

Shuttle-Craft Bulletin: Hand-weaving as a Business

If you have been thinking of turning your hand weaving into a business, Mary Meigs Atwater provided guidance for you in the April 1933 issue of the Shuttlecraft Bulletin. She had serious recommendations on how to make a profit from the business of weaving, with the following considerations:

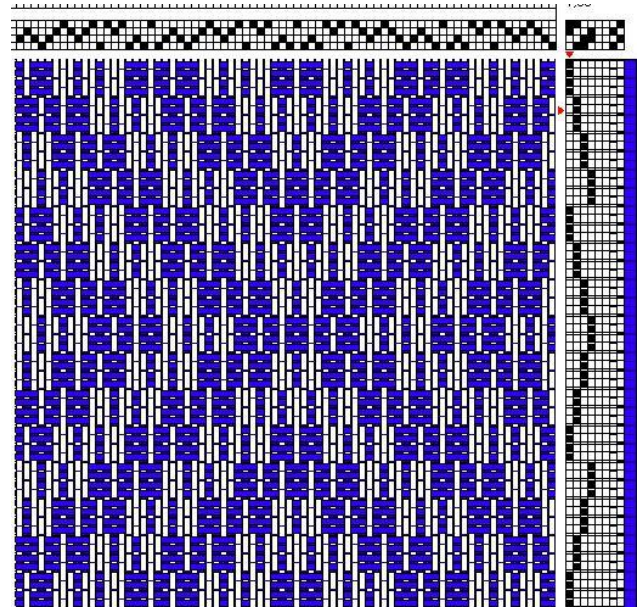
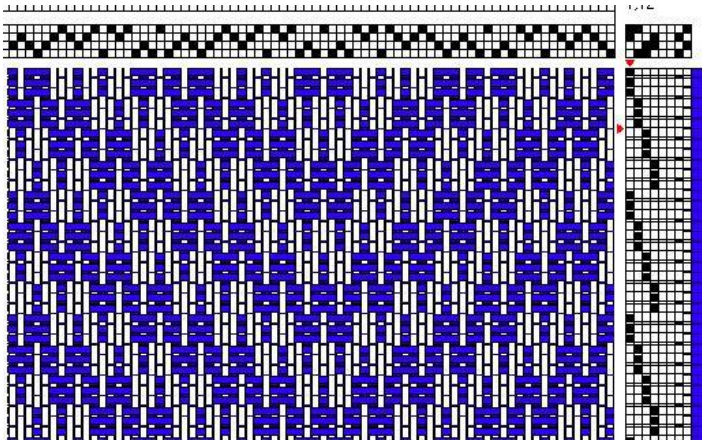
What to Weave: Mary believed that if one is serious about making money from weaving, it is necessary to experiment and plan, to develop a “standardized specialty” and produce it in commercial quantities. Do not rely on a one-off article or something done at the “dictates of fancy”, counting on luck. She wrote that it is only through the economy of scale, based on similar articles and repeat sales that there is profit. With careful planning, it is possible to offer different articles made from the same warp and threading. She recommended that a weaver make at least 6 of each article and be prepared to produce more if sales are good.

How to Sell: Mary had strong opinions about selling on consignment. She was not supportive and recommended not trusting someone else to do the selling. Too many times, she stated that those articles that do not sell, would-be put-on display and then put away in boxes. These days with online options, like Etsy or your own website for example, direct sales are much easier. Would Mary have had an Etsy site? Surely, the Shuttle-Craft Guild would have had a website, with a marketplace.

What Makes an Article Saleable: While there are no hard and fast rules for what sells, Mary had recommendations on what might improve the salability of a hand-woven article. First was price. The article must promise the purchaser value. To do so, the article should be easily and quickly woven. A purchaser may not appreciate the difference between a more complicated threading that takes a longer time to complete and a simpler one done more quickly. Next was finish, which should be exact and professional. Then there was the novelty of the piece. I for one, think that all handwoven items are novel, but a purchaser may not. This is a tricky one that probably only comes with experience. And last, she addressed color, which I personally find is a quality that most buyers are attracted to than anything else. At least this has been my experience with selling hand-woven towels. Buyers often remark on the color of a piece when purchasing.

Other considerations were time of year and location. With 1933 being deep in the Depression, Mary commented that in those very hard times, sales had dropped off. But, she noted, some weavers were having success, and in each of those cases it was for those who had developed a specialty and handled their own selling,

Mary goes on to recommend specific items that weavers should consider that might be of interest to perspective buyers: bags, pillow tops, table covers or table sets, which might be woven from the same warp. She provided an example draft for these, as shown here in a herringbone (left) and diamond (right) treadlings, with tabby.



She wrote that although these notes were for a weaver who wanted to make a profit, they should be of interest to those who weave for pleasure as well. Here is a quote from her that I think is applicable to these times:

“We are so constructed that it is good for the soul to create beauty by the work of the hands. It helps us over the hard places in life to be able to concentrate on problems of color, design and texture – problems that are unaffected by the price of stocks, the weather, or man’s ingratitude”.

∞ Keep weaving.