

History of Rug Making

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History of Carpet Making

Rugs and carpets have been prized possessions through the ages. Rugs were listed as valued chattels in the literature of Persia in the 6th century. They were probably coarse fabrics flat-woven on a loom in much the same way that other plain textiles were made. Hand-knotted rugs were created later, possibly by nomad tribes of Turkestan or the Caucasus. The weaving of hand-knotted rugs spread throughout the Orient, and Persia became the predominant center of manufacture.

Oriental rugs were carried to Europe by the Saracen conquerors of Spain and by the returning Crusaders. The Spanish were the first Europeans to make hand-tied pile rugs. In the tapestry-weaving center of Aubusson, France, flat-woven rugs were made. Aubussons were known for their floral patterns in pastels. Deep-pile rugs, first made in Paris in the 17th century, were called savonneries, after the abandoned soap works that housed the carpet factory.

Carpet-weaving industries developed in Brussels, Belgium, and, in the 1700s, in Wilton, Axminster, and Kidderminster, England. The French inventor Joseph-Marie Jacquard devised the mechanism for figured weaving in 1800. It was first used in Wilton.

The first carpet factory in the United States was founded in 1791 in Philadelphia, Pa., by W.P. Sprague, and the second, in Worcester, Mass., in 1804. Erastus Brigham Bigelow revolutionized the industry when, in 1841 in Lowell, Mass., he introduced the first power loom. Bigelow used steam to power an ingrain (flat-weave) loom. Later he perfected a power loom to make a Brussels, or looped-pile, carpet. The Axminster power loom was developed in 1876 by Halcyon Skinner, based on an idea by Alexander Smith.

The high-speed tufting method of carpet manufacture originated in the United States in the 1920s. It was improved for making broadloom carpet after World War II. The knitting method of carpet manufacture was developed commercially in 1951. The carpet industry grew steadily in the decades following World War II. The United States became the leading producer. Belgium ranked second, followed by Great Britain and West Germany. The Middle East remained the chief producer and exporter of handmade Oriental rugs. Factors in the industry's expansion included the vogue of wall-to-wall and room-to-room carpeting, the improvements in machinery for producing tufted carpets, and the development of synthetic fibers.