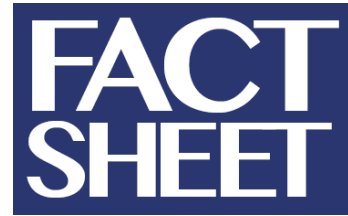




**AMERICA  
WE THANK YOU**  
An Armenian Tribute to Near East Relief



### The Ghazir “Armenian Orphan Rug”

In 1922-23, with the rise to power of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk as leader of the new post-Ottoman Turkish Republic, Americans were forced to leave Turkey. Therefore, NER had no choice but to evacuate 22,000 children from orphanages in Turkey and transport them to other areas in Greece, Syria, and Lebanon. “Papa” Jacob Kunzler, a Swiss national NER worker, led 5000 of these orphans on foot from Turkey to Syria & Lebanon by walking in caravans for 825 km or approximately 513 miles.

Early in 1923, the NER, under the American flag, established an orphanage in Ghazir, Lebanon, which housed 1,400 Armenian orphan girls who had witnessed the destruction of their country during the Armenian Genocide. “Papa” Kunzler became the director of this orphanage.

By a rule mandated by the NER, Ghazir orphans had to leave the orphanage as soon as they turned 16 years old. To ensure that the orphans would be financially self sufficient, and that the orphan girls would not end up as house maids or on the streets once they left the orphanage, NER maintained vocational schools. “Papa” Kunzler, and his wife collaborated with Ohannes Tachdjian (a rug merchant from Urfa, Turkey) to establish a rug-weaving factory in the Ghazir orphanage, where the girls could develop the art and science of weaving rugs and be able to self-finance their livelihood both inside and outside the orphanage. To finance this operation Papa Kunzler needed \$1,000 of seed money and applied to the General Secretary of NER but was approved only \$400 for a pilot project.

Three years after the Ghazir orphanage was founded and within a period of eighteen months, 7 Armenian orphan girls, on behalf of tens of thousands of Armenian orphans around the world, wove their masterpiece: a magnificent 11.7 by 18.5 feet rug, woven into 4,404,206 individual hand-tied knots, depicting various figures of more than 100 animals and plants. This beautiful artifact had hidden the treasure of a 4,000-year-old culture in the delicacy of its threads and sophistication of its bright colors. It was made specifically to be sent as a gift in “Golden Rule” gratitude to the United States of America, and was formally presented to President Coolidge on December 4, 1925. A label on the back of the rug reads, "In Golden Rule Gratitude to Coolidge". This is a reference to the "Golden Rule" campaign, where each year during NER’s existence, on the first Sunday in December, people in the United States were asked to eat only a one-course meal (similar to the one served to orphans in the orphanages) and contribute the money saved to Near East Relief. This rug came to be known as the “Ghazir” or “Armenian Orphan Rug.”



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US President Calvin Coolidge (left) receiving the rug from NER Vice-Chair John H. Finley as a gift from the Armenian orphans. Image of the intricate design of the Ghazir Orphan Rug (right).

Coolidge would write a note of gratitude to Dr. John H. Finley, the Vice-Chairman of the Near East Relief Committee, “The beautiful rug woven by the [Armenian] children in the [Ghazir] orphanage in the Lebanon has been received. This, their expression of gratitude for what we have been able to do in this country for their aid, is accepted by me as a token of their goodwill to the people of the United States. . . The rug has a place of honor in the White House, where it will be a daily symbol of good-will on earth.”

Coolidge displayed the rug in the White House's Blue Room. After his presidential term ended in 1929, the carpet was taken to his home in Northampton, Massachusetts. The rug lay in the living room of his house until his death in 1933, after which Mrs. Coolidge kept the rug in her home in Northampton until her death in 1957. After a period in storage, the Coolidge family returned the rug to the White House in 1982, where it was placed in storage.



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The rug is a relic of an incredibly difficult time in Armenian history. It is an example of the fight for survival of a culture. Additionally, it shows the best of ethnic cultural heritage, and a disappearing art form.



Vartouhi (Hovsepian) Gulezian, one of the 7 orphans who wove the rug back in 1925 visited the White House and was allowed to see the Orphan Rug on June 6, 1986.

In November 2014, after several unsuccessful attempts by the Smithsonian Institute and others to display the Armenian Orphan Rug, the White House released it for brief display in the White House Visitors' Center along with two other items gifted to America after international catastrophes in an exhibit titled: *Thank You To The United States: Three Gifts to Presidents in Gratitude for American Generosity Abroad*. No explanation as to its history or the fact that this was presented to the U.S. in gratitude for its assistance to orphans of the Armenian Genocide was provided.



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## The Rug Factory In Ghazir Lebanon



*Four Young Women weave the*

*“The Ghazir Rug is not just a carpet; it is a tangible connection to the first genocide of the Twentieth Century – a silent, beautiful rebuttal to those who deny the murder of 1.5 million men, woman and children in a campaign of mass murder, forced marches, rape and looting that befell the Armenian people from 1915-23. “*

- U.S. Congressman Adam Schiff  
November 2014



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