

The Origin and the Development of the Hooking Technique and “Hooked Rug” in America

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美國에서 Hooking 技法을 이용한 “Hooked Rug”의 起源 및 發展에 關한 研究

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國文抄錄

Hooking 技法은 歷史的으로 아주 오래된 技法으로 紀元前에 이미 에집트 및 스칸디나 반도의 國家들에서 使用되었다는 記錄이 있으나 본격적인 發展은 19세기 초반을 전후하여 美國의 서민층에서 수직양탄자를 製作하는데 使用함으로써 이루어지게 되었다. 이러한 hooking 技法은 근래에 들어 纖維系에서도 특수한 目的으로 가끔 使用하여 왔는데, 纖維에 使用하면 視覺的인 立體感을 나타내게 되고 독특한 觸感을 얻을 수 있기 때문에 앞으로 纖維系의 다방면에 利用될 수 있는 가능성을 갖고 있다. 本 論文에서는 이러한 hooking 技法의 歷史的背景을 이해하기 위하여 美國에서의 hooked rug의 起源 및 發展에 대하여 文獻을 중심으로 考察하였다.

I. Introduction

Even though hooking skills were developed at much earlier dates in other parts of the world such as in Egypt as early as fifth century, A.D. and in Scandinavian countries as early as the Bronze age, it is generally believed that hooked rugs may have been spontaneously evolved in America since no records have been found that indicate direct influence from other parts of the world.^{1,2)} It is true that Englishman used so called “String Work” in rug craft possibly before

hooked rugs were made in America, some people argue that while similar in effect it is not identical in technique.³⁾ William Kent did considerable research in the 1920’s in England to try to discover a British origin for the technique. He found many examples of “Pegged” or “Brodged” rugs but was unable to find any British literature concerning hooked rugs or any examples in museums or private collections.²⁾

The hooking technique has been used often in textile to produce visual texture and various tactical feelings. To give some background for understanding the technique, the development of hooking technique and resulting hooked rug in

America are reviewed in this article.

II. The Origin and the Development of "Hooked Rug" in America

Documents have not clearly related when hooked rugs were first made in America. Some experts feel that hooked rugs were not made before 1850.⁴⁾ Others believed that hooking strips of material into a coarse foundation fabric and used for floor mats was a much earlier craft. This claim is based on one hooked rug apparently bearing the date of 1784. The question arises, however, whether the numerals are merely an accidental selection of numerals 1, 7, 8, 4 or constitute the figure of 1784. General consensus of expert's opinion favors a much later date of the invention of the hooked rug, probably in early-1800's.³⁾

Hooked rugs were first made in coastal areas such as Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, New England, New York, Pennsylvania, and some parts of the South. It has been suggested that sailors and their wives have originated the simple hooking technique. Sailors had a marlinespike tool that was used for ropework. The marlinespikes shaped similarly to a rug hook appears likely to have been used to punch holes in the base of a rug.⁵⁾

The eventual popularity of hooked rugs in America is due in large measure to the importation of jute burlap from the East Indies beginning around 1850. The vast majority of hooked rugs have burlap bases, although examples on canvas and punched linen appeared as early as 1840. Burlap became plentiful by the mid-1850's and could frequently be salvaged from produced bags or grain sacks. At the same time, manufactured cloth became readily available and rug making flourished in even the poorest homes. The loose-meshed weave of burlap provides an ideal and economical base fabric for hooking.⁶⁾

Why might the process and the product of hooked rug making so strongly appeal to the average American? Perhaps one reason is that they needed rugs to ward off chill from dirt or wood

floors. Early settlers had no mats or rugs at all except those made of rushes or skins of wild animals. Later, when rugs were imported from Europe, the prices were so high that average householders could not afford them. Another possible reason was frugality, an essential trait in early settlers. Hooking provided a use for material too worn to serve any other purpose. Discarded clothing could be cut into foot-long strips and then hooked through the open weave of the backing to create a floor covering. Finally, there was the probable longing for beauty. The settlers brought only the essentials of living with them from their native land. Housewives sometimes swept or drew designs in the sand or dirt floor of their homes to provide some small decoration in a barren and plain environment. Any chance to create beauty was appealing, and a hooked rug offered both color and design.¹⁾ In the mid-1800's traveling salesmen made ready-made patterns generally available. One person largely responsible for these stamped patterns was Edward Sand Frost. Soon after the Civil War, Frost returned to his home in Biddeford, Maine. From 1864 he peddled his ready to hook rug designs from door to door throughout New England. Many patterns were copied from prize winning rugs at Country Fairs as well as from oriental imports. His business flourished and soon he started a factory to make stenciled rug patterns. Many competitors soon entered the new market and by the late 1800's several pattern books were available.⁷⁻⁹⁾

Because of the general availability of these commercial patterns, rug making was introduced throughout a broad area and many people became involved in the craft. However, most of the designs were not all artistic and unfortunately, their use resulted in a decline in the originality of individual rug makers. Even though much rug work was done, the period that followed was an arid one from an artistic standpoint, with expressions of individual originality victimized by the conventional commercial patterns. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, several

individuals in New England recognized the need to improve standards in the craft. Their success in interesting others resulted in a movement that brought fresh talent and skill to rug work, provided education in technique, design and color and produced a variety of patterns artistically conceived and drawn.¹⁰⁾

In 1937, the Metropolitan Museum of Art held the International Exhibition of Contemporary Rugs and Carpets. More significant than a mere exhibition, it marked a design milestone. For the first time in the history of this museum, the designer of a rug was given credit along with the manufacturer. In 1938, Museum of Modern Art also exhibited contemporary hooked rugs.¹²⁻¹⁴⁾

The hooked rug as an art form suffered decline once more when cheap machine-made carpets flooded the marketplace. As general interest in assembly-line products increased, a lack of interest in the hooked rug followed. There seems little advantage to the tedious, slow technique.

In recent years, people have become disenchanted with the products, pace and value of a machine age. Fine, imaginative one-of-a-kind articles are newly appreciated, and patient, careful workmanship is again considered praise-worthy. As a result, rug hooking is again attracted more and more thoughtful people who want to express their love of beauty in an individual, creative way.

III. The Techniques and Materials

"Hooked rug" when used generically includes three basic rug making techniques that preceded and influenced hooking. They are yarn sewn (including "Bed Ruggs" and "Acadian" rugs), shirred (including "Chenille" and Button rugs), and thrummed (including Scottish "Pegged" rugs) (Fig. 1). Before describing the technique of hooking, let us examine the earlier methods and followed their evolution to hooked rugs.

1. Yarn sewn

Yarn-sewn rugs were made in America during

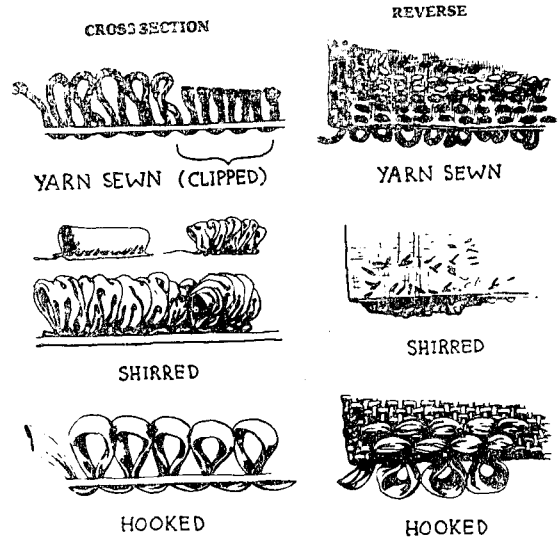


Fig. 1. Illustration of yarn sewn, shirred and hooked.

the 18th and the first quarter of the 19th century. During this period women generally carded, spun, and dyed their own wool and processed their flax, weaving it into tow or linen. The basic fabric of most yarn-sewn rugs was homespun linen or pieces from two grain bags. The yarn was sewn through the base with a continuous running stitch, leaving loops on the surface that formed and followed the shapes of the design (Fig. 1) usually the loops were clipped, leaving a soft pile surface. The backs have short, running stitches that form a dashlike pattern on the base. "Bed Ruggs" were made with the basic yarn-sewn technique, usually on a wool foundation. More bed ruggs originated in Connecticut than in any other state.¹⁰⁾ By 1750 and 1760 two over-all patterns were almost equally popular. One showed three or more vines meandering vertically on the rug face. The other pattern, more often used, was a branching, flowering bush with a surround or border of roundaulike vines. The "Acadian" rugs, made as early as the 18th century by French settlers in Quebec and Nova Scotia, carried the yarn-sewn technique one step further.¹¹⁾ By means of clipping, a baserelief effect was produced, raising the design against the background.

2. Shirred and thrummed

Shirred rugs, also made with rags, began to appear after 1820 and they continued to be produced until the late 1850's. These rugs were made with an applique technique, since cloth strips, which were far thicker than yarn, could not easily be drawn through a tight linen weave.⁶⁾

There were three methods used in making shirred rugs. In the first method, sometimes called "Chenille", a long strip of fabric was cut and a running stitch was drawn through it. The cloth was then gathered into folds by pulling the thread. The result looked like a fabric caterpillar. These "carcepillars" were then applied onto a linen, tow, or thicking base. On the reverse side of a shirred rug, only the thread stitches will show as the fabric is on the top surface (Fig. 1).

The second shirred method also used cloth strips. These were folded in half, and folded edge was applied to the surface. By sewing the folds closely together, one raw edge held up the next and formed the file.

A third shirring technique used small circular or square pieces of fabric that were folded in four and then sewn at the apex to the base fabric. These sometimes called "Button" rugs.

Shirred rugs had an inherent structural weakness. The threads that held the cloth to the base were easily broken under foot, which partially accounts for their rarity today. Hooking later proved to be a more efficient means of attaching strips of cloth to a rug base.

We know that American sailors filled much of their free time at sea and the waiting periods at home with varried handicrafts. One of these was "thrumming", an ancient sailor's technique used for making rope mats.¹⁵⁾ "Thrums" were short bits of rope which were porked through a canvas base creating a rough pile.

3. Hooking

In hooking technique, a 10~12 inches strip of cloth or other materials was held beneath a bur-

lap foundation. A hook was inserted through an opening on the surface and loop of the cloth strip was pulled up through it. The hook was then inserted into an adjacent hole and additional loop was pulled up; the closer the loop, the tighter the pile. After the hooking was completed, the loops were often clipped, sometimes at varing heights. The underside of a hooked rug has loops pulled flat against the base, covering most of the foundation but leaving very small areas of the burlap showing. The reverse side of the rug echoes the design on the front. Kinds of hook, materials, foundation, and frame will be discusse more in following section.

1) Hook

The hook is a small-handled tool about 5 inches long from hooked tip to end of handle. As mentioned before, modified version of sailor's marlinespike tool was used originally. Several variety of old hooks are shown on Fig. 2. Many craftsman prefer to make their own tools. A small screwdriver, awl, icepick, or other small tool can be field to the desired type. Basic technique of hand hooking are shown in Fig. 3.

There are several kinds of special tools for rug hooking, called speed hooks. The Susan Burr shuttle hook (Fig. 4 bottom) is the most efficient one. The shuttle hook is held in both hands and

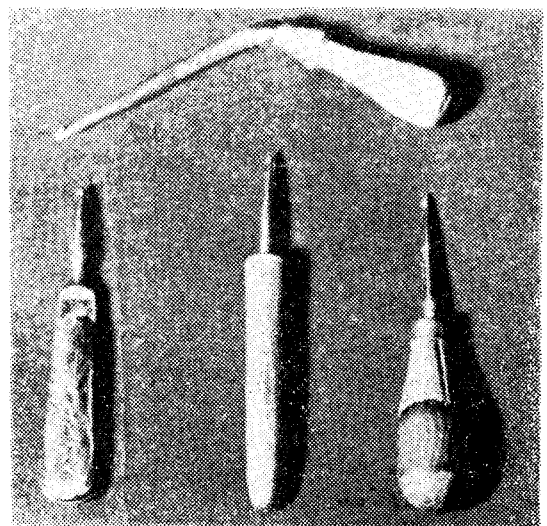


Fig. 2. Handmade old hooks.

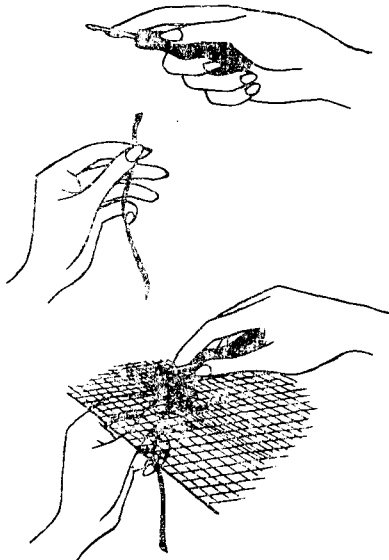


Fig. 3. Illustration of handhooking technique.

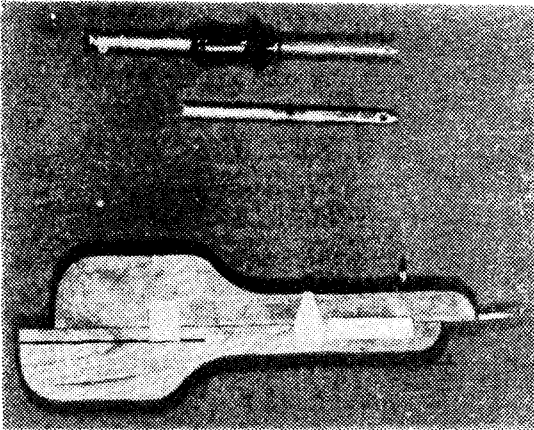


Fig. 4. Speed hooks.

works by alternating shifts. It is split in two halves that slide up and down. The right side, with the needle, pokes the wool into the cloth, leaving a loop on the other side of the backing. The left side of the hook is the foot: it goes down and holds the loop in place while the needle is withdrawn and then is poked in again a couple of threads farther on. The foot and the needle work alternately. When one is down, the other is up, and vice-versa. This shuttle hook must always be held horizontal to the standing frame, or vertical to the table frame. The backing cloth must be taut.

The punch hook is a very simple one-handed tool with either yarn or wool strips cut thin enough to pass through the trunk and needle of the tool (Fig. 4 top). It pokes a loop through the backing deep enough so that when the needle is withdrawn the loop will remain.

The automatic hooker, made by Norcraft, works much like an eggbeater cranking a ratchet that sends the needle in and out. It is quick and easy to use, but is only built for fine yarns.

2) Materials

A fabric which will cut or tear in strips about one half an inch width without much fraying is used for the majority of rugs. Wool is more durable and soft in the rug. Cotton has its own advantages. Burlap or linen of an open mesh is the most generally used as the foundation. Monk's cloth also can be used. Various kind of frames such as wooden strip frame and canvas stretcher frame can be used.

IV. Classification of the Hooked Rugs

1. Motifs

Many geometric designs are found in early 19th century American hooked rugs. Beginning with simpler designs the 'block' or 'basket-weave' is most frequent geometrical and probably one of the oldest patterns. Next comes the 'wave' or zigzag-like pattern. The patchwork design is based on irregularly placed rectangles and triangles. The log-cabin pattern, based on squares, is often found in large piece. The shell design and scallop are based on arcs of circles, overlapping and are often found both as a pattern and as a background on old rugs in Eastern Main and New Brunswick as well as in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Other geometric forms such as circle, stars, diamonds, medallions, squares are used. Many geometric designs were combined with other motifs. A geometric frame was used to enclose a floral design; or a geometric motifs was used with a repeating floral motif, forming a combination design.

Floral rugs were most popular; with pattern ranging from single-leaf forms to most elaborate and gorgeous bouquets. Flowers were used alone or in combination with other motifs. A sumptuous center bouquet, surrounded by scroll forms, was much-favored arrangement. Large roses, full of pedals and deep and brilliant in color were favorite flowers; lilies, holly hocks, forget-me-nots, bleeding hearts, autumn leaves were also common. There is diversity of opinion as to whether floral pattern proceeded or came after the geometric design. Since no dated rugs were available, it is difficult to tell which one is first. Because geometric rugs can be designed easily, the consensus is that geometric rugs were made first.³⁾

Marine rugs were common along the coast. Many of these were made by sailors during long whaling voyages. Women also used marine symbols in rugs. Full rigged ships were favorite motifs, as well as anchors, dridents, ropes, and waves. Dates were rarely incorporated in designs, but frequently initials and first names, probably of the children of the family, were inserted. Occasionally the letters of alphabet were hooked in.

Landscape designs were frequent, usually with trees, houses, churches, barns. These rugs are also valued as documentary material on life in the country and in the towns of early America. Animal patterns were often hooked, for farm animals and house pets were available as models and relatively easy to draw. Wild creature were also hooked.

Sentiment or motto rugs were popular, too. Embroidered mottoes, framed and hung on the walls, were faithfully enlarged and reflected in the words, "Home Sweet Home", and "Forget-Me-Not", on the floor. The words "Welcome" and "Call Again" were hospitality displayed on mats used just inside an entrance door to the house. Usually these were semi-circular, the straight edge just fitting the door still.

As national pride developed, patriotic designs appeared, with drawings commemorating historic events in the new country and eagles and flags

as decorative motifs.

2. Shape, usage and color

Hooked rugs were made in variety of shapes and in dimensions from a small two-foot mat to a room size rug. Ovals were popular, also rectangular rugs of a convenient size, for laying in front of a hearth or sofa.

The word "Rug" is somewhat misleading to hooked rugs. Besides floor rugs, a few were made to cover tables, chest, and chairs. "Bed Rugs" were used solely as bed covering and some of hooked rugs were used as wall hanging.

In early hooked rug only a few color were used in single rug. Restricted use of color probably resulted from the fact that the materials for making dyes, such as roots, bark, flowers, and berries, had to be laboriously collected and then carefully distilled for use. Blue was most common color because it was the easiest to procedure. Later, synthetic dyes expanded the color range.

V. Conclusions

The development of hooking technique and resulting hooked rug in America are reviewed so far. The hooking technique can be used in textile art besides rug making. One application is using hooking technique on printed fabric to produce rich and unique texture. The author has been tried various hooking technique for this purpose. Burlap or monk's cloth were dyed and printed before mount on the frame. Stuffed velvets were also used along with the yarn sewn technique. Those were made primary for the wall hanging, but those can be also used in other purposes such as in apparels.

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