

Radio Runner

The Visually Handicapped Weave

BY ESTHER HERFURTH CHOMBEAU

ANYONE who has taught the visually handicapped is aware that both the adult and the child should be given training in all crafts available to them. From my own art-craft experience of the past seven years with adults and children (educationally blind) in their mental and manual development I have found that hand weaving often holds a very important place in such development. When a person has little or no sight he must know how to use his hands and develop his sense of touch to the full. Training of this sort is vital towards promoting individual independence — for personal needs or occupation, sometimes remunerative occupation.

Our schools for the blind, together with summer sessions and home teaching for adults, give instruction in some or all of the following industrial and art crafts: Woodworking, auto-mechanics, weaving, basketry, brush and broom making, rush and cane seating, pottery, metal work, sewing, knitting, crocheting and tatting. Weaving is by no means the least of these. It can be a direct stimulus for the student's all-round growth. As the working of threads brings forth lovely color designs, pattern, and texture, in a useful article so it also may add a helpful combination to the pattern of life of an adult who seeks readjustment in a darkened world.

In this article let us turn our attention to the adult. Perhaps it is a very young man who has recently lost his sight and needs careful readjustment. Perhaps it is a grandmother with failing vision who wishes to continue in life useful. Then, again, it may be a man or woman who had been a daily wage-earner but accident places him or her among the

visually handicapped. These and many others ask, "What is there left for us to do?" The world in general knows that they are taught to read and write in the Braille system and to typewrite. But I wonder how many weavers realize that a person who does not see can readily learn to do simple loom weaving. With the aid of Braille directions and according to his ability, he is able to work out any of the more complicated patterns. Likewise he can become accomplished in the threading-up process. Where there is no color-vision there must naturally be supervision in the choice and location of materials. When a number of shuttles are used each may be marked according to the color and type of yarn it holds — by means of string, adhesive tape, Braille letters, etc. One worker may prefer various shaped shuttles as his way of designating different yarns, while another finds it easier to "know his shuttles" according to the amount of yarn they hold. Still another may have ways and means of his own.

Now to the weaving itself. We all know that we must approach the weaver to be as befits his desire, capabilities and needs. What did I give a man, age about fifty, who had been a day laborer with hands hardened and stiff from outdoor work?

I suggested there might be a number of articles that he could begin on. He was shown a jute carrying bag, a seersucker rug, and a cloth rug. He seemed to resent the bag for it was sewed together. The choice lay in the seersucker rug — perhaps because of the softness of the Rugro cotton roving filler. I was glad, for this particular rug is very easy



Following Braille directions in threading a loom

to make and the edges can be kept straight even by an awkward beginner, who must now depend entirely upon his sense of touch. I tied the warp, not because I did not wish him to learn this part of the work, but merely to avoid any possible discouragement. The threading and weaving directions were as follows:

Threading — For plain weaving one thread in each heddle
 Two in each dent (12 dent reed)
 Thread eleven dents (22 threads)
 Skip ten dents
 Thread eleven dents
 So on until desired width is reached.

Any color four-ply carpet warp is usable. A good combination is 2 black, 18 white, 2 black for the eleven dents. If a sectional loom is used, 33 threads to a section — 27 white and 6 black — filling ten sections. This gives a rug about 25 inches wide. When I warp from a spool rack I always place the black spools on the top row.

Weaving — Plain weaving for entire rug
 Selvage — 4, 6, or 8 rows — warp material
 Body of rug — cotton roving, single strand, good
 Body of one solid color — border striping of another
 Only one shuttle comes in use at a time this way
 Rose and white, blue and white, two shades of green are good. I wonder if a coarse colored jute might not make a serviceable porch rug made on dark warp.

Such a rug is not too heavy for Bernat's floor loom. This loom makes a good open shed, a special advantage to one who must feel for the opening.

Had the worker chosen the cloth rug, a very serviceable yet handsome and colorful rug could have been woven on the four- or two-harness looms by threading the desired width 1234 or 1122. Sleyed one to a dent (12- or 15-inch reed) with double threads in the four outside dents. Four-ply carpet warp in a number of colors threaded hit-and-miss fashion is exceedingly good. Bernat's carpet warp in blue, red, orange, yellow, brown, green and gray is a fine combination. Treadling should be for the Panama Weave (some call this a form of Basket Weave), that is, the treadling alternates the raising of harnesses 12 with 34 on the four-harness loom or 1 with 2 on the two-harness loom. The old-time method of using strips of old cloth sewed together and dyed could be used for filler, but I prefer to buy new dress material! Bright plaids of red and blue gingham with border stripes of plain blue or red color fabric makes a very happy combination. Many department stores will sell bolts or half-bolts in the autumn season for from 5 cents to 10 cents a yard. I have purchased from the large mail order houses, at special sales, color-fast wash prints and chambray at 8 cents a yard; ten yards weigh about two pounds. The bolts of material were taken to a printer's to be cut into 1½- or 2-inch width sections (width depends on weight of material). Some material which came in small lots I cut with a cloth cutter's knife. This knife cuts through as many as thirty thicknesses at one cut. A very sharp-edged kitchen knife will cut through a number of thicknesses at once. A "rag rug" of this kind, made up of gay material and bright color warp threads has a very different — more modern appearance. The Panama Weave gives a "nubby" surface. If a still "nubbier" surface is desired the threading and treadling may be for plain weaving but sleyed two in a dent for four dents, then skip four dents, repeating for the desired width. This is referred to as the Popcorn Weave. A heavy rug wool may be substituted for the strips of cloth as filler.

A diminutive elderly lady came to me, more than likely with the expectation that she would be placed at a hulky floor loom and be expected to pound out coarse ugly rag rugs. And how many people do think of weaving in terms of such rugs only! My lady had considerable useful vision, and when I showed her some of the daintier pieces she wished immediately to make something in linen. A tray cloth and

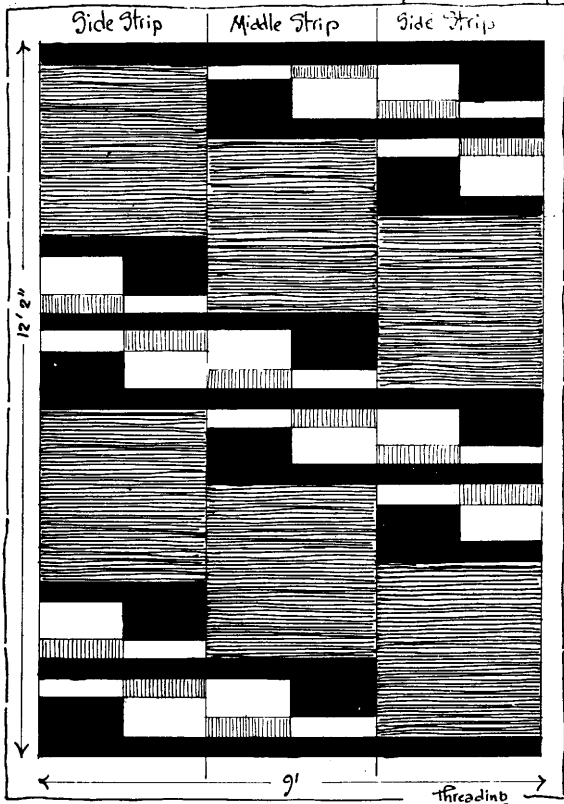


Using a Braille pattern in weaving

Series II, No. 7

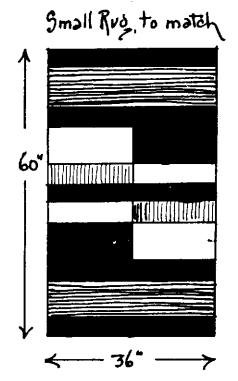
Shuttle-Craft Recipe for a Large Rug in three strips — for a Man's Room. Modernistic pattern in Crackle-Weave.

Series II, No. 7



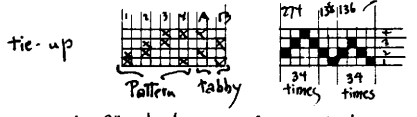
Warp and threading as for Series II, No. 6 (a).
 Weft, woollen rug yarn in black - 4½ lbs; red - 5¾ lbs; gold, 1¼ lbs; natural (tobby) 1½ lbs.

Weave as follows:
 Middle Strip:
 Tabby heading, ¾" black.
 (X) treadle 2, black, for 4 inches
 " 3, gold, " 4 "
 " 1, black, " 8 "
 " 2, " " 4 "
 " 2, red, 3 shots } Repeat for
 " 4, " 3 " } 36 inches
 " 2, black, for 4 inches
 " 3, " " 8 "
 " 1, gold, " 4 "
 Repeat from (X)
 treadle 2, black, for 4 inches
 tabby heading, ¾"



Side Strips (both the same)
 Tabby heading, ¾" black
 (Y) treadle 2, black, for 4 inches
 " 2, red, 3 shots } Repeat for
 " 4, " 3 " } 36 inches
 " 2, black, for 4 inches
 " 3, " " 8 "
 " 1, red, " 4 "
 " 2, black, " 4 "
 " 3, red, " 4 "
 " 1, black " 8 "
 Repeat from (Y)
 treadle 2, for 4 inches - black
 tabby heading ¾" black

Weave the small rug as follows:
 Tabby heading, ¾" black,
 treadle 2, black, for 4 inches
 " 2, red, 3 shots } Repeat for
 " 4, red, 3 " } 8 inches
 " 2, black, for 4 inches
 " 3, " " 8 "
 " 1, red, " 4 "
 " 2, black, " 4 "
 " 3, red, " 4 "
 " 1, black " 8 "
 " 2, black " 4 "
 " 2, red, 3 shots } Repeat for
 " 4, " 3 " } 8 inches
 " 2, black, for 4 inches
 Tabby heading, ¾" black.



For a rug 6' x 10' weave two strips — middle strip and one side strip, as above, — wearing the red part for 24" instead of for 36".

(For adaptation to the Structo loom see Series II, No. 6)

M. M. Atwater
 Bozoin, Montana, 1932

matching napkin for a bedfast friend were soon made of linen filler and cotton warp. These were made on a table loom threaded with 20/2 cotton for a 14-inch width, Pattern Series V, No. 6 (fingertip towels) from Mrs. Atwater's Recipe Book. At the time we paid no heed to the pattern, but worked as follows, doing only plain weaving:

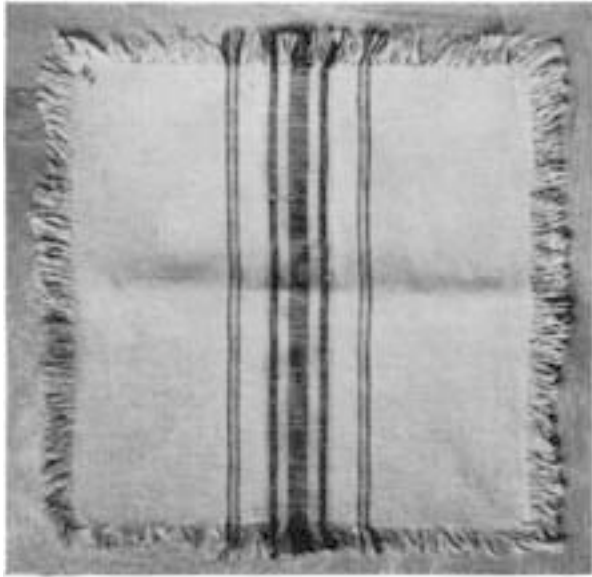
- Selvage — Six rows. This came out later, so leftover thread was used.
- Plain — Four inches Linen Special in natural. Good substitutes are: blue, green, yellow, deep orchid, tan.
- Stripe — Two rows dark brown No. 5 Perle cotton or Linen Weaver
 - Four rows yellow
 - Two rows orange
- Plain — Twenty rows natural
- Stripe — Four rows yellow
 - Two rows dark brown
 - Two rows orange
 - Two rows dark brown
 - Eight rows yellow
 - Sixteen rows orange (center). Work backwards from here.

I finished the pieces as follows: Two threads on each end next to the body of the material were drawn out as for hem-stitching and two threads from each side about an inch from the edge. The pieces within the drawn threads were square. Next came fine stitching on the sewing machine in the open spaces where threads were drawn. Twice around each

piece and a half inch over in order to make it hold permanently. The threads were then cut about two-thirds of an inch from the stitching entirely around each piece. This made it possible to pull out the loose threads for a fringe.

As you can see the fringed edges took care of any irregularities the beginner made on the edges. I often have a floor loom threaded with 24/3 Egyptian cotton 24 to 26 inch width on which as often are made two of the tray cloths at the same time, the one width serving for both. Many variations of stripings may be worked out, and little pattern combinations are lovely. Can you see the possibilities of a radio runner or luncheon set worked out on the same idea? My lady had much enjoyment weaving a variety of so-called linens. While her home life became richer and fuller with a table loom always at hand where she could find refreshment in a creative hobby, this lady helped another train her fingers to the weaving craft. Later they "swapped" ideas and sometimes even looms. One day while jokingly speaking to them I said, "Don't you think you have been weavers long enough? I shall be glad to buy your looms." "Oh, no," came a quick reply. "That would be worse than taking dessert away from a ten-year-old!" And I'm sure it would have been.

A young college chap came for training not because he had lost his sight but because he must expect to lose it within the next year or two. His tastes were not akin to kitchen rugs or dainty linens. Rather he questioned, "Is it



Tray Cloth

possible for me to make something modernistic?" I had Mrs. Atwater's Recipes on hand and let him see for himself some of the things that had gone modern in design. He almost begged to be allowed to try out the recipe for a large rug — for a man's room, Series II, No. 7 — and was enthusiastic with the idea that later he would try to work out patterns of his own. So we broke the general order of having for a beginning piece something small, simple and quickly made. The rug was made, well made, and many interesting pieces with original ideas followed. I do not know whether or not he is physically able today to see, but I do know that this young man's mind was so keenly alert during his weaving lessons that the beauty of good color and pattern combinations must surely have made an indelible impression upon it with possibilities for deeper and finer thought.

These are just four beginnings. Much, much more could be written concerning personal aims, efforts and results. Yes, I could even tell you of a lad wholly without sight or hearing who has found real enjoyment, exercise and expression through weaving. Perhaps his "great pride" is a wall hanging made for the entrance lobby of a beloved school where he is receiving most of his education. If only more



The visually handicapped weaver

of our people with defective vision could know that weaving may hold something in the line of culture, something in the line of pleasure and oftimes something in the line of profit. I wish they might all have a try-out in our craft, don't you? I shall be glad to correspond with anyone particularly interested in work for the visually handicapped.