



Young George Atiyeh stands in front of the Oriental rug store that his brother opened in downtown Portland in 1900.

OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



ABOVE: The Persian Tabriz carpet is centered with a blue Herati medallion within a patterned medallion on a cream field.



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The historic Tabriz carpet (seen hanging at right in a vintage photograph) differed from the colorful, patterned rugs in the Atiyeh showroom at the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exhibition in Portland.

Uncommon THREADS

By Helen L. Mershon ♦ Photos by Serge A. McCabe
THE OREGONIAN

It's a woven masterpiece of lustrous wool, hanging from a museum wall. The 19th-century Persian Tabriz carpet no longer covers the floor of a grand entry hall of a Southwest Portland home, owned by a prominent city leader and financier. But it remains a telling piece of city history.

Owned by the family of Ralph W. and Edith Hoyt for most of the 20th century, the rug was donated to the Oregon Historical Society recently by the descendants of George E. Atiyeh, the rug merchant who sold it to the Hoyts.

It had caught the Hoyts' attention in the prize-winning exhibit by A. Atiyeh & Bro. at the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition in

A rare Persian carpet links two historic Portland families



The decorative pendants on the Tabriz are free-floating in a cream field, rather than attached to the center medallion as in most carpets.

Portland. The couple bought the rug (and apparently some others) from Atiyeh, a rug importer who had come to Portland to work with older brother Aziz. For the next 70 years, the rug would link the Hoyt and Atiyeh families, who became friends.

Former Oregon Gov. Victor Atiyeh, George's youngest son, remembers seeing the Tabriz for the first time in 1943, when he and his father visited Edith Hoyt, by then a widow. Hardly an average hall rug, the Tabriz, which measures 9 feet, 7 inches by 15 feet, 3 inches, was the focal point of the Hoyts' large entry.

The young Atiyeh fell in love with the rug. George told his son that he had offered to buy back the rug from the Hoyts if they ever tired of it. His son doubted whether that would ever happen.

Years passed. After George died in 1944, sons Victor, Edward and Richard ran Atiyeh Bros., raised their families and did civic work.

At Edith Hoyt's death in 1957, the rugs remained with a daughter, Kathryn Hoyt, in Portland. About 1980, Kathryn Hoyt telephoned Victor Atiyeh and said she wanted to sell the Oriental rugs. The brothers brought the Tabriz back to their family.

Earlier this year, the three brothers — the third generation took over the operation in the 1980s — marked the 100th anniversary of the family business in Portland by presenting the Tabriz to the permanent collection of the Oregon Historical Society.

The well-preserved rug was woven in the Persian workshop of Haji Jalili, which made some of the finest Tabriz rugs. It has a linen warp (as opposed to cotton) with fine knotting, creating its velvety texture. From its beginnings the carpet was considered rare and unusual.

But its significance to the Atiyeh family is its place in Portland's early history and their connection to it.

In a way, the story of the men who sold and bought the Tabriz rug mirrors the American dream.

George Atiyeh was born in

WOVEN THROUGH GENERATIONS

What: The Tabriz rug is centerpiece of an exhibit of Atiyeh history and memorabilia.

On display: Through March 2001

Where: Oregon History Center, 1200 S.W. Park Ave.

Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday (Thursday until 8 p.m.), noon to 5 p.m. Sunday

Cost: \$6 adults, \$3 students with ID, \$1.50 ages 6 to 12



A gift from the Atiyeh family to the Oregon Historical Society, the 19th-century Tabriz will be on display through March 2001. Scholars describe the carpet design as "Book Cover," a classic Persian design.

1883 in a tiny Syrian village north of Damascus. His family sent him to the American high school in Sidon and American University in Beirut.

Shifting economic and political winds in the Middle East prompted teen-age brothers George and Aziz to seek their fortunes in the United States. Their family bankrolled their first inventory of Oriental rugs.

Ralph Hoyt was born in Portland in 1864 and started to work as a bank messenger as a teen-ager. He eventually became a bank officer, and by the time he bought the Tabriz, he had his own investment business.

He also was a church organizer, was elected president of the Portland Rose Festival Association in 1912 and served four terms on the Multnomah County Commission. When poor health forced his retirement in 1928, the commission named what would become Hoyt Arboretum in his honor. ♦

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