

Grand Isle Rug Factory

MCC-00238

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Collection Title: Grand Isle Rug Factory

Creator/Collector: Alice Esther Caron Gendreau

Collection Number: MCC-00238

Shelf Number: UM-238

Date Range: ca. 1964-1965

Extent: 1 folder (.05 cu. ft)

Provenance: Alice Esther Caron Gendreau, who was employed by the Grand Isle Rug Factory while they were working out of people's houses, donated these 3 black and white photos. The news articles were printed from the 1964-1965 St. John Valley Times microfilms by Archives staff.

Conservation notes: The 3 original photos donated were placed in an archival protector sheet and placed in an archival folder.

Access restrictions: No restrictions on access.

Physical restrictions: None.

Technical restrictions: None

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Citation: Grand Isle Rug Factory, MCC-00238, Acadian Archives/Archives acadiennes, University of Maine at Fort Kent.

Separated materials: Not applicable

Related materials: Not applicable

Location of originals: Not applicable

Organizational history: A \$63,000 grant was received from Department of Labor for a training program and the purchase of equipment for the "Nagy Rug Factory". Men and women from Grand Isle, Maine area were trained to be rug weavers on hand looms for a company called "Nagy Rug Factory". Before the factory was to be built, the weaving was done in a house on the corner of Main Street and Morneault Road in Grand Isle, Maine.

12 workers were employed and working 2 to 3 to a loom depending on the loom size. The patterns used were often abstracts and when patterns were not available they would use varied colors or a uniform color on a rug. Wool was used to weave the rugs and the backing was made of warp cotton as per Mrs. Alice Gendreau in October 2008. She also mentioned that these 12 trained persons were to go to St. Basile, New Brunswick to train other people on weaving. The selected people worked on their weaving for about a year while Mr. Ernest Nagy Sr, owner and

manager, tried to get the funding for the building of a factory between Grand Isle and Lille, Maine.

In late summer 1964, ground was broken to build the new factory but the Nagy Rug Factory was never built because Madawaska voters refused to appropriate its share of \$9,600 and this action had threatened the future of the Corporation and it also jeopardized the Small Business Administration loan to the rug company.

Biographical Note: Alice Esther Caron was born 6 March 1945 in Madawaska, Maine the daughter of Octave Fidèle Caron Jr. of Sainte-Anne de Madawaska in New Brunswick and Aline Sophie Picard Caron of Lille, Maine. Alice's mother, Aline, was a store keeper and a housewife. Octave worked as a farmhand and also worked at Fraser.

Alice had 3 brothers and 3 sisters. She did some of her schooling at the Notre-Dame de la Sagesse Convent in Ste-Agathe, Maine. She married Percy Gendreau on May 1st, 1965 in Lille, Maine and had 2 boys. She worked at the rug factory in Grand Isle, at the Parent Store in Lille, Maine, and at the Caron Store. As of October 2008, Alice still resides in Grand Isle, Maine.

Biographical notes: Ernest Nagy Sr., a partner in the Grand Isle Rug Factory, was born in Retfalvi, Hungary in 1911. Three years later World War I tore the world in pieces and Retfalvi was then part of Romania. Nagy graduated from a teachers' college in Transylvania and picked up some information about handicrafts, information which eventually came in handy in rug-making. In 1933 to 1935, he went to Bucharest and worked for the wool, skin, and leather departments of a Romanian manufacturing company. In 1935, he emigrated to Hungary. In 1944, he became an officer in the Royal Hungarian Army reserve and was captured by the Russians and sent to prison for 5 years in Siberia.

After his release in 1950, he met Julius Retfalvi, who would be his assistant in the Grand Isle Rug Factory. Julius Retfalvi was an opera singer in Vienna when he and Nagy met and came to Canada together.

In 1964, Ernest Nagy Sr. owner and manager of Nagy Oriental Rug Company wanted to build a rug factory in Grand Isle, Maine. A Department of Labor grant was approved for \$63,000 for the training program and the purchase of equipment. 10 local women trained 3 months in an empty local store that was temporarily serving as headquarters for the new firm. These women were to become the nucleus of the company to train future workers.

In 1964, an article in the St. John Valley Times mentions that the Nagy Rug Factory was to be located in Lille, Maine. The lot chosen was owned by Joseph Thibodeau of West Palm Beach, Florida. The lot was to be purchased from him by the Grand Isle Industrial Board and donated for the factory.

The final decision for the site was made by the St. John Industrial Development Corporation. The site was about midway between Grand Isle and Lille on U.S. Route 1 on the Pat Cyr farm. Ground was broken for the new factory and the first class of workers graduated. On September 16, 1964 bulldozers started to clear ground for the factory that was to be finished in November.

The Madawaska Development Committee joined hand with the Grand Isle Committee to make the Nagy Oriental Rug Company a joint operation to raise the working capital in the final step of financing. Honoring the pledges people and businesses had made to the St. John Valley Development Corporation was needed for the rug factory to be operational. The Nagy Rug Factory was never built because Madawaska voters refused to appropriate its share of \$9,600 and this action had threatened the future of the Corporation and it also jeopardized the Small Business Administration loan to the rug company. The pledges were returned to the contributors of Madawaska and the rug factory never opened in Grand Isle.

Scope and content: 3 black and white photos in very good condition and 19 St. John Valley Times news articles printed from 1964 & 1965 printed by the Archives staff. Names of people appearing in the photos are Gilman Chassé, Lionel Collin, Hermance Cyr (Ronald), Gladys Lausier, Alice Gendreau (Percy), Jeannine Cyr (Robert), Jeanne Soucy, Ann Marie Desjardins, Ursula MacDonald (Dick), Carmen Daigle (Normand), Lorette Doucette (Reed), Hilda Corbin, Anne Chassé (Edmond), Ernest Nagy Sr., Anne Marie Grivois.

Inventory: Articles of the St. John Valley Times from 1964-1965 on the “Nagy Rug Factory”:

Article #	Article Title
1	Grand Isle Rug Factory to Hire First Employees
2	Grant Approved to Aid Rug Factory
3	Valley Residents Asked to Apply as Rug-Hooker Trainees
4	Rug School Opens in Grand Isle; 100 More Trainees Asked Monday
5	Lille Site Chosen for Nagy Factory; Industrial Board Explains Decision
6	Nagy Rug Factory Going Up; Class Ends
7	Nagy Rug Factory Location Now Definite
8	Hopefuls Flock to Apply for Rug School; Towns Still Squabble Over Plant Location
9	Rug-Makers Exotic Past Includes Siberian Prison, Canadian Exile
10	Nagy Rugs on Display at Madawaska Store
11	Industrial Agent Tells Why Madawaska is Needed to Assist Nagy Rug Company
12	Madawaska to Join with Grand Isle to Make Rug Factory Joint Operation
13	Nagy Rug Plant Leaving Valley if Madawaska Pledges Flop
14	Why Madawaska is Needed
15	Board Set Up to Protect Rug Investors
16	Nagy's Satisfied
17	SBA Loan for Nagy Rug Concern in Final Stage
18	Nagy to Begin Production by October; New Weavers Train at St. Basile School
19	Pledge Money Being Returned