A SURVEY OF MAT HOOKING TRADITIONS IN CENTRAL NOVA SCOTIA 1900-1985

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A SURVEY OF MAT HOOKING TRADITIONS IN CENTRAL NOVA SCOTIA 1900-1985

by

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A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Folklore

Memorial University of Newfoundland

September, 1988

St. John's, Newfoundland

ABSTRACT

This study examines mat hooking traditions in central Nova Scotia over a span of seventy years, 1915-1985. Examination of one craft's historic and present state in a specific geographic region provides information about the effects of social and economic change on the craft's forms and functions. By focusing on the maker, as well as the artifact, one discerns a relationship between group aesthetics and individual preference, and craft production's role and function in the maker's life. These two factors exert influence on each other.

Acknowledgements

During the course of researching and writing this thesis I met and was assisted by many people. Foremost, the greatest thanks must be extended to the women and men of central Nova Scotia who graciously welcomed me into their homes to discuss their handicrafts. Without them this thesis would not have been possible. I would like to acknowledge, especially, Gertrude Beattie, who took special interest in my project, helping me locate informants, traveling with me to interviews and, in general, offering support and understanding.

I was financially assisted by a two year bursary from the School of Graduate Studies and by archival assistantships from the Memorial University Folklore and Language Archive. In addition, I received employment through the Graduate Students Union and MUN Extension.

The faculty of the Folklore Department have aided me in many ways during my academic career and I take the time now to thank them for their support. To my supervisor, Dr. Martin Lovelace, I owe many thanks. He patiently read sections of the early drafts, offering encouragement and gentle criticism and, on short notice, after returning from sabbatical, agreed to resume his supervisory role.

The staff at the Queen Elizabeth Library, E. T. V., and Computer Services, and the secretaries at the Folklore Department--Linda Kirby, Sharon Cochrane, and Laurie Cook--provided expert services in their fields.

During the final dragging months of writing this thesis several people willingly offered their time and talent as editors, without whose help I would have abandoned hope. Philip Hiscock and Joan MacDonald kindly read several

chapters, offering sage criticism and much needed encouragement. I was also ably assisted in this way by Jeannie Howse, Rick Rennie, Clara Murphy and Frank Power.

My family in Truro was instrumental to my fieldwork endeavours. My parents, Robert and Joan, provided me with a homebase, a vehicle, cameras, and cool Keith's ale. They have always been encouraging and accepting of the work I do. My aunt and uncle, Audrey and Bruce McCabe, offered encouragement, suggested informants, and gave me many cups of coffee. Visits with them were always refreshing.

My fellow students and friends were supportive throughout this program and without them my memories of graduate life would be empty. I extend thanks to Susan Hart, Kathy Kimiecik, Martha MacDonald, Clara Murphy, and Jill Thomson. Additional cheers to the S. S. Loretta, Johnny Walker, David Foy and his chiropractic abilities, Tam, for his unconditional love, Marc LaVoie, who first suggested I study Folklore at Memorial, Darrell's hilarious letters and continued promise of employment, Signal Hill--just for being there--and especially to K. K., Paul Foley, and Frank Power, for the best medicine!

Table of Contents

1. Introduction 1
1.1. The Region 5
1.2. Research Methodology 11
2. Early Twentieth Century Traditions 18
2.1. Introduction 18
2.2. Materials 22
2.2.1. Burlap 23
2.2.2. The Frame 25
2.2.3. The Hook 26
2.2.4. Fabrics 32
2.2.5. Dyes 34
2.3. The Hooking Context 35
2.4. Design and Aesthetics 37
2.4.1. Utilitarian Mats 40
2.4.2. Decorative Mats 49
2.4.3. Question of Originality 58
2.5. Templates 65
2.6. Stamped Patterns 66
2.6.1. The Decline of Mat Hooking 69
2.7. The Hooked Mat Trade 70
3. Renewal of Mat Hooking in Nova Scotia 74
3.1. Introduction 74
3.2. Renewal of Handicrafts 75
3.2.1. United States 76
3.3. Mat Hooking 78
3.4. Nova Scotia Renewal of Mat Hooking 79
3.4.1. Mrs. Withrow 80
3.4.2. Doris Eaton 83
3.4.3. Sylvia Macdonald 87
3.4.4. Mrs. Wright 89
4. The Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers 95
4.1. Introduction 95
4.2. Structure of the Meetings 96
4.3. Commercial Designs of the Guild 103

4.3.1. Reasons for Use of Commercial Patterns 104
4.3.2. Popular Courses 108
4.4. Individual Designs 128
4.5. Functions of The Meetings 129
4.5.1. Information Exchange 129
4.5.2. Social Gathering 137
4.6. Functions of Mat Hooking 139
4.6.1. Status Through Mat Hooking 140
5. Defying Cultural Norms: The Use of Mat Hooking to Express Individuality 146
5.1. Introduction 146
5.2. Background and Retirement 147
5.3. Inception of Mat Hooking 151
5.3.1. Early Mats 152
5.3.2. Bluenose Patterns 163
5.3.3. Individual Designs 167
5.4. Methods and Techniques 182
5.5. Use of Colour 184
5.6. Themes and Functions 185
5.6.1. Life Review 186
5.6.2. Play 187
5.6.3. Interaction and Enhancement 188
6. From Kitchen to Competition: Changes in One Woman's Mat Making 191
6.1. Introduction 191
6.2. Stages of Styles 194
6.2.1. The Early Years 194
6.2.2. Stamped Patterns 198
6.2.3. Recent Mats: Maritime Motifs 217
6.2.3.1. Influence of the Exhibition 227
7. Summary and Conclusions 242
Appendix A. 256

List of Figures

Figure 1-1:	Map of Nova Scotia with surrounding provinces, illustrating Colchester County and key towns noted in text.	6
Figure 1-2:	Map of Colchester County with principal towns and villages.	8
Figure 2-1:	Wooden mat hooking frame (c. 1930) still in use in Truro.	27
Figure 2-2:	Mat hook from Pictou County made from bone-handled knife.	30
Figure 2-3:	A variety of handmade and factory-produced hooks found in Colchester County.	30
Figure 2-4:	A "Hit and Miss" design made by Gertrude Beattie.	42
Figure 2-5:	The "Block" design made in Five Islands, Colchester County, c. 1925.	44
Figure 2-6:	"Brick" mat made by Luella Corbett, Five Islands.	47
Figure 2-7:	Luella Corbett with her "Brick" design tied quilt.	47
Figure 2-8:	A contemporary inch mat made by Roberta Doyle--based on an old design.	50
Figure 2-9:	A fancy floral mat with central motifs bordered by scrolls and flowers.	53
Figure 2-10:	Close-up of a mat made with repeated floral design, c. 1925, Five Islands, Colchester County.	56
Figure 2-11:	Floral mat made by Martha Pugsley.	56
Figure 2-12:	Quilting templates made by Pauline Curry, Five Islands.	59
Figure 2-13:	Mat made for a child's room, Truro, c. 1920.	63
Figure 3-1:	Sylvia Macdonald displaying her house and garden design.	90
Figure 4-1:	Audrey Organ using a quilting hoop as a mat frame and Frances Purdy using a factory built lap frame.	99
Figure 4-2:	Frances Purdy with lap frame.	101
Figure 4-3:	Bluenose stamped mat made by Audrey Organ, ca, 1980.	110
Figure 4-4:	Floral mat made with the shading technique.	112
Figure 4-5:	A mat made by Roberta Doyle in 1985. The use of shading is evident in the floral motifs.	114
Figure 4-6:	Bird motif wall hangings made by students during the 1984 mat hookers' school.	116

Figure 4-7:	Oriental mat completed by Audrey Organ in 1985.	120
Figure 4-8:	Oriental mat made in 1984 by a rug hooking student.	120
Figure 4-9:	Dolly Moore, centre, crocheting a fringe on her Oriental mat, with the assistance of Gertrude Beattie, while Roberta Doyle hooks a floral design.	122
Figure 4-10:	Close-up of Nellie Crowe's sculptured floral wall hanging.	126
Figure 4-11:	Gerry Hilchey hooking her large "Shell" pattern hall mat.	130
Figure 4-12:	Garfield mat made by Vida Miles.	132
Figure 4-13:	Betty MacKenzie-Cleland hooking a stamped mat.	134
Figure 5-1:	Elmer Mingo hooking a "Hit and Miss" design in his basement workshop.	153
Figure 5-2:	Dot Mingo displaying her house and garden wall hanging.	155
Figure 5-3:	Three mats made by Elmer Mingo. Sunflower, centre, Feet mat, top and partially visible at bottom.	159
Figure 5-4:	One of the first mats made by Elmer--central sunflower with bordering trees.	161
Figure 5-5:	Bluenose pattern #1000, modified slightly.	164
Figure 5-6:	The same Bluenose pattern with added central motif.	164
Figure 5-7:	Hooked mat depicting Elmer's family home with musical notes to the hymn "Bless This House."	170
Figure 5-8:	Rainbow mat with spaceship.	174
Figure 5-9:	Abstract mat made in 1985. Elmer referred to the motifs as microscopic germs.	176
Figure 5-10:	Christmas handbell mat made by Elmer.	179
Figure 6-1:	Geometric/Hit and Miss mat made by Mrs. Hanson, c. 1930.	196
Figure 6-2:	A stamped mat hooked in Economy, Colchester County, c. 1930.	200
Figure 6-3:	A mat hooked by Mrs. Hanson. Note changes to the scrolls' designs.	200
Figure 6-4:	Bluenose pattern #2121 hooked by Mrs. Hanson in the 1960s. Changed slightly from original.	204
Figure 6-5:	The same pattern with more changes and reductions in detail.	204
Figure 6-6:	Stamped pattern of girl in old-fashioned dress carrying a potted plant.	208
Figure 6-7:	The same mat design with changes and reductions in detail.	208
Figure 6-8:	Two girls in old-fashioned clothes in gardening scene.	210
Figure 6-9:	Mat designed by Mrs. Hanson illustrating two girls in old-fashioned clothes, working in a garden.	210

Figure 6-10:	Bluenose pattern, "The Three Bears," hooked by Mrs, Hanson.	215
Figure 6-11:	Community and landscape scene illustrating some maritime motifs Mrs. Hanson uses in her rural pictorial mats.	222
Figure 6-12:	Community and landscape scene designed by Mrs. Hanson, with her granddaughter's assistance.	225
Figure 6-13:	Maritime community scene hooked early in Mrs. Hanson's association with the Exhibition, illustrating her use of two-dimensionality.	233
Figure 6-14:	Mat drawn and hooked by Mrs. Hanson. In this instance she has attempted to portray depth.	235
Figure 6-15:	Covered bridge, drawn with the assistance of Mrs. Hanson's brother and neighbour. Special attention was given to the accurate representation of the main motif and the flow of the landscape.	238

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis surveys the major changes during the past seventy years in the designs and uses of hooked mats in central Nova Scotia. Once a household necessity among rural dwellers, mat hooking has become now a hobbycraft for retirees and the middle class. Emphasis will be on traditional or innovative designs and makers' motivations for hooking mats.

My decision to study domestic crafts was made during my second semester at Memorial University of Newfoundland when I enrolled in a Material Culture course with Dr. Gerald Pocius. Several classes focused on traditions and trends in quilting and mat making in eastern Newfoundland. I had never seen or heard of hooked mats, though, as I discovered later, my maternal grandmother hooked in her youth. I was especially interested in changes in mat form and function and how such changes affect reasons for engaging in the craft.

When I began an initial literature search, I was struck by the bias of art collectors and museum personnel. Most often they take an elitist or high art perspective and label the objects "folk," denoting something on the lower end of the art spectrum. For this reason, I avoid using the terms "folk art" and "folk artist," opting instead for non-judgmental terms like craftsperson, artist, craftmaker, artisan, and maker.

At the turn of the century researchers believed "folk art" existed only in the past or among groups who retained vestiges of an imagined prior culture. This belief was shaped by the popular image of the past as a safer, more static haven where people lived in greater harmony among themselves and with nature. Collectors and curators, therefore, concentrated on objects and makers which seemed to reflect this belief. Until recently, research was largely affected by the notion that non-elite art documents or expresses a desire for happier times. The choice of artists and artworks in articles and exhibits reflected this feeling. Curators and art journalists eagerly sought work from artists who depicted peaceful landscapes, village scenes, and passed traditions. An example of this emerges when one surveys the artists who captured writers' attention in the early 1970s in Nova Scotia. Much coverage was given to artists like Maud Lewis and Joe Norris who painted pastoral images of country and seaside life.[1] In the past ten years this bias has changed somewhat as art scholars have come to realize that craftspeople who depict modern scenes or personal vision deserve equal attention.[2]

Like researchers in the visual arts, many writers dealing with textile crafts in Canada and the United States focus mainly on eighteenth and nineteenth century forms. Very little attention is given in this research to hooked mats. In Canada, the results of most scholarly research on this craft is found in short articles concerned with its origins, or in museum catalogues describing select

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[1]For a representative view of the available literature on these two artists see Julia V. Watson, "Maud Lewis, Primitive Painter," *Atlantic Advocate* 72.4 (1981): 50-51; Marcia Ross, "Joe Norris: 'The Matisse of Folk Art'," *Atlantic Insight* 2.6 (1980): 58-59.

[2]For insight into the current direction of folk art scholarship see Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, *Folk Art of Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 1977).

historic pieces.[3] The mats are primarily survivals from the nineteenth century so contextual information about makers and users is unavailable.

The only analytic studies of hooked mats were conducted in Newfoundland. Gerald Pocius's survey, *Textile Traditions of Eastern Newfoundland*--the only folkloristic study of hooked mats in Canada--documents materials and methods of construction, and community and individual designs.[4] In a shorter article, "Hooked Rugs in Newfoundland: The Representation of Social Structure in Design," Pocius examines the relationship between mat design, their spatial location and the community's social structure.[5] In 1980 the Memorial University of Newfoundland Art Gallery published a catalogue, based on the work of Colleen Lynch, for an exhibit of Newfoundland hooked and poked mats.[6] The text provides information on mat construction and function, and on the makers' aesthetics. With the exception of a short article in *Cape Breton's Magazine* explaining methods of hooking a rag mat, and a Nova Scotia Museum publication offering some background information and patterns, no significant research has been conducted on this subject in Nova Scotia.[7]

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[3]Marius Barbeau, "The Origin of the Hooked Rug," *Antiques* 52.2 (1947): 110-13; Ramsay Traquair, "Hooked Rugs in Canada," *Canadian Geographical Journal* 26 (1943): 240-54.

[4]Gerald L. Pocius, *Textile Traditions in Eastern Newfoundland*, Canadian Centre for Folk Cultural Studies 29 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1979) 33-57.

[5]Gerald L. Pocius, "Hooked Rugs in Newfoundland: Representation of Social Structure in Design," *Journal of American Folklore* 92 (1979): 273-84.

[6]Memorial U of Newfoundland Art Gallery, *The Fabric of Their Lives: Hooked and Poked Mats of Newfoundland and Labrador*, (St. John's, NF: Memorial U of Newfoundland Art Gallery, 1980).

[7]"Hooking a Rag Rug," *Cape Breton's Magazine* 3 (1973): 13-15; Mary Saunders, "Rug Making," *A Nova Scotia Work Basket: Some Needlework Patterns Traditionally Used in the Province*, ed. Marlene Davis, Joanne Creelman, Joleen Gordon, Mary Roddis, Mary Saunders and Doris Wentzell (Halifax: Nova Scotia Museum, 1976) 32-43.

This thesis addresses adaptations which occurred in form and use of items hooked in central Nova Scotia. In the early twentieth century mats were hooked primarily for utility and secondarily for beauty and entertainment. When women produced enough mats for practical use in the home they continued to make them for decoration in little-used rooms or as gifts. Thus, there was a perceived shift in the object's function. Technological changes eased the burden of house and farm work and women were able to focus energy on improving the forms of designs. Furthermore, with fewer financial constraints they could invest in more costly materials and methods.

The craft declined in popularity in the 1930s and 1940s when improved social and economic conditions reduced the need for homemade mats. By the 1950s, efforts were made to re-establish mat hooking in rural and urban Nova Scotia for both economic and social reasons. While some co-operatives were established to make hooked items for sale, mat hooking generally was renewed as a hobby. Within the new cultural environment, hooked mats' forms and functions altered significantly. The makers' financial situation accounts for the changes. The availability of cash for leisure activities allowed new makers to buy stamped patterns and use techniques requiring the purchase of special tools and equipment.

Beginning in the 1950s, efforts to redevelop interest in mat hooking in Nova Scotia eventually led to the establishment of the Rug Hookers Guild of Nova Scotia and its regional chapters. The guild influenced its members' aesthetic principles, creating and perpetuating its own traditions. Currently, mat hooking is practiced by elderly women with renewed interest in the craft and by people who have recently learned to hook.

This thesis examines changes in mat hooking from the early twentieth century to modern times. During the research a link was discovered among

contemporary mat hookers between craft production and enhancement of personal status. In each of the three cases outlined, the practitioners feel they must manifest their continued usefulness, and attempt to do so by constructing and presenting hooked mats.

1.1. The Region

Situated on the eastern coast of Canada, Nova Scotia is a long, narrow peninsula linked to New Brunswick by a short isthmus. Running northeast to southwest, it is 560 kilometres (km) long, and 100 to 160 km wide, covering some 34,280 square km. The study area, Colchester County (pop. 43,224) comprises 361,500 hectares and is located in the northcentral region. Over eighty percent of Colchester County is forested and the geography ranges from coastal lowlands to small mountain ranges.[8]

The region was originally inhabited by Micmac Indians who migrated from the shore in summer to the forests during winter. The French Acadians were the first Europeans to settle the area, establishing farms along the fertile Cobequid Bay lowlands. After the British expelled the Acadians in 1775, the land was resettled by Protestant Scottish-Irish Loyalists from Massachusetts and New Hampshire.[9] They built homes at the head of the Cobequid Bay, now Truro and neighbouring Onslow. This is a fertile river valley, bordered by the Cobequid hills to the northwest and the Pictou-Antigonish Uplands to the southeast. Settlement patterns remain much the same today, concentrating around the coast and along "mountain" passes while a vast amount of the province to the east is still unpopulated.

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[8]K. S. Wood and J. Palmer, *Natural Resources of Northeastern Nova Scotia*, Institute of Public Affairs 81 (Halifax: Dalhousie U, 1970) 90.

[9]Hugh A. Millward, *Regional Patterns of Ethnicity in Nova Scotia: A Geographical Study*, Ethnic Heritage Series 6 (Halifax: International Education Centre, St. Mary's U, 1981) 1d.

Figure 1-1: Map of Nova Scotia with surrounding provinces, illustrating Colchester County and key towns noted in text.

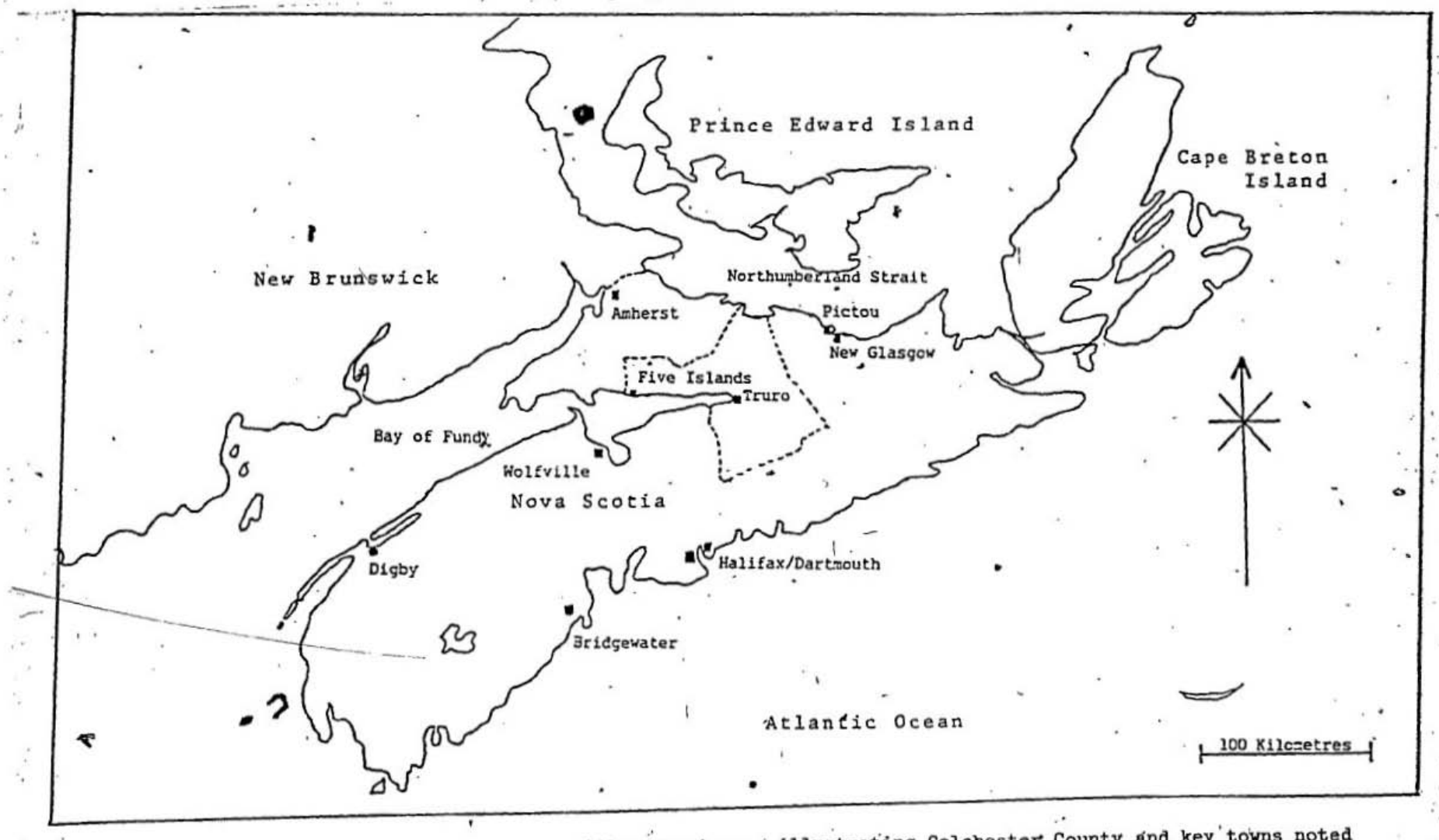


Figure 1.1 Map of Nova Scotia with surrounding provinces, illustrating Colchester County and key towns noted in text. Based on a map found in K. S. Wood and J. Palmer, Natural Resources of Northeastern Nova Scotia (Halifax: Institute of Public Affairs, 1970) 13.

Figure 1-2: Map of Colchester County with principal towns and villages.

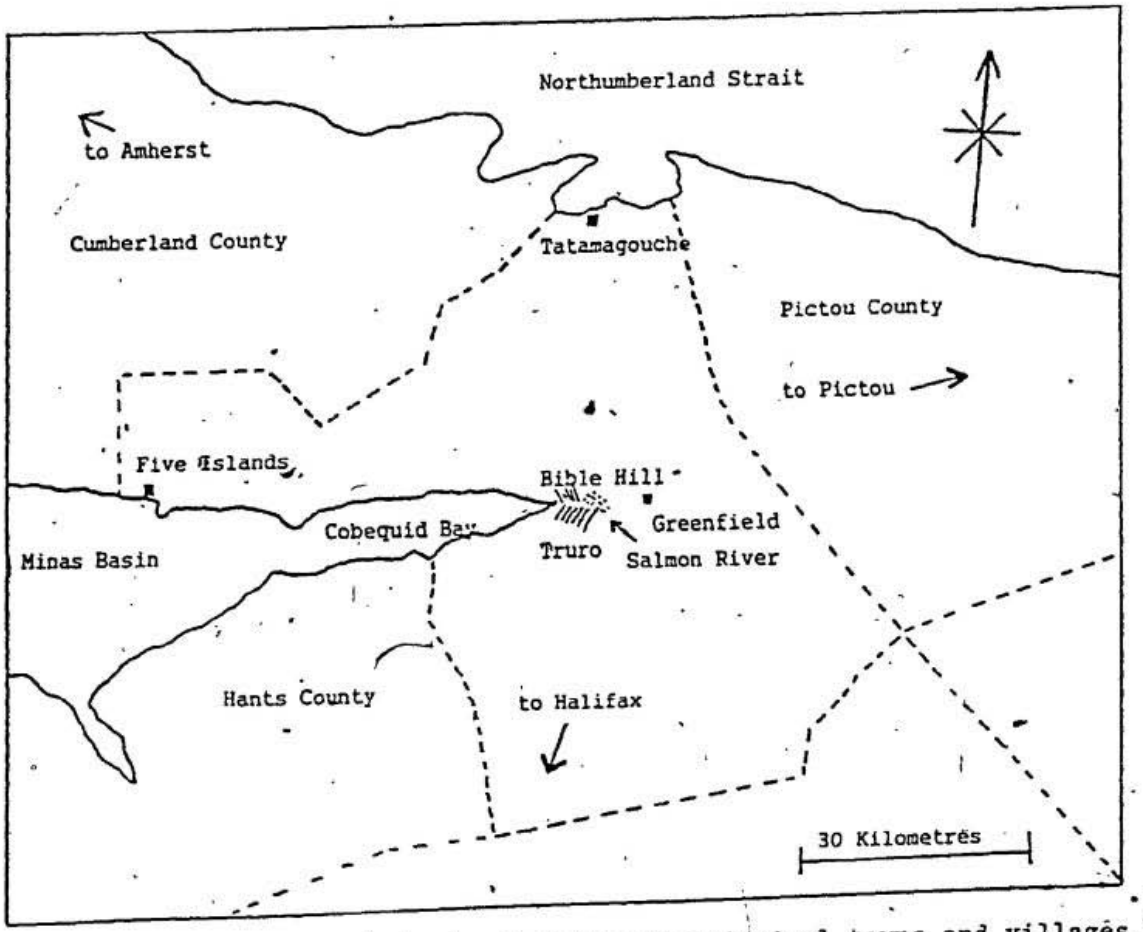


Figure 1.2 Map of Colchester County with principal towns and villages.

Colchester County has remained largely rural, with Truro the major commercial and social centre. The area's diverse natural resources gave rise to agriculture, lumbering, and shipbuilding, occupations carried out in many parts of the province. A number of factors altered Nova Scotia's basic economic structure in the 1860's. Much of the economy, dependent on the wooden shipbuilding industry, was undermined by the introduction of iron steamships. Improved transportation and developments in refrigeration reduced the need for dried salt fish, one of Nova Scotia's major exports. Revenues from lumbering declined as easily accessible forests were depleted and competition increased from Canada's west coast. Surplus labour and capital from these sectors were rechannelled into manufacturing, especially of textiles, iron and steel.[10] Centrally located and on the rail system, Truro was an ideal location for factories. By 1883, the town boasted two tanneries, an iron foundry, a textile mill, a sash and peg company, a railway car factory, and a condensed milk and canning company.[11]

Today, Truro (pop. 12,500) is a conglomerate of the main town and several smaller communities: the village of Bible Hill immediately across the Salmon River to the northeast, Salmon River to the east, and Truro Heights and Hilden to the south. Smaller bedroom communities exist in a ten kilometre radius, forming the suburbs. Truro remains a manufacturing, distribution and service centre, while the county's outlying regions continue to be agriculturally based.[12]

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[10]Department of Regional Economic Expansion, *Nova Scotia Economic Circumstances and Opportunities*, ([Ottawa?]: Department of Regional Economic Expansion, 1973) 2.

[11]*Place-Names and Places of Nova Scotia* (1967; Belleville, ON: Mika, 1974) 687.

[12]For information on Truro's manufacturing industry today see Archie MacNeil, "How Truro Firms Won Export Awards," *Atlantic Advocate* 71.1 (1980): 44-53.

1.2. Research Methodology

I initially intended to study both mat making and quilting in central Nova Scotia, chronicling the early twentieth century traditions and the subsequent mid-century renewal. These two crafts were chosen for several reasons. First, the cycle of activity-decline-renewal occurred within the past sixty to seventy years. I wanted information from people who practiced the crafts in the 1920s and 1930s when they were necessities. Second, some of these women, now in their seventies or eighties, renewed their interest and subsequent changes in their approach can be documented. Third, the crafts were introduced to people with no prior knowledge of them; thus, modern approaches to style, technique, and function can be examined and compared with the other two groups.

Colchester County was chosen as the study area because I was raised in the region and am familiar with it. Many people in Truro know me or my family, so contacts were easy to establish. In addition, I was often able to establish a common connection of kinship or friendship. Among strangers interviewed I often heard exclamations of "You're Joan's daughter" or "Your aunt, Audrey, is my closest friend." Once I was placed within a circle of familiar acquaintances, these women became more receptive to me than to those with whom no such connection was established. Although the majority of people I met were genuinely willing to assist me, those who knew my relatives were more at ease during interviews. More importantly, though, I chose this area because the Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers, a group associated with the renewed interest in mat hooking, holds its weekly winter meetings in Truro.

I intended to study changes in both mat hooking and quilting, but the sheer volume of material collected stipulated that focus be given to one craft. I chose mat hooking because the nature of its re-introduction in Nova Scotia permits

fuller documentation of historical changes and current developments. As the two have many similarities I make use of the research to augment my conclusions about mat hooking.

Most fieldwork was conducted from June to August of 1984 and January to May of 1985. Since part of my research included participation in the local mat hooking group which meets during the winter, complete information could not be gathered in the summer months

For informants' convenience all interviews were conducted at their homes. This also provided an opportunity to view their crafts in context. I used a non-directive approach to interviewing, taking no list of questions with me. The women were permitted to discuss at length aspects of the crafts which most interested them, providing an account of individual preferences. If matters arose which I felt needed expansion I directed the discussion. During return visits I often prepared a mental list of questions on aspects which I felt needed clarification or expansion. This method worked well, putting both interviewer and informant at ease.

To avoid the informants reporting what they thought I wanted to hear, I often made return visits to repeat important questions. I asked these questions after the formal interview, when the tape recorder was turned off and we were just chatting. I hoped this would make the women more at ease and accepting of me as a friend. The tape recorder sometimes inhibited personal comments and several woman requested that I turn it off while sensitive information was disclosed.

To learn former craft traditions, I contacted women who made mats and quilts in the early twentieth century. To gather a large data base and distinguish common, shared traditions from individual preferences, I interviewed nineteen women.

Relatives and acquaintances who knew former quilters and mat hookers helped me establish initial contacts. Among the elderly, quilting is more widely practiced than mat hooking because it is easier on arthritic backs. I therefore met more elderly quilters than mat hookers. On the suggestion of Mrs. Gertrude Beattie, I attended weekly meetings of the Truro Red Cross quilting group. Many members were over sixty-five at the time and had quilted together for years. During the sessions I participated in and observed all aspects of the quilting process. I formally interviewed five of the twelve regular members and several other older women who still quilt.

In February, 1985, I joined a beginners' quilting class to meet people with no prior quilting experience. I wanted to examine retention or alteration of techniques and patterns and investigate the maker's reasons for quilting. Besides acting as participant-observer, I recorded on tape the instructor's comments. I also distributed to the class a questionnaire dealing in general with students' craft background and motivations for taking the course.

During the class I heard that women in the small community of Five Islands are very active quilters. To study craft traditions of a small, closely-knit group, I spent a week in Five Islands (pop. 231) and interviewed thirteen local quilters, asking questions concerning early twentieth century and present quilting traditions. To supplement previous research, I also investigated the past and present state of mat hooking.

In Truro I joined the Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers, the local chapter of the provincial mat hooking guild. To gain greater understanding of a craft or event one must first experience it. For this reason, I designed and hooked a mat during my stay. In addition to receiving first-hand knowledge of unarticulated aspects of the craft, I was able to attend the weekly gatherings as a participant-

observer. I followed the daily routine: hooking, listening and talking with women about their work. My presence did not disrupt the normal flow of events as many members did not know I was a researcher. I assumed my reason for joining the group was common knowledge but when I called women to arrange interviews, many were surprised to discover I was a researcher.

To learn basic methods of mat construction and discover the current trend of design and style, I registered for a Continuing Education course in Beginners Mat Hooking offered by one of the guild's founding members. Unfortunately, the requisite number of students (eight) did not register and the course was cancelled. Therefore, I relied on guild members' advice and observed aesthetic and technic[13] preferences.

Eight members of the Colchester group were formally interviewed. To ensure adequate representation, I chose guild members whose participation ranged from extreme involvement to loose association. Additional information was gleaned during the mat hooking sessions through observations and casual conversations.

The Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers' work does not represent all mat traditions in the region. Some elderly people have continued or renewed their interest in mat hooking, and some who never hooked in their youth have recently begun on their own. I interviewed several people who work independently. Women and men who hook mats on their own are often difficult to find as their work may be unknown outside immediate family or friendship groups. The Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers suggested one independent mat hooker they know through his marginal contact with their group. On my thesis supervisor's

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[13]Simon Bronner, in his chain carvers' study, uses the term 'folk-technics' meaning "skills and procedures learned traditionally for the creation of objects or completion of tasks." Simon J. Bronner, *Chain Carvers: Old Men Crafting Meaning* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky 1985) 75.

advice, I contacted a woman in Colchester County who has a great knowledge of many crafts. She knew of only one woman who still hooked mats. While researching quilting traditions in Five Islands I was directed to a local woman who recently learned hooking from her aged mother.

Of the three independent mat hookers I interviewed, I chose to study only two for this thesis. They live in the Truro area, facilitating return visits. I had only one opportunity to speak with the third, who lived approximately seventy kilometres away. Study of individual traditions illustrates how, without the regulating influence of a peer group, a craft is moulded to suit the individual maker's needs.

Interviews were recorded on a Sony TCM 5000 cassette tape recorder using an external Sony F250S microphone, resulting in approximately 30 hours of tape. In addition, I took over 280 colour slides and 118 black and white prints using two Minolta SRT-101, 35mm, single lens reflex cameras, with 50mm and 25mm lenses. Tapes are in Memorial University of Newfoundland's Folklore and Language Archive under collection number 86-201.

Quotes from interviews include in a footnote the informant's name, date and location of the interview, and tape number. Subsequent references are indicated by the tape number placed in parentheses after the quotation. One interview, recorded on a Sony mini-cassette recorder, was fully transcribed and then erased. Quotations from this source are documented as "private transcription." Where I quote from written notes I include the term "fieldnotes" and the date of the exchange.

Within the quotations, interpolations by other participants are denoted by their initials enclosed in parentheses. I include my own comments and questions, enclosed in parentheses without initials, where I feel necessary. For the reader's

comfort and for clarity I omit false starts and stutters not integral to the statement's meaning. Two dashes (--) indicate the speaker is interrupted or breaks off. Words which I could not make out are signified by [unclear word]. Gestures and information separate from the speaker's words which are needed for emphasis or clarity are enclosed in square brackets, e.g., [laughter]. Omission of redundant or extraneous information is indicated by an ellipsis.

This thesis is divided into six parts. Chapter 1 has introduced the subject matter, described the geographic area, and outlined the research methodology. Five other chapters survey traditions of mat hooking in central Nova Scotia from the early twentieth century to present.

Early twentieth century mat making traditions are outlined in Chapter 2. Regional traditions existed (and still exist) among craftmakers based on the regulating effects of interaction with others engaged in the same activity. A brief overview of folkloristic and art-historical work conducted in this area sets the aesthetic atmosphere of the mid-century revival.

The third chapter deals with renewal of mat making. A brief introduction to the depression-era interest in the craft in New England and its effects on craft enthusiasts in central Canada is followed by a detailed account of its organized reintroduction in Nova Scotia. The principal members of the movement and their contributions are outlined, with emphasis on those who most affected the state of mat hooking in Colchester County.

The fourth chapter concentrates on the Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers, providing details of styles and patterns they most prefer. The socializing at the group's regular gatherings is a major element in the revivalists' tradition. A functional analysis of the weekly sessions illustrates how the group influences and

regulates the direction of members' work. As mat hooking is no longer a household necessity there must be other reasons for its existence. Examination of the women and their work provides information on the functions of mat hooking.

Chapters 5 and 6 concentrate on two mat makers, one of whom is marginally associated with the guild. Their work illustrates the diversity of individual approaches to crafts. A summary, and suggestions for further study, are given in my conclusion.

Chapter 2

Early Twentieth Century Traditions

2.1. Introduction

At the turn of the twentieth century Atlantic Canada's population was mainly rural. In Colchester County, Nova Scotia, Truro was--and remains--the only major trade and commercial centre. Due to small communities' isolation caused by inadequate transportation systems and local subsistence occupations, many people relied on their own resources and skills to provide life's essentials and amenities. Although both men and women procured food and income, it was women's obligation to properly feed and clothe the family and ensure a comfortable home.[1]

Before central heating became available, houses were warmed by wood, oil or coal stoves, and by fireplaces. These were inadequate sources of heat by comparison to modern standards. In addition, houses were not airtight and draughts easily swept through cracks and crevices. As a result, rooms were often chilly and floor boards were cold underfoot. Women were responsible for

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[1]Fiction may often be used as an accurate mirror of culture; Earnest Buckler's novel *The Mountain and the Valley* (Toronto: McClelland, 1961) provides useful insights into the daily work routine and division of labour by sex on a family farm in the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia in the first half of this century. See also the Nova Scotian novel by Charles Bruce, *The Channel Shore* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1954).

providing floor covering to keep the home comfortable. Floor coverings were usually small, moveable, hooked mats although some women made braided rugs.[2] Young girls learned to hook mats at an early age from their mothers or close female relatives; when grown with families of their own, they in turn instructed their daughters in this necessary art.

Today, those who hook mats or research the subject, do so in their leisure time. For them, it is a source of enjoyment rather than domestic, economic necessity. Contemporary literature on mat hooking, and indeed much of what is written on crafts or folkways, emphasizes the pleasure individuals draw from the execution and display of handmade items. Authors may create a chimerical picture of the past by assuming their own sentiments to be those of previous mat hookers. For example, in his study of mat hooking, William Kent ascribes his feelings to former practitioners:

> When I see an unusually beautiful rug, the product of the creative inspiration of a dweller in an out-of-the-way village or lonely town, of which there are too many, I reflect on the joy of meeting that man, woman or child and learning what was the suggestion, the urge that produced it, and the strength and the beauty of that thought, so that I might in time learn to appreciate more fully such thoughts and reverence them. They are what we wish to be believe are heaven sent.[3]

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[2]For information on braided rugs see: Gerald L. Pocius, *Textile Traditions in Eastern Newfoundland*, Canadian Centre for Folk Cultural Studies 29 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1979) 50; Helene Von Rosenstiel, *American Rugs and Carpets: From the Seventeenth Century to Modern Times* (New York: Morrow, 1978) 32-33.

[3]William Withrop Kent, *Hooked Rug Design* (Springfield, MA: Pond, 1949) 10-11.

Kenneth Ames refers to this as "the poor but happy artisan" approach.[4] These researchers fail to acknowledge that many traditional craftmakers did not enjoy their work. In his work *The Hand Made Object and Its Maker*, Michael Owen Jones discussed the motivations and satisfaction of several Kentucky chair makers. Some men find the job intrinsically gratifying, while others, engaged in the craft for financial reasons, find it frustrating and futile.[5] Researchers, therefore, cannot presume to know craftpeople's sentiments by merely viewing their products. Interviews are necessary to assess artisans' reasons for engaging in crafts.

Women who recall past activities for folklorists or historians may, through the filter of time, remember or report only pleasant aspects. In later years, when their most productive time is over, elderly people may be overcome by a sense of loss, and consequently construct an idyllic past.[6]

Maude "Granny" Yorke, born shortly after the turn of the century, raised fourteen children in Five Islands, Colchester County. She now lives alone in her two-storey family home on a secluded country road. When I visited her in April, 1985 she seemed pleased to be asked questions about quilting and mat hooking. Responses were interspersed with narratives about her early life, a time she feels was easier and less worrisome:

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[4]Kenneth Ames, *Beyond Necessity: Art in the Folk Tradition* (New York: Norton, 1977) 27-31.

[5]Michael Owen Jones, *The Hand Made Object and Its Maker* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1975) 168-201.

[6]While interviewing Indiana chain carvers, Simon Bronner noted that men frustrated by their present life envisioned the past in pleasant, comforting terms. See especially Chapter One, "Part of You is in Carving," which outlines four carvers' personal histories and discusses their views of the past. Simon J. Bronner, *Chain Carvers: Old Men Crafting Meaning* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1985) 17-72.

> Well, we had fourteen in our family and we had cows and hens. We grew a garden, and we had, you know, lots to do. We were always busy. Ya, picking berries. Then there were no cultivated berries; it was all wild berries. We lived here fifty-two years and we had a farm, cows and horses. . . . But I don't know, they don't, it's just quick today, in a hurry. Most of the women work I guess so they just have to rush things. . . . I don't think people were half as worried as they are today. Now I say, the men did all their own work and my husband didn't have any, like they have today, like a hay press and those things. We kept four cows here and two horses and ten or fifteen head of young cattle. It's one hundred acres this place but seventy's woodlands. And so we always had time for everything. They worked all day and all evening but still we seemed to have more time than they have today. . . . I don't care who said they do! . . . We certainly had a good life; we worked hard but we certainly had a good life. No regrets.[7]

Mrs. Yorke's view of the past is affected by present circumstances. She once lived a busy life centered around her large family. At this point Mrs. Yorke was in frail health and was emotionally frustrated by situations she could not control. Her view of the past was coloured by her isolation and failing health. Although from her narratives it appears that her early days were filled with hard work and privations, Mrs. Yorke recalled these times with loving attention to productive, cooperative, family aspects. She envisioned the past as a time of happiness, when her life was fullest. The same emotions flavoured Mrs. Yorke's portrayal of mat hooking and other household crafts.

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[7] Interview, Maude Yorke, April 1985, Five Islands, Colchester County, Nova Scotia, MUNFLA C8649. All tape recordings made during research for this thesis, except where noted, have been deposited in the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) under the accession number 86-201. Each tape is referred to by its MUNFLA shelf list number.

Some women did treat mat hooking as mere duty, much as they regarded other household chores. Mrs. Emily Spicer emphasized the immense amount of work her mother, Mrs. Faulkenham, did on her family farm around 1910:

> (Did she help out with the farm work?) Well, some, not too much, but there were so many men working on the farm and so much cooking and with ten cows and butter to make, and with washing to do without a washing machine, and the children and keeping a big house clean. In the summer she would help pick some apples or cranberries, or maybe pick up some potatoes if they needed extra help. Not too much of that 'cause with four or five, maybe six hired men working there she had all she could do to cook for them. Keep the beds clean. . . . And she knit, and she sewed, what she had to, she didn't like sewing. And she spun yarn and she carded rolls to make the yarn, which I helped her do many times.[8]

Mrs. Faulkenham did not like to sew, regarding it as a chore she was obliged to do. Mrs. Spicer disliked mat hooking although she helped her mother and future mother-in-law. "Well I did a little bit, but never a whole mat, but I've worked on theirs" (C8652). Regardless of whether women viewed mat hooking as a chore or pleasure, it provided a necessary commodity not otherwise obtainable.

2.2. Materials

[8]Interview, Howard and Emily Spicer, 5 April 1985, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, MUNFLA C8652.

2.2.1. Burlap

A hooked mat is made with loops of fabric pulled through a mesh foundation to form a flat, even surface. Historians argue over when and where this craft began. Some argue a North American origin because burlap--the material most often used for mat foundations--was not manufactured until the late 1820s.[9] This is not a valid argument as mats were also made on loosely woven linen.[10] Although linen is time-consuming to make, early householders probably pieced together scraps of worn-out clothes or blankets.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, burlap's popularity as container material ensured ample supplies of feed bags at every farm home. Once emptied and washed, they made excellent foundations. Pride was taken in using materials obtained from discarded or natural objects. For instance, empty bags served for backings, worn clothes for loops, and onion skins or collected plants for dyes.[11] This belief is reflected in the household economics adage repeated by Mrs. Spicer: "Make over, use up, wear out."[12] While desire to reuse materials also occurs in

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[9]For discussions of mat hooking's North American origin see: Joel Kopp and Kate Kopp, *American Hooked and Sewn Rugs: Folk Art Underfoot* (New York: Dutton, 1975) 37-48; Marius Barbeau, "The Origin of the Hooked Rug," *Antiques* 52.2 (1947): 110-113; Virginia D. Parslow, "Hooked Rugs," *The Concise Encyclopedia of American Antiques*, ed. H. Comstock (New York: Hawthorn, 1969) 350-52; Stella Hay Rex, *Choice Hooked Rugs* (New York: Prentice, 1953) 9. Arguments for a European origin are given in: Kent 28-43; Ramsay Traquair "Hooked Rugs in Canada," *Canadian Geographical Journal* 26 (1943): 240-54; Allen Eaton, *Handicrafts of New England* (New York: Harper, 1949) 114; Leonard Burbank, "More About Hooked Rugs," *Antiques* 2 (1922): 213-18; W. A. Turner, *Canadian Mosaic: Nova Scotian Volume* (Halifax: Women's Institute of Nova Scotia, 1957) 27; John Ramsay, "A Note on the Geography of Hooked Rugs," *Antiques* 18 (1930): 510-12.

[10]Max Allen and Simon Waegemalkers, *Canadian Hooked Rugs, 1860-1960* (Toronto: Canadian Museum of Carpets and Textiles, [1977]) n. pag.; Burbank 115.

[11]Use of salvaged materials is also noted in Pocius' study of traditional crafts in Newfoundland; Pocius 19-20.

[12]Fieldnotes, 5 April 1985.

times when there is no economic necessity to do so, it was a code of existence for those who lived before available and affordable mass-produced consumer products.

Some mats were made with burlap purchased from stores, catalogues, or John E. Garrett's Limited[13] which sold both plain burlap and stamped patterns. Mrs. Clarke, originally from Cumberland County, bought burlap from the country store for a particularly large mat. Although she did not purchase supplies for small, utilitarian mats, this was a special project worthy of some expense.[14]

Tradition prescribed that mats be rectangular or oval, although some mats were circular or square. Once the size and shape were selected, the burlap's edges were turned under and sewn or bound with cloth to prevent the weave from unraveling. Black binding was usually available at general stores or from Garrett's. Designs were traced or drawn freehand onto burlap using soft lead pencils, pieces of charcoal, or indelible ink.

Indelible ink remains the most preferred method since it will not smudge or stain the finished mat during washing. Mrs. Hazel Clarke remembers using indelible pencil:

> We used to take a pencil that you dip in water. [pause] What kind of pencil was it? Indelible pencil I guess it was called. And it leaves--and you placed your pattern on where ever you thought that you needed it and then traced it.[15]

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[13]Garrett's company made and sold stamped mat bottoms with the brand name *Bluenose Rugs*. This outfit will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

[14]The difference between practical and fancy mats will be discussed further in the chapter.

[15]Interview, Hazel Clarke, Truro, 3 April 1985, MUNFLA C8635.

Some women devised their own methods of marking. Mrs. Doyle, originally from Economy, Colchester County, recalls her mother drawing with the sharpened end of a turkey quill dipped in red ink.[16]

2.2.2. The Frame

After the design was chosen and drawn, the bound mat was stretched taut on a rectangular wooden frame, made of four lengths of wood, about one to two inches thick and two to four inches wide. There were two methods of securing burlap to frames. Most commonly, cloth strips were attached to the boards with nails or tacks. The burlap's edges were then sewn to the secured cloth with sturdy string or twine. Alternatively, some frames had holes drilled at regular intervals along the boards. String or twine was then sewn through the burlap and threaded tightly through the holes to hold the mat flat. The frame's four corners were joined by heavy iron clamps manufactured by a local blacksmith, purchased at the general store, or ordered through the Eaton's catalogue.[17]

It was difficult to reach central portions of large mats so once the outer edges were hooked, one or two parallel sides were untied and rolled inward. Rolling a mat significantly reduced the frame's overall size so the mat hooker could reach the centre. Mr. Spicer remembers helping his mother and sister roll mat frames:

> When you were done you could take them and roll them up you see. And you roll them up, as you hooked

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[16]Interview with Roberta Doyle, 13 April 1985, Truro, Nova Scotia, MUNFLA C8643.

[17]Canada's first major department store was established in 1869 by Timothy Eaton (1834-1907). In 1884 he began a mail order business which sent catalogues to homes throughout the country. For more information on Eaton and his company see: Mary Etta MacPherson, *Shopkeepers to a Nation: The Eatons* (Toronto: McClelland, 1963) and William Stephenson, *The Store that Timothy Built* (Toronto: McClelland, 1969).

> 'cause you could just reach so far and then you roll them up again. And then you hook further and roll them up again (C8652).

The language of this description echoes the rhythm and repetition of the craft.

In most cases, frames were placed over the backs of straight chairs, providing sturdy support at a comfortable height. More elaborate frames had four wooden posts, each with a base making them free standing. Near the top of the uprights an opening was carved out through which the frame ends were fitted [Figure 2.1]. Both types were much like small quilting frames,[18] although when not in use mat frames could be easily lifted and conveniently stored.

Wood for frames was sanded to prevent mat hookers from getting splinters or snagging their clothes. Frames were never painted or otherwise embellished, since they were all but obscured by the developing mat.

2.2.3. The Hook

Mat hooks were usually handmade, although factory-made wooden-handled tools were available at general stores, from Eaton's, and from order sheets published by Garrett's.[19] Hooks could be fashioned from any narrow length of metal attached to a comfortable handle. Howard and Emily Spicer recalled a hook her father made from an umbrella rib:

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[18]Pocius refers to handmade quilting frames in his study on Newfoundland textile traditions; Pocius 30. Eaton's sold wooden quilting frames with clamps which could be used as mat frames. In 1913, the frame and four clamps cost 98 cents while separate clamps were four cents each; Eaton's catalogue (No. 108, Fall and Winter, 1913-14) 305; 320.

[19]In 1913 Eaton's sold steel shanks without handles for five and ten cents, depending on the style. These were then attached to homemade handles. Eaton's 152. Garrett's sold complete hooks for twenty cents each in 1926. John E. Garrett, *Save Your Rags and Make Your Own Rugs* (New Glasgow, NS: Garrett, 1926) n. pag.

Figure 2-1: Wooden mat hooking frame (c. 1930) still in use in Truro.



Figure 2.1

> E.S.: Dad I think made them. It seems to me out of umbrella ribs.
> H.S.: You could use something as long as it's stiff enough so you could poke it through the mats and turn an end on it. And they were attached to wooden handles (C8652).

Mr. Spicer did not know how hooks and handles were joined because his mother always bought them at the general store. Although Mrs. Spicer could not recall for sure, she suggested rivets were used to join hooks to handles.

Mat hooks are similar to crochet hooks but are attached to a thicker handle because a sturdier grip is needed.[20] Some handles were formed from carved wood with a nail driven into one end. The nail head was then shaped into a hook. Some hookers bent the tines of a fork, leaving one crooked at the tip.[21] Metal ends of bone-handled cutlery were sometimes cut and filed to form attractive hooks. Figure 2.2 shows such a hook found in Pictou, Pictou County, embellished with the owner's initials and surname. Figure 2.3 illustrates a variety of handmade, wooden-handled hooks found in Colchester County.

Women I interviewed said their fathers or husbands made the mat frames and hooks.[22] Although mat hooking was viewed as a woman's chore or pastime, its hardware construction was always a man's job. Frames and hooks were fashioned in barns, tool sheds or other areas considered male domain. Although a woman could easily saw boards to the proper length or file nails for hooks, she

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[20]For general information on crocheting see: Gertrude Taylor, *America's Crochet Book* (New York: Scribner's, 1972).

[21]This is documented in Atlantic Canada's farm and country journal; Mary Dauphinee, "Rags to Riches," *Rural Delivery* 9.9 (1985): 29-30.

[22]Interview with Audrey Organ, 16 April 1985, Bible Hill, Nova Scotia, MUNFLA C8643; Howard and Emily Spicer, MUNFLA C8652.

Figure 2-2: Mat hook from Pictou County made from bone-handled knife.

Figure 2-3: A variety of handmade and factory-produced hooks found in Colchester County.

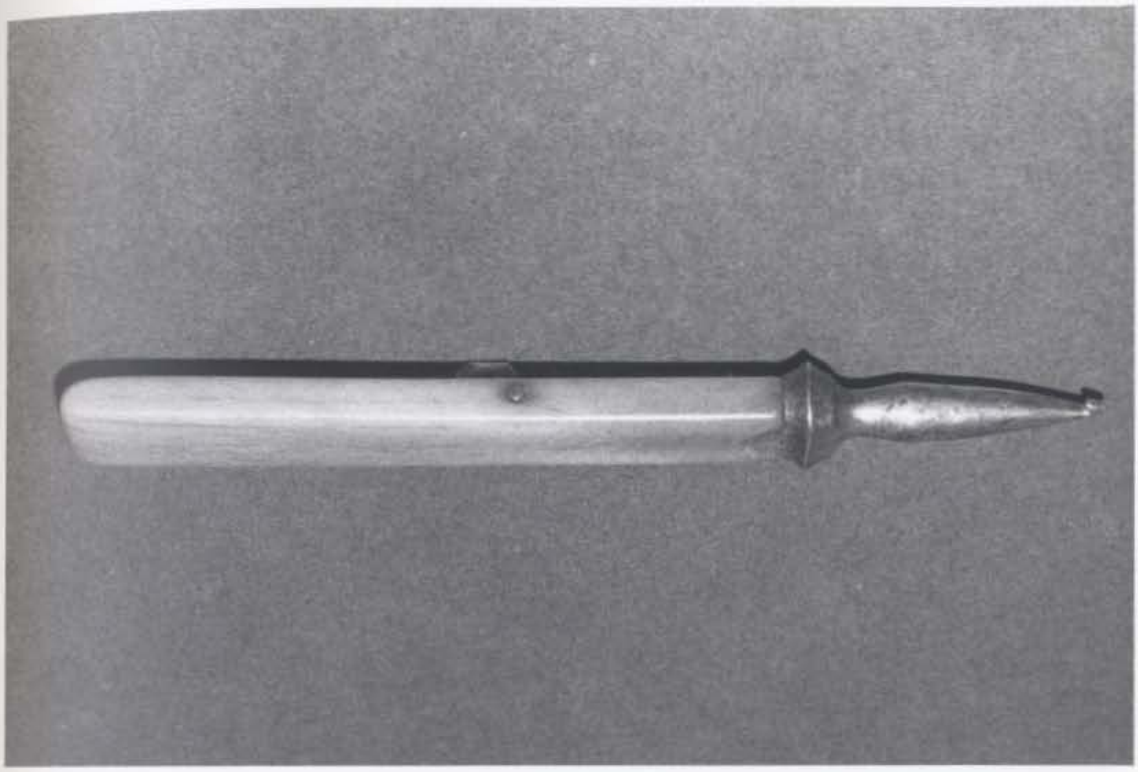


Figure 2.2



Figure 2.3

would have broken this territorial work code.[23]

2.2.4. Fabrics

Scraps and remnants of material and any clothes too small or too worn for the family were saved for hooked mats. Wool was considered the best fabric because it is sturdy, wears well under traffic, and accepts dyes readily. Cotton was used when wool was in short supply. In households with ample supplies of wool remnants, cotton was relegated to utilitarian "scraps mats." These were used in heavy traffic areas such as by the back door, where something was needed to catch the dirt. Cotton mats lasted only one season and were then either discarded or used outdoors or in outbuildings.

On farms with sheep, women often spun yarn specifically for hooked mats. Mrs. Spicer remembers a mat her mother hooked for their upstairs hallway:

> Sometimes she used rags and sometimes she used yarn she'd spun. And we had one long runner in the hall upstairs that was made with all yarn that she had, she had carded the wool, spun the yarn. (Did she dye the yarn, too?) Oh yes (C8652).

Due to the time and effort required to produce homespun yarn, these were considered special mats and were kept in little used areas of the home.

Burlap from unraveled feed bags formed a thick soft pile when pulled through the mat's foundation and clipped. Since yarn and burlap fibers are loose

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[23]For description of male/female domains in a Newfoundland outport see Gerald L. Pocius, "Calvert: A Study of Artifacts and Spatial Usages in a Newfoundland Community," diss., U of Pennsylvania, 1979, 360. Thomas Hubka describes gender ascription of territory in *Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn: The Connected Farm Buildings of New England* (Hanover, NH: UP of New England, 1984) 122, as does Cato Wadel in his Newfoundland study *Now, Whose Fault is That? The Struggle for Self-Esteem in the Face of Chronic Unemployment*, Institute of Social and Economic Research 11 (St. John's, NF: Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1973) 51-58.

the loops appear soft when hooked. As this effect is aesthetically pleasing, cut burlap was also reserved for decorative mats.

After the design was chosen, drawn onto burlap, and the mat secured in the frame, the mat hooker began cutting or tearing fabric into strips. Even men and young boys helped with this task. Howard Spicer recalls how he used to tear rags for his mother and sisters:

> I tore up a lot of old rags for making rugs for them. Tear them up about that wide [gestures approximately one inch]. (Did you use scissors?) Oh well, you had to when you couldn't tear them. But you start them with scissors and then you tear them (C8652).

Rags were torn rather than cut because fabric rips naturally along the line of weave. Material cut by scissors may cross cut the weave and, consequently, strips may unravel or break when pulled through the burlap. Strips were one-half to three inches wide; the widest were folded several times to produce a thick strand which formed a sturdy pile when hooked. By using only one width a careful mat hooker could produce an even, smooth mat.

Details in mats made with traditional, homemade designs are not as delicate as those made today. Currently, mat hookers use mechanical rag cutters which produce fine strips of material (see Chapter 4). It was too time consuming and painful to hand-cut rags into narrow pieces needed for small delicate loops. To enhance their mats, past hookers depended on overall designs and colour combinations instead of finely worked detail.

2.2.5. Dyes

Before commercial dyes, mat hookers either relied on garments' original colours, or used plant extracts to dye fabric. Fabric was immersed in dyes soaked from plants and a mordant, commonly salt or vinegar, was added to permanently set the colour.[24] By the 1920s women were using commercial dyes which were more convenient and produced brighter, truer colours. Inexpensive commercial brands such as "Diamond Dyes" and "Sunset Dyes,"[25] were easily obtained from local shops, through mail order catalogues and from traveling peddlers.[26] Due to their availability, convenience, and high quality, commercial dyes quickly replaced vegetable dyeing techniques. By the 1930s, only onion skins, which required little effort to collect and prepare, were still commonly used. Onion skins produce a yellow dye and can mute and blend other colours. Bright red, for instance, softens to a temperate rose when mixed with onion skins, and two or more clashing colours produce harmonizing hues. Onion skins remained popular as a dyeing agent long after more cumbersome natural methods were discarded.

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[24]Margaret Bennett Knight briefly described some natural dyes used by Scottish Newfoundlanders in the early twentieth century in "Some Aspects of the Scottish Gaelic Traditions of the Codroy Valley, Newfoundland," M.A. thesis, Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1975, 238-240. For additional information on natural dyeing techniques see Judy McGrath, *Dyes from Lichens and Plants* (Toronto: VanNostrand, 1977).

[25]Pocius noted that these two commercial dyes were also commonly used in Newfoundland; Pocius 51.

[26]Peddling was a common practice in rural Maritime areas at the turn of the century. Diane Tye records its inception in Cumberland County, Nova Scotia in her article "The Role of Watson Weaver, Itinerant Peddler, In His Community of Northern Nova Scotia," *Culture & Tradition* 6 (1982): 40-51. One woman I interviewed knew Mr. Weaver who regularly visited her home near Parrsboro, Cumberland County. Interview with Freeda Linkletter, 28 March 1985, Truro, Nova Scotia, MUNFLA C8651.

2.3. The Hooking Context

Women customarily hooked rugs in the kitchen, placing the frame over chairs. The frame remained here for the day and women hooked between housework. They worked in the kitchen because it was often the warmest room in the house, with the wood stove burning all day. Kitchens were also the social centre for casual visits; women could hook while talking with a visiting neighbour or relative. Mrs. Doyle spoke of her mother: "Oh, she did most all her hooking in her kitchen. That's where the old people always worked" (C8643). If space were available, frames were sometimes situated elsewhere, keeping the kitchen less congested. Mrs. Spicer's mother, Mrs. Faulkenham, used a spare room when the weather was warm:

> There was a large room that was supposed to be a parlour but it wasn't used as a parlour. We called it the north bedroom. And that was the room she used. And then sometimes in the middle of the winter she'd set up in the dining-room or bring it out in the kitchen maybe and then put it away at meal time (C8652).

Mrs. Faulkenham hooked or quilted in the kitchen only when other parts of her home were too cold.

Sometimes several woman hooked a mat, enjoying each other's company and the comradery of job-sharing. Emily Spicer remembers hooking mats with her mother, grandmother, and mother-in-law. I asked if there had been hooking parties where several women gathered together to work on one mat. She replied: "It was more or less they'd drop in and then they'd all hook and talk" (C8652). Cooperative mat hooking was less structured than quilting parties of the

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[27] As Mrs. Spicer indicated, mat hooking parties were unplanned, casual affairs. There is a bond between people who share jobs or tasks; participation in common work suggests cooperation and shared values. Although she did not hook mats for herself, Mrs. Spicer helped others for pastime and as a statement of her ability to do housework, an essential virtue for daughters and wives.

Many women, however, stated that mat hooking was a solitary activity. Mrs. Doyle claims her mother "would never allow anyone to hook on her mats" (C8643). Logistically, mat hooking was not conducive to group participation for frames could only accommodate one or two other hookers.[28] More importantly, it was often considered a pleasure for one's spare moments, rather than a job to be completed in a concentrated effort. For some mat hookers drawing a pattern or hooking a design expressed individual creativity and control over form. The product was more than a mat; it was an affirmation of their capabilities as homemakers and craftspeople.

Women usually hooked mats in winter for during summer they were busy with farm work. Mrs. Spicer recounted a few summer chores she and her family did in the 1920s:

> (Did your mother hook all year round?) No, mostly in the winter. She had too much to do in the summer. It was a big farm. They had a big kitchen garden. (So she worked on that, too?) Not too much, a little bit

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[27] For a history of Canadian quilting see Mary Conroy, *300 Years of Canada's Quilts* (Toronto: Griffin, 1976) and especially pages 33-34 for information on quilting parties. For a literary description of such a gathering in Nova Scotia see Donna E. Smyth, *Quilt* (Toronto: Women's, 1982).

[28] In Newfoundland, Pocius notes the opposite was true. He said that most textile crafts were "undertaken not as an individual task, but as a community activity," since mat hooking and quilting were generally conducted by several women; Pocius 54.

> maybe, but not very much because as I said she didn't have time. And she tended the hens; looked after the chickens and when apple season came on she always picked some of the apples and she was getting them, getting them ready--like ah, maybe in the evenings we'd all sit around and peel apples, core them and put them on strings to make dried apples. And of course when the beans were dry, those that were left over, oh, Dad used to beat those out with a, oh, I don't know what he had, a stick of some sort. Put them in a big bag and pound them. Check them over, make sure they were good. So we'd have plenty. Cranberries all had to be picked over. (So she was kept quite busy?) Very busy (C8652).

This brief account illustrates some summer and fall farm activities which occupied women's time.[29] Although hooking took place during winter, women collected fabrics and watched for potential designs during the entire year.

2.4. Design and Aesthetics

In the early twentieth century mat hooking was changing from a subsistence craft to a hobby. All traditions impose limits on individuality but the degree to which craftspeople deviate depends on a variety of factors. Women approached the craft with different goals and expectations, dependent upon their household's isolation and economic solvency. Those who hooked mats from necessity were under real physical demands to quickly produce suitable floor covering. Having little time and resources to prepare fabrics, colours, and patterns they relied on simple traditional designs and techniques. Hobbyists had more time and resources to explore individual themes and patterns.

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[29] For written accounts of Atlantic Canadian rural women's seasonal tasks see: Margaret MacPhail, *The Girl from Loch Bras D'or* (Windsor, NS: Lancelot, 1973); Hilda Chaulk Murray, *More Than Fifty Percent: Woman's Life in a Newfoundland Outport, 1900-1950*, Canada's Atlantic Folklore and Folklife Series 3 (St. John's, NF: Breakwater, 1979).

Another factor in the creation of previously untested patterns is the individual mat hooker's nature. H. G. Barnett suggests that people's social and psychological character strongly determine their propensity to innovate:

> It is a common-place that some people are more inventive than others. Individuals differ in the frequency with which they depart from the norms of behaviour, in the character of their preferences for doing so, and in the uniqueness of their divergent ideas. . . . In short, some people, for whatever reason, are temperamentally more conservative than others. Some are more likely than others to think of something that will generally be regarded as new.[30]

Potential to innovate is dependent upon mat hookers' need or desire to do so. At the same time, group conventions and expectations influence style exploration.

In the early twentieth century mat hooking was largely limited to household craft. Although women enjoyed the creative aspects of mat hooking and other household crafts, they considered these commodities as useful objects rather than art. Michael Owen Jones broaches this topic in his article "The Concept of Aesthetic in the Traditional Arts:"

> Seldom, in fact, do individuals in any group conceive of everyday objects and utilitarian products as works of art, or perceive them in any way except as they serve the practical ends for which they were created. Since folklore forms generally, and the traditional and conventional modes of artistic expression in particular, serve practical ends of communication and problem solving in everyday situations, it is unlikely that they often attract attention among individuals who employ them or are singled out for special contemplation and

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[30]H. G. Barnett, *Innovation: The Basis of Cultural Change* (Toronto: McGraw, 1953) 20.

speculation.[31]

Many women with whom I spoke did not consider their old mats to be of special merit. When linoleum[32] became available most mats were thrown away or stored in basements and sheds. Mrs. Pugsley, from Five Islands, has six old mats in her basement. She was surprised when I asked to photograph them and at one point said: "I really should throw them away because they're not serving any purpose."[33] The fact that she still has them indicates they are serving some purpose. As I photographed them, Mrs. Pugsley discussed with whom she made them and where they were used. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton explain that objects are charged with specific meaning, associated with "cherished experiences and relationships."[34] Similarly, Pauline Greenhill discusses family photographs as icons of relatives and symbols of the past.[35] For Mrs. Pugsley, these mats were links to her youth, reminding her of past people and events.

Mrs. Pugsley's attitude toward her former craft is the norm among elderly mat hookers. Only recently have people thought of mat hooking as art. This

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[31]Michael Owen Jones, "The Concept of Aesthetic in the Traditional Arts," *Western Folklore* 30 (1971): 79-80.

[32]Linoleum, a floor covering made from linseed, became affordably available in the United States in the 1920s. See Von Rosenstiel 71-72. From comments made by my informants, it seems this floor covering became popular in the Maritimes shortly after its introduction in the States.

[33]Fieldnotes taken during my visit with Martha Pugsley, 27 April 1985, Five Islands, Colchester County, Nova Scotia. I conducted a tape recorded interview (MUNFLA C8658) with Mrs. Pugsley prior to viewing her mats; however, the logistics of moving to the basement curtailed the use of electronic recording equipment. While in the basement I kept notes in a field note-book, retained in my possession.

[34]Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1981) 66.

[35]Pauline Greenhill, "Record, Communication, Entertainment: A Functional Study of Two Family Photograph Collections in St. John's, Newfoundland," M.A. thesis, Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1980, 76-77.

does not imply that the old mats lack artistic merit. I refer instead to makers' image of their work; artistic license is not an issue since they perceived mat hooking to be a craft--either utilitarian or an expression of their ability to use resources judiciously and competently. Household mat hookers, unlike elite artists, do not emphasize uniqueness. At the same time, as I pointed out, each hooker individualized traditional patterns and themes.

Most mats from the early twentieth century closely adhered to a limited repertoire of set designs and motifs, organized in a particular manner. From interviews I conducted with women and men of Colchester County and from viewing old mats, I compiled a list of the most popular traditional patterns. They are divided into two sections: utilitarian, characterized by basic geometric designs; and fancy or special mats, predominantly of floral design.

2.4.1. Utilitarian Mats

At one time mats were necessary for comfort, as Howard Spicer said: "they had nothing on the floors" (C8652). Women first made utilitarian mats, providing warmth for areas most often used: the kitchen, bedrooms, and near entrances. The need for adequate floor covering placed emphasis on function rather than form. Simple patterns with easily planned designs and basic colour coordination required less time to prepare and hook than more complex designs. Although women altered patterns slightly, due to personal tastes and the desire to individualize (see below), these designs were considered communal property and were freely used without considering ownership. Traditional, functional designs, relying on repeated geometric shapes, were often so popular they became codified in local repertoires and given specific names.

Hit and Miss

"Hit and Miss" or scrap mats were made with rags left over from previous mat projects. The design had no planned structure, although women tried to achieve colour variety. These mats, the most functional geometrics, were quickly and easily hooked and were placed in heavy traffic areas: by the back door, or in front of the kitchen sink--places where mat fashion was secondary to utility.

Sometimes mat hookers combined traditional geometric motifs with their own designs to create more personal patterns. Figure 2.4 illustrates Gertrude Beattie's first mat, a Hit and Miss design individualized by a wide, scalloped border. Mrs. Beattie said: "I just wanted to make it a bit different from all the rest."[36] Many women individualized basic geometrics by using unique structural combinations and individual colour schemes. Chapter 6 examines early geometric patterns of a Colchester County mat hooker.

Block Mats

Another basic mat design, "Blocks," was constructed of squares as illustrated in Figure 2.5. The maker, Martha Pugsley of Five Islands, hooked alternating coloured squares in a loosely structured arrangement, surrounding them by a wide dark border. Like other plain patterns, this mat was used in the kitchen where little premium was placed on decoration.

Brick

"Brick" mats had a series of rectangles shaded in a variety of patterns. The pattern could follow an arrangement or gradation of colours along horizontal, vertical, or diagonal lines. Each created a unique effect and altered the design's appearance. Figure 2.6 shows a brick mat made in Five Islands by Luella

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[36]Interview with Mrs. Beattie, 20 February 1985, Truro, Nova Scotia. After tape recording an interview (C8640) we walked around the apartment and discussed her mats *in situ*. As she spoke I wrote notes in my field book.

Figure 2-4: A "Hit and Miss" design made by Gertrude Beattie.

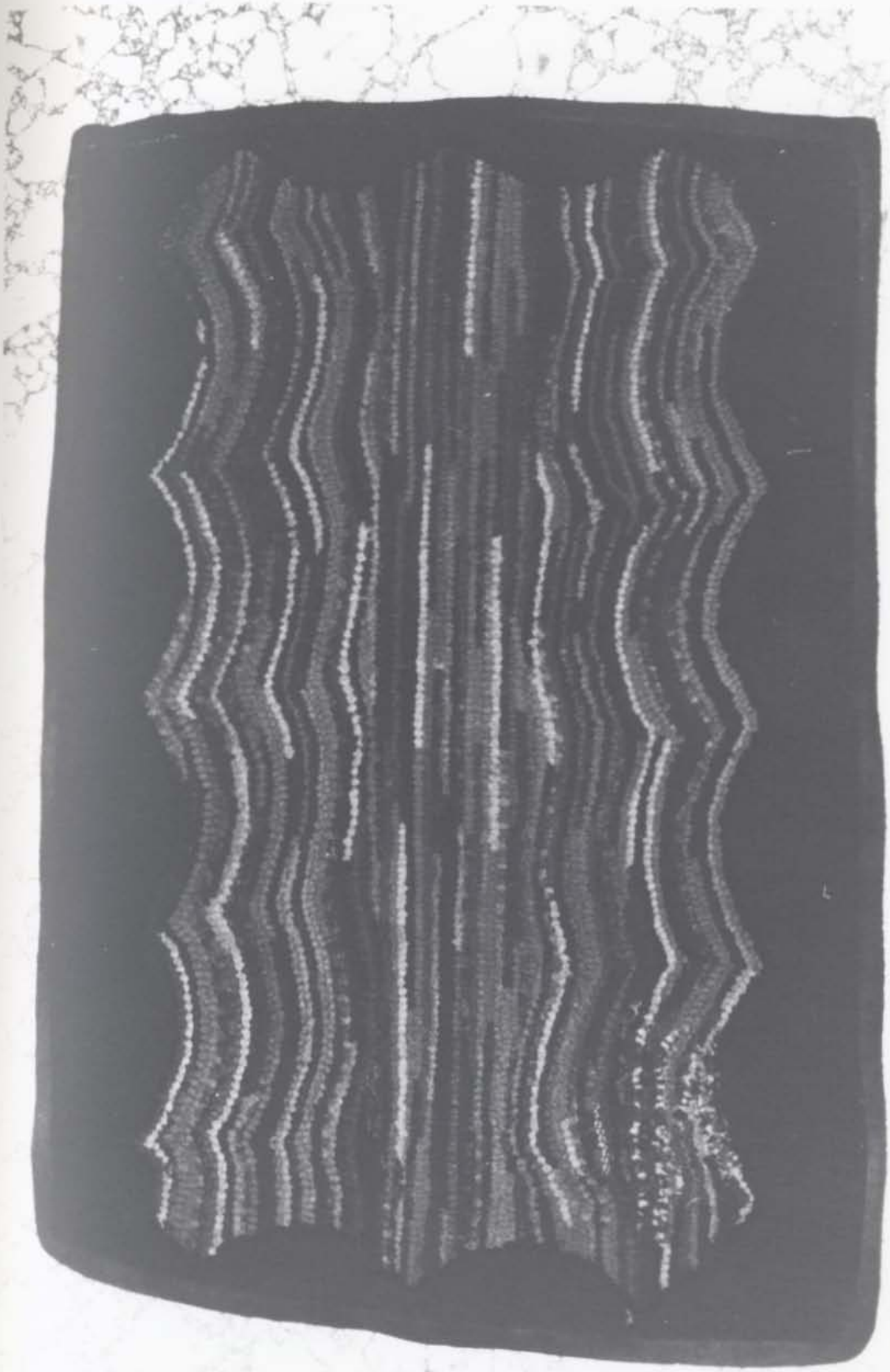


Figure 2.4

Figure 2-5: The "Block" design made in Five Islands, Colchester County, c. 1925.



Figure 2.5

Corbett. She accomplished its overall pattern by creating zones of light and dark bricks expanding from the centre.

Shell

The "Shell" or "Clam Shell" design was a formation of semi-ellipses, resembling a clam shell, similar in concept to the Brick mat. Motifs were staggered not to align vertically or horizontally. With no adjoining or butting edges, the design seemed to flow, an effect heightened by colour arrangement.

Quilt Patterns

Hooked mat designs were sometimes borrowed from traditional pieced quilt patterns. Two examples are Brick mats and "Sunshine and Shadows." For the latter, colours were arranged in a zigzag, blending from light to dark to light again. Mats with quilt designs were sometimes made to complement a quilt or throw.[37] Mrs. Corbett placed her brick mat in the kitchen to coordinate with a similar throw, draped over the back of a small couch [Figure 2.7].

Inch

The "Inch" mat, an overall pattern of one inch squares, formed a repeated chain-linked diamond design. Figure 2.8 shows a contemporary inch mat made by Roberta Doyle of Truro. Doreen Wright, a Nova Scotian mat hooker who traced this design's history, believes it was first developed along the province's northern shore.[38] She located several mats in Pictou County; the oldest was made by Ella Baily (b.1887) from River John who obtained the pattern in 1914 from her neighbouring sister-in-law. The only other inch mat Mrs. Wright located was in

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[37]A throw, or tied quilt, is a simple utilitarian quilt, secured by pieces of yarn tied at regular intervals. Throws often have no batting, consisting of only the top and back, and are used on couches, to be drawn over a sleeping or resting person.

[38]Doreen Wright, "Traditional Rug Hooking - Early 1900's," *The History of Rug Hooking in Nova Scotia*, ed. Doris Eaton, Sylvia Macdonald, and Doreen Wright (Truro, NS: Department of Culture, Recreation and Fitness, 1981) 12.

Figure 2-6: "Brick" mat made by Luella Corbett, Five Islands.

Figure 2-7: Luella Corbett with her "Brick" design tied quilt.

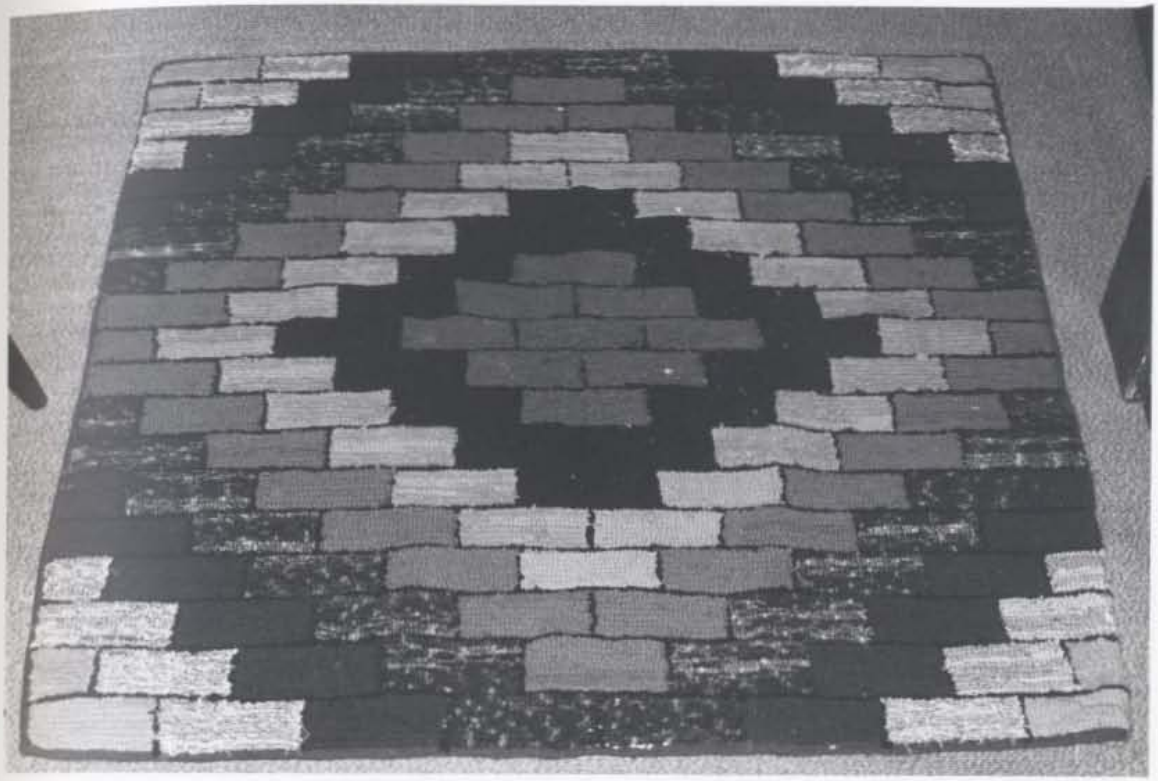


Figure 2.6



Figure 2.7

Centerville, Pictou County. It was hooked in 1920 by Mrs. Wallace MacKenzie who received the pattern from a neighbour.[39]

The Inch mat pattern was part of Pictou County women's active repertoire as early as 1914, although it is unknown where the design developed or when it was introduced to the area. According to Mrs. Wright's research, it was prevalent only in northern and central Nova Scotia. Perhaps this tessellate pattern was created by one or several women in Pictou County. Although more research is needed on the Inch pattern's history, the design's limited geographic range suggests its introduction in the first decade of the twentieth century, beginning to spread when mat hooking was in decline.[40] Subsequent decline of interest in the craft arrested further diffusion of this design from the epicentre.

2.4.2. Decorative Mats

After women made necessary utilitarian mats, they hooked more elaborate designs, reserved for the best rooms. "So it wasn't really a case of necessity?" I asked Mrs. Spicer. "Ah well," she replied, "it wasn't the last few years that they hooked. When they were younger it was a case of necessity. Perhaps they didn't have anything else to use" (C8652). As mentioned before, Mrs. Faulkenham designed and hooked a long hall runner from homespun yarn which she dyed herself. The mat's intended function is reflected in its location and the materials with which it was made:

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[39]Stella Hay Rex describes an Inch rug pattern as a "series of one inch squares;" Rex 24. The design to which she refers is also called "Boston Sidewalk," "Vermont Pavement," and "Sidewalks of New York" (29). Pocius documents mats with this name in "Hooked Rugs in Newfoundland: The Representation of Social Structure in Design," *Journal of American Folklore* 92 (1979): 275. These patterns are unlike the Nova Scotian Inch mats.

[40]The dates for the decline vary according to region and isolation. This is discussed in more detail below.

Figure 2-8: A contemporary inch mat made by Roberta Doyle--based on an old design.

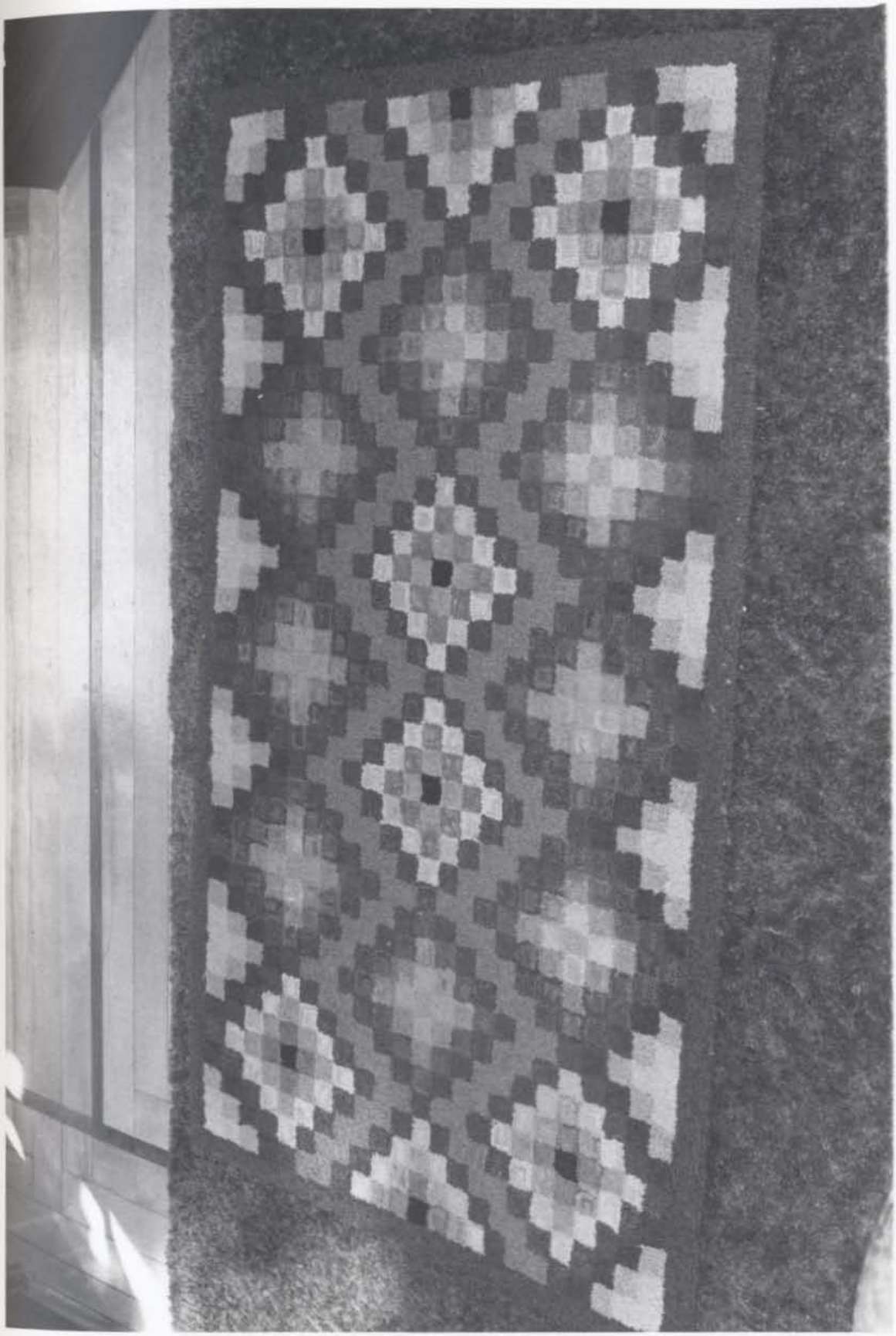


Figure 2.8

> It had a figure like a diamond with pieces going across. Very nice. And, oh yes, it was really long. Almost the whole length of the upstairs hall. And it had black velvet binding on the edge. It lasted years and years (C8652).

This large, special mat was placed in the upstairs hallway where it "would not be walked on by a crowd of men" (C8652). Mrs. Spicer distinquished between utilitarian and decorative mats when asked what patterns her mother made:

> My, my, well, sometimes they were more or less like block patterns or something of that sort. And sometimes she put--I remember one time she hooked a mat for my bedroom and she did it with a black border and inside was white. Then she had a spray of roses. Green leaves and pink roses on either end (C8652).

Special attention was given to this mat's design and colour arrangement and it was placed in a bedroom, where mats received less wear. Although practical, its ornamentation added to the room's decor more than a utilitarian design.

Geometric mats, once faded by time and use, became unobtrusive--familiar objects, unseen yet appreciated for their practicality. Fancier mats, receiving little wear, remained highly visible, to be admired for their aesthetic appeal.[41] Like geometrics, fancy mat designs were usually composed from a limited set of community-sanctioned motifs. Motifs most often used were flowers, leaves and twigs, baskets, and scrolls. Designs fall into two types: a-central figure(s) with a bordering design, perhaps a basket of flowers surrounded by scrolls, and a single design repeated in a basic geometric pattern.

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[41] It is suggested that art styles reflect society's social stratification; egalitarian societies produce art composed of repeated, simple, symmetrical elements while hierarchical societies produce asymmetrical non-representative designs. For an understanding of this theory, see John L. Fischer, "Art Styles as Cultural Cognitive Maps," *American Anthropologist* 63 (1961): 79-93. In relation to hooked mats see Pocius "Hooked Rugs" 281-84.

Figure 2-9: A fancy floral mat with central motifs bordered by scrolls and flowers.



Figure 2.9

In most cases, fancy designs were copied from magazine, newspaper, and book illustrations and assimilated into women's mat motif repertoire. Mrs. Clarke remembers small pictures in *The Family Herald*[42] which she enlarged freehand onto burlap:

> You'd see a little picture in a newspaper or *The Family Herald* or something and one mat I had there was a little design about that big [gestures approximately one inch] in the *Herald* and I just adapted them to the mat size (C8635).

When asked why a real flower was not used for design inspiration, she replied that it was too complicated to draw. Designs already composed in two-dimensional, simplified forms were easier to copy or enlarge.[43]

Design ideas were also obtained from decorative household furnishings or belongings.[44] Mrs. Clarke remembers copying a rose pattern from a set of curtains. She also recalls a grape pattern her grandmother saw on a waterglass:

> And I remember this particular one on the very outside border of all. It was a grapevine with bunches of grapes and leaves and vines and it was beautiful. She [her grandmother] took the design for it, she was away visiting, and she brought this waterglass home, this tumbler and it had a beautiful grape design around the glass and she said, "Here's what you put in the next mat" (C8635).

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[42] *The Family Herald and Weekly Star*, a weekly newspaper widely distributed in Canada from 1859 to 1968 from Montreal, Quebec, was a useful source of information for many families. See the introduction to Edith Fowke, "'Old Favorites': A Selective Index," *Canadian Folk Music Journal* 7 (1979): 29-30.

[43] Gerald Pocius noted this in his article "Hooked Rugs" 277-78.

[44] It is still common today to borrow decorative elements from household objects. Pauline Curry from Five Islands created quilting stitch templates from a design seen on a vacuum cleaner carton. The scroll in the lower right hand corner of figure 2.12 was formed in this way. Other templates pictured here were also borrowed from products in her home. Interview with Pauline Curry, 24 April 1985, Five Islands, Colchester County, Nova Scotia, MUNFLA C8654.

Figure 2-10: Close-up of a mat made with repeated floral design, c. 1925, Five Islands, Colchester County.

Figure 2-11: Floral mat made by Martha Pugsley.

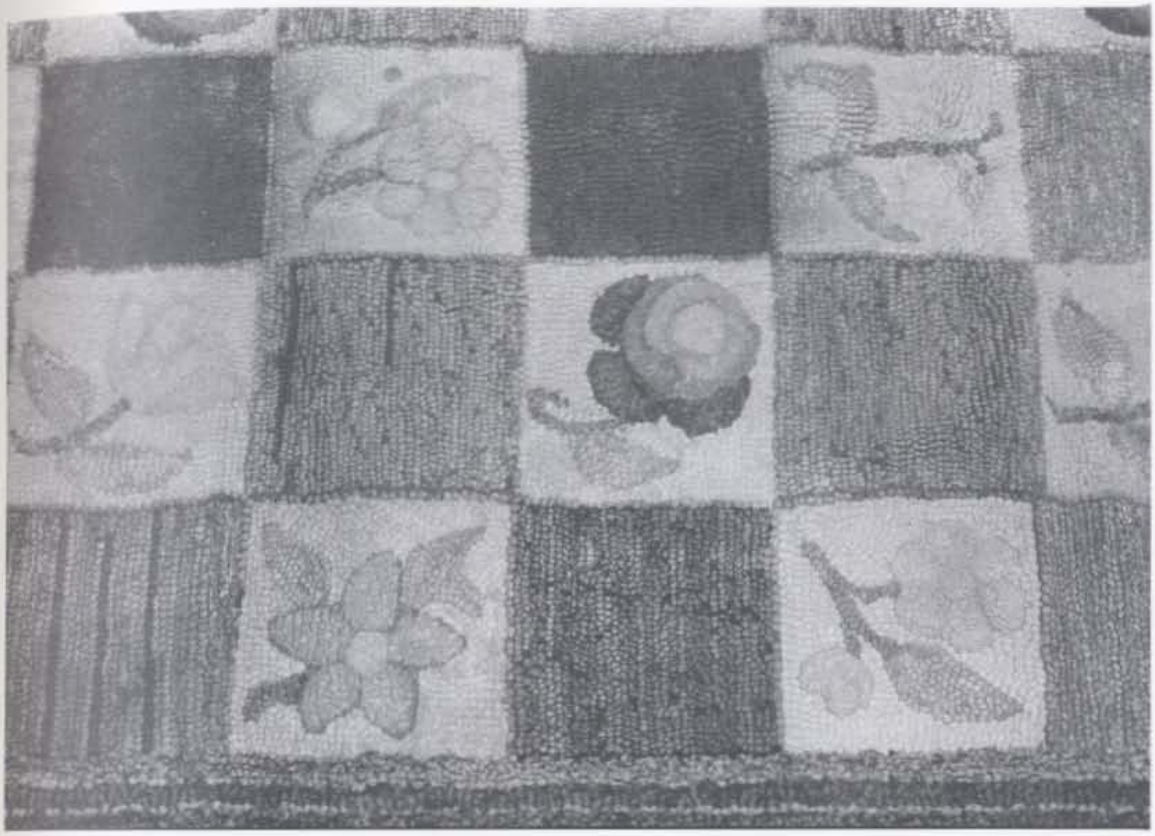


Figure 2.10

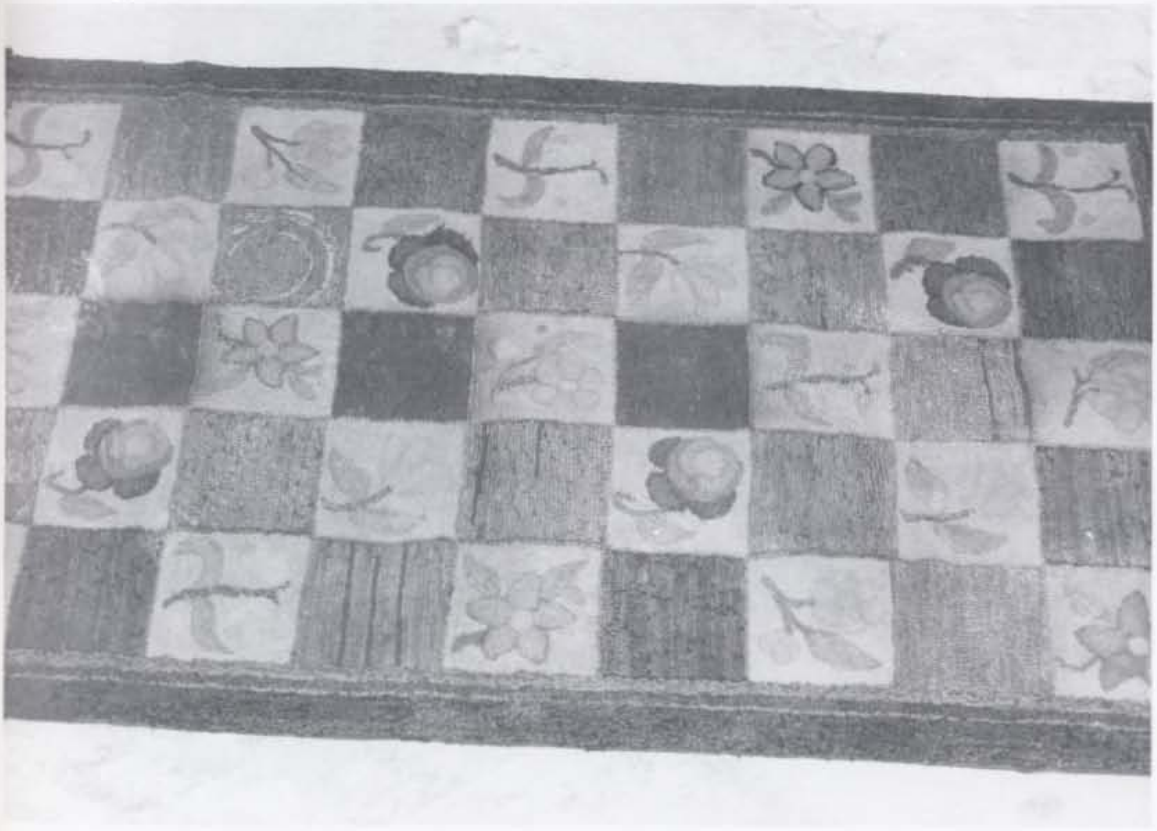


Figure 2.11

Motifs seen in magazines or on household objects were incorporated into mat hookers' repertoires provided they conformed with local aesthetics. Yvonne Milspaw, exploring one woman's quilting repertoire, reminds folklorists to consider popular art forms which may influence craftspeople:

> [The quilts] serve as gentle reminders that we cannot overlook the influences of popular design on folk art without endangering truth, nor can we dismiss the tremendous range of influences that converge upon this "static" art and imbue it with life and vigor.[15]

Although women wished to display imagination and talent, they did not want their designs to be criticised as too unusual or too elaborate. Either of these transgressions would set them apart as eccentric or even haughty.

2.4.3. Question of Originality

Possibilities for mat designs were endless since the medium easily accommodates almost any two-dimensional representation. In practice, however, most mat hookers closely followed local trends and reused traditional motifs. In his study of folk ballad composition, David Buchan discusses language stability in song texts:

> [The] oral poet is content to use his received traditional diction, and not only for reasons of necessity. Through generations of use, traditional language accrues a contextual force; it acquires connotative reverberations unrecognized by the ear untuned to tradition, and it becomes the "right" and

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[15]Yvonne Milspaw, "Jennie's Quilts: The Interface of Folk and Popular Tradition in the Work of a New York Quiltmaker," *New York Folklore* 8.1-2 (1982): 22.

Figure 2-12: Quilting templates made by Pauline Curry, Five Islands.

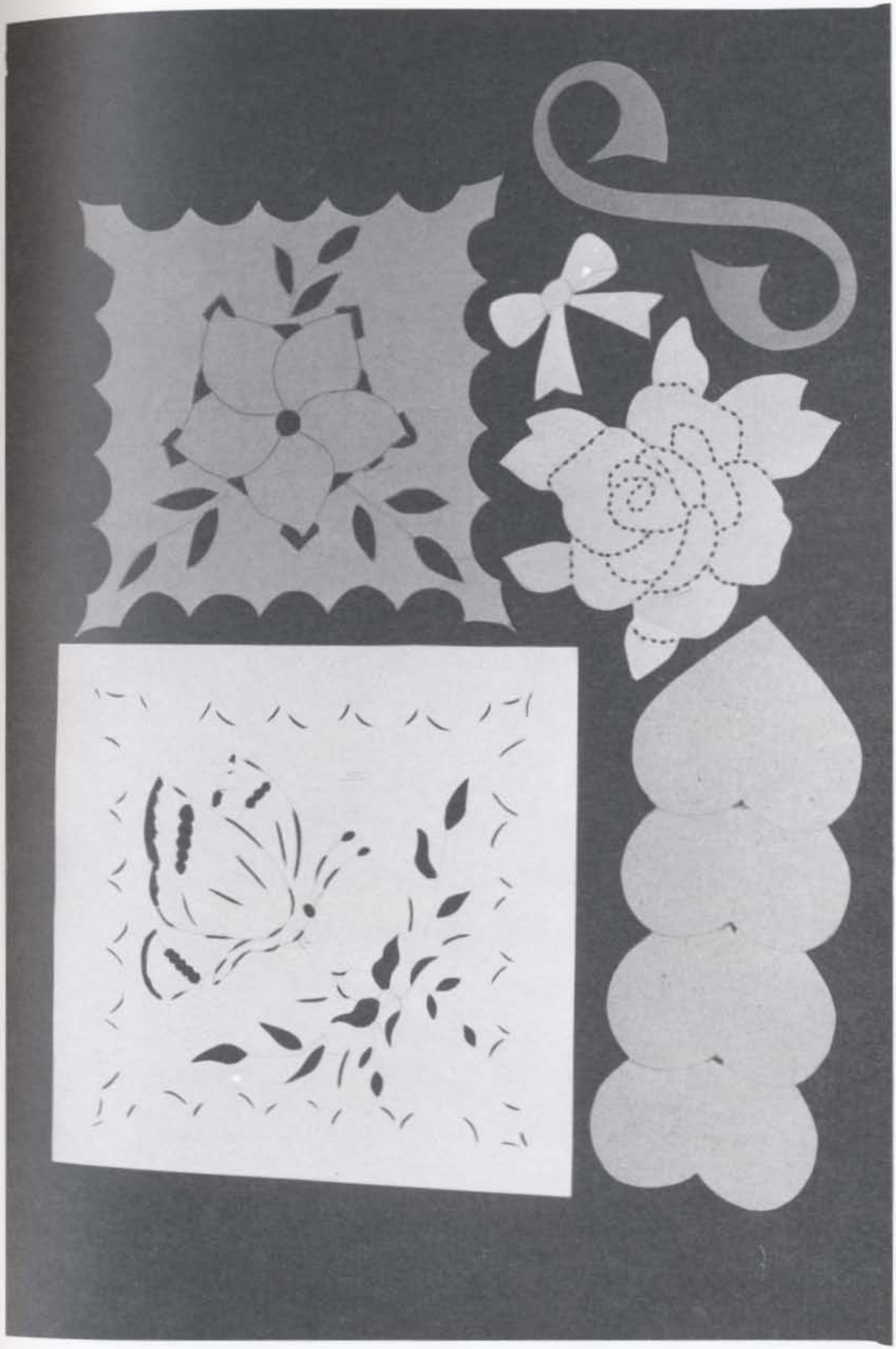


Figure 2.12

"fitting" language of verbal art.[46]

Similar aesthetic principles governed mat hookers' choice of design elements. When asked what patterns she and her mother designed, Muriel MacDonald, originally from Beaverbrook, initially said any design could be used, but then listed only geometric and floral patterns.

> Oh, anything at all, little diamonds maybe, all through, or a flower in the centre. (Did you make the patterns up yourself?) Copied them out of something, not out of my head. (So your mother made up her own patterns?) Oh, they always made up their own patterns. Somebody would draw the scroll on, copy it on or something (C8650).

Mrs. MacDonald's statements indicate that while women said they had freedom to draw any motif--"Oh, anything at all"--there was an unconscious law which regulated and limited creativity. Hence, their repeated and exclusive use of geometric shapes, flowers, and scrolls.

Some mats deviated from the norm outlined above. While doing my research I saw two such mats. Figure 2.13 shows a mat for a child's room with four animal motifs made by Doreen Wright's grandmother. The other aberrant design was displayed at the Annual Meeting of the Rug Hookers Guild of Nova Scotia in Canning, Annapolis County, in April 1985. It shows a collie dog standing in profile with a plain border design. Although use of children's motifs and family pets is commonly reported in mat hooking books,[47] they were rarely found in Colchester County. Although more individualistic than geometric and

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[46]David Buchan, *The Ballad and the Folk* (Boston: Routledge, 1972) 171.

[47]For example: Kopp and Kopp 58; 63-65.

floral designs, they were clearly sanctioned by the community as acceptable for occasional mats.

Since mat hookers collectively used and reused the same motifs originality could not be claimed. At the same time, individuality was not diminished, for makers and their neighbours perceived home-designed mats as unique, stressing differences in motif arrangement, colour co-ordination, and design source. John Vlach referred to this as a demonstration of "the complexities of personal experimentation within the boundaries of tradition."[48] Mat designs and mat making were simultaneously of the community and individual to each hooker.

Again an analogy between songcraft and handicraft can explain this dichotomy. Buchan states nonliterate singers, rather than memorizing a song text, recompose each performance:

> The traditional singer does not learn individual songs as fixed texts, but learns instead both a method of composition and a number of stories. By this method he re-composes each individual story every time he performs. . . . Each rendering of the story is, then, an 'original text.' The nonliterate singer is able to compose poems in the traditional way because he has mastered the tradition's phrases and rhythmic patterns, which may be looked on. . . as many-layered moulds into which the story-idea is poured.[49]

Mat hookers, too, recomposed traditional mat designs from a set of known motifs. W. F. H. Nicolaisen says variation in repetition is important for a tradition's continuation:

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[48]John Michael Vlach, "American Folk Art: Questions and Quandaries," *Winterthur Portfolio* 15 (1980): 348.

[49]Buchan 52.

Figure 2-13: Mat made for a child's room, Truro, c. 1920.

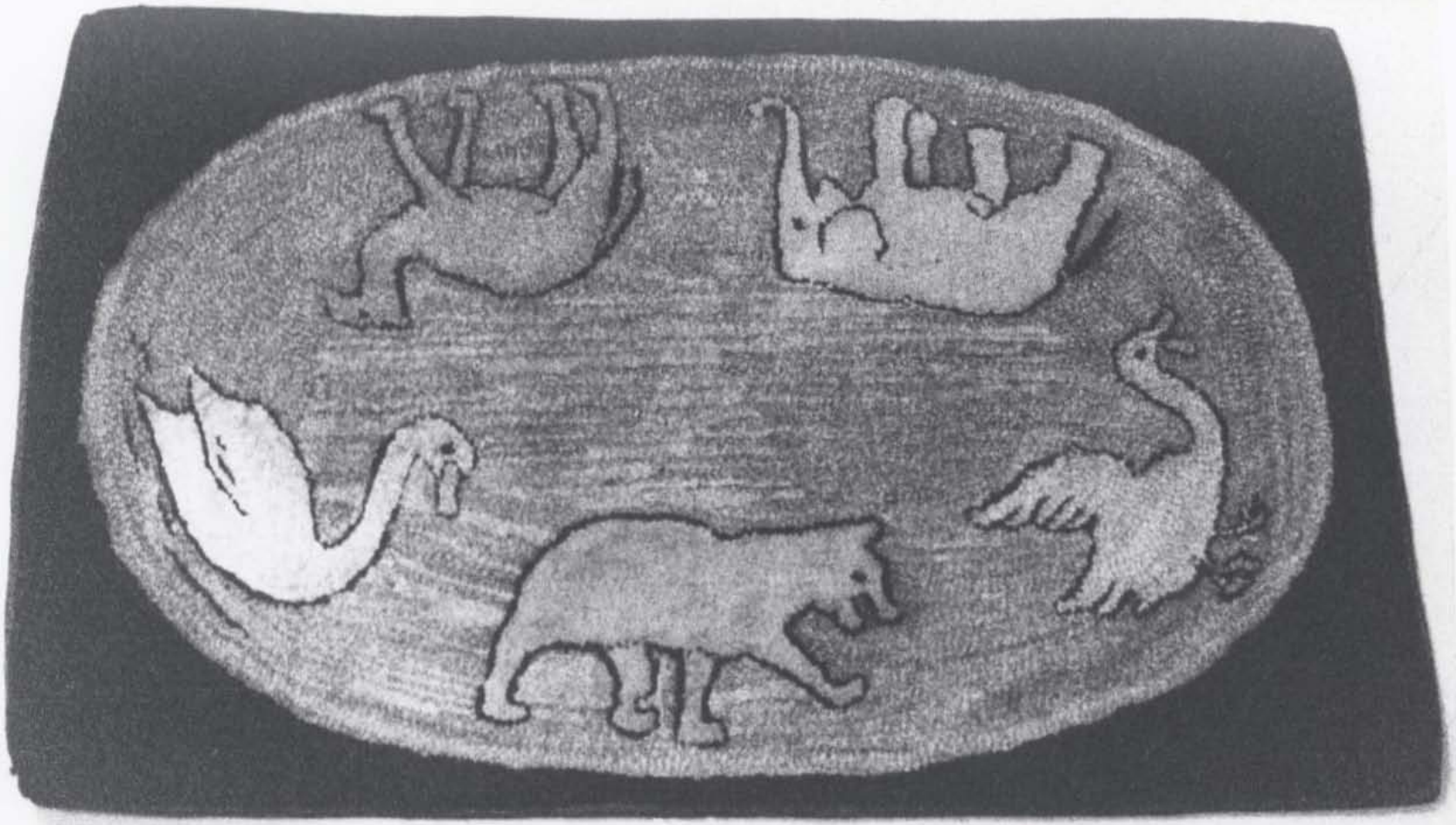


Figure 2.13

> Indeed, repetition without variation would be a meaningless formal cliché which would soon become tiresome, ineffective and therefore no longer entertaining.[50]

Women repeatedly used popular designs, adding slight changes to their choice and arrangement of motifs, colours, and textiles. Individual combinations and interpretations of community-known patterns produced similar yet unique results. Mat hookers were recognized for their methods of handling well-known motifs, as singers are noted for manipulation of phrases. Within a community, countless mats of similar design took on new characters and appearances each time they were hooked.

2.5. Templates

Favorite designs were often traced for future reuse or trade with other women. Templates were copied from existing mats or created immediately upon a design's construction. Hazel Clarke recalls how patterns were traced from one mat to another:

> Scrolls were a very popular pattern in the old days of mat hooking. Most of the old ladies had scroll patterns. Now, whether they designed them, or whether they were [handed] from one to another, they'd be hand-drawn. You know, somebody would see a mat with a scroll in it that they liked. Now, in order to take a scroll pattern off of that mat you'd get a piece of brown paper, put it underneath the mat and use a darning needle and poke your little holes all around the edge of the scroll and cut it out, of course, and trace it. And the same with the roses. Used to take an indelible pencil, you'd place your pattern on

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[50] W. F. H. Nicolaisen, "Variant, Dialect, and Region: An Exploration in the Geography of Tradition," *New York Folklore* 6.3-4 (1980): 143.

> where ever you thought you needed it and you traced around it and then drew the inner parts, like the veins in the leaves or the petals (C8635).

Often ideas for motifs were hastily drawn on paper, kept for future use. While looking through her old mat hooking supplies, Mrs. Clarke discovered some sketches and directions written on the backs of her son's grade school math test and some surplus wall paper. Like many women, Mrs. Clarke was watchful for possible mat designs and set them on paper for later consideration.

2.6. Stamped Patterns

In 1892, John Garrett established a mat design company in his home town of New Glasgow, Nova Scotia.[51] He offered well-drafted designs at bargain prices, marketing them to reach most of the Maritimes' population and beyond. Later, in 1929, he opened a branch in Malden, Massachusetts, operated by his sons Arthur, Frank, and Cecil. Another shop was opened in Burlington, Vermont, although no sources mention its dates of operation.[52] The company, named John E. Garrett's Limited, annually issued small pattern catalogues to subscribers. The patterns were called *Bluenose* designs after an icon of Nova Scotia's culture, *The Bluenose* schooner.[53] The firm also supplied mat patterns to general stores,

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[51]William Withrop Kent briefly describes Garrett's company in his book *Rare Hooked Rugs* (Springfield, MA: Pond, 1941) 173, 180.

[52]Kent *Rare* 173; Pearl McGowan, *The Dreams Beneath Design: A Story of the History and Background of the Designs of Hooked Rugs* (N.p: Pearl McGowan, 1949) 73.

[53]For information on the *Bluenose* see C. K. Darrach, *Race to Fame: The Inside Story of the Bluenose* (Hantsport, NS: Lancelot, 1985).

Eaton's, and *Chatelaine*,[54] a woman's magazine.

I surveyed pattern catalogues issued by Garrett's for the years 1926, 1950, 1964, and 1970 to see if hooked mat styles changed over time.[55] There were differences in styles, but in general patterns remained consistent in motif type: flowers, scrolled borders, geometric, and animal figures. In 1926 mat designs were dominated by symmetrical, but not central, floral scenes with detailed geometric and floral borders or wreaths. Geometric elements consisted of elaborately interlocking links and arrangements of lines, unlike simple diamonds or tessellate square designs, popular in folk tradition. Also prevalent were animal figures; a horse, an owl, a stag, and a lion graced the centres of separate mats. Garrett's offered a nursery design, showing the alphabet and ten numerals outlined on building blocks, a teddy bear and other toys, all on the same mat. Also available in 1926--but not in later catalogues--were mats with the insignia of the Masons, Orangemen, Oddfellows, Knights of Columbus, and Knights of Pythias, all well known men's service lodges.

Patterns from the Twenties are characterized by extremely intricate designs. Perhaps, since mat hooking was still popular at this time, Garrett's company realized they must offer designs which the majority could not create themselves. As mat hooking declined in later years, Garrett's designs became less fancy, emphasizing only the motif's basic forms. Pattern booklets from the 1950s and onward focused more on designs for children and on masculine images. Children's

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[54]*Chatelaine* magazine has been in circulation in French since 1928 and in English since 1960. I wrote the crafts' editor in 1985 requesting information on the Bluenose patterns they sold; unfortunately, their archives did not have information from this time. Letter received 10 April 1985.

[55]Several women with whom I spoke had old pattern catalogues and willingly lent them for my research.

designs were based on nursery rhymes, or showed cute animals popular with children and adults: kittens, dogs, animated ducks. Masculine designs were characterized by wildlife pictured in the glory of their native habitat: deer leaping over deadfalls, beavers chewing on trees, and moose standing by still lakes. These patterns suggest that by the 1950s mats were being made only as occasional projects; they were created specifically for children or--as implied by the masculine motifs--for the women's husbands.[56] The Bluenose Company may have catered to the tastes of men who hooked mats in their retirement. (See Chapter 5 for a discussion of a man who took up mat hooking upon retirement).

Use of stamped patterns depended on their availability in a particular region, and on women's financial resources. Emily Spicer's mother, Mrs. Faulkenham, drew her own patterns on bran or oat bags. Since money was limited on the farm, it was unthinkable to buy stamped mats when plain burlap was readily available at no cost. However, Howard Spicer's mother, who married a sea captain, "made patterns and bought patterns" (C8652). Within their household there were sufficient funds for purchasing mat bottoms.

Early in this century Colchester County women preferred using stamped patterns when available. They were considered technically more perfect than women's own designs, and were less tainted with the stigma of "homemade." Freeda Linkletter remembers her mother making geometric and scroll mats for the kitchen and stamped patterns for the parlour. The stamped mats were not considered necessities (for warmth) but decoration, as Mrs. Linkletter said "Just to pretty a place up" (C8650). Garrett's business was a great success because he touched a nerve in mat hookers' psyches. Although some women considered mat

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[56] In the 1960s or 1970s Louise Hanson purchased and hooked a beaver and a deer mat which she gave to her husband. See Chapter 6 for more details.

hooking an enjoyable pastime, all longed to be rid of homemade items' poverty stain. Bluenose designs were one step removed from this stigma because they were factory-made, elevated from the lowly position of hand-drawn.

2.6.1. The Decline of Mat Hooking

Mat hooking declined at different times in various parts of the province. More isolated and poorer families and communities continued to provide home-made floor-covering well after those in better circumstances. In other areas the necessity for handmade items had lessened to a point where only occasional mats were produced for profit or entertainment. People continue an activity long after its necessity because it provides purpose and continuity. Mrs. Purdy's mother made quilts after she had no need for them. Each year she vowed to make no more quilts, but come winter she began another project, using fabric scraps from her sewing projects. These quilts were given to friends or relatives.

Continuing a familiar task is comforting because it gives meaning to the day. Cato Wadel describes an unemployed Newfoundland man who goes everyday to his "store" (an outbuilding where men work) to perform little tasks.

> The purpose of his work cannot be just to 'have something to do.' The regular daily activities are of particular importance in that they supply him with the framework for a working routine.[57]

This is similar to women who continue to make quilts or mats after they are no longer required. This occurrence created an overlap between mat hooking's decline in the forties and its renewal in the fifties and sixties. During this interim, Garrett's company continued to make and distribute stamped patterns, albeit to a

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[57] Wadel 60.

reduced market. By 1979, though, the company was forced to close due to increased costs of imported burlap and competition from companies offering more diverse designs. The Bluenose Company's closure marks a change in present-day mat hookers' expectations and tastes. This is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

2.7. The Hooked Mat Trade

The advent of consumerism in North America is linked to the 1920s' economic prosperity.[58] Manufacturers of mass-produced items needed a market for their goods, so homemakers were enticed into desiring purchased, and perhaps inferior, goods. The recent vogue for cleanliness created and justified linoleum as a hygienic necessity. Hooked mats were quickly replaced when factory-made items, initially rare and therefore highly valued, became popular and inexpensive.

Women easily obtained the desired linoleum when American businessmen offered to trade it for old hooked mats. By the 1930s, in the United States' northeastern regions, hooked mats captured museums' and private collectors' attention, resulting in a high demand for authentic hooked items for decoration and public display. When the country homes of America had been scoured, entrepreneurs began collecting hooked mats from the Maritimes and Quebec. Mats were then sent to the United States to be sold at inflated prices to collectors and home owners. Mrs. Wright recollected a story about bundles of mats awaiting shipment from Nova Scotia:

> The collectors used to buy mats and put them in bales. And I guess it was quite common for the bales to be seen on the docks in Halifax. I was talking to a woman down in Church Point [Digby County] and she

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[58]Patricia Connelly discusses this in her study *Last Hired, First Fired: Women and the Canadian Work Force* (Toronto: Women's, 1978) 54-55.

> said they used to use the bales of mats to smuggle rum in that area. That was during the prohibition days [when] they used to smuggle rum down to the States (C8646).

The truth in the rum-smuggling story is unknown, but the narrative illustrates that many hooked mats were gathered and shipped to the United States for sale. Mrs. Clarke recalls mat dealers in Cumberland County:

> These people that were out, they made a great thing about buying all these old, dusty old hooked rugs and they traded the housewife and gave her nice linoleum. And you know, it wouldn't collect dirt or anything. Easy to keep clean and all that. They [the dealers] really cleaned the country-side (C8638).

Mrs. Spicer remembered her mother receiving new floor covering:

> When I was a little girl we had a great big kitchen, if you've been there you'd know. It was a bare floor. A hard-wood floor and that had to be scrubbed and I mean scrubbed. You scrubbed until it was white and then mother would have homemade mats all over it. We'd have to take those out and shake and beat, sweep them. Then after a while when I was home, I suppose a teenager, maybe less, she'd gotten rid of the mats and linoleum was coming in (C8652).

Mrs. Spicer emphasized the hard work needed to keep wood floors and hooked mats clean. Women with a heavy work load and those ashamed of their handmade mats were eager to receive new, easy-to-clean floor covering.

Acquisition of linoleum did not completely arrest mat hooking. Mrs. Spicer recalled her mother making mats after she got linoleum:

> She sold some and she'd use some for door mats 'cause those were still used in front of the doors so the dirt wouldn't drag in. Especially on a farm 'cause when the men came in from the barn they had to have something to wipe their feet on. So they were used that way. And everybody would have, after linoleum came in, or whatever they had,

they always had a mat in front of our bed. You never had to get out of bed on a cold bare floor. Always a mat (C8652).

As indicated above, some women continued to hook mats for their own use and for sale. Mrs. Clarke remembers being commissioned to hook large mats in the 1930s:

> All at once it became a thing to hook a nine by twelve rug. Now that's a big rug, especially one little rag at a time. And all through the country that's what they were doing. The men, women, and everyone would work on those rugs. They were sold to these Jews, as we called them. I don't know if they were Jews or not but they were some kind of foreigners. Jews or Syrians or something. And I think they were from the U.S.A. I don't think they were from around here. Anyway, it was a whole winter's work to hook one of those hooked rugs with everyone working on it. And they got the big sum of one hundred dollars (C8635).[59]

For commissioned mats women drew floral and scroll patterns like they did for special parlour mats.:

> I remember one [design] in particular that my grandmother found in the old *Family Herald*. There was a basket of roses and it was quite a wide, flaring basket, tapered at the bottom and full of roses and it had a handle on it. She wanted two baskets in the centre of this big rug. So what I did was take some cardboard or heavy paper and design the roses to whatever size I wanted and drew the baskets so I'd get them both the same size. And I traced them on the burlap with indelible pencil. So everything had to be just so. Those baskets in the centre of this big rug, the two handles were in the centre and the baskets were toward the outside and then around that in a big oval was a flower border. I don't know what it was, probably roses. And then the ground

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[59]Mrs. Clarke refers to rug dealers as Jews, although she is uncertain of their background. At this time in Nova Scotia there was considerable controversy concerning peddlers and foreign traders. See "The Curse of Itinerant Peddlers," *Maritime Merchant* 21 April 1904, C25+. Sheva Medjuck gives a history of Jews in the Atlantic provinces in her book *Jews of Atlantic Canada* (St. John's, NF: Breakwater, 1986) 22-45.

> work in the centre was a different shade from the groundwork in the next section and so on (C8635).

Although this mat was made over fifty years ago, Mrs. Clarke clearly remembers the design and circumstances surrounding its creation. This was a special occasion--the first time a large sum of money had been offered for an everyday item. For this reason they made the mat especially fancy.

The Maritime-American mat trade commenced in the 1920s and continued sporadically into the 1940s. By then women were selling mats to tourists and local residents who wanted handmade items for decoration. Despite hooked mats' marketability to tourists, the craft virtually ceased by the 1940s. At this time the United States' mat hooking renewal was in major operation and soon began to affect conditions in Nova Scotia. The renewal of this handicraft in both countries is discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Renewal of Mat Hooking in Nova Scotia

3.1. Introduction

Mid-twentieth century interest in crafts, termed "revival" by a succession of writers, may more appropriately be called renewal. Mark Slobin discussed this in his article "Rethinking 'Revival' of American Ethnic Music." He suggests that culture, rather than existing on a linear continuum, is circular or spiral. Therefore, aspects of culture do not "die," but become dormant to be reactivated in altered forms which suit the new social, cultural or economic climate:

> To revive means to bring back to life, and clearly this is not what we're talking about. In the first place, I don't think expressive culture really dies; you'd have to think of culture as a straight line evolution to believe that, and I don't. I think of it more as a spiral, changing, but dipping back along the way. Second, it's clear to many trained observers that even when people seem to be reviving things, that is exhuming them and breathing life into them, what they get is something new. . . . In culture, context counts for more than half of meaning, form for less.[1]

His observations on music renewal may be applied to any aspect of culture which enjoys a period of increased popularity.

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[1]Mark Slobin, "Rethinking 'Revival' of American Ethnic Music," *New York Folklore* 9.3-4 (1983): 37-44.

Renewal of an aspect of culture produces changes in its form and usage. All aspects of society undergo constant change, often so gradual to be indiscernible by insiders or observers. When a custom becomes dormant, society continues to flow and flux. Once renewed, the custom must be altered to fit its new surroundings. Furthermore, a different group may renew interest in the folkloric item and their expectations will reshape and redefine it.[2] Ethnic customs surviving or re-established in a new country are practiced by a generation living in different political, social, and cultural circumstances. Robert Klymasz notes that as Ukrainian Canadians become acculturated change occurs in their folklore. Old World traditions are reshaped to fit the new environment. Klymasz investigates "the overall direction of change and the various shifts and adjustments that are made in terms of form, content, function, carriers as well as vehicles, and occasions for the transmission of folkloric materials."[3] All these considerations are necessary to accurately study renewal.

3.2. Renewal of Handicrafts

This chapter discusses the North American handicraft renewal; in particular the post mid-century interest in mat hooking in Colchester County, Nova Scotia. People in the United States and Canada who renewed crafts were in different social and economic environs than the original makers. As mats were no longer economic necessities, their forms and functions changed remarkably. Research discloses several socio-economic reasons for such change.

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[2]Michael Owen Jones explores this theory throughout his study *The Hand Made Object and Its Maker* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1975) and in his article on modern house renovations, "L.A. Add-ons and Re-dos: Renovation in Folk Art and Architectural Design," *Perspectives on American Folk Art*, ed. Ian M. G. Quimby and Scott T. Swank (New York: Norton, 1980): 325-363.

[3]Robert B. Klymasz, "From Immigrant to Ethnic Folklore: A Canadian View of Process and Transition," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 10 (1973): 133.

3.2.1. United States

Current interest in crafts began in the nineteenth century among educated urbanites who sought solace from the effects of rapid urbanization and the homogeneity of mass-produced goods. They hoped possession of handmade objects would bring them closer to the believed essence of life. In Janet McNaughton's thesis "The Study of the CPR-Sponsored Quebec Folksong and Handicraft Festivals, 1927-30," the ideological roots of the North American handicraft revival were traced to the European national romantic school of thought which developed in the nineteenth century.[4] Her work, focusing on three Quebec tourist-oriented handicraft exhibitions in the early twentieth century, has valuable information on the Canadian and American craft movement.

Academic and popular interest in folk crafts created great market demand for authentic artifacts which could not be filled by available antiques.[5] In the United States during this century's first two decades, schools and workshops were established to supply urban markets with crafts. This sparked the first movement of the handicraft renewal. Rural men and women were re-trained in household crafts like weaving, quilting, woodworking, furniture making, and mat hooking. Meanwhile, in Canada, leisure-class women recognized a need to conserve and revitalize cottage crafts. Organizations such as the Canadian Handicrafts Guild were established to teach crafts to women in rural, economically depressed regions. Nation-wide educational programs spelled the beginning of the crafts

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[4]Janet McNaughton, "The Study of the CPR-Sponsored Quebec Festival and Handicraft Festivals, 1927-30," M.A. thesis, Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1982, 12-16.

[5]Allen Eaton, *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands* (1937; New York: Dover, 1973) 62.

movement in Canada.[6] As interest in crafts spread, women from middle and upper classes adopted them as leisure entertainment and therapeutic pastimes.[7] Folk art scholars suggest that these classes' interest in "folk art" is an attempt to display wealth and social position. Eugene Metcalf, applying Veblen's theory of the leisured class,[8] explains upper classes' interest in non-elite art:

> In Veblen's analysis, the production and appreciation of art becomes . . . a measure of civilized sensibility and cultural maturation. . . . High art was the measure of such civility, but folk art might confer an even higher status. Such status could not attach to the producers of folk art, for many of the objects they make, like weather vanes and shop signs, were produced for obviously utilitarian and socially useful ends, but it could apply to the promoters and collectors of the object if the object were treated in a non-utilitarian way.[9]

In many cases collection of "folk" art was an attempt to display wealth; most authors, however, suggest craft enthusiasts were benevolent toward economically depressed regions and genuinely concerned about preserving craft traditions.

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[6]A detailed outline of the general Canadian interest in arts and crafts is beyond the scope of this thesis. For more information see McNaughton 197-235 and M. A. Peck, "Handicrafts from Coast to Coast," *Canadian Geographical Journal* 9 (1934): 201-16.

[7]In his study of New England crafts, Eaton devotes a chapter to the use of handicrafts in occupational therapy; Allen Eaton, *Handicrafts of New England* (New York: Harper, 1949) 331-336. Therapeutic effects of mat hooking and other crafts are discussed in greater detail in following chapters.

[8]In 1899 sociologist Thorstein Veblen wrote an important study of the upper classes and his theories are still being employed today; Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (1899; New York: NAL, 1953).

[9]Eugene Metcalf, "Black Art, Folk Art, and Social Control," *Winterthur Portfolio* 18 (1983): 280. See also, Alf H. Walle and M. L. Brimo, "Elbert Hubbard, The Arts and Crafts Movement, and the Commercialization of Folk Art," *New York Folklore* 10.3-4 (1984): 47-63.

3.3. Mat Hooking

At the turn of the century in the northeastern United States, a limited revival of mat hooking occurred with the inception of cottage craft industries.[10] Organizers and teachers of craft companies promoted materials, techniques, and designs which were foreign to tradition but increased the crafts' marketability.[11] Pearl McGowan of West Boylston, Massachusetts, contributed greatly to the present state of mat hooking in New England and Canada.[12] She taught men and women to combine elements of art instruction with mat hooking skills. Mrs. McGowan, herself a designer, made and sold intricate patterns and applied new techniques to the craft. Her efforts to popularize mat hooking helped establish the craft in Canada. Because Ontario is geographically close to the United States, it was the first province to re-establish mat hooking. Women interested in hooking traveled to Massachusetts where Mrs. McGowan held her classes.[13] Ontario mat hookers were instrumental in organizing similar education for Maritime women.

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[10]This renewal is noted by Allen Eaton *New England* 118-30, and Joel Kopp and Kate Kopp, *American Hooked and Sewn Rugs: Folk Art Underfoot* (New York: Dutton, 1975) 88-90.

[11]Eaton *New England* 119-120; Kopp and Kopp 88.

[12]For insight into McGowan's approach see her book *The Dreams Beneath Design: A Story of the History and Background of the Designs of Hooked Rugs* (N.p.: Pearl McGowan, 1949).

[13]For further information on the Ontario renewal of mat hooking see *Ontario Hooking Craft Guild, 1966-1981: Our Story* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills, 1981.)

3.4. Nova Scotia Renewal of Mat Hooking

In the Maritimes, interest in home handicrafts had declined by the 1930s due to increased work opportunities, changing leisure activities and available market commodities.[14] Mats were no longer needed and few women continued to hook for pleasure. In the late 1940s the craft movement, which was already established in central Canada and the United States, made inroads in the Maritimes. As before, interest was first initiated as a business venture, providing income in economically depressed areas.[15] Craft programs had been successful in other regions of the northeast. In Labrador, Grenfell mat hooking co-operatives helped improve the quality of life in northern communities. Women made high quality, well designed mats suitable for American markets, to raise money for their families and the Grenfell medical mission.[16] In Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, a highly successful mat hooking co-operative was established in Cheticamp at the turn of the century. Miss Lilian Burke of Washington organized and trained local women to make market-oriented hooked products.[17] Like Grenfell mats, these designs and techniques conformed to market expectations. Today, the Cheticamp business is still a viable cottage industry providing steady income for community women.

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[14]As noted in the previous chapter, Patricia Connelly outlines social and economic trends which affected women's work in the home and public labour force; Patricia Connelly, *Last Hired, First Fired: Women and the Canadian Labour Force* (Toronto: Women's, 1978) 54.

[15]This is discussed briefly in an article housed at the Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Queen Elizabeth II Library, Memorial University of Newfoundland. "A Short Survey of Canadian and United States Handicrafts with Reasons for the Encouragement of the Arts in Newfoundland," Newfoundland Individual Development Board, St. John's, 5 May 1944, 3.

[16]Memorial U of Newfoundland Art Gallery, *The Fabric of Their Lives: Hooked and Poked Mats in Newfoundland and Labrador* (St. John's, NF: Memorial U of Newfoundland Art Gallery, 1980) 21.

[17]William Withrop Kent, *Rare Hooked Rugs* (Springfield, MA: Pond, 1941) 31; H. Gordon Green, *A Heritage of Canadian Handicrafts* (Toronto: McClelland, 1967) 53.

Recognizing the economic benefit of such groups, the Nova Scotia provincial government through the Department of Trade and Industry inaugurated a handicrafts program in 1943. Government-sponsored instructors taught local community groups to establish commercial craft businesses. The most successful venture was based in Terrance Bay, Halifax County, a financially bankrupt community. The Star of the Sea Handicrafts co-operative taught local women and men many crafts which were sold locally and throughout the country.[18] A mat hooking instructor in the Annapolis Valley brought this craft to the government's attention and in 1958 they launched a program to re-establish it.

3.4.1. Edna Withrow

Mrs. Edna Withrow was born in Nova Scotia early in this century.[19] Although her grandmother taught her to hook mats, she had no practical need to pursue it. While living in Ottawa with her first husband, C. G. Bennett, Mrs. Withrow was reintroduced to the craft. The growing American interest in mat hooking attracted the attention of Ontario craft enthusiasts. Mrs. Withrow traveled to New England to take courses from Pearl McGowan and other instructors. Once proficient at the craft, she attended Mrs. McGowan's teacher-training courses, and established a popular rug hooking class in Ottawa. The response was favourable; she fondly remembers that every seat in the class was taken. After the course, the most enthusiastic mat hookers continued to meet informally once a week to hook. In 1985 Mrs. Withrow said some original members of the Ottawa group were still meeting regularly. The social aspects of mat hooking is examined in more detail in the next chapter.

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[18] Green 49.

[19] I interviewed Mrs. Withrow in May 1985 at her home in Wolfville, Kings County, Nova Scotia (MUNFLA C8647, C8648). All personal information and data concerning her craft activities are taken from tape C8647 unless otherwise indicated in footnotes.

In 1954 the Withrows retired in Digby, Nova Scotia where Mrs. Withrow taught an evening adult hooking class sponsored by the Department of Education.[20] She and her husband later moved to Wolfville, a more central location, where she again taught evening courses.

In 1958 Mary Black, the director of Handicrafts and Home Industries--a division of the Department of Mines and Resources--asked Mrs. Withrow to teach week-long mat hooking classes in Halifax.[21] Handicrafts and Home Industries wanted to revive the craft as a hobby rather than for economic gain.[22] Although classes were popular the central location and length of study limited enrollment to Metro residents. The program was decentralized and Mrs. Withrow began teaching in small communities throughout Nova Scotia. Courses were advertised locally through the Women's Institute and church groups. Mrs. Withrow spent a week in each community teaching the basics of mat hooking before moving to another location.

Mrs. Withrow brought all the materials necessary to start a hooking project: hooks, cutters, burlap, dyes, and lengths of woolen material. She stressed that mat hooking can be inexpensive by suggesting women use fabric salvaged from old clothes. She supplied McGowan and Bluenose stamped patterns but recommended students create their own designs. Mrs. Withrow believes a revived craft should be based on regional, homemade designs:

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[20]Sylvia Macdonald, "Rug Hooking with Edna Withrow," *The History of Rug Hooking in Nova Scotia*, ed. Doris Eaton, Sylvia Macdonald and Doreen Wright (Truro, NS: Department of Culture, Recreation and Fitness, 1981) 8.

[21]Macdonald "Rug Hooking" 8.

[22]In 1986 I contacted the Department of Culture, Recreation and Fitness, under which the Handicraft program is now housed, but could not obtain information on the program. Access to information was restricted because it had been under the Department of Mines and Resources' jurisdiction.

> I wish we could produce . . . something that's entirely Nova Scotian, because it's more or less noted as being a place where we produce hooked rugs. There are quite a few groups in Nova Scotia now, but they [the designs] are not original, unfortunately. . . . I like the idea of Nova Scotia [designs] with boats and gulls and these (C8647).

Like her mentor, Pearl McGowan, Mrs. Withrow expressed a romanticized picture of past mat hooking traditions. McGowan has disdain for modern, commercial patterns:

> During [the beginning of the machine age] women who did hook, drew their own patterns, or wasted their time on atrocious commercial designs which grew worse and cheaper.[23]

She classifies early mats as antiques which "inherited the respect and admiration of a new generation" while those made from commercial patterns "lack sentiment and charm [with] no warmth for the soul."[24] Her attitude affected the early generation of teachers in Canada as noted in Mrs. Withrow's comments.

While stressing old-time forms, Mrs. Withrow realized that renewed handicrafts must be revitalized or updated to make them viable in the new social and economic environment. Her students learned to make many hooked items: covered bricks for door stops, stair runners, and chairseat covers. Although she taught primitives (traditional mats) she emphasized a technique called shading

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[23]McGowan 75.

[24]McGowan 75.

which gives hooked items greater appeal.[25] As part of mat hooking's revitalization Mrs. Withrow suggested items could be sold for seven dollars a square foot. However, few women sold their products because financial reward could not recompense time expended.

The Department of Handicraft and Home Industries' itinerant program in the late 1950s and early 1960s did not have lasting impact. In 1960 Mrs. Withrow held a week long seminar in Truro, one of the largest centres outside Halifax, and only eight women registered.[26] In Middle Musquodoboit, Sylvia Macdonald was asked to join the course in 1962 to provide the minimum number of students needed to hold a class.[27] The program's most significant accomplishment was introducing mat hooking to women who took avid interest in it, eventually teaching in their regions. The continual presence of a local teacher who offered encouragement and guidance stimulated a greater response to mat hooking than the province wide program. On mainland Nova Scotia Doris Eaton and Sylvia Macdonald have been instrumental in this cause.

3.4.2. Doris Eaton

Doris Eaton was raised in Massachusetts but visited Nova Scotia during her summer vacations. She first discovered mat hooking while staying with her grandmother:

> [I] had the 'honor' of being allowed to hook a few times with my grandmother when we came to Nova Scotia. My mother's gift to her was always a new 'mat

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[25]The terms primitive and shading are explained in more detail in the next chapter.

[26]Interview with Roberta Doyle, 13 April 1985, Truro, Nova Scotia, MUNFLA C8643.

[27]Interview with Sylvia Macdonald, 15 April 1985, Pictou, Pictou County, Nova Scotia, MUNFLA C8644.

> bottom'--mostly a winter's project, but sometimes she couldn't wait. *Then* I could 'help' [her] [her emphasis].[28]

Mrs. Eaton took no further interest in the craft until she returned to live in Nova Scotia. In 1961 she attended a hooking demonstration given by Mrs. Withrow in Wolfville. Mrs. Eaton was enthusiastic about the craft and helped organize a class. Ten years later when Mrs. Withrow curtailed her teaching in Wolfville, Mrs. Eaton had reached the point where she felt sufficiently qualified to take over these duties herself. She held classes during the evenings in Canning, near Wolfville.[29] In addition, Mrs. Eaton designed and hooked small wall-hangings to sell in local craft shops.[30] Around 1970 the demand for orders became too great for her to fill, so she initiated a pilot program sponsored by Canada Manpower. Local women were trained to hook the wall hangings she designed:

> There were eight ladies and fortunately I could choose the hookers I wanted, so that a few of them had been in the original class with Mrs. Withrow and the others had started in subsequent classes of hers. All, therefore, could work quickly enough to become fairly productive.

Mrs. Eaton designed the patterns, silkscreened them, planned the colours, dyed the fabrics, and framed the finished products. Although some women sold

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[28]Letter received 14 March 1987, Mrs. Eaton to author. All information is taken from this letter unless otherwise indicated in footnotes.

[29]Doris Eaton, "Rug Hooking - In Recent Years and to Come - In Nova Scotia," *The History of Rug Hooking in Nova Scotia*, ed. Doris Eaton, Sylvia Macdonald and Doreen Wright (Truro, NS: Department of Culture, Recreation and Fitness, 1981) 2.

[30]Eaton "Rug Hooking" 2.

their mats to tourists, peddlers, or on commission for supplementary income. this was the first organized effort to make mat hooking a profitable venture.[31]

In 1974, several years after beginning the project, Mrs. Eaton moved to Lunenburg County. Consequently, she discontinued her gift shop supply business. She did, however, continue to make stamped bottoms and established a mail order business, distributing throughout the Maritimes. The venture was too time-demanding so in 1979 she sold it to a woman from West Dublin, Lunenburg County. Mrs. Eaton continued to attend mat hooking camps in the United States to increase her knowledge and keep abreast of new techniques. She also taught mat hooking in many communities along the South Shore and her presence and activities sparked avid interest in the region.

Mrs. Eaton worked diligently to introduce new, innovative mat hooking techniques to her compatriots. In 1977 she invited an American mat hooking teacher and designer to give a one day workshop at New Ross, Lunenburg County. At the same workshop a dye expert from Halifax gave a demonstration in dyeing techniques.[32] Although enrollment was limited to 120 people many more wanted to attend, indicating a growing interest in the craft. This region's success owes much to Mrs. Eaton's courses, craft store, and exemplary mat hooking.

In April 1979, a representative group of mat hookers from the South Shore and Annapolis Valley met in Lunenburg County to consider forming a mat hooking guild.[33] It was decided the guild should be called *The Rug Hooking*

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[31]This comment excludes Cheticamp rug hookers, mentioned earlier, organized at the turn of the century to make homespun wool hooked items, separate from traditional or renewed methods.

[32]Linda Mason, "120 Participate in Rug Hooking Course," *Chronicle Herald* 20 Oct. 1977: 8.

[33]Minutes of meeting, 2 April 1979. The minutes and other related documents are compiled in a ring binder kept by Doreen Wright.

Guild of Nova Scotia. Regional groups, defined as "any three persons who met for the purpose of mat hooking," were established throughout the province. The executive--President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer--are selected from a different region each year. The guild was formed for the following purposes:

1. To encourage participation in the craft of rug hooking.
2. To foster a sense of originality and beauty in colour and design.
3. To provide opportunities for the exchange of ideas and information among Members of the Guild; and sponsor specific programs directed toward the excellence of the craft.
4. To promote public awareness of the craft through exhibits and publicity.[34]

The guild's formation reinforced commitment to the craft, increased public awareness through exhibits and media coverage, and encouraged continued education by inviting special lecturers to give workshops and addresses.

By 1980 the number of mat hookers throughout the Maritimes had risen considerably. This warranted a one week rug hooking course held at College Ste. Anne's, Church Point, Digby County. Instructors from Ontario offered Maritime mat hookers courses ranging from beginners to teacher training. Over the years more and varied courses were offered, significantly changing the approach to mat hooking in eastern Canada. In 1983 the spring school was moved from the southwestern region of Nova Scotia to the village of Bible Hill, Colchester County. Facilities for classes and students are available at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College. This central location is more convenient for people traveling from the other Maritime provinces.

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[34] "Constitution of the Rug Hooking Guild of Nova Scotia," Article II (1979) 1.

Every year the school hosts a public exhibition of students' work, where women and men view their contemporaries' latest work, receive acknowledgement for long hours of thought and patience, and exchange ideas outside the class room. In his book, *Discovering Saskatchewan Folklore*, Michael Taft says such exhibits offer craftspeople public exposure without having to sell their products. Today, homebased crafts often go unnoticed by the wider community. Craftspeople, however, want recognition for their expertise. "The compromise between selling one's work and keeping it hidden away from public view is the local fair or craft contest."[35] The rug school is also a social occasion where friends met in previous years socialize for the week. The school, an offshoot of Mrs. Eaton's concerted efforts to re-establish mat hooking in Nova Scotia and educate participants, is met with continued enthusiasm.

3.4.3. Sylvia Macdonald

Sylvia Macdonald was born in England but emigrated to Canada in 1946.[36] As previously mentioned, she was introduced to mat hooking in Middle Musquodoboit in 1962 by Mrs. Withrow. Mrs. Macdonald, a potter and painter, found mat hooking a rewarding hobby and good medium for expression. Having experience with drawing, she readily adopted Mrs. Withrow's advice about creating designs.

In the mid 1970s Mrs. Macdonald offered courses in mat hooking at the Pictou County Arts and Crafts Association. After generating local interest she invited Mrs. Eaton to give demonstrations and lessons on techniques, design and

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[35]Michael Taft, *Discovering Saskatchewan Folklore: Three Case Studies by Michael Taft* (Edmonton: NeWest, [1983]) 134.

[36]All information in this section was obtained during an interview with Sylvia Macdonald, 15 April 1985, Pictou, Pictou County, Nova Scotia, MUNFLA C8644.

dyeing. Afterwards, in 1979, Mrs. Macdonald began teaching mat hooking to residents of a local Seniors' Home. After the course itself ended, the group continued to meet once a week at Mrs. Macdonald's to hook and socialize.

Mrs. Macdonald encourages mat hookers to draw their own designs because she feels they should be fully involved in all aspects of a craft. By relying on individual creativity the hooker may experience greater satisfaction during the process and with the final product. She introduces designing to her students by giving them rough sketches to complete. In 1985 she made for her friends in Pictou and Colchester counties a small drawing (45 centimetres square) of a house with trees and a fence. By filling in the details, mat hookers had to think about design and colour representation. Mrs. Macdonald chose a small simple design to introduce techniques gradually without overwhelming students with a large or detailed project. She believed that once results were seen the students would have confidence to try their own designs.

I was present when some Colchester women were working on this project and witnessed their difficulties with design and colour. One woman, dissatisfied with her sky scene, repeatedly pulled out the rags. Eventually she studied the sky and tried to represent it as it appears. Gertrude Beattie recalls watching her hook this mat:

> She had an awful time getting that sky. And she ripped that out dozens of times and she'd swear about it. Then she began looking at the sky herself and seeing the colours that were in it. And she saw things she never saw before (C8644).

By drawing only basic outlines, Mrs. Macdonald forced students to create the features of a house and grounds. Flower boxes, flower and vegetable gardens, chickens and chicks, a thatched roof, and an owl are just some of the additions

used to individualize the mats. She also stresses using colour variety and depth to make objects more naturalistic and advocates taking basic colour courses to learn perception. This "high art" approach to mat hooking predominates in contemporary hookers' teaching and training. This is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Mrs. Macdonald enjoys many aspects of this art: dyeing, designing, and teaching. Yet she respects others' limited interest, realizing that people prefer different levels of involvement. Mat hooking and teaching are a large part of her life. Through it she fulfills her creative needs, is awarded a sense of purpose and enjoys others' company:

> You meet such nice people, really. I met Gertrude doing this. And it's such a relaxing thing to work at. I really look forward to the classes and although I haven't really got a great deal of action going here, I still have people interested and we still get together (C8644).

During the past 20 years, Mrs. Macdonald's personal dedication to mat hooking has renewed the craft along the North Shore.[37]

3.4.4. Doreen Wright

Although Mrs. Withrow taught mat hooking in Colchester County in the 1950s and 1960s there was no organized group to sustain and promote interest. Hence, mat hookers in the region worked independently. Then, in 1979, Doreen Wright established a mat hooking group in Truro.[38] Mrs. Wright has fond

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[37]The North Shore refers to the area of Nova Scotia bordering the Northumberland Strait from Tignish, Cumberland County to Cape George, Antigonish County.

[38]Interview with Doreen Wright, 6 January 1986, Bible Hill, Nova Scotia, MUNFLA C8646. All information pertaining to Mrs. Wright's guild activities are taken from this interview.

Figure 3-1: Sylvia Macdonald displaying her house and garden design.



Figure 3.1

memories of her grandmother hooking mats and has always been fascinated by the craft. She decided to learn hooking after her children were grown and she had more spare time. Her first project was copied from an "Inch" mat owned by an elderly woman in Bible Hill. She chose this pattern because she wanted to emulate her grandmother's tradition. She purchased burlap and a hook at a craft shop in Truro and used her mother's wooden mat frame. Mrs. Wright was not familiar with the use of old clothes or fabric scraps so she used yarn. Latchet rugs, made with short lengths of yarn pulled through a mesh foundation and knotted, were popular craft items in the late sixties and early seventies. Mrs. Wright combined her knowledge of the two crafts:

> I used all yarn. Well, I didn't know any different at that time, but I used yarn because I didn't know anything about gathering material and I didn't know how to get all my colours. I made another one after that and it's half and half. Half yarn and half material. I did the outer edge in material and the inner parts with all my colours in it, in yarn (C8646).

After completing two mats Mrs. Wright took a short course from Doris Eaton, held at Mount St. Vincent University in Halifax. She learned about gathering used clothes and woolen material, the rag cutting machines, and basic hooking and shading techniques.

Mrs. Wright soon realized that she needed other mat hookers' support. She placed a notice in the *Truro Daily News* asking to meet experienced or novice mat hookers. To her surprise fourteen people responded, although only one had experience:

> (Was the response good?) Yes, fourteen. (Did you give them a beginners course?) No, I wasn't that far along myself. No, it was just to get together and for us all to--I was hoping to get someone who already knew

> [how to hook] who'd help us. But it didn't work that way. . . . We just all kind of started on our own (C8646).

Doris Eaton was invited to give a weekend seminar in Truro. She explained the basics and supplied the group with necessary tools, fabrics and patterns. She also introduced them to Rittermere and Moshimer stamped patterns, two popular brands used by Nova Scotian mat hookers. The Rittermere company was established in Vineland, Ontario by the Rowan family. Edna Rowan and her daughter Margaret owned a craft shop and taught crafts, including mat hooking. In answer to a demand for patterns, Edna and her husband Ted designed and mass-produced patterns which are popular in Canada. The company was sold and is now called the Rittermere-Hurst-Field Company.[39] Joan Moshimer, an artist from Kennebunkport, Maine, created her own mat designs and later began commercially producing them.[40] In the next chapter, the impact these patterns have had on mat hooking in Colchester county is discussed in more detail.

In 1983 Mrs. Wright opened a rug hooking shop with a friend from Tatamagouche. The store, operating from Mrs. Wright's home, mainly supplies the local group with hooking materials: plain burlap, used and new woolens, hooks, frames, stamped patterns, and many other necessary items. Mrs. Wright also sells hooked mats on commission, although her clientele, mostly local guild members, have no need for completed projects. In 1980 the group joined the Rug Hooking Guild of Nova Scotia, becoming the Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers.[41]

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[39]Letter received 14 March 1987, Doreen Wright to author.

[40]Mason "120 Participate" 8.

[41]In 1975 and in 1979 Truro and Bible Hill, respectively, celebrated their centennials with much research and focus on the history of the places and their inhabitants. I believe the word *Heritage* in the group's chosen title reflects the sustained awareness of local culture.

Since the decline of traditional mat making in Nova Scotia, the craft has been altered by individual and collective efforts in the United States and Canada. These changes dominate the current work being done in Colchester County. The next chapter focuses on the Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers' traditions and explores their motivations for engaging in the craft.

Chapter 4

The Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers

4.1. Introduction

In 1985 the Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers had thirty-six members although only twenty women were actively involved. An average of eighteen members usually attended the sessions. Those who live outside Truro are often unable to attend due to poor winter driving conditions and the inconvenience of travel.

The women's ages range from approximately thirty-five to eighty-six, the majority are between forty-five and sixty-five. All are married or widowed (one woman is divorced) and all have children. Only two have children still in school and living at home. Some mat hookers have had previous full or part-time jobs in the traditionally middle-income female job sphere; school teachers and nurses prevail. Many have not held paying jobs since they married, although the majority are involved in volunteer community and church organizations. Their husbands have, or had, professional occupations. Representatively, there is a surgeon, an ophthalmologist, the town mayor, a salesman, and a lawyer. The group's husbands' income and status range from middle to upper-middle class.

Very few members hooked mats prior to joining the guild. The only one I met with experience attended Mrs. Withrow's classes during the 1950s (mentioned in the previous chapter). All have engaged in other household crafts such as

knitting, needle point, embroidery, and crewel work. Most women experimented with other crafts before discovering mat hooking. Mrs. Organ said:

> Doreen [Wright] and I started crewel work. We took that course with Heather MacCumber [a local crafts teacher] and we enjoyed that. But then she got into the hooking and that is what she really wanted. (So the crewel work fell to the wayside?) That's right. [Laughter].[1]

Some, like Mrs. Wright, developed a passion for mat hooking, concentrating their free time on it, while others prefer a variety of crafts. An analysis of reasons for craft production follows later in the chapter.

Among this group, interest in mat hooking is sustained by their enjoyment of the weekly social gatherings and feelings of accomplishment and specialization. A description of a typical meeting offers insight into the sessions' social dynamics. Discussion of the most favoured techniques and pattern types indicate the yearly rug school's effects and influence.

4.2. Structure of the Meetings

The Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers meet informally once a week during the fall and winter months. Sessions are held in members' homes on a rotating basis dividing hostess duties among the group. I attended nine meetings between early February and mid-April, 1985, and as participant-observer I describe a typical gathering.

Women assemble every Tuesday between 10 am and 4 pm to hook mats. The first session I attended was held in Clifton, approximately ten kilometres

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[1] Interview with Audrey Organ, 16 April 1985, Bible Hill, Nova Scotia, MUNFLA C8643.

from Truro. By 10:30 am most women had arrived at the Purdy residence, located at the end of a snowy lane. The backyard had a shoveled area for five or six cars. Mr. Purdy requested that he park the women's cars as he felt winter conditions called for his driving experience.

Before starting the day's work, it is customary to have a hot drink and sample the sweets prepared by the hostess. The finest china cups, silver tea or coffee services, and best cutlery are used. Kay Purdy had coffee and muffins ready when we arrived and activity centered in the kitchen for the first half hour. In most homes I visited, this room is not used for mat hooking because there is not enough space for guests and food preparation. However, the Purdy's kitchen is spacious with a large round table. Several women sat there hooking on small lap frames or putting finishing touches on the mats' fringes. Others sat on couches and chairs in the living room and den.

Talk is structured spatially according to the women's position in the rooms, occurring among those in close proximity. To converse with someone more than eight feet away the speaker must raise her voice and risk disrupting others.[2] Occasionally someone walks slowly around the room stopping to chat briefly with others and admire their work. Women sitting far apart will move to the kitchen for lengthy conversations.

At these gatherings a rag cutting machine is always placed in the kitchen for general use. The group purchased Gertrude Beattie's twenty-five year old rag cutter. Mrs. Beattie, who hooked mats from the 1950s to the early 1960s, purchased the machine from the Bluenose Rug Company in 1955. Several women

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[2]Edward T. Hall observed average distances between North Americans engaged in different types of conversation. He established that public distance, characterized by full voice with slight overloudness, is approximately five and one half to eight feet. A greater distance requires further voice raising, deemed suitable only for addressing large groups. Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (1959; Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1973) 184.

who hook prodigiously have purchased their own cutters. Mrs. Hilchey, one of the group's most avid hookers, spoke of the convenience of having a cutter in her home.

> That was one of the first things I got when I realized I was going to like hooking. I bought the cutter because no way could I be fooling around borrowing cutters. It's nice to have it in your own home 'cause you cut as you need it. Otherwise you waste too much 'cause you cut too much or you're held up.[3]

Women who do not own cutters prepare enough fabric during meetings to last the week.

A variety of frames are available and choice depends on the mat hooker's level of involvement and financial commitment. Some women use inexpensive quilting or embroidery hoops to secure the burlap. This is not recommended by the group's more serious members because it is cumbersome and may damage the burlap and hooked areas. Figure 4.1 shows Mrs. Organ using a quilting hoop and Mrs. Purdy with a lap frame. Figure 4.2 illustrates a close-up of the lap frame.

Most guild members have purchased American-made metal lap frames from Mrs. Wright's craft shop. The top edges of the frames' sides have spikes or teeth on which the burlap is tightly stretched. Some women have made or bought quilted frame covers to protect their clothes from the metal teeth when the frame is not in use. The reverse of such a cover is seen in figure 4.1 dangling unused from Mrs. Purdy's frame. Stands are available to hold the frame off the lap, permitting freer body movement and enabling the worker to sit comfortably. These tools are purchased by those who hook a great deal and are willing to invest significantly in the craft. Quilting hoops, metal frames and stands are

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[3]Interview with Gerry Hilchey, 28 May 1985, Truro, Nova Scotia, MUNFLA C8645.

Figure 4-1: Audrey Organ using a quilting hoop as a mat frame and Frances Purdy using a factory built lap frame.



Figure 4.1

Figure 4-2: Frances Purdy with lap frame.



Figure 4.2

conducive to large gatherings because they are compact and lightweight, making them easy to transport.

At the weekly meetings women hook until noon when they break for lunch, although not all cease their mat activities at the same time. Lunch is casual; each woman brings a sandwich or salad and the hostess prepares a fancy dessert. The break provides a rest from sitting and a chance to mingle with those working in another area of the room. Some women return to work in half an hour while others, involved in conversation, begin the afternoon's work after 1:00 or 1:30. The hostess usually does not hook since she is too busy making the stay comfortable for others: making fresh tea and coffee, washing cups and plates, and chatting with guests. During the afternoon the next week's meeting place is announced. By 3:30 members begin returning home to prepare their families' supper. This also gives the hostess time to re-organize her home before her husband or children arrive.

4.3. Commercial Designs of the Guild

The Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers work predominantly with pre-stamped patterns mass-produced in Ontario or the United States. Central Canada and New England are the mat hooking hub of northeastern North America. The Maritime provinces have no large mat making companies since Garrett's closed in 1979, and rely on outside suppliers. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the two most popular brands are Rittermere Rugs from Ontario and Moshimer Designs from Kennebunkport, Maine. Other mat design companies exist, especially in New England where the craft was revived earlier than in Canada. Occasionally Colchester members buy patterns from these outfits; however, most mat bottoms are bought or ordered through Doreen Wright's shop.

She stocks a small variety of mats and compiles the group's orders for Rittermere and Moshimer mats. While reducing shipping costs, buying in bulk also produces a repertoire of similar designs.

4.3.1. Reasons for Use of Commercial Patterns

Colchester women's preference for using commercial patterns rather than individual designs is based on their initial hand-drawn projects, existing aesthetics, individual preferences, direction of role models, and effects of the yearly rug school. Each factor will be discussed, followed by a description of the group's most favoured patterns and techniques.

Initial Projects

The founding members, who began making mats in 1979, had no experience with designing or hooking patterns. Doreen Wright purchased a few Rittermere mat bottoms from Mrs. Eaton; however, most women were intimidated by their size and intricacy. Instead of using these large patterns, they drew their own small samplers to develop some familiarity with the craft. Due to their inexperience some results were discouraging. Dismayed by early attempts the women chose stamped patterns for their next projects. By then, experience and training had improved their hooking skills and, consequently, results were more pleasing.

Existing Aesthetics

Most women who made a home-designed mat have not attempted one

again.[4] The popularity of commercial designs among previously established mat hookers created a certain aesthetic expectation not easily matched by hand-drawn patterns. However, simple designs are used in the kitchen or by the front and back doors where they receive much wear. Highly decorative designs are used in the living room as mats, wall hangings, seat covers, table runners, and firescreen front pieces. They function primarily as decoration for which a less detailed, homemade design is considered inappropriate. This use of stamped designs reflects the early twentieth century tradition of reserving precision-designed commercial patterns for the best rooms.

Individual Preferences

Most Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers do not create designs, preferring to hook stamped mats using new techniques and skills. Mrs. Hilchey, an active group member, does not draw patterns because she wants to focus attention and effort on other aspects of the hooking process:

> I like colours. I just plain like colours. I used to go in and almost drool over some of the yarns. The same with some of the teachers' [displays] when they had all the stuff lined up. I don't create much. That doesn't interest me. It's the colours. I'd rather let someone else do the designing. If I can see what I can do with it, if I can see the design then I can work from there. That to me is the fun (C8645).

Whereas Mrs. Hilchey's interest is colours, another mat hooker may focus on creating perfectly even loops or on expert handling of difficult techniques. Within the group, women develop certain areas of expertise to satisfy their preferences and achieve individual merit.

[4] The exceptions to this statement are discussed below.

Existing Role Models

Preference for stamped patterns also stems from existing role models. Within the guild there is a core group who are highly proficient at the craft and dedicated to their work. Their mats are often praised as exemplary products. These women are the group's mainstay; they organize meetings, correspond with other guilds, and offer advice to fellow craftspeople. Consequently, other members defer to their opinions on mat hooking. These prominent members, to whom the rest look for guidance, hook stamped patterns. As role models they often unintentionally influence others.

The converse is noted in regions where the role model(s) emphasizes homemade designs. In Pictou, Sylvia Macdonald, mentioned in Chapter 3, draws mat patterns and encourages her colleagues to do likewise. She provides individual assistance and group classes to foster self-assurance and promote an understanding of design techniques. As mentioned before, Mrs. Macdonald organized a small project in 1985, in both Pictou and Colchester Counties, to introduce designing. In Pictou, many of her friends began making their own designs. In Colchester County the effort had little effect; in 1987, when I attended an afternoon meeting I noted that all but one member were making stamped mats. There is no prominent force within this group to sustain interest in homemade designs.

Annual Rug School

Instruction at the annual spring school is another factor in the preference for stamped mats. Pattern companies in the 1950s were owned by hooking

teachers, like Pearl McGowan, and therefore it was advantageous for instructors to promote commercial designs. The ensuing aesthetic and business trend continued into the 1980s, with owners and operators of leading pattern companies offering hooking courses. In addition, new techniques and styles taught by instructors are most suitable for intricate patterns. In the past, traditional methods and materials limited the detail obtainable in a design. Today, the widespread use of mechanical rag cutters and availability of chemical dyes permit the application of varied and intricate hooking techniques. As mentioned in the previous chapter, interest among middle and upper-middle classes altered the concept of mat hooking as an inexpensive hobby. No longer must salvaged material be used; instead, some women spend a considerable amount of money on fabric dyed specifically for mat hooking. With use of superior fabrics, dyes, and special techniques, mats are more elaborate than before.

Interest in mat hooking among this socio-economic group has also changed the way information is transmitted. Both formal education and variety are highly valued among this group.[5] In answer to these values, new methods are taught at rug schools throughout northeastern North America. The ever changing and increasing information fulfills contemporary mat hookers' aspirations to learning and growth.

Present day methods of dyeing, shading, and cutting cloth enable group members to hook intricate, detailed designs which can only be drawn by a skilled drafter. Although most people have sufficient talent to create pleasing geometric,

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[5]We have become an "expert society" requiring more and more highly trained individuals to fill occupational positions. Education has therefore become cultural currency, highly valued by the middle classes who perceive it to be a stepping stone to higher social and economic circumstances. Burton Clark examines this theory in *Educating the Expert Society* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1962). In particular, see the second chapter "Education, Occupation and Status," 44-84. I am indebted to Joan MacDonald for this reference.

floral, or pictorial designs, as noted in work from the early twentieth century, few are facile enough to equal these difficult contemporary creations. Colchester women derive pleasure from learning these techniques and skillfully applying them to commercial patterns. In this way, new expectations developed from use of contemporary methods and materials. To give an overview of techniques used by Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers I will discuss the courses and processes most popular among them.

4.3.2. Popular Courses

Beginners Class

The Beginners class teaches mat hooking basics: actual hooking techniques--straight-line or random hooking[6]--colour coordination, and design competence. Beginners' projects most often chosen by the Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers are more utilitarian and less decorative than those made with other techniques. Items commonly made in this style are chair seat or stool covers and small kitchen mats of simple design. These projects initiate beginners without intimidating them with complex designs or discouraging them with large amounts of hooking.

Primitives

A course similar to Beginners is Primitives, as traditional mats are now called. Donna Atkin, a mat hooking teacher, explains the technique in a craft manual:

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[6]The straight-line technique involves hooking strips of cloth in regular, even rows, usually horizontally across the design, resulting in a regimented surface. In random hooking, the fabric is pulled up in swirls and curves to soften the mat's appearance.

> The term "primitive" refers to this simpler approach to the craft. Small details and intricate shading are omitted, and instead of six or more value swatches of one color, the rug-artist looks for three values--light, medium and dark--and the wools can be quite different from each other.[7]

The principles behind this technique lie in older methods. Unblended colours were used by most early mat hookers who did not have resources or time to dye material in varying shades. Since women used scraps from a multitude of sources the fabrics were often of different weights and weaves. This produced variations in surface texture which revivalists find aesthetically pleasing only for old-fashioned mats. Primitive techniques are used by contemporary hookers to add a touch of nostalgia to a room. Figure 4.3 illustrates a primitive "Bluenose" stamped mat found in Audrey Organ's home. In general, this style is not as popular as more elaborate methods.

Shading

Shading is the most pervasive technique now used by mat hookers with formal training. For this method many values of one colour are used in a single element. For example, on a red rose, six or more shades are used to produce a life-like effect. The style imitates colours and shadows produced by the object's contours, creating a more realistic appearance. During the course, mat hookers learn to apply this technique to different motifs. Separate classes apply shading to such motifs as birds, sea shells, and fruit [Figure 4.6].

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[7]This manual was printed on a home computer and photocopied for sale in the class; Donna Atkin, *Primitive Primer* (N.p.: privately printed, 1985) 1.

Figure 4-3: Bluenose stamped mat made by Audrey Organ, ca. 1980.

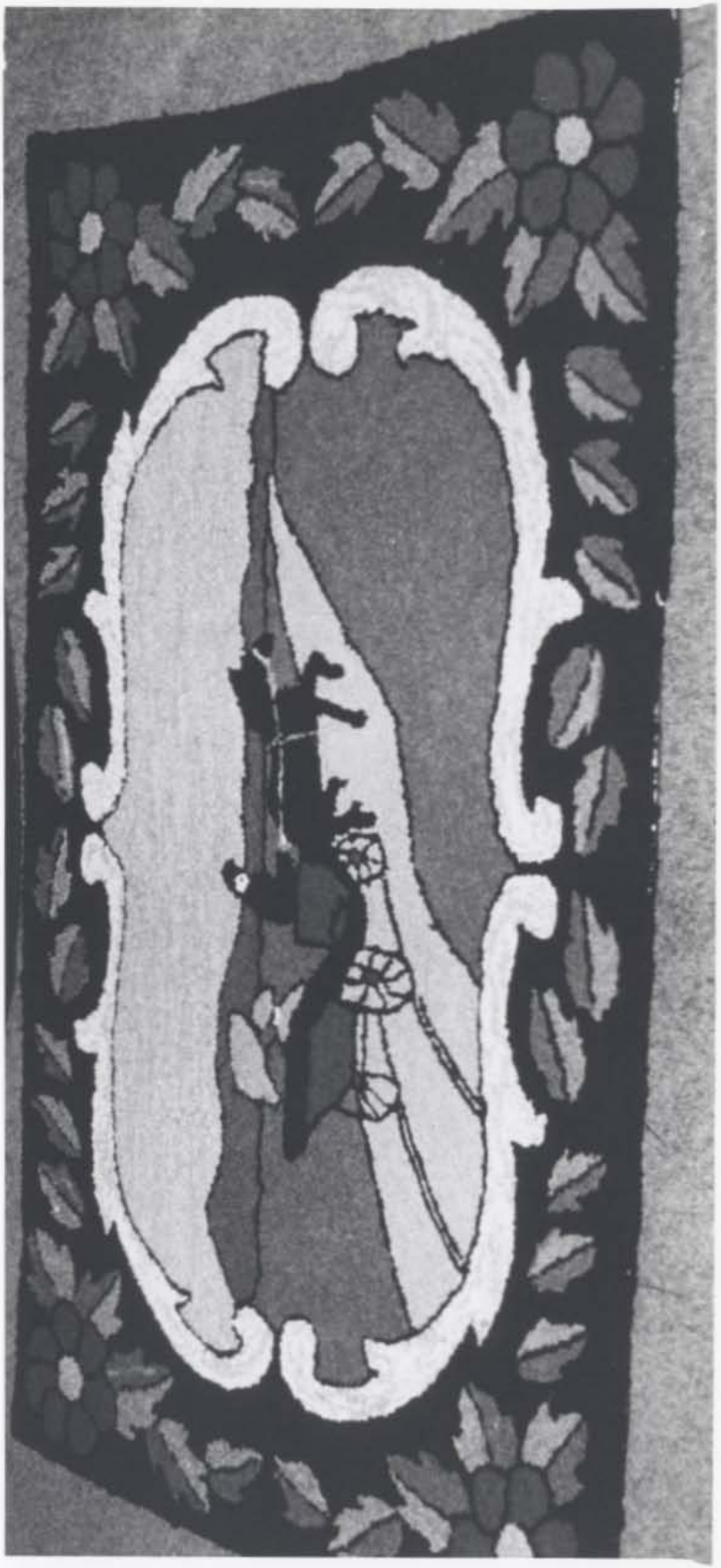


Figure 4.3

Figure 4-4: Floral mat made with the shading technique.



Figure 4.4

Figure 4-5: A mat made by Roberta Doyle in 1985. The use of shading is evident in the floral motifs.

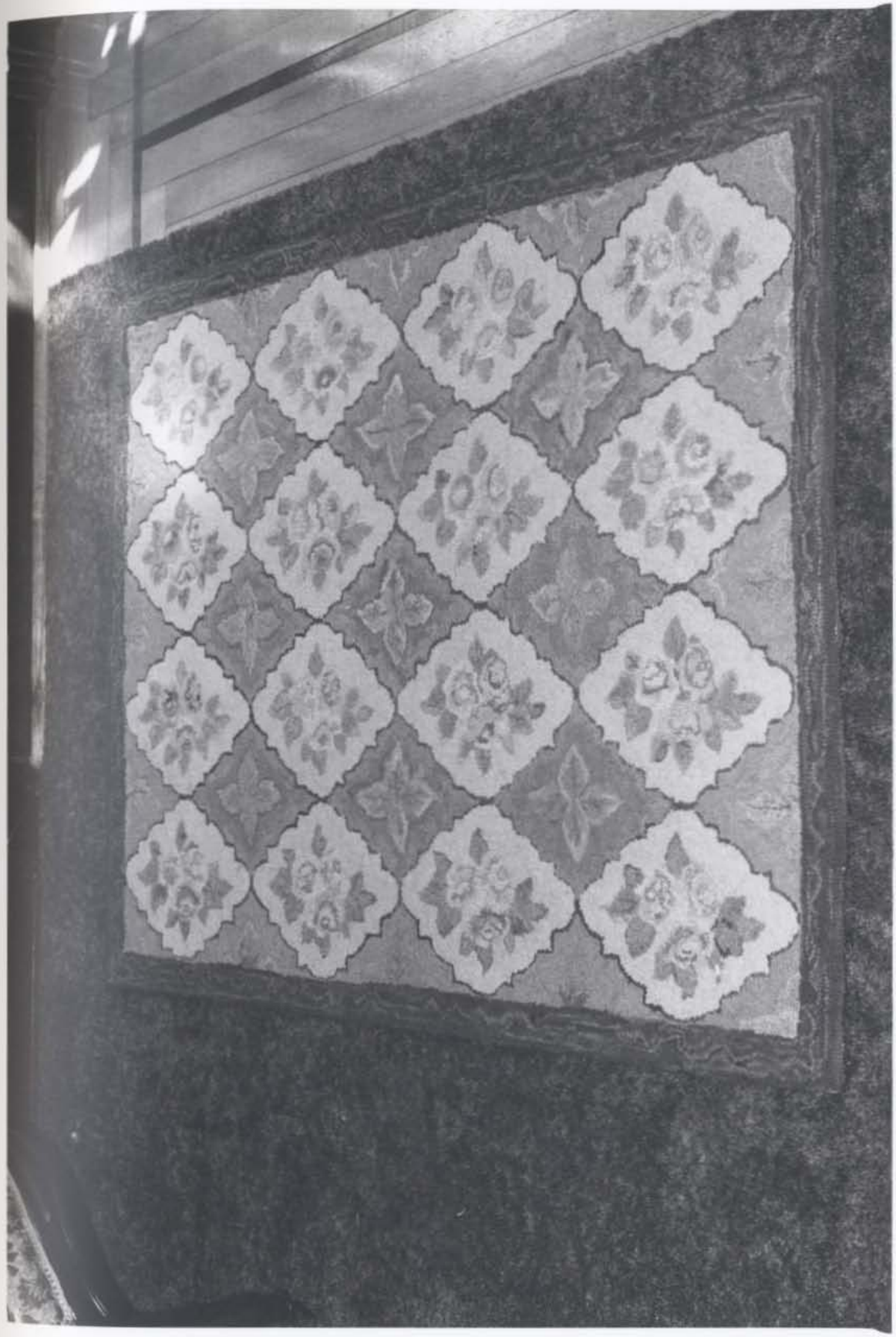


Figure 4.5

Figure 4-6: Bird motif wall hangings made by students during the 1984 mat hookers' school.



Figure 4.6

To be a proficient Shader one must either buy very expensive pre-dyed colour swatches from course instructors, or dye material at home. Mat hookers who dye at home usually solicit assistance from friends with dyeing experience, enroll in courses offered at the rug school or take courses organized by independent teachers.[8] Senior guild members, or those previously enrolled in courses, help those who have little or no dyeing experience. Although natural techniques are taught by some craftspeople, the rug school uses commercially prepared dyes because they are easier to use and produce brighter colours. Only the onion skin method, explained in Chapter 2, is taught by instructors; materials are fairly simple to collect and the process is not complicated.[9]

The Colchester group considers Shading the most important aspect of mat hooking and craft proficiency is judged by knowledge of the technique. This criterion is articulated in the following quote from one group member:

> Vida is one of our newer girls and she works quickly and she does a beautiful job, but she hasn't had any [rug] school and she doesn't do any shading.[10]

By judging Mrs. Miles' work in this way, the speaker implied that shading is very important to contemporary mat hooking. Shading softens a mat's appearance, a criterion by which mats are now judged. Viewing finished and

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[8]In the fall of 1982 Kay Maywood gave a weekend course in dyeing for craftspeople of various media at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College. Letter received from Doreen Wright, 14 March 1987.

[9]Many charts and books have been written on dyeing specifically for mat hookers. For more information see Doris Koehler, "Colour Planning Isn't Difficult," *Rug Hooker, News and Views* 4 (1975): 114; Joan Moshimer, "Dry Dyeing for 'Tweeds,' 'Checks,' and 'Paisleys'," *Rug Hooker, News and Views* 5 (1976): 136-7.

[10]Interview with Betty MacKenzie-Cleland, 10 April 1985, Bible Hill, Nova Scotia, MUNFLA C8641.

working projects, one is astounded by their beauty, harmony of colour and precise, even loops. During one hooking session a woman viewing Mrs. Hilchey's mat said: "It makes your eyes feel good when you look at it."[11] She was referring to the harmony Mrs. Hilchey achieved by carefully dyeing and blending her colours.

Orientals

The school offers a technique known as Orientals, deriving its name from the style it imitates. Oriental mats require no shading and need only three or four different colours. Techniques for hooking these mats are specific. Fabric is cut finely to produce an even, delicate appearance. Because the loops are so small, the fabric must be pulled through every hole to fill the surface. To obtain a smooth, controlled surface, mats are hooked in only one direction, with no random looping. The two long edges are fringed while the two short ones are bound. Fringes are made by turning the burlap's edge under and making, at intervals along the border, two rows of single crochet stitches. Cut fringes are threaded through the outer crochet stitch and knotted.[12] Figure 4.0 shows Dolly Moore fringing her incomplete Oriental with Gertrude Beattie's assistance, while Robert Doyle hooks a floral design on a metal lap frame.

Sculpturing

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[11] Fieldnotes, 16 April 1985.

[12] I learned this technique from an article by Donna Atkin, "Finishing Your Rug," unpublished manuscript, distributed during a mat hooking class.

Figure 4-7: Oriental mat completed by Audrey Organ in 1985.

Figure 4-8: Oriental mat made in 1984 by a rug hooking student.

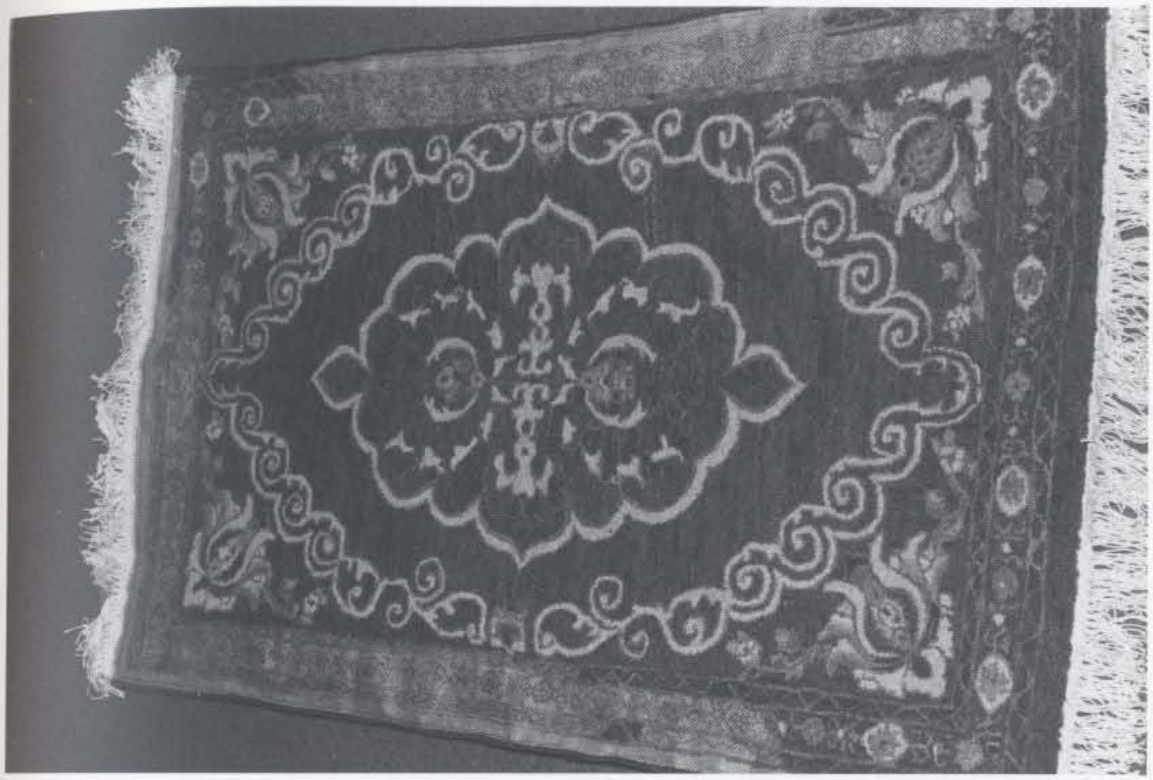


Figure 4.7



Figure 4.8

Figure 4-9: Dolly Moore, centre, crocheting a fringe on her Oriental mat, with the assistance of Gertrude Beattie, while Roberta Doyle hooks a floral design.



Figure 4.9

Sculpturing is a technique for making three-dimensional wall hangings. Its antecedents are recorded in mats surviving from the early twentieth century. In Prince Edward Island and in southern areas of Nova Scotia it was common to pull up loops of fabric several inches through the burlap. When the mat was complete the loops were clipped to form a soft surface. Sometimes the motif's contour and details were cut in various lengths creating a three-dimensional appearance. Usually only central motifs were sculptured to emphasize their form.[13]

Today, this technique is taught at the rug school, although instructors stress a more detailed approach. Tiny scissors are used to cut deep into a design, producing a relief image [Figure 4.11]. Although results are remarkable, the process is painstakingly slow. Due to the time and effort involved, this style is usually attempted only once. I asked Mrs. Hilchey if she enjoyed sculpturing as much as other techniques:

> I don't think I do. It's fairly hard. You have to pull up these loops, go in every hole and pull them up, cut them off and then sculpture. It just doesn't, it's slow. Now, Nellie Crowe did a gorgeous sculpture piece. And people say "Oh, how long it must have taken to do my rug" [her six foot by nine foot]. But it would have taken Nellie just as long to do her wall-hanging as to do my large mat. It's the cutting you see. You have to get way down in and cut to make three-dimensions (C8545).

Mrs. Hilchey's sentiments speak for the group's majority. Sculpturing is considered too time-consuming and precarious for the outcome. A steady hand and good eye are required; if a mistake is made while clipping, the entire piece

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[13]Interview with Jeanette McNeil, 17 May 1985, Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Kings County, MUNFLA C8647, and personal communications with Frances Purdy, February 1985, Bible Hill, Nova Scotia.

may be marred. Sculpturing requires strict attention and cannot be worked on during busy social gatherings. Women prefer projects that hook relatively quickly and can be carried on while socializing.

The courses offered at the spring rug school shape the direction of the year's projects. Students purchase appropriate mat bottoms for specific courses and work on them during the winter months. Many varied courses a. e offered although I have outlined only the most popular. The school's greatest effect is the transmission of new, exciting techniques which modernize the craft, making it more appealing and versatile to a large audience with a wide range of interests.

At the same time, courses and stamped patterns standardize Maritime mat hooking. Students from guilds in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island receive identical training and use stamped patterns from the same companies. As well, within regions and guilds certain group preferences arise. In the Colchester Guild a preference for shading dominates, while other guilds have different emphases. At the Annual Rug Hooker's meeting in Canning, Kings County in April 1984, I spoke with a man who took three courses in Oriental design. He said the Oriental style and patterns are very popular with the Annapolis Valley group of which he is a member. Although he started the craft ten years ago, he has not yet learned to shade.[14] Perhaps local enthusiasm for the Oriental style diverted his interest from other techniques. Involvement with the Colchester group whose collective emphasis is on shading, might have aroused his interest in it.

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[14]Conversation with Gordon Pearson, 20 April 1985, Canning, Kings County.

Figure 4-10: Close-up of Nellie Crowe's sculptured floral wall hanging.

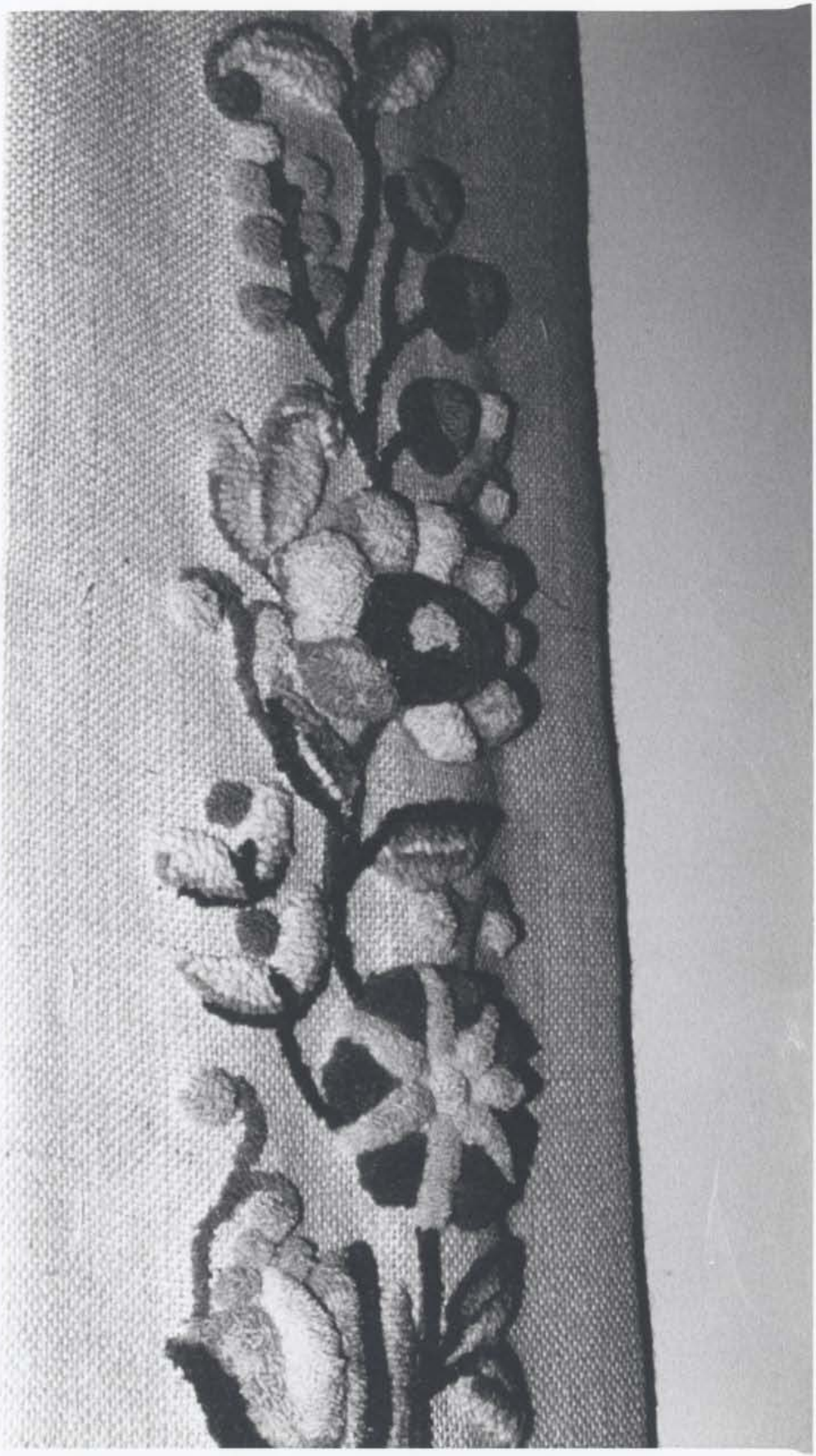


Figure 4.10

4.4. Individual Designs

The local guild acts as a regulating body, shaping members' expectations and direction. This is similar to the self-regulating aspect, still in effect today, of small communities earlier in the century.[15] Some women, however, step beyond community-based rules to create their own mat patterns.

Due to spatial and temporal limitations it is impossible to fully describe the attitudes of guild women who make their own patterns, or the mats themselves. Analysis of individual work within the guild disclosed a common theme in women's reasons for exploring their ideas. The three mat hookers I studied in depth have each created only one or two designs. The mats were made for specific purposes, for which a commercial pattern was stylistically inappropriate or financially unfeasible.

Mrs. Hilchey designed and hooked a six foot by nine foot traditional shell pattern hall mat [Figure 4.12]. She drew it herself because the price of a custom made stamped pattern of that size is prohibitive. Mrs. Miles hooked a Garfield[16] mat, which her son adapted from a poster. Her next mat also depicted Garfield, with Pookey, and the inscription "We're in this Together." She used these characters because the mats were gifts for her two teenage children. Mat designs for young children's rooms are available from some suppliers but none suitable for adolescents. Mrs. MacKenzie-Cleland also designed a mat for a particular person. In 1983 she hooked a mat to commemorate her daughter's return to Nova Scotia:

> That one I made myself. I designed myself. It's Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and there's the ferry and a

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[15] The guild's influencing aspects are examined in a later section.

[16] Garfield, a comic strip cat created by Jim Davis, is characterized by his ferocious appetite and love for his teddy bear, Pookey.

> helicopter. I designed it for my daughter. She and her husband were in Gander and they transferred to Shearwater. And they came over September of '83. He was repairing helicopters [in Gander]. And they came over on the ferry and there was a car waiting on this side. And I put a Gander sign and a Truro sign [on the mat] (C8642).

The mat depicted partial maps of the two provinces, the date of her daughter's return to the mainland, a drawing of a helicopter, a car and ferry at North Sydney, and town signs to indicate their homes. For this occasion Mrs. MacKenzie-Cleland decided a personal design was more meaningful than a purchased pattern.

A few women in this guild make their own patterns when available commercial mats are inappropriate to their needs. For the most part, though, Colchester Heritage Hookers prefer stamped designs' appearance.

4.5. Functions of The Meetings

4.5.1. Information Exchange

Before the decline of mat hooking in Nova Scotia in the first half of this century, advice was easily obtained from family or community members. Contemporary mat hookers, however, often have no relatives or neighbours with craft knowledge to whom they can turn for instruction.[17]

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[17] This situation is found among groups engaging in activities which were once traditionally learned. While researching contemporary quilters in Colchester County I discussed problems they encounter while working on their projects. Many do not have relatives or neighbours who quilt and often find it difficult to get assistance when they encounter problems. One woman jokingly suggested there should be a telephone help-line for quilters, called "Dial-a-Quilter," which women could call with their questions. (Conversation with Nancy Fraser during Phemie Menard's quilting class, 8 April 1985, North River, Colchester County.)

Figure 4-11: Gerry Hilchey hooking her large "Shell" pattern hall mat.

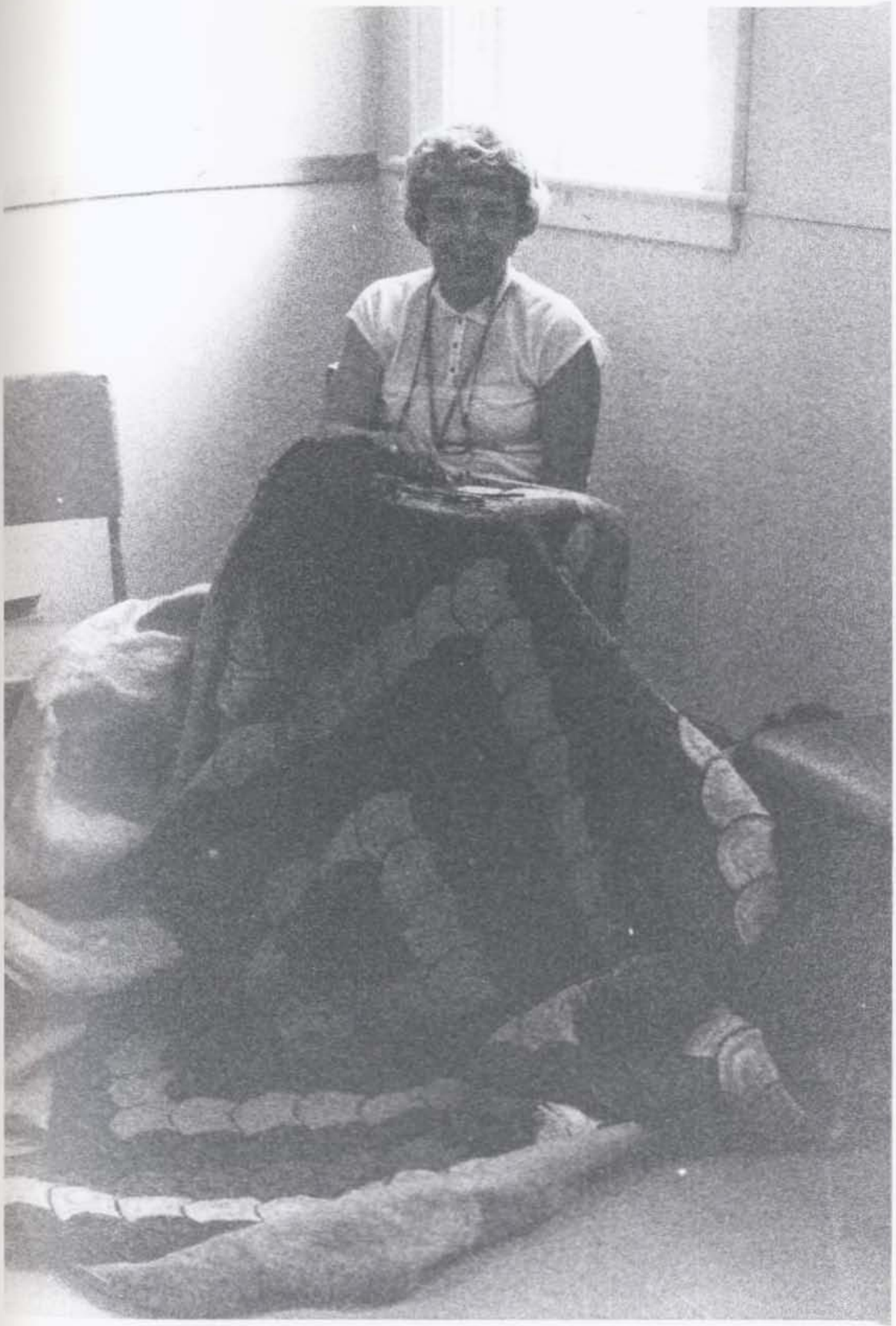


Figure 4.11

Figure 4-12: Garfield mat made by Vida Miles.



Figure 4.12

Figure 4-13: Betty MacKenzie-Cleland hooking a stamped mat.



Figure 4.13

The Colchester County mat hookers' guild substitutes for traditional community or kinship systems by its networks of experienced instructors. Weekly meetings offer the opportunity to associate with and seek advice from fellow enthusiasts. Initially, Mrs. Wright established the group to provide contacts with whom she could consult. Today, the women are comfortable with the basic skills, and new members benefit from their experience. With new techniques taught annually at the spring school, the craft has changed greatly from its antecedents, perpetuating a need for contact with others who have experience.

Revivalist mat hookers save all fabric scraps because shading and fine detailing require small amounts of fabric to produce the desired effect. Furthermore, current market preference for man-made and blended fabric has caused a shortage of inexpensive used wool garments. Members strongly advise that only pure wool be used since it wears well, accepts dye easily, and does not ravel when cut. Wool also produces a soft, muted texture, a characteristic important to revivalist mat hookers. Mrs. Crowe recalled with amusement how she learned about this fabric rule:

> That was a real nightmare. I bought more things that I couldn't use. Because we didn't realize that everything had to be 100% wool. So of course we'd go to the Salvation Army and Frenchy's and rummage sales and I gathered up a whole garbage bag full and when Doris Eaton came up [to instruct the group] I think there was one garment I could use (C8649).

Woolen scraps are often brought to the weekly gatherings and offered at random to women who need a particular shade.

Although women may not actually seek help at the meetings, the group supports them by praising and acknowledging their work. Mat hooking is a slow, often solitary procedure and comments, praise, and recognition are appreciated, especially from colleagues.

4.5.2. Social Gathering

It is already noted that the Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers' meetings are entertaining. William R. Bascom says the overt nature and purpose of a folkloric event often masks a deeper meaning.[18] Weekly meetings offer members an opportunity to spend time away from home with others who share their interests. Although several members of the Colchester Guild work part-time, none have full-time careers outside the home. Increasing numbers of women in the job market has meant fewer neighbours with whom housewives can interact during the day:

> [The] decline in social density around the home, comparable to the rural-urban shift in population has also left individual house workers potentially more isolated. Since most women are not full-time housewives, those women who are at home full-time may find it increasingly difficult to build and maintain social contacts with other adults.[19]

Several women mentioned that the weekly meetings offer a rare opportunity to socialize with peers. Marjorie Denyar lives on a rural road in Pictou County, approximately thirty kilometers from Truro. Her children have moved away and she is alone much of the day. She said the regular trips to these lively sessions provide relief from the insularity of country living. Another mat hooker, Mrs. MacKenzie-Cleland from Bible Hill, lives with and cares for two semi-invalid, elderly women. To cope with the constant pressure she spends an afternoon each

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[18]William R. Bascom "Four Functions of Folklore," *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1965) 290.

[19]Myra Marx Ferree, "Satisfaction with Housework: The Social Context," *Women and Household Labor*, ed. Sarah Fenstermaker Berk (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980) 108. See also Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework* (New York: Pantheon, 1974) 88-92.

week sewing for the Red Cross[20] and one day with the Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers.

Several mat hookers have recently moved to Truro and joined the group to meet others.[21] Incorporation is an important function of small groups, providing newcomers with a sense of place. Vida Miles began hooking in September, 1984 after she and her family moved to Truro. Her neighbour, Doreen Wright, introduced her to the craft, suggesting she attend meetings. Mrs. Miles did not know many people and felt this was a good opportunity to become acquainted with local women.[22]

The mat hookers' group fulfills both manifest and latent functions. Since specialization of mat hooking has resulted in fewer opportunities for assistance, the meetings offer a regular opportunity to exchange hooking ideas and supplies. It also serve social needs, being enjoyable weekly gatherings.

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[20]The Truro Red Cross chapter meets once a week to make quilts, sew curtains, aprons, tea towels and the like for needy families, usually victims of fire. The group consists mainly of elderly women who have quilted since their youth. Some, like Mrs. MacKenzie-Cleland, assist by sewing or knitting. During the afternoon, these women, most of whom have attended the Red Cross group for twenty or thirty years, discuss personal, local and national events. They enjoy the social elements and the feeling of benevolence obtained by helping a worthy cause.

[21]I distributed a questionnaire to a beginners quilting class in March of 1985. Eight of the nine women who completed the questions are long time residents of the Truro area and have many friends and contacts. They said they joined the group to learn quilting. One woman, who recently moved to Truro, replied that she joined not just to learn the craft, as she had prior experience, but to meet other women.

[22]Interview with Vida Miles, 2 April, 1985, Bible Hill, Nova Scotia, MUNFLA C8641.

4.6. Functions of Mat Hooking

Earlier I discussed the weekly meetings' social functions, commenting that non-working women need contact with peers. Also, some people begin crafts to keep active. Leisure hours for non-employed women increase when children leave home; the pursuit of home-crafts fills women's time. This is clearly indicated in a response to a questionnaire distributed in a quilting class in 1985. In answer to the question "Are you or have you been involved in other crafts? Please list these crafts and give brief descriptions of their uses" one non-employed woman stated: "I supply two craft shops in crochet items. I'm hooked on crochet and I do it from AM to PM. Project to work on in each room in my house and one by the phone."[23]

Not all housewives make crafts; some find alternative interests to fill their days. Also, not all craftmakers are housewives, as many women, employed or not, pursue craft activities during their spare time. Reasons for making crafts vary according to individual circumstances. Factory workers may make crafts for self-fulfillment denied at work; retired men or women may hook mats to reaffirm their vitality; career women may use it as a relaxing pastime. In the Colchester women's case, craft production does more than alleviate boredom and fill the days; it provides an avenue through which women, especially non-employed women, visibly display their contribution to the home. The following section examines how production of handiwork is connected to status maintenance or enhancement.

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[23]Nancy Fraser, questionnaire, North River, Colchester County, March, 1985.

4.6.1. Status Through Mat Hooking

Women who attend these craft meetings come mainly from middle income, traditional households. Husbands either have full-time occupations outside the home or are retired, while wives engage in domestic-care activities, ensuring the families' comfort. Traditionally the husband's occupation is the measure of socio-economic status for both partners, a trend which still prevails.[24] In conservative societies, where women are seen as an extension of their spouses, it is normal to identify wives by their husbands. Women are aware of their situation and often attempt to gain separate status.

The Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers are primarily housewives. Some are employed part-time outside the home and many are busy with volunteer church or community work. While my relationship with them did not warrant asking questions about social and personal status, the subject arose during a mat hooking session. Mrs. Wright talked about her husband always sheltering her from decision making, feeling it is a man's duty. She told the group how she "taught him a lesson" and related the following anecdote: The Wrights enjoy snowmobile riding in winter and Mr. Wright always drove since he felt Mrs. Wright was incapable of handling the machine. One day she insisted he let her drive. Sitting in the driver's seat with her husband seated behind, she drove slowly for a few metres, then suddenly sped up, racing along at a great pace. She was able to keep the snowmobile on a steady path over the hilly terrain. Once stopped, she permitted her husband to resume control of the snowmobile. Mrs. Wright said this exemplified how men, by purporting to protect women, keep them out of the mainstream of life.

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[24]This is noted by many historians and sociologists. For further readings see: Valerie Kincade Oppenheimer, *Work and the Family: A Study of Social Demography* (Toronto: Academic, 1982) 257; Jessie Bernard, *The Female World* (New York: Free, 1981) 188; Patricia Crawford, ed., *Exploring Women's Past: Essays in Social History* (Boston: Allen, 1983).

The others agreed that "at one time" women were too sheltered by their fathers and husbands, implying *they* do not feel so now. Perhaps compared to previous generations, women's circumstances in the home and society have improved, giving the impression of parity between the sexes. Mrs. Wright's story indicates that some women are not treated equally by the instrumental men in their lives and they acutely feel it.

Society devalues women's traditional work and undermines home-makers' self-esteem, especially with current emphasis on career women. Since the importance of housework and family care is under-appreciated and under-rated in western societies, a non-working woman may feel pressured to view her household contribution as inadequate. Myra Marx Ferree makes this point in her study of women and housework:

> As housework becomes more likely to be a second job rather than a full-time occupation, the full-time housewife is more likely to be seen as not making her full contribution to society or to her individual family. This endemic devaluation of housework may make it a less psychologically rewarding job.[26]

Social pressure exerts great influence on people, affecting how individuals

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[26]Ferree 108. Other researchers note current reactions to women's traditional roles both by women themselves and by others. In most cases traditional work is devalued by respondents. See: Winnifred D. Wandersee, *Women's Work and Family Values, 1920-1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981) 103-117; Bernard 245; Ann Oakley, "Reflections on the Study of Household Labor," *Women and Household Labor*, ed. Sarah Fenstermaker Berk (Beverley Hills: Sage, 1980) 8.

view themselves.[26] Non-working women, in the face of contemporary society's judgment, often feel their homemaker role is underrated and compensate by emphasizing their productive work.[27] A woman can provide concrete evidence of her work by producing handicrafts for use in her home. Mrs. Organ pointed out many objects in her home which she made:

> When you look around here, everything in my house I've made, practically. This is crewel work here and that's needlepoint, and in the dining room . . . there's cross stitch embroidery. Yes, I just had that one framed (C8643).

Sylvia Macdonald implies her craft efforts are worthy of more esteem than usually ascribed to pastimes:

> It's not *just* a craft. It's part of your life really. . . . My other main thing is that I haven't had to spend a lot of money to do it. It's something that you can progress in your expenses as you wish. You can start with a piece of burlap or hook and a few rags and you're away. And if you are finding that you can turn it into a *sale*. . . if you really wanted to make it a *paying job* you could [latter emphasis mine].[28]

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[26]Charles Horton Cooley refers to the social self-image as "the looking-glass self." He contends that people's impression of how others view them is important in the way they see themselves. Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1902; New York: Schocken, 1964) 183-85. In Wadel's Newfoundland study, a welfare recipient's attempt to preserve his self-esteem and public status is comparable to housewives who, although they deem their homemaker role is worthy, feel pressured to prove their value and contribution. Cato Wadel *"Now, Whose Fault is That?" The Struggle for Self-Esteem in the Face of Chronic Unemployment* Institute of Social and Economic Research 11 (St. John's, NF: Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1973).

[27]The term "productive work" is used here as explained in Ann Oakley, *Women's Work: The Housewife, Past and Present* (New York: Vintage, 1974) 11.

[28]Interview with Sylvia Macdonald, 15 April 1985, Pictou, Pictou County, Nova Scotia, MUNFLA C8644.

Mrs. Macdonald stresses two ideas. First, mat hooking is not *just* a craft; it is part of her life and her social identity. This indicates an attempt to promote her work from a hobby to a position of importance.[29]

When I asked Gerry Hilchey why she began hooking, she replied she wanted to make seat-covers for the kitchen chairs. She wanted to produce useful objects for the home. She and a neighbour joined the group together but Mrs. Hilchey emphasized the difference in approach. "I think she [the neighbour] just wanted to hook. But what I make I want to use and I want to make it for a certain thing" (C8645). Like Mrs. Organ, she is keenly aware of the decorative and material contribution she makes to her home and family.

Use of handicrafts as a means of enhancing personal status is best illustrated when items are made as gifts. Handicraft producers enjoy giving their wares as a statement of their love and viability. The time taken to produce a hooked mat or quilt cannot be recovered in prices the general public can afford. The recipient is well aware of the work, thought, and love which went into each object. Simon Bronner noted similar reactions by recipients of handmade objects:

> George Blume's daughter Patty has a chain her father made years ago, which is tucked away in the attic of her house. For her the chain evokes family memories. It is Christmas with his handmade fence around the tree, and his always making things. Carvers commonly make things for their families. The objects tie them together more closely. . . .[30]

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[29]Bronner, in his study of chain carvers, stresses the importance of crafts as an integral part of the maker's self and public image. In the introductory chapter he outlines his major informants' life histories, illustrating how chain carving fits their personalities and world view. Simon J. Bronner, *Chain Carvers: Old Men Crafting Meaning* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1983) 17-72.

[30]Bronner 106.

Bronner goes on to describe what the maker receives in exchange for giving products:

> The carver reaches out and offers, or leaves, the chain. He may get goods in return, but more often he gives simply for the satisfaction of giving and the attention it brings him and his work.[32]

The craftsperson who makes hooked mats for family members is solely responsible for their creation. All parties realize they are unique and cannot be matched by mass-produced, purchased objects. Producing such items for the home gives these women a sense of capability and proficiency. By making or giving items, they are awarded the status of producer--a highly valued role in western society.[33]

Hooked mats are made to elevate a woman's status in the eye's of her family and society. They engage in a craft few people understand, thereby gaining recognition as specialists. As this status is already ascribed, they need not enhance it by making their own designs. The use of stamped patterns, mirroring socially learned aesthetics, gives them the same advantage as production of individual designs. In fact, they use commercial patterns because homemade designs are less intricate and therefore less pleasing to themselves and their audience.

This group seeks fulfillment and recognition at a time when former household roles have changed. Traditionally oriented as homemakers, they find themselves with reduced obligations as their children have grown and no longer need care. In addition, today's society emphasizes women's careers, an area most

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[32]Bronner 106.

[33]Oakley "Reflections" 8.

guild members chose not to enter. The craft offers an avenue, in keeping with tradition, through which they display productivity and achievement. The next chapters explore the elderly's search for status enhancement and fulfillment.

Chapter 5

Defying Cultural Norms: The Use of Mat Hooking to Express Individuality

A Mat

A mat is Imagination
It comes through the eyes
It comes through the fingers
It comes through the burlap
It comes until you are a happy hooker
Now that's a mat.

Elmer Mingo, 1986

5.1. Introduction

Due to a multitude of factors, artistic creativity is often unchannelled until a person's later years. As children most people are encouraged to express themselves in visual and dramatic arts. They colour and draw, create games and plays, by themselves or in groups. As they grow older, expression is often restrained by social sanctions and personal responsibilities. As young men and women mature and begin careers and families, less time and energy is available for personal creativity. Hence, people may only find opportunity later in life--after retirement--to devote themselves to hobbies permitting artistic exploration.[1]

[1]Laurel Doucette's, "The Emergence of New Expressive Skills in Retired and Later Life in Contemporary Newfoundland," diss., Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1985, offers a discussion on aging and creativity from a developmental approach. She offers examples from ten informants who have begun or resumed creative skills in their later years.

While finding more time for hobbies, retired people are often restricted in their choice of activity by economic constraints or physical disabilities. Such restful, unstrenuous hobbies as knitting, needlepoint or mat hooking are popular crafts among the elderly. For some women, these are familiar household activities once practiced for necessity. Men turn to conventionally-termed "women's" crafts when more active, traditionally male activities become too strenuous. Men's treatment of feminine pastimes is coloured by their specific aspirations, role models or teachers, and individual personalities. In 1985 I met and befriended a male mat hooker from Colchester County. Studying his treatment of the craft elicits information on a masculine approach to this hobby.[2]

5.2. Background and Retirement

Elmer Mingo was born in Salmon River, Colchester County, in 1917. As a boy he lived on the edge of town in a two-storey white house. At twenty-three he began working for the Canadian National Railroad in Truro. During World War Two he was called for military service in Lewisporte, Newfoundland. Returning to Truro, he resumed his career with the Railroad, eventually becoming a conductor. In 1949 Elmer married Dot Asnor from Hants County; they settled in Salmon River and raised three children. Elmer retired in 1977.

As the transition to retirement can be frustrating, many people seek activities to provide entertainment and occupy their hours. Some scholars suggest artistic creativity is a tool used to ease troubled times:

> Incapacitation, incarceration, or the loss of a friend or a relative or of one's own health fosters introspection

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[2]One of Doucette's informants knits--a traditionally female task--but couples it with net making, a masculine activity; Doucette 185-87. Elmer's masculine treatment of "female" hobbies is discussed later in the chapter.

> which in turn may promote the production of a song or a story or another work expressing one's feelings; such expressive activity helps the individual to regain part of what has been lost or to compensate for that loss in an attempt to readjust to life and its vicissitudes. The individual who has suffered loss is charged with nervous energy, sensitive to the human condition, and most aware of himself and his own frailty.[3]

Upon retirement Elmer suffered a period of uncertainty. Although busy, he acutely felt the loss of direction and structure his vocation afforded. Barbara Myerhoff, discussing differences between male and female reactions to aging, argues that women often fare better than men. She states when men retire they lose the prop of former instrumental activities, while traditional women, whose major role in life was mother, wife and grandmother, still retain and often enhance their expressive roles.[4] Losing a vocation through retirement often causes a loss of identity and worth. J. A. Jahoda found this true among the group he studied.

> First of all the meaning of work has already been alluded to with reference to the notion of masculinity. Here it is necessary to expand the point by noting that studies of male unemployment and retirement indicate that a man's occupation is likely to be his major

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[3]Michael Owen Jones, *The Hand Made Object and Its Maker* (Berkeley: U. of California P, 1975) 165. Simon J. Bronner also deals with the relationship between art production and grieving in *Chain Carvers: Old Men Crafting Meaning* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1985) 36.

[4]Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days* (New York: Dutton, 1978) 261-268. For additional information on gender differences in aging see Morris Zelditch, "Role Differentiation in the Nuclear Family: A Comparative Study," *Family, Socialization and Interpretation Process*, ed. Talcott Parsons and Robert F. Bales (Glencoe, IL: Free, 1955) 307-52; and Nancy Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality," *Women, Culture and Society*, ed. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1974) 43-66.

source of identity.[5]

Before and after retirement Elmer was a busy man. He and Dot own a camper-trailer and spend many summer months camping in the Maritimes, Quebec and Ontario. They grow vegetables and flowers in their garden. As a Truro native, Elmer has many kin and friendship ties in the area with whom he keeps regular contact. He also has interest in the larger world community; Elmer regularly watches evening local and national news on television and during visits often made reference to current affairs.

A man with this level of personal and community involvement should be, upon retirement, well-adjusted and fulfilled. However, during my first visit I found evidence to the contrary. Elmer said the days seemed long after he stopped working for the railroad. He said, "You got to have something to do or a fellow would go pretty near nuts."[6] I questioned him later about his decision to begin mat hooking:

> (You found you really enjoy doing it?) Oh, yeah, yeah, yes. I, ah, I can put a, a lot these days in the winter. Now, in the summer I don't do much but I, nearly every day I go down to the cellar and spend an hour, hour and a half, or two hours and listen to my favourite Keith Barrie. Mr. Cole from Winnipeg and the other programmes that's on stereo there in the afternoon. One-oh-two point seven on "RSVP." And you know, these kinds of programmes and oh, you listen to them and it's something. It just sits there and you listen to it. (And so you pass the time?) Yeah, yeah. That's right. It's a hobby. Passing the time. Now, my brother, he does a little bit, he does an awful

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[5]J. A. Jahoda, *Marienthal: The Sociology of an Unemployed Community* (London: Tavistock, 1972) 104.

[6]Fieldnotes, 26 January 1985.

> lot of, oh, carpenter work. Making things. Things of this nature. Oh, everybody's got to keep themselves busy.[7]

More than his many diverse activities and interests were needed to give his life focus and meaning. He needed one unifying pursuit to provide a pastime, entertainment, relaxation, and a sense of accomplishment.[8]

He did not begin mat hooking immediately after retirement; he first tried other crafts including latchet hooked rugs. I saw one mat made in this style and asked when and why he made it. "Oh, that was after I finished railroading I did that one but that was a latch hook. I didn't care for that kind of work" (C8635). Finding latchet hooking unsatisfying, Elmer began tinkering with carpentry, making small useful items for the home. Although he gave up woodworking in favour of mat hooking, his completed projects were a continued source of pride. On my first visit he produced a wooden object. "Do you know what this is?" he riddled.[9] The object had a narrow flat base with two oblong sides rising from the bottom. "It's a napkin holder," I said quickly. Elmer looked triumphant. "Take it home with you," he said. The napkin holder, neither sanded nor painted, was held together with glue. The object's simplicity and mode of construction did not diminish Elmer's pride of workmanship. It spoke for his continued active vitality and resourcefulness. This theme of usefulness, reflected in the mat designs he makes, recurred again and again in our conversations.

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[7] Interview with Elmer Mingo, 5 January 1986, Salmon River, Colchester County, Nova Scotia, MUNFLA C8635.

[8] It is generally acknowledged that crafts are used by retired men to help adjust to new roles. A journalist described one man's woodcarving, explaining how it compensated for his loss of employment; Linda Mason, "Woodcarving Now More than a Hobby," *Chronicle-Herald* 29 Oct. 1979: 21

[9] Simon Bronner describes the riddling nature of some handicrafts, stating the object encourages interaction with others; Bronner 108-111. Elmer's search for interaction is discussed below.

5.3. Inception of Mat Hooking

Elmer began mat hooking four years into retirement after seeing it illustrated in a *Time Life* hobby book:

> The only reason I took it up, I bought a book one time called *Back to Basics*. Well I was just thumbing through it and I said, "I don't know why in the hell I can't do that." So that's how I took it up. If I hadn't got the book I mightn't have been at it yet.[10]

Elmer's purchase of the book indicates his search for an activity to fulfill his needs and occupy his hours. Mat hooking attracted him because it was not physically trying. In 1985 when we met, Elmer walked very slowly and had difficulty managing stairs. Mat hooking's sedentary nature is suitable for his condition, while the productivity helps him cope with declining strength.

He tried other hobbies but prefers mat hooking because "it is more rewarding for the time spent."[11] Elmer's techniques, discussed below, enable him to complete mats rapidly. Starting as a small hobby to fill time, mat hooking now involves both him and Dot, who began hooking in 1983, occupying their days in winter and summer.

Elmer usually designs and hooks mats in his basement. There he keeps his large moveable frame and a collection of rags and yarns [Figure 5.1]. A naked light bulb provides good overhead lighting. A nearby work bench, telling of previous, more physical activities, sports an FM radio tuned to "CBC Stereo"--the national, mainly classical music network. Here Elmer spends winter mornings

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[10]Interview with Elmer and Dot Mingo, 26 January 1985, Salmon River, Colchester County, Nova Scotia, MUNFLA C8633.

[11]Letter received, 17 July 1986, Elmer Mingo to author.

or afternoons drawing or hooking mats. In spring he moves his supplies to a small tool shed beside his house where he sits by the open door.

Elmer's approach to drawing and hooking mats is highly individualistic, reflecting his strong-willed personality. His many hooked pieces defy easy organization and description. In the first four years he made over twenty-five mats in a variety of styles. I have outlined his mats chronologically to illustrate important changes in his approach to designs and techniques.

People first approach new hobbies or crafts tentatively to become familiar with the forms and techniques. Once comfortable, they further explore and express their emotions and philosophies. Changes in the art's form may occur during the learning process. To account for these changes, I have divided Elmer's material into three categories based on designs and techniques he employed. As will be seen, both factors are essential elements in his work. In this analysis, style and theme are treated separately. Following the introduction to his styles Elmer's mats are discussed in relation to themes he explores, and messages he expresses. For the most part, themes do not fall into the same categories as styles.

5.3.1. Early Mats

Elmer was familiar with mat hooking, having watched his mother make mats, although he had not considered it appropriate entertainment for himself. That is, not until he saw a craft book displaying it as suitable for both sexes. He designed several mats following the book's suggestions on materials and techniques and paralleling his mother's early traditions.

Elmer used old burlap potato bags for the foundation. He hooked with woolen and cotton remnants of underwear and tee-shirts inexpensively obtained from Stanfield's textile factory in Truro and from the Windsor Wear Company in

Figure 5-1: Elmer Mingo hooking a "Hit and Miss" design in his basement workshop.



Figure 5.1

Figure 5-2: Dot Mingo displaying her house and garden wall hanging.



Figure 5.2

Windsor, Hants County. Unlike other mat hookers, Elmer has no preference for wool fabric, using and mixing any material available. His only criterion is the material's expense and accessibility. He discussed this one day when I asked what fabrics he uses:

> (So you use whatever you have?) Yeah, just whatever you can get your hands on. If you have a nice coat on coming into the house perhaps you may not have it going out. [Laughter] Not quite that bad, but it could get that serious (C8633).

A joking statement, nevertheless it reflects mat hookers' constant search for supplies.

Working in isolation from revivalist hookers in Colchester County, Elmer did not know about mechanical rag cutters. Therefore, like his mother, he cut material with scissors. Even after learning of this labour saving device, he continued to cut by hand as the machine's cost is prohibitive.

Elmer's first patterns were unique renditions of traditional designs remembered from childhood, although given masculine treatment. In their study of objects as symbols of the self, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton claim men and women respond differently to stimuli and may ascribe different meanings to them. This is due to sex stereotypes and their influence on personalities:

> Men not only act in accordance to masculine stereotypes; they also respond to things around them in terms of appropriate masculine scripts when they supposedly choose freely for themselves. In other words, the selves of men and women represent different sets of intentions or habits of consciousness.[12]

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[12]Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1981) 106.

Elmer emphasizes his maleness while exploring a women's hobby and traditionally feminine motifs. He may be attempting to counteract mat hooking's feminine image. Two floral designs hooked in 1981 suggest traditional, early twentieth century mat patterns but are devoid of fine details which suggest a woman's hand. There are no fine buds or sprays of blossoms; instead, Elmer relies on bold motifs outlined against plain backgrounds. On one rectangular mat a large central sunflower is framed by four smaller flowers [Figure 5.3]. The brown central sunflower is surrounded by fifteen yellow petals, each adorned with red, blue, pink or white lines running lengthwise through it. Four smaller flowers, also plainly depicted, have elaborate colour schemes. This mathematically-applied use of colour recurs in Elmer's mats and its meaning is discussed below.

The viewer responds immediately to the movement and vigour radiating from the circular centres, the petals' out-reaching spokes, and the calculated variety of colour. The design reduces objects, by elimination of detail, to mere symbols of their referents. Elmer tried not to capture the motifs' details but used their images to create a strong visual stimulus, emphasizing colour combinations.

Elmer gave only cursory attention to these early efforts, allowing no time for further discussion or admiration. He was derogatory about the material used. Pointing to one mat he said: "This one here was made on an old potato bag. Just junk. You can see how flimsy it is"[13] [Figure 5.4]. They were shown without particular pride, as though now merely chronicling his early mat hooking. He gave more emphasis to later mats, indicating stronger emotional connections.

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[13]Fieldnotes, 5 May 1987.

Figure 5-3: . Three mats made by Elmer Mingo. Sunflower, centre, Feet mat, top and partially visible at bottom.

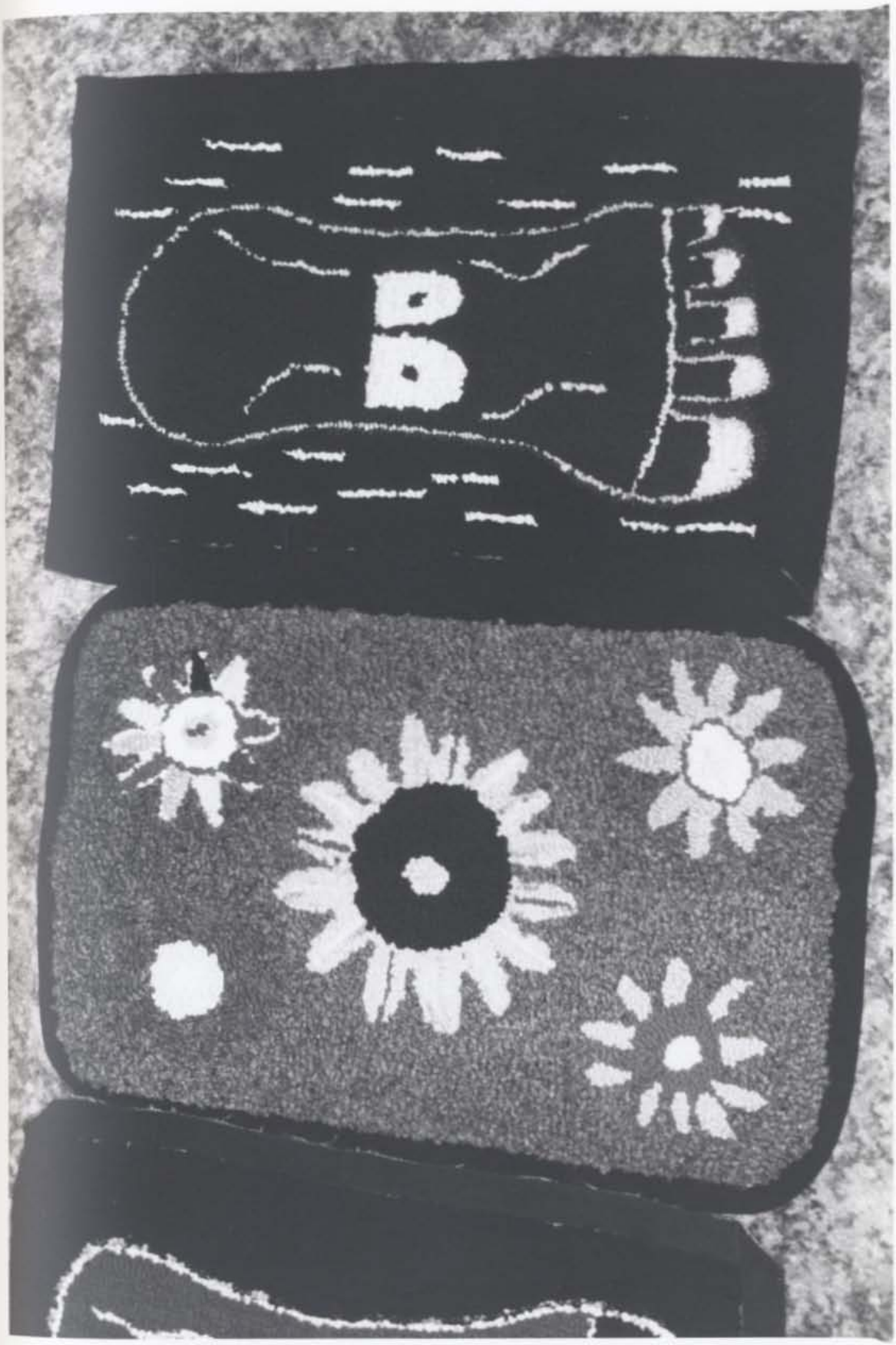


Figure 5.3

Figure 5-4: One of the first mats made by Elmer--central sunflower with bordering trees.

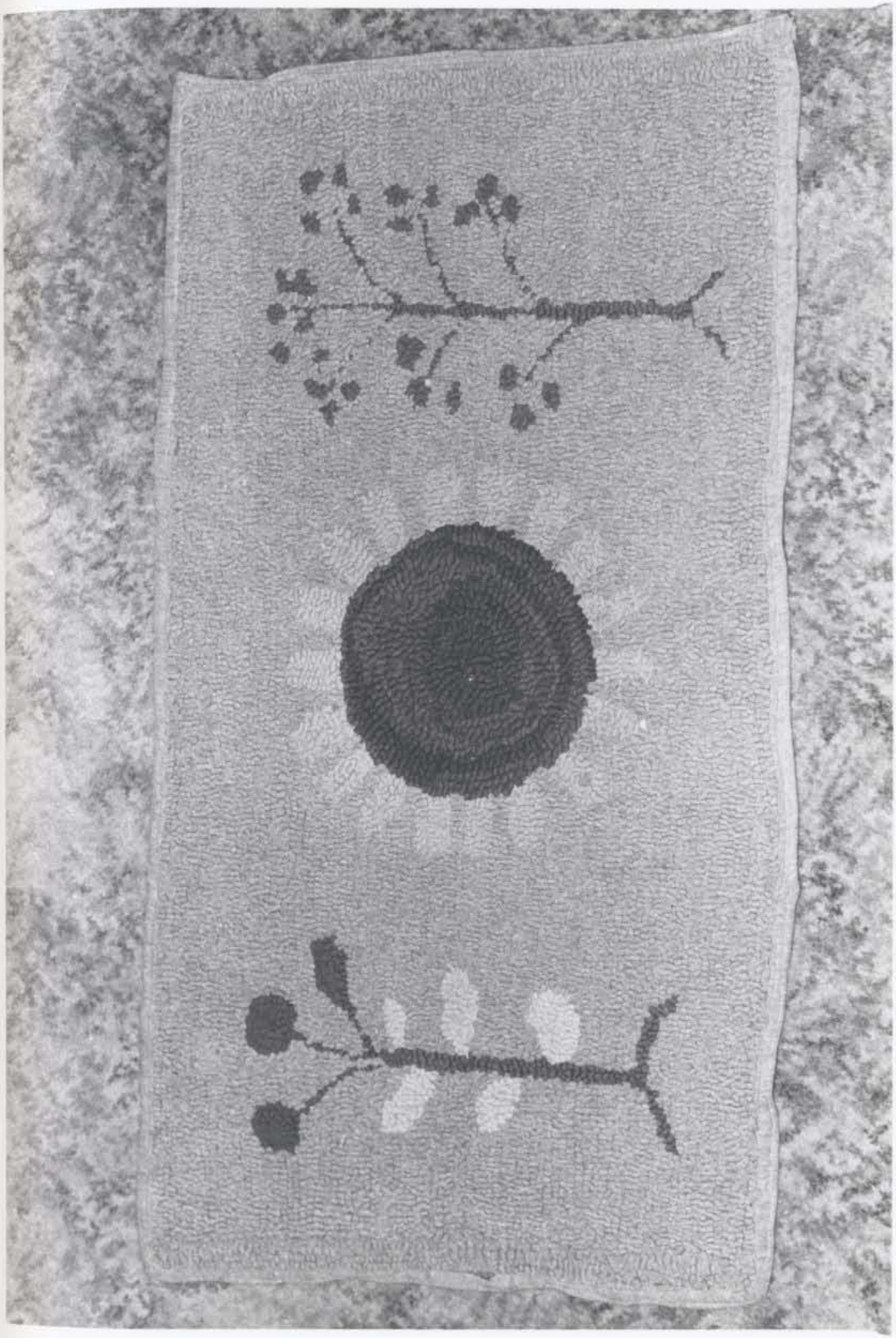


Figure 5.4

5.3.2. Bluenose Patterns

After designing several mats, Elmer travelled to New Glasgow, about 70 kilometres away, to purchase stamped mat bottoms from Garrett's Antique Shop. The last Bluenose patterns were being sold and because of dwindling supplies he bought several copies of the same design. For the first mat he closely followed the original form, but altered subsequent mats by adding or substituting his own motifs. This treatment indicates his enjoyment of experimenting with and manipulating designs. He also avoided the tedium of hooking two identical patterns. Having recently created several designs--a pastime he thoroughly enjoyed--he felt uninspired by stamped patterns.

Elmer hooked two versions of Bluenose #1000 [Figure 5.5] slightly changing the pattern.[14] He modified it by eliminating the tiny buds, hooking straight lines of colour in the background, and partially altering the diamond motifs. For the second mat, he eliminated the diamonds entirely and added four hearts in the centre, each with the pointed end turned inward, creating a small central dot [Figure 5.6].

Elmer's purchase of stamped patterns seems puzzling; he so obviously enjoys creating designs, rarely hooking a stamped pattern as drawn. Asked about this decision, he first emphasized his pleasure in changing patterns:

> You can do something with their [the Bluenose] patterns. So you, you take the patterns and then you do your thing with them. It may not be just a pure bred Bluenose pattern. . . . They give you the idea and then [you] can do what you want to with them.[15]

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[14] John E. Garrett, *Make These Charming Bluenose Hooked Rugs* ([New Glasgow, NS]: [Garrett], 1970) n. pag.

[15] Interview with Elmer and Dot Mingo, 26 March 1985, Salmon River, Colchester County, Nova Scotia MUNFLA C8634.

Figure 5-5: Bluenose pattern #1000, modified slightly.

Figure 5-6: The same Bluenose pattern with added central motif.

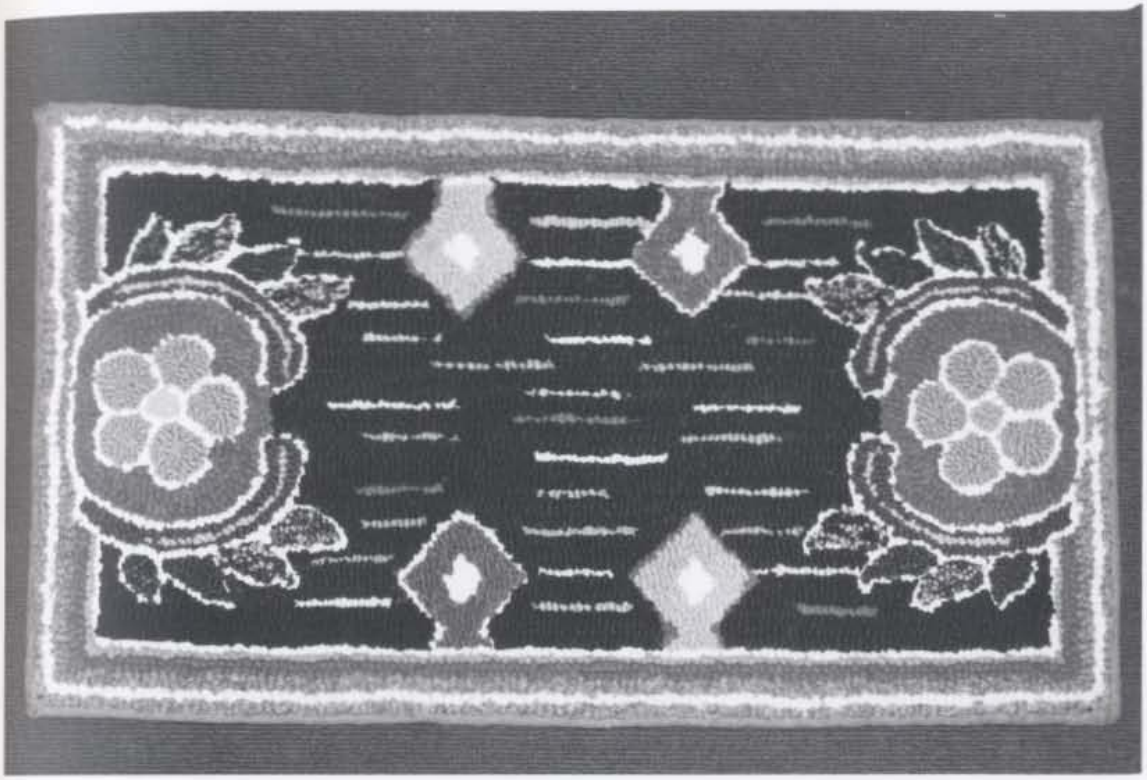


Figure 5.5

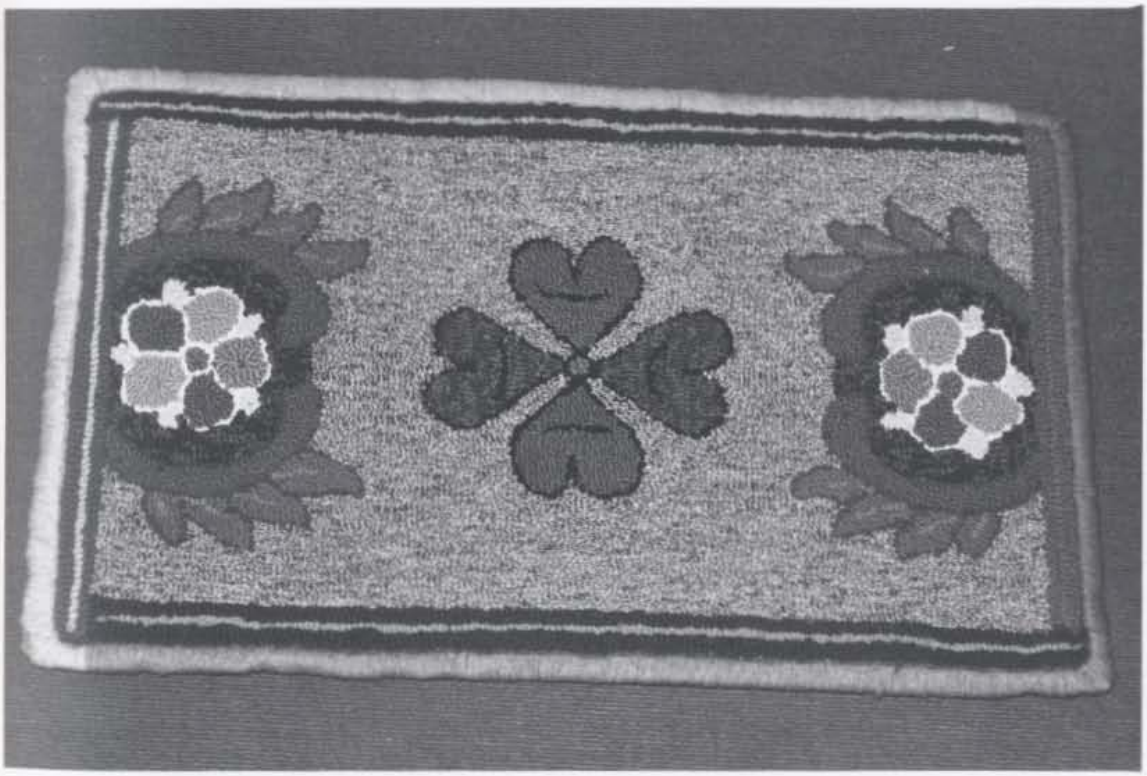


Figure 5.6

As conversation returned to altering patterns, Elmer spoke condescendingly about commercial designs. "So what I was trying to show you is what you can do with these Bluenose patterns to *improve* them" (C8635). Later, I asked Elmer why he bothered with stamped patterns:

> Well I'll tell you a little secret there, dearie. Stamped mats were cheaper to buy that way than it was to [buy burlap] by the yard. So what you did if you got mad enough you did your own. If you didn't get mad enough and you wanted something simple, you did the pattern (C8634).

Primarily, Elmer used stamped mats for economy and, although preferring to explore design creation, asserted his aesthetics on Bluenose patterns by altering and re-arranging motifs. Through alterations he demonstrates his belief in the importance of individuality.

At this point Elmer switched from hooking with rags to yarn bought from the John Ross and Sons Show Room in Truro. This shop, the area's largest yarn outlet, boasts a variety of wool and synthetic yarns in many colours and plies. Elmer prefers working with yarn because it need not be cut into strips. Elimination of this step greatly reduces the time it takes to prepare a mat. Also, rags obtained from used clothing are often only available in small quantities of single colours. Elmer can buy sufficient quantities of one colour, or easily purchase more to complete a project.[16]

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[16]Other mat hookers discussed the problem of not having enough fabric of a given colour. The Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers mentioned that the colour of a garment purchased at a used clothing store is nearly impossible to match from another source (Fieldnotes, 19 March 1985). Also, it is difficult to reproduce a colour identical to a previous dye batch.

Most importantly, synthetic yarn is moderately priced, complying with his criterion for engaging in an inexpensive hobby. One Colchester Heritage Rug Hooker said: "Now, Elmer, he uses everything and anything. . . . He's out for the cheapie" (C8642). True, but his use of yarn signifies more than frugality; Elmer produces well-executed mats from what revivalists consider inferior materials. Colchester hookers and teachers at the rug school prai~e woolen fabric over all other materials. Interacting with the women, Elmer often hears comments on fabrics which they feel should be used. Despite criticism from the Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers, Elmer adheres to his method. Results achieved are a statement of his creative ability and independence from conventional norms. Elmer's use of yarn and inexpensive patterns reflects his philosophy of frugality. His choice also reflects reality. Living on a CNR pension, the Mingos cannot afford extensive expenditures for mat hooking. As noted in Chapter 4, tools and materials now available incur considerable cost. Back stocks of Bluenose patterns are cheaper than plain burlap, and Elmer's choice of inexpensive and durable fabrics is closer to the historical spirit of mat hooking. By their purist stance, Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers demonstrate only lip service to tradition.

5.3.3. Individual Designs

Several years after they began hooking, Elmer and Dot saw in the Truro *Daily News* an announcement about an evening hooking group in Bible Hill. As mentioned in Chapter 4, this was a hobby group for women who could not attend Tuesday meetings. The weekly session provided opportunity to use the group-owned rag cutter. Although Elmer did not use the machine, he attended the meetings to socialize. Dot made use of the rag cutter and also enjoyed interacting with others who share the hobby. They looked forward to the regular outing,

considering it a social evening. In fact, Elmer emphasized his communal and festive aspirations by bringing treats like buttermilk for the others.[17]

Elmer heard of the rug hooking school through contact with this group, and attends yearly courses at the Agricultural College in Bible Hill. Nevertheless, as will be discussed later, he is not greatly influenced by the designs or techniques taught. He prefers, instead, to create his own designs, making a statement about his personality and exploring and expressing his feelings. His mats are unique among his peers.

These hand-drawn patterns differ from those he hooked previously. As mentioned earlier, they defy easy description due to number and variety. Upon viewing a roomful of his mats one is struck mostly by their diversity. From the variety exhibited, one assumes Elmer draws patterns in reaction to whims or feelings. However, his mats may be categorized into four groups based on design motif: family, humour, geometric, and abstract.

Before proceeding, it should be noted that these categories are my own etic classifications based on an analysis of Elmer's collection. He did not offer a complete emic classification system. While considering his mats individually, Elmer groups some of them together according to design. Such comments as "This is another Christmas mat" and "Here's another abstract jobby" indicate that some are labelled according to surface appearance.

Family

Four mats deal directly or indirectly with his family or childhood. Although he may not verbally express this theme or even see a relationship among these mats, they have doubtless served to explore the past. Elmer designed and hooked two mats to celebrate Christmas traditions. Both are small simple drawings

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[17]The evening classes ended in the winter of 1985 due to poor attendance.

utilizing distinct, well-recognized holiday symbols. One has a Christmas tree with simple round ornaments, the other a large central bell, flanked by four striped candy canes. Conventional, easily recognizable symbols express the joys and delights of this holiday. Traditional children's symbols suggest past Christmases--of Elmer's youth, and those spent with his children.

Another mat in this category has connections to Elmer's youth. The "Bless This House" mat [Figure 5.7] shows his childhood home. He carefully drew from memory the house's basic details, including two architectural additions and surrounding trees and shrubs. Elmer created a tribute to and reminder of his early days and family.

Elmer further enhanced the scene with a homey, yet decidedly individual image. Instead of the popular expression "Bless This House," Dot designed the hymn's musical score. Below the house, she placed the notes to the first lines: "Bless this house oh Lord I pray/Make it safe by night and day." This unique interpretation of a popular house plaque illustrates how Elmer expresses ties with his childhood and articulate his quick humour.

In the 1970s, the television presentation of Alex Haley's novel *Roots* stimulated interest in family history.[18] Genealogy research has continued, albeit at a more moderate pace, into the 1980s. In 1985, Elmer's family held a reunion at a campground on Nova Scotia's North Shore.[19] In commemoration of this important family event, Elmer designed a long narrow runner. On a plain blue background the names of three generations of Mingos are hooked in red. At the "rally," as Elmer called the reunion, he hung the mat outside his trailer for family members to enjoy:

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[18]Alex Haley, *Roots* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976).

[19]The North Shore is the area along the Northumberland Strait between Tignish and Antigonish.

Figure 5-7: Hooked mat depicting Elmer's family home with musical notes to the hymn "Bless This House."

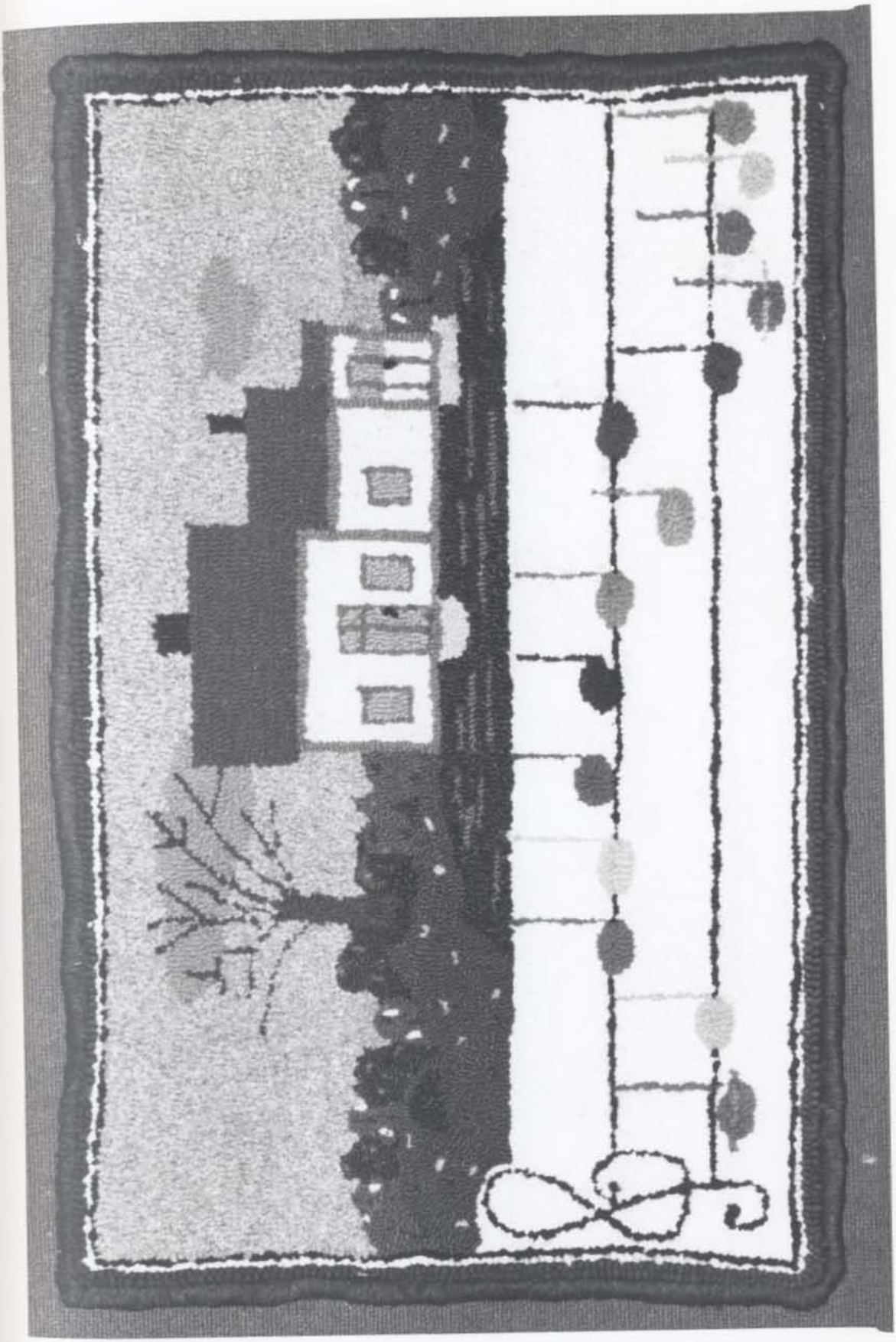


Figure 5.7

> I got quite a few compliments on it at the rally. It's a piece of material that, ah, well that's it! It was done. You can't hang it, you can't show it, you just roll it up and leave it. That's it. Well, you can't put it on the floor, and you can hang it on the wall, but who in the hell wants to look at a bunch of names? [Laughter] You know what I mean? It was just a one shot deal. It was just made for that occasion and it went over well. So that is all that was necessary (C8635).

Although his verbal presentation appears flippantly self-denigrating, both the reunion and what it stood for were important to Elmer. The commemorative mat indicates deep feelings of family commitment.

Humour

Many mats have an overriding playful sense. The designs have movement, colour and sometimes unexpected humorous twists. One can sense the fun Elmer had while designing and hooking them. He created two mats for a newly-wed couple which he explained were to be placed by their bed to "put their feet on each morning."[20] Each mat had a giant foot with large toes and the bride and groom's first initials [Figure 5.3]. These images, one blue and one red, signify the union of marriage and new life the couple will lead. The traditional male/female colours, blue for boys and red or pink for girls, reflects the wish for married couples to have children.[21] The mat is frankly silly, expressing Elmer's views on married life's joy and mundanity.

A more fanciful mat depicts a huge rainbow curving over blue clouds [Figure 5.8]. The bright colours first attract observers' attention; then one notices

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[20]Fieldnotes, 29 March 1985.

[21]Elmer's use of dark blue and red, rather than "baby" blue and pink reflects his strong masculine approach in the use of colours. This is discussed in greater detail below.

a tiny spaceship in the upper right corner. Elmer introduced a little whimsy to the scene. He said in a serious tone--but with a glimmer of a smile at the corners of his mouth and eyes: "And that's a spaceship coming down to visit earth" (C8633). These playful aspects are discussed in the theme section.

Abstract Designs

The bulk of Elmer's mats are abstract or geometric forms. He draws them for the pleasure and challenge of drafting designs. Their patterns provide opportunity to display organizational skills; he enjoys pointing out difficult patterns and colour arrangements.

Three abstract mats made in different years also express Elmer's playful tendency. Fun is expressed through freely flowing designs and bright colours. Elmer's abstract mats contrast sharply with early traditional florals or geometrics and revivalists' pictorials and intricate florals. The attractive designs, with pleasing colour schemes and fine quality work, are objects of pride.

Elmer was unable to provide answers about design inspiration. He stated that he merely doodled and drew until finding a pleasing configuration. He called one "the bug mat" because, after its completion, it suggested an arthropod gathering:

> I made another one something like this here and it was funny. It was going to be an abstract job and anyway I started out and I cut my thing up and looks like a couple of eyes. . . . So anyway, I put a little eye or a wriggle or two in it and the next one I had an eye . . . and the next one was something like a fish. Anyway, it was a bunch of bugs. (D.M.: Well, when he finished it looked like potato bugs.) It looked like potato bugs all through it. Lady bugs (C8633).

Figure 5-8: Rainbow mat with spaceship.

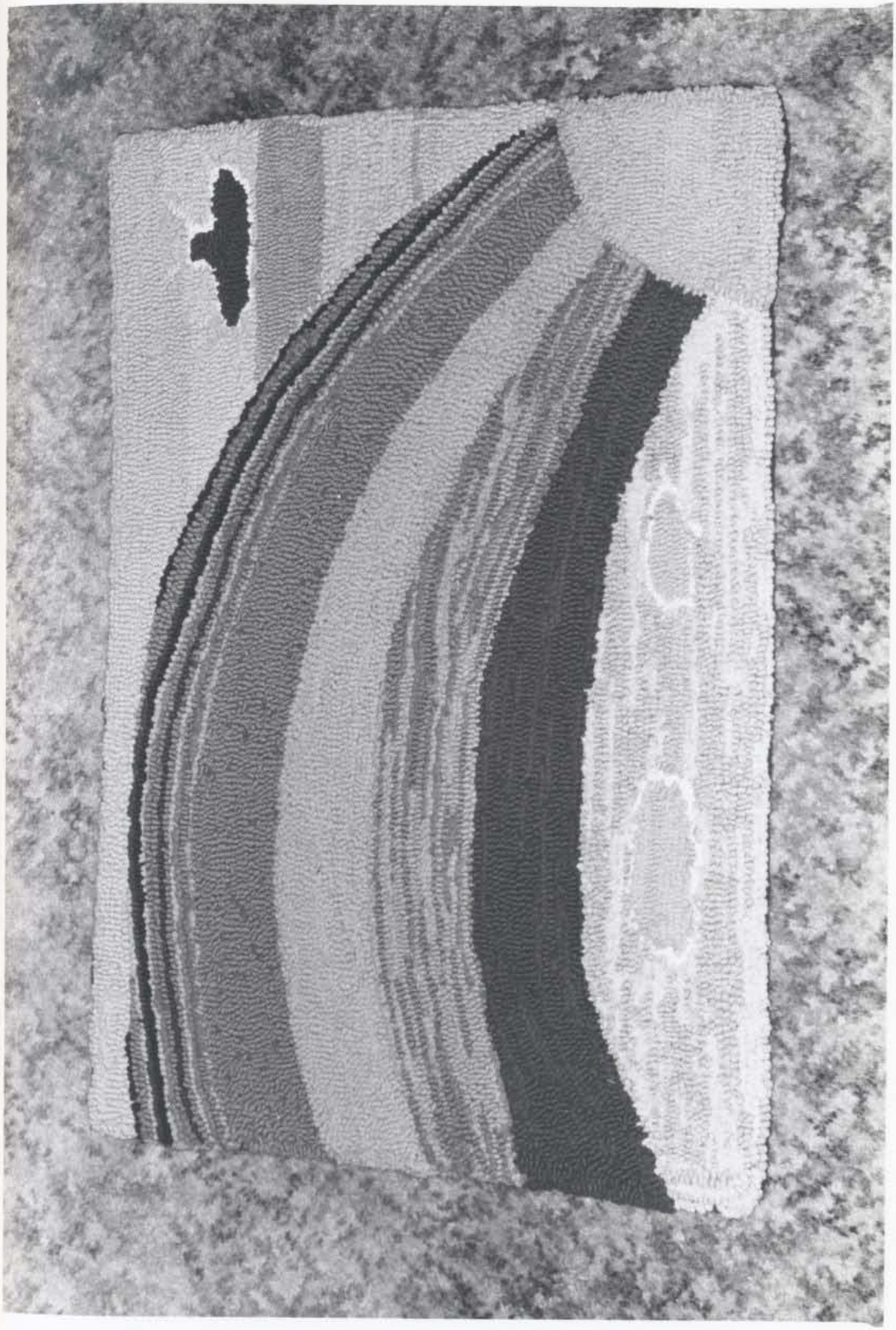


Figure 5.8

Figure 5-9: Abstract mat made in 1985. Elmer referred to the motifs as microscopic germs.

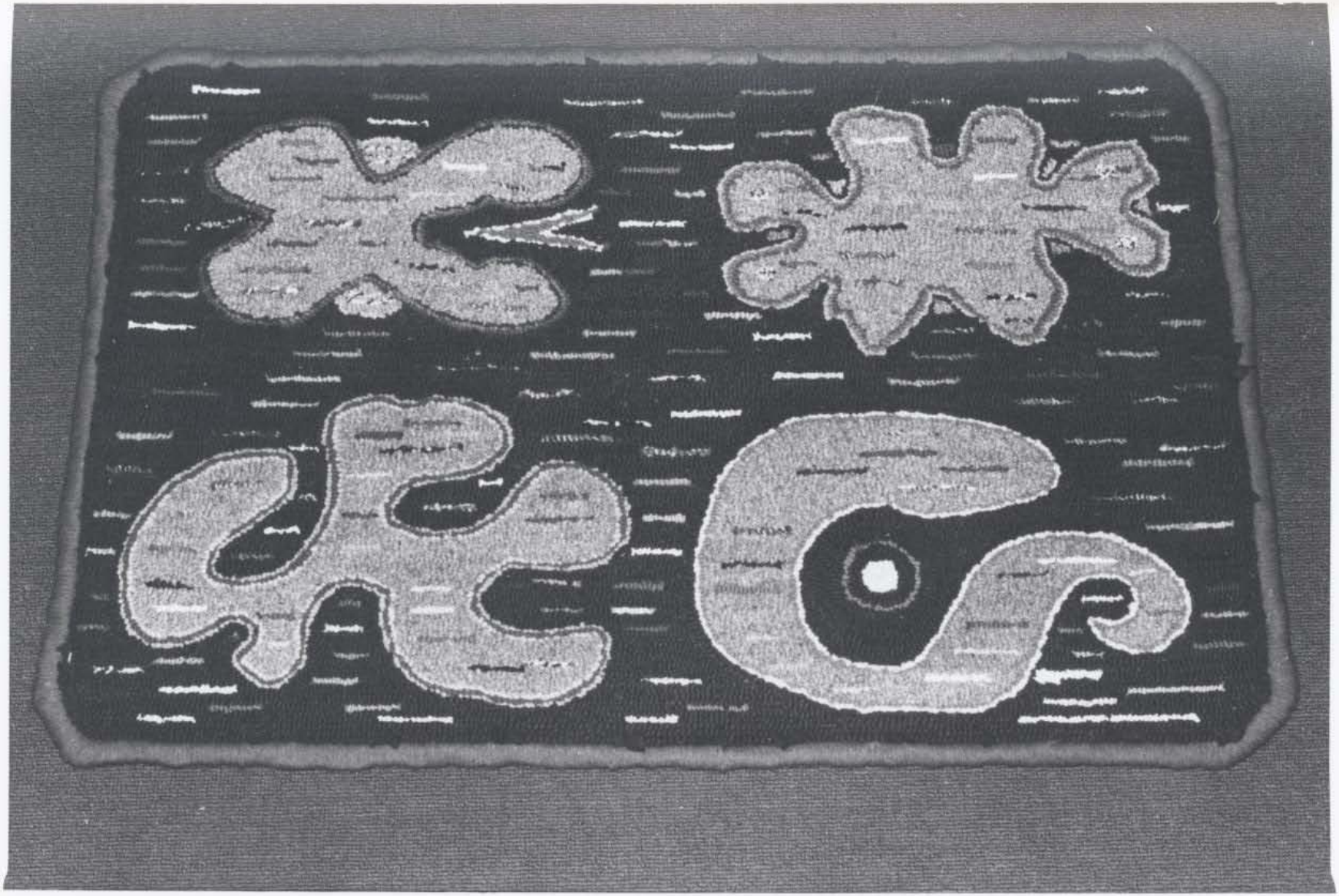


Figure 5.9

Abstract designs often resemble known objects. Free designs' appeal is their ability to suggest images.

These compositions take hooked mats to the furthest design limit. As an abstraction of community tradition they make Elmer Colchester County's only avant-garde mat hooker. Elmer is proud of being in the forefront of a previously unexplored area of mat design. Although other mat hookers in the area strayed from traditionally-accepted designs and popular commercial patterns to explore personal images, I encountered no one who considered abstracts appropriate. When revivalist hookers were shown photographs of Elmer's work, none expressed honest interest in their forms; within their mat hooking tradition the designs were unacceptable. His abstracts are more appealing to people who have no connection with the craft and are not biased by other hookers' and teachers' conventional expectations.

Geometric Designs

Similar to abstract mats is Elmer's treatment of geometric form. A mat he calls a Christmas design is divided in two rows and three columns, each adorned with four small handbells [Figure 5.10]. The pattern's focus is the bells' form, not their intrinsic meaning. Elmer articulated this when discussing how he designed the pattern:

> Well I tell you. I was out in the trailer last summer and I was doodling around with a pen and trying to find a kind of an angle or something I could put together and so after a lot of doodling I found something I could cut out and put four together (C8633).

Elmer did not intend to express Christmas sentiments as its title implies. Although employing a Christmas symbol, the pattern's visual geometric message contrasts with the holiday mats examined earlier.

Figure 5-10: Christmas handbell mat made by Elmer.

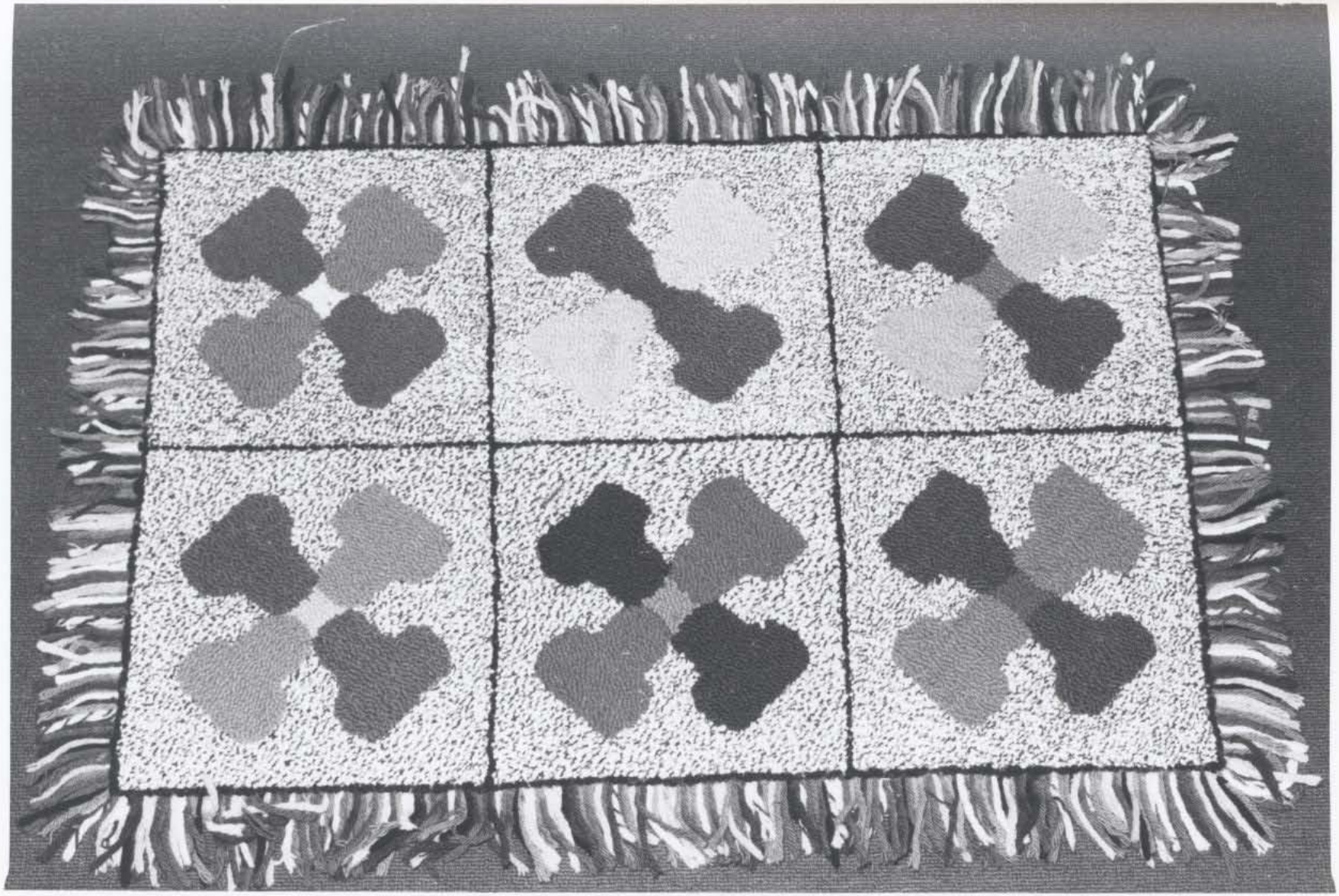


Figure 5.10

This simply designed bell mat was hooked early in Elmer's career. Later, geometric forms show more complexity. In 1984 he designed a pattern of small hexagonal shapes and, lacking confidence in his ability to arrange the design, he contacted a woman who had drafting experience:

> There's one there with the hexagonals. It took quite a bit of maneuvering to get the hexagonals for those. So when you didn't know how to do it--it's pretty hard--but when you ask a professional how to do it. . . . I phoned up this [unclear word] and she said it's no problem. She said you take an angle of 180 degrees and bisect it by 60 and 120 degrees. 180 degrees! She kind of stumped me for a second. It's only a straight line. It kind of stumped me for a minute and she laughed, she knew what she was doing (C8633).[22]

Elmer designed this mat because he enjoys problem solving. Elmer also enjoys co-ordinating colours and expressed this while discussing a cross-stitch pattern:

> I got a 24 by 36 [inch] mat out of it. Like the big X's is done in two colours and the little X's is done in two colours and [by the] time I wound up I have one, two, three, four, five, oh, I got about eight colours, combination of eight colours in it, I guess. . . kind of a complicated damn thing. And it seemed to me when I looked at the pattern down there I said "Oh hell, that's nothing to do." And then when you blow it up and put it onto your canvas it sure got a little more difficult 'cause when you're starting to take your combinations of colours you didn't want to put the same colours in the six X's, the six squares. Oh, I got it all arranged (C8633).

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[22]Small repeated geometric shapes have long been part of Nova Scotia's mat hooking tradition. The traditional Nova Scotian "inch" mat described in Chapter 2, is similar in concept to a hexagonal mat. This "inch" mat, too, was viewed by makers as challenging.

This elaborate use of colour indicates Elmer's fascination with planning. While hooking pre-stamped Bluenose mats he challenged himself by organizing colour schemes. Similarly, geometric designs provide opportunity for intricately organizing colour and design.

5.4. Methods and Techniques

During our visits, Elmer repeatedly stressed adherence to esoteric methods. His stock phrase was "You gotta do your own thing" (C8633, C8634). This is most evident in the designs described above. Elmer derives pleasure by producing mats unique from his contemporaries. His individuality, evident in pattern and fabric choice, extends also to use of alternative tools and techniques.

Although familiar with conventional wooden frames, Elmer wanted a more mobile frame which he could carry from the basement workshop to the shed or trailer. Initially he built a small wooden lap frame, similar to those used by some Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers. Elmer's frame has a thin plywood bottom cut in a semi-circular groove to fit comfortably against his abdomen. From the base, rear posts rise slightly higher than front posts, providing a slanted top which affords a better view of the burlap. A rectangular frame is nailed to the uprights. Unlike other mat hookers, Elmer uses a staple-gun to secure burlap to the frame.[23] Since the entire frame is small, a large mat must be moved and restapled many times before its completion.

After a year's use Elmer designed and built another frame with special features suitable to his particular needs:

> I made that [frame] myself. I was over to Doreen's [craftshop] and she had one over there and I wanted

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[23] This method's masculine connotations are discussed below.

> one but I didn't like the way hers was made. It was too light . . . just a little too light. So I came home and like I tell you, you do your own thing, you see. See, I got mine on wheels (C8633).

Elmer's frame is a marvel of construction. Two round poles, approximately three feet long are inserted between two rectangular posts, forming a traditionally-shaped mat frame. Burlap is stretched over strips of metal "teeth" nailed to the two posts and stapled or tacked to the other two. The frame is secured with hinges to two upright posts made of scrap metal tubes, in turn bolted to a baseboard. This system enables him to tip the mats at any angle, much like a drafting table. Attached to the bottom of the baseboard are four small wheels, facilitating movement of the frame within his home and workshop or to rug hookers' meetings in Bible Hill. The frame is not only practical, its planning and construction satisfied Elmer's penchant for innovative thinking, problem solving, and self-sufficiency.

An important aspect of Elmer's work is the way he solves problems of mat construction. He often relies on his own innovations rather than customary methods or techniques suggested by Colchester women. Rather than crocheting tassels onto the mat's edge, a time-consuming method, Elmer glued multi-coloured strands of yarn to the border of his Christmas Bells mat:

> And I use a lot of this quick glue. . . . Well, you put this glue down and you glue this on. And this glue goes on white, but it turns colourless afterwards. It's beautiful stuff. (You glued on the tassels?) Yeah, those tassels are all glued on, boy, and our kids were home and were stumbling all over it and I don't think I lost over four (C8633).

This method is faster and easier than crocheting. Some mat hookers work slowly, often with two or more mats begun, while Elmer finishes his mats one at a time, with as little trouble as possible. Guild women expressed surprise at Elmer's technique, suggesting crocheting is more durable and accords with the handmade image.[24] For Elmer, however, this short-cut is perfectly acceptable. Community rules are readily bent when he discovers an alternative method more appropriate to his needs.

5.5. Use of Colour

Elmer's organization of colour indicates his independence from conventional forms. He plans elaborate colour schemes based on repetition and balance while adopting a carefree attitude to the actual colours chosen. This is expressed in the following exchange:

> Here's another shirt that one of these days is going to be gone into something. (It will be sky or something.) Yeah, it will be a sky. . . . And I'll have a little bit of something else to throw in and by the time you get it all done, when you get done throwing stuff in, you've got something (C8633).

As he is unconcerned with colour harmony and coordination, Elmer uses only colours available:

> You don't just go and dye your stuff. Now to do it professionally, like you've seen Mrs. Wright's over there, well then you go into the dyeing business. But when you go with straight colours you gotta take what you can get and try what you can get. If I get two or three pieces of this and two or three pieces of that, well that's great (C8633).

[24] Fieldnotes, 13 April 1985.

Elmer's seemingly inexhaustible stock of yarns and fabrics ensures a variety of colours, contributing to the bright mix found in his mats. Most contemporary mat hookers use only several colours dyed carefully to ensure uniformity and harmony. Elmer describes Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers' as "professional," precisely following current mat hooking rules. Disregarding many of their suggestions, he fills his mats with a multitude of colours. One woman in the Colchester group referred to Elmer's mats in this way:

> His work, to the uninitiated, his work isn't bad. But also his colours are all man colours. You can tell when you look at it that it's either a very mannish woman or a man that has done it. Because of his combination of colours (C8642).

Bold, bright, clashing colours are used together indicating an individual approach.

5.6. Themes and Functions

For over a decade folklorists have stated that crafts are used to communicate ideas. Michael Owen Jones carefully and meticulously outlined the life of a Kentucky craftsperson whose fears and aspirations are reflected in his carved chair designs. The relationship between form and function is addressed in Simon Bronner's research on wooden chain carvers. The problems of organizing artists' work for such analysis is a major concern for researchers.

In her doctoral dissertation, Laurel Doucette outlined seven themes found in creative activities of ten elderly men and women in Newfoundland. Her categories, she warns, apply to elderly people who began or resumed creative activities in later life. The seven themes are: autobiography; integration; legacy; status maintenance and enhancement; play; compensation; and a means of social

and cultural interaction. Doucette's categories and analysis are useful in examining Elmer's mats. His hooked mat designs and techniques explore four themes: life review or autobiography; play; status maintenance and enhancement; and social interaction. Within these categories there are manifest and latent functions. Elmer chooses a design to fulfill a particular purpose, while often subconsciously expressing deeper meaning.

5.6.1. Life Review

In their respective studies, Laurel Doucette and Barbara Myerhoff refer to a process of autobiography or life review through which the elderly attempt to organize past events into coherent, meaningful blocks.[25] The process helps justify life and accept the present and future. Retirement, often conceptualized as the final stage in life, is a time when people reflect on the years and summarize their lives. Family members, past traditions, and former occupations are recalled.[26] The mat of Elmer's childhood home, for instance, was hooked as a reminder of earlier times.

Elmer's life review is not entirely retrospective. His Christmas mat hearkens back to family traditions, especially those concerning children. As well, it looks forward to a time when he and Dot will have grandchildren. The family reunion mat, chronicling deceased and living Mingo relatives, offers balance between past and present. This time split is indicative of Elmer's outlook. While active and interested in present life, he cherishes and respects the past. He frequently juxtaposes comments about recent travels and interests with anecdotes

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[25]Doucette 286-93; Myerhoff 33-34.

[26]Arch Williams, a retired Newfoundland fisherman, paints historic scenes of Newfoundland life, drawing much on his memory of past traditions and conditions. "Arch Williams: Fisherman Turned Artist," *Decks Awash* 8.4 (1979): 15-16.

from his past. This is reflected in his mat designs. Elmer's work is active, vibrant, and creative, despite the passive nature of life review. It offers a view of the past and a strong statement of his continued enjoyment of life.

5.6.2. Play

Creativity is considered play, resulting in nonfunctional enhancement of utilitarian objects.[27] Many researchers have noticed crafts' and hobbies' play aspects. Play in this sense is serious--while giving the maker pleasure it also indicates latent functions.[28] Although art may function in one or more of these ways, the simple quality of fun should not be overlooked.

Elmer's sense of good-natured fun was evident from our first introduction. He is a talkative, unretiring man who enjoys lively conversation. He frequently made funny comments and told blatant falsehoods in an attempt to trick me. While looking over hooked mats in a photograph album he showed me a picture of a blue sky. As he turned the page to the snapshot he said: "Now we have the Florida sky." Having no reason to doubt his word I remarked: "That's in Florida?" He muttered affirmatively, "Hmrph." Here Dot interjected: "*No*, it's not!" (C8633). In fact, the photograph was taken by mistake outside their home. I wondered how many others he caught with this joke? Elmer's humour and flair for the individual are reflected in his mat designs.

Some mats are devoted solely to humour while others, of another theme, have playful aspects. The rainbow and feet mats, mentioned earlier, are examples

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[27]This is based on Johan Huizinga's analysis of play-form in art. "Play, we say, lies outside the reasonableness of practical life; has nothing to do with necessity or utility, duty or truth." Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1955) 158.

[28]Adele Wiseman noted this in her study of a doll-maker, *Old Women at Play* (Toronto: Clark, 1978) 145.

of the former. The "Bless This House" mat's imaginative twist exemplifies Elmer's trait of elevating a design from the ordinary to the unexpected. This unique interpretation extends also to colour arrangements, for as mentioned, they are bright and often uninhibited. In his 1985 abstract project, bright purple, yellow, and red vibrantly contrast with a background of olive green. The colours and their combinations suggest movement and invite exclamation. Elmer's mats are not meant to blend with the decor or be easily overlooked. Their fantastic colours and designs say 'interact with me and have fun.' Overtly, Elmer's playful elements are entertaining to himself, while designing and hooking them, and to those who view them. His desire for recognition is an underlying factor in his choice of designs. Elmer's mat hooking increases his interaction with others and enhances his status.

5.6.3. Interaction and Enhancement

Mat hooking is neither a popular nor well-known craft, especially among men. Thus when the Mingos go camping, Elmer places his frame and yarn outside the trailer where other travellers are attracted out of curiosity. A gregarious man, Elmer enjoys meeting other campers and displaying and discussing his handiwork. He thrives on attention and interaction, using mat hooking to stimulate both. Performing his craft in public places, such as campgrounds, affords some measure of exposure.

The rug school presents another opportunity to display his work in the company of peers. As mentioned above, Elmer attends classes but pays little heed to instructions. He prefers instead to meet people and voice his opinions and ideas.

Previously I gave examples of Elmer's independence in all aspects of mat hooking: constructing frames, altering stamped patterns and designing complex geometrics, and using glue and staples during construction. Elmer chose these alternative measures in an effort to feel useful and vital. These actions provide opportunity for status enhancement, eliciting praise and appreciation from others.

Selling or giving mats as gifts also provides opportunity for status enhancement. Some craftspeople do not sell their work because they will not be sufficiently reimbursed for their time and effort. Those who sell their work experience pride in the knowledge that their efforts are valued and appreciated.

Elmer began selling mats several years after he started hooking because he was accumulating more than he could use. Selling mats also helped defray the material's cost. Nevertheless, Elmer's love of designing and hooking encouraged him to make mats, while income from sales is secondary. Discussing one sale he said: "I've got enough to buy two Christmas presents, that's the main thing" (C8635). The thrill of seeing others enjoy his work and the status he obtains as craftsperson is a greater reward. Elmer recalled a woman from the Annapolis Valley who bought his "Bug" mat for therapeutic reasons:

> This lady bought it down in the Valley. Said "My granddaughter," she said, "is scared of bugs." She said, "Now this would be a good thing for her." Oh, and away she went (C8633).

As with any decorative craft, making and displaying hooked mats provides avenues for praise and recognition by community members. In addition, Elmer has succeeded in what is still considered a woman's craft.

Mat hooking affords Elmer a sense of purpose lost with the commencement of retirement. Although he does not hook everyday, he is continually involved

with the activity: shopping for yarns, drafting designs, and thinking of new patterns or colour schemes. Elmer has other varied interests--travel, world events, and his family--but mat hooking dominates. Dot's subsequent enthusiasm for the craft fostered a convivial atmosphere for hooking. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, the presence of others involved in common interests provides a pleasing work milieu.

Elmer's diverse designs are tangible embodiments of his feelings, beliefs, and fancy. Through his designs Elmer honours the past, displays love and pride, gives vent to his wit, and expresses ties with tradition. While creating a design he attempts to explore and convey ideas. The end product is more than a mat; it is a summation of Elmer's world of ideas and emotions.

Chapter 6

From Kitchen to Competition: Changes in One Woman's Mat Making

6.1. Introduction

Unfounded belief has it that art, especially folk art, is a product of artists' visionary imagination and independent of external influences. Much of the popular literature on the topic describes the craftsperson's work as impervious to external stimuli, somehow exhibiting a combination of traditional community values and independent vision.[1] However, no art exists in isolation; all artists are part of a group, inculcated with similar values and beliefs, shaping their views and affecting their art. Arnold Hauser, in *The Philosophy of Art History*, contends that an artist's style is directly linked to an audience: "If one begins to track a given stylistic form to its real origin, one has first of all to consider its public."[2] Examination of one woman's hooked mats shows that her art, both traditional forms and original creations, is influenced by those with whom she interacts. The designs she creates are very much a product of her peers.

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[1]Kenneth Ames describes this in *Beyond Necessity: Art in the Folk Tradition* (New York: Norton, 1977) 21-27. For examples of this belief in Nova Scotian folk art literature see: Elissa Barnard, "Nova Scotia's 'Spirit' Sweeping the Nation," *Chronicle-Herald* 6 Aug. 1985: E2.; Dalhousie Art Gallery, *Decorated Nova Scotia Furnishings* (Halifax: Dalhousie Art Gallery, 1978) 1.

[2]Arnold Hauser, *The Philosophy of Art History* (New York: Knopf, 1959) 227.

Louisa Hanson (nee Tupper), was born in Milton, Queen's County, Nova Scotia, in 1910. She was raised on a small farm in Greenfield, Colchester County and completed Grade Nine at the Greenfield public school. After her marriage to Albert Hanson and the birth of their daughter, Grace, she and her family moved to St. Stephen, New Brunswick. They later returned to Greenfield, where Albert worked for the Department of Transport while Louisa tended the house and garden. Mrs. Hanson, now a widow, lives in the farm house with Grace's daughter, Vickie (b.1973). Grace lives and works in Halifax and her younger daughter, Stephanie (b.1980) spends her summer vacations in Greenfield.

I first contacted Mrs. Hanson in July 1984, after hearing of her from Mrs. Ruth Thomson, a resident of Greenfield. She informed me that Louisa hooks "truly unique mats."[3] Mrs. Hanson was more than obliging, welcoming me into her home and discussing aspects of her art and life. Unfortunately, she sometimes had difficulty providing accurate dates or coherent answers to my inquiries. I have therefore drawn inferences about her design choices from the mats and (less frequently than I would have liked) from her scanty comments on them.

On my first visit Mrs. Hanson brought out of storage much of her most recent work. The mats, all drawn by her, were the ones she presumed I wanted to see and the ones which she wanted to display. Later in the interview we went upstairs and I discovered several old geometrics and many stamped patterns. I wondered why she omitted these from the pile she arranged to show me. I generally found the women I interviewed equally proud of their earlier efforts and their most recent crafts, though they were often more enthusiastic about the

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[3]Fieldnotes, 19 June 1984.

latter.[4] Such an overriding emphasis on the latest products implied a change in Mrs. Hanson's attitude toward her work. Mrs. Hanson's mats and her feelings about them are marked by distinct divisions in time periods. The differences and similarities found in the three periods hinge on the mats' function.

Ruth Bunzel warns about describing and arranging works of art into "periods," arguing that the nature of art denies its mapping over time.[5] Michael Owen Jones argues that a career can be examined in time sequences provided the researcher takes precautions to avoid expressing an evolutionary model.[6] He believes that while an artist's work cannot be neatly categorized into "periods" governed by a predominant style, "one can mention certain tendencies at particular times in an artist's career and explore how they relate to his needs and values and to his relationships with other people, including his customers."[7] Bunzel's and Jones' main objection to organizing a body of work into a time frame is that artistic creation must not be viewed as a linear process, increasing in intensity and quality, and peaking at the end of the artist's career. Creativity, they argue, is a complex process; at any point in the artist's career certain conditions and stimuli may result in the production of his or her best work. In addition, Jones and Bunzel see design elements not as evolutionary but as

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[4]This has been mentioned by other folk art scholars. See Michael Owen Jones, *The Hand Made Object and Its Maker* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1975) 146; and Simon J. Bronner, *Chain Carvers: Old Men Crafting Meaning* (Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 1985) 59, 126.

[5]Ruth Bunzel, "Art," *General Anthropology*, ed. Franz Boas (Boston: Heath, 1938) 570.

[6]For further understanding of what he terms an evolutionary model see Michael Owen Jones, "The Study of Folk Art Study: Reflections on Images," *Folklore Today: A Festschrift for Richard Dorson*, ed. Linda Dégh, Henry Glassie, and Felix J. Oinas (Bloomington, IN: Indiana U Research Center for Language and Semiotic Studies, 1976) 296-97.

[7]Jones *The Hand Made Object* 106. For further analysis of this theory see Michael Owen Jones, "Two Directions for Folkloristics in the Study of American Art," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 32 (1968): 249-59.

recurrent: at times actively used and at other times stored in the artist's inactive repertoire.[8]

When one mat hooker's work spans at least fifty years, as Mrs. Hanson's does, organizing and examining the material in apparently chronologically ordered groups is justifiable. Her mats can be divided into three major categories and one sub-category distinguished by form and function. Her early utilitarian mats, from the 1920s, were of simple geometric design. The next group, generally stamped patterns, were crafted for enjoyment of design manipulation and creation. The final group are primarily her own designs. By the third and final stage, Mrs. Hanson had begun participating in the annual Nova Scotia Provincial Exhibition. I will discuss these three stages and their inherent styles, emphasizing the effects function had on form.

6.2. Stages of Styles

6.2.1. The Early Years

As a girl of perhaps four or five, Louisa (Mrs. Hanson) watched her mother hook mats for the family and, as a child given to imitating her elders, she felt she must also have a mat. She said: "I remember when I was little, I *just had* to have a mat."[9] These first attempts were simply crooked loops pulled through the

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[8]I am using Kenneth Goldstein's interpretation of active and inactive repertoire as discussed in his article "On the Application of the Concepts of Active and Inactive Traditions to the Study of Repertoires," *Journal of American Folklore* 84 (1971): 62-67. Many researchers notice the tendency described above. In particular, throughout his book Jones discusses design elements periodically reused by a chairmaker during his career (*The Hand Made Object* 108, 116) and in Chapter 4 of Bunzel's study *The Pueblo Potter: A Study of Creative Imagination in Primitive Art* (1929; New York: AMS, 1969) 49-68 she describes Zuni potters' reuse of personal and traditional motifs.

[9]Interview with Mrs. Hanson, 29 July 1984, Greenfield, Colchester County, Nova Scotia. Hereafter referred to as private transcription.

burlap but they enabled her to sit and work beside her mother. Not until her teens did Mrs. Hanson begin to actually design and hook mats for use in her home. Her first projects were simple "Hit and Miss" designs with decorative geometric borders. Several early mats are still used in the bedrooms and second storey hallway of her home. Though faded from years of use and exposure to sunlight, patches of colour offer a glimpse of the vitality they once possessed.

Mrs. Hanson does not place much emphasis on the early mats, although I tried to initiate conversation concerning their patterns and her previous hooking tradition. All she said was, "I made those when I was about seventeen," passing over them quickly and showing me her more recent designs. A few weeks later I again visited Mrs. Hanson, this time with a friend. When Jessie saw the old mats she exclaimed enthusiastically, "What kind of patterns are these? Do they have a name?" Mrs. Hanson replied vaguely, "Oh, I just did them. I didn't, uh--I just put that in--see they're so old" (private transcription). The three mats, in good condition, were still used to cover the bare floor boards but Mrs. Hanson no longer thought them worthy of display. In Chapter 2, I discussed the difference in perception and appreciation between plain geometrics and stamped or fancy designs. I argued that utilitarian mats become secondary, with regard to decoration, in comparison to more elaborate mats. The former are appreciated for their warmth but decorative qualities are surpassed by more coveted floral and representational mats. When pressed about the designs' source Mrs. Hanson said: "Well, I made it up but I think it's almost like one I'd seen. Because at that time I didn't know too much about it, you know" (private transcription). Over fifty years passed since Mrs. Hanson designed these geometrics; mat-hooking has taken on a different meaning for her. Due to the amount of planning necessary to create them, and the mats' changed function, representational mats she now makes seem more important than geometrics.

Figure 6-1: Geometric/Hit and Miss mat made by Mrs. Hanson, c. 1930.

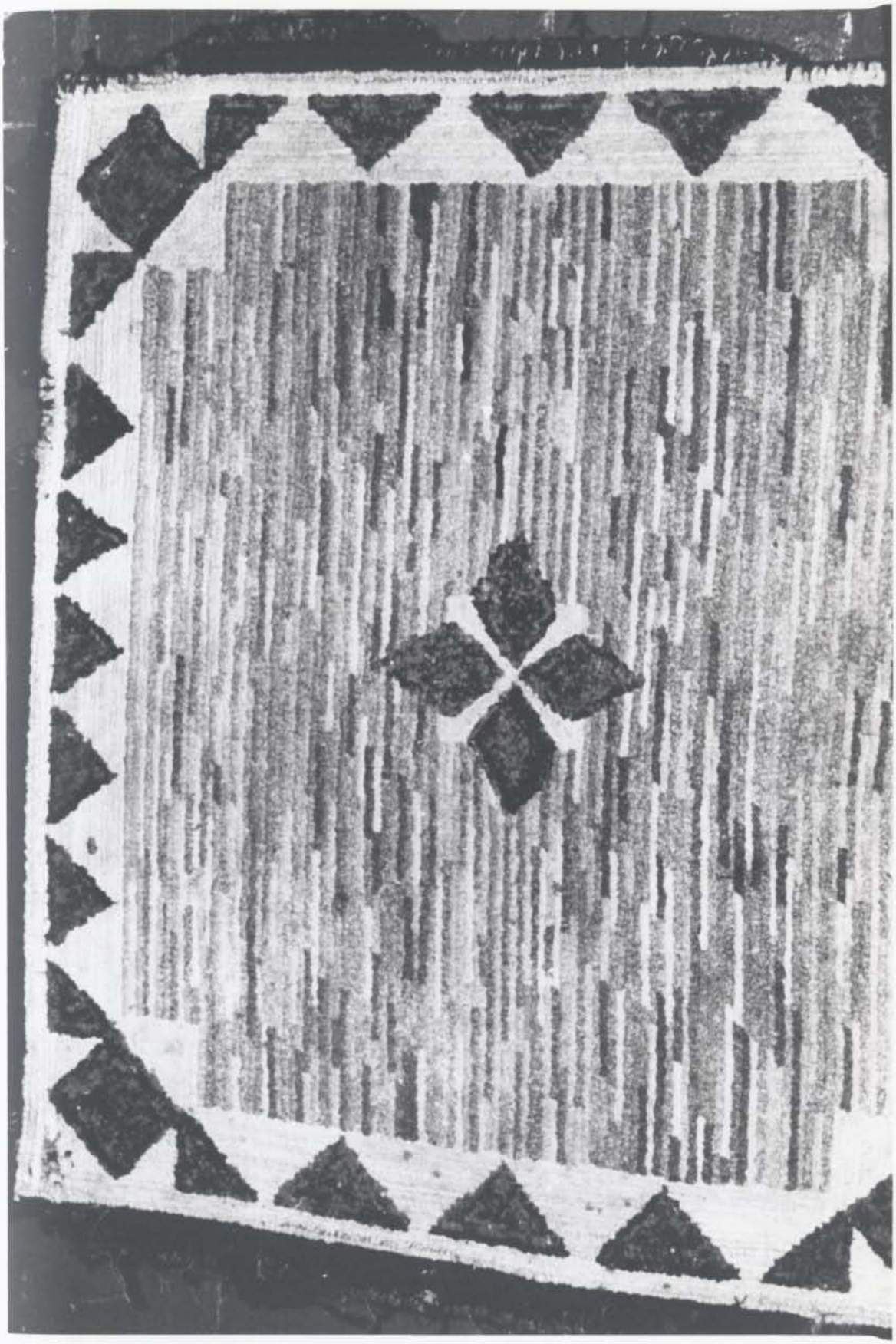


Figure 6.1

6.2.2. Stamped Patterns

Mrs. Hanson first heard of stamped patterns in the early 1930s when she visited with her aunt, Annie Woolf, in Timberlea, Halifax County. She enjoyed the opportunity to hook mats with others; in fact, mat hooking remains a means by which some women find a common ground for interaction.[10] Eugene Metcalf notes that art functions to "connect the artist to his society."[11] Women's work in the home is solitary and fragmented; communal work-like activities, such as mat-hooking or quilting, provide legitimate cause for congregation to exchange news and pass the time. Mat hooking--which includes trading patterns, dyeing techniques, and suggestions--took place among small groups of women, usually relatives or close neighbours. This ensured similarity of designs and techniques. During Mrs. Hanson's visit, the Woolfs were buying Bluenose stamped patterns, tracing them for their own use and for trade with other women. She said: "I didn't know anything about drawing them. Not until I had gone to my aunt's at Timberlea" (private transcription).

As outlined in Chapter 2, copying and tracing mats was a common activity and Mrs. Woolf and her daughter, Margaret, practiced it frequently. Mrs. Hanson still has their mat hooking supplies and showed them to me in March 1985. Among the assortment were commercial dyes, Bluenose catalogues, newspaper clippings, and designs hand-drawn on brown paper. Some patterns had pin pricks

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[10]For examples of group participation in home crafts see Margaret Bennett Knight, "Some Aspects of the Scottish Gaelic Traditions of the Codroy Valley, Newfoundland," M.A. thesis, Memorial U of Newfoundland, 1975. She describes both spinning bees (269-71) and milling frolics (283-300) concentrating on communal festive aspects. Gerald L. Pocius also mentions crafts' community or group oriented aspects in *Textile Traditions in Eastern Newfoundland*, Canadian Centre for Folk Cultural Studies 29 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1979) 54-55.

[11]Eugene W. Metcalf, "Black Art, Folk Art, and Social Control," *Winterthur Portfolio* 18 (1983): 283.

following the motifs' outline, indicating transference from a mat onto paper.[11] Full-size test sketches signed by Margaret Woolf were used to establish a suitable design to be traced or copied freehand onto burlap. The hand-drawn patterns were made with pencil, crayon and ink on large sheets of brown wrapping paper. Some were copies of popular Bluenose patterns while others appeared to be original designs. The Woolfs' test sketches and patterns were carefully copied, ensuring they remained as faithful to the Bluenose originals as drawing skill permitted. Since Mrs. Hanson learned to copy and trace patterns from these women, it seemed likely that her later mats should follow this tradition. But this, as we will see, was not the case.

I obtained only scattered comments concerning her work at this time. From physical evidence, however, I was able to outline some of her approaches to stamped patterns. Of the mats stored in her home, most of the old Bluenose patterns had been altered in some way.[12] Figure 6.2 shows a mat hooked in the 1930s in Economy, Colchester County and Figure 6.3 the same pattern hooked by Mrs. Hanson. Although difficult to discern in these photographs, the central floral design is identical on both mats; the scrolls, however, differ considerably. Judging from the loss of detail and inexact proportions of the scrolls on Mrs. Hanson's mat we may assume she drew them herself.

Why then, when she had taken precaution to hook the central motif in its exact state, did she change the scrolls? The answer lies in the pleasure taken from altering designs to exhibit control over their form. Mrs. Hanson consciously

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[11]For a fuller description of this procedure see Chapter 2.

[12]Due to Mrs. Hanson's inability (already alluded to) to give full information about her mats, I assume age of a pattern by the wear they exhibit and materials used. Recent mats, for example, were made with bright, synthetic material and were never used, while older examples were made with wool and show some wear from years of use in Mrs. Hanson's home.

Figure 6-2: A stamped mat hooked in Economy, Colchester County, c. 1930.

Figure 6-3: A mat hooked by Mrs. Hanson. Note changes to the scrolls' designs.



Figure 6.2



Figure 6.3

manipulated design elements to express her vitality as a craftsperson and an individual. She treated traditional geometric patterns with individual flair to give them a degree of originality, and the Bluenose mats she hooked were likewise personalized in small ways. Later, however, she began significant alteration and rearrangement of stamped patterns to suit her own tastes. This trend took on major importance in her later work.

The role of personal preference in Mrs. Hanson's adaptation of stamped patterns can be illustrated by examination of two Bluenose mats of the same design (#2121), hooked in the mid-1960s.[14] She bought a stamped pattern of a house and windmill beside a peaceful lake with a sailboat [Figure 6.4]. She changed parts of the design, apparently to make it conform more closely to her own aesthetics. The sun, half hidden by thin clouds in the original design, was replaced by several small birds. The house, pictured at an angle and half concealed by trees and shrubs, was completely redrawn. Mrs. Hanson changed the house form to a simplified full-front, bilaterally symmetrical design, eliminating the intricately drawn trees and shrubs. She redesigned two trees behind the house, transforming them into round, full bushes of solid colour. As we will see later, this is very typical of Mrs. Hanson's tree style. Although she left one tree in its detailed state, she mentioned that she preferred her own simple design as intricate trees were too difficult to hook. "Those were scattery trees up there. I just made them plain round so that I could hook them better" (private transcription). Mrs. Hanson was certainly capable of hooking such finely detailed motifs; one tree in the mat was left detailed and, on another mat, she carefully hooked branches and shadows. Her alteration, therefore, must have depended

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[14] I assume they were hooked at this time because their design is listed in a Bluenose catalogue dated 1964. John E. Garrett, *Bluenose Hooked Rugs* ([New Glasgow, NS]: [Garrett], 1964-65) 3.

more on personal style choice. This mat, a mixture of closely followed details and individual designs, suggests Mrs. Hanson's appreciation for the overall form and her insistence on structural changes to individualize it.

Mrs. Hanson hooked another version of this scene with further reduction in detail and rearrangement of motifs [Figure 6.5]. She used the same two-dimensional style house with a central chimney, central door and two bordering windows, but eliminated still more trees, leaving only one sculptured pine beside the house. The windmill in the hand-drawn copy was moved to the extreme right-hand corner, and reduced to a small brown block with two fans protruding from its edge. This simplification of design seems to indicate a lack of drawing ability. Had the viewer not known of the Bluenose original, Mrs. Hanson's design intent would have been unclear. The rushes and water details were eliminated and replaced by small dories. Much like her version of the Bluenose design, three birds fly above the windmill, but they too have been moved to the right-hand corner. The boat has acquired an extra sail, and looks very similar to the sailboat shape she repeatedly used later. The border on this mat has been simplified from a scalloped design to four simple bands of colour. The reduction and rearrangement of details and the use of established traits of personal preference (birds, stylized trees, sailboats) indicate that Mrs. Hanson drew freehand a copy of Bluenose #2121 onto a plain piece of burlap. The alterations represent a combination of Mrs. Hanson's aesthetics (dories instead of rushes) and technical limitations resulting in simplifications.

Substitutions in design and re-use of standard motif types are not the product of an unimaginative artist. Repetition of designs indicate a personal stock of elements, called upon to compose an item of established control. As mentioned in Chapter 2, David Buchan describes how non-literate peoples

Figure 6-4: Bluenose pattern #2121 hooked by Mrs. Hanson in the 1960s. Changed slightly from original.

Figure 6-5: The same pattern with more changes and reductions in detail.

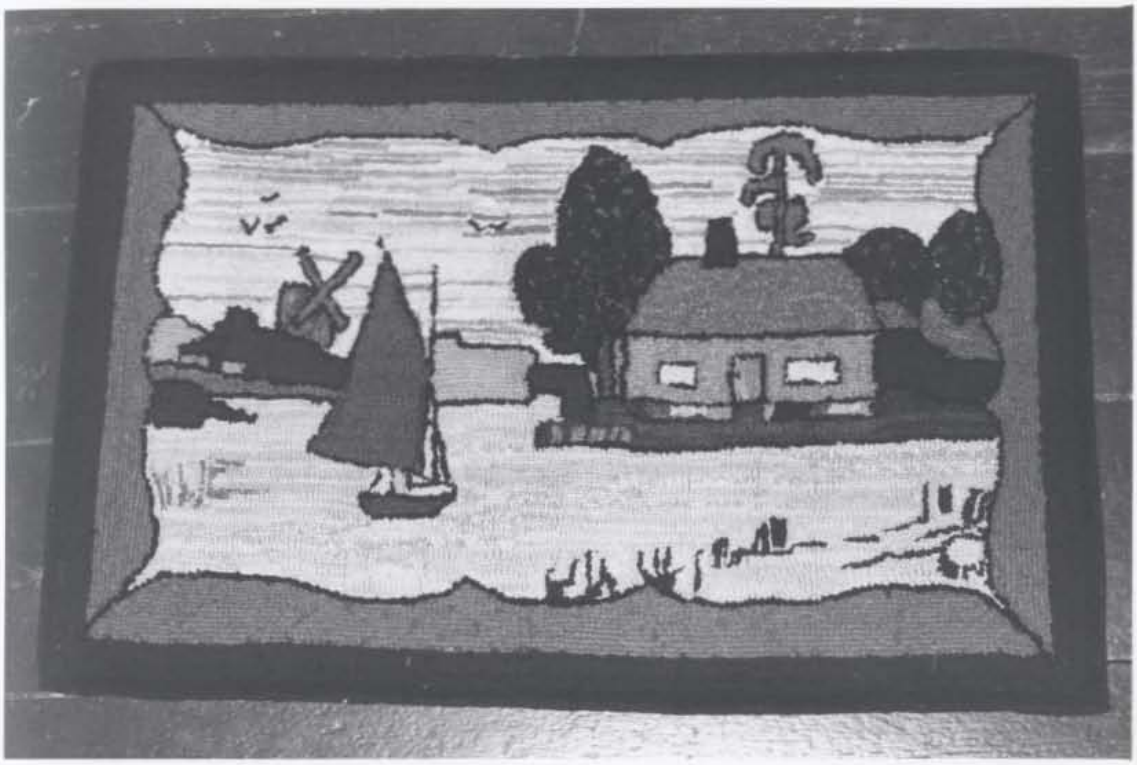


Figure 6.4

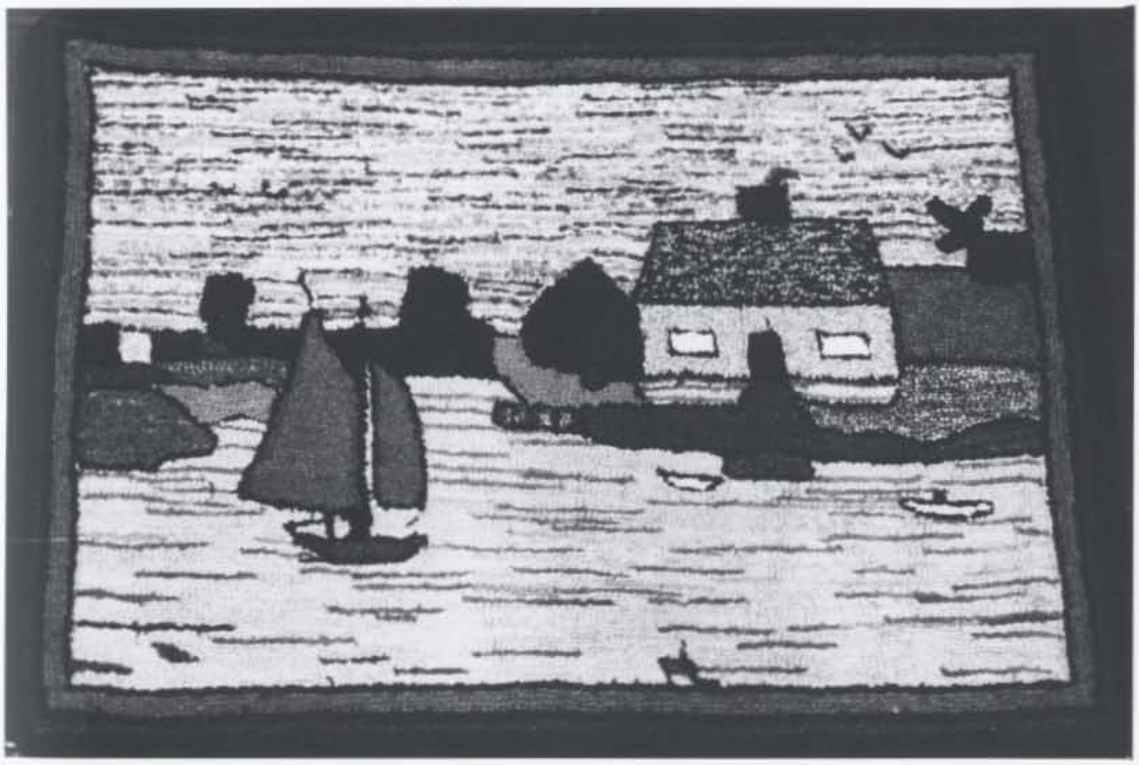


Figure 6.5

compose ballads by learning formulas which make up the story line. Likewise, mat hookers in the early twentieth century learned to draw floral and representational designs by creatively choosing and combining known elements to produce a pleasing effect. From Mrs. Hanson's statements it appears she was not introduced to this tradition. She designed simple utilitarian mats but made no mention of, and I did not see any, traditional floral patterns. Mrs. Hanson switched from making geometrics to altering and hooking Bluenose patterns. Thus, she learned to compose her own designs by first becoming familiar with the motifs and styles on commercial mats and then gradually altering and recomposing them to suit her tastes. Throughout the years of stamped mat hooking Mrs. Hanson's alterations and explorations led to development of a personal repertoire which she would later call upon to compose her own designs.

The change from reliance on stamped patterns to sole use of her own drawing skills is clearly demonstrated in a series of four similar mats. Each mat depicts a bonneted girl in old-fashioned dress, standing in either a garden or field. Although unable to locate a commercial pattern of similar design, I believe one of the mats was a stamped pattern, the others copies and variations.

The two mats I will first discuss have the same design. One pattern shows a well-drawn figure of a bonneted girl in long dress, carrying a potted plant, walking before a fence [Figure 6.6]. The fence runs the width of the mat; a flower box is depicted on the right and a birdhouse perched on a wooden stand to the left. A tree to the girl's left has an irregular leafy area with dark branches visible among the foliage. Shadows have been hooked under the figure, tree, and bird house. The tree, shadows, details in the girl's clothing, and the exact proportions are elements and technical qualities unlike Mrs. Hanson's, suggesting that this was a stamped pattern. Mrs. Hanson slightly altered this pattern, to include several of

her own design elements, adding a personal touch. As in most of her outdoor scenes, stamped or hand-drawn, she has hooked several small birds in the sky. The border, comprised of five different bands of colour with a large six-petalled flower in each corner (although one flower has seven petals) suggests her creative hand. These large floral borders, repeatedly used by Mrs. Hanson, are not found on any stamped patterns.

The second mat in the group has the same design with only a few small differences [Figure 6.7]. Some alterations suggest Mrs. Hanson's preferred style, while others indicate her limited drawing skills. The tree has been redesigned, conforming to Mrs. Hanson's favorite tree style: a short trunk with a solid ball of green representing the leaves. The border has also been slightly changed to three bands of colour and three blocks enclosing either a five--or six--petalled flower. The bonnet has lost its definition and looks like a large sun hat, while the knickers' frills have been eliminated. The position of the legs is slightly altered, suggesting a change during the copying process. There are fewer slats on the fence, with eighteen fully or partially visible in the copied mat, twenty-three in the original. The similarities in these mats and the minimal stylistic and technical changes in the second indicate intent to produce a near likeness to the original.

The remaining two mats, illustrating gardening scenes, have thematic similarities but different motifs from the first two and from each other. The first mat shows two girls: one pulling a small waggon, the another standing over a garden plot with a watering can [Figure 6.8]. The bonnets and dresses, similar to those in the first two mats, have been simplified, suggesting loss of detail during copying. Though evidence suggests Mrs. Hanson drew this design free-hand, the scene was likely inspired by a stamped pattern or picture. Judging from its three-dimensional appearance, Mrs. Hanson probably copied or traced the waggon from a commercial source, drawing the rest of the scene by hand.

Figure 6-6: Stamped pattern of girl in old-fashioned dress carrying a potted plant.

Figure 6-7: The same mat design with changes and reductions in detail.

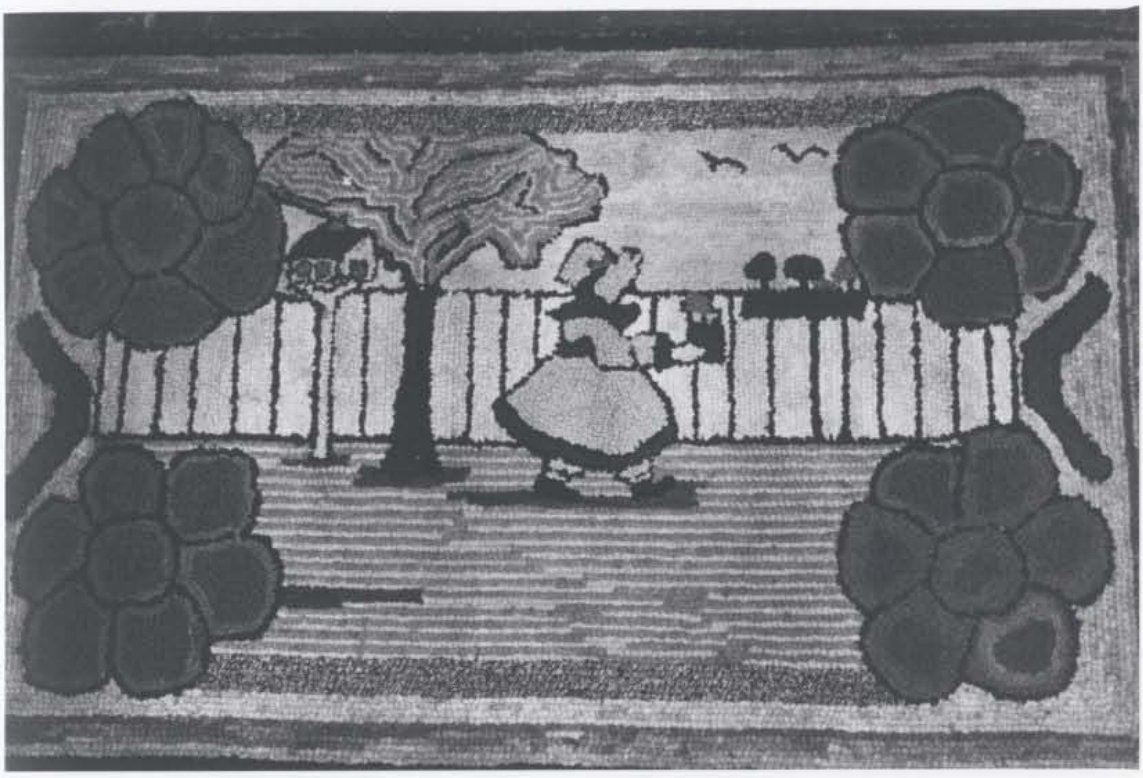


Figure 6.6

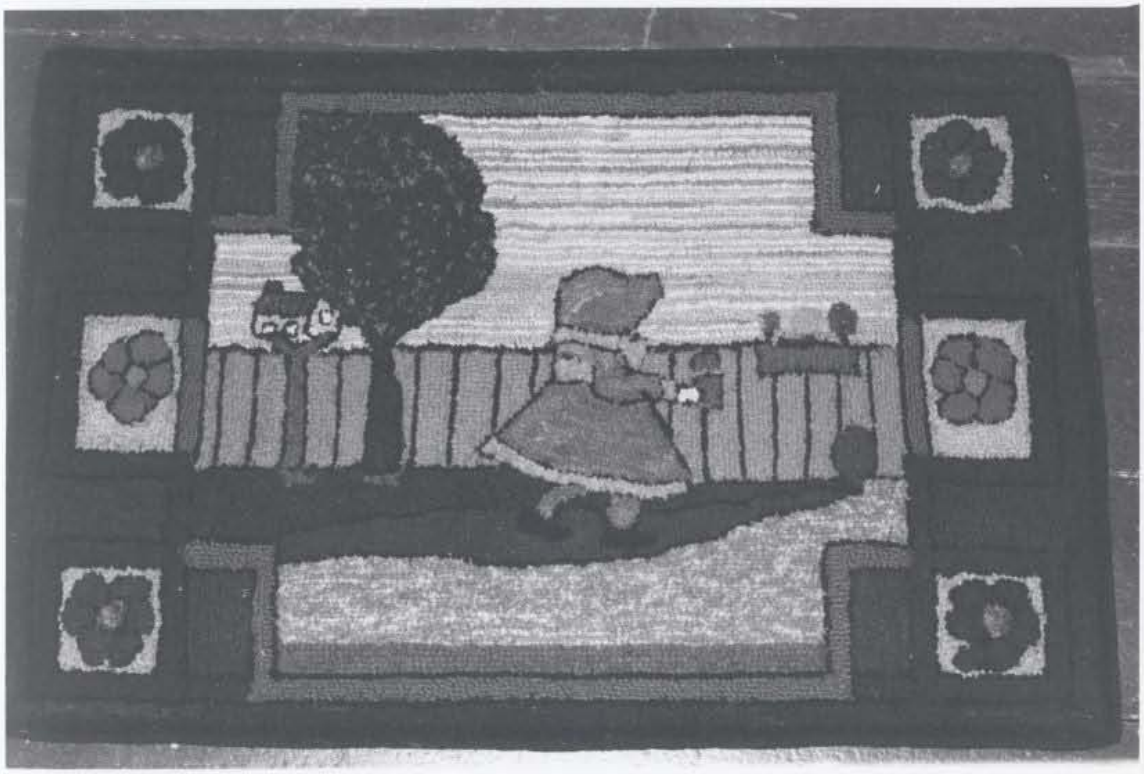


Figure 6.7

Figure 6-8: Two girls in old-fashioned clothes in gardening scene.

Figure 6-9: Mat designed by Mrs. Hanson illustrating two girls in old-fashioned clothes, working in a garden.

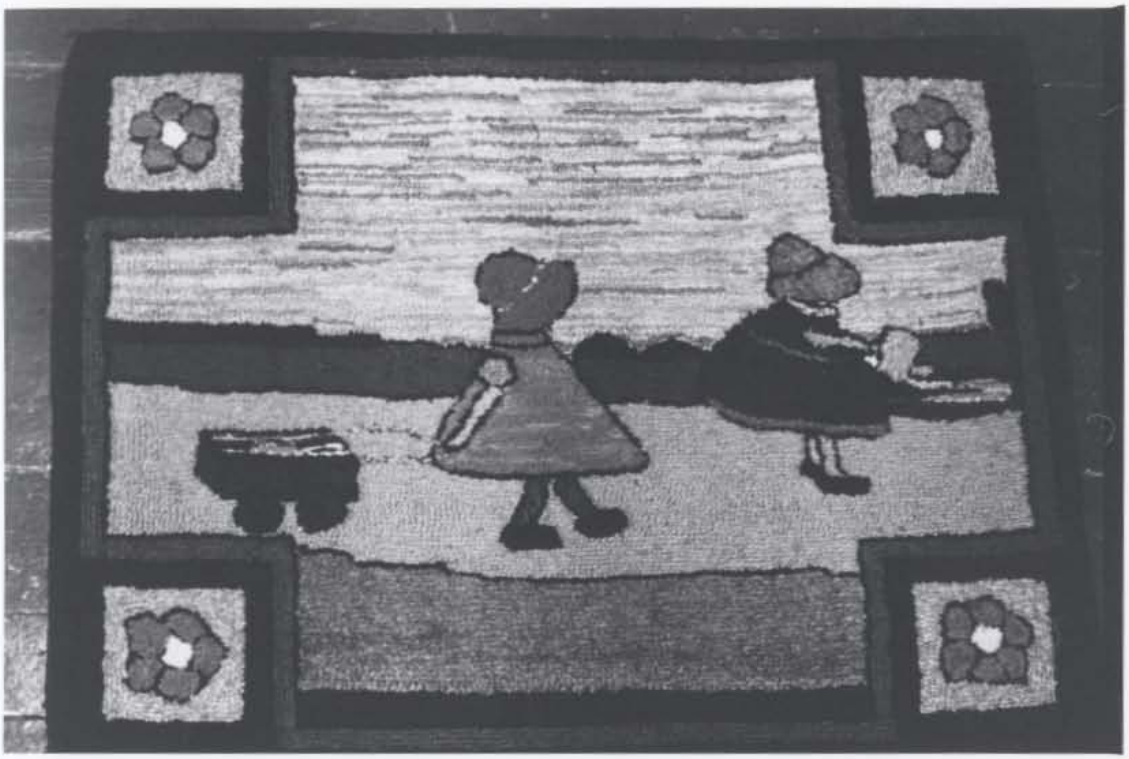


Figure 6.8

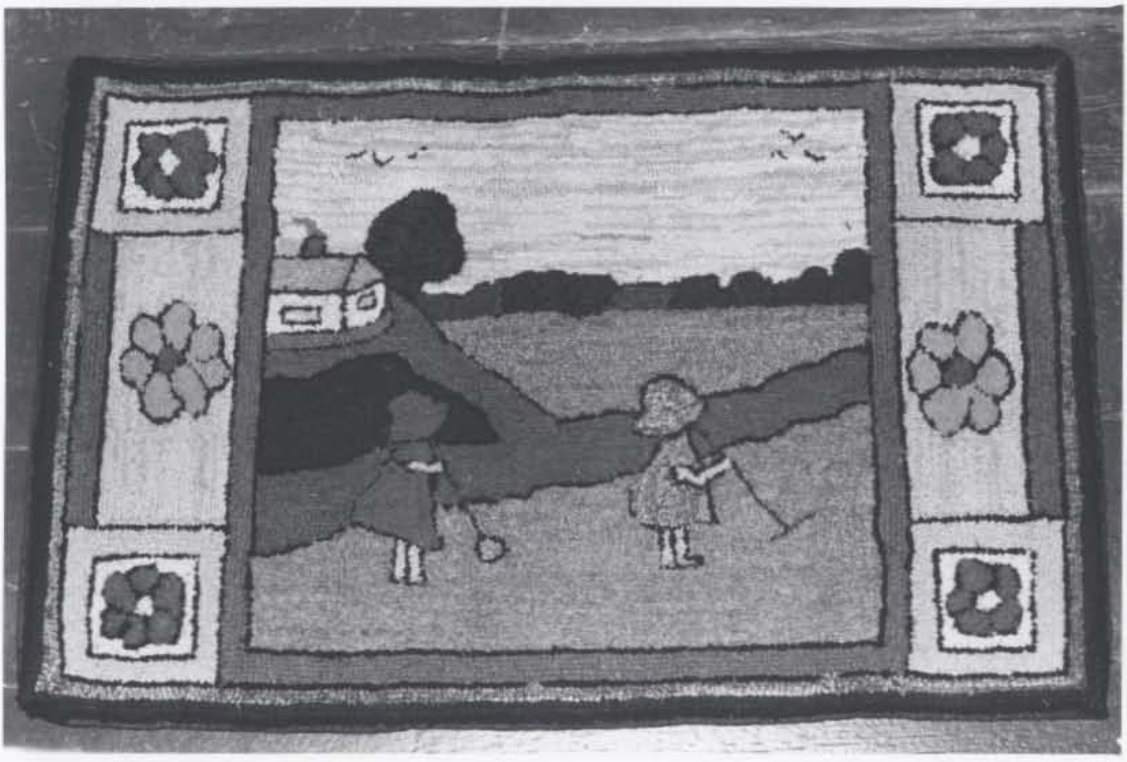


Figure 6.9

In the other gardening mat, surely designed by Mrs. Hanson, the two girls have lost much detail and symmetrical appearance [Figure 6.9]. The bonnets no longer have definite brims, and merely rest upon the girls' shoulders. The two stand in a field, one holding a rake and the other a hoe. The dresses are plain triangular shapes and the bare arms and legs have been reduced to stick-like proportions. The shrub-covered horizon is quite high on the mat and two roads curve upward to a two-dimensional house peeking from the upper left-hand corner. The border resembles that of the third gardening mat previously described: four bands of colour and two sets of three flowers along the edges, each with five to seven petals.

The lack of detail in the girls' figures and clothes, and Mrs. Hanson's characteristic landscape and house motifs (elements similar to those used later in her hand-drawn rural pictorial mats) indicate an original design. From this sequence of four mats one assumes Mrs. Hanson established the final, hand-drawn design through exploring the other three. The evolution from a closely followed stamped pattern to an independently-created design illustrates Mrs. Hanson's transition from using commercial mats to drawing her own scenes.

The practice of copying patterns is as old as mat hooking itself. Indeed, in any activity where pattern is used, the tendency is to copy designs which please the individual's aesthetic sense or conform to group aesthetics or fashion.[15] However, even within this borrowing tradition, individuals exercise some freedom, omitting elements which displease them, incorporating those they like. Levi-Strauss refers to this creative freedom as *bricolage*.[16] New ideas presented to

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[15]Bunzel notes that Zuni potters chose designs from older pots and incorporated original designs. Both however, closely adhered to the community's unspoken sense of "right design." Bunzel *The Pueblo Potter* 51-54.

[16]Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1969) 16-22.

artists are compared with old ideas; satisfactory components are used as given, or altered to conform with the artists' extant styles and individual and community tastes.[17] *Bricolage* encompassed Mrs. Hanson's treatment of Bluenose patterns and set the stage for inception of independent designs. She did not actually reject commercial patterns; she used and altered them until she discovered a comfortable style.

As noted above, Bunzel and Jones warned against an approach which leads to spurious development of a linear evolution theory. Mrs. Hanson's transition from hooking stamped patterns, to altering them, to creating her own designs was not a linear one. Though she began to hook and alter stamped mats in the 1930s, she hooked a series of Bluenose patterns in the mid-sixties and early seventies, closely following the given designs. In an apparently studied move toward ever-increasing individual expression, the four hooked Bluenose mats appear anomalous. These mats, hooked for her husband and daughter, were considered special and required particular attention. This was evident when I first saw them, rolled up with moth balls, tied with string, and stored in an upstairs closet. I was immediately struck by her precise following of the designs, and the care taken to hook in all given details without altering the motifs. In one Bluenose pattern, a scene of a deer jumping over a fallen tree,[18] Mrs. Hanson took care to sensitively represent the motifs. She hooked the fabric in a manner calculated to make the scene look more realistic. Instead of making straight rows, she hooked the deer with contours imitating its hair:

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[17]Henry Glassie, "Folk Art," *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1972) 259-60. Gerald Pocius refers to this practice in the development of Newfoundland house types. See Gerald Pocius, "English Styles and Irish Adaptations: The Emergence of Newfoundland House Forms on the Southern Shore," Newfoundland Historical Society, St. John's, NF, 29 Jan. 1981; see also his, "Calvert: A Study of Artifacts and Spatial Usage in a Newfoundland Community," diss., U of Pennsylvania, 1979, 193.

[18]Garrett *Bluenose* 2.

> I hooked him round and round, as you say, you know;
> I hooked him round and round. His tail and all that. . . .
> I tried, yes, I tried to raise his horns to make him look
> like a deer. I thought he'd look more like a deer,
> you see and I was trying to represent his fur (private
> transcription).

She treated the wood grain on the fallen tree in much the same manner.

In other cases, she traced mats with the same careful adherence to the commercial form. This can be seen in the Bluenose mat of The Three Bears[19] [Figure 6.10]. Although there are several changes in form and some finer details have been lost, the mat shows a deliberate, careful effort to follow the pattern. The cuffs, collars, and waistbands of the bears' clothing were included, details incongruous with Mrs. Hanson's usual style of limited intricacies.

Why did Mrs. Hanson not alter these designs? There are at least two reasons, the first involving belief in the authenticity of print. Referring to Newfoundland textile traditions in the early twentieth century Pocius says "... printed designs manufactured for a specific textile object were always considered the most desirable."[20] The same holds true for mat hookers in the twentieth century; they felt professionally-made, commercial mats were more attractive than mats based on their own designs.

The second reason--and the most important to Mrs. Hanson--lies in the mats' purpose or use. Unlike other altered Bluenose creations hooked to display her creativity of design, these unaltered mats were gifts for her loved ones. To

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[19]Garrett *Bluenose* 3.

[20]Pocius *Textile Traditions* 57. He also discovered that Newfoundland singers refer to a printed song text because they feel it must be the correct version. Gerald L. Pocius, "'The First Day that I Thought of It Since I Got Wed': Role Expectations and Singer Status in a Newfoundland Outport," *Western Folklore* 35 (1976): 116. Similarly, a woman from upstate New York who learned through oral tradition to make pierogies referred her granddaughter to a recipe she had seen in the local paper (K. Kimiecik, 1986, personal communication).

Figure 6-10: Bluenose pattern, "The Three Bears," hooked by Mrs. Hanson.

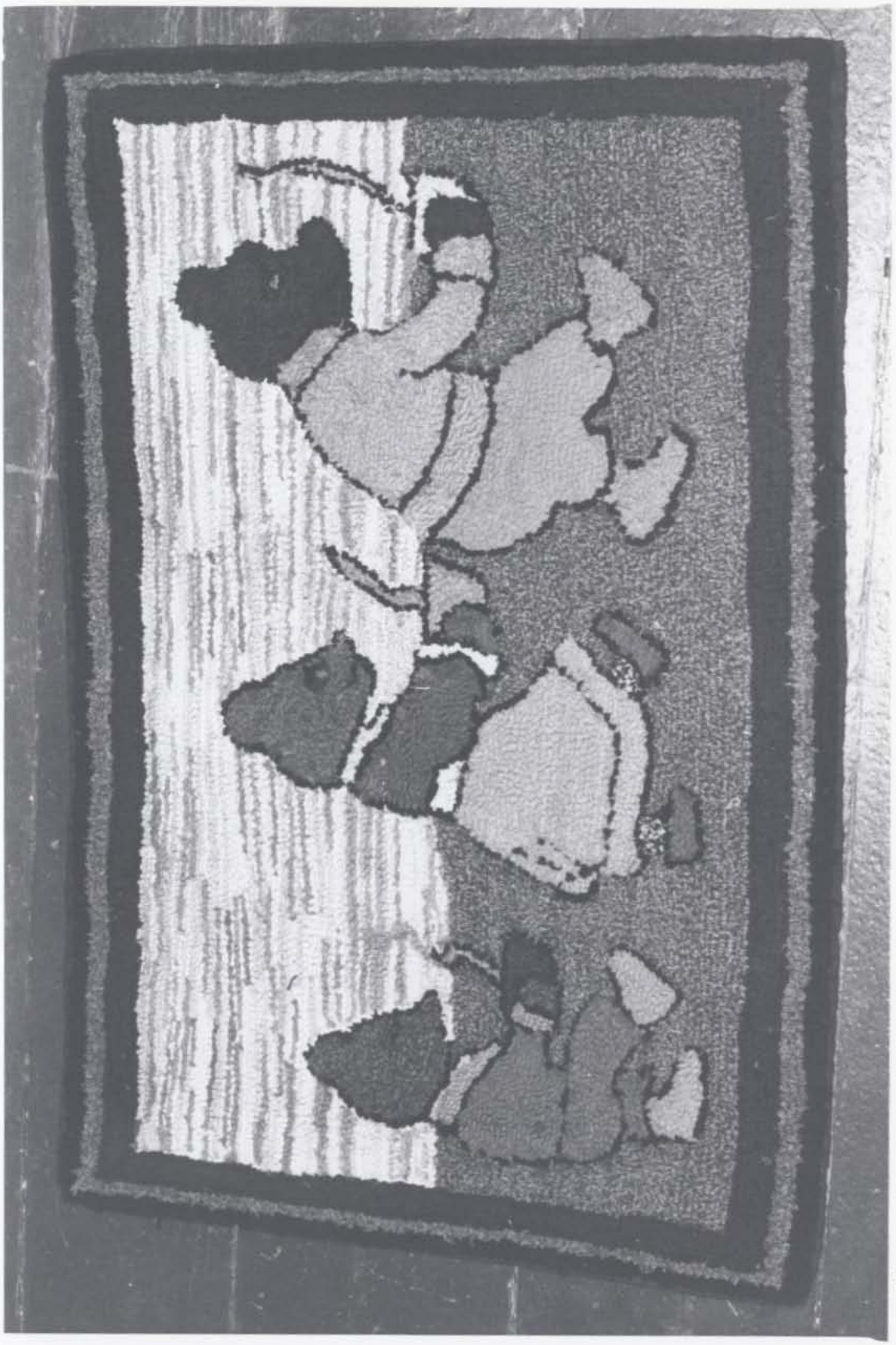


Figure 6.10

ensure quality of design, she closely followed the patterns, at the same time demonstrating her capabilities as a craftsperson through the mastery of hooking techniques. She perceived a difference between mats used on the floors and those considered special.

6.2.3. Recent Mats: Maritime Motifs

The popular idea of what makes art "folk" has been influenced by scholarship on the subject in Canada and the United States. As noted in previous chapters, this began after the turn of the century when educated anglophone Canadians turned to the rural handicrafts of Quebec, seeking solace from the modern world and re-affirmation of their higher social position. In 1930, Marjorie MacLaughlin, a woman involved in the renewal of mat hooking in Quebec, suggested "improved" styles for hooked mats. She believed women could increase the popularity and market value of their craft by using rural landscape scenes. She based her judgement on anglophone market preferences:

> These hooked rugs, besides being beautiful things to decorate one's house, make a permanent record of a phase of French-Canadian life that is being driven rapidly out by modern machines. A hundred years from now people will look at them in the same spirit that we now look at Krieghoff's paintings.[21]

The popularity of recent historical rural scenes in non-elite art has continued. The study of folk artists in Nova Scotia suddenly increased in the 1970s with exhibitions and publications arousing interest within academic circles

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[21] Marjorie MacLaughlin, "Landscape Rugs in Quebec," *Canadian Geographical Journal* 1 (1930): 650. Cornelius Krieghoff, a German born painter, settled in a small Quebec village and painted genre scenes of the inhabitants' lives. For more information see J. Russell Harper, *Krieghoff* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1979) and Marius Barbeau, *Cornelius Krieghoff* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1948).

and throughout the general public.[22] Exposure given to these styles shaped public expectations and fuelled demand for this type of art. Although I could gather little information from Mrs. Hanson concerning her motivation for adopting this style, one may infer that a degree of influence stemmed from exposure to publications about these other artists. Mrs. Hanson may have noticed a trend toward scenes of rural life either at the Nova Scotia Provincial Exhibition or through media coverage, encouraging her to adopt this style. Her scenes of rural landscapes and villages received praise from the judges at the Exhibition and from spectators, neighbours and consumers of folk art, reinforcing her use of this style.

By the late 1960s, Mrs. Hanson's craft was neither a household necessity nor an implement of social interaction with neighbourhood women. Working independently, she was free from the group effect (mentioned in Chapters 2, 3 and 4) which creates homogeneity through association with others following similar methods and designs. Her mats had become, foremost, a vehicle of artistic expression relying on the popular image of folk art at the time. Her recent repertoire is based on combinations of several favorite motifs expressing variations on the theme of Maritime rural life. The following discussion illustrates changes which occurred within the body of work and influences which affected her art.

The craftsperson's designs are usually drawn from a store of ideas composed of commonplace motifs and previous observations. With skill, these are organized

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[22]There was much publicity on such Nova Scotian artists as Maud Lewis, Joe Sleep, and Fred Trask, who paint scenes of regional rural life in Nova Scotia. For specifics see: Marie Elwood, "Twentieth Century Nova Scotia Folk Art," *Canadian Collector* 1 (1977): 31-34; Donalee Moulton-Barrett, "Vivid Images from a Windowsill," *Halifax* 7.3 (1981): 54-58; Sheila Cole, "Down-East Folk Art," *Axiom* 2 (1977): 47-48; Mary Lutwick, "Fred Trask: 'Folk Artist'," *Atlantic Advocate* 3.71 (1980): 90; Doris McCoy, "Frail Woman with a Bold Brush," *Atlantic Advocate* 57.5 (1967): 36-37+; Bruce Ferguson, *Joe Sleep, Retrospective* (Halifax: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, 1981); Julia V. Watson, "Maud Lewis, Primitive Painter," *Atlantic Advocate* 72.4 (1981): 50-51; Fred A. Hatfield, "Fred Trask: Colour Him Artist," *Bluenose Magazine* 4:3 (1979): 10-11.

into a competent form. Barnett describes how individuals organize their experiences to preserve self-identity:

> [The] sociopsychological self [is] an entity that is the product of a unique life history in a unique social microcosm. He is continuously, and largely unconsciously, casting his environment in the mold of his past experiences through a dynamic interaction between its components and his self conception.[23]

Although Mrs. Hanson does not depict specific places or actual houses or objects, she incorporates elements with a maritime flavour, reflecting the rural environment of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

The mats always depict summer scenes of small houses with rolling lawns and small kitchen gardens, solid barns and meandering country lanes. Puffy deciduous trees spring from the landscape and Lombardy poplars point to blue skies. Mrs. Hanson's panoramic landscapes give the impression of viewing the scene from the bottom of a hill. This drawing technique creates more land mass upon which to draw motifs. The effect reflects strongly the geographic locale of Mrs. Hanson's home. Her farm is situated on a rounded hill overlooking the Greenfield Road and several other houses. This area is mostly woodland with small hills, some of which have been cleared for farming or grazing. The rough, meandering country roads illustrated in her mats are like the confusion of roads in and around the area.

These rural scenes are at once static and busy. There are--with the exception of the gardening mats previously discussed--no human or animal figures. However, the mats are alive with artifacts: houses, barns, churches and schools, boats, gardens, bridges and wells, all of which suggest human habitation. The

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[23]H. G. Barnett, *Innovation: The Basis of Cultural Change* (Toronto: McGraw, 1953) 114.

flow of the landscape and suggested movement in the winding roads and curved wooden fences adds life and movement to her designs. Her choice of motifs portrays a stable, serene world with an emphasis on three important institutions: the home and family, offering comfort and security; the school, which outside the home is the central influence on a child; and the church, representing spiritual guidance and a sense of community.

Nova Scotians' identity is greatly influenced by the sea's presence. Mrs. Hanson's designs reflect this identity. Most of her patterns include peaceful harbours with small unmanned dory-shaped boats moored just offshore. In two mats there are, in addition to dories, single-masted, square-rigged sailboats resting on calm waters.

The *Bluenose* is a fishing and racing schooner built in 1921 at Lunenburg, just sixty kilometres from Mrs. Hanson's birthplace in Milton. It has become a symbol of Nova Scotia. Because of the media's tireless efforts to utilize it in advertising and tourism campaigns, the image of a full-rigged schooner has pervaded all Nova Scotians' consciousness. Mrs. Hanson's inclusion of dories and sailboats reflects this shared marine identity and recalls her ties to the South Shore's maritime tradition.[24]

The covered bridge, once popular in New Brunswick, is another traditionally Maritime image employed by Mrs. Hanson. The world's longest covered bridge in Hartland, New Brunswick has become, like the *Bluenose* in Nova Scotia, a readily identifiable provincial image. As provincial landmarks, New Brunswick's covered bridges receive much publicity through advertising and

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[24]The South Shore refers to the Atlantic coastal region between St. Margaret's Bay and Yarmouth.

tourism.[25] Mrs. Hanson's sojourn in St. Stephen provided opportunity to become familiar with this symbol and store it in her repertoire of potential designs.

The old-fashioned draw-well is another motif which Mrs. Hanson repeatedly uses. While discussing this motif, she mentioned the well at Grand Pré, a site in the Annapolis Valley immortalized by the nineteenth century poet Longfellow in his poem *Evangeline*. The image of Evangeline's statue in front of the large well at Grand Pré is a familiar reference to most Nova Scotians. The pervasiveness of these symbols in the thoughts of Maritime people is reflected in Mrs. Hanson's free and unselfconscious use of them in her booked mat designs.

The use of sailing ships, wells and covered bridges is also a conscious attempt to give designs an old-fashioned appearance. Mrs. Hanson mentioned this while discussing one of her mats:

> This is supposed to be just--see the Dutch people, you know, they have one of those things on the barn. (Weathervanes?) Yes, I tried to get the barns a bit different like they would be if I could make them look old (C8639).

She makes a deliberate effort to represent the land and lifestyle of early twentieth century Nova Scotia. The four motifs mentioned above lend an historic atmosphere to rural scenes portrayed in Mrs. Hanson's mats, completing the sense of time and place she attempts to convey.

Mrs. Hanson has amassed a portfolio of motifs from newspapers and magazines appropriate for the representation of rural maritime life. She uses the pictures as visual aids for elements technically and stylistically difficult to execute. All of them depict historic scenes. I found, for example, a clipping from a recent

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[25]For an example of this publicity see, "New Brunswick Rich in Covered Bridges," *Chronicle-Herald* 27 Oct.1979: 24.

Figure 6-11: Community and landscape scene illustrating some maritime motifs Mrs. Hanson uses in her rural pictorial mats.

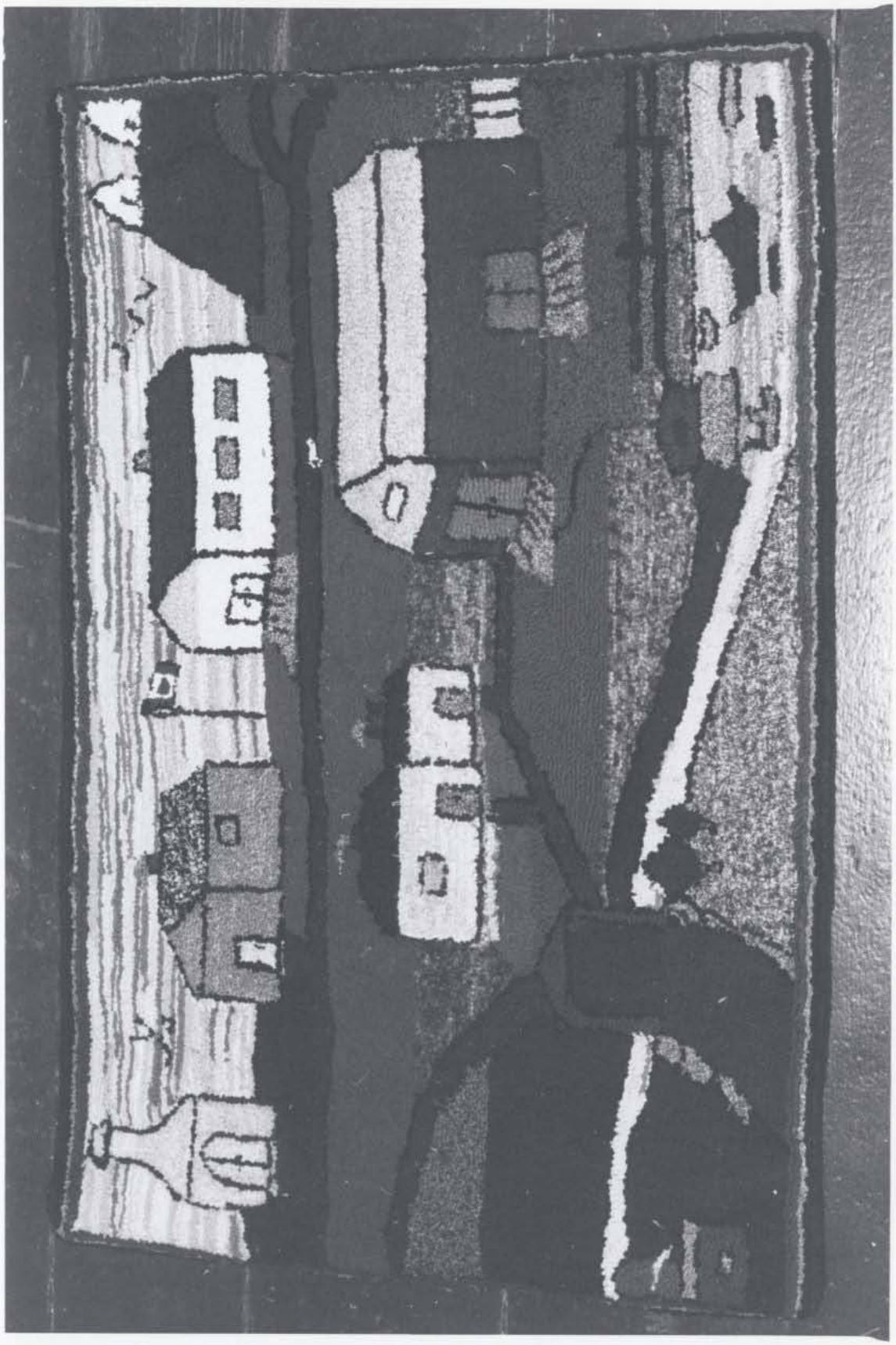


Figure 6.11

Nova Scotia newspaper with a photograph of a Union Jack flying in the breeze. The caption under the picture read: "A rare sight on flag poles," and "motorists . . . express their delight in viewing the 'old flag' flying again."[26] One of Mrs. Hanson's mats has a Union Jack flag fluttering outside a schoolhouse and the image is strikingly similar. Her preference for using these old-time motifs is encouraged by the media's emphasis on the images' nostalgic value.

Although she believes pastoral designs and old-time motifs are appropriate for her art, Mrs. Hanson is not rigidly opposed to including modern elements. Her granddaughter, Vickie, also displays artistic talent and often offers criticism and suggestions while her grandmother draws and hooks her mats. One particularly busy scene was designed jointly by Mrs. Hanson and Vicky, both of whom continued suggesting more motifs as Mrs. Hanson drew the pattern [Figure 6.12]. Her attempt to draw an historic setting was scuttled when Vicky suggested she include modern street lights and use the Maple Leaf flag (issued in 1967) instead of the Union Jack. Both the street lights and new flag modernize the scene, placing it in the second half of this century:

> I tried to get the French into it if I could, see, more or less with the farm and the water. And I saw something like that on T.V. one time--I saw a church but it wasn't quite that design of a church. There was a church here and a manse. . . . We more or less tried to get it like this. Vickie said "Oh, you're putting too much into it." "Oh," I said, "may as well be a school into it." I thought trees, mailbox and a flag. Vickie said, "You can't put a Union Jack." "Oh," I said, "it wouldn't be a Union Jack *now*," I said. And she wanted a light in it. How could I ever get a light?! But, anyway, we did get a light. (Yes, it does look like a street light.) That was it, I thought it *ruined* it with a street light but she wanted, over there [gestures on the mat] to put in *another* (private transcription).

[26]Undated clipping from unidentified newspaper.

Figure 6-12: Community and landscape scene designed by Mrs. Hanson, with her granddaughter's assistance.

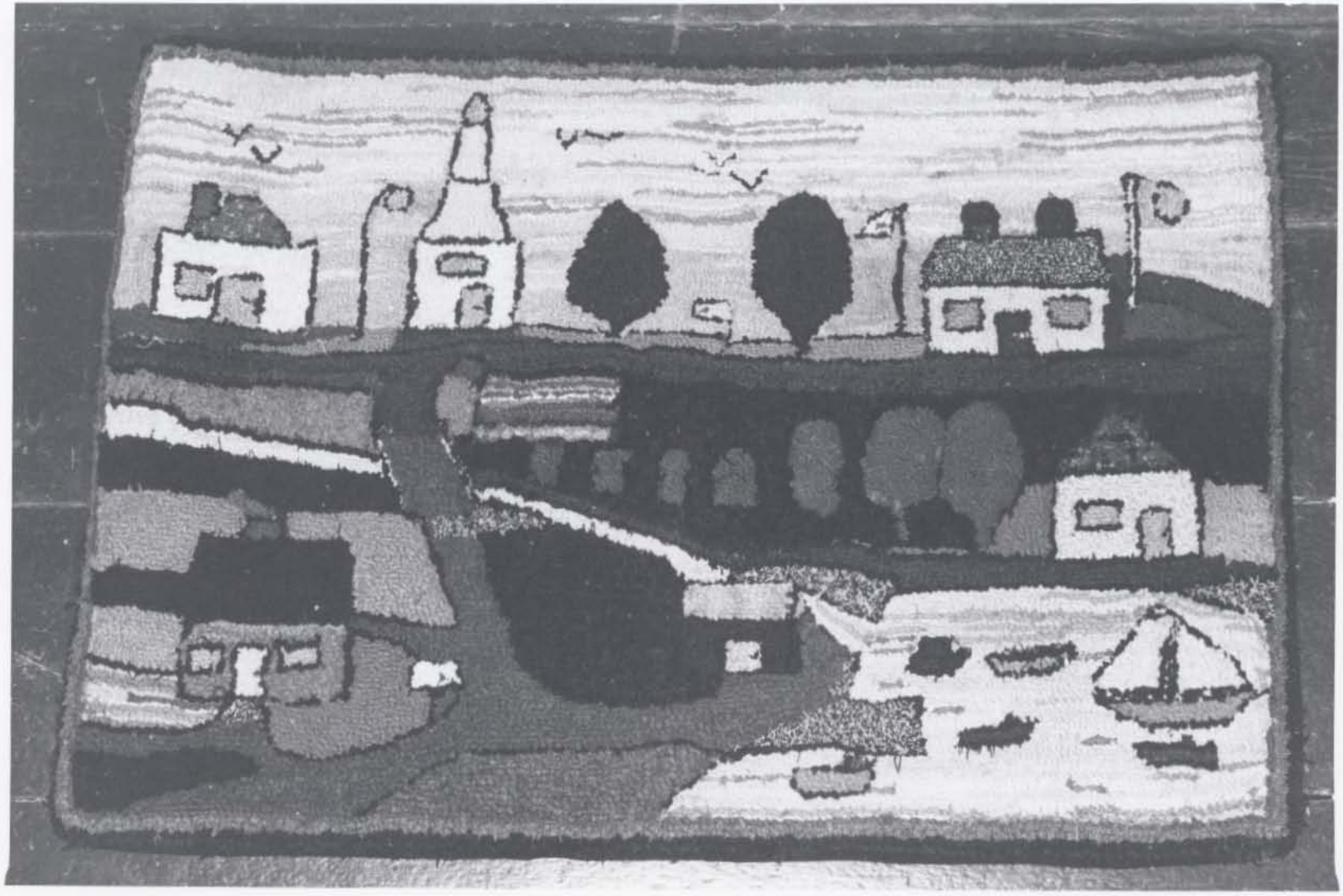


Figure 6.12

This brief exchange illustrates Mrs. Hanson's conscious effort to produce an early twentieth century scene. She said a street light would "ruin" the picture, implying it was incongruous with old-fashioned motifs like the French church, rural mail box, and Union Jack flag. Despite this, she complied with her granddaughter's wishes and introduced modern elements. It is important to note that this is the only mat which incorporates such modern images, indicating her strong preference for historic scenes.

Some art scholars claim makers have a definite plan of what they want before they begin[27] while others believe art is more spontaneous.[28] Jones contends that both or neither of these arguments may hold true for a given artist at a particular time.[29] Mrs. Hanson sometimes knows what direction a scene will take before she begins; at other times (such as with the mat described) the design process is cumulative and quite impulsive.

6.2.3.1. Influence of the Exhibition

The Nova Scotia Provincial Exhibition, held every August in Colchester County, has been one of the most influential factors in the development of Mrs. Hanson's style. She began displaying mats in the arts and crafts exhibit in 1967 when she entered a Centennial motif and has since been a regular contributor. Her original designs, which, as I have indicated, developed from her penchant for altering Bluenose mats, were initially displayed for the thrill of exposure and competition. After repeated successes, the Exhibition became the motivating

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[27] Dunzel *The Pueblo Potter* 49 and Boas 156-57.

[28] "What is American Folk Art? A Symposium," *Antiques* 57(1950): 360, 361.

[29] Jones *The Hand Made Object* 66.

factor in her choice of design. As Barnett noted, competition promotes innovative action:

> Competition is a potent incentive when mutually desirable rewards are allocated on the basis of performance. In such situations it is productive not only of increased effort but also of distinctively new kinds of effort to achieve greater shares of the reward. It stimulates innovation as well as prolonged and intensified effort along conventional lines.[30]

Mrs. Hanson felt pressured by the Exhibition's competitive nature to choose designs according to her perception of public preference. In conversation she often mentioned the Exhibition, stressing her efforts to create designs to please the judges and the public. The praise she received from them and spectators, neighbours, and consumers of folk art, reinforced use of a public-oriented style. Thus, the relationship between Mrs. Hanson and her viewers became that of craftsperson and client.[31]

At an arts and crafts competition the public and judges are the clients, expressing certain demands or expectations which the craftsperson or artist fulfills. This relationship forms without contract and often without verbal exchange. If the art is successful, the craftsperson will continue to produce similar items to ensure a prosperous relationship with the client. The craftsperson may introduce modifications, based on public reaction. She may continue to use the modified design if favorably received, or discontinue its use if sales (or prizes)

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[30] Barnett 72.

[31] Jones noted interaction between craftspeople and their clients, suggesting styles are often chosen on the basis of this relationship rather than on the artist's personal preference. Jones *The Hand Made Object* 126-39; Michael Owen Jones, "'If You Make a Simple Thing, You Gotta Sell It at a Simple Price': Folk Art Production As a Business, Part I," *Kentucky Folklore Record* 17 (1971): 73-77.

drop or criticisms are made. She must pay close attention to the public, interpreting and analysing changes in attitudes and tastes, altering the craft accordingly. The craftsperson watches her competition (the other exhibitors), adopting their popular elements of design and style and avoiding unpopular ones.

Mrs. Hanson's case is a good example of this, as illustrated in analysis of change in her motifs and techniques since she entered public competition. First, desire to produce pleasing mats influenced her technique of hooking rags through the burlap. There are several ways of doing this, each one creating a different effect in the surface texture's appearance. Rags may be hooked in straight rows which produces evenly spaced lines, highlighting and emphasizing the bi-dimensionality of the design. They can also be hooked randomly, in swirls and curves, softening the surface's appearance. The mat hooker may follow lines or grain of the depicted object producing a three dimensional, realistic appearance.

Mrs. Hanson, like many other hookers, uses a combination of all three techniques in her mats. For example, in one mat she hooked the background in straight rows and the flowers in swirling lines, giving petals shape and fullness. She further highlighted the petals by hooking them higher than the rest of the design. Mrs. Hanson used this highlighting technique specifically in her special mats.

Mats hooked in swirls and circles are even on the front with all the spaces filled, but on the reverse burlap shows through the loops of material. Apparently, evenness of both back and front is one criterion of excellence at the Exhibition. This prompted Mrs. Hanson to alter her method of hooking to satisfy the judges' aesthetics:

> It's hard work, you know, to get it down there for the Exhibition. See it's hard to get it--you leave all the spaces, you will [if] you go round and round. But for

> *yourself* it's all right. . . . You go round and round and there'll be spaces there [indicating the reverse side]. It can't be helped (private transcription).

Mats she made for herself were hooked randomly, but those destined for the Exhibition were hooked in straight horizontal lines to meet the competition's criteria.

Michael Owen Jones suggests that craftpeople working for the public develop an "operating culture" or style which suits the clients but is at odds with their own "private culture" or personal stylistic preference.[32] The change from Mrs. Hanson's private culture to a public culture is indicated by the manner in which she now hooks rags. Other changes in her style have occurred in the arrangement of design, use of colour, and alterations in drawing technique, all to satisfy the public's aesthetics.

Mats designed for her own use, and her early exhibited samples, had wide decorative borders: floral, geometric, or simple alternating bands of colour [Figure 6.8]. This decoration draws attention away from the central figures, diminishing the design's visual impact. However, her recent mats have narrow, black, unobtrusive borders which do not distract viewers' attention. This stylistic change was likely calculated to suit a criterion--or perceived criterion--of the judges. Perhaps people were critical of Mrs. Hanson's unique design and she opted to discontinue its use rather than risk public censure.

In most mats, Mrs. Hanson uses only one colour to hook roads and buildings, creating a flat, two-dimensional effect. She has only recently begun using a variety of colours to hook the sky (greens, blues, black, white and pinks) in an attempt to represent it more naturalistically:

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[32] Jones, "'If You Make A Simple Thing,'" 18 (1972): 11.

> (Now, do you always do the sky like this, with all the different colours?) I have been lately. I thought it looked better that way, kinda. You know, you see different colours, well now it's the same [looking through the window she notices it is overcast] but in the daytime sometimes, there'd be grey, isn't it? Like up here. It looks almost white sometimes (C8639).

Mrs. Hanson's treatment of the sky is a change in technique not yet applied to other motifs. For instance, she does not use varying shades of green--excepting already mottled tweeds--to represent grass. This sudden, limited change in technique exemplifies the change from two-dimensional forms to a more realistic depiction. This is perhaps Mrs. Hanson's attempt to keep up with perceived standards. Jones states that changes in art production or form are brought about by outside stimuli with some motivational appeal to the artist.[33] Mrs. Hanson may have seen mats at the exhibition with carefully prepared skies. If they were pleasing to her as well as the public, she may have been motivated to adopt the technique.

In her early stages, the Exhibition influence was minimal and motifs were drawn two-dimensionally, appearing flat and still [Figure 6.13]. Glassie refers to this simplification of form as an abstraction of "a structural concept."[34] The object, reduced to its minimal form, is a symbol rather than a true representation. This symbolic reduction is apparent in Mrs. Hanson's work. For example, she drew two-dimensional, frontal views of houses with steep-pitched roofs, central chimneys, rectangles for doors, and squares as windows. In successive mats she

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[33]Michael Owen Jones, "'There's Gotta Be New Designs Once in a While': Cultural Change and the 'Folk' Arts," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 36 (1972): 52.

[34]Henry Glassie, "Folk Art," *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1972) 259.

utilized the same house design in a different configuration of motifs. The same symbolic reduction is evident in the dory-shaped boats, and the birds and trees. Re-use of the same motif and topography does not indicate a lack of technical skill or imagination; the artist uses these symbols to communicate an idea. The symbols are of Maritime rural life. Neither the houses, boats, nor birds are the central message; the scene's rural nature is the idea Mrs. Hanson repeatedly portrays.[35]

Her horizons are fairly straight lines high on the mat, offering little variation in topography. The landscape appears flat with hills depicted by slightly curved roads placed at angles to the sky. She does not use the dimension of depth, but draws buildings and trees at the horizon the same size as--and often larger than--those in the foreground [Figure 6.13, as above]. It was Mrs. Hanson's original objective in drawing these scenes to produce a reflection of her cultural heritage. As she became involved with the Exhibition, competition became her motivation and she altered her style to meet judges' standards. After completing several mats in the manner described above, Mrs. Hanson attempted drawing buildings at an angle, showing both the front and gable ends. Without adequate knowledge of techniques for representing depth she succeeded only in producing a two-dimensional facade with a three-dimensional gable end [Figure 6.14].

By 1984 she was producing fairly accurate three-dimensional representations of barns and houses, interspersed with occasional two-dimensional houses or churches. Recently, she has paid more attention to the flow of the landscape, giving the scene perspective by drawing buildings at the horizon smaller than those in the foreground. Figure 6.15 shows a covered bridge and a house drawn

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[35]For a similar study of the artist's use of familiar motifs see Simon J. Bronner, "'We Live What I Paint and I Paint What I See': A Mennonite Artist in Northern Indiana," *Indiana Folklore* 12.1 (1979): 5-17.

Figure 6-13: Maritime community scene hooked early in Mrs. Hanson's association with the Exhibition, illustrating her use of two-dimensionality.

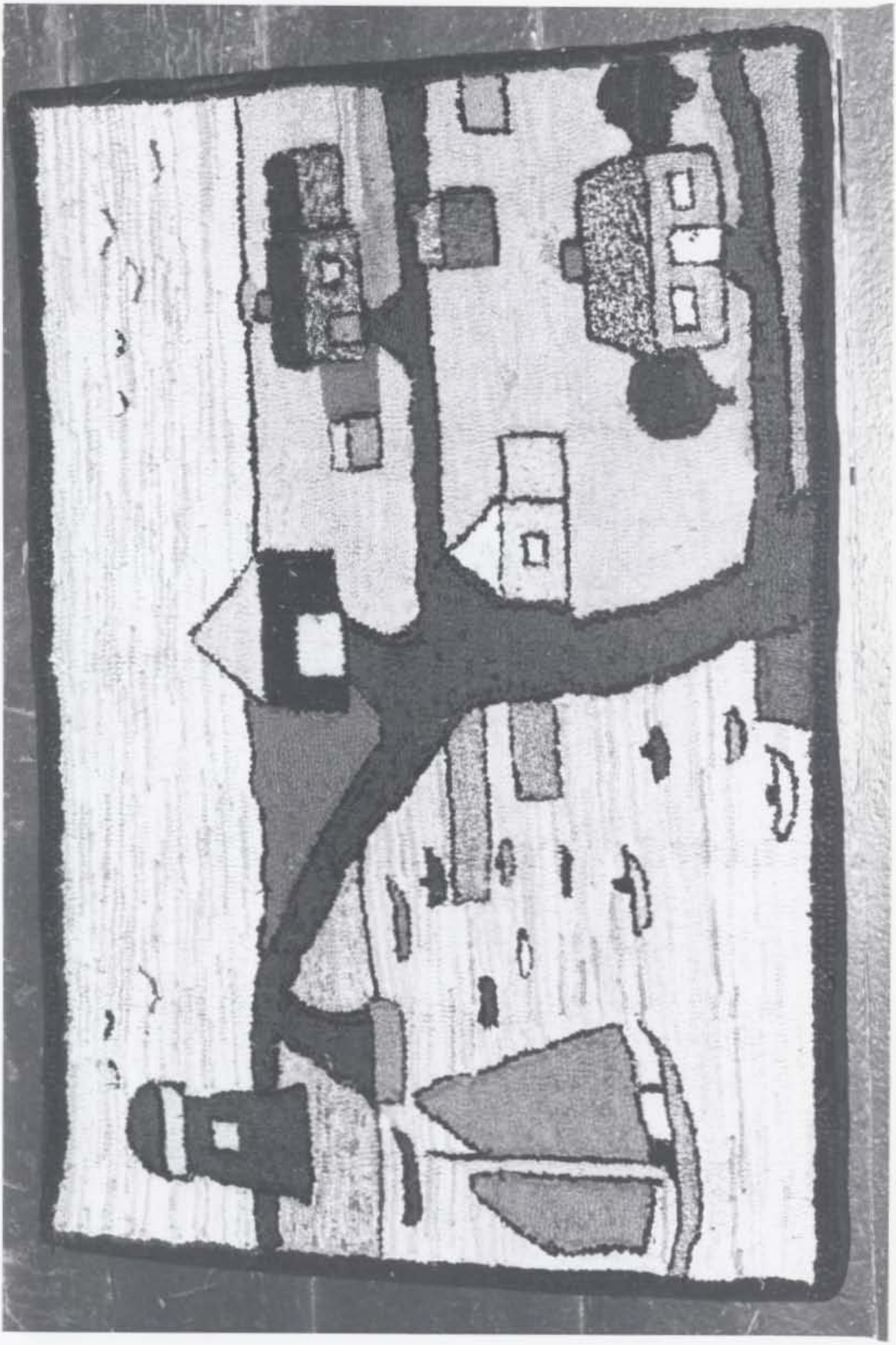


Figure 6.13

Figure 6-14: Mat drawn and hooked by Mrs. Hanson. In this instance she has attempted to portray depth.

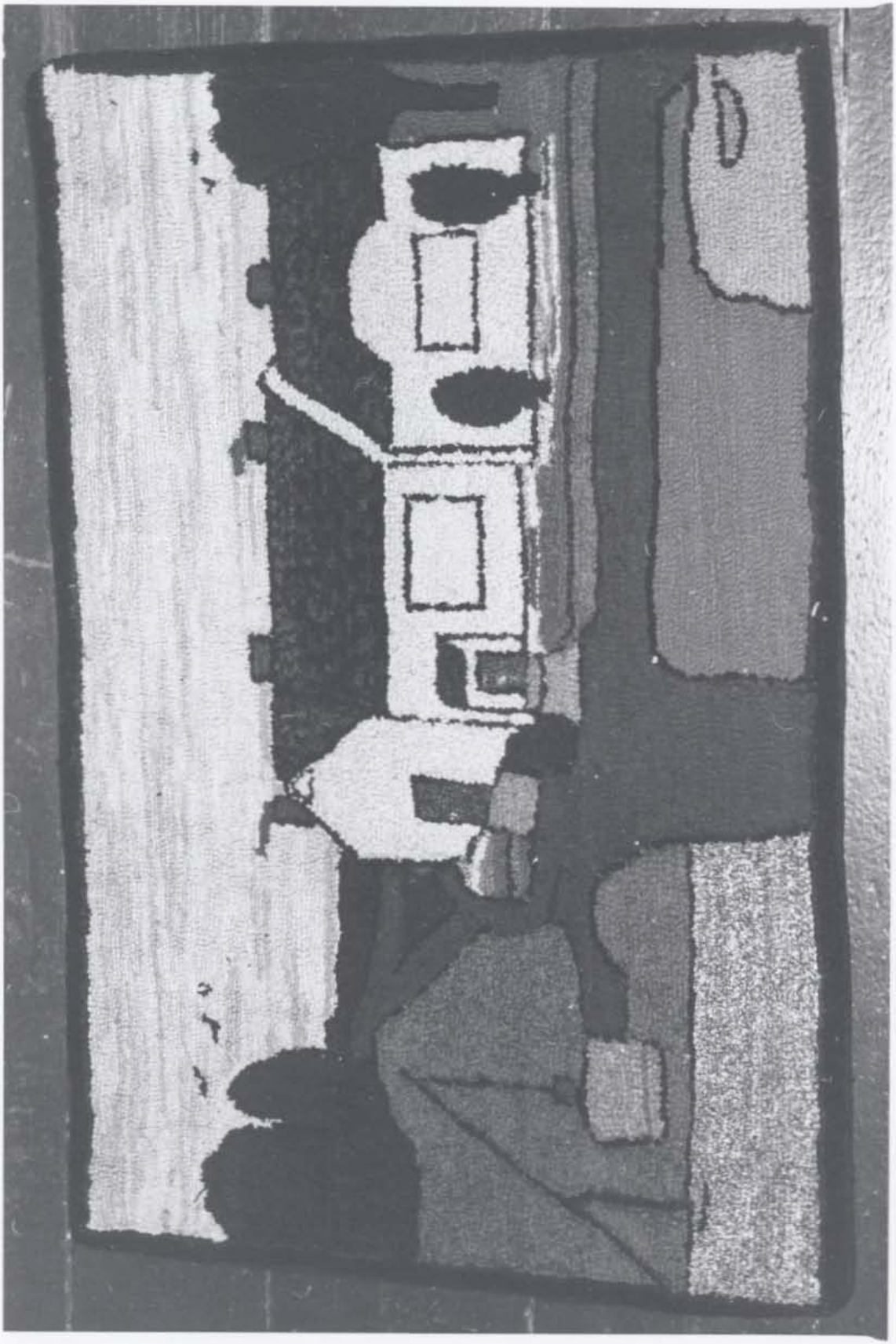


Figure 6.14

with particular care to their proportions and dimensions. Mrs. Hanson got assistance from her brother and a neighbour in designing this motif and they cooperated to produce a very accurate representation. Both design elements were drawn at an angle, suggesting three dimensions, while the road, river, and landscape curve and flow naturally. No longer concentrating solely on the concept of rurality, she gives more emphasis to motif structure, indicating a shift in her perception of appropriate design.

The request for assistance stemmed from her need to change her drawing style to satisfy the judges' and public's expectations. Mrs. Hanson alluded to an awakened appreciation of form and perspective when she discussed a motif. Figure 6.12 depicts a coastal scene with two-dimensional houses, a sailboat, roads and a lighthouse. The three wharfs lie flat on the water with no regard for realistic perspective:

> It's supposed to be a scene like from the country. That's supposed to be a little wharf going out there. It must be high tide! [Laughing] You know how a wharf *should* look. [Laughing] (It should have little legs.) Yes! They should have them there, I can see that *now*. I could see that afterwards. (But I wouldn't have even noticed it until you pointed it out.) Probably not (C8639).

I wondered when Mrs. Hanson had noticed her "error." She said: "I can see that *now*. I could see that afterwards." This was not the first mat in which she used flat rectangles to represent wharfs, nor was it the last. In subsequent coastal scenes, when she began exploring three-dimensional houses, Mrs. Hanson still drew wharfs in this manner. In fact all but three of her coastal scenes have these legless wharfs. Her most recent mats, emphasizing architectural forms and natural landscapes, show water but no wharfs. In light of her new emphasis on

Figure 6-15: Covered bridge, drawn with the assistance of Mrs. Hanson's brother and neighbour. Special attention was given to the accurate representation of the main motif and the flow of the landscape.

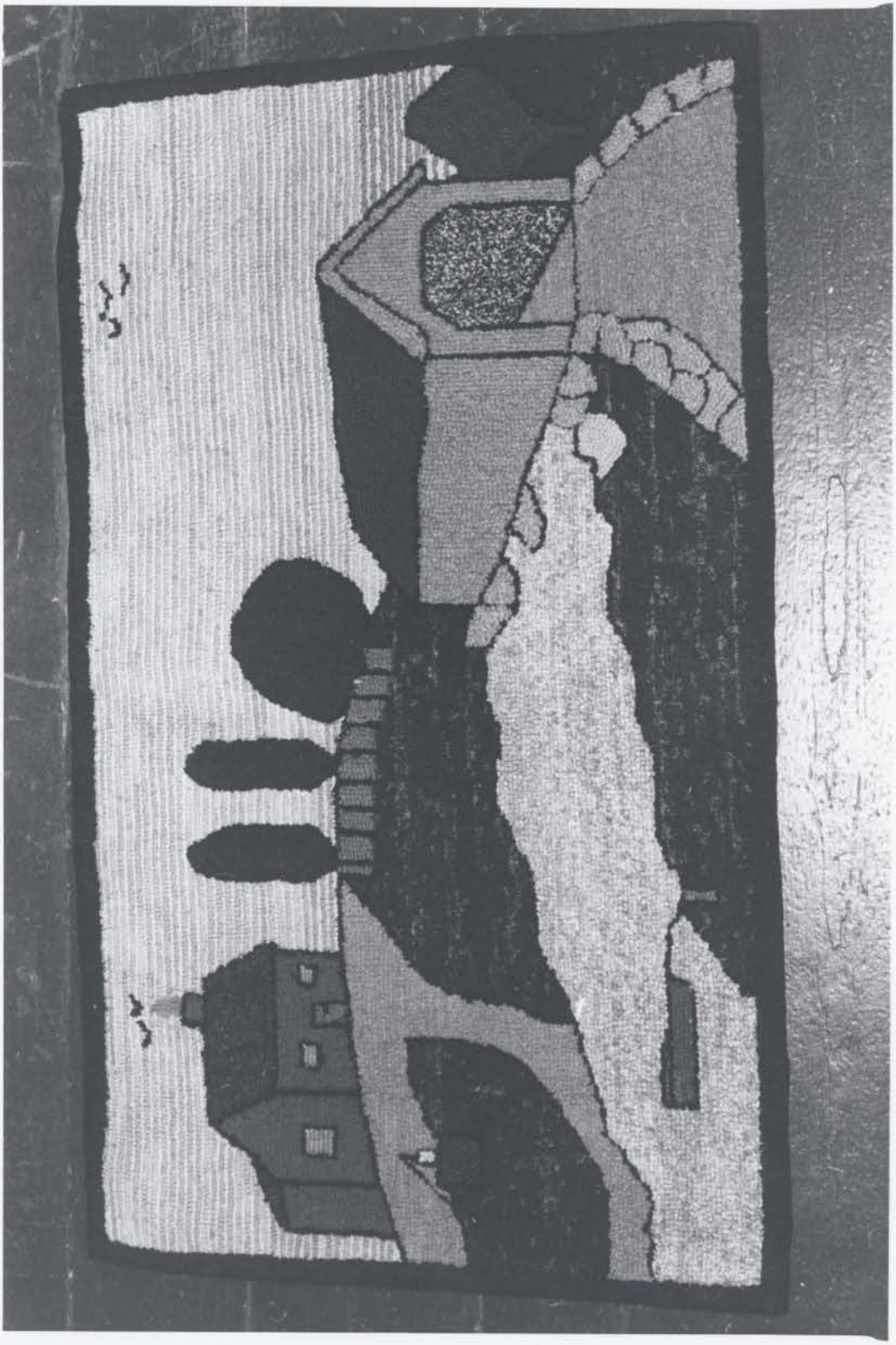


Figure 6.15

form, it appears Mrs. Hanson eliminated this motif because she was told it was not satisfactorily designed.

The differences between her early mats and those most recently produced indicate a newly established sense of right design. Before, Mrs. Hanson drew her own representations of form; she now applies techniques learned from contact with other artists and critics. Without feedback from the arts and crafts competition Mrs. Hanson's drawings would not have taken this direction. Arnold Hauser explained this point when he wrote: "The stimulus to a change in style always comes from without and is logically contingent."[36] Change is the result of a desire to alter a design to better meet conditions.[37]

The first change in Mrs. Hanson's approach to mat-hooking occurred when she visited her relatives in Timberlea. There she was shown a new form of mats, but the stimulus was not simply exposure to alternate forms of designs. Merely coming in contact with a new idea is not enough to bring about change; the artist must also have a reason for adopting the style or form. Mrs. Hanson chose to hook and alter stamped mats for two reasons. First, it gained her entrance to the women's world of patterns, mats, and sociability. Several times during our discussion she mentioned her stay in Timberlea and the pleasure derived from visiting and interacting with her relatives. As the Woolfs were involved with mat hooking more as a hobby than a necessity, Mrs. Hanson was introduced for the first time to the craft's social aspects. Hooking geometrics for her home provided enjoyment of the process and artistic release but not in company of others. To be part of this hooking group Mrs. Hanson had to accept the conditions of her hosts and participate in their traditions. Second, the new form permitted her to explore

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[36]Hauser 26.

[37]Barnett 387.

her own sense of design by experimenting with alterations and substitutions. She later developed a rural pictorial repertoire from elements she felt were important and appropriate. This style was largely shaped by a sense of place--an identity with things rural and marine, reinforced by the media. An outside stimulus, the recognition and praise she received, encouraged her to continue with these maritime images.

Gradually Mrs. Hanson altered her technical approach to the motifs. She placed more emphasis on three-dimensional forms of buildings and landscapes. Although she still explores the theme of past rural life, use of these motifs and technical qualities has been altered by a desire to continue placing at the Exhibition.

Earlier in this chapter I expressed caution in ordering a body of work into a time frame to facilitate analysis. However, analysis of Mrs. Hanson's work was aided by such ordering since her art fell naturally into categories marked by stylistic and technological changes. Her work is affected by the dynamics of her social and psychological selves and therefore reflects changes and influences in her private and social life.

Chapter 7

Summary and Conclusions

Craft forms, like any aspect of society, are affected by economic, cultural and social changes. Transformations in mat hooking in central Nova Scotia since the turn of the twentieth century mark changes in the people's lifestyles and needs. Rather than try to write a definitive work on mat hooking's history, I have outlined the craft's major changes. In addition I have explored several mat hookers' work in detail to exhibit diversity within tradition.

Mat hooking developed as a household necessity, dependent upon available materials. Despite limited material resources, many pleasing "folk" designs entered community tradition and were transmitted over time and space. Over the years this established an aesthetic adhered to by most mat hookers. Nevertheless, women individualized community designs by following personal preferences concerning design placement, and colour combinations and coordination. Well-known designs were therefore familiar yet unique in the treatment received at the hands of each maker.

When all necessary mats were made, some women continued to hook, creating more elaborate designs and using better fabrics. Useful as decoration, the mats were also a means of passing the time and providing opportunity to be imaginative. In the 1930s and 1940s the introduction of factory-made floor covering to Maritime women curtailed most hooking activity. Homemade mats, bearing the stigma of poverty, were abandoned for purchased linoleum.

At this time in the United States and central Canada the craft was being renewed. Initially government sponsored agencies organized women from economically depressed regions to make mats for sale. Patterns were chosen by the organizers to best fulfill market expectations. Eventually the craft became popular with those who had been purchasing the products--middle class women--and courses were established to meet their demands. Over the years new techniques were applied to the craft, made feasible by the practitioners' greater spending power. These women developed styles and designs that were not only expensive but also time consuming. In short, the accent shifted from frugality to elaborate display of material and technique.

The renewal affected more than the craft's physical form. Today mat hooking is an uncommon specialized activity. Schools and courses established to teach elaborate techniques reinforce this trend. This bestows on the Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers and their peers a sense of achievement not found in other household crafts. The modern style is slow and laborious, suitable to those with ample time to spare--the retired and non-employed. For middle-class, non-employed women, mat hooking provides a sense of utility and accomplishment. At the same time, it fulfills the same social function as earlier in the century. Examination of social conditions under which the Colchester Heritage Rug Hookers work, reveals that mat hooking offers non-employed women common ground for interaction and opportunity to socialize with their peers.

In central Nova Scotia, independent mat hookers, not influenced by the renewalists' direction, adapt the craft to their particular needs. Without formal training they exhibit more idiosyncratic approaches than the previous group. Examination of their motivations, expectations and repertoires provides information on why and how individuals mold a craft to suit their needs.

The two independent mat hookers I studied are elderly and of modest income. Through mat hooking they receive public recognition otherwise unattainable. Elmer Mingo began mat hooking to keep busy after retirement and discovered that it fulfilled many needs. By creating useful items he gained an instrumental role, enhanced by achievement of difficult goals. Mat hooking is also expressive, providing an arena for presenting emotions.

Mrs. Hanson, an elderly widow living in rural Colchester County, continues to hook mats for annual display in an arts and crafts competition. Her hooked mat collection shows a clear transition from household necessity, to personal pastime, to public recognition. Designing and hooking popular unique mats gives her a winter's pastime and awards her the status of artist. In old age, while her life roles are decreasing, Mrs. Hanson receives community recognition for her craft efforts.

In the past, although it was a common activity, mat hooking provided limited self-enhancement. Today, as a specialized activity, the craft greatly enhances makers' private and public selves.

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Appendix A

Tapes

C8633	sides A and B	26 January 1985	Elmer and Dot Mingo
C8634	side A	21 February 1985	Gladys MacLean
	side B	26 March 1985	Elmer and Dot Mingo
C8635	sides A and B	5 January 1985	Elmer Mingo
C8636	sides A and B	1 August 1985	Hazel Clarke
C8637	sides A and B	3 April 1985	Hazel Clarke
C8638	sides A and B	6 January 1986	Hazel Clarke
C8639	sides A and B	29 March 1985	Louise Hanson
C8640	sides A and B	20 February 1985	Gertrude Beattie **
C8641	side A	2 April 1985	Vida Miles
	side B	10 April 1985	Betty MacKenzie-Cleland
C8642	sides A and B	10 April 1985	Betty MacKenzie-Cleland
C8643	side A	13 April 1985	Roberta Doyle
	side B	16 April 1985	Audrey Organ
C8644	sides A and B	15 April 1985	Sylvia Macdonald, with G. Beattie
C8645	sides A and B	28 May 1985	Gerry Hilchey
C8646	side A	6 January 1986	Doreen Wright
	side B	May 1985	Ann Gun **

C8647	sides A and B	17 May 1985	Edna Withrow, with Jeanette McNeil and Barbara Eaton
C8648	side A	17 May 1985	Edna Withrow
	side B	19 May 1985	Nellie Crowe
C8649	side A	24 April 1985	Maude Yorke, with Evelyn Yorke
	side B	19 May 1985	Nellie Crowe
C8650	side A	21 February 1985	Muriel MacDonald
	side B	28 February 1985	Freeda Linkletter
C8651	side A	1 March 1985	Iris Joyce **
	side B	28 March 1985	Freeda Linkletter
C8652	sides A and B	5 April 1985	Howard and Emily Spicer, with Robert and Joan MacDonald
C8653	sides A and B	22 April 1985	Alberta Dowe **
C8654	side A	24 April 1985	Pauline Curry
	side B	25 April 1985	Crace Chambers **
C8655	side A	24 April 1985	Edith Corbett **
C8656	sides A and B	26 April 1985	Luella Corbett **
C8657	side A	27 April 1985	Crace Crawford **
		27 April 1985	Evelyn Yorke **
	side B	27 April 1985	Elizabeth MacAloney **
C8658	side A	27 April 1985	Martha Pugsley
		27 April 1985	Iona Canning **
	side B	27 April 1985	Iona Canning **
C8659	sides A and B	30 May 1985	Pansy MacKenzie **
C8660	side A	30 May 1985	Pansy MacKenzie **
C8661	sides A and B	23 January 1985	Phemie Menard **
C8662	sides A and B	18 and 25 March,	Phemie Menard **

1 April 1985

Note: ** indicates tapes not used directly in the text.