



BLACK SHEEP HANDSPINNERS GUILD NEWSLETTER

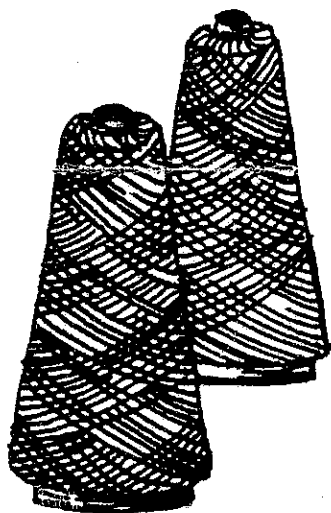
Number 95 - January 1987

Editor: Deborah Serviente  
63 Neimi Road  
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UPCOMING MEETINGS

January 10, Noon--ROCK DAY CELEBRATION!!! Rock Day, also known as St. Distaff Day, is a mark of the year for handspinners and is a good reason to come to the next meeting to celebrate. Bring a dish-to-pass for lunch. Pat Randorf will be surprising us for a playful start to 1987.

February 7 ,Noon--Bring a few samples of handspun fibers worked into a woven or knitted swatch. The yarns can be either dyed, or natural, and/or a combination of both with emphasis on design and combination of colors. We will share samples and ideas and discuss possible projects which could evolve from the swatches. This is a good way to see individual work and learn new ways of perceiving color and design. Don't be afraid to experiment--some "accidents" can turn into wonderful projects. Also think about what kinds of projects and emphasis you would like to see in the Guild this year and what areas you would like to concentrate on. As an example, we could have more dye workshops this year if the emphasis is on color. And/or meetings or workshops on design and possible projects for specific kinds of fibers. Please be vocal about your specific or special needs in the coming year. If you have any good ideas for a meeting or workshop or if there is something you want to share with the Guild that could be worked into a Saturday meeting, please contact Pat Randorf. 564-7493.



DUES DUES DUES..... Have you sent in your dues for 1987 and a membership form?? Dues should be sent to the new treasurer, Kathy Halton, RD 1, 2505 Danby Rd, Willseyville, NY 13864.

NOTES ON DECEMBER MEETING

The meeting for old and new officers, scheduled for 11AM, turned out to be a cold gathering of 3 new officers, none of whom had any idea how to turn the heat on nor had the key to the coffee cabinet. But soon women and dishes-to-pass arrived and someone screwed in the right fuse for heat. Amy Hnatko's

wines helped keep us warm, too. Though it was too cold to spin, it was fine for eating and the food was delicious. Discussion included Pat's suggestion that the Guild choose one topic to study for the whole year rather than skipping around from month to month. It was also suggested that new members, especially beginning spinners, be taken under the wing of an "older" member--an assigned "Big Sister," so to speak. A beginners' workshop for late winter/early spring was suggested as well. Several people felt the need and desire for opportunities to share "disasters." Would it be possible for meetings to break into 2 groups, one for beginners and another for a leave-your-ego-at-home critique session? There's so much we can learn from each other. Welcome to new member Deborah Miller of Freeville, an animal scientist at Cornell who operates a small knitting business.

#### UPCOMING EVENTS

- March 5-8 Knitting Guild of America National Convention in New Orleans.  
For info call 617/524-2401 or write the Guild, Box 1606,  
Nashville, Tn 37901
- May 27-29 3-Days Congress at Berea College, Kentucky. 26 courses. 16 instructors. Knitting, marketing, dyeing, handspinning, weaving, felting, designing, advertising, exotic wools, precious fibers, exhibits, demonstrations. For info, Precious Fibers Foundation, PO Box 511-S, Berea, Kentucky 40403. 606/986-1495.

#### SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN & HANDSPINNING

What does Scientific American magazine have to offer spinners? Plenty in the January 1987 issue. Michael L. Ryder has written a fascinating article on the evolution of the fleece from "the hairy brown coat of the earliest domestic sheep" to "today's fine white wools." For instance, did you know that primitive sheep underwent a yearly molt? They were plucked for wool during the molt. Today's descendants grow continuous coats which are sheared. The breeding for continuous growth "probably began soon after the advent of shears which made it unnecessary to wait for molting." While technologies that were newly developing had a lot to do with the selective breeding for characteristics in sheep, Ryder also believes that the opposite was equally true--"particular features of the sheep's coat inspired new ways of using it." The article necessarily gives a brief account of the history of textiles from the earliest feltmaking (possibly as early as 6500 BC) to later spinning and weaving. The pictures accompanying the article are in themselves worth the trouble of locating this issue at the library: fiber samples; electron microscope picture of individual fibers; and my favorite shots, that of a flock of rather fluffy Merino sheep and their regal, older cousins, the wild

## ADVERTISEMENTS

Yarn for sale. 100% wool, moth-proofed, on cones. Strong enough for warping.

Good for knitting, too. Debbie 347-6631 \$3.50/ lb. 3/3

For sale. Studio/Singer bulky ribber used about 3 times, \$175. Spring lamb fleeces, clean and soft. Kathie Garnsey 315/364-8889 3/3

Two 3/4 Angora rabbits, nice wool; 1 black doe, \$20 and 1 blue buck, \$15.

Black Leicester ewes, white Finn ewes and some crosses; reasonable.

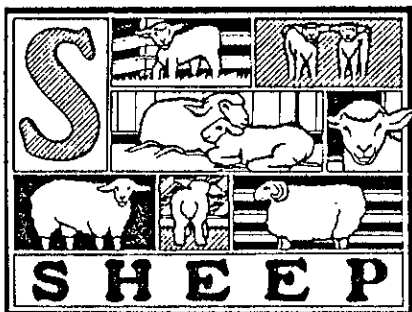
Also 2 blk Finn wethers, Marianne Horchler, Woolery Farm, Genoa, NY 315/497-1542. 2/3

Advertising Rates: 1-3 lines, \$1 for one time, \$2 for three times  
4-12 lines, \$5 for one time,  
13 lines-1/2 page, \$10 for one time.

## SOME WINTERTIME WANDERINGS

It seems as if the snow may never end. There's well over a foot of snow out there with no indication of letting up. Those fluffy white flakes keep drifting down. The beauty of it all amzes me. And half the beauty is being cozied up indoors, the woodstove glowing with warmth. Accompanying this lovely song is my ten month old struggling with swollen gums which periodically wake him into his own foggy night. I'd begun spinning some wool from fleeces purchased at market day this previous summer--a creamy white Romney, black Corriedale, and a lovely heathery grey from the two carded together, the beginnings of a sweater. There are times when I look at that mountain of fluff in huge plastic bags waiting for something constructive to happen to them or waiting for decay to take them to dust and the whole thing seems if not impossible, highly unlikely to happen in the former way. On nights like tonight it seems not unlikely, not impossible, but only fitting that some beautiful clothing should emerge from all that chaos from nothing more than the simple and persistent touch of a human hand at work.

What follows are various articles collected by Guild members and sent to the newsletter over the past months. Enjoy and Happy New Year to All.



Wool production in New York in 1985 totaled 389,000 pounds, according to the Crop Reporting Service. Though production was only 2 percent below 1984 levels, a major decline in the price received for wool caused a 29 percent decrease in the value of NYS wool production to just \$202,000 in 1985.

If you were to spin for a coverlet to be made by Harry Tyler in the early 1800's, here is what he'd charge you and what you'd have to produce:

#### *Coverlet & Carpet Weaving*

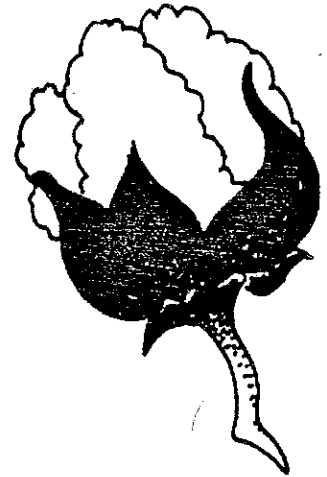
BY HARRY TYLER, two miles South of Smithville, Jefferson County, N. Y. "Persons wishing the above work may be assured that all work entrusted to my care, shall be done as well, if not better, than by any other weaver in the State. But in order to do this the yarn must be prepared according to the following:

#### *Directions*

"FOR COVERLETS:—Spin 60 knots to the pound in the oil. When doubled and twisted, 7 runs for one Coverlet, or 13 runs for two Coverlets in the same web. 3½ lbs. Knitting Cotton, No. 12, three threaded, for one Coverlet or 7 lbs. for two. N.B. The Wool may be spun crossband and not doubled, 30 knots to the pound.

"FOR CARPETS:—Spin warp 40 and filling 30 knots to the pound in oil; when doubled and twisted, 13¼ knots each for a yard.

"For weaving, do not twist your yarn very hard if you wish good work. Yarn should be scoured with old soap, and not allowed to lie in the suds, anytime, and rinse perfectly clean in clear water, to color scarlet."



#### *Price For Weaving*

"For weaving one Coverlet \$2.75; for more than one in the same web \$2.50 each. Ten shillings per Coverlet for dyeing scarlet."

(From Northern New York Coverlets 1976 by Helen P. Hastings, Sandy Creek, N.Y. --copies may be purchased at the Oswego Co. Hist. Soc.)

#### **FEWER SHEEP AND LAMBS**

The number of sheep and lambs on farms across New York State on January 1, 1986 totaled 55,000 head, according to the New York Crop Reporting Service. This total is down 7 percent from the 59,000 head a year earlier, and is the lowest first-of-year total since state records began in 1867.

The January 1 sheep and lamb inventory in the United States totaled 9.93 million head, down 5 percent from the 10.4 million head on hand January 1, 1985. The national total, like New York's, is also a new record low.

The value of all sheep and lambs on January 1 in New York totaled \$4.37 million, down 7 percent from a year ago. The average value of \$79.50 per head is down 1 percent from \$80.00 per head in New York on January 1, 1985. The U.S. average value of \$67.40 per head is up 10 percent from the previous year. New York's current value of \$79.50 is 18 percent above the current U.S. value.

During 1985, New York had 2,200 farms with sheep, down 8 percent from 1984. The 1985 U.S. total of 117,220 farms with sheep was 5 percent less than the 1984 total.

(From April 1986 Co-op Extension News)

**\*\* WOOL CONTAMINATION \*\***

Two lots of wool are prepared for sale. They have the same micron, yield and staple length, yet one lot sold for twice as much as the other. What went wrong, or better yet, what was done right? One grower applied management techniques 12 months prior to shearing to determine the problems and needs of the mills. He invited wool buyers to observe his operation and to visit during shearing. Their suggestions were carefully noted and evaluated for practical application to the operation. In this case, the main factor was keeping contamination levels to a minimum.

**Vegetable Matter Content:** Vegetable matter content is one contaminant that can be measured from year to year for those who core their wool. The content may vary from less than 1% to as high as 25%. Sources of contamination on farms are overhead feeders, ground hay, throwing hay on backs of sheep, and pouring grain in feeders over the head and neck. It is remarkable how wool will retain whole corn. Pasture and range areas contribute to many varieties of burrs, needle grass or seeds which work their way into the wool, and sometimes the skin, damaging the pelt. In some cases the vegetable matter can be removed physically at the warehouse or mill, but be prepared to see it reflected in the price offered for the clip. Another method of extracting vegetable matter is to convert it into carbon by action of acid and heat. Carbonized wool has decreased fiber strength and a harsher handle in addition to the higher cost of scouring.

**Polypropylene:** The mills are still concerned about the slow response to poly hay baling twine content in wool. In many mill procedures, the wool fabric is run through an ironing or heating process at which time the poly melts, damaging the fabric. A producer may make an earnest effort to dispose of all plastic twine but fails to realize that each time a bale of hay or straw is tied, four small pieces of twine, about an inch in length, are left on the bale or ground. Using wire can correct this situation and some producers who purchase their hay have made arrangements in advance to have their hay baled with wire. Sisal twine is also a satisfactory substitute for poly twine where it is impractical to use wire. The extra cost is minimal when considering the appreciated value of the wool. Another alarming fact is the practice of grinding hay without removing the poly twine. Producers in poly-free areas have introduced this problem by purchasing feed pellets in which ground hay was used as an ingredient. Once the feed pellet passes through the sheep's digestive system the poly is present for contamination.

**Colored Fiber Ratio:** An important factor when manufacturing pastel or white fabrics and yarns, it is the ratio of colored to white fibers in a specific lot of wool. Colored fiber ratios are normally counted when wool top is measured for average staple length and final micron test. This data combines to determine the top specifications. Top manufacturers must meet specifications of a proposed mill product in order to complete a sale.

Sources of colored fiber are:

- Colored genetic faults (spots) in white wool type sheep. In years past dedicated sheepman would pay the shearer a silver dollar for every sheep found with a colored spot in the fleece. The colored fibers were removed from the fleece and the sheep was marked for culling in the fall.
- Stained wool: A major source of colored fibers is stained wool which will not scour clean. The colored fiber ratio rises dramatically when tags are included with the fleece. When table skirting is applied at shearing time, low ratios are common.

- Blackface and colored wool sheep: These sheep are a source of colored fibers which can be transferred to white wool type sheep by merely running in the same pasture or range.
- Contamination from other livestock and animals: A typical example has been observed when working or holding sheep in corrals in which horses or cattle have been held for a period of time.

**Paint Brands:** Mills maintain that paint brands are a major source of contamination and is costing the domestic wool industry in excess of \$5 million per year in premium prices. This estimate does not include the loss of domestic wool which is replaced by imported wools in blends and fabrics requiring paint-free wool. In response to mills offering premiums for paint-free wools, producers are moving in several directions to reduce this contamination problem.

The following is a list of options:

- The use of colored ear tags with identification and ownership. One large western producer has clearly noted that he has had more sheep returned since using ear tags, maintaining that it is difficult to pay much attention to faded brands at shearing time. Producers should look into the type of tags available, as certain ones have considerably higher retention rates than others.
- The use of nose brands or ear marks. This option appears to be more successful on farms, but does present some difficulty in identification at a distance or during movement through a chute.
- The use of newly developed scourable branding paints. A medium size paint iron is recommended and the application of only one brand per sheep. The mills have indicated they will offer less for the wool and insist on no additives to the paint.
- The application of an approved paint brand on the top of the back (above the hips). The sheep are run through a chute prior to actual shearing, at which time the brand is clipped or sheared off the fleece. It is wise to try to have the wool buyer present to observe the thoroughness in removing the paint brand. One major mill purchased several clips prepared in this manner and indicated that the paint was adequately removed to eliminate most problems encountered with paint brands. This procedure is the mill's second choice to no paint at all.

It is important that sheep producers be more conscientious of how their wool is worked before, during and after shearing. The American Sheep Producers Council, Sheep Industry Development Program and the National Wool Growers Association are sponsoring a program to improve the image of the American wool clip. This program will emphasize quality improvement through the theme "American Wool - Pack It With Pride". Whenever you see this theme, think of what you can do to handle and package your wool clip to avoid contamination.

This special report is an excerpt from the booklet "Wool Preparation and Marketing" by Travis Jones for the National Wool Growers Association. For a complete copy write: Wool Preparation and Marketing, NWGA, 8 East Broadway #415, Salt Lake City, UT 84111. A condensed version of the booklet is available through ASPC, 200 Clayton St., Denver, CO 80206.

### New High Yielding Flax Variety

With high yield and early maturity, **NorMan flax** presents a promising new option to growers across the Canadian prairies.

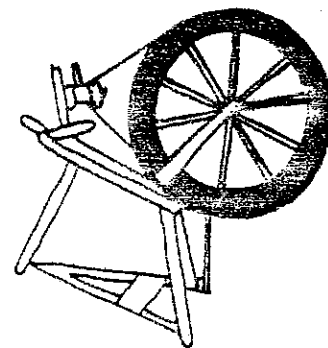
This new variety was developed at the Agriculture Canada Research Station in Morden, Manitoba. NorMan is similar in yield performance and maturity to the popular variety NorLin, although NorMan is not as well adapted to late seeding. NorMan yields higher than Dufferin and Linott. In oil content, NorMan is consistently higher than the check varieties. Seed size is larger than McGregor but oil quality is slightly lower.

Co-operative tests show the new flax variety is especially adapted to the black soil zone of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and the brown soil zone of Saskatchewan and Alberta. Good lodging resistance, similar to NorLin, allows easier harvesting.

Multiplication and distribution of NorMan flax has been assigned to SeCan Association.

SeCan Association works closely with leading government and university plant breeders to make outstanding new varieties available to Canadian farmers. At present, over 100 varieties are distributed by 2,500 SeCan members across the country. A Certified tag or bulk certificate accompanies every seed purchase, as proof of strict adherence to government standards for purity, cleanliness and germination.

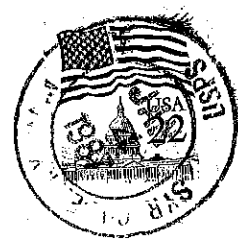
For more information, contact: Mr. Larry White, Managing Director, SeCan Association, 885 Meadowlands Drive, Ottawa, Canada K2C 3N2 (613) 225-6891.



( From Seedsmen's Digest 4/86)

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