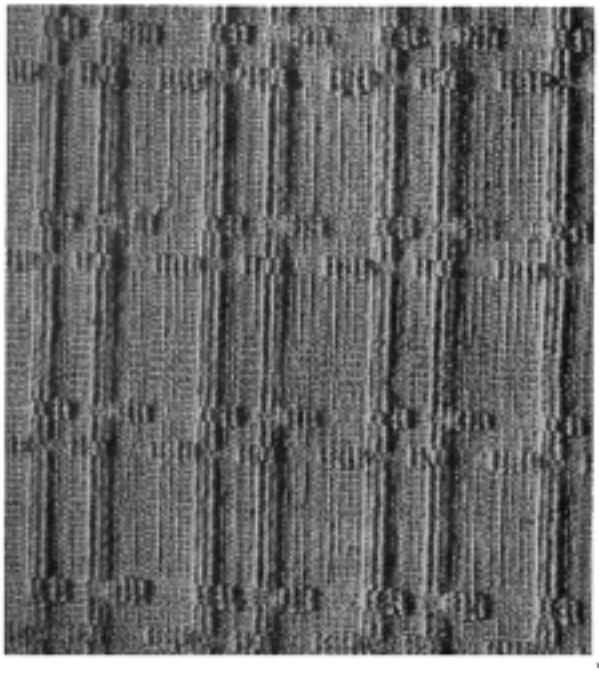
Editorial Note—Creative design with the traditional threadings as a point of departure mark the collection of handwoven fabrics by Berta Frey shown on this and the following pages. The "flame point" design at the top of the page is an excellent example of her imaginative treatment of old weaves. It was woven on the "honeysuckle" threading with a warp of 40/2 linen, 24 to the inch, and weft, 18/2 wool in four shades of green. This fabric was a winner in the Design Competition sponsored by the Fairchild Publications in 1941.

Her deep love and appreciation of the work of the past, underlaid by a broad knowledge of weaving, both historic and technical, is expressed in these contemporary interpretations, such as the striped upholstery fabric to the left, which employs the threading of the traditional bedspread pattern sometimes called "Governor's Garden," shown in the insert. This uses alternately two ends of white, two ends of brown in No. 3 pearl cotton. The treadling is straight twill, alternating two shots of white and two of brown.

The three fabrics in the lower left hand corner achieve great richness of texture and color, and impress one with a sort of timelessness not always found in contemporary textiles. Top left is a drapery in tabby weave, in Chinese red, developed with a variety of yarns and shades used in both warp and weft. It was made for use in a dining room, with the color chosen to match the red in antique Chinese prints. Right is an all-silk yellow drapery fabric, using various sizes and kinds of yarn, with plain twill threading and broken twill treadling. Varied rayon warps and heavy cotton weft in yellow are used for the corner left. Lower right is a deep wine red crackle weave, in a contemporary interpretation.

On page 5 the white drapery to the left, in silk and wool, shows great delicacy, and yet richness of effect. These were commissioned as draperies for offices in a New York skyscraper. They were woven on goose eye threading, using skipped dents in the reed. The

[*Continued on Page 6*



AMERICAN HANDWEAVING

— *A MID-CENTURY VIEWPOINT* *By* BERTA FREY

WHY DO YOU take all the time and trouble to weave that piece of cloth? Wouldn't it be easier and more practical to go to a store and buy it?" How many times that question, in one form or another, is asked of me and I am sure that every weaver has met the same question many times.

Invariably, my impulse is to answer, "But it is such a whale of a lot of fun." And most of the time, I follow the impulse and answer just that. Certainly none of us would weave if it was not fun.

The first part of a new year is always a time of review, of analysis. This year of 1950 at the midway mark of our century has called forth more reviews and analyses than any other that we can remember. So then, let us weavers join the ranks of reviewers and look at our weaving—present, past and future—to see how we fit into this mad world in this maddest century.

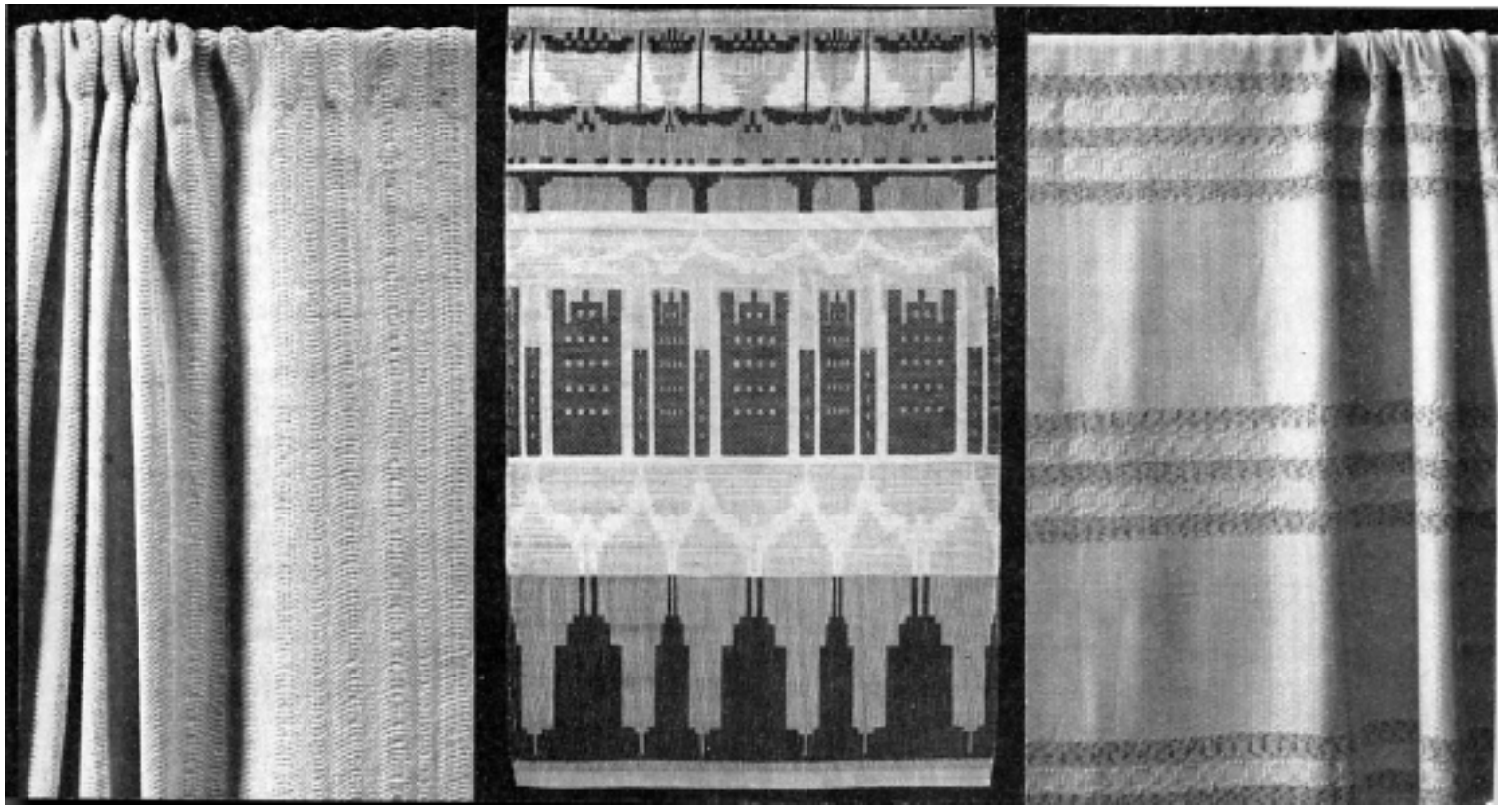
It may not be a very practical answer, but isn't the first answer really that we weave because we enjoy it? There is a satisfaction and a thrill to see an idea grow and take shape in our own hands. Too often it is not so easy as that; our beautiful idea is not always such a beautiful web. Then it becomes a challenge and the sense of accomplishment when we have pulled a near failure into a success will bolster any morale and inflate any ego. Our looms are our Ivory Towers. How quickly we can forget annoyances at the loom; how many tempers can be worked off by the vigorous exercise of the beater! How many beautiful letters we can compose at the loom, and isn't it too bad that the next day, when they are put down on paper, they are not wonderful at all?

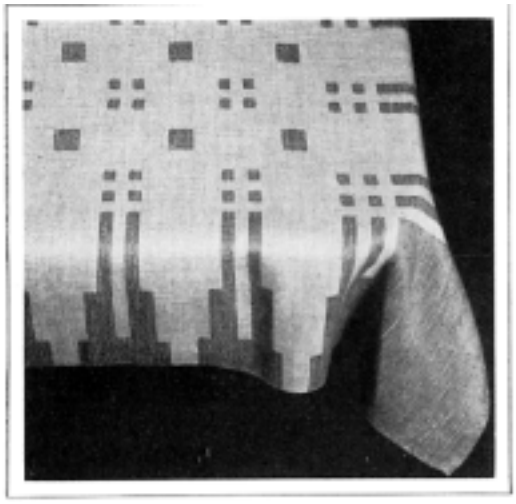
Aside from the fun of handweaving, can we find justification for it in this machine age and world? Handweaving is not justified unless we do the thing that the machine cannot do, or unless we do it better. We don't weave our sheets and pillow cases—Lady Pepperell and Mr. Cannon can do much better jobs than we can, and more economically. We can find the same answer to every other fabric in our daily lives, except for that intangible quality known as "individuality." We are willing to accept mass production and assembly lines just so far, but there is always a point at which we rebel and want something that is our very own and is not repeated in every third house on the block.

We don't mind having our cars come off the assembly line, but how often we have our initials painted on the door. And to show our pride in our best sheets, we carefully embroider our monograms on them. When it comes to table linens and blouses, we can weave those and weave the initials or monograms as an integral part of them. Power looms will not do that for us.

It is not necessary to mention custom woven upholstery, drapery and clothing fabrics; they are too well known and too much appreciated to need comment here. It is this personal touch to our weaving that makes it valuable, both sentimentally and actually; that lifts it above even the best of mass produced fabrics; that puts it in the field of art rather than industry.

All photographs of Miss Frey's fabrics by JANE ROGERS





Tablecloth, pink and white, traditional summer and winter weave but in a modern interpretation.

Handweaving then, as a means of production, is not justified, but if we place it in the field of art, it needs no further justification than its own existence.

So much for our present. What of our past and of our future at this bend in the century?

A backward look at our handweaving shows that we weavers have not been too creative—we have spent most of our energies in collecting "new patterns" in the same old weave and our "new" patterns have not been new at all. They have been new only to each of us as we have collected them from a fellow weaver to whom they were new only because she had not seen them until she collected them from a fellow weaver . . . . and so on ad infinitum. In the twenties and thirties our weaving was predominantly Pattern. We overlooked the fact that no one pattern or weave was suitable for everything and we often ignored the fitness of fabric to use.

In a New England type of house and on a four poster bed there is nothing more suitable or lovely than a Whig Rose bedspread. But that same Whig Rose spread whether in the traditional blue and white or in the modern chartreuse and brown certainly is not attractive on a Hollywood bed in a city apartment. And regardless of how lovely it is on a four poster, Whig Rose does not belong on curtains, on rugs, as upholstery on a chair nor—Heaven forbid—as a winter coat! But haven't we all seen it, and haven't most of us old timers been guilty in our early days of committing some such crime?

It was in the early forties that the style pendulum began to swing violently away from pattern and toward color and texture. It was then that handweavers really made more progress in the designing of fabrics and in creative weaving than in all the preceding years of this century.

Today's new weavers who are coming on in this era of color and texture are quite likely to look back at the mistakes that earlier weavers made and scornfully reject all pattern weaving. It is not through a mistaken sense of loyalty to our old pattern friends that we oldsters feel that the new weavers are making the same mistakes that we did—but in the opposite direction.

Few artists will content themselves with a palette of red, black, blue, white and yellow. While it is possible to get almost any hue or tone from this palette, the artist finds it to his advantage to add several kinds of blue, of red, and of yellow as well as many of the in between colors and off shades. Similarly, we weavers can, and do, make beautiful fabrics from the simple 1, 2, 3, 4 threading; but if we use them imaginatively, most of those old patterns and weaves that we collected so industriously in our dark ages of the twenties can become the prize takers in this year's competitions.

Now at the beginning of the fifties, it is time for us weavers to collect the best from our rich heritage and bring our weaving to its greatest glory. Our task in the coming years is to sift out what is useless today and to rescue those techniques which can be translated into forms that will be thoroughly in step with the times. Even the hackneyed old "Honeysuckle" can be dressed up in today's style and instead of looking like something out of Godey's Ladies Book, it can be as modern as tomorrow's newspaper.

Nor is Colonial Overshot, of which Honeysuckle is the most used and abused pattern, our only chance at modernizing traditional weaves. Summer and Winter is a marvellously good construction for upholstery and contrary to general opinion, its simple pattern limitation for four harnesses is an asset for modern design.

And thus we face the challenge of the future. We resolve that we will no longer weave our fabrics in the same old way merely because they have always been done that way; nor will we throw together colors and textures with no further thought than to be "modern." We will consider carefully the use to which we are going to put our fabrics, and then we will choose the most appropriate yarns, the most interesting draft, and the most advantageous treadling to produce the best possible fabric to fit perfectly into its proper place in its particular surroundings. • • •

EDITORIAL NOTE [*Continued from Page 4*

warp is white silk, 40 ends to the inch, and weft wool and rayon, latter known as Angel Crepe or Boucle de Laine.

The "Skyscraper" wall hanging is a rearrangement of the pattern "Constellation Orion," originated by the late Margaret Bergman, in summer and winter weave. The white silk drapery with silver stripes, on the right, was woven on an M's and O's threading but with plain twill treadling. The stripes combine chenille, a little rayon, and tinsel.

Several of these fabrics, including the brown and white upholstery material and the yellow silk drapery, were made for well-known decorators. A variation of the white drapery with silver stripes, on page 5, woven in gold without the stripes, hangs in Dumbarton Oaks. The Chinese red draperies were made for the new home of Mr. and Mrs. Van Tuyl Boughton in Basking Ridge, New Jersey, and are used in the dining room with original Sheraton and Duncan Phyfe furniture and heirloom silver designed by a contemporary of Paul Revere.