

## It's all in the hands, says expert spinner

Story: SUSAN TAUBER  
Staff photos: MINDY M. SAUNDERS  
Jean McClain just bought enough wool for \$7 to knit two sweaters. Cheap, right? But there's a reason for the wool's low price. When the Avon Township woman bought it, it was still like it was on the sheeps' back before the farmer sheared the animals.

The curly black-grey wool was dirty and in clumps that stuck together. However, this didn't discourage Mrs. McClain. She wanted 1 1/2 pounds of wool in that form.

Mrs. McClain is a wool spinner. And if already prepared for knitting, she wouldn't have been able to spin the wool into yarn to use for knitting sweaters.

"I took up spinning about seven years ago," she said while seated at her spinning wheel. "I've always liked the old arts and I decided, just like that, to take up spinning."

Spinning wasn't her first choice for another hobby to pursue. She wanted to learn to belly dance instead but seven years ago there weren't many teachers to give instructions and there were even less interested students.

Once the mother of four made her decision to take up spinning, she found a teacher and learned the art of transforming wool in its natural state into strands of knitable, crochetable or weavable yarn.

She even ordered a handmade spinning wheel sight unseen from a Wisconsin craftsman and waited one and a half years until her wheel was delivered.

"I TOOK THE wheel to my teacher in Utica, Sharon Lemke, strapped behind the seat belt on the back seat of my car so nothing would happen to it," said the craft enthusiast.

Before Mrs. McClain got interested in spinning, she dabbled with cake decorating, rug hooking, sewing with fur and other endeavors. She sews all her own clothes and has recently begun a career in real estate.

"I've tried many crafts I've stayed with spinning the longest."

It's not hard to imagine why when one sees her at work. Sitting at the edge of a chair with her right shoe off, she holds the unspun yarn in her lap. Then using both hands, she pinches the wool with her fingers, elongating it before its pulled into a gold tube, one inch long. While she's working with her hands, her right foot is moving rhythmically up and down on the treadle, which moves the spinning wheel moves the gold tube the wool is twisted and spun into yarn.

There is a soft hum while the treadle works and the continuous movement of hands, foot, and wheel is hypnotizing.

Mrs. McClain has her spinning wheel in the den where her family

gathers for television, or a fireside chat.

THERE ARE OTHER wheels in the McClain house besides the handcrafted black walnut wheel. Mrs. McClain has collected three more. She has two yarn winders dating from 1740 and 1840 and a tall, thin wood walking wheel.

"I'd like to have four antique wheels so I can leave one to each of my children," Mrs. McClain said.

Though the hobby could lead to dying wool, Mrs. McClain isn't interested in learning that aspect. She does wash her own wool since it has a sheepish odor when she buys it and knows how to card it when it comes in short lengths.

To card the wool, and make it adhere into longer strands suitable for spinning, Mrs. McClain uses two reangle-like pieces of wood with short metal teeth. Holding one in each hand by a handle, she combs the wool repeatedly, often suffering from cut hands from the teeth.

There is a right and wrong way to card since each carter is designed for either the right or left hand.

Since taking up spinning, Mrs. McClain has made herself a thick winter sweater and is currently working on one for her husband, Jim. She spins enough yarn to make one section, knits the piece, then goes back to her spinning.

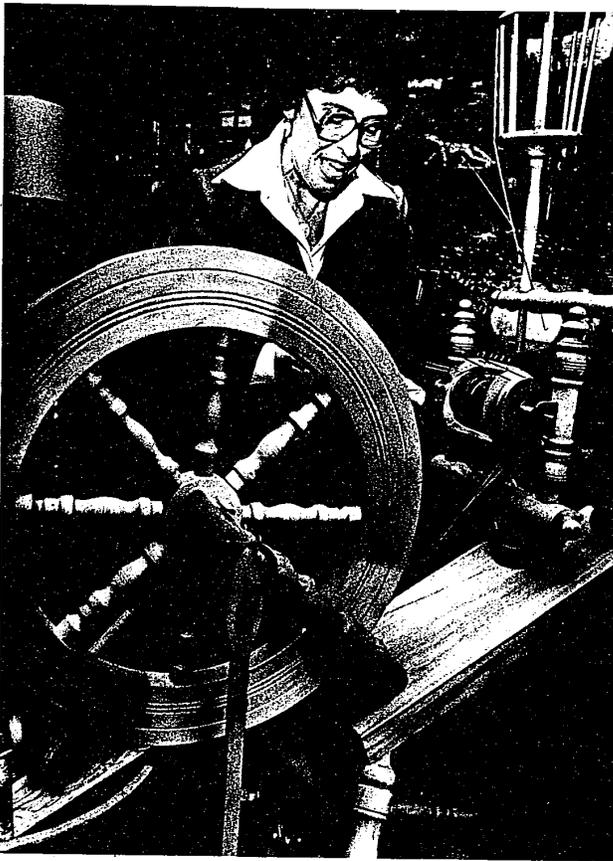
Her husband has used her wool to weave a Navajo rug sample.

Much of Mrs. McClain's homespun wool is waiting to be used. Lying in a basket are examples of her spinning. Some yarns are smoother than others, illustrating how her spinning skills have improved.

Her hobby isn't burrowed in her home. Mrs. McClain recently demonstrated the art of spinning at the Harvest Festival fundraiser for Stoney Creek School. Dressed in a early American dress she made for Rochester's 1983 centennial, she worked in the old school house and answered questions from observers.

"I just loved doing the work in public," she said.

One question she wasn't asked was if she could spin with dog hair. The owner of two dogs said she couldn't because "it never quite loses its smell."



Jean McClain finds it relaxing to sit at her handmade spinning wheel and turn curly-haired sheep-sheared wool into knitable, crochetable and weavable yarn.



Spinning good quality yarn is done in the fingers, according to Mrs. McClain. She pinches and elongates the wool with her fingers before it's pulled into the one-inch long tube.

## DAR looks back—forward

By SHIRLEE IDEN

There are graves of two Revolutionary War soldiers in the family cemetery adjoining her Mississippi backyard.

Today, two decades after moving up north from the area she was born and raised in, she binds the memories of those ancestors to her by her membership in the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR).

Mrs. Elton Behr, that southern belle moved north, is now the State Regent for Michigan of the DAR. A resident of Okemos, Mich., she took great pride in the three-day state meeting held in the Michigan Inn in Southfield.

"I was elected regent three years ago, and this is my last state conference," she said. "I think it's wonderful to meet in Southfield because people like to come to the metropolitan area and one third of our members are here."

Mrs. Behr said the Michigan DAR has about 3,900 members and is a growing organization.

"The Bicentennial year had a great effect on our membership and we attracted many new people in these years," she said. "People get all charged up and interested in history and their own families when you have a big observance."

"I think the 150th anniversary of the state of Michigan will have the same effect."

MRS. HAROLD BEAM, a Detroit resident who belongs to the Redford-based John Sackett Chapter of DAR, has been a member of her chapter for eight years.

"I had a number of friends who belonged and they seemed to enjoy it, so I decided to become a member too," she said. "My ancestors fought in the revolution so I am eligible."

Mrs. Beam serves as National Defense Chairman for her chapter and in that capacity makes monthly reports on national defense from material supplied her by the National Society of DAR in Washington.

From that Washington office, Mrs. George Upham Baylies, president general, was a special guest at the conference. On Wednesday evening she gave the keynote address, "Our Values Endure."

"I'm having a wonderful time here," she commented at a Thursday afternoon luncheon on National Defense. "This is not my first visit to this area, but it's my official visit to Michigan."



ALICE SERRELL

Elected 18 months ago, Mrs. Baylies will continue as president general for another 18 months during which she will visit a number of other states as well as England and France.

"We have more than 209,000 members in every state and in other countries as well," she said.

Mrs. Helen Fasola of Livonia, a member of the John Sackett Chapter, was in charge of the exhibits room at the conference. She exhibited information about DAR, a number of scrapbooks of their achievements and pictures of members.

DAR MEMBERS are of every age, religious denomination and background having in common ancestors who took part in the American Revolution.

Mrs. Perry L. Bailey, of Lansing, who said she was enjoying her visit to Oakland County, said she's been a member since 1962. "My ancestor was Capt. Samuel Bliss of Massachusetts who led a group in Minutemen in that colony."

She added her husband belongs to the Sons of the American Revolution.

Hosting more than 200 members and guests at the conference was Alice Serrell, Regent of the General Richardson Chapter and a resident of Avon Township.

"I've been a member for 31 years and spent an entire year planning for this conference," she said. "It's been worth every minute of time and work, too."

For Margaret Steward of Bloomfield Hills, being a member of the John Sackett Chapter is special because the group is named for her own ancestor.

"I also have a daughter who's a member," she said.

The topic at Thursday's luncheon was a discussion of national defense featuring Col. Richard L. Wiles and Lt. Col. Donald E. Odel from the Selfridge Air National Guard Base. Wiles discussed "Relative Defense Postures of the USA and the USSR."

DAR nationally is 88 years old and meetings like this conference take place annually in every state.

AT NATIONAL enclaves, the group takes stands on vital issues by means of resolutions which are discussed and debated and then passed or defeated. Resolutions which are current with DAR now include one on government regulations which said the DAR "opposes dictatorial intrusion into this country's free enterprise system by bureaucratic regulatory agencies."

Another is entitled "Desperation Tactics on ERA" and resolves that members of the National Society, DAR, "as individuals continue to oppose the conspiratorial boycott in states which have not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment and to oppose extension of the time limit for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment."

The group supports continuation of veterans' benefits and opposes treaties which would opt for one world government. It supports Right to Work Laws and opposes the Labor Law Reform Bill of 1978.

DAR takes a stand against American involvement in the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and affiliates which the resolution states "has been ineffective, have wasted billions of dollars of American money, have demonstrated no ability to restore a sound world economy and pose an imminent threat to the solvency of the USA."

Other area women taking part in the three day conference were: Debby Meyers and Mrs. Nancy Meyers of Southfield, Mrs. Louise Siegmund of Livonia, Mrs. Louise Hildenbrand of Novi, Mrs. Martina Fysh of West Bloomfield, Mrs. Elizabeth Dettler of Livonia and Mrs. Bessie Necker of Farmington.

Others: Mrs. Freddie Cole of Plymouth, Mrs. Gladys Suttin of Plymouth, Sue Cooper of Novi and Dr. Helen E.R. Ditzaby of Northville.

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