

September
2014

A Message from the President

Greetings to all,
It begins to feel like fall, which suits me fine. Between the deer and the weeds I have already given up on the garden for this year, but have great hopes for the next. And fall means the opportunity for fun at the Finger Lakes Fiber Festival, aka Hemlock, and my favorite. I volunteered there last year and enjoyed it enough to do so again this year; if you are interested in volunteering please let me know.

Our September meeting will feature a talk by Marjorie Inana on her experiences in working toward her Master Spinning certificate, along with lots of samples and projects completed along the way. She has some spinning tips and shortcuts to share as well. Thank you Audrey for arranging what sounds like a perfect spinning experience!

See you then!

—Sharon

September meeting at Sharon's house!

Directions: If you can find your way to All Saints, you are almost to my house --just 1.8 miles to go. As you come down the hill on 34B, instead of turning left to go to the church, take a right onto Ludlowville Road--different names but same crossroad. Ludlowville Road is a bit twisty, but shortly you will come to a stop sign at the bottom of Brickyard Road. Continue straight on, across a steel-deck bridge, to another stop sign. The Ludlowville park is ahead of you at this T. Take a left and after two houses a right, onto Salmon Creek Road. I am at 177. You may park in the driveway, on the adjacent lawn, in front of the greenhouse but please do not block the vet truck. Questions? Call me at 607-280-8726, or email.

September 13

We will meet **at Sharon's house** and hear Marjorie Inana talk about her experiences in the Master Spinner certification program.

President	Sharon Gombas
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	& Marjorie Inana
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The Black Sheep meet from 11am - 3pm on the 2nd Saturday of each month at All Saints Church Parish Hall, Route 34B, in Lansing, NY.

Call for information on teaching/ demonstrating/

One of the upcoming fall newsletters will feature a report on what sorts of outreach activities (including but not limited to demonstrating, volunteering, mentoring, teaching, exhibiting, judging) the members of the Black Sheep guild have been engaged in over the last year or so, by way of highlighting our commitment to the future of our craft, and stressing the centrality of these activities to the mission of the guild. We would love to know about what activities each of you has participated in, and encourage you to send that information to Wayne.



Kathy Halton has been experimenting with growing cotton (under cover). A very handsome plant, as you can see.

A Fair-y Tale—by Sharon

Once upon a time (August 26) Audrey, Tammy, Cathy Chesnut, Sue Quick, Louise, and Sharon went to the State Fair to demonstrate in the wool booth. There were mountains of carded wool waiting to be turned into gold (or yarn), and many spinners from the Golden Fleece spinning guild applying themselves to the task. Our friend Vernice Church was spinning away on the great wheel, the Kool Aid dye pots were bubbling, the loom clacked on, and our visitors visited and asked questions, or just watched, either mesmerized by our prodigious skill or overcome by ennui.

We had so much fun that half of us returned the next day to do it all again. Member Marilee Williams was there with a teenaged friend who flew out from Spokane to be at the wool booth (her third time I believe, though the first since moving across country).

Ellie, Cathy Halton, Shelly and Sharon also passed fun and interesting days in the Agriculture Museum at the fair, demonstrating flax spinning, weaving, and visiting in general. There is much to see and learn there, and many fine demonstrations to observe--I especially liked the marbling, and the dulcimer music. And we will all happily ever after do it again!

Fibery Events

Interlaken Historical Society will host a Plowing Day and Country Fair Sept 27, 2014, 10 am to 4 pm

Brook Farm, 8228 N. Main St. Interlaken, If there is enough interest, the guild could set up a booth there. Let Wayne know if you are interested.

Sept. 27 & 28. Alpaca Farm Days

Cabin View Alpacas. Spinners invited to sell goods and to demonstrate fiber arts. No cost. Table etc. will be provided. Contact Robin M. Houseworth, robinmhouseworth@gmail.com

Oct. 11 & 12, 2014 - Little York Fall Fiber Arts Festival, Little York Pavilion, Preble, NY www.cortlandrep.org

BETH SMITH BREED STUDY WORKSHOP

Nov 1 & 2

Details p. 5

After you've pulled your flax

As spinners, we don't give a hoot about most of the flax plant. The cuticle, epidermis, woody core, and lumen (the hollow space in the middle of the plant) are matters of indifference to us. So is most of the part lying just beneath the epidermis, for that matter—variously called the cuticle, the inner bark, or the bast. This layer is only of interest to us only insofar as the little bundles of spinnable fiber are embedded within it, stretching the length of the stem. (For the quantitatively inclined among you, Patricia Baines, in her book *Linen Hand Spinning and Weaving*, reports that there are 15-35 bundles of fiber in each flax stem, each of them containing 10-40 individual fibers.) The next tasks in processing flax, after you've pulled it from the ground and combed (or rippled) the seed for reuse, center around getting rid of the parts of the plant you don't want, and separating the fiber bundles from the “pectinous gums, waxes and non-cellulosic substances” in which they are embedded. We do this by letting the the moistened stems rot. ‘Retting’ is the technical term for this. The moisture itself dissolves some of the soluble pectins; molds and bacteria serve to break down the rest of the plant, freeing the fiber. There are two modes of retting. In one of these, ‘dew retting’, the fiber is spread out over wet grass, kept moist, and turned (“tended”) once or twice, over a period of 3 or 4 weeks, or even longer, depending on conditions. In a ceaselessly rainy summer such as this one has been, the shorter period should suffice. The flax is fully retted when the fibers can be pulled easily from the stem.

Eighty percent of flax is dew retted nowadays, because it is the most economical and environmentally friendly way of doing it, and because the alternative—water retting—has certain aesthetic drawbacks. In this method, the flax is submerged in water, either stagnant or running. It decomposes much more readily this way, and in hot weather it can be ready in as few as three or four days. The main problem is that the water so used is much the worse at the end of the process. As it breaks down, the plant generates butyric acid, and gives the water an odor that Baines characterizes as ‘odious’. (I'm inclined to be more charitable, finding it not all that much worse than other barnyard smells.) On a large scale, though, retting flax in natural bodies of water was a major preindustrial source of pollution, and was banned in some areas even back in the Middle Ages. It is nonetheless the means I opt for. I have found that a Rubbermaid 45 gallon trash can (the kind with a lid and wheels) is ideal for the quantity of flax I get from my 8 x 10 foot. patch. You fill it with water, stand the bundle of flax up in it, weight the top of the flax down with bricks, close the lid, and put another brick on top to keep all of the plants submerged. You should test a stem or two after three days, and after four days, to see how it is progressing. The fiber will separate readily from the stem when it is ready. Letting it sit too long can cause the fibers themselves to break down, which you want to avoid. Dew retting yields a darker flax than water retting, they say. After your bundle of fiber is retted, you should set it aside to dry. We will go on to the next steps of flax processing in our flax workshop sometime in October. —Wayne



Pictures from the State Fair—by Louise



BREED STUDY WORKSHOP

WITH BETH SMITH

Beth Smith is so obsessed with fiber that she has fleece in every room of her house, including her bathroom. She teaches the whys and how-tos of preparing and spinning as many breeds as a spinner can in her classes taught all over the world and in articles written for Spin Off, Knittyspin and Entangled magazines. She also writes for Ply Magazine and serves as a member of the editorial advisory board. She is the previous owner of the world famous online shop ,The Spinning Loft, renowned for its selection of raw wool, including rare breeds of sheep , available by the ounce (or more) for studying, sampling or just stashing. Her book, The Spinner's Book of Fleece: A Breed-by-Breed Guide to Choosing and Spinning will be available in July 2014.

WORKSHOP: The workshop will demystify the what, why, and how of sheep breeds. We will spin 18 different breeds of sheep over 2 days. We will review the sheep breeds and their categories. We will wash raw wool to maintain lock structure in both small batches as well as washing lock by lock. We will try a variety of hand processing tools and learn what methods work best for particular breeds. We will spin using different techniques to create yarns for specific types of knitting.

EQUIPMENT TO BRING: Spinning wheel in good working order, pen, one empty bobbin, small plastic bags and paper for notes and labeling. If you have hand cards, a flicker and or hand held combs please bring. If you don't have them, some will be available for you to use .

WHEN: Saturday, Nov1 and Sunday Nov.2

WHERE: Country Inn and Suites, route 281, Cortland, New York

WORKSHOP TIME: 9 am to noon and 1pm to 4pm each day

COST: Guild Members \$55 for two days. Non Guild individuals \$125

NOTE: A \$60 MATERIAL FEE IS DUE TO THE INSTRUCTOR AT THE TIME OF THE WORKSHOP

SING ME UP FOR THE BETH SMITH WORKSHOP

NAME _____

PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

Send your check to Marjorie Inana 41 W. Court St. Cortland, New York 13045 and make check out to Black Sheep Handspinners.

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