

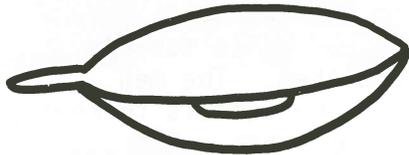
TATTING

AN ENDANGERED ART

BY SHERYL ZULIAN AND CINDY SANDELIN

An unfamiliar art is tatting. Tatting is a delicate hand made lace and is nothing more than tying a simple slipknot with a shuttle and thread.

Tatting shuttles are made of metal, plastic, bone or tortoise shell. Some shuttles have a hook on one end, other do not, but most shuttles are shaped like the one shown in the illustration below.



"When I first came here, I was crazy about Colorado. I'd never seen so much snow. In Nebraska it never snowed that much, and if it did it melted pretty quick, or the wind blew it into drifts."

A grandmother of five, the spright, petite Mrs. Combs says with a laugh, "The kids in Boulder want me to come live with them, but there is so much wind there, I don't want to get blown away!"

Mrs. Combs commented that she would like to continue living in Steamboat, "I don't want to move any farther away from the kids, but all my friends are here. Sometime in winter, I'd like to go someplace warmer, where there is a milder climate, but only for the winter. I'd be here in summer. Oh, boy! I wouldn't like to go where cyclones and such are."

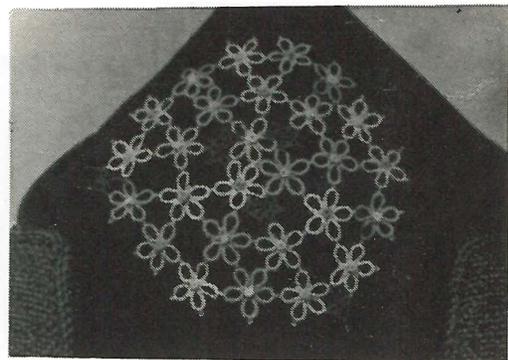
An expert on tatting, Mrs. Beulah Combs, has lived and tatted in Steamboat Springs for over fifty years - ever since she came here in 1925. Born in Nebraska, Mrs. Combs moved, with her family, to Clark, Colorado, when she was eleven. At the age of fifteen, Mrs. Combs came to Steamboat to finish her last three years of high school.

When asked if there were many people here at that time, Beulah said, "Goodness, no! Steamboat was a small town. I think it has tripled since then."

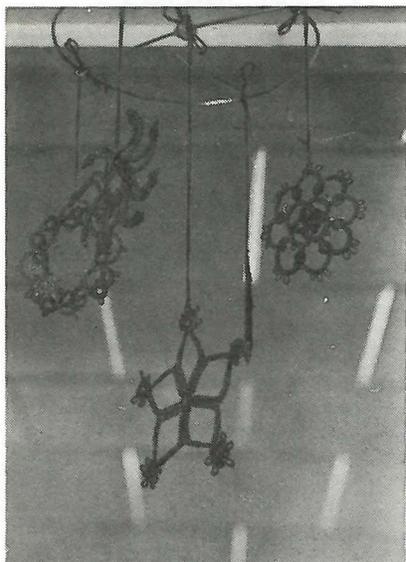


Mrs. Combs shows how to tat.

Floods are not particularly agreeable to Mrs. Combs either, but she has had some experience with them. Butcher-knife Creek, which runs beside her home has overrun its banks at least twice in the last few years. Last April, when the creek flooded, Mrs. Combs and her husband were forced to move for five days until the creek went down again.



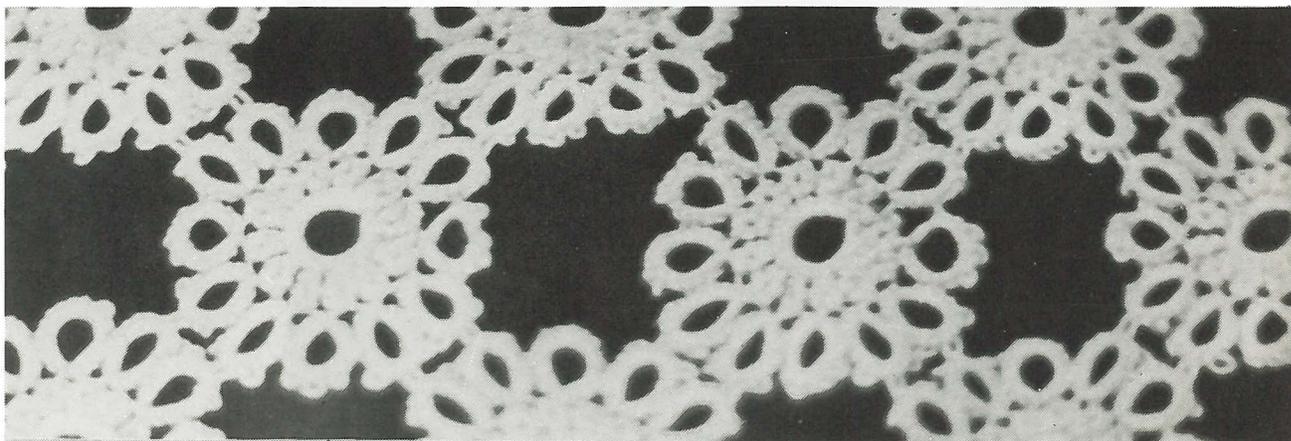
A tatted doily used as a decoration on a pillow.



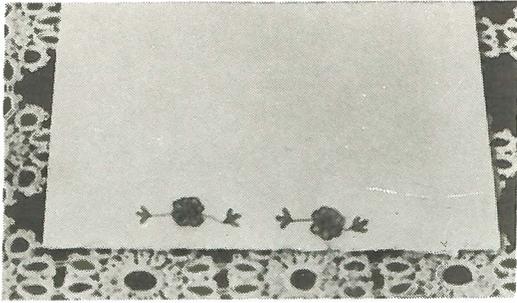
Along with the mobile shown, Mrs. Combs tatts lovely snowflakes.

But, even with floods and cold winters, Mrs. Combs readily agrees with anyone who says that Steamboat Springs is the best place to live. And she has lived in one place for forty-four years - the house she lives in now, and the one she has lived in since she was married.

In that house, Mrs. Combs has tatted hundreds and hundreds of items. One of the most impressive objects she has tatted is a forty-two year old tablecloth that has been used constantly since the day she finished it. The tablecloth, still in excellent condition, took about two years to make.



Part of a tablecloth tatted by Mrs. Combs. This tablecloth contains 5,400 flower shapes.



Tatted flowers on notecards.



A few of the items
Mrs. Combs has tatted.

Mrs. Combs has tatted other objects such as: snowflakes (tatted pieces that when done look like snowflakes), little flowers (which she puts on note cards and stationary), book marks, and edgings for handkerchiefs, pillows, washcloths, towels and even dresses.

Her skillfulness and creativity have enabled her to come up with seventy-nine different patterns for snowflakes and numerous patterns for such things as runners and doilies.

Tatting, to Mrs. Combs, is not a lost art. "There are quite a few people that do it, but they just maybe make a small edge for things... they don't go into it like I do."

Mrs. Combs does get into tatting, too! Most of the items that she tats are sold at the Unique Shop. (The Unique Shop is a shop for knick-knacks made and sold by older members of the community.) Some of the things Beulah Combs makes, she gives, as gifts, to relatives, or she uses them in her own household.

Of the numerous items she makes, Mrs. Combs's tatted snowflakes seem to be the most popular. Over two hundred snowflakes were sold in the months of November and December alone. She also sold over fifteen boxes of note cards. (The note cards have small tatted flowers on them.)



"We've got the hang of it now."



Tatting also makes beautiful doilies.



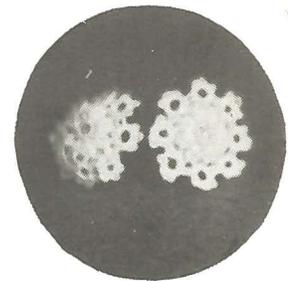
An interested student.

Watching Mrs. Combs tat makes tatting seem quite simple. Learning, however, was not quite so easy - even with an excellent teacher like Mrs. Combs. But, even Mrs. Combs cannot teach everyone. Two kinds of people that Mrs. Combs cannot teach to tat are: left-handed people and large groups. "I can only teach one person at a time, and it can't be done if you are left-handed. Left-handed people have to tat the right-handed way. I've tried to teach left-handed people, and I tried to learn to do it myself, but it can't be done," explains Mrs. Combs.

Another problem with tatting is picking out knots. "If you make a mistake, you have to pick it out - it's not like crocheting that you can unravel. When your stitches won't slide, you have a knot that has to be picked out," says Mrs. Combs. "Another thing - you've got to have really dry hands, or your slipknot won't slip."



Tedious learning.



Tatted earrings.

Trying to tat for the first time proved that knots did have to be picked out. We (Cindy Sandelin and Sheryl Zulian) found that practicing the double stitch, until we could do it with ease, helped us to do it with ease. We then moved on to the next steps, which were more complicated. After many hours, lots of work, and much patience, we learned to make a picot. Being able to make a picot proved to be rewarding because picots make the tatting look frilly and fancy. And being able to tat, under Mrs. Comb's direction, proved to be a great accomplishment, indeed!

If you would like to try your hand at tatting, steps and diagrams on how to tat follow.

To order your own tatting kit (shuttle and thread included), send \$1.00, for postage and handling, to:

THREE WIRE WINTER
Box 664
Steamboat Springs, Colorado 80477

Her screechy voice wavered as her mind
Wandered back to the old ranch house
And the snowy winter of 1923.
Between the two they argued about the
Depth of the snow. Where did it come to-
On a barbed wire fence?
"I reckon I know," he said contrarily.
"I betcha!" she said,
"The worst winter we had was more than
a THREE WIRE WINTER!"

I heard the old timer say,
"I sure as heck 'member the winter of 1911,
It was more than a THREE WIRE WINTER:
Instead of the snow being to the third
Wire, it was all the way to seven!"
His raspy voice faded as he recalled the
Coldest winter ever - of all!