

Macrame, ancient art come to life

BY SALLY BAIR
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When Charlotte Charles decided it was time to do something for herself, she enrolled in a night class at Hempfield High School and found herself becoming immersed in the ancient craft of macrame. Since last year when she first learned, she has created many projects, some of which enhance her R1 Columbia home and many of which have been given as gifts to lucky friends and relatives.

Charlotte says, "Macrame is the only thing I do and I really enjoy it." As the wife of Jim Charles, sales representative for American Breeders Service, and mother to Melissa, 11, Mike, 10, and Matt, 4, she of course does many other things, but macrame has become her one craft.

She makes it sound simple when she states, "If you can make a square knot you can macrame. I couldn't even tie a square knot when I started." Since then, however, she has learned to tie "lots of different kinds of knots" and feels comfortable reading directions and understanding new ones.

Knots are the basis for macrame, of course, and the uniformity of pressure on the knots is what gives the final project the symmetry which characterizes most macrame projects. Charlotte points out, "Knots should be tied gently. Your knots will always be the same, so you don't want someone else working on your project."

Charlotte also notes that macrame does not have to be expensive, although some materials can be costly. All you really need to start is cord and some pins to hold the cord in place as you work. Charlotte says a board designed for macrame is helpful because it provides a surface for pinning and has measurements. Special pins can be purchased to anchor the ropes before the knotting begins.

She says all necessary supplies can be readily purchased in craft stores in the Lancaster area. She adds that cord comes in all colors and thicknesses, which account for the wide variety of projects you

can create without having vast experience.

There are many books available on the subject both for purchase at craft stores and from the library. Charlotte already has acquired a variety of instruction books and in her spare time studies them and plans her future projects. "I could spend hours looking," she states.

She recommends that anyone wishing to learn macrame take a class or learn from someone who is presently doing it. "It's a hobby for everybody. It's very simple and goes way back," she says.

While macrame has recently enjoyed a revival in popularity, it is indeed an ancient art used by all civilizations for thousands of years. The art knew few boundaries with early examples of knotting having been discovered in a Finnish peat bog, dating from 6850 B.C. It has also been found in areas as widespread as Egypt and Peru. The Inca Indians used the knots instead of a written language to record numbers and messages.

American Indians used similar knot records to count the days of the week, bearing out the fact that in the earliest days of knotting the knots were primarily useful, not decorative.

Decorative knots were found mostly in the Far East, with temple hangings in Japan and China having very ornate knots. These were then incorporated into elaborate clothing and other furnishings and exported to the Middle East where Crusaders found them and carried them back to Europe. After the Crusaders, knots were often combined with fringes, with the fringe either added to the cloth or the weaver simply knotting the fringed warp threads.

The first lace pattern books appeared in the sixteenth century, and these included directions for a knotting point, which is a coarse lace resembling macrame.

In the eighteenth century fine lace became a symbol of wealth, so few macrame pieces remain. In the nineteenth century interest was renewed because of sailors who spent long months at sea and worked on fashioning hundreds of articles from the readily available



This selection of projects made with through the simple combinations of knots. macrame gives an idea of the variety possible

rope on the ship. These sailors, though often jealous of their knowledge of knots, traded some special knots and learned new ones wherever they traveled throughout the world. Often their products had combinations of many knots in the designs.

In England at the end of the nineteenth century, children were taught to tie knots by tying strings to a wooden frame. From the age of five they were taught simple knots. Fancy macrame was very fashionable among the wealthy of this period. Victorian ladies with leisure time knotted elaborate pieces used for table covers, bench covers or seat covers. Eventually this craft became unfashionable and other crafts gained in enthusiasm.

Now the enthusiasm is back, and Charlotte is one of the most enthusiastic.

One of her favorite macrame projects is making pocketbooks because they are also practical. She was so pleased with her progress and the results, that she chose one to enter at the Pennsylvania State Farm Show in January. She didn't win, perhaps because macrame is judged in a category with many other crafts, but her enthusiasm remains and

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she plans to enter something in the local shows this fall.

The purse is hand washable, so with the heavy knots will be very durable and usable. Materials for

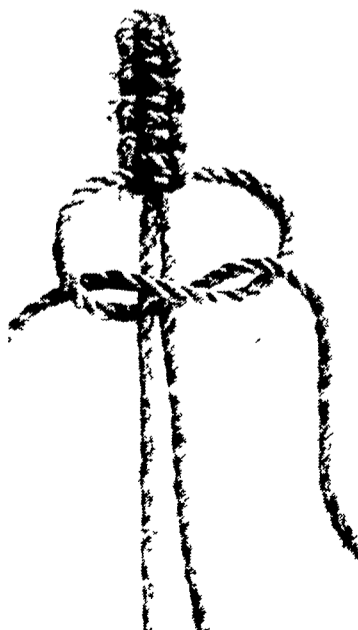
the pocketbook totalled about \$10.00.

She has made plant holders and says, "There are a hundred dif-

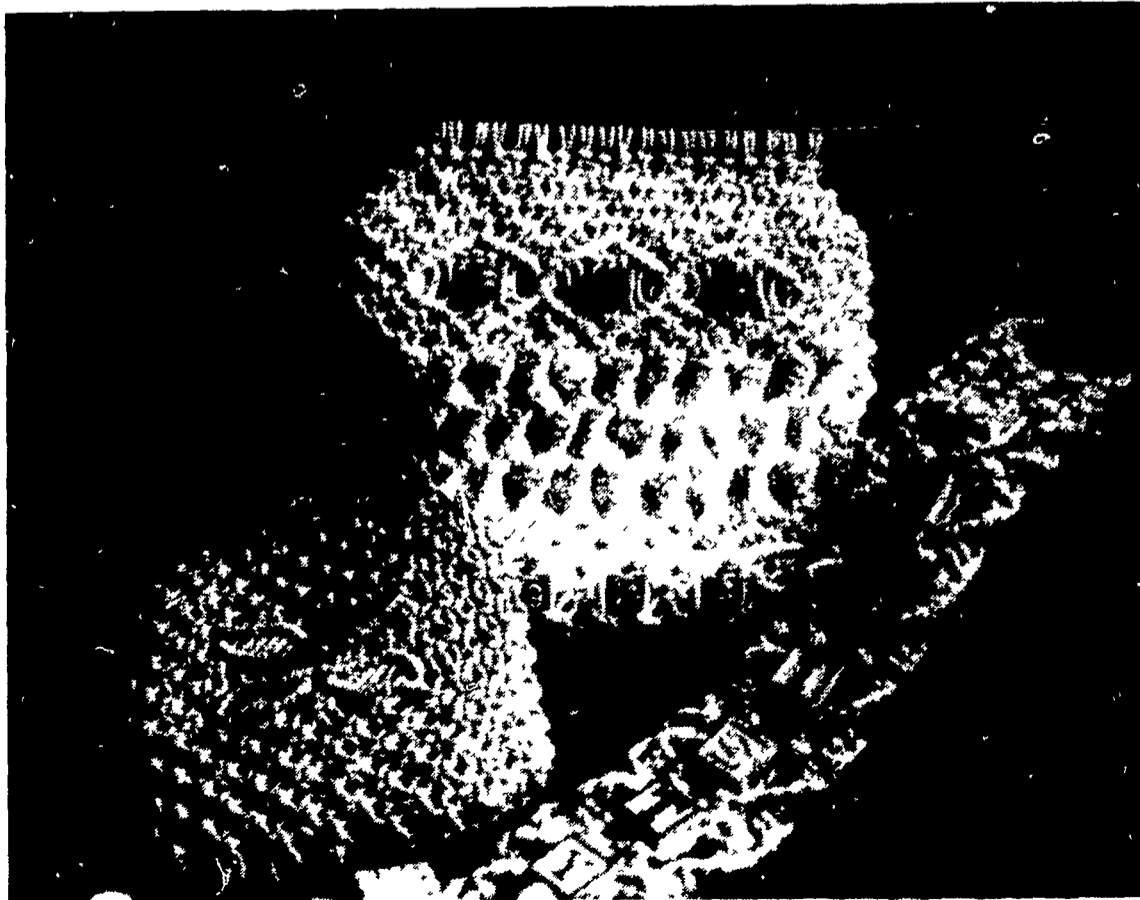
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A macrame board is a useful accessory to anyone beginning a project in knotting. This shows clearly the use of pins in the board to anchor the cords before proceeding.



A square knot is the first basic knot to be learned in macrame, and this shows the first step toward completing the square knot.



One of Charlotte Charles' most involved series of four. It took about 25 hours to projects was this knotted wreath which is complete. composed of 540 square knots worked in