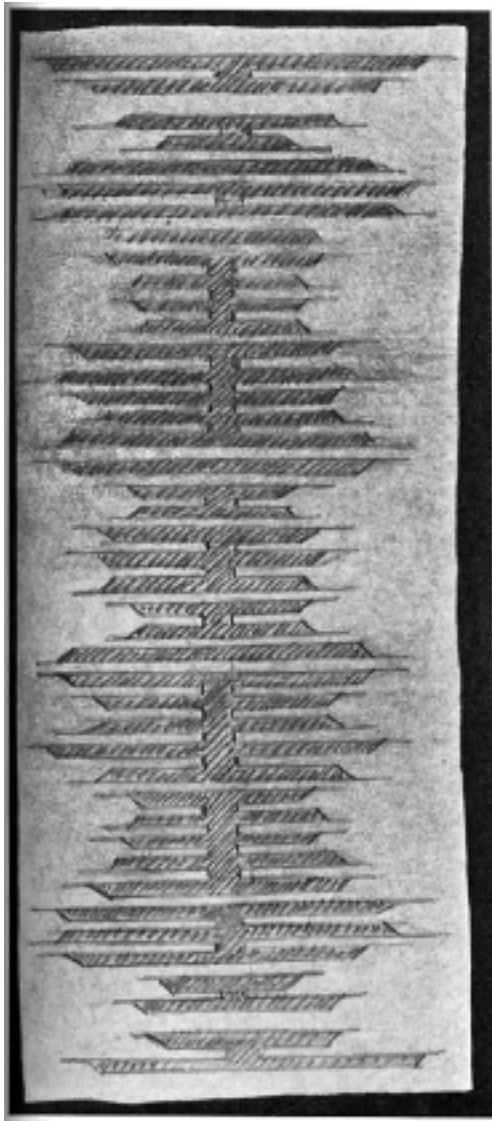


DISTINCTIVE AMERICAN RUGS: DESIGNED AND WOVEN IN THE HOMES OF COUNTRY WOMEN



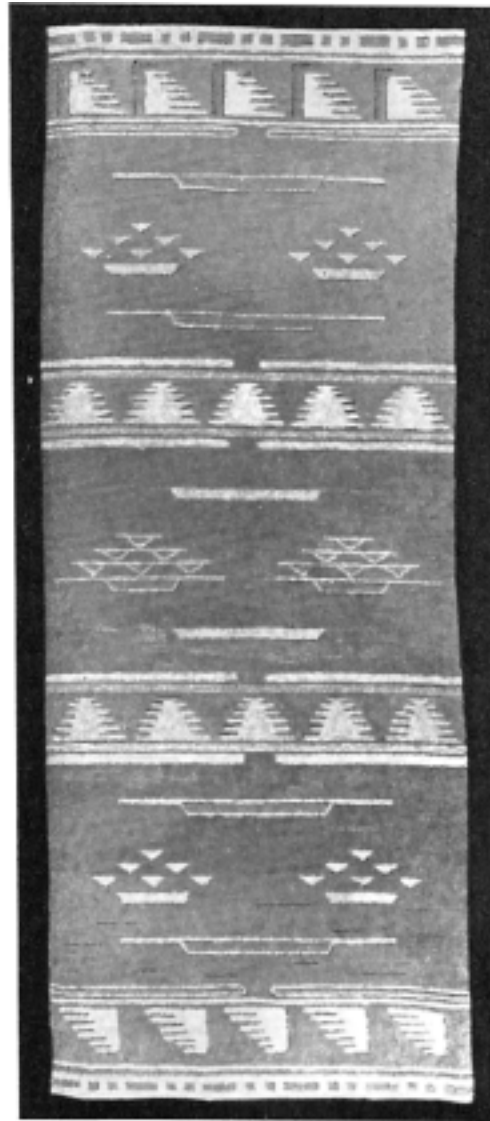
NO country in the world has so few home or village industries as America, and in no country are they more necessary. The tension of life is so great with us that, without the relief of some form of creative work that shall add its quota of beauty or usefulness to the sum of our common possessions, its petty cares and trials are apt to result in a narrow and apathetic outlook of which the inevitable result is a feeling of hopeless discontent. Especially is this true of women, not the alert, aggressive woman who has fitted herself to become an independent wage-earner, but the home woman whose actual livelihood is earned for her, and whose activities are limited to the care of her house and children. No matter how inadequate the means she may have at her disposal, convention or her own lack of training and experience dictates that her time be spent in the thousand small cares of her home, or in what she may find of social enjoyment within her reach. These restrictions bear most heavily upon the farmer's wife and daughters. In no rank of life does the wife have so little money, so little authority and so few interests outside the walls of her own home. Unless a farmer is so prosperous as to be accounted wealthy, ready money is a scarce commodity in the household, and almost the only expedients the wife and daughters can resort to for "spending money" are the familiar ones of selling butter and eggs, or taking in summer boarders. These are all right as far as they go, but they go a very little way when compared with the many interesting and ingenious home industries by which the farm and village women of other countries add considerably to the family income, and which serve to occupy pleasantly and profitably all their spare time.

It is not that the American woman lacks energy or ability; the lack chiefly is of opportunity and training. The sad truth told by often-quoted statistics as to the prevalence of insanity among farmers' wives, shows clearly the effect of mental and nervous energy left to turn back upon itself and ferment in a life of monotonous household care and the sordid trials incident upon the possession of only insufficient means. Even on the brighter side, there is the record of



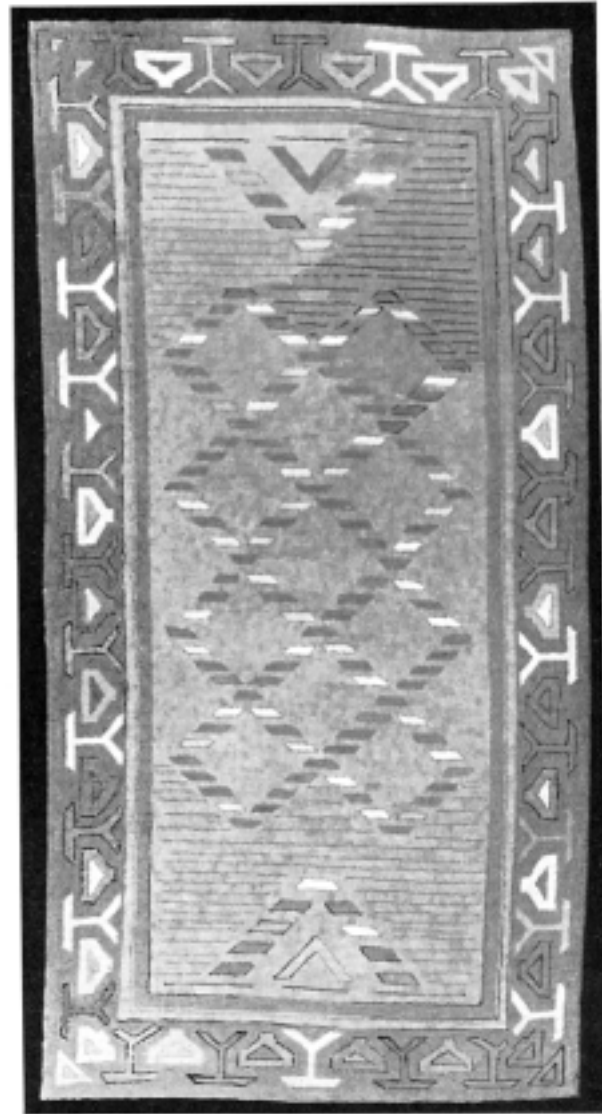
Designed by Helen R. Albee

PRIMITIVE DESIGN WORKED OUT
RICH RED AND BLUE



Designed by Helen R. Albee

RUG OF APPLE-GREEN IN MODIFIED
INDIAN DESIGN



LATTICE DESIGN WITH INDIAN BORDER
THE COLORS GREEN, RED, ORANGE,
BROWN AND BLACK

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time and energy turned to such poor advantage that the results are either nothing at all or pitifully meagre. Where the need for money is great, so great that the women of the family must become wage-earners to help meet expenses, the daughters leave home for the hard and dangerous life of shop or factory girls, and the mother joins the army of country women who make possible the sale of many of the cheap garments in department stores by sewing for whatever price they can get—in most cases a few cents at most for a single piece. In more prosperous homes, where the man is the sole provider or where the farm yields sufficient for a fairly comfortable livelihood, the spare time of the women is most often spent in the making of useless and usually hideous “fancy-work,” which is at best little more than a pathetic expression of the natural human desire to create something that shall give pleasure.

HARDLY more than the suggestion and a little training are needed to turn this creative energy into the production of wares that might be as beautiful as the laces, embroideries and hand-woven fabrics made and sold by the villagers in many of the countries of Europe, and for these wares there is a profitable and ever-increasing market. In many cases the first knowledge of a craft does not need to be taught, as with the famous Abnakee rugs, which the art sense and altruism of one woman have developed from the common “hooked rug” of New England. The evolution of these beautiful rugs is a story familiar to everyone interested in handicrafts in America, and it is an enterprise the success of which illustrates perfectly any argument in favor of the possibility of developing home industries in this country.

Mrs. Helen R. Albee, whose training in the principles of design made it possible for her to carry to such success her idea of establishing this lucrative home industry in the hill region of New Hampshire, needed only the suggestion. A chance word from an observant friend opened her eyes to the possibilities of the sturdy and durable, but usually hideous, rug made by drawing strips of cloth through burlaps or coarse canvas. These hooked rugs were to be found in most New England farmhouses, but the crudity of their design and coloring, and the fact that they were usually made of strips cut from

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any worn-out garment that had utterly passed its usefulness, precluded any possibility of their possessing value as a salable commodity. In fact, no one thought of selling them, except perhaps now and then to a neighbor, and yet nowhere is there a greater need of some source of income other than that derived from crops than exists in the farm region of New Hampshire.

Mrs. Albee did some very thorough experimenting herself before she organized her rug-making as an industry. There were fabrics without number to be tried before just the right material was found which would give the thick, velvety pile and firm springiness beneath the tread that characterizes these rugs, and there were endless blends and mixtures in the dye-tubs before the soft, subtle shades were discovered that give to each rug its perfect coloring. When she herself had arrived at a pretty clear knowledge of what she was about, she began her systematic efforts to interest the neighboring women in the new industry. Owing to the conservatism and aggressive independence of the women, this was the most uphill work of all, but it finally succeeded, and now some of the most beautiful modern rugs are made in the neighborhood of Pequaket, New Hampshire.

In the charming book, "Mountain Playmates," in which Mrs. Albee tells of her experiences in rejuvenating an abandoned farm, she also gives a brief sketch of the inception and development of the industry that has made her famous, but her method of work is given more fully in her book on rug-making, which is most helpful and suggestive to all workers. The strongly distinctive designs are all original, the outcome of patient experimenting, as were the dyes and fabrics used. In the early days of her rug-making, Mrs. Albee was a devotee of the curved line, and all her designs were expressive of the infinite subtlety of curves, later, the strength of the straight line became evident to her as belonging peculiarly to this work, and the rugs sent out now from the farmhouses around Pequaket show designs that are almost primitive in their strong simplicity. As Mrs. Albee says herself of the evolution of her designs: "The decorative forms used by our own Indians, as by all primitive peoples, appealed to me greatly, yet their symbolism would be meaningless to us, however expressive of Indian religion and legendary lore. The only thing to do was to think myself back to the viewpoint of the primi-

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to the mind, as, on the other hand, trivial and imitative work, undertaken merely to kill time or to foster personal vanity in showy possessions, is belittling. The money earned in this way, while the home life goes on uninterrupted, is precious, but it is nothing in comparison with the educative effect and the ever-growing pleasure of the work itself. As Mrs. Albee says of her own first efforts and experiments:

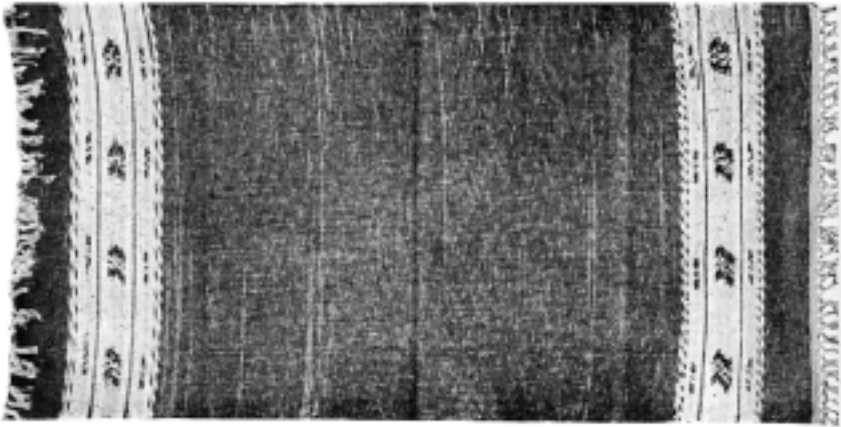
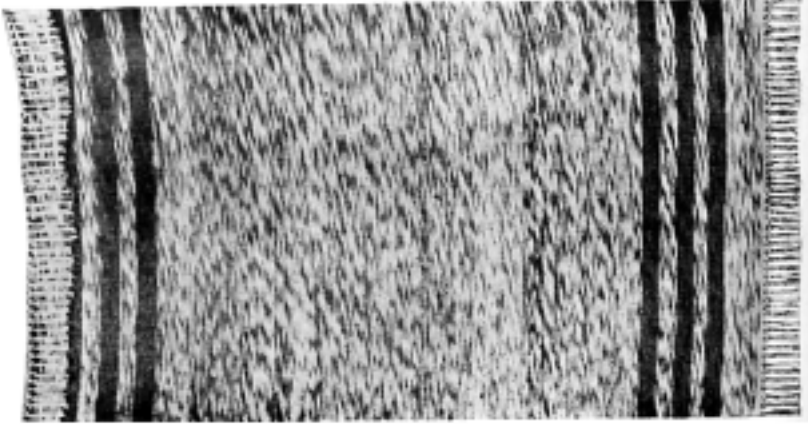
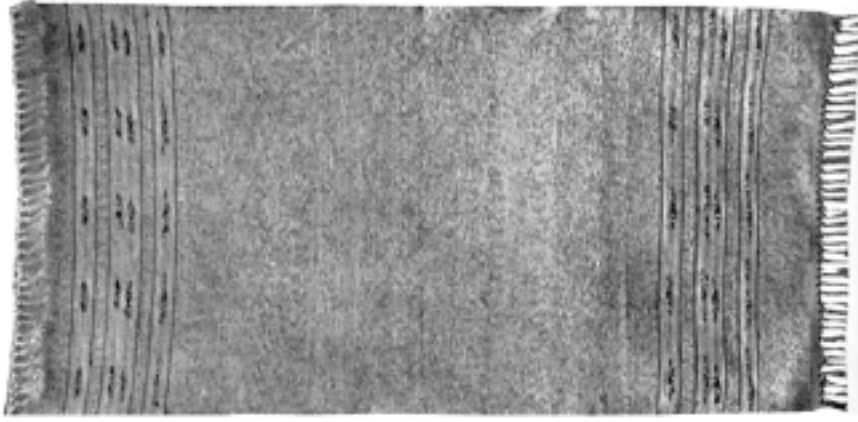
"That I had never seen a rug executed, and had merely heard the process described, seemed of no consequence, nor did my absolute ignorance of dyeing daunt me. Such trifles could soon be mastered. I stood ready to rush into all sorts of things where archangels would have feared to tread. With a community wishing home employment on the one hand and an enthusiast eager to advise and reform on the other, nothing seemed easier than to fuse the two into an immediate and successful enterprise. The forest and wayside began to wear a different aspect. They were no longer habitations of the spirit, they were commodities that would yield their secrets to me. The crimson thyrsus of the sumach, the superb yellow of the goldenrod, the cinnamon brown of ferns excited me. How did Nature secure these hues? Were her colors fast? Where was her laboratory and what were her mordants? I revelled in color as never before. I saw combinations that filled me with despair. What beautiful mysteries lay on every hand awaiting the touch of the alchemist! I knew not what hour they would reveal themselves, or what the disclosures would be. I did not wish manuals of dyeing; I preferred to learn for myself and be my own text-book. During intervals between our meals the kitchen stove was covered with vessels of all sizes, with brews and stews of every description."

THIS and much more of vivid, delightful chat is found in "Mountain Playmates," chat that gives a glimpse of the joy found in this work. Of the work itself, the illustrations shown here give some idea of what has been evolved from the patchy monstrosities formerly seen in every farmhouse. Even though the color is lacking, the designs speak for themselves and the color may be imagined by anyone who has ever seen these rugs. The design which shows as the most indeterminate in the pictures is really one of the most beautiful of the rugs. The center ground is of two tones of soft



Designed by Helen R. Albee

A RUG IN TWO-TONES OF CHOCOLATE
BROWN, WITH SKETCHY FIGURES IN
APPLE-GREEN



MARTHA WASHINGTON RUGS

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chocolate brown, the color shading from one tone to the other at the center. The small, sketchy figures are in a light, clear apple-green, outlined with soft orange-yellow. The ends are made to contrast pleasantly by putting the ground in the apple-green, with the simple border figure in brown outlined with yellow. In the most Indian-looking of the rugs,—the one crossed by four bands of roughly triangular figures,—the ground is of apple-green, with threads of a darker tone irregularly woven in. The bands are of soft orange, with the figures,—which appear lighter in the cut,—of a very dark blue. The smaller figures, which appear between the bands, are of blue, with an orange outline around each, this scheme being reversed in the center of the rug. The rug showing the latticed design and the well-defined border has a center ground of pomegranate red. This has a mottled or stippled effect, the color varying in tone from pomegranate to red, yellow and brick. The figures are in varied colors,—rose, apple-green, soft red, orange, brown, and dark and light blue, each outlined in velvety black. The border figures are also in many colors on a ground of apple-green. Simplest of all is the rug showing a primitive figure of short irregular horizontal bands that extend the length of the rug. In this, the ground is of varied tones of light brick-red, and the figures of very dark Prussian blue, outlined in orange-yellow.

A NOTHER style of rug, totally different in effect from the rich and deep-piled Abnakee, is called the "Martha Washington." It is the evolution of the old-fashioned rag carpet, as the other is of the hooked rug, and it is as suitable for bedroom use as the richer rug is for the living-rooms. This woven rug is very soft and demure in coloring, and is light and washable, so that it is excellently adapted for all of the daintier uses of a woman's especial room.

It is now six years since the first Martha Washington rugs were started in a woman's studio at Philadelphia. At that time they were made of plain materials which were dyed with vegetable dyes, the ground work presenting a cloudy appearance which charmed artists and made the rugs very popular with discriminating buyers. Denims in soft colorings were much used for raw material,

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torn in strips in order to give a rough appearance to the rug. No intricate border-making was then attempted, only three or four bands of contrasting color being used. Only one loom was kept going, but the products of this supplied the demand at that time.

The industry grew until it was found that several looms would be required to fill the orders. Nine foot looms and intermediate sizes were installed and intricate designs were made for the borders, adding much to the effectiveness of the rug. In the early days of the industry the material was either torn by hand or cut with a large meat knife, but as its scope increased, and the material was bought in fifty-yard pieces, a circular cutting machine was found necessary to save labor. This machine cuts the material in one-inch strips fifty yards long, and leaves no frayed edges as do the other modes of cutting.

A later rug made by the same weavers is called the Priscilla, and this closely resembles the original Martha Washington. This is also made from new material, but it is torn into strips. After it has been torn it is put into hanks and dyed in beautiful soft colors, which will wash and remain fast. The borders on these Priscilla rugs are merely plain bands of color at either end, as the rug is intended for Colonial furnishing, and does not seem to need the elaborate borders that the more finished Martha Washington rug requires.

One pattern in the Priscilla rug is made by winding a strip of white material with blue, green, or some other color for the body of the rug. The bars at either end are of solid color, forming a strong contrast to the iridescent effect of the center. Another variety has a solid color for the body of the rug, with three-inch bars at the ends, while a third is made by twisting two colors together, such as blue and green for the body of the rug, the bars being made of either blue or green as required.

The latest product from these looms is called the John Alden rug, which is very much like the Priscilla, as it presents a coarse texture. This rug is woven in a loose basket-weave which is very attractive. The colors are dyed in the same manner as for the Priscilla rugs, and the same kind of borders are used,—except in the bath rugs, which have a special border suitable for this purpose. These rugs are heavier than either the Martha Washington or the Priscilla, as a

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three by six weighs nearly six pounds. The Martha Washingtons are used in bedrooms and in all the rooms of the summer cottage, while the John Alden and Priscilla rugs can be used especially for porches and bathrooms, on account of their washable properties, and their strong, heavy texture.

In the old colonial town of Germantown just outside of Philadelphia, a band of weavers is busily at work turning out some quaint little rugs called the Dorothy Manners rug. These are made in many different colors and sizes, and are very picturesque in appearance and heavy in weight, being woven principally in the hit or miss style with plain borders. The Old Colony Weavers, as they are called, take great pride in the fact that their rugs cannot be bought by the trade, as their industry is carried on exclusively from the loom to the home direct.

The spread of home industries is slow with us, but it has its start. Women are beginning to realize the possibilities of loom, rug-hook and dye-pot for beautiful, original and lucrative work, and it does not take long for the American woman to grasp an idea when once it is presented to her in attractive form. From rugs it is easy to advance to beautiful home-woven fabrics of all kinds, and from these will inevitably spring beautiful decorative work that shall have its own meaning and fill its own place in the lives of the workers as well as of those for whom the work is done.

