

A Brief History of the New England Weavers' Seminar, 1955 to 1995

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NEWS '95 is the 21st Seminar and the 40th year so it seems fitting that a brief history be provided to the participants. A charming story of the years 1955 to 1973 was written by Creighton Stanwood and can be found in the NEWS library. It has been condensed here. Harriet Mitiguy and Betty Atwood collaborated on the update; 1973 to 1993.

Initial publicity for what was to become the New England Weavers' Seminar appeared in the 1954-55 winter issue of the "Handweaver and Craftsman" published and edited by Mary Alice Smith, from then on an ardent supporter of NEWS. It read,

The Weavers of Western Massachusetts and Miss Ruth M. McIntyre of the Extension Service of the University of Massachusetts, with the cooperation of the Massachusetts Association of Handcraft Groups, are sponsoring a weaving Seminar on July 28th-29th, 1955 at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. The program will include lectures, demonstrations, discussions, and exhibits by the participating guilds.

These sponsoring guilds were:

Buckland Weavers
Weavers Guild of Southern Berkshire
Weavers Guild of Springfield
Springfield Guild of Craftsmen
Holyoke Weavers
Hampshire Weavers
Hampshire Hills Handicrafts, Inc.
Deerfield Valley Art Association
Shelburne Falls Community Art Center

Mae D. Aldritch served as President for the first three Seminars. Quoting Standford,

...the rank and file of casual or devoted weavers, be they hobbyists or semi-professionals, had no formal art training and yet they needed basic knowledge of design and color as well as of yarns and techniques for good weaving. So the program developed: design, color, museums as sources of ideas and some ways to adapt them, demonstrations of techniques, and finally in summation of all this, a large and versatile display of Kathryn Wellman's textiles.

296 men and women attended this first Seminar. 182 came from Massachusetts, 37 from New York, 19 from New Hampshire, 17 from Connecticut, 11 from Rhode Island, 9 from Vermont, 7 from Maine, 6

from New Jersey, and one each from Michigan, Virginia, California, Pennsylvania, and Georgia. Among these were Josephine Estes, Kate VanCleve, Lili Hoffman, Marion Powell, Evelyn Neher, and Berta Frey.

The first Seminar consisted of Guild shows, with prizes donated by a number of the commercial exhibitors, talks, and demonstrations.

The second Seminar, having outgrown Skinner Auditorium, moved to Bowker Auditorium in Stockbridge Hall for a three day program. Weaving was on display from 11 Massachusetts Guilds, the New York Guild of Handweavers, and state guilds from New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. There were commercial exhibits of yarn and equipment. The program consisted again of lectures and demonstrations, a panel discussion, and a two part color workshop by Jackie von Ladau with a concluding talk by Dorothy Liebes.

The Seminar proved to be such a success that it was voted to appoint a committee to draw up a Constitution and By-Laws to formalize the New England Weavers Seminar. It consisted of Miss Kate VanCleve, Mrs. Elmer Pillsbury, and Miss M. Lillian Hunter. From 1959 on, we were known as the New England Weavers Seminar.

Also that year, the first pre-conference workshop took place led by Dorothea Hulse, ably assisted by Mary E. Snyder and Phyllis Dow. Other "firsts" were non-competitive "Courtesy Exhibits" from guilds outside of the New England area and a Teachers' Exhibit, highlighted by Dorothea Hulse's display of "The Robe" she wove for the MGM movie. Approximately 200 weavers attended the Seminar.

On July 10th, 1961, the new president was Miss M. Lillian Hunter and the new meeting place was the Commonwealth Room in the Student Union with the weaving displays in Skinner Hall a considerable walk away (and too small to properly display the juried show). 5 morning programs were study workshops and a mid-morning workshop was introduced as well as the first syllabus covering in detail the Seminar activities and issued to all attending the complete Seminar. More than 200 attended from the United States and Canada. Noted speakers were Berta Frey and Harriet Tidball.

The 1963 Seminar moved to the Women's Physical Education Building with ample room for meetings and exhibits in the same building. On this, the 10th anniversary (5th Seminar), a "really professional" exhibit used new display equipment designed by Stephen Hamilton. In addition to the regular juried exhibits, made up of entries from individual members of the sponsoring Guilds, each Guild sponsored a special Guild Exhibit based on a theme selected by that guild with a winner chosen by popular vote. Outstanding presentations were made by Else Regensteiner, Grace Reed, and Gail Redfield among others.

In October 1963 the first edition of the NEWS Bulletin was issued. It is issued twice a year to cover news of upcoming Seminars and the activities of the New England weaving guilds with the more recent addition of threading drafts and woven samples.

The 1965 Seminar took place in the same venue as the 1963 one. That year the heat was a problem. The president was Helen Skirm. The theme was "Design for Today's Living". The featured speaker was Glen Kaufman from Cranbrook Academy, who also gave a workshop, "Design, a Total Experience". At a "Get Acquainted" night, slides were shown from previous Seminars.

The site was again shifted for the July 10th to 14th meetings of the 1967 Seminar to air-conditioned Hasbruck Auditorium, with the exhibits and the Fashion Show open house back in the Women's Gymnasium. The president was Molly Houle. The theme was "Putting Inspiration to Work". New for this Seminar were "Goody Bags" containing an assortment of things for the handweaver from weaving suppliers and guilds for each attendee and Swap sessions where small samples in specific categories were exchanged. In addition to the regular exhibits, there were displayed Berta Frey's Museum Collection, Myra Young's Bobbin Lace, and a study of Gothic Crosses by the Worcester Weavers Guild.

The July 14th-18th, 1969 Seminar had lectures in the Mahar Auditorium, Fashion Show in Hasbruck Hall, Awards Banquet in the Ballroom at the Student Union, and all exhibits were displayed at the Newman Center. Mrs. Laurence Davenport stepped in on short notice as president on the death of Molly Houle. The opening speaker was Henry Pasco, who talked on "Weaving for Business and Pleasure". The morning lectures and workshops were conducted by Winnifred Mooney on "Creative Design with Special Emphasis on Color". Afternoon speakers were Madeleine Smith on "Backstrap Weaving", Dr. George Linton on "Man-made Fibers", and Mary Saylor on "Fashion and Handwoven Fabrics".

The 1971 Seminar with Mrs. Davenport again serving as president, mostly took place in the new Campus Center at Amherst on July 11th-16th. The Awards Banquet, Fashion Show luncheon, and exhibitions were all held in the Student Union. The keynote address was given by Nell Znamierowski on "The New Decade Ahead in Weaving" as well as morning lectures and a workshop on "Design". Berta Frey spoke on "Four-Harness Weaving", Gail Redfield on "Multiple Harness Weaving", Esther Gothoffer on "Tapestry", and Molly Duncan (from New Zealand) on "Wool and Flax". Afternoon workshops were conducted by Elsie Spencer, Palmy Weigle, and Dorothy Young.

Included at the end of Creighton Stanwood's manuscript is this poem by Dorothea Hulse:

Friendship is a Weaving

The web of friendship is strong and sure,
An interchange of warp and weft,
Its strength is open to the viewer
The colors warm, their blending deft.

The ply of warp is trust and confidence,
And twists for strength, experiences shared.
The warp is beamed with mutual dependence,
Your weave is true when friends have cared.

The weft completes the wonderful cloth
And vibrant colors are fun you've known.
The texture is deep understanding and growth,
You lasting friendship is finally woven.

1955 to 1971

Harriet Mitiguy and Betty Atwood provided the following update to our history:

NEWS is now entering its 5th decade. There have been many changes over the years but the original purpose remains constant. A gathering of weavers from not only New England but from all parts of the world cannot help but be educational, stimulating, and rewarding for all attending.

The 10th NEWS was held July 9-13, 1973 at U. Mass. Amherst. The president was Dorothy Burton with Helen Barrett as V.P. in charge of the program. There were 13 participating New England guilds. The Campus Center continued to be where all the lectures were held but the Student Union was used for the Fashion Show, meals, and the Banquet. Keynote speaker was Mary Snyder on "Techniques of Manipulation for Contemporary Textiles". Other speakers were Nellie and Philip Bergh, "Embroidery for Weavers"; Dorothy Carlsmith, "Flat-woven Rugs"; Elsie Spencer, "Huck Weaves"; Dorothy Young-More, "Narrow Bands"; and Jan Nyquist, "Increasing Your Weaving Efficiency". An Anniversary Party was held on Wednesday evening.

The 11th Seminar was held July 6-11 at U. Mass. Amherst. President was Helen Barrett, Mary Yusko 1st V.P. Keynote speaker was Else Regensteiner lecturing on, "The Thread of Tradition in Contemporary Weaving", "Pattern Weaves", "3-Block Weaves", "Double Weave", and "The Thread of Tradition in Contemporary Tapestry". Other speakers included Jan Nylander, Alta Turner, Dorothy Chapin, and Libby VanBuskirk. Study groups on two afternoons were taught by Jeanetta Jones, Dorothy Beck, and Katherine Mook. Other happenings included Room Shows by member guilds, Swaps of samples, Awards for the Exhibits at the Banquet, and Commercial Exhibits. Some of the multi-award winners were Barbara Herbster, Dorothy Burton, Betty Shannon, all from Boston; Eunice Smith, Springfield; Louise Wood and Marion Andrews from N.H.; Betty Atwood and Catherine Fuyat from Vermont.

The 12th NEWS was held July 10-15, 1977 again at U. Mass. Campus Center. Mary Yusko was President and Harriet Mitiguy was V.P. One new guild was represented: Green Mountain Weavers Guild. Programs varied with Hilary Chetwynd from England, Mollie Duncan from New Zealand, Helen Hernmark from Sweden (now living in Connecticut). Ken Weaver spoke on "Repp Weaves", Alta Turner on "Navajo Weaving", and Michael Rupp on "Overshot Variations". Others were NEWS faithful member, teacher, and juror, Elsie Spencer, Barbara Wittenberg, and Katherine Bardwell. The Juried Exhibit gets better every conference. Some of the winners were Connie Gallagher, Donna Muller, Barbara Elkins, Guli Kula, and Barbara Herbster. Room Shows, Swaps, and the Fashion Show were especially well attended. More day registrations was the sign of changing economics with more weavers employed in other jobs.

The 13th NEWS, again at U. Mass., was held July 29 – August 3, 1979. Harriet Mitiguy presided with Pat Lyster as first V.P. Keynote Speaker was Sally Sullivan, "Design and Textile Arts". Other speakers included Rita Androsko, Dorothy Burton, Brigita Furman, Beverly Gordon, Margareta Grandin-Nettles, and Elsie Spencer. A new addition at this conference was the use of Herter Hall for the Special Exhibit which included a Memorial Exhibit of Helen Kliquot's work, recent pieces by the speakers as well as an extensive Exhibit from the Olympia and Seattle Weavers Guilds. The Juried Exhibit had more entries from members with Barbara Herbster's "Stand of Birches" winning "Best of Show" and Chris Mudge's tablecloth, "Wild Flowers", getting the "Judges Choice Award". The Boston Guild had 10 awards, Vermont 6, and other guilds 2-3 each. The first AFTER NEWS Workshops were held at Hampshire College for 3 days. Donna Muller was Coordinator and the teachers were Sallie O'Sullivan, Toni Kormos, Ann Carlsmith, and Penny Drooker, who provided exciting hands-on experiences despite the heat.

The 14th NEWS was held July 20-24, 1981 at U. Mass. Patricia Lyster presiding and Norma Smayda as first V.P. Junius Bird was the Keynote Speaker, "Weaving in South America Before the 16th Century". Dini Moes gave a series of 5 lectures, "From Fibers to Finishing". Theo Moorman, Clotilde Barrett, Jane Busse, Bob Hanson, Katherine Mook, Norman Kennedy, Carol Kurtz, and Barbara Wittenberg filled the days to capacity with inspiration and information. The Special Exhibit at Herter Hall was a wonderful mixture of all types of weavings from the above speakers. After NEWS, the Hands On Workshops were held at U. Mass for 3 days coordinated by Peggy Brown and taught by Toni Kormos, Dorothy Burton, Carol Kurtz, Barbara Wittenberg, and Clotilde Barrett.

The 15th NEWS was held at U. Mass. Campus Center on July 18-22, 1983. Norma Smayda was president and Mary Ellen Goodband, V.P. Mary Snyder was the main speaker on "Twills and Lacey Weaves". "Mad" Max Liederman from Rochester gave a dynamic Keynote Address. Other speakers included Ted Carson, Pat Luster, Penelope Drooker, Sylvia Hayden with other special interest groups. The Special Exhibit at Herter Hall had work of the above speakers as well as Weavings from the Tidewater Guild of Norfolk, VA and the Weavers Guild of Richmond, VA. Added this year was the Popular Vote for the Fashion Show, which went to Freda Tyrell from England for her "Farmer's Smock", modeled by Ted Carson. Hands on Workshops came the 3 days before NEWS with 70 students in classes.

July 22-25 were the 4 days, 3 evenings of the 16th NEWS at U. Mass. Mary Ellen Goodband was president and Donna Muller was V.P. The new block format had General Lectures by Naomi Whiting Towner, Persis Grayson, Nancy Harvey, Doramay Keasbey, and Dini Moes. There were 18 other Special Interest groups to choose from. The Special Exhibit of teachers' work was joined by Damask and Opphamta woven by Diana Tramba from Glimakra and handspun and nature weavings by Betty Williams. "Small Expressions" with all miniature weavings was superb. Connecticut Guild's Fashion Show was a big hit using 5 sections of early to modern fashions in natural and synthetic fibers. The Before NEWS Workshops were cut to 2 days with 4 subjects. Penelope Drooker was coordinator.

The 17th NEWS was held July 20-23, 1987. Rachael Emmons presided with Nancy Britton as first VP. Before NEWS Workshops were coordinated by Martha Pappas with Dianne Itter, Allen Fannin, Malin Selander, Leslie Voiers, and Nell Znamierowski as teachers. A sincere "thank you" went to Alma Bouffard who retired after many years as Coordinator with the U.Ma. Campus Center. Andrew Staley had learned well while he worked with Alma and carried on without a hitch. Allen Fannin was Keynote Speaker. Diane Itter, Malin Selander, Ed Franquemont, Nell Znamierowski, and Patrice George also lectured. With the 4 day format, the NEWS tradition of Swaps, Room Shows, Study Room, Juried, and Commercial Exhibits filled every waking minute. A big attraction was the Special Exhibit of "Textiles from the Shelburne Museum" as well as recent works from the NEWS speakers, all coordinated by Betty Atwood and Cecelia Oliver.

The 18th Conference was cut to a three day weekend gathering, adjusting to the economy and the desire to attract newer, younger weavers with families and jobs outside the home. Nancy Britton was President with Betty Atwood as VP. Warren Selig was Keynote Speaker. Other lecturers were Susanne Baizerman on "Ethnic Finishes" and Ed Franquemont on "Andean Textiles". There were 20 Special Interest groups to choose from with Penny Drooker, Donna Muller, Margaretta Grandin-Nettles, Kate Smith, Dini Moes, Joyce Redstadt, Norma Smayda, Nancy Lyon, Edith House, and others. The Special Exhibit was of "Household Weavings from Czechoslovakia" as well as works from the above speakers. Swaps, Study Room, Fashion Show, and Room Shows were all included in this timespan. Winners of the

Juried Show and of the Fashion Show were the subject of an exhibit at the Museum of American Textile History in Andover, MA following NEWS. After NEWS Workshops on Monday through Wednesday were not as well attended. July 14-16, 1989 were the dates of the Seminar but U.Mass could not accommodate NEWS in July 1991. The Board appointed three members to research locations, formats, and costs.

The 19th NEWS Conference moved for the first time from U.Mass to the Waterville Valley Conference Center, NH July 19-21, 1991. Betty Atwood was president, Martha Pappas was VP. The biggest job was coordinating all the changes. This was ably handled by Mary Ann Sanborn and Ute Bargmann. By changing locations around New England, it was hoped to entice new participants to one or more days, to cut expenses, and to try a new format. While the RI Guild and many members of the Connecticut Guild were missed, many first time participants came from Maine, NH, and Vermont. The country atmosphere and outdoor swimming pools were enjoyed by some while others would have preferred less walking and air conditioning. The speakers and program were excellent with the theme, "Friendship Through Fibers", carried throughout the Seminar. Madeline van der Hoogt gave the Keynote Address, "Fly with the Eagles", as well as several Special Interest Seminars. General lectures were given by Donna Sullivan, Anita Mayer, and Helena Hernmark. For the second time, the selected winners of the Juried and Fashion shows went to MATH in Andover, MA for a further exhibit. The Before NEWS Workshops were well attended. They were given by Anita Mayer, Donna Sullivan, and Leslie Voiers.

The 20th Biennial NEWS Conference was held July 16-18, 1993 at the Waterville Valley Conference Center in NH. Martha Pappas presided with Winn Shaw as first VP. It was under Martha's very able leadership that, through an appointed ad hoc committee, a sympathetic lawyer (husband of a weaver) was found to help NEWS become incorporated with a nonprofit status. Virginia West gave the Keynote Address, "Head, Heart and Hand". General lectures were by Sue Beevers, "Color Harmonies and Interaction", and Dini Moes, "Designing for Aesthetics and Function". There were 30 Special Interest Seminars to choose from with truly varied topics. A special presentation was given by Marsha Perlmutter, "Three Mill Girls", on Saturday night. The awards for the Juried Exhibit and Friday night Fashion Show were numerous and well deserved. There was no new location agreed upon at this time so the 1995 Seminar will return to the UMass Campus Center in Amherst in July of that year.

Regardless of where NEWS meets, the wonderful friendships made remain. The sharing of good meals, the laughter, the late night talks, the swapping of ideas and information is always there. Quoting Linda Ligon from "Handwovn", "There's an incredible range and richness of interest, experience, and knowledge amongst our wonderful community of Handweavers; fibers create a fine web of connections. I feel fortunate to be a part of it."