



BLACK SHEEP HANDSPINNERS GUILD NEWSLETTER  
Number 86 - February 1986

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It was so nice to see such a large turnout at Rock Day. It was a good time to see old friends and make new ones. The food was good too! The following comments on Rock Day are gleaned from the Foothills Spinners and Weavers Newsletter (with some help from the Golden Fleece). "January 6th is an ancient day of celebration. During the twelve days of Christmas, people put aside as much of their work as possible, including spinning. St. Distaff's Day, Jan. 6, was the first day back to work for the women, but as the men had one more day off they would tease the girls and create general havoc. So this became a day of celebration. The word "rocken" is German for distaff, so "spinning on the rock" meant they were spinning from their distaffs. When the women dressed their distaffs with the flax, it was tied in place with ribbon. On this special day, married women used green ribbon, and available women used red ribbon." This should have appeared last month, but better late than never....

#### NEXT MEETING

February 8 at Varna. 10:30 AM - Officers both old and new meet for executive committee to get it together.

12 NOON Membership meeting. Program is Cochineal. Please remember that this program is a GROUP EFFORT. Come prepared to share any experiences you may have had with cochineal, and bring any samples you have. Mary Ann Sumner is donating a potful of boiling bugs and I will bring a pot of alum and cream of tartar for those of you who have not had time to mordant your yarn in advance. Bring skeins to dye. These skeins should be tied in at least four places and identified as yours with a button or other form of label. Cochineal yields a very wide range of colors according to the mordant used. I encourage all of you to pre-mordant sample skeins with a wide range of mordants. Another characteristic of cochineal is that the pot can be used over and over, each subsequent dyeing getting lighter. Please do not plan on putting more than 1/2 ounce of wool in the FIRST pot. That way we can all get some really deep-colored samples. Also, to allow enough time, we will be putting the samples in the first pot BEFORE the business meeting, so come a little early so we won't delay the meeting with getting the pot going. There is no limit on the amount of yarn that can be dyed in subsequent pots (within reason), but the colors will be paler.

#### SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS

The date will usually be the second Saturday unless otherwise announced. Our Pres. has suggested the following schedule for meetings in general: 10 AM building open, coffee on, come to spin and chat. This is also a good time for beginners to get help. 11:30

Business Meeting - Marty promises to hold this to a half hour. 12 Noon - lunch. 12:30 Program followed by Show and Tell. Joan says the programs will generally be just half an hour to an hour in length.

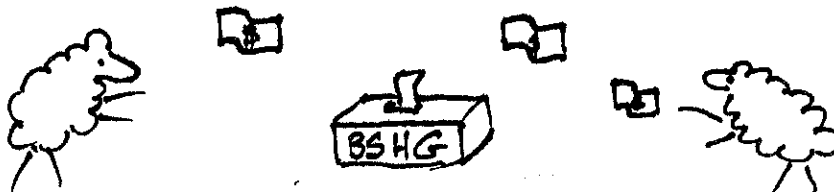
#### UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Our Program Chairman, Joan Johnston has come up with some suggestions to whet your appetites: Onion Skins and the Gerber Technique, Making Subdued Colors from Chemical Dyes, Naturally Colored Fleeces, Space-dyed Silk Bricks, "Personal" Colors. Joan would really appreciate hearing from you with suggestions for other program topics, and more especially for volunteers to do these and other programs. Please call her, 272-2697

#### DUES ... DUES ... DUES

Ah yes, that time of year is upon us again. Please send your checks to Helen Kiker, 14 Redwood Lane, Ithaca, NY 14850. \$10 Active member, \$12 Inactive member, \$8 Newsletter Subscription, \$5 Student. If there are any questions as to which category you belong in, please call Helen 273-3124. It is important that you pay your dues promptly. The newsletter after this one will be your LAST if we have not received your check by the time of its mailing.

Which brings me to the subject of the exchequer. Hey all you out there, are you aware that our dues covers just a little over half of our annual expenses? Our expenses tend to run around \$1100 for a year; the dues will bring us around \$700 (that includes the recent increase). We have about \$750 of committed expenses: \$250 rent (10 meetings @ \$25), \$100 liability insurance, and \$500 newsletter. So already we are over the amount of the dues and we have not bought any supplies for a program, or a book for the library, or anything. Last year we made about \$200 on the beginners workshop. We also made about \$100 on Spinners' Market Day. What makes events of this kind a success is the dedication of the people who volunteer their time and energy to organize and run them. Please do not consider that your responsibility to the Guild ends when you write your check for your dues. We can only survive with the ENTHUSIASTIC and COMMITTED support of our members. There are several suggestions floating around for raising more money. How about an intermediate workshop? (It seemed the beginners workshop goes better if held in alternate years). Can we hustle more money out of the Market Day? We certainly seem to get a crowd. How about little nifty dinwidges to sell at Christmastime? We could take a meeting to all sit around and make little fleece dusters or some other marvelous item that are too boring to make by yourself at home, but maybe if there was company and chat???? 'Nuf said. We need your ideas. Call Marty 243-5282, Helen 273-3124, Vernice 659-3822, Mary Ann 257-5754, or Daisy 272-4552 to bounce around your notions. Thanks, and see you at our next meeting.....



## WORKSHOPS

We have a report from Helen Kiker on the WORKSHOP ENTHUSIASM POLL. Jean Case on Silk came out first with 19. This is a very popular workshop, therefor maybe hard to book, and we need to get on it. We need someone to come forward to coordinate this if it is to happen. Second was our own Nancy Morey for a dyeing day. Maybe one day in the summer? Helen is willing to coordinate this one. Knitting with Handspun had a 10, and Designing on the Knitting Machine got 9. Also scoring 9 were Fred Gerber and Angora. Whether or not these workshops happen will largely depend on someone's willingness to make them happen. If you are very enthusiastic about the subject, how about coordinating it? There is lots of help around, all it takes is one person who is willing to be responsible for getting other people to work! How about YOU? Please call Helen 273-3124, or if she is unavailable you can always try me, 272-4552.

## COMING EVENTS

Feb 5 WINQ4 Weavers' Inspiration Night at the Tabby Shop. 273-3308

Feb 8 BSHG Meeting at Varna

Feb 10 deadline for applications for Convergence '86 in Toronto. See Winter '85 SS&D for details.

Feb ? Golden Fleecers are having Nancy Morey for a two-day dyeing workshop. Call Chris Radigan at 315-451-3478 for details.

mar 15 Spring Fever 1986 - SPRING COLOR. Ithaca Textile Arts Guild. Color Workshop, Exhibit and Sale. Individuals may enter items. Call Liese Bronfenbrenner 257-2570 for more info.

Mar 8 BSHG Meeting at Varna, Program to be announced.

This is the address and phone number of a tanning company that Marty told about at Rock Day. They are quite speedy (about a month).

L & M Fur and Woolen Enterprise  
Erie and Belemont  
Quakertown, PA 18951  
215-538-1181

There will be a detailed treasurer's report for 1985 in the next newsletter.



## COCHINEAL

Before the advent of the chemically formulated dyes there were only two main sources of red available: madder and cochineal. Madder and related plants contain a dyestuff that is known to us today as alizarin and is still used as a dye in its chemically synthesized form. Cochineal is obtained from insects that are related to the mealy bugs that commonly infest house plants. There are four of these insects that have been important as a source of red dye, each from a different part of the world. Kermes is probably the oldest dyestuff known. It was used around the Mediterranean and throughout Europe. It was eventually supplanted by cochineal however, due to the brilliance of the reds the latter yields when mordanted with tin. St. John's Blood, an insect that is found in Poland, was used less widely because of difficulties in cultivation. Lac is a native of the Far East. This insect is important in two ways. It is the source of a red dye. It is also valuable for its resin. All the mealy bug type critters have a protective wooly coating. The lac insects deposit a resin that is collected and known as shellac. The cochineal insect is found in the New World.

"Over the millenia the insect dyes have been of inordinate importance. They have been perhaps equal to indigo and exceeded in ultimate value and significance the shellfish purples. Although not of even minor value for cellulose dyeings and so not competitive with madder and the famous and unbeatable Turkey Red on cotton, the insect dyes ultimately lasted even longer than alizarin which was among the earliest synthesized of the important natural pigments. After the discovery of the tin Mordants with cochineal it became the most important red dye in Western civilization." Cochineal is still on the FDA list of acceptable food colors and has been largely responsible for the red of Maraschino Cherries. There have been written records of the use of these dyes ever since the times of Pliny and Aristotle.

The insects are all members of the Coccidae family of scale insects or woodlice. The cochineal insects are several species of the Genus Dactylopius. They have a wide range including most of Central America and northern South America. In this country they are commonly found in Florida, but occasionally in Texas and further west. They live on cactus, primarily Opuntia sp.. The female insect, which is significantly larger than the male, loses both legs and wings after reaching maturity. Once she settles on a cactus, she is there for life. This makes them easy to gather. They are scraped off the cactus, dipped in boiling water to kill them, and dried for storage and shipment. At this time, most cochineal is cultivated in Peru. Due to the recent unstable political situation, the price has risen dramatically. (It was totally unavailable for a while.) I paid \$16 for two ounces! Hopefully, the price will come down some when the Peruvian politics stabilize.

Cochineal will dye substantively, that is, without a mordant. It will also dye when used alone with just the addition of an organic acid. All of the metal salts that are commonly used as mordants by the natural dyer will also work well with cochineal, each one yielding a different color. Substantively, the color is a muted lavender. Interestingly, the addition of an alum mordant used

alone does little to enhance the color. But with the addition of cream of tartar to the alum mordant a rather brilliant magenta is obtained. Chrome used alone also gives a pale uninteresting lavender, the cream of tartar with chrome gives a much richer, darker lavender, and chrome and alum used in equal parts with cream of tartar yield a deep purple.

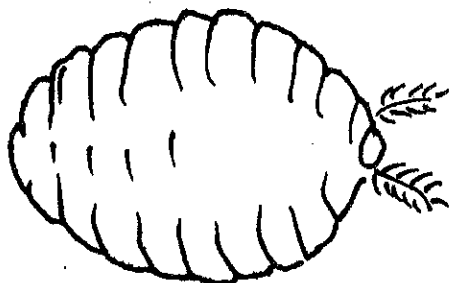
Copper and iron used alone both yield a gray color. When tartar is included the copper goes more to lavender, while the iron stays more greeny-gray. But the addition of oxalic acid to the iron mordant yields a deep, intense color very close to black.

The really exciting metal to use with cochineal is tin. Tin used alone yields a brilliant red-pink. When used with any of the organic acids, it tends to push the color past spectrum red into the scarlet range. The clarity and brilliance of these colors is unusual among natural dyes. The organic acids used by themselves all tend to push the color into the red-orange range, but not so brilliant as when used with tin. A real dark red-brown comes from vinegar, cream of tartar alone also gives a red-brown, but not as intense. Oxalic acid alone gives a real orange.

There is another form in which cochineal can be used for dyeing. That is ammoniacal cochineal or carmine. The beetles are soaked in ammonia and water for a period of time (days or weeks, depending on who you read). This carmine when used alone with an alum mordant yields very beautiful lavenders, and with tin and oxalic acid gives really vibrant magentas. One interesting note here is that although insect parts in a cochineal dyepot give almost no trouble in terms of spotting, the carmined insect parts are a real problem in this way and must be filtered out before the bath is used.

I would like to thank Jean Warholic for the loan of Cochineal and the Insect Dyes by Frederick H. Gerber. Fred Gerber is one of the world's greatest authorities on natural dyeing. This little book contained so much information that it was unnecessary for me to go elsewhere for this short article. The quote on the importance of cochineal may be found on page 6.

I have found no references in this book or in any of the others I looked in regarding the washfastness of cochineal. I know that some of the Guild members have been disappointed in this way by the dye. The complete absence of any references to the problem, and the great importance of the dye in antiquity lead me to conclude that it can't have been an insuperable problem. However, our ancestors were also not accustomed to the kind of washfastness that we enjoy with the modern dyes, and they did not tend to wash fabrics as often as we do now.



Female cochineal insect.  
Would be about  $\frac{1}{16}$ " long.  
(from a drawing by Fred Gerber)

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RAM FOR SALE - Half Finn, half Border Leicester. White, nice disposition. A handsome fellow and eager breeder. \$100. Joan Johnston 272-2697



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