

Rug hooking helps this farm woman to relax

By JOANNE SPAHR

MARIETTA, Pa. - "Oh, I guess I am just always looking for something new to get into" says Mrs. Grace Bixler with a laugh, describing how she became interested in a craft she has been doing for nearly 20 years now - rug hooking.

According to this Marietta R1 farm wife, who is a part-time farm worker, 4-H leader, active church member, and grandmother of 11, an advertisement in the Sunday paper one day in 1958 made her curious about the primitive art of rug hooking. So, she joined a class at the Landis Valley Farm Museum and has been doing it ever since.

"Oh, it's easy," emphasizes the energetic craftswoman with a wave of her hand. "Anybody can do it, but it does take time and a little imagination."

In her nearly 20 years of working at the art, Mrs. Bixler has created approximately 13 floor rugs which she keeps for herself or gives away to her six children. In most cases, these rugs are used for living room or bedroom rugs.

"When I make them, I blend in the color scheme for the room I have in mind," she says, pointing to the green and gold rugs on her hardwood living room floor.

But, when it comes to judging how long it takes her to hook a floor rug, she shakes her head, shrugs her shoulders and remarks, "I just don't know, to tell you the truth, because I work on them when I have time, and I use them for relaxation."

Continuing in her train of thought, she chuckles and says, "One time I tackled a big project - it took me seven years to complete!"

That project was a 6' by 8" rug comprised of four burlap bags sewn together. Materials she finds around the farm are usually what Mrs. Bixler uses for her backing materials.

"When rug hooking was first brought to this country by the English, who learned



Mrs. Grace Bixler, Marietta R1, does rug hooking for relaxation and fun. She has made 13 rugs in nearly 20 years of working on the craft.

it from the Scandinavians, the backing used was made of coffee bags or grain bags, and today I use seed corn or alfalfa seed bags." Mrs. Bixler says that with this material for backing, and wool purchased at rummage sales, her rugs are relatively inexpensive to create.

"I've never really priced my rugs, but I use old woolen clothes and have some given to me, plus I go to sales, so the materials are cheap," she explains further. There are times, however, when she does buy the materials for her backgrounds.

A big cash outlay for her in the beginning was the rug hooking frame, which sold for \$26. She also uses a

quilting frame for some of her work.

The process of hooking rugs is very easy, according to this 20 year veteran. After the wool is washed (the fabric must be wool for primitive rug hooking), it is cut into thin strips by either a rug shredder or by hand. The rug shredder, of course, makes uniform strips, while hand cutting is more open to human variation.

Then, using a rug hook, a tool about 4½ inches long with a tip that resembles a crocheting needle, the wool is pulled up from underneath the backing, and hooked.

In rug hooking there is no knotting or tying of ends, since both the starting and

finishing ends are pulled through the top of the rug.

Of course, there is a certain amount of creativity involved in making up the designs. Mrs. Bixler has created some of her own, but she also uses other people's designs. She copies them onto pieces of tobacco paper and stores them in a cupboard for future use. Right now she has a store of about 10 to 12 designs which she says, "ought to keep me pretty busy in time to come."

But, if her rug hooking doesn't keep her busy, her weaving, antique collecting, gardening, and crocheting will. Plus, she's just beginning the craft of scherensnitte, or paper cutting.

Her home is decorated

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A woman of many hobbies and loves, Mrs. Bixler is a gardener at heart. Here, she works on her circular flower beds.

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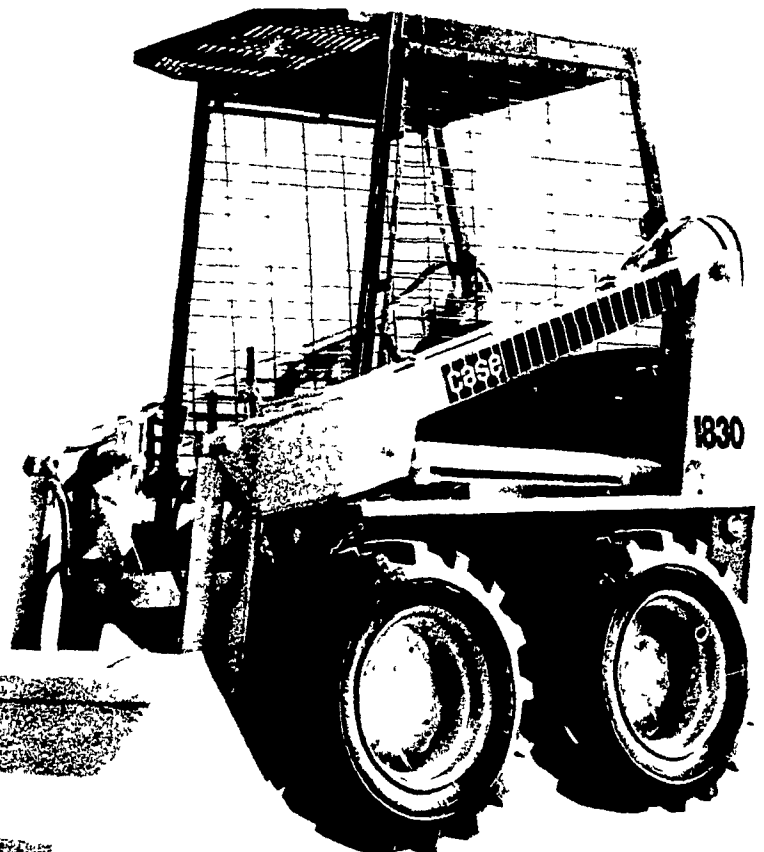
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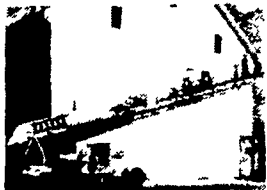


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