

Will you show this to Mrs. Brown sometime?

MRS. SHELDON J. HOWE

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May 8, 1974

Dear Mrs. Duris:

You asked what sort of needlework Olive Curtiss did. It was most interesting and I am trying to think of a way to trace it. She made what is now called a bed rugg and there *are* only about forty of them still known to exist. They all originated in Connecticut or were made by women who moved from that area to other parts of New England, although there are very few of those. Several breadths of hand woven blanket were sewed together to make a coverlet big enough to go over a big bed and hang to the floor on three sides. Then the blanket was completely covered with embroidery done with several strands of homespun wool dyed often with indigo but also with brown and warm colors. The patterns were always bold and often a plant grew up the center and a wide surrounding border of a meandering stem held a great flower or leaf in each curve. *Darning stitch or a looped stitch covered every inch of background.*

William Warren began to recognize bed ruggs as a separate category of American folk art several years ago, consulted Gertrude Townsend of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and went to

work to study them. Miss Townsend explained the fact that they were always needlework and never hooking which many people had thought as sometimes a looped stitch was cut and formed a sort of pile. A year ago there was a beautiful bed rugg show at the Hartford Atheneum put on by Mr. Warren. Only one other rugg had a pattern growing from a great heart at the base like Olive's. Otherwise, her pattern follows the usual style. Somehow the two women in Deerfield who were studying 18th c. American needlework found the bed rugg and traced off the huge pattern on four great squares of heavy gray paper. Then they embroidered it again on heavy white linen in the stitchery of the 18th c. crewel patterns. It is in one of the museum houses in Deerfield now and its indigo threads are still strong and lovely.

On a wrapping around the pattern which I found in an old trunk in Memorial Hall Miss Whiting had written "Only extant copy of this pattern" and the words "Olive Curtis bedspread" above it. It must have been such a tremendous endeavor that if it survived it would probably have appeared in Olive's inventory at her death. I have to see if that is in Northampton. Or perhaps you know where I might find it. The fascinating thing is that although bed ruggs were not made near Granville, several were made in the Durham area.

I will send you pictures of the pattern when we finish cleaning and stabilizing it.

Thank you for all your help.

Margery Haue

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P.S. I am doing a book for Scribner's on the embroidery revival in Deerfield at the turn of the century. Olive and the patterns that were derived from her bed rugg pattern will have a chapter.

about 2 yards each side -



a bad drawing but you can see how tedious
it is. Sawher in Miss Whitcup's notes & found 1798