



The Fabric of Pennsylvania

**THE RAGS
TO RUGS
EXHIBIT AT
THE
LANCASTER
QUILT &
TEXTILE
MUSEUM**

by Lori Myers

There's a sense of pride and confidence that comes with allowing strangers to lay judgment on a work of fiber art that took months or possibly years to complete. At the Rags to Rugs Exhibit inside the Lancaster Quilt & Textile Museum, that pride and confidence is clearly on display. Here, southeastern Pennsylvania's hooked and hand-sewn rugs took center stage on November 17, 2007 and continue to bask in the spotlight until December 31, 2008.

Whether an original design or one painstakingly created from a pattern, guest curators Patricia T. Herr, a textile researcher and collector, and Leslie Gorbey, a local court judge and avid rug hooker, wanted to give museum visitors a feast for the eyes. They also wanted to prove that rug hooking is an extraordinary art form, which has come a long way from its historic beginnings. By all accounts, they succeeded.

Patricia and Leslie's efforts to gather the fiber art exhibited inside the museum were helped by Lancaster rug hooker Peggy Hannum. Upon the permanent and movable walls inside the museum's second floor is a collection offering a virtual history lesson and a contemporary look at the spectacular varieties of hooked and hand-sewn rugs created by the area's rug artists.

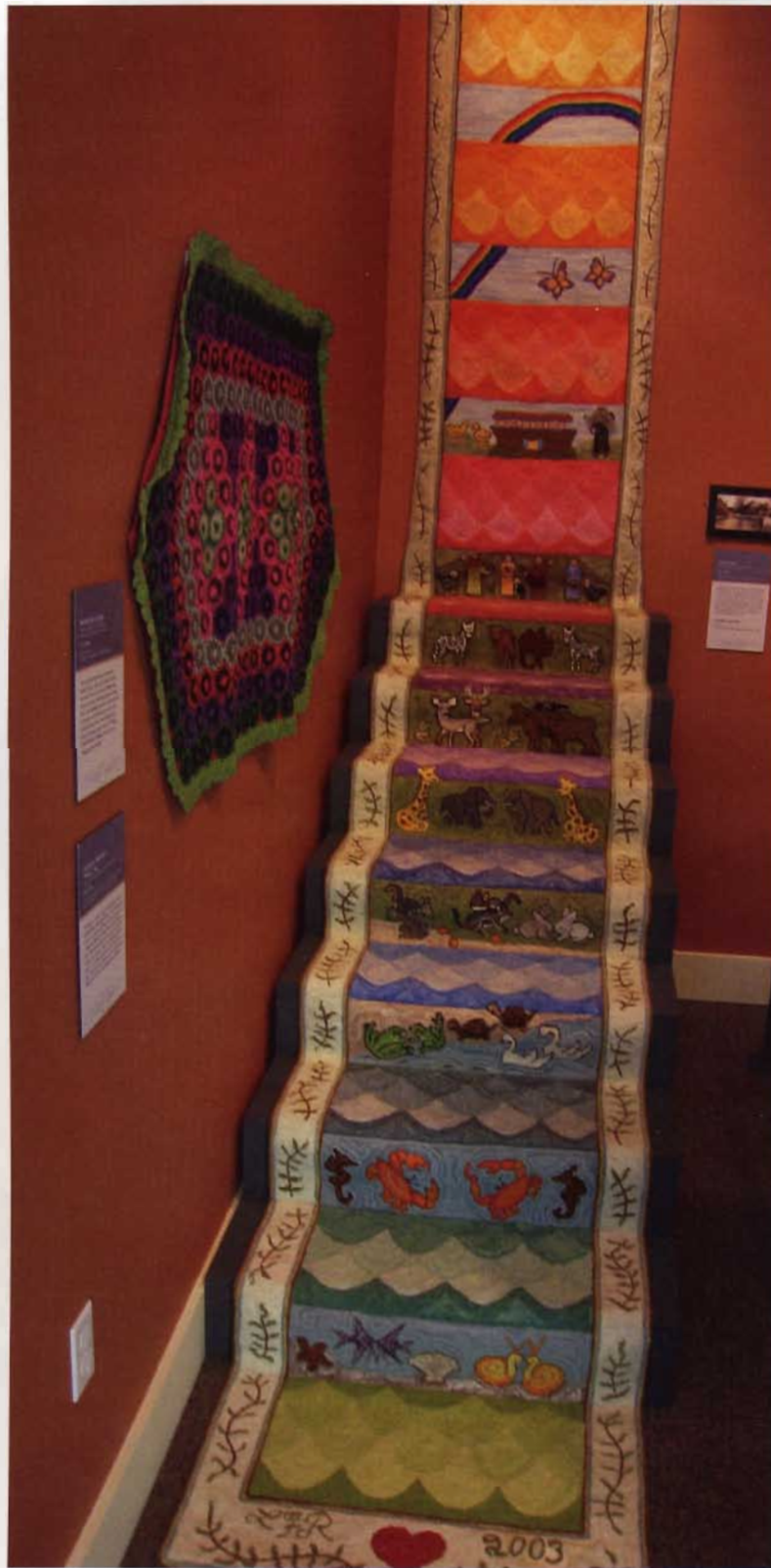
"We wanted to present the making of rugs, the books about rug hooking, an interactive exhibit that visitors could have fun with, and then show rug making's commercial aspects," Patricia says. "We also wanted to show different techniques of rug making such as rugs with appliqués, cross-stitching, and rugs with pom-poms."

Like any other large-scale project, the museum's exhibit began as a seed of an idea that took root and blossomed beyond anyone's expectations. It's one of the first, if not the first, to feature the talents of southeastern Pennsylvania's rug artists and to create a visual history of the craft in this region. Patricia has been associated with the museum for many years as a member of the board of directors, and felt that hooked and hand-sewn rugs from Pennsylvania were overlooked.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEIGH MACKOW/LANCASTER
QUILT AND TEXTILE MUSEUM

ISTANBUL, 60" round, #3- and 4-cut wool on linen. Designed by Pearl K. McGown. Hooked by Peggy Hannum, Lancaster Pennsylvania, 2004. "Having traveled to Istanbul, Turkey, several times, the name appealed to me, as well as the exotic, Middle Eastern theme. I decided to use the bright, intense colors one encounters in Middle Eastern rugs. This is an all-color plan, so the challenge was to place each color around the rug to keep the eye moving. **ISTANBUL** has been a family favorite, as well as mine, probably for the intensity of color and Oriental design."



“Peggy and Leslie felt it was time to do some sort of rug exhibit at the museum,” recalls Patricia. “They approached Peter Seibert (the museum’s president/CEO) about the idea, and then he spoke with me.”

In the spring of 2004, Patricia and Leslie got the word out that they were searching for anything rug-related in the southeastern Pennsylvania region. They called it a “rug harvest,” and the plans were to document rugs sent to them or rugs they heard about. They connected with those in the rug community that they knew—rug hookers, textile researchers—plus others in Pennsylvania and neighboring states. More than 60 people joined in the search and/or contributed a rug or some type of rug-related display. Unfinished and completed projects were brought to their attention, as well as rugs rolled up and collecting dust in attics.

“We did this research with an exhibit in mind,” says Patricia. “We documented the name of the owner, the materials used, the measurements. We wanted to find out what was out there.”

The rug harvest went beyond what people offered on their own. Patricia also went to other museums to see what they possessed, and she gathered information on the hooked and hand-sewn rugs in large private and public collections. In total, information on more than 500 rugs was recorded from 2004 to November 2006.

The historical and larger section of the rug exhibit is what visitors see first. This section attempts to teach the rug novice about rug making’s origins and the amount of care and detail necessary to create these fiber treasures. It also strives to prove that rug making is not only a commercial enterprise, but also an expressive art with personal meaning. Exemplifying that fact is a circa 2000 stairway rug that is the first thing seen on display here.

HOOKED STAIR CARPET, 29½" x 20", wool on burlap. Made and signed by Lydia F. Ridgway, working in Honey Brook, Chester County, Pennsylvania, circa 2000. On loan from the collection of Lydia F. Ridgway. This rug attracts the viewer for several reasons beyond its form, which was made to use as a stair carpet. Walking down the stairs, one sees a fascinating spectrum of arcing colors. On proceeding up the stairs, each step reveals a new portion of the Noah’s Ark story. The maker, a professional rug hooker who also designed this carpet, attached this label on the back: “NOAH/1998-2003/Lydia F. Ridgway/No one ever said/keeping a promise was/easy.”



UNTITLED HOOKED RUG, 32" x 44", wool on burlap. Attributed to Fannie Stoltzfus, working near Whitehorse, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, circa 1930. Given by George Lyster in memory of Kimberly Ann Bupp. Like most Lancaster County Amish rug makers, Fannie Stoltzfus probably used dress fabric remnants that remained after the making of clothing. Lancaster County Amish women in the first part of the 20th century made the family clothing from solid-colored, light-weight, all-wool and some cotton fabrics.

It was hooked and designed by Lydia F. Ridgway of Chester County, and it tells the Noah's Ark story one step at a time. At 29½" x 20', the hooked runner was actually used by the fiber artist in her home with family and friends traipsing upon it. On the back of the runner is a label, attached by Lydia, that reads "NOAH/1998-2003/Lydia F. Ridgway/No one ever said/keeping a promise was/easy."

"It's a rainbow of colors when you walk down the stairs," explains Kimberly Fortney, vice president of the Heritage Center of Lancaster County, of which the museum is a part. "It tells the story when you go up the stairs."

Other rugs in this section include those from the earlier part of the 20th century, many with a local Amish flavor and

the philosophy that nothing is to be wasted or thrown away. These rug hookers salvaged old clothing and household textiles to create their rugs and used them as functional pieces, such as in front of fireplaces or as buggy spreads.

Fannie Stoltzfus, who hooked a large circa 1930 Amish rug of flowers, used dress fabric remnants that remained after making clothing for the family. The clothing, as well as this rug, was made from solid-colored, lightweight, all-wool fabrics. In some instances, Amish women used cotton cloth to make clothing and incorporated that material into their rugs.

The rugs exhibited inside the museum show that Amish creativity extended beyond perfectly balanced motifs. A rug dated 1944 and created by a Lancaster County-based Amish

maker proves that fact. It shows a pansy and bird motif—a very balanced design that is typical of Amish rugs—yet its creator added irregularly dispersed lines to break up the field and add interest.

One of the more common patterns used by Amish rug makers is one of a team of horses trotting forward and pulling an unseen carriage. The exhibit includes one made around 1940 and, as with many of the rugs chosen for the museum display, it has an interesting story behind it. Aaron L. Smucker was said to have drawn the pattern for this horse rug around 1930 for his sister Sarah to use in her rug making. Here, the horses appear two-dimensional and one horse also seems to be missing its back leg.

In consideration of the hand-sewn rugs that the museum also wanted to feature, a circa 1940 cross-stitched Amish rug whose maker's name is unknown is also included. In this rug, wool yarn cross-stitching decorates the burlap backing while

leaving some of it open—a method occasionally used by the Amish. The museum curators guessed that the item was probably used as a table or a chest cover because the open material would have been too unstable to be used on the floor.

Patricia was excited about the displays that proved to visitors that creating rugs was much more than picking up some backing and poking some wool in and out of holes. One wonderful find was a board of original color swatches from Pearl McGown, which someone had originally bought at an auction. Another is an interactive exhibit of making a rug that visitors of all ages can try. "These are all a part of telling people how rugs are made," Patricia says.

Leslie was able to loan a rug-stripping machine that had belonged to her mother-in-law, along with an unfinished rug that her mother-in-law had started but never completed. It was the first rug she had ever attempted to make after taking



UNTITLED HOOKED RUG, 22¹/₄" x 36", wool, yarn, and rag on burlap. Unknown Amish maker, working in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, dated 1944. Given by George Lyster in memory of Kimberly Ann Bupp. This dated rug illustrates the common use of floral and bird motifs in Lancaster County Amish rugs. The pattern appears to be an original creation of this maker. She balanced the design, as is typical in Amish rugs, but added irregularly dispersed lines to break up the field and add interest. The pansies rendered in bright purple and pink leave no doubt that this is an Amish-made rug.



UNTITLED HOOKED RUG, 23" x 42", wool and rag on burlap. Unknown Amish maker, working in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, circa 1940. On loan from a friend of the Heritage Center of Lancaster County. The side view of a team of horses trotting and pulling an unseen wagon or carriage is one of the most common patterns used by Amish rug makers. This pattern is said to have been drawn by Aaron L. Smucker around 1930 for his sister Sarah to use in her rug making. As in most figural Amish rugs, the horses appear two-dimensional. In this case, one horse also seems to be missing its back leg.

lessons from a local teacher. It represents a sample of what a rug might look like with only part of the motif appearing on the backing. It's also a rug that she asked Leslie to finish for her after the rug had sat for many years in its present condition. As a result of that exchange, Leslie became interested in rug hooking, despite only having done quilting and other needlework in the past. She took lessons, practiced her hooking technique, and had two classical/commercial rugs accepted into the museum's juried show—*Aunt Tillie's Garden* and *Cranberry Bog*.

Juried winners are displayed in a room adjacent to the historical and the making-of-rugs section. A total of 76 rugs were entered. Judges examined each entry without knowing the names of the artists. Forty-one rugs were finally selected to represent the best of southeastern Pennsylvania. As the rugs came in, were judged, and awarded, the curators and museum staff wondered how to best categorize them for display. It was then that themes began to appear in almost equal

groupings. The curators decided to divide the rugs into three separate rotations. First were rugs with animals—cats, sheep, butterflies, a unicorn—such as Karl Gimber's *Goat Inn Boots*, a name he found in a book about old taverns in England. There was also Anne Stevens' rug entitled *Swamp Turtle*, which enhanced a collection of small turtle figurines that Anne had inherited from her mother.

The next rotation for the juried exhibit was flowers and fruit, a collection that included Mary Lynne Naples' rug *Joanne's Quilt*, which she had chosen to hook because it represented both a challenge and a way to broaden her hooking experience. Another large oval rug in the flowers and fruit category was Peggy Hannum's *Istanbul*, in which she pays homage to her travels to that Turkish city. Peggy used bright, intense colors, which were similar to the ones seen in Middle Eastern rugs. Nancy Parcels' *Fraktur Flowers* may very well be saying that what is old is new again. Inspired by an antique Pennsylvania Fraktur, Nancy



UNTITLED HAND-SEWN CROSS-STITCHED RUG, 19" x 37¹/₂", wool yarn cross-stitched on burlap, cotton backing. Unknown Amish maker, working in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, circa 1940. On loan from a friend of the Heritage Center of Lancaster County. Decorating the background burlap with wool cross stitching while leaving some of it open is a less common method of rug making but was occasionally used by the Amish. Because of the instability of such a textile it most likely was intended as a table or chest cover. The cross-stitch patterns resemble the smaller-scaled needlework seen on earlier Amish samplers and decorated towels. As with the other Lancaster County Amish textiles seen in this exhibition, the bright colors with heavy accents of purple predominate.

hooked in the maroons and mauve colors similar to those used by artists of the past. The blue arch she included at the bottom of the motif was a reminder to the observer that once a color of wool was gone, any scrap was used to finish a project. Primitive antique rugs and folk art inspired Mary Jo Gimber's *Sowing Seeds* rug. To create this rug, Mary Jo drew a sketch and then went directly to the linen to draw the design freehand so that the design would be fresh and not overworked. In the corner, Mary Jo hooked black seeds representing ideas not yet sprouted for future rug designs.

The last rotation, displayed from September 5 to December 31, is the pictorials, including such creative rugs as Judy Carter's *Mermaid*, representing the first time Judy had ever hooked a realistic face.

Strolling from the room where the historical rugs are displayed to the adjacent contemporary juried section offers visitors a true sense that rug hooking is a living craft that transcends time, one that continues to grow and change and enthrall.

"We wanted to continue to spread the word to people to

consider rug hooking an art form," Kimberly says. "In this exhibit we get a sense of the traditional, where rugs had a clear function on the floor or to protect other rugs. Then we have the art pieces that have never seen life on a floor."

As with the Amish, there was a mentality that all materials must be used, that nothing is made frivolously or without function. The juried display shows the other and more forward aspects of hooked and hand-sewn rugs.

"In the juried section, we wanted to show modern rugs," Patricia adds.

From Bank to Museum

The Rags to Rugs Exhibit graces the inside of a building with a long and interesting history. Its large windows overlook the hustle and bustle of downtown Lancaster's businesses, eateries, trendy retail shops, and a next-door farmers' market. A section that used to be the building's exterior and courtyard is now enclosed. Inside is a gift shop with rugs and other textile items for sale, along with shawls, scarves, and books. A new reception area greets visitors, and there's an ice cream

The Lancaster Quilt & Textile Museum in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is the permanent home of 82 quilts and the temporary home of the Rags to Rugs Exhibit, which will be on display through December 31.



parlor serving as a respite from the warm outdoors.

“We wanted to keep as much of the history as we could,” Kimberly says about the renovations completed in 2007. “We wanted to keep the spirit of the structure and blend the old and the new.”

Lancaster Trust Company originally owned the 1912 building (a community bank that had a definite presence up until the Great Depression). Columns, a majestic domed ceiling, and lead-lined windows greeted bank customers as they came in to make their deposits and withdrawals. Between the bank’s closure and the 2004 opening of the Lancaster Quilt & Textile Museum, the building was used for a variety of pur-

poses. An interested community member restored the building in the 1980s. In the late 1990s, the popular rock band, Live, bought it as a rehearsal studio because they liked the acoustics produced by the large cavernous space.

“There’s a rumor that the band put up a net hoop in the room and played basketball,” Kimberly says.

Soon the band moved out, and the city of Lancaster purchased the building for use by school children. But other events would soon cause the building to once again change hands. The acquiring of a collection of 82 authentic late 19th–20th century Amish quilts by the Heritage Center, of which the Lancaster Quilt & Textile Museum is now a part,



UNTITLED HOOKED RUG, 20³/₄" x 72³/₄", wool on burlap. Attributed to Ida Garman, working in Mastersonville, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, circa 1940. On loan from Steve Smoot Antiques. Ida Garman, the maker of this rug, obviously had access to the same Priscilla patterns that were in Alice Fordney’s possession. This long rug is listed by the Priscilla Company as Pattern #23-10-60. The description states, “A rug of this size is for use in front of davenport or fireplace.” The letter abbreviations for suggested colors that are marked on the pattern owned by Alice Fordney are the exact colors used by Ida Garman on this rug. Ida did however make another rug of the same pattern using other colors.

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UNTITLED HOOKED RUG, 18³/₄" x 30¹/₂" wide, rag on burlap. Unknown maker, working in the Manheim area, Rapho Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, circa 1940. On loan from the collection of Sam and Kathy McClearen. Using recycled materials did not inhibit the maker of this rug from expressing a sense of humor. In what appears to be an original pattern, a free-flowing form depicts dancing bunnies. The maker's use of variegated fabric strips for the background adds to the charm and motion of this composition.

set into motion the development and existence of the Quilt & Textile Museum. Where once loans were made, a band played, and children congregated, the space now showcases a permanent exhibition of the 82 quilts, displaying one-third of them on a rotating basis. "Each quilt tells its own story," Kimberly says. "They are traditional in their construction."

The bank vault, where once money and valuables were kept safe years ago, has now been transformed into an interactive center where visitors, especially the younger ones, can learn about quilts and how they are made. Along the walls in this small room is the story of an Amish girl named Sarah who waits for her grandmother to arrive home so the two can go and pick out fabric for a quilt. Along another wall are magnetized colorful wood pieces where one can create a "quilt" of his or her own.

Plans are underway to introduce new exhibitions into the museum. Slated for 2009 is "Navajo Rugs, Germantown Yarns, and the Pennsylvania Connection." This exhibition

will look at the influence of the textile mills in Eastern Pennsylvania and the yarns they produced for use by the Navajo Indians of the American southwest. The exhibition will feature between 40 to 60 examples, focusing on the history of this important change in rug making. The museum notes that visitors will be able to compare Navajo weavings to those of the Pennsylvania German weavers who, in the same time period, had access to the new Germantown wool yarns, yarns that were also shipped west to traders in Arizona and New Mexico.

Continuing Hooking Art Through Education

The Lancaster Quilt & Textile Museum doesn't only "show." It also "tells" and educates school groups, adults, and families through its programs and demonstrations. Its mission is to interpret the cultural history of Lancaster County and pass along that information to its citizens.

Some examples of workshops that took place in the past



ESPALIER PEARS, 51½" x 25", #6, 7, & 8-cuts of wool, on linen. Designed by Beverly Conway. Hooked by Nancy Parcels, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, 2004. The pattern gets its name from the French term, 'espalier." This is a method of pruning fruit trees. All the woolens in this rug are hand dyed. I did change the commercial design somewhat to make it my own style.



ONE WHITE PUMPKIN, 17" x 31" (including tongues), #7 and 8-cuts of wool, on linen. Designed and hooked by Nancy P. Parcels, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, 2003. This table runner is made of all recycled woolens. Many of them have been hand dyed and several are used as is. The "One White Pumpkin" is the star of the mat. The lamb tongues are made of the wools used in the piece. The rug was hooked in 2003. Can you find the date?



year include the techniques of needle felting holiday pumpkins, Santas, and snowmen made from raw wool. Peggy and Leslie helped participants create a hooked ornament, and the two women also led a group on the basic aspects of rug hooking, beginning with transferring a pattern onto a backing and then continuing with the hooking process, creating a color scheme, and then teaching finishing techniques. Punch needle rug hooking and appliqué were other workshops offered. The museum also provides outreach kits for children in classrooms or groups who are unable to visit the museum.

Rugs as Art

Patricia, Leslie, Peggy, and the staff at the Lancaster Quilt & Textile Museum took several years to collect and document the rugs that grace the space inside the museum's new home. Both the old and the new rugs fit comfortably inside this building. The reasons were simple: to show visitors how far rug hooking has come and present its possibilities for the future, to show people that rugs are more than the wool and backing from which they are made, and to show the social connection among people, function, and art.

This living craft, along with its past, present, and future, is now carved in stone. Its function and art rest comfortably inside this very historic and contemporary building. **RHM**

Lori Myers is an award-winning freelance writer based in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. She is a frequent contributor to Rug Hooking Magazine and authors the annual Celebration of Hand-Hooked Rugs.

Hours: The Lancaster Quilt & Textile Museum is open Monday through Saturday, 9 am-5 pm, closed Sunday.

Admission: adults - \$6; groups over 15 through prior arrangement - \$4; students with a valid ID - \$4; children under age 18 - free. Teachers and chaperones in a school group through prior arrangement - free.

Address: 37 N. Market Street, Lancaster, PA 17603; 717-397-2970; www.quiltandtextilemuseum.com.