



PIONEER ART:

Rugs

By Alice Baker

The most comforting house-hold furnishings of pioneer days were the home-made rugs. Women showed their ingenuity in the many types which they devised. The art of these rugs depended upon the degree of plenty of the housewife and her natural personal taste in creating them.

Then, as now, the braided rug was a popular pattern. When coats, suits, and dresses were worn to the shabby stage, there was still much cloth which was firm and strong in them. These garments were ripped, washed, torn into strips, and braided. The braids were then sewed into ovals or circles; and a mat pleasing to the eye and comforting to the feet was placed where its utility was most demanding.

Braided rugs required large pieces of cloth but there were always smaller pieces left from the garment which were not suitable for braiding strips. In the days when every ort and smidgin had value, these smaller pieces of cloth could be used for hooked rugs. Cut into narrower strips three-fourths of an inch wide, they were pulled with a stout hook into a canvas or burlap background in designs created by the maker. In the hooked rug the house-wife could give free rein to her imagination in devising designs limited only by the materials she had at hand.

Hooked rugs were and are highly prized. Those still in existence, even of Colonial times, are exhibited in museums as rare possessions. The writer of this article, however, had a hard time tracking down one that had been designed by its maker. She finally found one made by Mrs. Jerome Mealey of Eagle, "made many, many years ago," the deviser apologized. Hooked rugs are still being made; but women depend on art companies for their designs.

A rug utilizing old felt from discarded hats was made by cutting circles of various sizes and placing them upon a heavy background. The edge of the rug was bordered by scallops of the same or other material. If other cloth of a fraying nature had to supply substance to the rug, the fashioner meticulously buttonhole stitched each circle or scallop with a contrasting color of yarn.

Another type of rug, very ingenious, was made by cutting seven-inch squares out of old hand knitted stockings, sweaters or what-not. These squares were sewed on the back-ground cloth three inches down, leaving the four inch length toward the outer margin. When all the squares were in place, the edges were raveled most of the way up. This type of rug was the softest and the most comforting of all types, a joy to touch on a below-zero morning in a frigid bedroom.

Equally soft and similarly comforting was that of a rug which carries no name in the writer's memory but which was made by a feeble imitation of oriental rugs. The maker must have a long length of shop twine, double it, and pin it to her knee. Very small strips of cloth (3½" by ¼") were placed across the cord and the ends pulled up behind and slid along the cord. Long strings of these pieces were made and later sewed onto a back-ground. There was little chance for variety of design but still some variation could be made.

The pioneer woman had little time to make artistic objects; but if she were not stricken by guilt by her inattention to her daily duties in her creative projects, she found an emotional release that made her life happier and most rewarding.