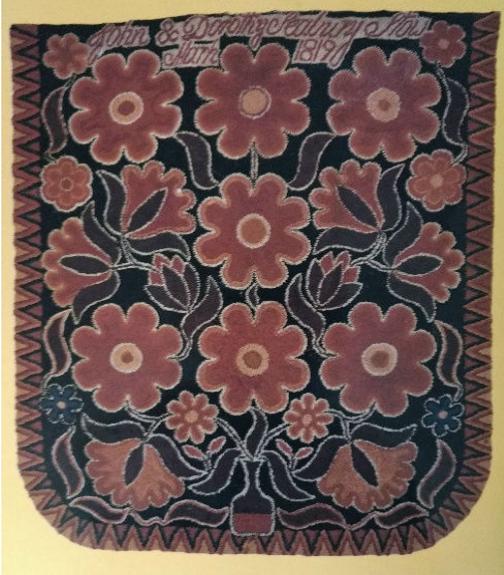


A Brief History of Rug Hooking



The Eastern seaboard of New England and the maritime provinces of Canada claim rug hooking as a truly indigenous folk art. The first hooked rugs probably never saw the floor as they were used as bed covers to keep our ancestors warm through the cold winters. As a bit of prosperity took hold, hooked pieces were put on cold floors in an effort to keep interiors warm.



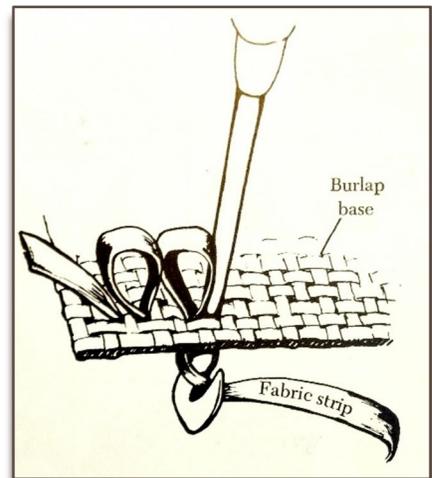
This 1819 rug created by Dorothy Seabury covered the bed. The 101 x 93" rug is in the Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, VT and is featured in Joel and Kate Kopp's *American Hooked and Sewn Rugs: Folk Art Underfoot*, 1985 edition.

Rugs were initially created through the use of hand-woven cotton or linen backings. Country women would use their scraps or worn out clothing, cut into strips and hooked or pulled up through spaces made in the cloth backing. Around 1850 when burlap began to be used for feed bags, this became a recycled backing for hooked rugs. Hooked rugs were far more utilitarian than the early quilts were. They experienced hard use and repeated washings.

Slowly, through the continued making of hooked rugs, patterns and simple designs were introduced as a way of making the rug hooking process more interesting. The early hooked rugs had a progression of use. The most recently completed rug would go into the parlor. That rug in turn would go to a bedroom, then to the kitchen, and when it was completely worn out, out to the trash heap.

Later rug hookers started to make rugs to sell and the pattern business was born. It was a way of expressing the homemakers' creativity amid the overwhelming responsibilities of running a home and family.

The craft has gone through many phases throughout the years, and almost faded into obscurity. Pearl K. McGown is credited for reviving the craft in the 1930s and 40s with her own pattern making business, making patterns available to many American women who were looking for a rewarding craft. In the 1950s, McGown formalized the study of the art of rug hooking and furthered the rug hooking throughout the world with her teacher certification and workshop programs.



This drawing by Kay Hines in Kopp's *American Hooked and Sewn Rugs* (1985) illustrates the hooked rug technique of pulling up wool loops from beneath a woven base fabric.

Rug hooking today has evolved to incorporate experimentation with designs and techniques, keeping in mind the traditions of the past. Many hooking artists hand-dye their own wool fabrics and use very thin wool strips to create subtle shading. Others continue to use wider strips of wool as an ode to the origins of rug hooking. These hooking artisans achieve interest through textures with checks, plaids, and herringbones in the wool. What started as an indigenous North American folk art is now pursued as a craft and art form, and is proudly enjoyed by thousands of people throughout the world.