



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



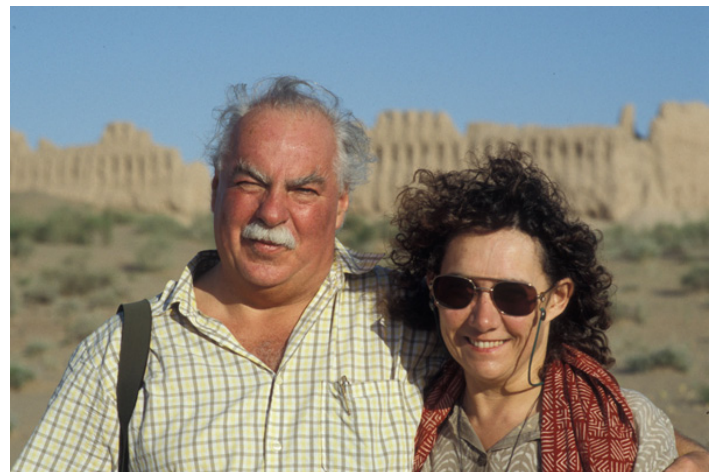
Vol. 20 No. 1 September 2012

www.ne-rugsociety.org

September 28 Meeting: David and Sue Richardson on the Qaraqalpaq Yurt

At the opening meeting of the New England Rug Society's 2012–13 season, David and Sue Richardson will present "Qara U'y: The Qaraqalpak Yurt and Its Decoration." The Richardsons are independent researchers occupied full time with the study of Khorezm, the isolated region watered by the lower reaches of the Amu Darya, lying just to the south of the Aral Sea. The original impetus for their historical and sociological investigations of the area was their deep fascination with its textiles. In their extensive travels, they have watched Qaraqalpaq yurts being made and erected and have lived and slept inside these structures. Their book, *Qaraqalpaqs of the Aral Delta*, was published this year.

After introducing us to the Qaraqalpaqs and their unusual, formerly semi-nomadic lifestyle, the Richardsons will describe the special features of the Qaraqalpaq yurt and will consider the various weavings that are associated with it, along with Qaraqalpaq storage bags, rugs, and carpets. Finally, they will attempt to resolve the controversy that has surrounded Qaraqalpaq carpets for over a century.



David and Sue Richardson

September 28 Meeting Details

Time: 7:30 p.m.

Place: First Parish, Bedford Road, Lincoln

Directions:

From Rt. 95 (128), take exit 28B, Trapelo Road West. Proceed west about 2.5 miles to a stop sign at the five-way intersection in Lincoln (there's a white planter in the middle of the intersection). Go right on Bedford Road for 0.1 mile to Bemis Hall, a large brick building on the right. First Parish is on your left.

From Rt. 2, take Bedford Road, Lincoln Center exit (eastbound, turn right at light; westbound, go through light, turn right, and circle 270° to cross Rt. 2 at the light). Proceed 0.9 mile to Bemis Hall, a large brick building on your left. First Parish is on your right.

Parking:

Park in the lot behind the parish house, along the street, or in front of Bemis Hall, if that building is dark and not in use.



A wealthy Qaraqalpaq family's yurt, painted by Boris Andrianov, an archaeologist and ethnographer with the Khorezm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition, 1946

October 5 Meeting: Jon Thompson on Mamluk Carpets



Jon Thompson

On October 5, noted carpet scholar Jon Thompson will present “Late Mamluk Carpets: Some New Observations.” Over three decades, Thompson’s interests have ranged from Turkmen tribal weaving to opulent carpets made for the Iranian, Turkish, and Mamluk Egyptian courts of the fifteenth century onwards. What began as a private fascination with rugs and textiles while he practiced medicine in London became Thompson’s main career; with Louise Mackie he published *Turkmen*, the catalogue of a landmark 1980 exhibition held at the Textile Museum in Washington. An innovative and delightful introductory book, *Carpet Magic* (also titled *Oriental Carpets from the Tents, Cottages, and Workshops of Asia*), followed in 1983. His other major works include *The Nomadic Peoples of Iran* (2002), *Milestones in the History of Carpets* (2006), *Timbuktu to Tibet* (2008), and *Carpets and Textiles in the Iranian World 1400–1700* (2010). From 2001 to 2007, he was May Beattie Fellow in Carpet Studies at the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology and the Khalili Research Centre, University of Oxford, where he worked to establish a database of the images and notes on carpets made by May Hamilton Beattie (1908–1996) in order that her research be accessible to scholars. He also taught courses on carpets and textiles of the Islamic world at Oxford and at the British Museum. Now retired from Oxford, Thompson continues to teach in London, at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

A small group of knotted-pile carpets is recognized on sound evidence to have been produced in the late fifteenth century for the Mamluk elite and for export. The current belief that they arose “out of nowhere” stems from a seeming lack of precedent for their well-developed technique and mature decorative style. Thompson will seek to show that the sudden flowering of carpet weaving at this time was part of a cultural renaissance that took place during the reign of the Mamluk sultan Qaytbay (r. 1468–96), and that it can be accounted for by the recruitment of weavers from Turkmen-ruled Iran and Asia Minor. He will draw evidence for this from depictions of a distinctive type of carpets in European paintings, corresponding mentions in written sources—notably Venetian and Florentine inventories—and specific details of a few surviving carpets and carpet fragments.



Blazon of Sultan Qaytbay on a large Mamluk carpet in the Bardini Museum, Florence

October 5 Meeting Details

Note date: ONE WEEK after the September meeting!

Time: 7:30 p.m.

Place: Armenian Library and Museum of America
65 Main Street, Watertown

Directions:

Go to Watertown Square. (Out-of-townners, get off the Mass Pike at exit 17 and follow the signs.) Take Main Street (Rt. 20) westbound (left turn if coming from the Pike). Church Street is at the first traffic light, and the museum building is on the right-hand corner.

Parking:

Turn right on Church Street and enter the municipal lot on the right. Most meters are free after 6 p.m., but check to make sure!

Co-chair Report for the 2011–12 Season

Leadership

Ann Nicholas and Julia Bailey have completed their second season as co-chairs of NERS and will continue in that role. Ann's major responsibilities are managing the speaker program and arranging meeting venues. Julia edits and produces the newsletter and runs meetings.

Other steering committee members who keep NERS going are Lloyd Kannenberg and Louise Dohanian, who, along with Ann, provide AV equipment and bring refreshments to meetings; Jim Sampson, who manages our membership rolls and distributes newsletters; Bob Alimi, our webmaster; newsletter writer Jim Adelson, who reports on speaker presentations; and other regular or occasional newsletter contributors Jeff Spurr and Ann. Jeff is exploring publicity options; he will be posting upcoming meetings on *www.rugrabbit.com* and together with Jim Sampson is working on a new brochure or bookmark to publicize NERS. Also with Jim Sampson, Joel Greifinger has been instrumental in devising the recent member survey, and he and Rich Blumenthal constitute the digital projector support team. Yon Bard has continued as steering committee advisor and photographer at meetings.

Meetings and speakers, 2011–12

The past season's meetings illustrate the breadth and variety of our speaker program. In September, at the Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA), Watertown, Judith Dowling, a scholar and Boston dealer of Japanese art, opened the season with her introduction to Japanese folk textiles and showed us handsome examples from her own collection.

In October, at First Parish, Lincoln, Turkish art historian Nurhan Atasoy regaled us with her efforts to gain access to, study, and secure better storage for the massive Ottoman imperial tents in two Istanbul museums.

In November, again at First Parish, NERS member Tom Hannaher, otherwise known as Mr. Mola, gave an engaging overview of the lively and immensely varied blouse panels sewn by Kuna women of the San Blas Islands and provided a splendid sampling from his own collection.

Lauren Whitley, curator of Textile and Fashion Arts at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, hosted our February meeting, which included a reception, a tour of four early Chinese carpets on exhibition, and a behind-the-scenes viewing of some smaller rug and textile treasures in the MFA collection.

At a special March meeting in Lincoln, Russian scholar Elena Tsareva presented a sweeping historical survey of Eurasian felts; later in the month, at ALMA, Peter Poullada introduced us to the history of the Lebab Turkmen, ethnically mixed rugweavers of the Middle Amu Darya region.

At his Dedham gallery, auctioneer and NERS member Michael Grogan kindly hosted our April meeting, which honored our own Alan Varteresian with an exhibition drawn from Alan's collection and an overview of his family history and collecting tastes presented by Julia (see Jim Adelson's account, pp. 4–5).

Under sunny skies, our May picnic at Gore Place, Waltham, concluded the season with a lively moth mart and a post-lunch show-and-tell (see photos, pp. 6–7).

Finances and membership

Our finances have remained sound; we again ended the season with a budget surplus, due this season to the generosity (and proximity) of local speakers and meeting hosts. Membership decreased slightly, from 128 to 124, but we did welcome four new members. We continue to be one of the largest and most active American rug societies. True to our name, the majority of our members hail from New England (with every state represented). But a few of us are from further away: New York (1), Indiana (1), Texas (1), California (1), and even a new member from Austria.

Special acknowledgment is due to our Supporting and Patron members, whose "above and beyond" generosity has helped maintain our financial health. Supporting members for 2011–12 are **Arthur Kazianis, Lena and Charles Nargozian, Ann Nicholas and Richard Blumenthal, Kolya von Somogyi, Steve and Harmony Spongeberg, and Peter Walker**. Patron Members, who support NERS at the highest level, are **Jim Adelson and Debbie Sheetz, Julia and Doug Bailey, Richard Belkin, John Collins, Louise and Armen (Buzz) Dohanian, Michael and Nancy Grogan, Tom and Ann Hannaher, Lloyd and Susan Kannenberg, and Beau Ryan**. Thank you all.

To our members

In conclusion, we the co-chairs extend to you—and to all NERS members—our warm thanks for your support during the past season. We hope that, in the forthcoming months, you'll continue to offer the encouragement, enthusiasm, and constructive ideas so necessary in keeping our society vital and rewarding.

Julia Bailey and Ann Nicholas

April Meeting Review: Collector Series, Honoring Alan Varteresian

On April 20, NERS enjoyed the second installment of its Collector Series, this time featuring the interests and accumulated treasures of longtime member Alan Varteresian. The meeting, which was graciously hosted by Michael Grogan at his Dedham auction gallery (1), had a very large turnout (over 130, including as many guests as members) and some atypical elements, such as a live pianist sponsored by Alan's good friend Dave Kerr.

Those attending were treated to a full-scale "pop-up" exhibition of about fifty rugs, bagfaces, and trappings from Alan's collection, mounted earlier that day in the anterior room of Grogan's gallery (2). Julia Bailey, curator of the exhibition, also provided background on Alan and his various rug connections and remarked on a number of the pieces on display. At the end of her presentation, various attendees paid tribute to Alan, and Alan himself took the microphone (3), offering some entertaining comments about his acquisition of one of the pieces.

Alan's family background was evocatively captured in pictures and photos going back more than 100 years. Alan has oil portraits of his maternal grandparents, Rebecca and Melkon Topalian, in Kayseri, Turkey, where they lived and where Melkon operated his business as a rug dealer. A photograph showed Melkon and Rebecca with nine of their eleven children, including the three oldest sons—Hagop, Astig, and Arshag—who, operating as Topalian Brothers, had a large rug wholesale business.

Alan's grandmother Rebecca and his mother, Esther, emigrated to the US in 1919. Rebecca was an experienced weaver: Julia showed a photo of a small rug with an eagle that she wove to celebrate her new home in the US. Alan's father, Avedis Varteresian, emigrated to the US in 1912 and eventually went into the candymaking business with his

friend and partner, Avedis Zildjian. That enterprise did reasonably well, but the partnership became much more successful when the two changed focus and in 1929 opened up US operations for the Zildjian Cymbal Company. Avedis Varteresian and Esther Topalian met around 1929, and married in 1933. Alan was born in 1934, and his brother, Russell, followed in 1939.

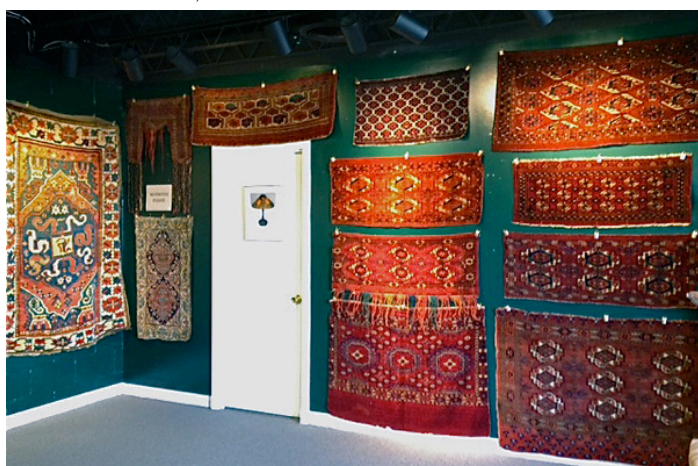
While Alan grew up amidst rugs, his interest in them was slow to develop. He acquired his first weaving, a 1920s Kashan prayer rug, in 1969. According to Alan, the piece was "best forgotten," and he sold it. The next year, he went to an auction of the Dole Collection at Eldred's on Cape Cod, where he bought a Qashqa'i bag face. This was his first purchase of an antique weaving, but it already reflected what were to be some of Alan's consistent collecting interests: love of high-quality wool and its tactile properties; fascination with stylized animal, floral, and geometric design motifs, particularly as used in different weaving groups and in different places within an individual weaving; and attraction to pieces with a wide range of colors.

Tribal weavings form the majority of Alan's holdings, but Julia next turned to some Turkish village examples with classical design elements appreciated by Alan. These included two Gördes prayer rugs too fragile to show at Grogan's. A third rug, attributed to Dazkırı, bore a design commonly used in Transylvanian rugs, so called because many were exported from Anatolia and preserved in churches of that region.

To illustrate Alan's interest in provenance, Julia showed a Tekke chuval featuring the so-called Salor turret gul. The piece had originally been acquired by German businessman Hugo Carl August Wilhelm Hummel in his travels through Central Asia in the 1890s. Hummel was also quite a



(1) Overflow audience being summoned from exhibition and bar, and Alan entering at the far end of the gallery



(2) Exhibition view, with Turkmen examples at right

photographer, capturing many pictures of the peoples he visited, of himself in these settings, and of the articles he saw and obtained, including this very chuval. The piece remained in the Hummel family for more than a century; Alan acquired it in 2002, when the Los Angeles dealer Raymond Benardout was selling the collection.

Although Alan is best known as a Turkmen collector, his weaving affections are much broader. Julia took us through a number of his Persian pieces, including a Veramin pile mafrash side panel and several Southwest Persian bags. Next she moved on to Alan's holdings of exemplary Shahsavaran soumak pieces, including a classic "beetle" bag, a white-field Moghan bagface, a piece featuring the Lesghi star motif, and a bag with double-headed birds or beasts.

Turkmen aficionados were not slighted, as Julia progressed to stars from Alan's Turkmen collection. She opened with an Eagle Gul group I trapping that Alan had kindly lent for display at ACOR 8 in Boston in 2006 (see www.ne-rugsociety.org/gallery/acor-turkmen/acor-turk-navframe.htm). She then highlighted several pieces in rare formats, including a Tekke khalyk (door-surround, probably for the doorway of the bridal camel litter in a wedding procession) and a Yomud diah dizlyk (pentagonal decoration for the bridal camel's knees). More common formats, such as chuvals and torbas, predominated among Alan's Turkmen pieces. Alan's very first Turkmen acquisition was a Yomut chuval with a single, striking motif in its elem. His chuvals also included one Saryk, and a particularly old example of a type sometimes labeled proto-Chodor because of its structure and purple-brown ground color.

Tekke torbas are common and popular among collectors, but the numerous examples in Alan's collection reflect his attuned eye and appreciation of the subtle but myriad variations in the form—differing major-gul centers and projections, minor guls, border motifs, color, and handle.



(3) Raconteur Alan at the dais

After the focus on Alan's weavings, the spotlight was turned on Alan himself, even though he's usually one to avoid it. Members of the audience, whether fellow collectors or Alan's friends and neighbors, distilled the essence of Alan to a single observation or phrase: "Generosity and good will," "Alan knew everybody," "Look at the weave," "If you were to have a friend, he's the guy to have," "At a human level, they don't come any better," "A teacher first and foremost." One audience member noted Alan's talents for storytelling, asking how he "bagged" one of his rugs, a certain Southwest Persian Khamseh on display at Grogan's. Alan related that he had first seen the rug hanging in a 1705 house in Northborough. The owner was an elderly woman, with whom Alan became good friends. Unfortunately, she suffered from a malady that affected her nose, but as a Christian Scientist, she wouldn't seek treatment. Despite the spread of her condition to more of her face and an eye, she proved extremely hardy and lived to the age of 106. When she died, the family was aware that Alan had always treasured her rug, and sold it to him. *Author's note—the many eccentricities of this woman's life and death, combined with Alan's storytelling flair, made his rendition many times more colorful and engaging than what's printed here.*

Great NERS thanks: to Michael Grogan for hosting the evening in his gallery; to Julia, for selecting the pieces and interpreting Alan's perspective on them; and above all to Alan himself, for generously sharing his weavings and wit on this occasion, just as he has shared his wisdom at many times over the past years.

Jim Adelson

May Meeting: Annual Picnic

About forty members attended the annual NERS picnic on Sunday, May 20, again on the spacious grounds of Gore Place, Waltham. Enjoying the lovely weather,

picnickers shopped the “moth market” under the trees, ate their lunches at outdoor tables, and participated in the afternoon show-and-tell.





1. Shopping the moth mart; 2. lunch; 3. show-and-tell begins; 4–5. East Caucasian rugs; 6. Moroccan band (detail); 7. mixed-technique Afshar bagface; 8. Ladik kilim fragment; 9. Chodor (?) tentband fragment; 10. Baluch bag; 11. pre-Columbian panel, ca. 900; 12. Carl Strock showing the smallest item, an embroidered bag for a talit (prayer shawl), inscribed “The bar mitzvah boy, Ezriel son of Israel Fiegelman”

Rug and Textile Events

Future NERS Meetings

November 10 (Saturday, 2–4:30): “Three Collections, a Dozen Pieces.” NERS members Ed Berkhoff, Lloyd Kannenberg, and Richard Larkin will show four pieces each and join in a panel discussion on collecting (John Collins Gallery, Newburyport)

Symposia

The Textile Museum, Washington, DC: annual fall symposium, “Ottoman by Design: Branding an Empire,” Oct. 12–14: explores themes raised by the exhibition The Sultan’s Garden (see below)
Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin: Volkmanntreffen, Oct. 26–28

Exhibitions

The Textile Museum, Washington, DC: The Sultan’s Garden: The Blossoming of Ottoman Art, Sept. 21–Mar. 10, 2013
Peabody-Essex Museum, Salem, MA: The Invention of Glory: Alfonso V and the Pastrana Tapestries, Oct. 27–Dec. 31

Auctions featuring rugs

Nagel, Stuttgart, Sept. 11 (Rugs, Carpets, Ethnographic Art)
Dorotheum, Vienna, Sept. 24 (Oriental Carpets, Textiles, and Tapestries)
Grogan, Dedham, Sept. 30 (Fine and Decorative Art, Rugs)
Christie’s King Street, London, Oct. 2 (Oriental Rugs and Carpets)
Bonham’s New York, Oct. 9 (Fine Oriental Rugs and Carpets)
Bonham’s New Bond Street, London, Oct. 17 (Oriental and European Carpets and Rugs)
Skinner, Boston, Nov. 10 (Fine Oriental Rugs and Carpets)
Rippon-Boswell, Wiesbaden, Nov. 24 (Major Autumn Auction)

Shows and fairs

Satirana Textile Show, Lomellina (Italy), Sept. 13–16
London Antique Textile Fair, Oct. 7
Antique Rug and Textile Show, Motel Capri, San Francisco, Oct. 18–21

Photo Sources

p. 1, David and Sue Richardson; p. 2, Jon Thompson (l), Julia Bailey (r); p. 4, Mark Hopkins; p. 5, Michael Grogan (l), Mark Hopkins (r); pp. 6–7, Yon Bard (1–2, 5–11), Jim Sampson (3, 12), Doug Bailey (4); p. 8, Jim Sampson (top), Lloyd Kannenberg (bottom); p. 9, www.artfinder.com (l), www.nationalgalleries.org (r)

Other than Carpets: The Graham Shoulder Plaid



(1) The Graham shoulder plaid, Bannockburn, Scotland, circa 1820

Editor's note: Lloyd Kannenberg brought this textile to the picnic show-and-tell (1), where he related a shorter (but nevertheless professorially lengthy) version of the account that follows. I thought his tale eminently worthy of repeating in print—especially since, as one of the “upholders” of the blanket, I was distracted from the oral presentation by my aching arms.

Supposedly a story goes with every rug (and every other weaving), but most such stories are short on facts and long on wishful thinking. The one that accompanies this textile, however, is better documented than most, and it's a dandy. I'll tell you a little of it.

But first things first: this twill-woven woolen textile is a shoulder plaid, 4½ x 11 feet in size, and used in the manner of a Navaho wearing blanket. It was made about 1820, plus or minus a decade, by the famous firm of Wm. Wilson and Sons of Bannockburn, for one Thomas Graham, First Baron Lynedoch. The sett, or pattern, is a modified Graham of Montrose tartan; I speculate that the colors are muted because Thomas, an enthusiastic huntsman, probably used the plaid as camouflage when out in the heather. The monogram (2), embroidered in silk, was added at a later date by one of the Maxtone-Grahams.

Thomas Graham (3) was a wealthy landowner who earned his title for service in the Napoleonic Wars. He was the first commander of the blockade that starved the French out of Malta, winning that island for the British in 1800. He served with great distinction under Sir John Moore and was second in command to Wellington in the Iberian Peninsula.

But he began his military career only in middle age, and the reason why is quite romantic.

It turns on his wife, “the beautiful Mrs. Graham,” née the Honorable Mary Cathcart, the second daughter of the Ninth Baron Cathcart. Mary and Thomas were wed in 1774; she was 17, he 26. It was definitely a love match. A year after their



(2) The added Maxtone-Graham monogram



(3) Thomas Lawrence, *Thomas Graham, Lord Lynedoch*, 1816, Appley House, London

marriage, Thomas Gainsborough painted her formal portrait **(4)**. Gainsborough was quite smitten by Mrs. Graham, and made another, less formal portrait of her that now hangs in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. When, in 1792, Mary died of consumption, Thomas was distraught, and turned to the consolations of war. He could no longer bear to look at Mary's portrait, which was stored away and nearly forgotten. Coming to light many years later, it was donated by the family to the nation with the stipulation that it must never leave Edinburgh. It is now in the Scottish National Gallery (where it is currently on display). Many of Graham's official papers were donated to the National Museum of Scotland; his personal effects descended through the family (he and Mary had no children).

This shoulder plaid eventually came into the possession of Joyce Anstruther Maxtone-Graham, author (under the name Jan Struther) of *Mrs. Miniver*. The book was made into a movie starring Greer Garson; it won six Oscars in 1942. At one point in the book, Mrs. Miniver is in a study, awaiting



(4) Thomas Gainsborough, *The Honourable Mrs. Graham*, 1775–77, Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh

the arrival of a friend. She looks around the room and notices that

the hearth-rug was an old Khelim strip, threadbare but still glowing. Its border was made up of a row of small lozenges, joined by their acute angles. Beginning on the extreme left, she let her eye run idly along the row, naming the colours to herself as she came to them. Blue, purple, red. Blue, purple, re—but here she was checked, for the second red was different from the first. So she had to begin again. Blue, purple, scarlet. Blue, purple, crimson. Blue, purple, sc—but here was yet a third red, which made the first one look almost orange. Blue, purple, flame, then. Blue, purple, crimson. Blue, purple, scarlet . . .

And I will leave you to finish the story yourselves—but remember, it began with this shoulder plaid, which I got from Jan Struther's grandson!

Lloyd Kannenberg

Contributors to this issue: Julia Bailey (editor), Jim Adelson, Doug Bailey, Yon Bard, Michael Grogan, Mark Hopkins, Lloyd Kannenberg, Ann Nicholas, Jim Sampson. **Distributor:** Jim Sampson.

NERS 2011–12 Steering Committee: Jim Adelson, Robert Alimi, Julia Bailey (co-chair), Yon Bard, Louise Dohanian, Joel Greifinger, Mark Hopkins, Lloyd Kannenberg, Ann Nicholas (co-chair), Jim Sampson, Jeff Spurr.

If you haven't already done so, please renew your NERS membership now! You can pay online using a credit card: go to www.ne-rugsociety.org/NERS-paypal.htm and follow directions. Alternatively, you can mail your check, payable to NERS, to our Charlestown address (see the box opposite).

The New England Rug Society is an informal, non-profit organization of people interested in enriching their knowledge and appreciation of antique oriental rugs and textiles. Our meetings are held seven or more times a year. Membership levels and annual dues are: Single \$45, Couple \$65, Supporting \$90, Patron \$120, Student \$25. Membership information and renewal forms are available on our website, www.ne-rugsociety.org; by writing to the New England Rug Society, P.O. Box 290393, Charlestown, MA 02129; or by contacting Jim Sampson at jahome22@gmail.com.



The New England Rug Society

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