



## HOW ABNÁKEE RUGS ARE MADE: FULL DESCRIPTION OF THE EXACT METHOD OF WORKING: BY HELEN R. ALBEE

THERE is a confusion of mind about the character of the Abnákee rug, for it is often referred to as a woven product. It is not made on a loom, but on a frame of soft wood, preferably of white pine, which costs but a dollar and can be used for a lifetime. Old-fashioned rugs were sewed full size into a quilting-frame and were rolled up as the work progressed. This involved a considerable space for working and a strained position in reaching over the frame, and a general complaint was that the worker's back and shoulders ached after working a while. One of my first efforts was to secure a frame that should be small and adjustable, light yet firm, and I have adopted the following model. It consists of four pieces; two of them are two inches wide, an inch thick, and four feet long, with a row of half-inch auger holes bored about three inches apart down the middle the whole length. The other two are crosspieces sixteen inches long, with a peg to fit the auger holes set in the middle of each end at such a distance that, when slipped into the holes, it makes a rectangular frame that is twelve inches one way, and any required width up to four feet the other. To make it firm, a second piece is nailed on the top of each crosspiece twelve inches long so that it comes flush with the edge of the long pieces when they are placed over the pegs, and acts

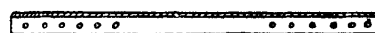
as a brace to keep them from slipping about. To steady it still further, short wooden buttons are screwed on near each end of the upper braces, and they are turned so as to cover the pegs when the frame is put together. The illustration makes these points clear. When not in use the frame can be set up against the wall, in a corner or behind a door, and takes up next to no room. When in use the frame occupies a horizontal position with each end resting on a window sill, table, arm of a chair, or any firm support of convenient height. The worker sits in front of the frame, and the chair should be of such a height as to enable her to sit erectly, without resting her arm on the frame, and she should shift her position as the work progresses so as to be directly in front of her work at all times. Such a frame can take a tiny sampler, a small square, or a rug of indefinite length and even more than four feet wide, provided it has a border; for the center of a bordered rug is worked first, and later the border, which is put on the frame horizontally, and worked from right to left, shifting the burlap always to the right as the work is finished, until one has gone all about the rug. If a large rug is desired one should get an extra pair of sides of proper length which can be used with the regular crosspieces.

The hook is equally simple. There is a

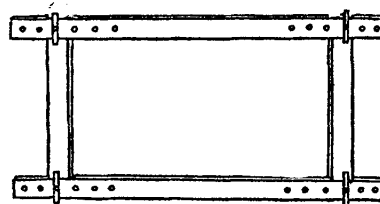
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patent device in the market which works up and down, but I do not recommend it, for it cannot produce certain results that are distinguishing features of an Abnákee rug. The best hook is about five inches long, the handle representing half the length. It is made of a forty-penny nail, slightly curved, and filed and smoothed into the shape of a big crochet needle. Such a hook costs fifty cents, and, with a good example as a model, can be reproduced easily at home; but certain exact proportions should be observed; for, if the hook is too small, or not properly shaped, it will not catch the strip of cloth easily, and if too large it injures the burlap. If the handle is too small it cramps the hand of the worker. The aim in this work is to have every condition so perfect that a woman can work indefinitely without fatigue. If anywhere a muscle rebels, something is wrong about the relative height of the frame and chair, or with the shape of the hook, or the way it is held.

In putting the frame together, make it two or three inches wider than the stamped pattern you wish to use. Also in stamping a design allow a margin of burlap from two to three inches beyond the pattern, for it must be turned under later and hemmed as a finish to a rug. When tacking the burlap on the frame double under an inch or less of the margin that lies outside of the pattern, so as to save any strain coming on a single thickness of the burlap; but do not turn under so far that the doubled burlap will be hooked into the rug. The narrowest dimension of the rug should be tacked to the long sides of the frame, placing it so that the full width of the rug will fall well within the frame, for it is difficult to hook up close to the frame. The burlap should be taut and firm, but not strained, and the tacks should be shifted from time to time so as to let any strain on the threads be as much distributed as possible. If by chance a tack should cut a thread, the break should be darned at once. Turn the



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edges straight and true, and tack the burlap with great precision, for if put on carelessly and a little askew, the rug can never be pulled straight after it is finished. Use tinned tacks, for they do not cut the threads as ordinary ones do. Place them about two inches apart.

Cut the dyed cloth into yard lengths, and fold each length over, end to end, and then double once more in the same way so that the folded cloth, four-ply in thickness, is nine inches in length, but full width. It is much easier to cut the cloth when standing. Never cut cloth on the crosswise of the goods. Begin at the left-hand corner, and cut the strips with great accuracy a trifle less than a quarter of an inch wide. With large sharp shears one can cut as easily through four thicknesses as through one. If the cloth has been folded properly with the edges exactly even, the strips will run on the straight of the goods. By opening the cloth out, one can see whether the cutting gouges in anywhere and makes a bias. Strips should run straight and true; otherwise they are weakened in a twilled weave, and pulled apart easily. Cut the strips with long clips, three if possible. Most people are inclined to cut in deeper at the end where the thumb holds the cloth, but by using care and turning the cloth over, this tendency corrects itself. If strips are cut too wide,

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they make a coarse and rough looking surface, even after they are clipped; they should be cut just wide enough to make a firm even strand that will not pull apart easily. A yard of cloth should make about ninety strips, and it takes about a yard and a half of cloth to hook a square foot of rug.

Now having the burlap pattern on the frame and the strips cut, take the hook in the right hand, holding the handle well within the palm with the forefinger extended and resting on the upper side of the hook and the thumb held underneath as a brace, and the other three fingers closing lightly around it. The fingers and thumb merely retain instead of grasping the hook, and the real pressure should come from the palm upon the end of the handle rather than through tightly clutched fingers. Placing the left hand underneath the frame, take the end of a strip of cloth, holding it between thumb and first finger, letting the strip drop down across the palm, and using the little finger as a gauge, much as is done in crochet work. Hold the end of the strip close to the burlap immediately under the point where you wish to begin, which is at the extreme right-hand lower corner of the design.

Hold the hook at an angle of about forty-five degrees; push it through the burlap, catching the end of the strip, and bring it up through the burlap about three-eighths of an inch. Do not wrap the strip about the hook when bringing it up, but let the hook drop just below the strip and it will draw up easily. In bringing up the hook, drop the handle downward to an almost horizontal position, pressing the hole open with a backward movement with the under side of the hook. This not only enlarges the hole, but keeps the point of the hook from catching in the meshes of the burlap. This single point, which seems trifling, is the secret of rapid work, and a little experimenting will make it clear. If the hook is held vertically as it is

brought up, it catches constantly and causes no end of vexation.

Having brought up the end, put in the hook again about two or three threads distant (working from you) and bring up a loop of equal height, and continue to bring up loops until the strip is used; but be sure to bring the end to the top. Thus both ends are on top, which leaves nothing loose on the under side to catch and pull out; also ends left on the under side make a rough surface. Keep the strips worked close to the under side of the burlap, so as to present a smooth firm surface, and see that no stitch is taken across another, for this makes a bunch.

Pull loops up with a single short movement of the whole arm. If a wrist or elbow movement is used it soon fatigues some muscle, and the worker feels the pinch. This slight movement of the arm from the shoulder upward and backward is very different from a restricted wrist movement that usually results in twisting and wriggling the loop up through the hole. Perhaps at first one will find this arm movement will pull out the preceding stitch, but by keeping the tip of the forefinger or thumb nail of the left hand underneath on the last stitch one soon overcomes the difficulty, and the pull can be made to come on the loose end of the strip running through the hand, and not on the previous stitch. I explain at length for the first efforts to acquire facility in this single point are often very discouraging; but once grasped, the worker has mastered the most difficult feature in the whole process of rug-making, and upon the mastery of this point depends whether a woman shall cover a square foot of hooking in two hours or in ten.

To my mind the chief value of a craft is not so much to produce a quantity of any given article as it is to lead the individual to higher levels of thought and action. Every process pertaining to a craft represents three things:—the actual matter used, the application of certain forces to that matter and the individual

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who determines how the forces shall be applied. In short, every process involves matter, force and spirit. It is of infinitely more value *how* a thing is done, than that it merely *is* done. Between the two lies the wide gulf that divides skilled and unskilled labor. Of itself labor is not educative; but work that represents the greatest conservation of energy, that produces maximum results with a minimum of effort, ranks as an intellectual and spiritual output rather than a manual. Herein lies the joy of intelligently directed work—it is the chosen expression of both hand and brain; and if infused with a still higher ideal it may become a spiritual stepping-stone to any soul that is reaching out beyond a clever manipulation of matter and is learning the conscious use of higher forces in conjunction with matter. There is not a process in my craft that does not fling wide open a door upon this stupendous truth, which, if once perceived, explains the unusual character of the present craft movement as well as the unusual and vital character of the leaders in the movement.

The chief difference between the new method and the old is in the arrangement of the loops when pulled up. As I stated before, the old method was to work in straight rows; but I found that by taking three stitches from the edge of the frame toward the center with two or even three threads of the burlap between each stitch, then passing over three threads to the left and working three stitches back toward the frame, the filling goes in a series of loops, three-deep, that is carried in an undulating row across the frame from right to left instead of a single straight line of loops. It is necessary, however, that these three-deep rows should be worked close up to each other, or else a line of the bare burlap will show on the under side, which mars the effect, for the wrong side of a rug properly worked is almost as beautiful as the upper surface.

In working with a strip never allow it

to get twisted, and hold it so that the hook can be dropped down under it between the last stitch and the fingers holding the strip. The first thing is to learn to run a straight line of loops as a marginal line to the rug, then to work the three-deep rows running from right to left, which method is always used in filling the ground color of a rug; then one should strive to work from left to right, up or down with equal facility; for until one has complete mastery of the hook she is not a skilled worker.

The straight line of loops is used for three purposes only: to make a clean marginal line at the edge of a rug; to outline the details of a design, and occasionally to make broken lines across the ground in connection with shading.

Do not attempt to fill the entire frame full from one side. Work from the nearest edge of the frame only to the middle of it, then turn it about and work from the middle to the other edge. When a frame is half filled I shear the surface, which is done with very sharp shears held horizontally, cutting with the whole length of the blade, not with futile little snips with the tips of the shears. Hold the forefinger of the left hand immediately under the portion to be clipped and by raising the material a little the shears cut only where you desire to cut. As the loops have been brought up with very slight irregularity as to height, by taking off only the tips of the highest ones, a smooth surface of cut and uncut loops is produced, which is better than if every loop was sheared.

When a frameful is completed take the work off, and shift the burlap along, tacking through the finished rug on one side and the burlap on the other three sides as before. Each frameful will represent about ten inches of the length of the rug.

If a pattern is used, work the ground from right to left until the design is reached, then outline the design with very even narrow strips, following all curves and turning corners with precision. Fill the enclosed pattern, but do not

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crowd it lest you destroy the outline; then fill in the ground, working carefully into all corners and crevices, for the nicety of the pattern is preserved as much by what lies outside as what is inside the outline. Very acute angles should be filled with an end instead of a loop, and tapering details can be diminished by a loop used the broad way, then running a loop the narrow way, and finishing with an end set the narrow way.

Keep turning the frame over from time to time to see that vacant places do not occur. One soon learns to feel them with the tip of the finger underneath, and though it is better at first to look for them, one should use as many of his senses in this work as possible. To fill vacancies, bring up an end and one or more loops, cutting through the last loop so as to leave it as an end on top. In filling never carry a strip from one point to another. Each place should be filled separately and the strip should be cut off each time.

When the rug is completed, take it off the frame and cut down the marginal edge so as to leave it not more than two inches wide; turn under the edge almost an inch and hem with heavy linen thread, taking stitches through to the burlap; otherwise, if taken only into the strips of cloth, both the stitches and the loops may pull out if the rug is roughly shaken in cleaning. I face my rugs with a light-weight quality of cotton carpet binding of ecru color which gives additional protection at the edge, where the hardest wear comes.

I should like to speak briefly of dyeing,

for my experience agrees with that of other contributors of *THE CRAFTSMAN*. For years I have used one of the brands of German aniline dyes recommended by Prof. Chas. Pellew in his articles on dyeing, and I find them not only satisfactory, but with eight colors that were compounded for me to match certain samples I submitted—two reds, two blues, two yellows, a green and a drab,—I have secured a range of over three hundred tones and shades that enable me to match any samples of coloring sent to me; yet, I have only begun upon the possible range that these colors can produce.

My dyeing is done in small nine-yard dips, and in order to match my colors exactly in successive dips I have resorted to the following method: I dissolve a quarter of an ounce of each dry color separately in a pint of water and keep the solution on hand in bottles, and my formulas are based upon so many teaspoonfuls or tablespoonfuls of the liquid dye to three, six or nine yard quantities. The variation of even a teaspoonful of the diluted color in any given formula makes a perceptible difference in tone; yet, with care, I get comparatively uniform results year after year by using dyes in this way. For stronger tones of dull red or dark blue I dissolve one-half to one ounce of the dry powder to a pint of water and use the whole measure. Beautiful greens that were rich yet soft in tone were my most difficult problem; but by using a bright yellow and a dark blue I have secured lovely results that stand light and wear with scarcely any perceptible change.