



# TEXTILES IN AMERICA

{1650-1870}

A dictionary based on original documents, prints  
and paintings, commercial records, American  
merchants' papers, shopkeepers' advertisements, and  
pattern books with original swatches of cloth

FLORENCE M. MONTGOMERY  
FOREWORD BY LINDA EATON

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PRINTS AND PAINTINGS,  
COMMERCIAL RECORDS, AMERICAN MERCHANTS' PAPERS,  
SHOPKEEPERS' ADVERTISEMENTS, AND  
PATTERN BOOKS WITH ORIGINAL SWATCHES OF CLOTH

*Florence M. Montgomery*

*Foreword by Linda Eaton*

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*Textiles in America*  
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*Dry goods merchant Elijah Boardman (1760–1823), New Milford, Connecticut.*

*Portrait by Ralph Earl, dated 1789. Oil on canvas; H. 83", W. 51".*

*(Collection of Mrs. Cornelius Boardman Tyler;*

*Photo, Metropolitan Museum of Art.)*



*"Ah, remember? Organdie, taffeta, dimity, lawn, batiste, chiffon,  
China silk, voile, muslin, damask, percale, cambric, tulle."*

Drawing by Alan Dunn; © 1973 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.





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To several keepers at the Victoria and Albert Museum, I am greatly indebted for their interest in this book and for their generosity in sharing their research with me. Natalie Rothstein first told me of the Moccasi manuscript and the Hilton manuscript. She also gave me many references to documents in the Public Record Office which she had systematically studied for her own work in Spitalfields silk weavers and exports of English cloth to the American colonies. On numerous visits to the museum, she and other members of the Textile Department have generously allowed me to study important records such as the Kelly books, the Warner Archive, and the Barbara Johnson scrapbook. Peter Thornton's splendid book *Baroque and Rococo Silks* and, more recently, his keen interest in upholstery as keeper of furniture and woodwork rekindled my enthusiasm for textiles and furnishings. He and Simon Jervis provided the photographs and information concerning the late eighteenth-century Science Museum manuscript. Peter Floud first brought the important Berch collection to my attention.

Over the years, John Cornforth and I have engaged in a dialogue about textile furnishings, and his many articles in *Country Life* have brought English furnishing practices much closer to me than was possible on the few trips I made to England.

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For many years, I have had a friendly exchange of information with Mildred Lanier, former curator of textiles at Colonial Williamsburg. She shared her research on textiles imported to Virginia from Great Britain and advertised for sale by Virginia merchants. Her work on Marseilles quilting is embodied in the dictionary entry for marcella. Over the years something of value was gleaned on each visit to the textile collections at Colonial Williamsburg.

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Robert L. McNeil, Jr., through the Barra Foundation, made it possible to include a greater number of color plates than we had thought possible. By presenting so many well-preserved antique textiles in color, the reader can sense not only their beauty but their true character as well.

To Erita Ferriday Stockwell I am grateful for friendship in accompanying me on research trips which did not interest her and for companionship which is the best antidote for tedious work.





## Foreword



First published more than twenty years ago, *Textiles in America* has stood the test of time. This informative volume continues to be a valuable resource for all those interested in textiles and textile history. Thanks to her thorough and exacting research, author Florence Mellowes Montgomery succeeded in identifying a wide range of primary sources containing textile samples labeled with the names by which the fabrics were known. She has indeed demystified many of the terms found in period inventories, newspaper advertisements, and merchant records that had been a considerable source of confusion to historians and curators who would stumble over written references to such items as “cherryderry” or “humhum.” The dictionary that Florence compiled, which forms two-thirds of this book, is just as relevant to scholars today as it was when it first appeared. Moreover, her discussion of design sources, pictorial records, and surviving examples of textile furnishings continues to inform those seeking to create accurate historic interiors.

Florence Mellowes was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1914. She received her B.A. from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in 1936 and was employed as library secretary at the Art Institute of Chicago before heading off to Radcliffe College for a masters degree in fine arts. She subsequently served as assistant to the director at the Rhode Island School of Design’s Museum of Art before moving to New York to work with Joseph Downs, then curator of the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1946 she married Charles E. Montgomery, who was an expert in antique pewter.

In 1949 Florence moved to Delaware with her husband, who was hired to help Joseph Downs catalogue the enormous private collection of Henry Francis du Pont at Winterthur. The Winterthur estate opened to the public two years later, in 1951, and the Montgomerys stayed on at the museum for nearly twenty years more. Charles served variously as curator, museum director, and senior research fellow, and Florence also filled numerous positions during her tenure. She organized the first-ever training class for museum guides, taught art history in the

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Winterthur Program in Early American Culture, and spent ten years as assistant curator of textiles. In 1970 her influential *Printed Textiles: English and American Cottons and Linens, 1700–1850* was published to wide acclaim.

In 1970 the Montgomerys left Delaware for Connecticut, where Charles assumed the position of curator for the Garvan Collection and professor of art history at Yale. He remained in that role until his death in 1978. Florence continued her own extensive research and writing, publishing this volume in 1984. She remained active with teaching, museum consulting, and volunteering until her death in 1998.

Florence and Charles Montgomery were both scholars in the field of American decorative arts. For furniture and metalwork—his specialties—the scholarship of the period was focused on objects made by artisans in North America as well as the tools and materials used to create those objects. Within this context, textiles were considered to be a female craft, with emphasis given to domestic spinning and weaving. However, many of the furnishing textiles used in early American interiors were actually the products of proto- and early industrial manufacturing concerns in sophisticated centers throughout Europe. Others were from India and China and formed part of a centuries-old global trade.

As a result of her research in this aspect of textile history, Florence Montgomery gained a reputation as a scholar of international significance. Her work remains highly regarded both here and abroad. The title of this book, *Textiles in America*, is therefore somewhat misleading, as the information that the volume contains is just as relevant in Europe as it is in North America. Many, many scholars in the field of decorative arts have long since acknowledged its importance.

A testament to its significance, *Textiles in America* was out of print little more than a decade after its publication. Over the years, there have been numerous requests from researchers and textiles enthusiasts alike for a reprint. We are pleased that those requests have been fulfilled, and this important scholarship will be now available to a new generation.

Linda Eaton  
Curator of Textiles  
Winterthur Museum & Country Estate



# *Introduction*



Textiles played an important part in the lives of American colonists. Estate inventories indicate that bedding and bed curtains were among the most highly valued possessions, exceeded in value only by land, buildings, and, in rare instances, wrought silver. In monetary terms textiles were by far the largest commodity imported into the colonies. Many of the textiles mentioned in early newspapers, inventories, and manuscripts are no longer known. This study, begun while the author was a member of the curatorial staff of the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, grew out of the need for accurate information on the kinds of textiles used in early American homes. To furnish period rooms authentically, it is necessary to know what kinds of textiles were available and how to distinguish one from another.

Answers were sought to questions about clothing materials for men, women, children, and infants; household linen for tabling, toweling, ticking, and other bedding; and suitable textiles for bed and window curtains, upholstery, slipcovers, table and chest covers, and floor coverings. The names of high-priced fashionable clothing materials had to be distinguished from common, coarse goods worn by laborers in various agricultural and craft occupations; and, among woolen goods, heavy fishermen's clothing and Indian blankets from



fine-quality worsteds for bed furniture or a gentleman's coat. Which linen and cotton textiles were for the house and which were used for grain bags, sieves, sails, or horse coverings?

There are many pitfalls in the identification and study of textile terms. Technological changes from traditional hand methods to mechanization of fiber preparation, spinning, weaving, and finishing have been enormous. Over the centuries many textiles ceased to be manufactured as they were superseded by new types. Sometimes the old names persisted but were applied to cloth of quite different character.

Commerce was closely linked with fashion and powerfully influenced textile production throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Exotic embroideries, painted cottons, and silks brought from the Orient by the East India Companies in the early 1600s had become the rage sixty years later. Their popularity led to imitation by English and European manufacturers. Such fabrics as alacha, cherryderry, dunjars, and seersucker were among those copied. More importantly, European textile printing with woodblocks (in itself a technological advance over painting by hand) arose from a desire to meet the demand for brilliantly colored, washable cottons from India. The generic term *calico* included a wide variety of "plain, printed, stained, dyed, chintz, muslins, and the like."<sup>1</sup>

Magnificent garments worn by Siamese ambassadors on a state visit to the court of Louis XIV in 1684 are said by French economist Jacques Savary des Bruslons to have inspired French imitations, called *siamoises*.<sup>2</sup> First woven of cotton brightened with colorful silk stripes, they later were made of linen and cotton. These inexpensive textiles, in turn, rivaled English-made goods. In an attempt to capture the trade with the Levant, *drap londre*, *londrin*, and several other worsted cloths woven in Languedoc, were made in imitation of English cloths exported by the Turkey Company from the port of London to the Levant.

From about 1650 French silk weaving was centered at Lyons where the finest artists and *ornemanistes* designed rich brocades for those Europeans who could afford the luxury of silk. These highly prized textiles were shipped to England clandestinely to avoid high duties or total import prohibition. English-woven silks patterned after French models were marketed as French.

In England silk weaving was carried on largely at Spitalfields in the east end of London where Huguenot weavers settled when they fled France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Over eight hundred Spitalfields watercolor patterns are owned by the Victoria and Albert Museum. Together with the archive from Warner's, one of the largest English silk-weaving firms, the two collections form an unusually complete record of fashionable dress silks from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The popularity of certain textiles caused their names to become generic, such as holland for good-quality bleached linen long woven in that country. Textile names were often derived from towns first made famous by their manufacture. Cambric and shalloon originated in Cambrai and Chalons in France, while osnaburg is clearly a product of the German city of Osnabrück.

Problems of language and changing terminology caused confusion among merchants. During the American Revolution, when the merchants of Providence, Rhode Island, sought to establish trade with France, they found that

All the Dictionaries in the World could not translate the names of the goods ordered. Order a French Merchant to ship a piece of *Mousseline de Livre* but no Manufacturer in Europe would be able to furnish him, and he would write in answer that it was not to be found, unless some American were to tell him that a piece of Goods called *ourgandi* answers to Book Muslin, except in the folding it.<sup>3</sup>

From medieval times the English economy depended upon the woolen trade. As late as 1694, Sir Josiah Child cited the statement of Sir Edward Coke (1552–1634), that “nine parts in Ten of our Exported Commodities doth come from the Sheep’s Back, and from hence alone is the Spring of our Riches.”<sup>4</sup> In early times English wool was exported in the fleece or in unfinished and undyed cloths, but from the sixteenth century the government encouraged the production and export of finished goods because of the great profit to be derived from them. The staple English cloth manufacture was the broadcloth made of “short-stapled carded wool, in both warp and weft, and fullled so that the woven mass of fibres was thoroughly felted, to give an enduring,

strong, weather resistant fabric.”<sup>5</sup> Considerable variety was afforded among these Old Draperies with differences in breadth, weight, and finish, to say nothing of pattern and color. Some cloths took their names from the towns or areas wherein they were then woven, such as Bath beaver, Bocking bay, Bristol, dorsetteen, pennystone, and stroud.

During the sixteenth century skilled weavers from Flanders and Holland were enticed to settle in England for the purpose of improving textile manufactures. A new class of fabrics called the New Draperies was the result of this infusion of foreign technical skills. The New Draperies consisted of worsted yarn warp (spun from combed, long-staple wool) mixed with a woolen weft (spun from carded, short-staple wool). In general they were lighter in weight than the Old Draperies and were suitable for wear on warm days or in hot climates. They needed little or no fulling or elaborate finishing. Barracan, bay, bombazine, calimanco, grogram, mockado, perpetuana, rash, say, serge, shalloon, and stammet are some of the names given to them.<sup>6</sup> The names, weights, and values of twenty-nine New Draperies are listed and described in a manuscript dated 1592 which is reproduced in John James, *History of the Worsted Manufacture in England*.<sup>7</sup>

By the close of the reign of James I (d. 1625) other types of worsted cloth had been invented which are described in “Allegations on behalf of the worsted weavers of Norwich,” a manuscript preserved in the British Museum. Alleging that there was little difference between the New Draperies and the Old Draperies, it argued that

a buffyn, a catalowne, and the pearl of beauty, are all one cloth; a peropus and paragon all one; a saye and piramides, all one; the same cloths bearing other names in times past. The paragon, peropus, and philiselles may be affirmed to be double chambletts; the difference being only, the one was double in the warp, and the other in the weft. Buffyn, cattalowne, and pearl of beauty, &c., may be affirmed single chamblett, differing only in the breadth. The say and piramides may also be affirmed to be that ancient cloth, mentioned in the said statute [7 Edward IV], called a bed; the difference only consisting in the breadth and fineness.

To make of this worsted a stamin, was but to make it narrower and thinner in the stay; to make the bed a say, which



served for apparel, was to make the same much narrower and finer; this cloth hath continued its name and fashion till this day; but, now lately, by putting the same into colours, and twisting one third of one colour with another colour, being made narrow, it is now called piramides.

From worsted are derived, in another line, other cloths. A worsted was wrought with four treadles; to make thereof a bustian, is to weave with three of the same treadles; to make the same double chamblet, is to use the two right foot treadles; to make it single, is to use the two left foot treadles; to make this a philisello, a peropus, a paragon, or a buffyn, is but to alter the breadth, and to make them double, treble, or single in the stricken [weft, or shoot]; and to make this buffyn a cata-lowne, it is to twist a thread of one colour with a thread of another, and strike it with another colour; to make the same a pearl of beauty, is to make it striped, by colours in the warp, and tufted in the stricken.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to these worsted and part-worsted textiles, Dutch and Walloon weavers fleeing Spanish rule in the Netherlands brought to the Norwich area the art of mixing linen and silk with combing wools. Some of the names applied to these goods are alapeen, anterne, bombazine, darnex, drugget, frizadoe, grogram, hair camlet, and poplin.<sup>9</sup>

The West Country was famous not alone for broadcloths but for a variety of other goods, some probably woven in broad widths and others in narrow. "Some new sorts of Drapery invented, as Du Roys, druggets and durantes" also included everlasting, perpetuana, and sempiternum, all suggesting the quality of durability.<sup>10</sup> Druggets, related to sagathys, shalloons, and silesias, were striped, corded, or patterned in mosaic or with flowers. Serge, usually of twill weave and often combining combed and carded yarns, was produced in great quantities. Samples dating from 1716 in "rich, bright colours—pink, cream, tawny, light and golden brown, yellows, whites, and blacks" are preserved in the collection of the Archief Brants in Amsterdam.<sup>11</sup>

Weavers in the north of England, especially in the area of Yorkshire known as the West Riding, made a specialty of coarse broadcloths and narrow kerseys in solid colors, used for uniforms all

over Europe, and in mixed colors for the clothing of servants and common people. Before the end of the sixteenth century Yorkshire weavers undertook the production of worsteds. Their manufacture, for the most part limited to the middle and lower grades, included bay; calimanco, glazed and in brilliant colors; shalloon, thin, twilled, glazed, lining material; camlet, thick, rough, rain-resistant material suitable for cloaks; and tammy in glazed varieties for curtain linings and flour and meal sieves.

Norwich, "the chief seat of the chief manufacture of the realm," produced finer qualities of worsteds including calimanco, camlet, and damask, suitable for dress and furnishing materials. The most flourishing period of their manufacture occurred during the mid-eighteenth century when the export market included all of Europe, China, the Levant, the West Indies, Spanish America, and the North American colonies.

Names for the various kinds of Norwich stuffs—including those made entirely of worsted yarns, wool and worsted, and silk and worsted mixed—are particularly difficult to identify. Novelty titles abound, and when the sale of a material languished it was given a new name in the hope of captivating buyers. Speaking of Norwich manufacturers in 1662, Thomas Fuller said "Expect not I should reckon up their several names, because daily increasing, and many of them are binominous, as which, when they begin to tire in sale, are quickened with a new name."<sup>12</sup>

Camlet was woven in striped, shaded, spotted, sprigged, changeable, and brocaded patterns. Camleteen, narrower and thinner than camlet, was also produced in great variety. Worsted damask, sometimes called bed satin, was woven in single colors or in two contrasting shades. Black Norwich crape was adopted for official court mourning, but it was also woven in bright colors. Within a large category called calimanco were included striped, flowered, and checked patterns. Others bore such names as dresden, espolinados, and martinique (names penned in the pattern books), probably invented to appeal to certain markets. Some names suggested small allover patterns: cheverett, diamantine, esterett, floretta, and harlequin. A group of fabrics featuring white lace bands woven on colored grounds with polychrome brocaded flowers was called variously batavia, blondine, grandine, taboratt, or brilliant, mecklenburgh, and russaline. Camlet

became china, or cheney when waved or moiréd, grograms and gro-grinets, harateens and moreens.

Woolen materials in everyday use for linings, interlinings, undercloths, and outer garments were woven in several grades and in many European countries. These included bay, flannel, and serge. Related to serge was ratteen, which was well fulled and napped with teasels on one or both sides of the cloth. Say, a light, inexpensive, twilled wool is defined as a kind of serge. Half thicks and longcloth, some with weft cording, were also twill woven. Other heavy materials, whose appearance we can only imagine, are bearskin, beaver, fearnaught, forest cloth, shag, swanskin, naps, spotted ermin, and thunder and lightning.

From the beginning of the seventeenth century, Lancashire, especially the area around Manchester, became the center for cotton and linen / cotton weaving in England. The main production between 1670 and 1700 consisted of barmillian, jean, pillow, stripes, and tufts. By the mid-eighteenth century the general categories of dimity, fustian, and muslin included such textiles as “herringbones, pillows for pockets and outside wear, strong cotton ribs and barragon, broad-raced linen thicksets and tufts, dyed, with white diapers, striped dimities, and lining jeans.”<sup>13</sup> From shortly after the middle of the century these textiles were imitated in manufactories near Rouen in France.

Fortunately, early trade practices bequeathed to us a surprising number of documents which made this book possible. Scattered about the world are books of cloth swatches containing contemporary names, dimensions, colors, prices, and the names of their manufacturers. Some were prepared by British agents acting for American merchants or those of other countries; other accumulations, such as the Berch Papers, were compiled by economists or historians; and still other collections resulted from the efforts of government officials to promote textile manufactures within their own countries. These swatch books, merchants’ records, and business papers are described in greater detail in the bibliography.

A wealth of textile samples, especially of dress goods, is found in trade publications and mill pattern books. Interesting for their designs, they are often not identified or dated. Collections are found in the Merrimack Valley Textile Museum, North Andover, Massachusetts; the Goldie Paley Design Center at the Philadelphia College