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A Note about Miss Lillian Burke Miss Burke's agent in Cheticamp, Mrs. Willy Aucoin, and one of their rugs. Dr. G. B. Fairchild: Her name was Miss Lillian Burke. She was a grade-school art teacher in Washington, D. C. • she was hired by my aunt to come to the house and teach her children how to paint, water colours primarily. They became very fond of her. Then the First World War came along. And Burkie enlisted • or whatever women did in those days. She became an occupational therapist and went overseas for a fair number of years, stayed on in American hospitals in Germany after the war, teaching people who had lost both arms • that kind of thing • how to do things. She was extremely skillful with her hands and very imaginative. She could sculpt, she could make jewelry, she could work in metal, she could weave. But she was good at all of them. And she had a very pleasant personality. She was very quiet. Lovely smile. After the war, after my grandmother died in 1922, -mother was looking around for someone imbued with the same spirit as my grandmother had been, of trying to do something for local people. She looked around and realized that lace was no good. I mean grandmother had tried lace and the local people were just not built for lace-making. It just didn't work out as a cottage industry. This is what they were looking for. In those days, the only chance for making a little money, was from something in the home. So hence, cottage industries. So she got Burkie to come up. And at first • there used to be a building in Baddeck called Gertrude Hall, which was the library. They used the library as a salesroom for hooked rugs. They got the local people to bring in rugs that they made and they would sell them for them to the tourists on commission. (Victoria County people?) Yes, Baddeck Bay. Well, after a year or two of this. Miss Burke was not making what you'd call a good living at this. But she decided that one of the problems was they weren't making very good rugs • neither the design nor the colour nor the workmanship was very good. So she started to try and improve all three. She realized the finer the hooking the better the rug, and if you use good materials it's better, if you use wool it's better than rags. She didn't have too much success with the women around Baddeck. A few were interested in doing things her way. Most of the others would stick to their traditional designs, traditional bright colours • and when they didn't sell, it was the fault of the person that was buying, not their fault. In all events, after a few years, she gradually moved over to Cheticamp, where she found a more congenial environment. The women in Cheticamp were willing to learn, were willing to change, were willing to hook rugs the way she thought they should be hooked and which she could sell. Well, from being a small operation of taking rugs on consignment that somebody else had made she gradually worked to making rugs on order. She opened a studio in New York • she had a loft in New York • and she would buy the burlap and she would draw the designs on the rugs and make sketches of the colour sketches and submit them to interior decorators around New York. And she made some big ones. I think the greatest length she made was 50 feet. That's a big rug. By made I mean, she'd design them and she'd come up here every summer, supervise, so to speak, you



see. She'd draw the design on the burlap and give them a colour sketch reduced of a corner • the pattern would generally go all the way around • and she taught them how to get the colours they needed. She wasn't actually hooking • but she could show them that while it's a lot easier to hook in straight lines, it's a better rug if you hook in circles. And if you stipple irregularly it looks all right. And she also taught them if you have a big area of one colour, then you use 3 or 4 colours actually • almost the same but slightly different • gives a little texture to the whole business. And they took to it like ducks to water and they made good rugs • the people of Cheticamp. Cape Breton's Magazine/47