

#1



In the beginning of the 19th Century, the bed with its expensive textiles was an important part of fashionable household furnishings, and bed clothes reflected a family's social status. The hangings and coverings also provided essential privacy and warmth. Imported fabrics were available, but costly, and rural families made many of their own household textiles such as bed hangings, sheeting, blankets and quilts, tablecloths, toweling, aprons, and work garments. Spinning, weaving, and sewing took a major portion of a family's time; a simple bed sheet containing six yards of cloth required approximately three weeks of spinning and a week of weaving.

"I thought I should make a great deal of cloth but I could not get quite 30 wait of flax so I was obliged to spin cotton and that takes a great while to make a little cloth. I han't hardly made a sheet since I can remember. I have fifty wait of wool that is half spun.... I have got two calico bed quilts almost pieced but I am afraid that we shan't get time to quilt them this fall I have so much other work to do."

—Hannah Hayden, letter June 3, 1811.¹



Fig. 3

Flax hetchel with flax twist, c. 1830. Pulling the flax fibers through the hetchel's teeth separates out the fine flax for spinning.



"Flax Scutching Bee," 1885. Scutching or swingling removes the hard pieces from the flax, leaving the long, fine fibers ready for hetcheling.

Fig. 1

Bedstead with hangings, 1775. South Parlor, Wells House. These reproduction Williamsburg check linen bed hangings are typical of home woven hangings.



Fig. 4



Fig. 2 Federal style bed with hangings in a fashionable urban home.

Bed hanging fragment, c. 1825. Bed hangings like these were used in wealthy urban homes. Fig. 5

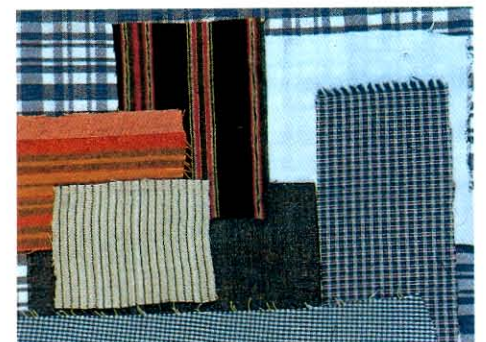


Fig. 6

Fabric fragments, 1800–1840. Fabrics like these were made and used by women in the home for clothing and household textiles.