

HISTORY OF THE EUGENE WEAVERS GUILD

(This is the first installment of what will be a year-long series devoted to the Eugene Weavers Guild history. Thank you to Dee Brown for this information.)

This history was a talk by Clarice E. Krieg , March 25, 1996 , on the guild's 50th Anniversary held at the Eugene Garden Club building.

It is proper for me to begin this account of the early days of the Eugene Weavers' Guild with this quotation from the first page of the minute's book:

“Through the combined efforts of Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Sullivan and Miss Anita Slater 16 persons met at the home of Mrs. Sullivan Monday evening March 18, 1946 to discuss the possibility of organizing a group for handweavers. Anyone knowing of similar groups in other cities was asked to report on their organization and purpose. Miss Clarice Krieg reported on a group in Iowa City, Miss Slater on the Portland groups, and Mrs. Sullivan on the Seattle Weavers' Guild. That there was a need and the group could fill a purpose in the exchange of ideas and sources of information, it was decided that such a group would be organized that evening with all present as members. Mrs. Sullivan was named president and Miss Clara Nashalm , secretary-treasurer.”

And thus the guild was born. A name was found for it at the next meeting. After considering Eugene Handweavers, Eugene Weaver' Guild, and Willamette Valley Weavers, Eugene Weavers' Guild was chosen and we were off and running.

A draft constitution was ready for discussion in May, but it was not adopted until December. What caused the delay? In order to give the group real “guild” status, a two tier membership was proposed – apprentice and master; and the guild was to assume real responsibility for teaching weaving. We eventually decided that the group was too small to undertake such an ambitious program. We would concentrate instead on getting as much publicity as possible by being “visible”, taking advantage of every learning experience, and helping each other with the exchange of our knowledge.

We met in our homes until the size of the group required us to find a meeting place. It was not until 1954 when the membership reached 30 that we moved to the Woman's City Club building. It was convenient and very satisfactory but the dues had to be raised from fifty cents a year to \$3.50, so we could pay the rent!

HISTORY OF THE EUGENE WEAVERS GUILD

(Part 2 - Eugene Weavers Guild history.)

We took every opportunity to become known as handweavers. Starting in Nov. 1946 and continuing until 1953, we accepted the invitation of the Eugene Garden Club Crafts Group to join them in their hobby shows. Members displayed their work and several times we had demonstrations with a loom as part of the exhibit. The Guild was also invited to participate in two table setting displays organized for the benefit of the Children's

Hospital School. Silverware and dishes were furnished by Skeie's and the displays were at Rubensteins's. We even offered our handwoven napery to other participants in these displays! In 1947 we began to enter competitions at the Lane County Fair and also had an exhibit with a working loom there. The exhibit part of this activity worked well and always attracted attention. The Fair Board found us somewhat of a problem, however, and we found ourselves sometimes in the Art Dept, and sometimes in the Hobby Dept. which was most unsatisfactory. The competition also required yearly consultations with the managers regarding the placement of our pieces. We wanted them displayed as "handweaving" – not in the usual categories – towels, baby blankets, etc. It took until 1953 to gain this recognition.

In October 1949 we began talking about "a sale". We all were actively weaving and quantities of good goods were piling up in our homes – and we wanted to weave more and more! The first of a series of twice yearly sales (spring and Christmas) was held May 6, 1950 at the Masonic Temple which was then downtown. Fourteen weavers brought 537 pieces to sell. A "silver tea" was also held, which along with the Guild commission yielded \$160 which was donated to the Children's Hospital School. Several later sales also were for this charity. We learned that a sale is work, work, work, but undaunted, accepted the Eugene Garden Club's invitation to join them at their Christmas bazaar – which we did for several years. Sales were also held at Johnson's Furniture store with good success.

HISTORY OF THE EUGENE WEAVERS GUILD

(Part 3 - Eugene Weavers Guild history.)

In spite of good publicity by newspaper and radio – Eugene was a much, much smaller place then – attendance at the sales remained small. We very seldom sold more than 30% of the items offered. The average price of pieces sold was a disappointing \$3.50. One of the final efforts at "a sale" was held at the Eugene Hotel, where we were put in a dark, dismal basement room with wretched, predictable results! Moving our looms to demonstrations was a chore and expense. We longed for a small portable folding floor loom and began to set aside some of the sales take for this purpose.

Are you interested in the list of items which turned up for the sales? There were aprons, baby blankets, bags, bibs, bookmarks, bridge sets, cocktail napkins, dowel mats, hot dish mats ,novelties, pin cushions, place mats (single and sets), pot holders, purses, rugs, runners, scarves, skirts, stoles, tablecloths, towels, yardage, and are you ready for this?? – miscellaneous (45 of them!).

One of the highlights of the first years was a workshop in June 1951 taught by Berta Frey, a weaver of national stature. We took our looms to Mrs. Wheeler's where her son's woodworking shop was turned over to us. This was a profitable and successful venture and we felt it was a true guild experience. Mary Elizabeth had tried as early as 1949 to have a weaving class available at the vocational school but without success.

In the meantime programs at the regular meetings consisted of an exchange of information, studying traveling exhibits, talking about what we were weaving. We seized every invitation to exhibit weaving and exchanged visits with weavers from Corvallis, Salem,

and Portland. No notice of a competition was ignored and many pieces were entered – some winning prizes.

In June 1952 monthly daytime workshops held by members were started. This activity later led to changing the regular meetings from evening to morning. Rhoda Ryan and Ruth Wheeler helped teach weaving to polio patients at the hospital. The looms were dressed by members who were not free during the daytime.

HISTORY OF THE EUGENE WEAVERS GUILD

(Part 4 - Eugene Weavers Guild history.)

In celebrating this fiftieth anniversary of the Guild's founding we really are honoring our "founder", Mary Elizabeth Starr Sullivan. She was a real artist and had studied weaving at Cranbrook Art School.

Several of her pieces were included in a traveling exhibition – one of the first of its kind – which toured museums and schools during the last years of the 1930's. She came to Eugene as a bride in 1946 from a position at the University of Washington Dept. of Home Economics where she taught textiles and weaving. In the summers of 1947 and 1948 she was invited to teach weaving at the Pi Phi settlement school in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. We were lucky to have her as a founder. Her wisdom started us along the right paths. We were sorry when she moved to Berkeley in 1949.

I must start drawing to a close, but would like to say a few words about some of the 16 original members. Unfortunately I do not have an anecdote for each one. Georgia Dale had a horse farm out near Spencer Butte. Beryl DeFord and Hazel Fishwood were in the art department of the local schools. Martha Foster, a U. of O. librarian, was a beginning weaver. Clara Nasholm was an assistant and later head at the Eugene Public Library. She had planned to spend most of 1939 in Stockholm learning to weave. Her plans were cut short by the outbreak of war and embassy orders to return home. She and her wonderful stationary 8-harness Swedish loom traveled by freighter north along the coast of Norway by day, anchoring at night, until safely out of the war zone. Rhoda Ryan, a professor's wife, was a beginning weaver. We must not overlook the one man on the founders list – Edgar Whitmore, a retired business man from Seattle. Edgar was into making rag rugs and raising goats. We had one of our potluck picnics at the Whitmore place out behind Spencer Butte. We never could tell if we, or the goats, had enjoyed the evening more! Anita Slater, one of our conveners, left in 1947 for a teaching position in Tacoma.

But I must close. More power to the Eugene Weavers' Guild and many, many more successful and rewarding years!

Clarice E. Krieg March 25, 1996