

We did all the work while our mothers made the mats. Some of us made the mats, too. My mother and my brother made 15 in one winter (Alfrieda). I think we made and sold about 100 (Eileen). I made them with my mother (Jeanne).

It's important to remember because it is a part of our history and culture. We know he probably sold them for a lot of money but at that time we had to do whatever we could. Had we had a place like this here (St. Anne's Nursing Home) at that time we would have been in there (the kitchen) and turned every pot over. People were really hungry.

THE END

**Hooked rugs are a traditional Acadian domestic craft that originated in the mid-1800s along Northeastern Canada and the U.S. The memories shared by the authors come from an era referred to as "hooked rug mania" by fashion writers. Many wealthy Americans and some Canadians would travel to Cape Breton for vacation and purchase the popular items from locals. At the same time, collectors and dealers often travelled to Cape Breton's rural communities in order to obtain the rugs as consumer commodities to sell in cities.*

- MacDonald, S. (2001) As the Locusts in Egypt Gathered Crops: Hooked Mat Mania and Cross-Border Shopping in the Early Twentieth Century.

MAKING MATS

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The women used to make hooked rugs or mats and trade them for supplies. This continued in the 1940s and after the war.

It started during the depression, in the 1930s, people were so poor, they would do anything. There was no money in fishing. At the dock, if you could sing a good song you could go home with fish, that is how cheap it was. People sold and ate blueberries from the bush. If you were a young fella who could shoot a gun you had to go out and try and get a duck, deer or rabbits to get meat. Anything for a bite. Some people were poor enough that they were on relief from the county. The government overseer of the poor would go around so he would know if you had a dozen or half a dozen children. The more kids you had it was harder to keep them fed. A family here in Petit de Grat had 24. A dollar was worth a fortune at that time.

So, all the women made mats – or rugs with a hook. A man we called ‘The Jew’ used to come to the Island to trade stuff for the mats - flannel sheets or oil cloth. They used to make cushion flooring with the oil cloth for our houses. Even the boys would make mats. I (Eileen) had a brother who could hook like a woman!

Sometimes there were two of them. The Jew used to have a driver he brought because he didn’t drive. They used to come from Montreal with boxes of rags, and other materials. Some was material to use for the mats but you would buy a box about three-feet squared and you would be surprised to see what they were getting in there.

He would not pay any cash for the rug but he had rolls and rolls of oil cloth. Whatever you wanted he would get it for you. It was a good thing for people because people were very poor. But, we don’t think he ever had to pay out too much. We imagine he did pretty good with them.

He had a name but everyone just called him The Jew. He would stay at the boarding house and leave his oil cloth and stuff he had.

