

INTRODUCING

FLORENCE TITUS --
EARLY 20th CENTURY
MINNESOTA RUG WEAVER

It was a different time then. Rockford was a long drive into the Cities. An 8th-grade education prepared a person with all the skills, though not the sophistication, that a 12-year education does now. Young farm women were not encouraged to work "out" (outside the home) and were expected to stay home until they got married. A two-harness rug loom was dear--at \$32--and warp cost 15¢ a pound.

In 1916, Florence Titus was 15 years old and looking for a way to earn money without working out. She had been milking cows since she was 7, and she picked berries so well that neighbors fought over who would have Florence pick for them. But with 7 children on the farm in Rockford, more money was necessary.

Florence saw her sister's mother-in-law weaving rugs; Florence immediately felt that weaving was more to her liking than crocheting and tatting items for her hope chest. So, with several years of berry-picking money, Florence saved up the sum of \$32 and ordered a two-harness rug loom from Montgomery Ward. It came by freight from Chicago to the Rockford Depot, and then by horse and wagon to the farm.

Instructions came with the loom, but Florence didn't bother to read them. She had quickly learned the essentials from her sister's mother-in-law, and whatever else she needed to know she learned through experience.

She began weaving rag rugs, obtaining the rags from the Oriental Rag Company in Lima, Ohio. She didn't advertise: neighbors saw her at the loom and bought a rug, then others would see the rugs and contact Florence. She sold rugs for \$1 per yard, on the average--wider ones more, very narrow ones less.

Ms Titus' trademark--the only form of identification she uses--is an inlaid

design at each end as a border. Her rugs are 12 epi, with 12 ends of black and 12 of white. At the beginning of her weaving career, the warp colors would remain vivid for years; now, the black fades to gray after a while. The weft pattern that Ms Titus prefers is a hit-and-miss style. The best weft material is baby diapers: it packs down very well, which makes the rug last a long time. I saw some rugs at the Titus' home that were 30 years old, and only a couple of the rugs have a worn spot or two. Denim is too heavy to beat down well, and nylon doesn't beat well at all. It took her a while to realize that the shawl knot--the knot used at the ends of shawls that women wore all the time and used for everything, the knot we call the over-hand--would work much better on warp ends than square knots.

Florence Titus' rugs ended up in Africa, China, and Japan--purchased by missionaries while they were state-side. She even made carpets 12 feet wide, working with 4 sections, each a yard wide, then sewing them together. Matching was rather tricky with those rugs, and on an area that large, the match had to be precise. She also wove quite a few stair coverings, which would have a design down the center of the rug rather than at each end--or they would be entirely hit-and-miss.

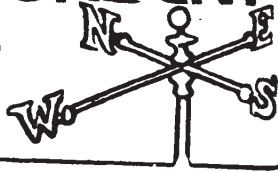
The Montgomery Ward loom still stands in Florence's basement, ready to weave. Several repairs have been made through the years: the front warp reel was replaced with a roller from a farm binder by her father many years ago; the heddle frame was also replaced.

Before Florence Titus married in 1934, she could weave up to 10 yards a day. After she married, her husband indicated that he would earn the family living. When he died a short time later, she returned to weaving, but on a smaller scale, mostly as a solace.

She keeps the loom ready to weave at all times still, although I suspect it's been a few years since she has actually woven anything. It's easier, she explains,

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CORRESPONDENT REPORTS



ON THE MIDWEST WEAVERS CONFERENCE

Does every Guild member know that we exchange newsletters with a number of Guilds around the nation? And we hope that will be an ever-increasing number of exchanges. They are valuable, and are retained in the library for member perusal. We hope as we recruit volunteers for the Weaver to have a regular gleanings page. I thought this article from the Madison (WI) Weavers Guild Newsletter, September 1981 issue worth sharing with you. It was written by Madison Guild Treasurer Fran Bryson:

The Midwest Weavers Conference, a smaller version of Convergence (600-700) meets annually in early summer for a three day conference somewhere in the Midwest (Ames, Iowa next summer). Weavers (from 27 states this year) get together to exhibit their work (individual exhibits, style show and guild booths), to meet and hear nationally known speakers) as well as seeing some of their work), to attend mini-workshops on a wide variety of subjects, and to see the latest in supplies and equipment at the commercial exhibits. Optional three day workshops given by some of the main speakers are held in conjunction with the conference. The Conference leaves you flying high with ideas and excitement.

Next year's conference will be at Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa from July 8 to 11. Want to join other Madison weavers who attend? Send \$2.00 to Mary O'Shaughnessy for a lifetime membership (how's that for a bargain?), and each year you will be mailed information about the Conference and the workshops so that you can sign up and attend. Send dues to M. O'Shaughnessy, 2126 Skyline Place, Bartlesville, Oklahoma 74003.

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to show visitors what weaving is with the loom dressed.

I also suspect that every winter she plans to do more weaving, once the garden has been turned under, and the Christmas oranges have been distributed, and she has a bit more time. Well, maybe next winter...

Kate Foreman



STUDIO TOUR continued from page 1

Marj Pohlman, a member of our Guild, is nationally known for her ecclesiastical weavings; the Shuttle Race is shared by four Guild members: Susie Sewell, Faye Sloane, Karen Searle, and Betty Rosenstein. They are primarily custom weavers.

Textile Arts Alliance sells weavings by local, national, and international fiber artists including Guild members Mary Temple, Cathy Ingebretson, Kathy McMahon, Phyllis Waggoner, Gin Weidenfeller, Lynn Klein, Pat and Paul O'Connor, Alexandra Cervenka, Sandra Roback, Ruth Bright Mordy, and Tim Harding.

Dyeworks specializes in natural dyeing of silk, woolens, alpaca, llama, and other fibers. Ann Hieronymus and Mary Cooney own the shop.

Morgan Clifford studied in Norway and has been weaving professionally for 7 years. The weaving we will see is at St. Mark's Cathedral.

Avoid the hassle of traffic and meters--get a good look at Twin Cities fiber studios and the work of some of our own Guild members--and enjoy the fellowship of luncheon together at the Guild, Saturday, October 24. Mail or bring in your reservation by October 20.