

# THE SUTTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SUTTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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### HAND WEAVING

By Ol' Samuel Suttonian

The craft of textiles is older than documented history. Archaeological information and the continuous production of woven materials strongly indicates that the state of the art is several millenniums old. Evidence of woven goods has been found in locations throughout the world in areas where cultures of long ago have vanished.

India is still handcrafting woven cloth in remote areas using methods which were developed B.C. In South America weaving of pre-dyed yarn into intricate geometrical patterns is still a way of life.

Sutton in the early 19th century was the location of a cotton mill built in Wilkinsonville by David Wilkinson, brother-in-law of Samuel Slater who in 1789 arrived in America from England with designs of Arkwright's textile machine in his mind. England had prohibited the export of these machines and forbid emigration of knowledgeable mechanics. In 1790 Slater built a cotton mill in Pawtucket for Moses Brown which was powered by water from the Blackstone River. Eventually other mills were established up stream on this river.

The Bay Colony recognized the critical need of controlling production of textiles. This is evidenced by the following quote from the records of the Company of Massachusetts Bay, year 1656 at Boston:

"Clothing imports being short, spinning and weaving was enjoined upon every family, quotas of 3 pounds per week of linen, cotton, or woollen cloth for 30 weeks per year, upon penalty of 12 pence for every pound short, under control of the Selectmen of each town."

If you visit either the home of Marge Johnson or Phebe Rosebrooks in the West Sutton area you would think this law was still in effect as a dual environment prevails. Fragrant traces of wood smoke from ever-fired wood stoves, the thump of the loom beater, the slack of the ratchet as the cloth materializes and is wound on the breast beam of the loom, are all sounds that can be heard in these two homes today.

Not a necessity today, but a craft hobby passed on to Marge from her mother who did a lot of weaving of rag rugs on an old loom that probably originated in Sweden.



Phebe Rosebrooks and Marge Johnson  
inspect Rug on Loom



Marge Johnson at Wheel Spinning Wool

Phebe's interest started more than 30 years ago when she attended weaving classes at the Worcester Y.W.C.A. which was then located on Chatham Street. During this time, the Worcester Weavers' Guild was formed and Phebe became a charter member. Marge has been a member of this organization for 16 years because of Phebe's influence. Both have an active interest in the guild attending regular meetings and participating in its activities.

During Marge's year and a half stay in England recently, she fulfilled a long desire to learn spinning and acquired A Scottish Hebridean spinning wheel in London. She attended classes in its operation and use for making yarn from fleece at Mid-Hertfordshire College in her local area.

It is interesting to watch a handful of combed fleece being fed into the flyer and onto the bobbin of the spinning wheel, eventually becoming a skein of yarn which can be knitted, crocheted, or woven into numerous items.

Articles hand-crafted by both women range from 15 foot stair carpets, bags, and placemats made on table looms.

Phebe and Marge have displayed and demonstrated the art of hand-weaving at craft shows and in local schools where much interest has been shown by the children.

The practicality of Phebe's weaving was proven when her woven cloth was given to a milliner a few years back, who created a "Sunday-Go-To-Meeting" hat embellished with flowers for her.

It is gratifying in the year 1980 to know so many of the ancient crafts are still being pursued.