Black Sheep Handspinners Guild Newsletter
May 2010
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http://www.blacksheephandspinnersguild.org
The Black Sheep meet from 11am-3pm on the second Saturday of the month at the All Saints Church, Route 34b in Lansing.

Editor's Notes
Marianne Pelletier

Jim was not able to get me his notes or agenda by print time. We try to schedule print time as close as possible to the meeting so that Jim has everyone's requested agenda items on his list, but this meeting is put back one week since the church is hosting a blood drive May 8. I don't want to wait until next week to tell you that the date is changed, so I'm not pushing back publication time.

I'll forward you Jim's notes and agenda when they're ready.

Minutes from the April Meeting:

- All Saints Church has asked us to stop parking on the sidewalk nearest the door that we use. It cannot support the weight of the cars.
- The group voted to move our May meeting to May 15 to accommodate the church's using the space May 8 for a blood drive. Our other choice was to change location or run the meeting later.
- For every meeting 2 or 3 people are needed for both set up and break down of the room that we use. We have to make a spinning space around 10:30, and then afterward put the room back to its original arrangement.

NOTICE THE DATE CHANGE! WE MOVED THE MEETING BACK ONE WEEK. NORMAL SCHEDULE WILL RESUME IN JUNE.
Susan Sarabasha, program committee chair, shared her interest in bringing Susan Lamb, a dyer and spinner from Wisconsin, out for a weekend workshop. The session would be a Thursday night through Saturday session scheduled in 2011. Members were enthusiastic about the idea.

The sale of Celia Radke's stash of yarn and fiber could not be held at the All Saints Church, so the group of members helping with her estate are planning to host it at someone's house in June (see Ads), and not on a Guild day. There are 150 items, mostly yarns. Discussion ensued about getting the list of available items to members, and the group opted to use an ad (see the last page!) with a Google link to the list.

The annual Earth Day celebration will NOT be including spinning this year.

Other Odd Notes
After a lot of discussion about what the precedent is for passing along requests for spinning help, we agreed to require that these requests be ads and not announcements. Evidently, we didn't have people writing the Guild before asking to hire someone to spin their dog hair and whatever, so our current marketing efforts, especially the web page (thanks, Teresa!) are getting the word out there.

Tell Us What Listservs You're On!
I was happy to hear that there are more spinning/weaving/knitting lists than I knew about before. Which ones are you on? Here are mine. I'll print yours if you send them in next month's newsletter.

Weaving Sales Ads: a listserv for selling everything about weaving, including fiber, tools, looms, and literature: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/WeavingSalesAds/?yguid=176914366

Charka: For spinners on charkas. http://groups.yahoo.com/group/charkha/

PlusSizeKnits: I rarely find patterns that fit me, so I loved finding this group: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PlusSizeKnits/

Anticipated Adventures in Flax
Marianne Pelletier

You know how sometimes you can put things off by saying, "When I have a..."? Ten years ago, I said, "I'll grow and process my own flax when I have a proper retting pond and land." I have that now, so this year I bit the bullet and bought some flax seed.

Flax has been used as an alternative to cotton for making clothing, and was a staple product in New England during its agricultural years, since it was grown to clothe the family. From the Old Sturbridge Village resource page (http://www.osv.org/explore_learn/document_viewer.php?DocID=778), "The farm family usually raised flax and wool to be made laboriously into cloth, but they often obtained cotton cloth as well at the general store or during a trip to Boston, so the women in the family could
have a fancy dress." I love this line because, in this century, see my linen clothes as fancier than my cotton clothes.

Flax, unlike wool, has a lot of steps involved in its production. Essentially, plants are grown as close as possible to each other to encourage them to grow straight up, and then are pulled out by their roots and dried. To see a short video of flax harvesting at the Hermitage (Pennsylvania), click on this YouTube video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bAvUrj-Yq6s&feature=PlayList&p=CD9CE7477817E25A&playnext_from=PL&playnext=1&index=23.

After the plants are dried, the seeds rattle around in the bolls. Then the work begins. I adapted this list from All Fiber Arts (http://www.allfiberarts.com/library/aa97/aa072397.htm):

1. Rippling: the seeds are removed from the stems as they are passed through a comb. The seeds are captured for replanting.
2. Retting: The plants are either left outside and turned over once in a while over as much as 6 weeks, letting the natural rain soak them, or the plants are submerged for 3 days in standing water. Water retted flax (retted in the pond) creates a stink and leaves the flax a pale cream color. Dew retted flax comes out silvery. The purpose of retting is to separate the fiber from the plant's walls.
3. Breaking: the flax stems are beaten like mad on a flax brake, which looks like a saw horse with a handle (see an example here: http://www.jeanmillet.org/Breaking-Flax,-c.1850-51.html).
4. Scutching: the fiber is then separated from the boon (the outside walls of the plant) by a sword-like thing that scrapes down the fiber section of the plant. Stahlstown, PA, has a flax scutching festival. You can see the 2006 festival highlights on this YouTube video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IRMvC1eDxo
5. Hackling: the fiber is pulled through progressively finer sets of nails and pins to both remove the tow (remember the expression, "tow-headed boy"?) and to break the fibers open into thinner and thinner fibers.
6. What's left is strick -- fiber ready for spinning.

You can imagine that this list of back breaking tasks would lead anyone to allow modern industry to handle processing flax. Indeed, I have not been able to find a whole lot of sources for flax strick, and bought my last one at Shaker Village in Canterbury, NH.

So my materials list, then, is:

- Seeds and prepared soil. The deer and rabbits on my land ate all of my planted crops last year, so I'm curious if they'll eat the flax.
- A retting pond. Got one.
- A flax brake.
- A scutching sword. Sounds like a fun way to whittle away a rainy Sunday.
- Hackles. I've been looking for hackles for years, and I may take Wayne Harbert's suggestion to just make them.
- Lots of muscle rubbing ointment

Black Sheep Handspinners Guild, May 2010
Linen is fascinating to me for many reasons. First, it is part of my Yankee heritage. An early New England family grew a portion of an acre of flax every year in order to make an outfit for each member. The spinster sister spun the flax. Second, I have not run into any stories of flax production having a similar dark history that cotton has had, and is likely why it's now more expensive. Third, I loved the story that Judge Thomas Mellon, the founder of the Mellon fortune, told of growing up on his farm. His family paid their annual rent with produce and with linen bags. They got a much higher price for the bags, so they paid most of their rent in linen bags (see *Thomas Mellon and His Times*, which is finally publicly available). These snippets show the resiliency of this fiber and the people who worked it. Let's see if I'm one of them.

**Member Made! Pictures from the March Meeting**

_Susan Sarabasha took these photos. Thanks!_

Sharon's felting work in the foreground, with other member fibers.
Left to right: Kathy S with her alpaca products, Marjorie I (her hand weaving is at the bottom left), Vickie M with her soaps, Char S looking over the soaps (her jewelry is way to the left, not in picture).

Ruth trying out Marianne's charka with Teresa comparing notes, left, and Wayne, back left, working cotton on one of his antique wheels. Marianne and Wayne both agreed that getting back up off the floor is the hardest part of charka spinning.

**Upcoming Events**

Marianne thanks Knitter's Review for most of these listings. Oh, and for including Roc Day in their listings. Please forward events you know of to Marianne at fudger28@yahoo.com for inclusion on this list.

**Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival**
May 1-2, Howard County Fairgrounds, West Friendship, MD. [http://www.sheepandwool.org/](http://www.sheepandwool.org/)

**New Hampshire Sheep and Wool Festival**
May 8-9, Fair Grounds, Hopkinton, NH. [http://www.nhswga.com/content/view/36/33/](http://www.nhswga.com/content/view/36/33/)

**Knitter's Weekend Getaway: All About Socks**

**Pleasant Mountain Fiber Arts Workshops**
Once again we are pleased to present a three day instructional fiber arts event **June 18 - 20** in Denmark, Maine. The program includes a wide variety of fiber workshops: spinning, dyeing, knitting, crocheting, rug techniques, jewelry, rug hooking, silk painting, carding, penny rugs, basketry, punch needle, stitchery and felting techniques.
Nationally known felter **Sharon Costello** is our feature artist this year.

Full details about the workshops, accommodations and registration information can be found on our website: www.pleasantmtfiber.com.

**Focus on Fiber**
July 9-11, Madison County Fair. They are looking for exhibitors. They say, "The fairgrounds are in Brookfield, which is located about 30 minutes south of Utica." They did not leave a web page, but the note came from Pam Haendle, pamela.haendle@bnymellon.com.

**North Country Spinners**
September 24-26, 2010
Johnsonburg Presbyterian Center, Johnsonburg, NJ, Warren County.
http://www.northcountryspinners.org/retreat.htm

**Interlaken Historical Society Country Fair and Plowing Day**
The Interlaken Historical Society will again hold their Country Fair and Plowing Day at Brook Farm on **Saturday, September 25th, 2010, 10am - 4pm**. They invite the BSHG to bring your spinning wheels and provide spinning demonstrations during the day. The barn at Brook Farm (right on Rt89 in Interlaken) is a 1903 Wells post and beam barn, quite astonishing in its size and great condition. There will be other old fashioned crafts, animals etc. and the vintage plowing demos are interesting and fun. You will be inside the barn so weather is no problem. Contact Jean at ejeancurrie@gmail.com or one of the organizers, Allan and Ann Buddle at orchardland@zoom-dsl.com if you can come.

**Northeast Handspinners Conference**
November 5 to 7 at the Grand Summit Resort, Mt. Snow, VT.
Please Support Our Advertisers!

To place an ad
A check for $5.00 made to BSHG for an ad to run three times (a year is $15) should be sent to the current treasurer, Sharon Gombas, 177 Salmon Creek Rd. Lansing, NY 14882. Send the ad to the newsletter editor, Marianne Pelletier, at: fudger28@yahoo.com. If you have a question for her or others, you can email us through the links at the top of the newsletter.

Sale of Celia Radke's stash
At her untimely death, Celia Radke had the winning stash. On June 19, 2010 from 10am - 2pm it will all go on sale at the house of Jean Currie, County Rd 153, Interlaken. Most of the sale is yarns with a few spinnable fibers. Celia had great taste in fiber, so this is high quality at great prices. If you want a heads-up about what you might see and will want to buy, go to:

https://spreadsheets.google.com/ccc?key=0Aq6HH9sEgdpxdEtzNE5uU21sTzBMcG9xUlpsNURtZ0E&hl=en