

# They spin and weave a story of yesterday

Norma Bracke loves old-time materials and spins and weaves her own.

"I'd start with the sheep, but they frown on sheep-raising in Livonia," she said.

June Finnegan is primarily a weaver. Right now, she likes to turn out miniatures of the colonial overshoot coverlets.

Carole Ashley started with history and went on to historical methods of making clothing.

All three wound up as part of a special exhibit that will continue through this week in the Henry Ford Museum, Greenfield Village, Dearborn.

In the step-by-step series that make up the Warp and Weft exhibit, they are helping demonstrate the various processes their ancestors used to make the warm clothing needed in the northern territory they chose to settle.

They are among a couple dozen metropolitan area women, mostly members of craft guilds, who are bringing the old processes up to date by giving visitors a chance to try some of them.

"THE CHILDREN who visit — and their parents too — can learn at this exhibit by touching and trying instead of just watching," said Gina Thompson,

who coordinated Warp and Weft for the Henry Ford Museum.

"We do start with the sheep, and there are pieces of wool for the youngsters to touch. Then they are shown how the wool is carded, its fibers straightened for spinning."

Two kinds of spinning are demonstrated. Visitors can watch and then try using the very old-time hand spindle. There also are several samples of the more recent invention, the spinning wheel, which works a lot faster in turning out fiber.

A separate table tells the story of dyeing. A vat of dye is tended to produce newly-colored wool yarn, and there are samples of the natural materials that pioneer women used to color their wool.

Then come the looms, ranging in size from the granddaddy four-harness hand loom — "It isn't working really well right now but we still wanted to show it," Mrs. Finnegan said to the little looms lined up for small visitors to operate.

Along with the exhibits on turning sheep's wool to wool fabric, there are some that depict the transformation of flax to linen.

Featured there are spiked hackles in three sizes that straighten the flax fibers as they are pulled through. There is also a different kind of spinning wheel that utilizes water as the thread goes through.

"Flax contains a lot of gluten," explained Carole Ashley, "and using the water helps glue the fiber together."

MRS. ASHLEY said she has been working at the museum for several months and is beginning to feel a bit more proficient in operating the devices that make cloth.

But the interest in old methods for producing fabric began for Mrs. Ashley before her museum employment.

"My husband, Edgar, and I started going to a living history group in Westland," she said, "and that led us to researching costumes. We wanted to find out how the different parts of people's clothing were made."

For Mrs. Bracke, a consuming interest in material manufacture began with a course in weaving and macramé at Schoolcraft College about seven years ago.

She now belongs to the Michigan Handspinners, the Town and Country Handweavers and the Mill Race Weavers, and she spends a lot of her waking hours on her creations.

"Members of my family are well supplied with things I have made," she said. "In fact, my daughter just sent me a picture of my new grandson, propped against one of my pillows."

MRS. FINNEGAN took some classes in weaving at Greenfield Village eight

years ago and since then has allied herself with the Michigan League of Handweavers, one of the oldest such groups in this area, and an all-out devotion to weaving.

She taught a little of the art to Girl Scouts in the troop she used to lead, and still works with the Huron Valley Girl Scout Council in conducting weaving classes for scouts.

The colonial overshoots she now enjoys are the patterns, now to be found on books on the subject, used for coverlets by women of a century or two ago.

"I make them as miniatures," she said, "and it's most interesting to work out the patterns and try creating variations. With all the current interest in miniatures, I may sometime try selling some of my overshoots as dollhouse quilts. I think there might be quite a market."

Story:  
Margaret Miller

Photos:  
Art Emanuel

Hackles in three sizes are used by Jill Nichols to prepare the flax fibers for spinning. She starts with the largest set and progresses to the smallest.



Carole Ashley demonstrates how water is used in the spinning of flax.



June Finnegan manipulates her shuttle skillfully to produce a colonial overshoot pattern in miniature.

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