

HOOKED RUGS

Earliest rugs (1700-1820) were used for bedcovers-these are not hooked rugs, rather wool yarn sewn onto a woolen base.

A hooked rug is made by pulling fabric strips up through a backing with a hook. The resulting loops cover the backing and make the design.

Hooked rugs are thought, by most experts, to be an indigenous American folk art. First produced in the late 1850's on the Eastern seaboard and Canada. The introduction of burlap sacking material, which made a perfect backing for pulling the cut fabric strips through was introduced at this time.

The first rugs were drawn by hand and designs were taken by the rug maker's surroundings or experiences... floral, embroidery, china, family pets, etc. In the 1860's several pattern making businesses started. One of the most famous was Edward Sands Frost. While his patterns brought rug hooking to the masses, it is thought that the pattern business stifled creativity. Nineteenth century publications, like Godey's, carried ads for patterns.

In the 1900-1920's period hooked rug making developed into a cottage industry in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Labrador, Canada. One of the most famous was the Grenfell Mission. Grenfell mats were made in homes, using finely cut strips of wool and cotton knit fabric such as stockings and underwear. Most are hooked with the loops in horizontal rows.

During this time period there was much interest in older hooked rugs. Between 1923-1929 over 2,000 hooked rugs were sold at auction in New York City.

Dating rugs is an inexact science. You must look at fabrics used, backing material, and colors (natural versus aniline dyes). Aniline dyes date from the end of the 19th century.

Care of old hooked rugs. Display out of direct sunlight. If on the floor, place in low traffic areas. If mounted for hanging, make sure it is securely attached to the backing fabric to distribute the weight. Spot cleaning can be done carefully, after testing a corner for color fastness. Do not vacuum or vacuum carefully, watching that corners and edges are not pulled into the vacuum. Rugs should be stored rolled up, with the top of the rug on the outside.

Criteria to consider when buying: age, condition, and price. Condition most important. Check for moth evidence (holes and casings). Backing should not be brittle or shedding. A good rug can be repaired, but it can be an expensive proposition.

Further reading:

"AMERICAN HOOKED & SEWN RUGS- FOLK ART UNDERFOOT" by Joel & Kate Kopp 1975

"HOOKED RUGS- AN AMERICAN FOLK ART" BY Lesley Linsley 1992

“RAG RUGS OF ENGLAND AND AMERICA” by Emma Tennant 1992

Hooked rug books by Jessie Turbayne

Hooked rugs by Kent