

Metro

THE ART OF DOCUMENTATION: THE NEW BRUNSWICK MAT REGISTRY



Art talk

**Margaret
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Before leaving for Costa Rica where my daughter and I are ringing in the New Year, I wanted to get caught up with a story about the New Brunswick Mat Registry.

To date, the non-profit group of volunteers, in partnership with the New Brunswick Museum and Musée Acadie, has documented more than 400 mats according to Judy Morison, of Dorchester, who co-chairs the registry with Marielle Poirier of Grande Digue.

"Many of them are over 100 years old, so it's starting to be a data base of great importance," Morison said.

As long as there are hooked mats out there made in New Brunswick or by a New Brunswicker and 25 years or older, the group wants to know so the mats can be added to a database, creating a digital archive of our cultural history. Registration events have been held throughout the province over the past



by a New Brunswicker and 25 years or older, the group wants to know so the mats can be added to a database, creating a digital archive of our cultural history. Registration events have been held throughout the province over the past few years, two of which I've been invited to attend, the most recent being this past October in Moncton where the process was documented by a film crew.

When people carrying the mats arrived for their appointment, they were led through several stages. First the history of the mat was recorded: Who made it – individual or a group? Why did they make it? Was it practical, decorative or to mark a significant occasion? Was it made for personal use or for sale?

I had an opportunity to listen as registry volunteers Marie-Claude Hébert and Yvette Melanson recorded the history of a mat brought in by Thérèse Léger, which was designed by her father, Walter Arsenault in 1967 in honour of Canada's Centennial and hooked by her mother and aunt.

This mat isn't just an original design, it also sheds light on New Brunswick history and culture.

"It's always fascinating to look at the design and see what you can discover about the province," said Line Godbout, registry co-founder and founder of Les Hookeuses de Bor'del'lo. "For example, bridges, if you look at the database, you'll see bridges at Grand Falls and Hartland depicted."

Another includes a log cabin, people, trees and a pile of cut logs "and you can tell this was an original design and not from a catalogue and when we discover a rug like this we are very excited," Godbout said.



Peter Larocque, curator at the New Brunswick Museum, and Marielle Poirier, co-chair of the New Brunswick Mat Registry, examine a hooked rug created by Noella LeBlanc of Memramcook from knitting yarn with a feedbag backing. PHOTO: MARGARET PATRICIA EATON



Marie-Claude Hébert and Yvette Melanson interview Thérèse Léger who brought in this 1967 rug designed by her father to celebrate Canada's Centennial and hooked by her mother and aunt. PHOTO: MARGARET PATRICIA EATON

"Today I had the pleasure of meeting two rug hookers, well, in a way you could say three. One was 91 years old, one was 88 and the other one brought in a rug made by her aunt who was 95 and had fallen, so couldn't come. So already you have a history. You can sense the pride when people bring in something that was made by a mother or an aunt and sometimes they don't know

what to do with it, but when they bring it here, they get an idea of the importance of what they have."

At another station Peter Larocque, curator of art and culture at the New Brunswick Museum and Poirier were measuring the mats and examining the materials used to create them, and at still another Morison was sewing tags with a registration number to their

undersides taking great care that no stitches showed through, before it was photographed for the database. If the mat was signed on the underside, the signature was photographed as well.

The registry has moved to the next level, thanks to the federal New Horizons for Seniors' Grant, and provides video productions in both languages, created by Moncton's Atlas Films.

In addition to the documentation process, the videos will contain interviews and conversations around rug hooking. Godbout, for example, interviewed retired Senator Viola Léger, who learned to hook for a theatrical role and has a collection of 14 mats, most of which were made in Memramcook.

"Léger talked about the place of hooked rugs in our culture and how we can encourage the younger generation to discover their heritage and be proud of it," Godbout said.

Other interviews were done by Lynn Kinsella with the Carnegie Hookers in Rothesay while Doris Norman spoke with renown professional tapestry artist Susan Vida Judah, whose work has been exhibited at the New Brunswick Museum and represented by leading galleries, including Gallery '78

in Fredericton.

"We also filmed conversations," Morison said. "For example there's a husband and wife team who hook together, an aunt and her niece, two adults with the Reach program in Fredericton, two children who learned to hook through a school program with Marielle and a pair of sisters-in-law from Cormier's Cove who are aged 100 and 102."

The registry is working out details for the film's launch in the spring, when the editing process will be complete.

"We haven't got our plans for that finalized yet, but we will," Morison says.

Godbout said anyone with a hooked mat should reach out to discover the story behind it. To get in contact with the registry visit mats-tapisnb.com; see their Facebook page; contact Morison at 506-379-6682 or morec@rogers.com; or contact Poirier at 506-533-9578, marjean@nb.sympatico.ca.

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A freelance writer, photographer and poet, Margaret's weekly column focuses on artists, galleries and art issues in southeast New Brunswick