She Works With Cotton From Seed To Cloth

By BOBBE WEST

Not many folks grow cotton anymore and even fewer do anything with it except maybe use it for stuffing unless they raise it to sell.

Mrs. Gladys Clark, Route 1, Box 152, Duson, not only raises cotton — she weaves it into lovely useful items for the home.

Mrs. Clark was one of the craft-persons demonstrating her skill in Lafayette at the recent Festivale Acadiens, spinning and weaving with white and yellow cotton.

"I learned to card (use of a metal comb or brush to disentangle the fiber of cotton) spin and weave from my mother when I was a very young girl.

"My mother gave me a dozen homespun blankets made out of the brown and white cotton when I got married. I would help her with the carding and spinning. That was years ago and just about a lost art.

"She continued, "Then one day after that time, Miss Louise Olivier, from Arnaudville, visited our area and she got the ladies in our neighborhood interested in going back to planting the brown cotton and weaving. She found a market for the articles they would make. I still was not interested too much in weaving, so instead I would sew bonnets and pinafores for her."

"Finally, she got me back to the weaving. The project was called the Acadian Handicraft Project. Ever since then I've been weaving."

She sighed, "I'm the only one left from that party that is still weaving. Most of them have passed away and my mother is now 87 and is an invalid."

Mrs. Clark sparkles as she used the spinning wheel, happy to show the visitors an almost lost art.

"The brown cotton is not found on the market — you must grow your own. We kept the seeds of the cotton from one year to the other and it was handed down from one generation to another."

"I grow a few rows of cotton in my garden," she smiled, "I spin only the brown cotton which is used mostly for trimming. I would make very few solid brown place mats, only on special order."

"I don't make items larger than twelve inches wide — place mats, runners and table napkins."

She continued, "It is very hard work to thread a loom, so I have my loom threaded twelve inches wide. I could thread my loom up to thirty-two inches wide but I have more demand for the twelve inch articles than I can supply so I leave it threaded twelve inches wide.

"It takes me 400 threads for the warp to have the material twelve inches wide and for the napkins I use the same weight thread for warp and weft."

"Now, for place mats I use a heavier thread for my weft."

The place mats and napkins that she finds so easy to sell have a rustic appearance, light beige with dark tanish stripes near the edge.

Mrs. Clark At Her Spinning Wheel

Mrs. Clark was one of many exhibitors who were on hand to demonstrate their skills at the Lafayette Natural History Museum and Planetarium for the Louisiana Native Crafts Festival which was part of the Festivale Acadiens held each fall.

Examples of her work will be on display at the Evangeline Art Center during the Cotton Festival.