Vadie Williams, Folk Artist: Drawnwork as a Reflection of Personal Identity in Rural Kentucky

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VADIE WILLIAMS, FOLK ARTIST: DRAWNWORK AS A REFLECTION OF PERSONAL IDENTITY IN RURAL KENTUCKY

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RURAL KENTUCKY

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This study focuses on Vadie Conner Williams, an individual folk artist, and the drawnwork she has created throughout her lifetime. Included is a description of her rural farm background, her needlework skills and her creative process. The study also examines the significance of drawnwork to Williams and determines how she has adapted her work to satisfy her personal needs as well as the needs of her customers. Based on tape recorded interviews and a close examination of her work, the study concludes that drawnwork is an integral part of Williams's everyday life; it is an indicator of her beliefs and a source of identity within her community.
Vadie Conner Williams
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Folk art is an integral part of the everyday life of a folk artist and an indicator of the values and the beliefs held by the artist. The product of the folk artist, whether a quilt, a dance, or a house, is indeed the most visible and tangible evidence of artistic ability; however, artistry also can be seen in more commonplace, everyday aspects of the artist's life. An artist's values and beliefs are expressed through the art he or she creates. By critically examining in this thesis a group of objects made by an artist, comparisons of style, technique and design can be made among the works.

My study focuses on Vadie Conner Williams, an individual artist, in the context of her community and her life in rural Allen County, Kentucky. In addition to a critical examination of products, I herein attempt to determine not only how those products were made but why Williams made them -- to record the life stories along with the record of the products. I present my fieldwork, a brief overview of folk art scholarship, and the history of Allen County, along with Williams's drawnwork. The
presentation documents drawnwork as an expression of Williams's beliefs, as a source of identity for her within her community, and as an indication of the art to be found in her everyday life. Chapter Three contains illustrations of the process of drawnwork as well as photographs of the finished product. (See List of Illustrations.)

Drawnwork is the process of using a needle and thread to create woven designs on a piece of fabric. The process of drawnwork involves selecting thread and fabric, designing the work, determining the placement of the design on the fabric, drawing out threads from the fabric, hemstitching, and tying crochet thread onto the hemstitched columns in a distinct pattern.

The study of an individual and the function of his or her art is of recent interest to folklorists. Prior to the 1960s, a decade of change in many avenues of folklore, folk art objects were procured, purchased, and exhibited by art historians and collectors based on the objects' "primitive" aesthetic appeal. Rejecting the art historian's approach to folk art, folklorists began studying folk art in cultural context -- recording and presenting objects of folk art in the context of the community, the aesthetic of the group who produced the art, and the individual artists. Another influence on the study of folk art was the rise of folklife studies, a "holistic" approach to the discipline of folklore, brought to the forefront of American folklore scholarship in 1963 by Don Yoder.
Folklife studies, the application to the American scene of the European discipline called regional ethnology, was brought about in part due to the rise in ethnic consciousness -- the rise of the notion of cultural pluralism. Yoder describes the folklife studies approach as follows:

In a sense folklore and the folklore movement represent a nineteenth-century discovery, in the English-speaking lands, of a partially conceived folk culture, basically oral tradition. . . . The folklife movement is the twentieth-century rediscovery of the total range of the folk culture.

Utilizing the ideas of the folklife movement and cultural context, folklorists began to study items of material culture in order to gain understanding of a folk culture in its entirety. Yoder asks, "What, then, is the value of folklife studies?" And in the answer to his question I find two reasons for my own research: first, to enrich the knowledge of American history by "finding worthy of study those cultural goods which everyone had or made instead of the unique products of a few creative geniuses of our culture," and second, to show "... the range of human thought, more basically perhaps than history, literature, and other already accepted subjects." I chose to direct my thesis toward a better understanding of folklife by looking specifically at Williams's needlework, a traditional form of women's expression and listening to her talk about the many phases of her long, productive life. Individuality and creativity play an important role in
Williams's work as well as in her everyday life.

Folklorists and anthropologists have addressed creative expression by women in studying pottery, quilts, rugs, and other forms of women's traditional arts. Anthropologist Ruth Bunzel, in *The Pueblo Potter* (first published in 1929), asks questions about the individual creativity of women potters and the freedom of individual expression within an established tradition. Bunzel describes the "socially determined" limitations placed on an artist -- even an artist "of marked originality." Bunzel finds the limitations of the New Mexico and Arizona potters well defined yet continuously changing and adapting to include "approved expressions" previously not accepted or to include the work of a particularly talented individual who, by her unorthodox creations, helped to redefine the group's aesthetic (well-defined limitations). Williams's work is well defined; yet, as her work has evolved and changed over her lifetime, she has found acceptance within her community of customers. Kurt C. Dewhurst, Betty MacDowell, and Marsha MacDowell address creative expressions by women in their 1979 exhibit catalog *Artists in Aprons: Folk Art by American Women.* My study gives value to drawnwork as "women's work" by noting the significance of drawnwork to Williams. Furthermore, my study shows how the tradition was passed to Williams; how she has altered the tradition over time; how she found time to do her work, amidst her responsibilities of farm, home,
and outside employment; and how she adapted her work to fit
the limits imposed on her by age and lifestyle. Williams
is a thoughtful, acute, humorous woman with beliefs and
values rooted in the rural farm life of her childhood. Her
intelligence and her values are expressed in the intricate
work she creates and in her ability to adapt that work to
both her customers and the circumstances in her life.

I conducted the fieldwork for my study from 1984 to
1986. During this time I examined many pieces of
Williams's work, held informal conversations with her and
her daughter, Priscilla Strausburg, and conducted tape
recorded interviews. I prepared an interview guide for
each interview and while transcribing an interview I began
my question guide for the next one. The interviews were
from one to two hours in length and were always accompanied
by longer visits with Williams. On one occasion, we
documented her collection of drawnwork pillowslips -- a
lifetime accumulation of her work. We examined each piece
and identified the date she made it, the pattern she
followed, how she used the piece and its special
significance, if any. Informal conversations with Williams
add further insights to this study; I present the
informally gathered information as accurately as possible
and accept full responsibility for its content.

Several other primary sources were of help to me in
doing this study. Prior to 1984 Williams taught me how to
make drawnwork, and our friendship continues. Working
closely with Williams, I observed her keen memory for the designs, her enthusiasm for passing her knowledge to me, and her precision in completing each step of the drawnwork process. In 1983 I was present at Williams's interview for a public radio folk artist presentation entitled, "Documents in Sound." In addition to in-depth interviews with Williams and detailed examination of her work, I researched the history of drawnwork, the history of Allen County Kentucky, and recent studies in folk art by folklorists. I found several magazine articles and books on needlework but none of these included any significant information on drawnwork. A couple of resourceful bibliographies and folklore studies of individual folk artists aided my research. Local histories and statistics compiled by the federal government are my source materials for information about Allen County. Looking for items of drawnwork, I surveyed the textile collection and acquisition files at the Kentucky Library and Museum, Western Kentucky University. In the archives I found a paragraph about drawnwork and one sample of drawnwork. This item, classified as "Material Culture," was submitted to the archive by a student in 1965.

The Kentucky Museum's collection contains seven pieces of drawnwork, dating from the 1880s, donated to the museum during the past decade. The collection includes a white linen tablecloth described as "Italian hemstitching," which is, in fact, elaborate drawnwork; a handwoven linen
table cover made by Harriet Norris of Warren County, Kentucky; a white damask towel with two rows of drawnwork across each end; white batiste woman's "drawers" with one row of simple drawnwork worked around each leg; another white linen tablecloth worked in a pattern similar to one of the patterns Williams uses; a pair of women's cotton "drawers," probably made by Alma Hendricks, Emma Hendricks March and Laura Hendricks of Simpson County, Kentucky; and a very large white linen tablecloth worked in drawnwork by Hallie Moore Neely of Franklin, Kentucky. Five of the seven museum items do not resemble Williams's work nor do they resemble the way she approached design on fabric. Another dissimilarity is found in the items themselves -- Williams never embellished garments of clothing with drawnwork, although she made many garments for herself during her lifetime. The corner pattern on the nineteenth-century linen tablecover made by Harriet Norris is very similar to a pattern of Williams's. Another of the Kentucky Museum's tablecloths contains a design motif like Williams's, but the work on that tablecloth is enclosed within the piece of fabric; Williams's work always runs from one edge of the fabric to another edge of the fabric.

Although the Kentucky Library and Museum, a regional depository, contains but a few pieces of drawnwork, drawnwork was a very popular type of needlework in the late 1890s and early 1900s. While living in Morgan County, Tennessee, and coordinating the first Artist In Residence
Program for Scott County Tennessee, I searched through the library at Rugby, Tennessee, and found that in 1890 and 1891 The Ladies Home Journal carried a series of how-to articles teaching women the techniques of drawnwork.\textsuperscript{16} Pieces of drawnwork, made decades ago, have recently been found in flea markets, at yard sales, and in antique shops throughout rural Tennessee, Kentucky and Indiana. Several women in Allen County have "family heirlooms" embellished with drawnwork. Examples include a child's christening gown in Ruby Claire Jackson's family and two drawnwork pillows owned by Irene Motley. Motley's pillowtops were a gift from a German friend who lived in Louisville, Kentucky.

Though most women today purchase Williams's drawnwork as a keepsake or an item they will eventually "pass on" to a daughter or daughter-in-law, producing a lasting piece of work is only one of Williams's reasons for making drawnwork. I am interested in studying Williams's drawnwork because as woman's work it is an expression of her beliefs and her identity within her community. Drawnwork is something Williams values, something she has adjusted over time to suit her needs and to accommodate the needs of her customers. It is women's work made by and for women. And as women's work, drawnwork reflects the maker's values and expresses the customer's desires. Examination of pieces of drawnwork made over a lifetime reveals personal values and various economic conditions for women.
and their families. The type of fabric and thread used in drawnwork are good indicators of Williams's economic means and of her personal thriftiness. Is the fabric expensive linen; is the drawnwork made on feed sack material; is the drawnwork fabric a remnant from another sewing project? In recent years, more women have purchased items from Williams because they are employed outside their homes and have less leisure time to learn and produce handwork themselves. Drawnwork is visible proof of Williams's desire to create. Examination of her work reveals a part of her life's story.
Notes


4. Ibid.


6. Ibid., p. 62.

7. Ibid.


11. I used a Marantz cassette tape recorder and Sony HF60 tape. Quotations from Vadie Williams are from interviews conducted by me. Unless otherwise noted, these interviews took place in Vadie Williams's home in Scottsville, Kentucky.


13. Kay Harbison, "Drawn Handwork" (Western Kentucky Folklife Archives MSS number 1974-24).

14. The one exception to this is a dress collar that Williams made a few years ago (probably 1986). I discuss the collar in Chapter Two along with other one-of-a-kind pieces.
Allen County, Kentucky

Allen County, founded in 1815, is in the Pennyroyal geographic area of the state of Kentucky.¹ The name Pennyroyal comes from a small plant of the mint family which grows frequently throughout the state.² Geographer Carl Sauer described the Pennyroyal area in 1927 as having "superior" land on which people moving West had settled to raise cattle, hogs, and tobacco. In 1886, the C & O Railroad completed a rail track from Gallatin, Tennessee, (south of Allen County) to Scottsville, the county seat of Allen County, with the hopes that the railroad would continue from there either to the nearby town of Glasgow to the northeast or to Bowling Green to the northwest.³ Although the railroad brought trade and outsiders into the county, the failure of the railroad company to complete the proposed connection from Scottsville to another town via rail meant that Allen County remained the end of the line instead of becoming a connecting point between larger towns. Without the access to larger towns to the north, Scottsville's growth, as a larger city, was never realized.
Allen County has always been and continues to be predominantly farm land and essentially rural. The county's population in 1980 was approximately three-hundred people greater than its population in 1890. According to the U. S. Bureau of the Census, the 1,249 farms in Allen County in 1982 were exactly the same number as in 1870. Although a constant population is reflected in the above figures, Allen County and its people have experienced many changes over the past 174 years. First, there was a significant increase in population (an increase of 3,069 people) between 1890 and 1920 due to a boom in crude oil production. By 1919 there were, according to H. H. Patton, "... 200 drilling rigs in Allen County and about 2000 wells had been drilled." Although the oil boom dramatically increased the population for a few years, most of the people who were drawn to Allen County by the oil business moved away as the supply of crude oil was depleted. Next, the lumber mills clear cut much of the county's timber. The clear cutting of timber dramatically altered much of the landscape, provided jobs and resulted in the booming lumber business. There are currently five lumber mills which continue to use timber, one of Allen County's most plentiful natural resources. Another change began in 1960 with construction of the Barren River Dam and Reservoir, part of a larger federal government project, which was to control the water sheds of the Barren and Green Rivers. Ten thousand acres of land, including much
valuable farm land in Allen County, is covered by the Barren River Reservoir at seasonal pool level. (The lake takes its total pool from Allen, Barren, and Monroe Counties.) Still evident on the cultural landscape are large tracts of clear-cut land, along with a few abandoned oil drilling rigs, farms and, of course, the lake.

Scottsville and Allen County have seen a small amount of industrial growth; the two largest factories are General Electric and Kirsch Industries. Dollar General Store, a nationwide discount retail store, originated in Scottsville, and although its main warehouse is currently in Scottsville, its national headquarters was moved to Nashville, Tennessee, in 1987. Industries located in or near Scottsville, including the smaller industries such as Gerald Printing Service, Sumitomo Electric Wiring Systems (operating since 1988), and several "sewing factories", have offered Allen Countians jobs away from the farm. (Many young people leave Allen County for larger cities with more job opportunities. Indianapolis, Indiana, is the city most often mentioned as a place to find employment.) Regardless of the changes Allen Countians have experienced over the years, the values established by the rural farm people, for the most part, have not changed. In 1968 Dr. Thomas Clark said of Kentuckians, "In social relations, their reactions have been translated into terms of intensive personal values. Folk literature, mores, and behavior were shaped by this fact, and still are."
Vadie Williams and Her Family

Vadie Williams's ancestors were part of the early migration of white settlers (possibly Scotch-Irish) to the Pennyroyal geographic area of Kentucky. Her parents, John and Amanda Conner, were natives of Allen County, and she was born in Allen County's Settle community on 6 June 1892. Vadie Conner married Lively Ashley Williams; they had one daughter, Priscilla Williams Strausburg and an adopted son, James. The life the Conners and Williamses lived was similar to the life of other Allen County farm families of the 1890s and early 1900s, according to Williams:

It wasn't poverty that drove you to it, but that's the way everybody did. Grew their own crops. . . . It was work. We lived off the farms. We put up our beans and potatoes, and we had our chickens. We put up our pork. We lived on the farm -- lived off the farm. Everybody was equal back [in] those days. There wasn't no rich people and poor people. There were some [families that were] better livers than others, but we was all just one big family -- our neighbors and everybody. We visited and had a big time. . . . Back then we raised our own sheep, sheared our own sheep, and carried our wool to Scottsville and had it carded. They put in into rolls, . . . then we'd carry it home and we'd spin it, . . . All the neighbors did the same thing.

The Conner family adhered to a strict work ethic. John William Conner, Williams's father, farmed 150 acres at the turn of the century, and Amanda Weaver Conner is described by her daughter as "a busy woman" who churned, knitted stockings and socks, cooked, spun cotton into thread, wove blankets and lighter-weight fabrics, raised
four children, and quilted. Perhaps Williams admired her mother's needlework skills most of all:

My mother was handy with a needle and I reckon we all kind of inherited some of it. . . . She was good on quilts. Not too many fancy quilts. She made them to use; she had every string that was left anywhere for a quilt piece. She was a good quilter. She was just handy with a needle. 13

The home was Williams's classroom; she learned drawnwork informally at an early age from her mother as she explained:

Mother [Amanda Conner] worked on it, and I learned it that way. I've improved on it. I do more than she did; I do more different designs than she did. That's where I learned to start from. . . . I was very young, meddlesome, you know. I always wanted to do what my mother was doing. 14

Drawnwork was "pick-up work," done primarily at night after the evening meal. 15 Sitting near the fire and playing games were two activities that often took place after a winter's evening meal in the Conner household. During this time Williams's mother completed her household work: cleaning dishes, preparing the home for morning activity, or perhaps readying the rooms for sleeping. After completing her tasks, Conner often participated in her family's evening activities by sitting with the family. She filled this time with "pick-up work." "Pick-up work" was part of Conner's regular schedule; it was necessary, required work, but it also was a type of work accomplished while sitting in one place. It did not require her to be outside the house; it did not require she use large tools such as a loom or quilting frame or pots and pans; "pick-up
work" allowed her to make frugal use of her time while being in the company of the family and participating (somewhat) in family activities. Conner's "pick-up work" included making, as well as repairing, clothing, bed sheets, table cloths and other items for the home and family. Specifically for Conner, "pick-up work" was knitting, mending socks and garments with needle and thread, and working on her drawnwork. Williams followed her mother's lead in always finding time to do drawnwork, although that time was often in small bits and pieces. Williams explains how she has made time to produce drawnwork: "Since I've got older I work in the daytime because I don't get out to work now, but long as I was able to work on the farm, why I done all my [drawn]work at night."¹⁶

Williams believes her mother learned drawnwork from another person, but she has no clue who that teacher was. She does not remember her grandmother making drawnwork, and there were no other drawnworkers who lived in the Settle community where Williams grew up. Williams recalls that her mother "was doing it the first I remember, and I don't know where it come from. She must have learned it from somebody else to start with, but I don't know who."¹⁷ Williams had two sisters who also learned drawnwork from their mother. It was customary for girls to learn needle skills from their mothers, and drawnwork was just another skill in the Conner household, as Williams notes:
Back them days it seemed like whatever our mothers done we's going to do too. We got into things like that. I know my sister [Vertie], my oldest one that's dead, she worked a little tablecloth and it was a flour sack material or something like that. Some of us said something to her about putting that [drawn]work on that kind of material, and she said, 'Well, that just shows what I'd do if I had something better.'

Although fabric was expensive, Amanda Conner not only decorated pillowsips, an essential household item, but she also placed drawnwork on less essential "little doilies [to] set around [and] made dresser scarves to go on her little tables." Conner's drawnwork is an indication that the family placed value on beauty and efficiency; after all, the drawnwork items would have served their purpose as tablecloths, dresser scarves or pillowslips just as well without the drawnwork embellishment.

Conner's embellishments included two drawnwork designs, the spider and the buttonhole stitch. Her daughters made items in these patterns for use in their own homes. Williams, in taking her drawnwork tradition beyond that established by her mother, has expanded on what she learned from her mother by creating her own designs. In addition, Williams used drawnwork for many more purposes than did her mother. Drawnwork supplemented Williams's income during the years that she made drawnwork pillowslips, tablecloths, and napkins for the public, and through working for others, Williams found an outlet for her creativity and resourcefulness. She catered to her customers not only by creating new designs to fit their
needs, but also by applying drawnwork to fabric that was later used in a nontraditional way. One example of the latter is a collar Williams made for her great niece. The collar was of similar construction to a large napkin, but after the chosen fabric was embellished with drawnwork, it was adapted to a conventional sewing pattern and made into a collar to be worn over a dress or blouse. Williams is the only member of her family to express such individuality and creativity through her tradition of drawnwork.

**Drawnwork**

Drawnwork was a needlework tradition in Italy, the Netherlands, France, Finland, and Sweden during the mid-seventeenth century. Often called dresdenwork, drawnwork was one type of "fancy work" being made in America before the nineteenth century. Drawnwork has never been a type of needlework made by every woman or even attempted by every woman. It is not typical of the sampler work or of the basic sewing skills learned at home by young women. Drawnwork can only be accomplished by a skillful needleworker -- a person who understands the weave and composition of fabrics, the intricacies of different threads and the purpose of various size needles and other tools. A drawnworker must also understand artistic design and apply that understanding to her work throughout the process. The process of drawnwork involves the following steps: gathering tools, selecting thread and fabric,
determining the design and the placement of the design on the fabric, drawing out or removing weft or warp threads from the fabric, hemstitching, and tying crochet thread onto the columns in a distinct pattern. (See Chapter 3 for a complete description of the drawnwork process.) Some designs involve an additional step of embroidering or weaving onto the tied threads.

Drawnwork, a type of needlework incorporated into a piece of fabric, was applied to fabric being made into tablecloths, dresser scarves, napkins and clothes. Ideally, the fabric used in drawnwork has the same number of threads per inch in the warp and weft. Today the fabric Williams prefers is linen, cotton, or a polyester and linen blend with the characteristics of linen. In the past, Williams and her mother used flour and feed sacks for doing drawnwork. Williams describes the fabric used by her mother, Amanda Weaver Conner:

It was very cheap but almost as high comparatively speaking as it is now. We didn't make money like we do now, you know. We just got a little at the time; we didn't have a lot of things like they have now, but -- make the best of what you could. Back those days, women in the spring of the year, when their hens would lay more, maybe buy a whole bolt of domestic and make it up into sheets and pillowslips and underwear. We used to make our princess slips out of it and things like that. My mother would buy, nearly every spring, a bolt of domestic which would have I guess thirty yards in it. I don't remember just how much. Had one brand they all called L and L -- double L -- I believe that was the way we called it. [Mother] usually just used domestic [to do drawnwork on]. We didn't have these good linens then like we do now. . . . We'd get that [domestic fabric] at that country store in Settle, [Kentucky] because we didn't come to Scottsville -- largely because there was no way
to come only horses, horse-drawn vehicles. We didn't come to Scottsville much... Meadors run it [the store in Settle]. [The domestic] was measured off so many yards, whatever you wanted.**22**

After the material has been selected, the artistic process begins. Williams chooses a design and determines placement of the design on the piece of fabric. Traditionally Williams and her mother placed the work only around the edges of the fabric. In recent years, as a result of customers' requests, Williams places designs in various places across the length and width of fabrics.

"Drawing the threads is the next thing," comments Williams.23 Plain weave coarse fabric is ideal to use for removing threads because the threads are easy to pick out and remove.24 The first row is drawn out to the desired width by removing a number of consecutive threads. Each subsequent horizontal or vertical row is measured against the first row to assure consistency in width.

After threads have been removed from the fabric the next step is hemstitching, a process which groups the remaining threads into vertical columns. The texture and composition of the warp and weft threads of the fabric affect the hemstitching process. Cotton sewing thread is used for hemstitching. All the work is done by hand with needle and thread. One side of the row is hemstitched by laying the fabric over the hand, and the other side is hemstitched with the fabric in an embroidery hoop.

With the hemstitching complete, crochet threads are
tied onto the work in a specific pattern forming the intended design. The first thread is tied onto a group of vertical columns (or a single column -- depending on the design); each successive thread is tied onto the previous crochet threads as well as onto other groups of columns or single columns. There may be as many as eight threads worked across the fabric to form a design. Tying the crochet threads onto the fabric is the final step in almost every design that Williams has created.

**Variation in Design and Function**

Vadie Williams and her sisters learned drawnwork at an early age from their mother. However, as Williams continued to make drawnwork, she created her own designs as well as used her drawnwork for nontraditional purposes. While in her nineties Williams adapted her work from the large, bulky tablecloths to small more physically manageable pieces. This change in size of the drawnwork she made allowed her to continue her tradition although she was no longer as strong and could no longer move around as well without the aid of a walking cane and later a walker. Williams's personal creativity as well as her adaptations over time set her apart from her mother and her sisters and help distinguish her as a folk artist. Sometime in the mid-1940s she began expanding on the two patterns she learned as a child by working different designs into the hemstitched columns of thread. At first glance her
patterns seem unrelated to those of her mother's, but closer scrutiny reveals the common elements. Williams's designs are based on those of her mother's; the hemstitching and often the tying with crochet thread are identical to her mother's; however, her elaboration on her mother's weaving patterns expresses her individuality. Creativity is also expressed through the items themselves — many items Williams makes serve different purposes than the items made by her mother. In addition, Williams's unique use of colored thread as well as colored fabric afford other exceptions to the practices she learned from her mother. Two examples of elaboration on Conner's patterns are Williams's creation of the "corner" design and creation of one-of-a-kind pieces for nontraditional uses. Williams's design variations thus provide a continuity between the past and present and at the same time express individual creativity. She has found a way to "create," as she refers to her technique, to find personal satisfaction in producing an item very different from items produced by her mother and the few other women who make drawnwork; yet producing something that remains within the established community aesthetic. Williams compares herself to Evelyn Law, an Allen County painter, whose artwork she admires because of Law's ability to look at an object whether it be a still-life, a photograph, or a landscape and to reproduce that object on canvas with oil paints. Vadie Williams sees her own ability to be creative as something she was born
Williams's new designs include those based on designs of her mother's, as well as designs unrelated to those of her mother's. Especially noticeable among her design work is a pair of pillowslips made with purple fabric and purple thread, one of her earliest creations. In this effort she designed something very different; though when she completed that set of pillowslips she never made another like it. The "purple pillowslips" are not a pair that Williams likes because they are too hard to make and because she has never seen another pair even similar to them. She sought and found a boundary with this experimental design. The design was too unlike the designs learned from her mother for her to find them appealing or for her to want to experiment further with the basic design elements she created. Another deciding factor was the large amount of time she spent on making these. Although drawnwork, be it pillowslips or tablecloths, is a very time-consuming art, she never mentioned the time involved as a hindrance except with this experiment.

The early "purple pillowslips" and other designs were created from her imagination and from ideas that came to her as she lived and worked in her rural farm community. Williams's customers also have directly influenced her creation of designs as well as her production of drawnwork. Without interest shown by other women in the community, it is unlikely that Williams would have produced such a large
amount of drawnwork. The largest quantity of her work was made between the early 1950s (after she and her husband, Lively Ashley Williams, moved to the Franklin Road closer to Scottsville, the county seat of Allen County) and the mid 1980s. "I've been living here thirty-eight years the twenty-first day of this month [November 1985], but I done a whole lot [of drawnwork] before I come out here." Living closer to town, however, made Williams more accessible to customers. Most of the women who wanted to purchase drawnwork lived in or very near Scottsville. After Williams's family moved nearer to Scottsville, her customers could obtain her work more readily. Once she began making drawnwork for other women, news of her skill spread quickly and customers continuously petition her work. At ninety-seven years old, Williams continues to produce drawnwork for her own pleasure and at the request of others.

Customers encouraged Williams to produce more drawnwork and they often sparked her creativity by requesting items Williams had not previously made. Williams remembers the first large tablecloth she made for a customer:

I made my first one for Jimmie Nichols, and I told her I would be two years a doing it. I didn't know how long I would be. I had no idea how I was going to fix them corners. So after I got it done, I just put it in a wheel [an embroidery hoop] and went to work on it, and that [the corner] is what I come up with. I don't know when I made it. It's been since she [Nichols] moved out to where she is now. Oh, it's been twenty years ago I guess -- fifteen, eighteen, or twenty -- somewhere along
there. My sister [Vertie] died fifteen years ago; it's been since then that I made it. I made all the wheels, my mother didn't ever make any wheels, I made all them up.26

This first large tablecloth necessitated the creation of the woven corner, an element woven into the square (empty) space that remains where threads have been removed both vertically and horizontally. The corners are Williams's exclusive creation, and she has created many, many corner designs. Threads tied onto the vertical columns form the foundation of each corner which contains three yards of crochet thread and requires an hour of time to complete.

Williams's variations in designs have been a result of personal creativity, customer requests, and her own aging process. During her nineties, Williams made a few changes in her work -- changes that were not only practical but that allowed her to continue her tradition and her level of production. One change is her creation of simpler patterns, those that require less time to complete and that do not contain the elaborate weaving of crochet thread on the hemstitched columns of thread. Also, Williams no longer produces the large tablecloths which contain many yards of heavy linen fabric and a lot of space in which to calculate the placement of drawnwork. With the large tablecloths, Williams began her job by spreading the entire piece of fabric on her dining room table and measuring, pulling threads and cutting the desired dimensions. Williams's ability to manipulate the bundlesome fabric
became limited as she grew older, as was her ability to handle the weight of yards of heavy fabric in her lap as she drew threads, hemstitched and completed the drawnwork. Williams moves and works at a slower pace than when she was younger, thus each piece requires more time to complete. By limiting the size of her work and creating patterns simpler than the complex designs of buttonhole or spider learned from her mother, Williams has adapted her tradition in order to maintain customers and produce her work in a reasonable amount of time -- just as she has done for the past forty years.

There is a difference in Williams's work and her mother's work in not only the creation of design but in the function of the finished product as well. Conner made fabrics decorated with drawnwork strictly for use in her own home while Williams produced drawnwork for the public -- something her mother never did -- in addition to making items for her home. Williams also changed "pick-up" work into a source of income for herself and created a business with little or no investment, as the customer supplied the material and thread and made payment upon completion of the project. Although the quality of Conner's work is unquestionable, Williams, too, has always been conscientious about her own work and fair in dealing with customers. She charges a certain price per yard for her work and she is proud that no one has ever returned work to her because it was unsatisfactory.
Notes


3. H. H. Patton, A History of Scottsville & Allen County (Scottsville, Kentucky: Allen County Historical Society, 1982), p. 21. The C & O Railroad changed its name to C & N (Chesapeake & Northern) because another company had the name C & O. Later this track was owned by L & N (Louisville & Nashville). The railroad line to Scottsville was discontinued in the early 1980s.

4. U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, The 1982 Census of Agriculture: Preliminary Report [for] Allen County, Kentucky, p. 1. This document defines a farm as "any place from which $1,000 or more of agricultural products were sold, or normally would have been sold during a census year." According to the Preliminary Report, there were 1,294 farms in Allen County in 1982. Eighty-eight percent of the farms were individually or family owned. According to U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Population, there were 1,249 farms in Allen County in 1870.

5. Wendell Hone, Sr., An Historical Atlas of Kentucky and Her Counties (Owensboro, Kentucky: Progress Printing Co., 1965), p. E-9; and U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, United States Census of Population: 1980. There was, however, a significant increase in population (3,069) between 1890 and 1920 due to an oil boom in Allen County.


8. Interview with Hal Bryant, Scottsville, Kentucky, 6 March 1989.


11. Interview with Vadie Williams, Scottsville, Kentucky, 9 September 1985. Williams remembers that one of her grandfathers was "said to be an Irishman", but she did not know the nationality of her ancestors who settled in Allen County. The family names Weaver (Williams mother's maiden name) and Conner (Williams's maiden name) do not appear on the 1815 Allen County Tax List. See Louise Horton, *In the Hills of the Pennyroyal: A History of Allen County, Kentucky from 1815 to 1880* (Austin, Texas: White Cross Press, 1975), pp. 143, 149.


15. Ibid. Williams's term "pick-up work" refers to women's handwork (usually some type of needlework). The piece of work was completed over a long period of time -- "picked up" and worked on when other chores and responsibilities were completed or when the maker found a few minutes of time to herself.


17. Interview with Vadie Williams, Scottsville, Kentucky, 21 September 1985.


19. Ibid.


24. Irene Emery, The Primary Structure of Fabrics (Washington, D.C.: The Textile Museum, 1966), p. 76. Emery defines plain weave as "... the simplest possible interlacing of warp and weft elements... The principle of the interlacing is unvarying alternation. Each weft unit passes alternately over and under successive warp units, and each reverses the procedure of the one before it... The obverse and reverse of plain weave are structurally identical."


26. Ibid.
CHAPTER THREE

THE PROCESS

Tools and Materials

Williams created drawnwork primarily for use in her own home until the 1930s when she moved from Settle, Kentucky, a rural farm community, to Scottsville, Kentucky, the county seat of Allen County, where she began making pillowslips for other women. Since the 1950s she has "taken in work" [Williams's words] and made items to the color, size, and design specifications of other women.

The tools of Williams's trade are simple ones which can be found in the sewing basket of any woman. She uses a yardstick; scissors; "a pin -- I use a pin to start it . . . just any kind of pin I pick up, nothing special";\(^1\) needles -- "according to the size thread";\(^2\) and an embroidery hoop. In addition to these tools, Williams needs only cotton sewing thread, size sixty; crochet thread, size thirty; and a piece of fabric. Before moving to a nursing home, Williams always kept her tools beside her chair in a white oak egg basket that belonged to her husband's grandmother; she still uses a basket to hold her tools and continues her drawnwork from her new home. The
majority of Williams's work has been done for other people, mostly women friends who admire not only the beautiful work but the woman herself. Although there is not a strict protocol that must be followed by the women friends, or customers, who want Williams to make drawnwork for them, there are certain aspects of the job for which each is responsible: the customer usually purchases her threads and fabric and often selects the pattern or design.

Fabric is a very important element, and, although the process of making drawnwork has not changed over time, the fabric available has changed dramatically in Williams's lifetime. When Williams was a child, she and her mother, Amanda Conner, used bleached and unbleached domestic purchased at Meador's Store in Settle, Kentucky, and fabric from flour sacks and feed sacks. Conner bleached the sacks in order to remove any markings or floral patterns before making the sacks into tablecloths and dresser scarves with drawnwork around the edges. Williams has used other fabrics, including broadcloth, pillowcase tubing, and linen -- her favorite fabric -- in addition to the feed sack and domestic fabrics. Fabric which looks like linen yet is a blend of either cotton or linen with rayon, nylon, or other synthetic material is another of her favorites because this fabric does not need to be ironed after laundering. The synthetic fabric "is not as easy to get now as it was when I first began [making tablecloths for the public]," states Williams. All of the fabrics have several characteristics
in common; the fabrics are plain weave, the warp and weft threads are similar in size and texture, and the threads are easy to pull out or remove from the fabric. Because each type of fabric has a different make-up, Williams adjusts her work in response to the composition of the fabric. Examples of fabric variations include a fabric with more threads per inch in the warp than in the weft, warp threads of various thicknesses, and threads with thick and thin places along their length. Williams continues her artistic tradition by putting drawnwork on whatever material is available.

**Preparation**

Williams has always made drawnwork pieces for herself and her daughter and she has made many pieces for other women during the past several decades of her life. Whether designing a piece for herself or for a customer, Williams follows essentially the same procedure. She must first know what the piece will be used for and then must determine the exact amount of fabric needed for the project. (Sometimes a customer has a piece of fabric, already purchased, and Williams uses the piece to make whatever the customer requests.) If working for a customer, Williams invites the customer to her home to talk about the use of the piece, the quantity of fabric needed and the quantity and types of threads needed. A customer must purchase the fabric and threads for her project.
Local fabric stores carried linen or comparable fabric in the past, but today most customers order their fabric through mail order catalogs because the fabric needed for drawnwork is unavailable in local stores. The crochet thread and sewing thread are often obtained locally, however; sometimes customers (or Williams herself) must travel to the nearby towns of Lafayette, Tennessee, or Gallatin, Tennessee, to purchase their thread, especially if they need a color other than white. Williams determines the quantity of fabric needed for a large project, and the size of smaller projects is determined by either the customer or by the fabric. The amount of fabric for a tablecloth, for example, equals the measurement of the table top plus nine inches on each side of the table. The additional nine inches per side allows for the tablecloth to "drop" from the edge of the table a distance of seven inches and for the cloth to have a two inch hem. The size of pillowtops, pillowcases, and napkins is determined by the customer. After the fabric and thread are procured, the customer selects a drawnwork pattern, unless Williams is making a tablecloth. Williams always makes tablecloths with the "spider weave" design. Recently customers have asked Williams to chose the pattern she prefers. Also, Williams or the customer must determine the placement of the drawnwork design on the fabric. Traditionally Williams and her mother placed drawnwork only around the edges of the fabric. Due to recent customer requests, Williams
places designs in various places across the length and width of fabric.

**Process**

After the preliminary preparations of gathering tools, purchasing threads and fabrics, and deciding on the pattern and placement of drawnwork, Williams is ready to put her unique skills to work, as she explains:

It's tedious, nobody [else] is going to do it. It takes a while to learn it too. You can't pick it up in just a little while; there's too many different phases of it. Pulling the threads, then hemstitching it, working it, [then you have to] go back and fix your corners.

So, the work begins by removing threads from the fabric:

I have to measure off where I want to draw the threads. Drawing the threads is the next thing. I pull the threads out where I'm going to put the work in. (See Fig. 1.)

The width of the drawnwork area (or the number of threads removed) is determined by three factors: the intended design, the notion of the artist, and the type of fabric. The job of pulling threads is directly influenced by the type of fabric, and, as Williams describes, some fabrics are more difficult to work with than others:

This material has got that skip in it. When you start out to pull your first thread, if you get into one of them skips there, it will break, and you just have to kind of pick it out until you get farther enough to run it one way. Now it pulls better one way than it does the other way. These skips are mostly running that way [horizontally in the fabric]. I have had a whole lot of [the material with skips in it], but after you get one or two threads out it's not too bad. I made one [tablecloth] for David Williams, Blanche's boy. It was the worst one I ever had. I just like to never
Fig. 1

Pulling threads.
got the threads out. You sit down with four or five yards of that stuff in your lap to pull them threads out of it; it's not funny.

The science of drawnwork emerges as Williams describes her systematic plan of pulling threads. The first row of pulled threads is made by removing adjacent threads, one at a time, from the fabric. She measures each subsequent row against the initial row of pulled threads to assure accuracy in width, as she explains:

I have to keep one for a pattern to go by. I take this one then fix it, and use this for a pattern. If I vary just one thread on this one, then first thing you know, you get it too wide. So you have to be very particular about it.

After removing threads from the background fabric, the next phase is hemstitching, a process which groups the row of threads into vertical columns. The texture and composition of the fabric affects the number of threads per column; Williams states, "it is according to the fabric -- some is coarser than others. You have to judge [making the columns] your own way." Cotton sewing thread is used for hemstitching. Williams places the fabric across her left hand and takes a stitch at the right-hand edge of the fabric; then she passes the needle behind a group of fabric threads emerging in front of the sewing thread. (See Fig. 2.) She pulls the loop made with sewing thread down tightly against the fabric to form a column of threads. Williams completes this grouping of threads by making a small inconspicuous stitch at the base of the column of threads -- this stitch is on the left-hand side of the
Fig. 2

Hemstitching the first side.
Next, she moves the needle to the adjacent fabric thread, makes a tiny stitch, passes the needle behind another group of threads, brings the needle in front of the sewing thread, pulls the loop tight, and makes a small stitch beside that column of threads. She does not count the individual threads per column, but makes her columns consistent in size through years of experience. This process also requires an embroidery hoop as she explains:

I do part of it on the hoops and part by hand. I do the first by hand then put the second row on the hoops. I can hemstitch it either way. . . . [The first] is one side of the drawnwork where the thread is drawn out. Then when you get on the other side, you have to pick up the same amount of threads as there are on the other side. So, you have to put it [the fabric] in the hoops so you can see where it [the group of threads] is. (See Fig. 3.)

Each of the following steps is accomplished with the fabric in the embroidery hoop. After the hemstitching is complete, "you put in the [crochet] thread -- you go tying through there with your . . . crochet thread [and] a bigger needle." Working from right to left, the first crochet thread is tied, in a specific location, onto a group of columns (or a column -- depending on the design). A knot is made by passing the needle behind a group of columns, catching the crochet thread with the needle to form a loop, and tightening the loop onto the group of columns forming a knot. At this point a small stitch is made through the knot to secure the knot. The thread continues across the length of the row, and it is tied onto group of columns after group of columns creating the design. (See Fig. 4.)
Fig. 3

Hemstitched columns completed.
Fig. 4

Groups of columns tied with crochet thread.
Fig. 5

Photograph of Figure 4 after the drawnwork pattern and the corner are complete.
Each successive crochet thread is worked across the length of the row in the same manner and is tied onto the previous crochet threads as well as onto individual columns (or groups of columns). A design may contain as many as eight threads. With the exception of the corners (which I will discuss later), tying is the final phase of Williams's Édrawnwork designs. (See Fig. 5.) The two designs Williams learned from her mother -- buttonhole and spider -- also involve another step in which either buttonhole stitch or needle weaving embellish the pattern formed by tied threads.

A special feature of the tablecloths, pillowtops, and napkins is the treatment of the corners -- the place where fabric threads have been removed from the warp and weft leaving square, empty spaces at the corners of the piece. (See Fig. 5.) Williams describes the corners:

I put wheels in there; fill it in with [crochet] thread. The thread goes across, and then I use them threads and put others [crochet threads] in and make designs in the corners. . . . They're not all wheels. Some of them [the corners] are other ways. Just a corner is all I know to call it.

The corners are Williams's exclusive designs; they are a variation of her mother's more complicated whole-pattern designs. Crochet threads tied onto the groups or columns form the foundation of each corner or "wheel" at the empty space. The wheel, a type of corner, is made by tying all the foundation crochet threads together in the center and then needle weaving crochet thread onto this foundation.
Williams has many wheel designs and continues to create variations. Each wheel contains three yards of crochet thread and requires an hour of time to complete, if the thread works well. There are, however, many factors involved in making a wheel as Williams explains:

"It makes some difference in the thread where you fill in. I'm using [size] thirty thread, but it's hard twisted until it looks like it's finer, and it don't fill in as fast as that softer thread does. It's twisted and that makes it kink bad. When you pull your thread down, it twists around and it kinks. I don't much like it, but I'm getting by with it."

Another finishing touch that Williams sometimes adds is the addition of crocheted lace to the edge of the item. When using a lace edging, she finishes off the raw edge of the fabric using a blind hem, crochets the lace, and sews the lace onto the hemmed edge. After describing the elaborate process of drawnwork Williams concludes, "There's lots of work on them."

Williams clearly understands the importance of her work. She has maintained a tradition over the span of her lifetime and the drawnwork itself has meant a variety of things to her. Drawnwork has been just "pick-up work"; at one point in her life it was something meddlesome for her to do -- a way to imitate her mother; drawnwork has always provided her a means with which to decorate her home; and her "pick-up work" became, in later years, a source of income. In addition, Williams's drawnwork provides her with a creative outlet, a way to establish an identity as
the only person who makes drawnwork, and, of importance to her, something to leave behind when she is no longer alive.
Notes

1. Annie Archbold interview with Vadie Williams, Scottsville, Kentucky, 1 March 1983.

2. Beth Hester interview with Vadie Williams, Scottsville, Kentucky, 21 September, 1985. All quotes in Chapter Three, unless otherwise noted, are from this interview.


4. Amanda Weaver Conner, Williams's mother, was not confronted with the square, empty space that Williams calls a corner because Conner never made the large tablecloths that Williams has been asked to make in recent years.
CHAPTER FOUR

VISIBLE ARTISTRY

Drawnwork: The Visible Sign

Throughout her entire life, Williams has continued to make drawnwork although she has produced the majority of her work for the public since the early 1950s. Drawnwork, as a visible product of Williams's artistic ability, is readily identifiable and easily recognizable. Many people associate Williams with drawnwork and, even if not acquainted with her personally, associate her name with drawnwork. Williams's work in progress and her finished products were always visible in her home and are still visible in her room at Friendship Nursing Home in Scottsville. In her home she kept her work in progress in a basket beside her chair in the living room, and now her work in progress is inside a more contemporary basket in her room. Although Williams is unable to visit her home more than a few times a month, her daughter keeps the home very much like Williams always did. Thus, pieces of Williams' drawnwork continue to be visible in her home. The pieces include mantle covers on the mantle, two pillows on the couch in the living room, an everyday tablecloth on
the kitchen table, and dresser scarves and shelf edgings made to fit her dish cabinet. After making several pillowtops for customers (later made into pillows), she made the pillows in 1985. The pillowtops she makes usually have two horizontal rows of drawnwork, dividing the piece of fabric into thirds, with two vertical rows of drawnwork across the fabric. These four rows, of course, intersect forming four corners. After the drawnwork on the pillowtop is complete, a solid-color fabric is placed under the top and these two tops were made into a pillow. The solid-color fabric is visible through the areas of drawnwork providing a contrast which "shows off" the work. Williams used bright yellow and green fabric for the underfabric and gold variegated thread for the drawnwork on white fabric and then she added colored fabric ruffles and stuffed the pillows with plastic bread wrappers saved for that purpose. Someone suggested the plastic to her as a stuffing, and although she made these pillows with the plastic bags, she did not like the plastic stuffing -- it flattened too easily.\(^1\) The drawnwork pillows are another example of Williams's adaptation and creativity. The idea of making a pillowtop came from a customer. Williams took that idea, combined it with her tradition of drawnwork, decided that pillowtops were an item she could handle physically at her age (unlike a large tablecloth which is heavy, cumbersome, and takes a long time to complete), and began making pillowtops as customers requested them.\(^2\)
Another place drawnwork appears in the living room is on the mantle. The mantle, which frames a gas heater, is the focal point of the living room, the room entered from the front door, and displays matching black vases, a recent snapshot or two of family members, a pincushion shaped like a mouse and another pincushion resembling a hat (crocheted by a friend with purple and white yarn), and a modern clock. In three places on the mantle -- under the vases and in front of the clock -- pieces of handwork are hung for display. Most of these pieces are crocheted doilies made for the mantle; however, Williams has custom-made drawnwork pieces for the mantle as well, and she periodically changed the items on display when she lived at home.

The living room now contains two comfortable padded upholstered chairs, a wooden rocker with padded seat, a ladderback chair, two small tables, and a black and white television as well as the couch and mantle. Williams took one of her chairs to her room at Friendship Home so that she would have a comfortable place to sit while doing her drawnwork. The furniture in her living room is positioned along the walls except for the rocker -- the seat usually offered to a guest -- which is near the center of the room. Williams's place, the place she most often sat and the place she did her work, was in one of the upholstered chairs between the front window and a side window. She could see outside or watch television as well as receive
adequate light to work by when she sat in this chair. The
couch, where the drawnwork pillowtops are located, is
actually a place to display the pillows and is only used to
sit on if more than four or five people are in the living
room at one time.

Each downstairs room in Williams's home contains
items of drawnwork she has made. In the two downstairs
bedrooms dresser scarves are embellished with drawnwork.
Inside the dresser drawers, neatly folded and stacked, are
drawnwork tablecloths and pillowslips. Except for one
small piece her mother made, the remainder of the items in
the drawers are her own work. In the dining room, an oak
glass-front dish cabinet has drawnwork pieces on display.
The fabric, embellished with drawnwork, hangs down from the
edge of each shelf inside the cabinet and is tailor-made
for this cabinet just as any tablecloth is tailor-made for
a particular table. Draped across the top of the cabinet
is a narrow strip of fabric trimmed on each end with
drawnwork and crocheted lace. The kitchen contains a table
which is always covered with a cloth Williams has designed.
The kitchen tablecloth is one of many "everyday" pieces
that has probably been made from a feed sack or a flour
sack. Sometimes smaller pieces are sewn together to make
an everyday kitchen tablecloth.³

Williams's drawnwork serves many purposes --
sometimes functional and at other times aesthetic,
depending on her reason for making it. Pillowtops, dresser
scarves, mantle covers, and dish cabinet edgings are on display because their main purpose is aesthetic. Pillowslips, which are aesthetically pleasing also, were made to be used, but they are now stored in a bedroom dresser drawer and are displayed only at certain times, such as when a visitor asks to see all of Williams's patterns. Williams keeps one of her tablecloths on her kitchen table and has another dresser drawer filled with many "everyday" tablecloths. Whether Williams intended for an item to be used everyday, to be on display, or whether she changed her intended use for the item over a period of time, each piece was made meticulously in the traditional manner and is functional as well as aesthetically pleasing.

**Community Identity**

Williams's drawnwork is not only visible in her home but also in the homes of her daughter, other members of her family, friends, and acquaintances as well as in the homes of people she has never met. Lillian Allen of Scottsville, Kentucky, displays Williams's work on special occasions and holidays: she has a red tablecloth which she uses only on Christmas and Valentine's Day. Allen had identical red tablecloths made for her daughter and her daughter-in-law. Others like Mary Ella Gilbert of Goodlettsville, Tennessee, display their tablecloths on the dining room table everyday. (Gilbert and her family do not use the dining room table for everyday meals.) Many women use their
tablecloths for special dinners and family gatherings. Williams's drawnwork -- usually sheets and pillowcases -- were customary gifts for wedding showers; on such occasions many people who were not acquainted with Williams saw her work and thus became potential customers. Williams gives the following account of a conversation with her daughter, Priscilla Strausburg, about some pillowslips made for wedding presents:

A woman said to Priscilla the other day I had made her three pair of pillowslips for her boys, and the last one just got married the other day, and she gave it [a pair of pillowslips] away, the last one. I don't have no more idea of making that woman pillowslips because it's been several years. Said she told her [Priscilla] she guess I'd forgot it, I'd made so many. I don't remember making her them pillowslips -- there's just so many of them. I've made lots of pillowslips. 4

Also, her work has been bought by and for people who live outside the Allen County area:

I've got work in half the states in the Union. It's gone all over. [Women] would see one piece, and they want a copy of it. It just sells itself. Somebody sees a tablecloth, and they want one like it. 5

Williams enjoys making drawnwork; she makes drawnwork for many reasons, including for pleasure as well as for the income, and she has always adapted her work according to the needs of customers. Williams talks about her work:

To me it has been [satisfying]. Been a lot of pastime to me because I can sit and do that when I can't do something else. I'm the type I want to be doing something or another. I like to do it. I never fret about it. Used to I'd have three or four tablecloths in the house at the same time. I never fretted or worried about it. I just do it as I can. I could turn it off a little faster then than I can now because [now] I'm so slow about my
other work. I don't get as much time on it. I don't walk good. . . . I've enjoyed it. And I've never had any complaint. Never had anybody to say this is not what you promised. That's what would hurt me worse than anything else, but everyone seems to be satisfied with it. I've never had any complaint on it. . . . I've made some little money [from drawnwork]. What I done was free, I mean it didn't cost me anything to do it. And it helped out in lots of places. Yes, I appreciate the work because it helped me with part of my grocery bills and things like that. . . . I like to have it [myself]. I like to have things [made of drawnwork], and I take care of it. I don't just throw it around. 

While working for the public, Williams has adapted many items to the specifications of her customers. Although Williams's work has been innovative, she has also limited herself to producing items which fit into her drawnwork tradition. Henry Glassie observes this quality in folk artists:

While the elite artist may be willing to risk his standing to appear ahead of his times, it is only a rare folk artist who strives for innovation; his replication is an affirmation of a tradition. This does not mean that the folk artist is an exacting copyist or that there is no margin for variation within folk tradition. From his perceptions of a number of similar artifacts, the folk artist abstracts a structural concept that is a minimal description of the form of an object, containing a specific relationship of components without which the object would not be the object -- without which a bench would not be a bench. From his perceptions he abstracts, as well, a small set of rules that define the limits within which he can modify the concept according to his taste and talent and the taste and pocketbook of his client.

Tablecloths made for the public, for example, contain rows of drawnwork placed around each edge of the cloth facilitating Williams's innovation of the "corners" or "wheels." She describes how the invention came about:
I made all the wheels, my mother didn't ever make any wheels, I made all them up. . . . I made my first one for Jimmie Nichols. . . . I had no idea how I was gonna fix them corners. . . . I went to work on it [and] that's what I come up with.

In addition to the creation of "corners," Williams has met customers' specifications by producing non-traditional items such as pillowtops and clothing and producing traditional items for a non-traditional purpose. Tablecloths, pillowslips, napkins, sheets, and dresser scarves are the items Williams is accustomed to making for other women and for herself. Her ability to produce uncharacteristic items at the request of others shows her adaptation to change, within her tradition, and her individuality as expressed in her work. Williams explains a collar she made:

I made a collar for a dress just over a year ago [for] . . . Rita Shaw in Texas. I seen her picture with it on. She had that on a black dress. I did that work in it, and it just turned out fine. . . . [The collar] come to a point, and I put one of those corners in there.9

A set of communion cloths for Scottsville Baptist Church, where Williams is a member, is another atypical example of her work. Although she has made many tablecloths in her lifetime, the communion cloths are an atypical example of her work because they function differently from any tablecloths she has made. A group of church members provided the linen, and Williams volunteered her time to make the cloths. Williams expresses her views on the church cloths:
It's like Brother Bradley said up there at the church that day. He said, talking about the tablecloths, 'Now this is something that will be here when you and I are gone.' Of course, it won't have to be here too long to be here when I'm gone, but he may go before I do -- you can't tell. It's just something to leave behind that somebody else can think about.

Contributing the time to make the communion cloths was important to Williams. She provided a gift for the new church -- special communion cloths that no other member could have made for the church -- a useful donation that will last for the lifetime of the church -- a creative expression that says "I care." The cloths are a symbol of Williams's long-standing faith and commitment to her church. Because of her age and subsequent inability to participate in church activities as she did when she was younger, the cloths were Williams's gift to the church, the congregation and the preacher; they were her means of saying she will always continue to contribute and be a part of the church as long as she is able.

The Marketplace

In addition to discussing Vadie Williams's work, the uniqueness of her work and her contributions to her community, it is necessary to look further into her marketplace and to try to determine how others have affected the traditional product she creates. One question Rosemary Joyce addresses in "Fame Don't Make the Sun Any Cooler": Folk Artists and the Marketplace" is that of what
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happens to the process and product of the folk artist as the artist and their work becomes popular and receives more attention from the public. Unlike many of Joyce's informants, Williams's fame has not been widespread outside her immediate community. The exceptions are one newspaper article and photograph that appeared in The Citizen Times (an Allen County weekly newspaper) and a small regional folk art exhibit that included two of Williams's pillowcases. The exhibit was held in 1983 at the Capitol Arts gallery in the nearby town of Bowling Green, Kentucky. Vadie has not been bombarded with attention from newspapers, magazines, or television, nor has she had to contend with people at craft shows or shops who want to purchase her work. Although she has not had demands from outside the community, she has been admired and given attention within her community. People have visited her who would probably not have visited her except to examine her work and place an order for work to be done.

The attention Williams has received has led to alterations in her product but not to alterations in the process. Unlike some of the Amish women described by Geraldine Johnson in Weaving Rag Rugs: A Woman's Craft in Western Maryland as compromising the quality of their woven rag rugs by increasing their speed to meet demands, Williams has never compromised the quality of her work. Even with many orders on hand and several pieces of material waiting in her back room, each piece of drawnwork
was always made with the same time-consuming steps and personal care. Never has Williams altered her process. The product, on the other hand, has been altered. As stated earlier, Williams learned drawnwork from her mother and at that time she learned to place drawnwork on pillowslips, tablecloths and doilies. Williams's current repertoire reaches far beyond those few items, and her expanded number of products is due mostly to customers' requests. Altering patterns, colors, and even whole products to meet a customer's request is commonplace among many folk artists. Johnson describes the Georges Creek women weavers as being willing to make rugs to the color specifications of their customers. Also, the weavers from Garrett County have discarded their standard-sized rugs and made narrow rugs, placemats, and nonstandard lengths of rugs in order to satisfy their customers and sell their products. One Garrett County weaver told Johnson of a customer who brought poor quality rags to be woven into rugs. The rags contained bulky seams (a quality deemed undesirable by the weaver), buttons, hooks and eyes. The weaver did not refuse to make the rugs, but she did explain to the customer that the quality of the rug depended on the quality of the prepared material the customer brought. Other weavers that Johnson interviewed saw customer requests in a different light. They were not against altering their work for a customer, but often refused -- especially if it was an "unusual request".
After weaving two unsatisfactory rugs using plastic, one weaver refused orders of plastic rugs from her customers. When told that other weavers used plastic, she simply stated, "I don't" rather than take an order and weave a product she was personally unhappy with. 17

Williams has made everything that any customer has requested of her. No request has been denied except her refusal to make large tablecloths in recent years. Her reason is however that she is no longer physically able to handle the large amount of material, not that a customer has asked her to step beyond her own traditional or artistic boundaries. Most of the pieces Williams currently produces are small. This change in product size is due to customers' requests and her physical limitations. The small pieces include pillowtops and cardtable-size tablecloths.

Since residing at Friendship Home, Williams has also made a wall hanging for herself that hangs over her bed. The wall hanging is a "sampler" of her patterns and contains many different corners. It is backed with strips of bright solid-color fabric to enhance the drawnwork designs. The wall hanging is a symbol of her many years of work as well as a display of her myriad patterns and corners. It hangs as a constant reminder of her life's work and the work she has gained so much pleasure from. It is also a visible reminder of the past and another item she will leave behind. This unique piece is perhaps a by-
product of customer's requesting both small pieces and pieces which showed several different corners. Whatever the origin, the final product remains as a tribute to Williams and her work.

Williams's products have changed over time, due to her age and customer requests, yet her process has remained the same. And, as Rosemary Joyce points out,

Of course, customer demand has always been a part of marketing. . . . Customer demand has thus influenced the design, materials, and techniques for making practically every traditional object in this country.18

Joyce is very concerned about the many small changes in products that customers request of folk artists and changes the artists themselves have made due to salability of their traditional products. She feels these changes can lead to disintegration of "generational continuity" and loss of tradition.19 I agree with Joyce that purchasers need to be educated to appreciate traditional artists for the work they produce and not for the machine they can be. Although Williams's recognition has remained, for the most part, within her own community and she has not faced the demands and attention other folk artists have had to face, the fact remains that under pressures from customers she maintained her process, time-consuming as it is. This unwillingness to compromise the process has helped preserve her original tradition and her cultural aesthetic.
Artistry in Everyday Life

Visible artistry is tangible evidence of a person's artistic ability. Williams, the artist, can be seen through the drawnwork in her home, drawnwork at community and family events, and drawnwork in the lives of individuals. What less visible means of artistic expression exists in Williams's life? How is her personal aesthetic expressed in her everyday life? A close examination of her physical environment reveals many clues to answers for these questions. Williams's home on the Franklin Road is located near the highway on the edge of a hill overlooking her farm. She and her husband bought the land in 1947, and they helped with the construction of the house, barn, chicken coop, shed, and brooder house. An aerial photograph shows the arrangement of the trees, fence rows, and garden as well as the buildings on the farm.

When they moved to the farm in 1947 there were no buildings on the land; she influenced the arrangement of all the essential buildings on the cultural landscape necessary for operation of a farm, including the house. She describes how the house was built:

Every bit of it's built [with lumber off this land]. Mighty little lumber brought in here -- I mean in the way of lumber. Of course we had to buy our sidings and bricks, and things like that. Others was cut on the farm; sawed on the farm. I helped stack the lumber because it was during the war, and we couldn't get hands to bring it out from the mill. I helped stack. I helped to haul the lumber up here. It was . . . me and a hand we had that hauled the first load of lumber that was ever brought up here. It was down in the bottom and we brought it up here. I helped do all that's been
done on it. Our casing, window and door casing, is solid oak cut right here on the place. Our sheeting, two-by-fours, two-by-sixes, everything about it cut right here on the place.\textsuperscript{20}

Williams, like many other folk artists, is not accustomed to explaining her sense of design as the following dialogue demonstrates:

**HESTER:** Where did you get the design for your house?

**WILLIAMS:** I don't remember where we got it. I don't think it was to the exact design we picked for it. Maybe we changed it, you know. I think it was out of some catalogue, I don't know.

**HESTER:** Most of the house is red brick, but you have yellow brick mixed in there.

**WILLIAMS:** We've got it trimmed in yellow brick.

**HESTER:** Was that [the yellow brick] in the catalogue too?

**WILLIAMS:** No, we got that somewhere in the south. Got it through Asia somebody.

**HESTER:** How did you decide where you wanted to put those yellow bricks on the house?

**WILLIAMS:** I don't know. [Laughs.] Just the thought in our minds, I reckon. That's nothing we went by. Just decided we wanted it trimmed with yellow brick.

**HESTER:** There is a place by this chimney that has a few yellow bricks on it.

**WILLIAMS:** Just a design there. It wasn't put where I aimed for it to be. I aimed for them to put it up on there [the chimney]. But we went off to town for something, and when we come back it was down there. I aimed for it to be farther up, higher up on it. I just had to let it go.... That's the best I can tell you because it's all water over the dam now.\textsuperscript{21}
Williams's personal aesthetic is, however, clearly defined; her arrangements and designs have a reason and a purpose. During my informal visit with Williams in September 1986 she talked about her neighbor's yard. Williams said she failed to understand the neighbor woman's plan. The neighbor, it seemed to Williams, had made a mess of things; she had "no rhyme or reason" to the way she planted her yard. The neighbor simply dug a hole in the yard and planted a tree or a shrub or a bed of flowers. Each planting was made without giving thought to the yard's overall plan.

Williams's yard is a direct contrast to her neighbor's yard. Each of the four maple trees in Williams's front yard, planted when the house was built, are spaced evenly between the house, the road, and the other three trees -- spaced, in fact, where the corners are spaced on a pillowtop (if the pillowtop represents the front yard). Shrubs and flowers, planted next to the house, abound. Also, flower pots sit along the edge of the front porch and hang, two on each side, across the front of the porch. As with the inside of the house, Williams's daughter continues to keep the yard and porch as Williams always has. There are two exceptions to Williams's placement of flowers next to the house: first, a trellis in the side yard on which grapes and yard-long beans are grown, and second, a row of peony plants at the edge of the front yard. Williams's yard is immaculate and her flowers
are beautiful. 22

Williams's personal aesthetic is expressed in her arrangement of items inside her home: cans of food and empty canning jars stored on homemade shelves in the basement, dishes arranged in a glass-front cabinet, vases and pieces of drawnwork placed on the mantle, chairs and a pie safe coated with fresh paint in the kitchen, and drawn-work pillowslips laid in a dresser drawer. Also, Williams's aesthetic is expressed in what is no longer visible on the cultural landscape. For example, without cows, horses, and a truck garden, fences were no longer needed and thus torn down; without chickens the brooder house and chicken coop were no longer needed and although they remained as storage for awhile, they were eventually torn down as their only function became to shelter groundhog holes. As the needs and function of the farm changed, fences and buildings were torn down; thus Williams's personal aesthetic is apparent in what is absent from the landscape as well as what is present.

Williams's yard provides clues to her artistry as does her house and the placement of other buildings on the farm. Her personal aesthetic is expressed through everyday items in her home as well. The arrangement of buildings and trees and the design of her home contain elements of order; the designs are usually symmetrical. Order, defined as "a condition of logical or comprehensible arrangement among the separate elements of a group," and in many cases
symmetry are important elements in Williams’s personal aesthetic.

Summary

The value of order incorporates the idea of a correct place for things (i.e. plants in the yard or drawnwork on a piece of fabric) and a correct way of doing things. Order is a value Williams learned early in her lifetime from her parents and from the rural farm culture in which she was raised. She learned to value order from her family and practiced order in her daily activities. As a child Williams performed chores on the family’s farm in Settle, Kentucky, attended Big Springs Missionary Baptist Church and Sinking Springs Church, and attended Big Springs School and Sinking Springs School. The Conners family valued work -- they had to work hard to exist on the farm; they valued Christianity -- Williams continues her membership at the Scottsville Baptist Church; they valued education -- Williams attended school for eight years, Allen County’s maximum education at the time, and participated in many activities at school including drama and reciting poetry. Also, education was part of Williams’s training at home. Her father, John William Conner, read to her often and taught her poetry. Amanda Weaver Conner, her mother instructed her in woman’s work; she taught Williams to weave, spin, sew, cook, tend a garden, store food, and raise farm animals such as sheep, chickens, and geese.
Williams's brother, Vivian Conner, taught her to work on the farm. She enjoyed doing chores with her brother as she describes:

My brother came along and I followed him. I cut bushes and raked hay and things like that. (Laughs.) I done a lot of outside work because I followed him. He didn't like to be out by himself, and I was a tomboy anyway. After Lively's eyes failed him, I went out and worked just like he did. Fenced -- I could put stretchers on a fence good as any man.24

Williams's education and work ethic were learned at home, both inside and outside of the house, at church, and at school. Work, Christianity, and education, the values she learned as a child, continue to be important to Williams.

Within the value of order, having a place for things -- a right and wrong -- Williams sees many choices and is open to variation as her drawnwork clearly demonstrates. She has created unique pieces of work which function in ways different from traditional drawnwork items. The dress collar, the pair of pillowcases made of purple fabric (and purple thread), and the communion cloths mentioned previously are three examples of this deviation from tradition. Also, Williams has created many designs which are variations of the patterns taught her by her mother:

I've added patterns. She [Williams's mother] didn't do any of this corners at all because she did all her work in pillowslips. I've got about five or six different corners that I've patterned myself. I originated . . . about putting them in. You know what I'm talking about -- the corners. She didn't, well now the spider weave was similar to the corners. But, she just didn't have the material to work with or she could have done all
that I do. She just couldn’t get the material then. People wasn’t able to afford it anyway.  

The design variations are used on both traditional and non-traditional items. In addition to unique pieces of work and variations in design, Williams exhibits flexibility within her tradition by adapting to customer requests. Williams’s creation of the "corner" or "wheel" on tablecloths is an example of her adaptation. A customer presented her with a new situation, and Williams met the challenge by building on the foundation of her unique knowledge. She has constantly varied her products in order to meet customers’ requests and develop new designs for herself. Another example of her creativity, her success in reaching beyond the confines of what her mother taught her, is her adaptation of her methods to the making of pillowtops -- strictly a customer request. Her work is important to her as a means of identity for herself and also a means of identity within her community, and it reflects the values she holds, the values of order and symmetry, the values of right and wrong -- values she learned through her rural farm culture. Drawnwork is her signature, left to remind the community and all of Allen County of her existence; through her work she will be able to leave something behind when she dies. Williams has continued her work for many reasons, as she explains:

It’s just my nature. I just like it. I do it as much for the pleasure of it. I just need to do something. And I do it for what I get out of it because I never have gone up [in price] on my work. It just stays the same all the time. It takes so
long to do it that it [the income] don't amount to much, but what it does is that much. 26

Williams is flexible about the order within other aspects of her life as well. The end result of Williams's artistry -- whether designing a yard, arranging canned food on a shelf, making drawnwork, or controlling the cultural landscape -- reflects the value of order and also reflects adaptability within that order.
Notes

1. Saving plastic bread wrappers to stuff pillows is another example of Williams's recycling of discarded items.

2. Williams has several other pillows in her living room that she made, but only the two most recently made pillows contain drawnwork.

3. Small pieces of fabric were recycled to make useful items for the home. Williams recycles her own old clothing into rags by cutting and sewing the clothes into the appropriate size rag.


5. Interview with Vadie Williams, Scottsville, Kentucky, 21 September 1985.


13. Ibid., p. 103.


15. Ibid., p. 120.

16. Ibid., p. 143
17. Ibid., p. 85.

18. Joyce, "'Fame Don't Make the Sun Any Cooler'", p. 238.

19. Ibid., p. 240.


21. Ibid.

22. Prescilla Strausburg, Williams's daughter, lives nearby and has taken care of her yard (mowing, raking leaves, etc.) and helped take care of her flowers and garden for several years, especially as her ability to walk declined.


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