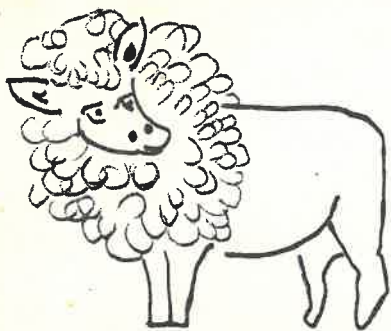
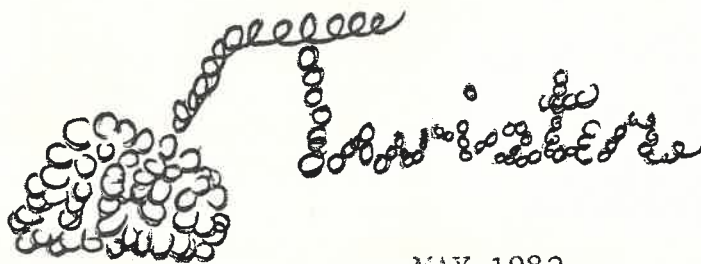


Twist O' Wool Guild



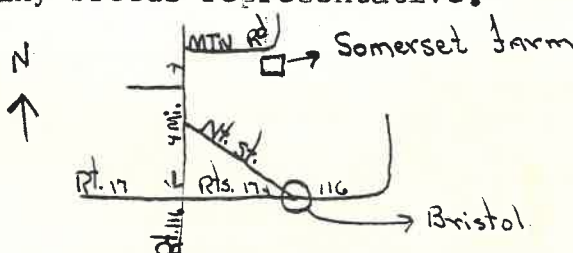
NEWSLETTER # 9



MAY 1982

CALENDAR

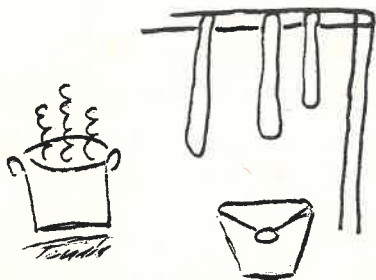
- May - Bobbin Lace with Margaret Lancaster.
- June - FLEECE FAIR -- Somerset Farm Bristol, Vt. Bring your best handspunners fleece to sell or show. Also any excess equipment (spinning and/or weaving) that you would like to sell. POT LUCK PICNIC at 6 p.m. Bring a dish to share, your place setting and a chair. ATTENTION SPINNERS!!!! This is a great opportunity to compare and buy freshly shorn fleece. Hopefully there will be many breeds representative.



- July* - Westport, N.Y. Tentative schedule: Meet on Library Lawn at 1p.m. Business meeting at Library then to Craft Co-op Store. Walking tour of Westport and ending at the beach for possible picnic.
- *NOTE : Date of this meeting is JULY 10th with raindate July 17th.

More information at May and June meetings

DYE WORKSHOP



Mid June (12th or 14th)

For information call
MARGOT SAMSON 453-3751

Margot will have more details at next Guild meeting (May 6th).

LIBRARY NEWS --- New issue of SPIN OFF newsletter. Packed with information on Spinning for money, color blending and the old controversy of slub yarn vs. smooth yarn in handspun.

Some back issues of SHUTTLE, SPINDLE, DYE POT loaned by Michela Granstrom. Latest issue HANDWOVEN includes Designing, Weaving, Sewing and Tailoring Clothing, summer clothing projects and an article on "How to Weave when you don't have time".

PLEASE return overdue books, magazines, and tapes. Items should be kept one month only. If you can't come to meeting, drop it off at Library

or mail to Ellen Leone RD 2 Box 9 Bristol, Vermont 05443.

BOOK REVIEW

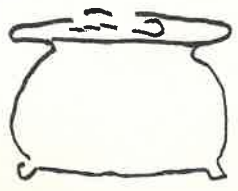
THE WEAVING BOOK of PEACE and PATIENCE by Isadore Safner and Diane Piette, 1980, Two Cape Cod Weavers, P. O. Box 186, Brewster, Ma. 02631. This book is based on the weaving drafts of Patience Lawton Kirby (1767-1841) and her daughter, Peace Kirby Howland (1792-1859), of Dartmouth, Ma. The drafts are now part of the permanent collection of Old Sturbridge Village. They were written on the back of bills and correspondence of the Kirby family which help date them. The recently published book has the Kirby drafts which have been translated for the modern weaver. The original drafts were written in a form no longer used. It is a valuable collection of old weaving drafts that we can study and weave today.

Sandy Olivio

For those of you wondering just what secret ingredients a couple of Bristol knitters possess that has allowed them to "cook up" such exquisite handspun garments---WONDER NO MORE! Recently printed - Hot Off the Press - A RECIPE FOR KNITTING HANDSPUN! (by Bobby Kennedy and Shelagh Smith) The leaflet on sale for 75¢ is brief but packed with the ingredients you need to knit your own handspun - from sport weight to super bulky - into a beautiful garment that looks and feels good and FITS. The recipe helps you classify the size of your handspun, knit the test swatch and cook up your own special garment.

Ellen Leone

P. S. Don't miss the "final blessing". It says it all!



THE DYE POT

On a nice October day, with pails of rain water collected, I started to experiment with Black Walnut Hulls (not shells) which were infected with many little creatures (maggots).

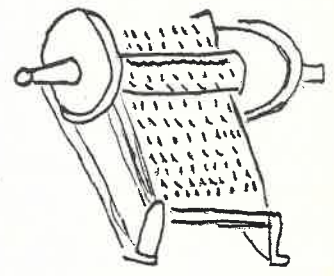
The hulls were boiled in the rain water for one (1) hour and then I strained the brew. I submerged unmordant washed handspun yarn into the liquid and simmered it for a half-hour. I had to rinse it many, many times in order to remove all the sludge that was present in the brew. Even when the rinse water was absent of dye, there was still sludge. FINAL results:

Shelagh Smith

XXXXX DRUM CARDER REVIEW XXXXX

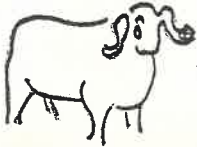
No. 3 Louet Woolpicker/Carding Board

The woolcarding board is a dual-purpose tool, covered with tooth cloth of 7½" - 15". Placed on a flat surface, below waistheight, it takes full advantage of gravity. Two tabs under the carding board will keep it against your surface. The rolling pin is rotating, pushing it away from you across the face of the board. Reaching the end you lift the pin and start all over again. The bat can easily be removed with your fingers and rolled into a rollag. Grease as well as washed wool can be used. Advantages I found: it doesn't make a mess, is easy to clean, no oil nor pulleys to break.

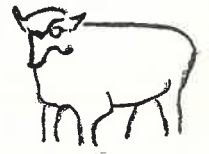


It works fast and handles specially long fibers very well like Lincoln, Mohair, Romney. Blending colors is easily done. A handy cleaning tool is coming with it, also usable as a flicking tool. I would not recommend it for fine wools. The price is \$125.

Margot Samson



RAMBOUILLET



This breed of sheep was developed around 1786 by Louis XVI in France. He imported Spanish Merinos and crossed them with his sheep on his estate called Rambouillet, hence their name. These sheep are large, strong bodied with little wrinkling (folds). The fleece has less oil than Merino so there is less shrinkage. Wool count ranges between the 60's to 70's. Uses would be similar to Merino such as baby clothing. Data is from the samples. Staple length $3\frac{1}{2}$ " to 4". Crimp measured approximately 12 per inch.

Samples courtesy of John Zecker

I had to try spinning some. It was very dirty so I washed it the usual method. First teasing, which I found very much easier than Merino, then washed and fluffed before I carded with my drum carder. I was extremely surprised that this could be done. Found it to have a lot less oil and NO sticky feeling after washing like Merino. Two similarities were the nubs present in the batts and spinning. The wool was very cohesive and spun a fine yarn which I plied. The finish yarn I thought was less elastic than Merino yarn.

Annette

Interested in ANTIQUE FLAX? Look in the Guild Scrapbook. We were given some by Hilda Garner. A note attached to it said, "Flax came from a Mrs. Merritt Hurd's farm. It was grown there in 1860. (Addison, Vt.)"

I looked at Addison County Agricultural Society records at the Sheldon Library and found the following:

- 1859 Premium of \$2 given to Mrs. Charles Pettibone, Bridport for Linen diaper, 10 yards.
- 1859 \$1 to Mrs. J. (Ames) Field, New Haven for Tow Cloth 30 yards.
- 1864 Mrs. G. V. Cook New Haven for the best Linen diaper, 10 yards.
- 1881 There was no linen entry.

Interested in weaving linen? Listen to Peter Farnham describe his trials and tribulations in weaving linen material for his linen shirt. Recorded at Thistledown Seminar 1981. I wish to thank Peter for the samples he sent us. They will be in the Guild Library along with the tape so we may all see and learn from them.

Bleaching the linen cloth may be done by wetting and sunning multiple times, or by chemical bleach. The latter weakens the fibers, and it loses its strength and permanence as a fiber.

Growing FLAX in the Eighties



According to an old New York State Agricultural Society Journal, the traditional day for planting flax is Good Friday. We've never been quite organized enough to have our garden in that early! But after our usual plowing and harrowing last year

I staked out a claim on a 20' x 20' plot in one corner of our garden and raked it, as the flax expert from Maine Mary Chase recommends, to a "fine tilth". Then I broadcast a pound of flax seed on all but a little five-foot square area which I reserved for an experiment with food co-op flax seed -- not a fiber flax. Again, tradition says that seeds should be planted five to a thumbprint for nice thick growth. Crowding of plants results in longer, finer stem growth and thus finer and longer fibers. I lightly rolled the seeds with a water-filled oil drum, but a heavier weight or more pressure may have increased the germination.

Germination seemed very slow - plants were coming up anywhere from a week to three weeks after planting. There was very little rain that spring, which may account for the variations. Some plants were six or eight inches tall before others had managed an inch. Having read that flax could be weeded at about six inches tall by actually walking on it to reach the inside of the plot (pioneer kids weeded barefoot or in heavy socks - depending on the types of weeds present) I weeded as much as I could reach from the edges and then threw feed bags down on the plants and sat on them to work my way through the rest of the plot. As I stood up and moved the sacks along, the "flattened" flax would gradually stand upright again and suffered no damage. This method is not recommended for plants much taller than six inches because they seem to be less resilient as they get taller. If all weeds are removed at this point, the density of the flax prevents any more weeds from growing. The weeding is very tedious, however, and there was a little spot right in the middle of my flax patch which I never did get to. This part was a pain to harvest, being full of weeds which were a nuisance to pick out of the pulled flax.

The fiber flax (*linum usitatissimum*) grew to about three feet and produced tiny white flowers during the last third of its growing period. The food co-op flax seed grew only to about eighteen inches and had little blue flowers. When the leaves started to wither on the lower third of the stems, I should have pulled the flax. I hesitated, hoping to get a little more height, but may have sacrificed some fiber quality doing so. Re-reading comments by Mary Chase I realized that three feet was the expected height anyway. However, my flax was in the ground a little more than the 90 day growing period, and even withstood a frost or two. The flowers continued to bloom and the flax seemed unscathed, but the fiber may have been affected. At any rate, I found that I could pull a small handful of flax by grasping the plants about half-way down the stems and giving a quick jerk. If I tried to pull a larger handful out, large chunks of dirt would come up with the roots and it was hard to pull and messy. The little bits of soil clinging to the shallow roots of the smaller handful could easily be shaken off before bundling. As we gathered the flax we were very careful to keep all the root-ends together, which is an important precaution to take throughout all processes so that fibers are aligned and not criss-crossing.

After drying, I rippled the flax by pulling it through my fingers to remove the seeds. Time consuming! Some of the seed pods burst, revealing brown seeds inside, another indication that I may have left the plants too long before harvesting. The control group of un-rippled flax, true to rumor, attracted chickens, birds, mice and other seed-loving critters to our back porch. Soon even the control group had been rippled - and a little frazzled from all the wild-life activity it had hosted!

We are lucky to have a small brook on our land which originates in an iron ore producing hillside and meanders on down to Lake Champlain. It

may be the minerals in that brook which made the flax retted a pale greenish tint. I had tied flax bundles to large rocks so that the fiber could be submerged in the water. About two weeks later, when the flax was probably ready to dry again, we had an early snow fall which buried flax, brook and all under about six inches of snow! After drying and processing, the fibers were much shorter and weaker than I had hoped. I also dew-retted some flax by laying it out on the grass and turning it several times during a two week period. When a fraying is visible on the top of the flax plant, or when a dried piece can be broken and the shell scraped off by your thumb-nail, the flax is ready to go on to braking and scutching. The grass or dew-retted flax seemed to be more lustrous than the brook-retted flax, and was a silver-gray color. "Retting" means the process of dissolving (by bacterial or fungal action using water as the agent) the gums that connect the fibers to the woody part of the stem. Once the fibers are no longer bound to the undesirable portions, these tough parts can be broken apart and scraped away from the fine fiber. Not having any antique tools to work with, I made do with pieces of firewood for braking (pounding on) and scutching (scraping on) my flax. Not as hard as I thought! I may never have to use a flax brake! A coarse-toothed wool card sufficed for the hackles and did a fine job of removing the rest of the stem debris from the fiber.

Although my flax was not long enough to properly dress a distaff, I have spun it from my hand and it makes a nice, fine linen thread. I am pleased enough with it and will process the rest of my bundled flax. I didn't plant any this year (1981), but next year, when by braking, scutching, hackling and spinning of last year's crop is done, I'll probably put in another patch. Somewhere in my Irish ancestry there must have been a wizened old lady inspired to sow and spin flax who's managed to pass this madness along to me. My place is filled with bundled flax, retted flax, half-broken flax in boxes, bags of hurds and tow too good to throw out and too dirty to spin.

Mary Heald

The following information is from a leaflet by Mary Chase titled
 CULTURAL DIRECTIONS FOR FIBER FLAX
 (Linum Usitatissimum)

Flax may be grown on most soils except heavy clay or very dry, sandy soil. It likes an open, sunny location and requires moisture to its roots throughout the growing season. The soil should be free of weeds.

It is best to plow and fertilize the ground in the fall. Manure should be applied at least a year before planting. Too much nitrogen will produce coarse fiber. As early in the spring as possible, work the ground to a fine tilth and sow the flax while there is still some moisture in the ground. Light frost will not hurt flax in its early stages and early plantings are more disease resistant.

Fiber flax is sown thickly so they will grow tall and slender without branching. Broadcast the seed at the rate of 1 pound to a plot 15' x 20'. Sow as evenly as possible. After broadcasting, gently harrow or rake the surface to cover the seed shallowly -- 1/2 inch.

When the plants are a few inches high hand weed the patch. Weeding is important. Carefully done now, the flax will crowd out later weeds.

The flax will bloom at 50 - 60 days. The flowers will open when the sun strikes them and close by mid day. There will be a flush of blooming for a few days, then sporadic blooming the rest of the period.

Harvesting takes place about 30 days after the full blooming. Later harvesting produces coarse, inferior fiber. The lower third of the flax stalks will be yellowing. Seeds and pods will still be unripe but will continue to mature after harvesting. Harvesting must be done by hand pul-

6
ling, so you will have the full length of fiber and keep the natural taper for spinning. Pull the stalks from the ground in small handfuls, butting root ends, and tie into bundles. These are stacked in cocks on the ground or hung on a rack in the open air to dry. Flax must be allowed to dry thoroughly before rippling and further processing.

(YANKEE MAGAZINE Sept. 1976 had an interesting article on Mary Chase and growing flax. ED.)

Here is a 1/2 tsp of Flax Seed for you to plant this spring. Use a small flower box or pot. Good Luck!!!



Dressing a Distaff

The following procedure of dressing a distaff was demonstrated at Thistledown 1981. It is called the Cotton Candy Method. It appears to be a very easy method. First shake the fibers to open the ends. Hitting them on a table does a fine job. Next step is to pick up a small amount of fiber and wrap it around the distaff, slowly whirl the distaff until you have enough flax on it. If it appears to be wrapping too thick, raise the height of your distaff from the pile of fiber. A thin layer on the distaff gives better control and evenness when spinning. Try to keep in the middle of the distaff.

