Blockprinting

Blockprinting was begun to print decorative paper to cover scrapbooks. When it became evident that the women were able to learn to print (at first with very small blocks), a separate work unit was established. The many requests the project received from schools and institutions for curtains led to the production of printed yardage. Colorful wall hangings were added later.
Workers became very skilled at printing fabrics for book covers, portfolios, wall hangings, and curtains. Samples of the printed textiles were included in an educational series for high schools and colleges.
Harold Scott, a designer-foreman, cuts a design into a linoleum block. Scott offered evening classes at the Milwaukee Urban League for workers interested in design work, and the project distributed an educational portfolio of outstanding worker designs.
Workers mixed inks to achieve the colors specified for each design. The project was constantly experimenting to improve the appearance and washability of its blockprinted textiles.
Material was stretched over a padded table before printing. Blockprinted textiles required an even film of ink and careful overlays of colors.
For decades blockprinted curtains hung in Atwater School in Shorewood (Wis.), Whitnall Park, and the Elizabeth Waters Hall of the University of Wisconsin at Madison.
See Mary Kellogg Rice, *Useful Work for Unskilled Women: A Unique Milwaukee WPA Project* (Milwaukee County Historical Society, 2003) for references and photo credits.