

## **Henry Tyler, coverlet maker extraordinaire**

10/12/22

Henry Tyler created the Tyler Coverlet and was a prominent weaver in Jefferson County in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. You may wonder, what is a coverlet? Isn't that the same as a bedspread? The answer is no, they are not the same. A bedspread generally reaches the floor. A coverlet is designed to be a decorative element at the foot of the bed, or an extra layer on top of the bed.

Henry Tyler was born in Connecticut in 1801 to English parents and eventually settled in Butternville, Jefferson County New York. Butternville is in the Town of Henderson, NY in 1834. Butternville is along Route 75, commonly known as Butternville Road. Henry created approximately 300 coverlets using a technique he designed on looms he designed. This technique was called doublecloth. He was a man of high principles and was painstakingly accurate in his work. His pieces were complicated and intricate. He designed all of his patterns. The coverlets came in two main colors, red or blue and they dye was sourced locally from Elisha Camp of Sackets Harbor. Each coverlet was reversible with the main color on the front set against a white background on the back. The coverlets were made of two pieces sewn together on the right and left side of the coverlets, both sides, so that each side was a mirror image of the other.

These were highly sought after as wedding gifts and were considered an essential piece of every 'upper-class' brides 'setting out'. Each coverlet contained the name of the bride and their township so that no two coverlets were identical. Henry was also known to make coverlets for other occasions such as baptisms and births and well as non-occasion coverlets and rugs for children and individuals. Each again, noting the name of the receiver so no two identical.

Another distinguishing feature of the coverlets is the symbol on the bottom right corner of each one. The early coverlets, 1834-1840, were made with a lion, a nod to Henry's English heritage. Eventually, , from the mid 1840's on, the American Eagle replace the Lion. Tyler's son Elman stated that the lion should be replaced with a more patriotic American symbol. It is said that the British brides preferred the lion. The British American brides requested the Lion with stars, and the American brides chose the Eagle. Edges were decorated with the popular fence and tree border and floral designs.

Henry Tyler died August 22, 1858 at the age of 57 after suffering a stroke and is buried in the Smithville Cemetery, Jefferson County, NY. After his death, Henry's son Elman Tyler (1829-1909) wove coverlets in the same pattern as his father.

Why am I writing about Henry Tyler? The Cornwall Brothers Store Museum has one of Henry Tyler's coverlets on display. Ours was made for Mary Child of Jefferson County in 1839 and is blue and white. It has the Fence and Tree border.

The Jefferson County Historical Society has over 40 in their collection. They are displayed on a rotational basis on the second floor. Tyler Coverlets are also in collections at, The Art Institute of Chicago; The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; The National Museum of American History (Smithsonian), Washington, DC; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Tx.; The Met, Fifth Avenue, New York, NY; The Denver Art Museum; The Art Museum of Colonial Williamsburg and the Farmers Museum in Cooperstown, NY.

It would seem we are in good company as a Tyler Coverlet owner. Come on down in the Spring to see the coverlet. It is an amazing piece of work.