



View from the Fringe

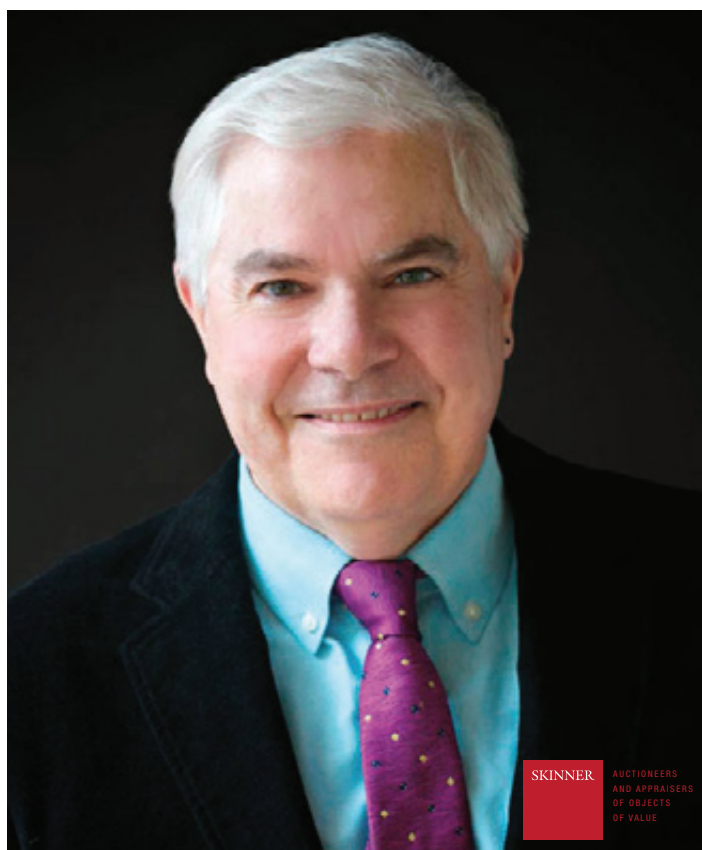
Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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March 11 Meeting: Lawrence Kearney Presentation and Skinner Auction Preview



Lawrence Kearney

On March 11, NERS member Lawrence Kearney, who since 2013 has been Director of Fine Oriental Rugs and Carpets at Skinner, will treat us to a PowerPoint presentation, "The Story of Rugs Is the Story of Civilization," during the evening preview of Skinner's March 13 carpet sale.

Using Jon Thompson's system of classification, Lawrence will explore the development of rugs and related textiles made in tribal cultures, village and cottage-industry environments, and urban workshops. He will conclude with thoughts about the future of rug collecting and the rug business in general.

Lawrence is well known to us as a speaker on sundry rug and textile topics (his last NERS talk, in 2013, was on American-made Art Deco and modernist hooked rugs:

see ne-rugsociety.org/newsletter/fringe-v21n2-11-2013.pdf).

He is also an award-winning poet, an adjunct instructor at the Rhode Island School of Design, and the author of numerous articles for *HALL* and *Oriental Rug Review*.

A 5:30 wine-and-cheese reception, hosted by Skinner, will precede Lawrence's presentation, which will begin promptly at 6:30.

Those wanting more time to view the rugs and textiles in the sale may come earlier: Friday preview hours start at noon.

NOTE: Skinner asks all NERS members planning to attend the reception and lecture to respond via the link or email address given above (following RSVP).

March 11 Meeting Details

NOTE EARLY MEETING TIME!

Time: Refreshments begin at **5:30 p.m.**
Presentation starts at **6:30**

Place: Skinner
63 Park Plaza, Boston

Directions: skinnerinc.com/about/directions-to-skinner/

Parking: City streets or parking garages

Food: Wine-and-cheese reception, courtesy of Skinner

RSVP: Online at: events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/eventReg?oeidk=a07ecb7a7ne2014b10d&oseq=&c=&ch=
or by email: event@skinnerinc.com

April 1 Meeting: “Good, Better, Best”



Detail views of examples to be considered in “Good, Better, Best”: Yomud chuval, Akstafa long rug, Anatolian kilim

On April 1, at First Parish in Lincoln, we’ll experiment with a new meeting format, titled “Good, Better, Best.” Three longtime NERS members will each give a short presentation about a specific type of weaving in which he is interested, and will illustrate what distinguishes examples of that type from one another. Meeting attendees can expect to see these distinguishing qualities highlighted not just via published images but also by “in the wool” examples from the speakers’ own collections.

Yon Bard will consider *chuvaks*—large storage bags for holding household items—made by the Yomud Turkmen. These bags were woven in great numbers and exhibit an almost endless set of design variations. Yon will highlight some of the qualities that he feels differentiate the best examples from the others.

Richard Belkin will focus on Akstafa long rugs, from a region in western Azerbaijan. These Caucasian rugs are often recognized by the presence of large, paired birds (sometimes identified as peacocks). Richard will speak on other features of the rugs, including a series of folkloric designs—human and animal—found along with the bird motifs.

Anatolian kilims have been at the center of John Clift’s collecting interests for the last decade or more. For his topic, John has selected a particular design, described as the “turtle motif,” that is found in kilims from several villages in western and central Anatolia.

If members have pieces from their own collections that illustrate the speakers’ topics, they are encouraged to bring an example or two for show and tell after the three presentations.

April 1 Meeting Details

Time: 7:00 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 the 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.

Food: Provided by **members whose names begin with H through P**. Please arrive before 6:45 to set up, and plan to stay afterwards to clean up.

November Meeting Review: Islamic Art in the George Walter Vincent Smith Museum



1. Jim Sampson welcoming other NERS members to the George Walter Vincent Smith Museum, in Springfield

About thirty NERS members made their way to Springfield, MA, on Saturday afternoon, November 21, to view the recently updated Islamic art gallery of the George Walter Vincent Smith Museum (1). Our leader for the tour was guest curator Kendra Weisbin, who spoke to us about the eponymous collector who started the museum, a few of the many items he donated, and her own decisions in reinstalling the gallery.

George Walter Vincent Smith, Kendra noted, was born in 1832 and made his fortune in carriage building, allowing him to retire at the age of thirty-five and spend his remaining years collecting art. From his native Connecticut he moved to Springfield, the hometown of his wife, Belle Townsley Smith. Together the couple amassed an enormous collection, some of it acquired in Europe, and the rest—including 146 rugs and textiles—purchased more locally, in New York, Boston, and Springfield itself. The Smiths offered to Springfield some six thousand objects, on condition that the city erect a building suitable to house the collection.



2. Program Chair Joel Greifinger introducing tour leader Kendra Weisbin at the entrance to the Islamic art gallery

The museum opened in 1896, and Smith served as its curator until his death in 1923.

Kendra began her remarks at the Islamic art gallery entrance (2), which was flanked by four prayer rugs—a Kerman pile rug and an Anatolian prayer kilim to the left, and two pile rugs—a coupled-column Ladik and a Daghestan—to the right. She explained that in selecting objects for the gallery and organizing their display, she and the GWVS staff had to deal with a collection that was broad but uneven, with many examples from Iran but relatively few from Turkey or India. They had therefore decided to arrange the exhibits thematically, rather than by geographic origin or chronology. The prayer rugs at the gallery entrance reflected the theme of Muslim religious practice.

The gallery preserves the preexisting cruciform plan, a somewhat ironic shape for artifacts from primarily Islamic cultures. Nevertheless, Kendra noted, the configuration works well for grouping items by theme. From the entrance, the visitor's eye is drawn first to the opposite end of the

room, which also houses objects made in the service of religion, and then to the side alcoves, which contain the arts of court and city on the left and of nomad and tribe on the right.

The first object we encountered after entering the gallery was a long Talish runner, with a plain indigo field and a white-ground reciprocal border (3). Kendra noted that it evokes Persian garden design, its abrashed indigo field having a watery feel, like the central channel of a Persian *chaharbagh*. Smith acquired the rug in 1897, for a mere \$37.

At the far end of the gallery hung a Tabriz rug (4) representing (or at least indirectly suggesting) Muslim religious practice. One member of our group described its design as “riffing on a Turkish prayer rug”; although of Persian origin, it was clearly derived from the prayer rugs of Ghiordes. Unlike its models, however, it had silk pile and foundation, enabling very fine knotting and detail. The mihrab included coupled columns and a hanging central lamp, and classical Turkish tulips appeared at the bottom of the field. The main border was likewise based on a Ghiordes design. Kendra pointed out that the Tabriz was large for a prayer rug, suggesting that it may have been made as a wall hanging rather than for actual use in prayer. In excellent condition, it had been among Smith’s highest-priced rug purchases; all told, he owned three silk Tabriz rugs, for which he had paid \$400, \$800, and \$1,500.

In addition to rugs, the part of the gallery highlighting arts associated with religion included other objects, among which were three *kashkuls*, or alms bowls used by mendicant Sufi dervishes. These kidney-shaped vessels, each a foot or more long, were made from split halves of coco-de-mer—double coconuts from a species of palm tree found only in the Seychelles Islands. The shells had drifted all the way to the shores of Iran, where they were collected and their exteriors elaborately carved with hunter-and-falcon motifs and *botehs*.

Displayed in the section devoted to royal and urban arts were several beautifully illustrated manuscript pages, on loan from the neighboring Michele and Donald D’Amour Museum of Fine Arts. Folios from a deluxe copy of the Persian epic *Shahnama* (Book of Kings), created around 1590 at a commercial workshop in Shiraz, included an intricately detailed double-page frontispiece depicting King Solomon and Queen Belqis enthroned in their respective courts.

Kendra also pointed out two ceramic plates produced in Iznik, Turkey, and dating to the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. These hadn’t been listed in the museum inventory; they were discovered only when the new installation was being prepared—by “doing a little archaeology in our own collection,” as Kendra put it. This type of unearthing, she added, happens in many museums.



3. Caucasian long rug suggesting a garden watercourse



4. Silk Tabriz with Ghiordes prayer-rug design

The larger of the two plates was unusual in having designs of roses and *saz* leaves both in the center and around the rim; the other plate had a more typical arrangement of central cartouches and floral clusters surrounded by a Chinese-inspired wave-pattern rim. Hung above the plates was a nineteenth-century Turkish *yastık*, whose village weaver had adapted the floral repertoire of Ottoman court textiles to the coarser medium of knotted pile (5).

Smith's ceramics also included several nineteenth-century Persian tiles on which men and women dressed in courtly Qajar style were shown making music and dancing. One tile included an identifiable cityscape of Isfahan. These tiles had been formed in molds and painted; Kendra said that other examples survive from the same molds, but with different colors and linear details.

The section of the gallery devoted to nomadic and tribal arts was dominated by Turkmen weavings (6), of which Smith owned thirty-five. In the Smiths' home, many of these had been used on the floor, but in the museum Smith had them mounted on the walls, reflecting his recognition of their artistic merits. That he took any interest whatsoever in Turkmen utilitarian items was itself unusual; other collectors of the time preferred court and city rugs.

A *khalyk*, made to decorate the bridal camel litter, had

typical Tekke attributes: asymmetric knots open to the right, and a standard design. Its original tassels remained in splendid condition, so that the chevron patterns formed by the colored tassel wrappings dominated the appearance of the *khalyk*. Next to it was a Tekke main carpet with classic major guls, *gurbaghe* minor guls, diamond tertiary field motifs, a main border featuring octagons, and plain kilim ends. Like so many of Smith's rugs, the carpet was in excellent condition. Finally, Kendra drew our attention to a Yomud or Saryk *kapunuk*, or door surround. On the basis of design, she dated it to the early nineteenth century, pointing out that the curled leaves in its "arms" were still connected to a serpentine vine, whereas in later examples the leaves are separated from the vine. Likewise in great condition, this *kapunuk* contained a quantity of bright magenta silk.

After we finished viewing and discussing objects in the gallery, refreshments set out in a nearby alcove fortified us for the trip home. We extend our many thanks to Kendra Weisbin for sharing her knowledge of the Smiths, the objects in the collection, and the design planning for the new gallery. We also greatly appreciate the support of museum director Heather Haskell in arranging the session and joining us for Kendra's presentation.

If you've never been to the George Walter Vincent Smith Museum, or haven't visited in a while, we encourage you to take in the newly installed gallery of Islamic arts, and to enjoy the rest of the eclectic Smith collection as well as the adjacent attractions in the Springfield Museums complex.

Jim Adelson



5. Turkish *yastık* (cushion cover) above Iznik plates



6. Some of Smith's Turkmen weavings

Lead-up to the November Meeting: Gerard Paquin Shares His Collection

Preceding our November meeting at the George Walter Vincent Smith Museum, Gerard Paquin and his partner, Anne Benedict, kindly hosted a viewing of rugs and textiles in their Hatfield home. About a dozen fortunate NERS members had the opportunity to see part of Gerard's collection, discuss some of his pieces, learn about his collecting interests, and hear the stories behind some of his acquisitions.

Gerard and Anne moved into their large, century-old farmhouse five years ago. Virtually every room provides display space for the various objects they've acquired—not just rugs but also American homespun blankets, ceramics, and furniture. Although special lighting makes it possible to enjoy these items at any time, we were lucky enough to have a sunny day with plenty of natural light.



Gerard described how he began collecting oriental rugs: with the auction purchase of a Pakistani "Bokhara" in the late 1970s. From this typical if inauspicious start, he quickly got more serious, taking every Islamic art course that Walter Denny offered at UMass Amherst, along with other classes in Western art. He also started going to exhibitions and conferences, beginning in 1980 with the Textile Museum's landmark "Turkmen" and the third ICOC.

Gerard then turned to his collection; this report concentrates on eight of the many pieces we saw. He began with two Bijars. The first was a floor rug, about 6' x 12', with a central medallion and a beautiful gold outer ground (1). He noted that it had typical Bijar structure, with heavily depressed warps, so that only one node of each knot was visible from the back. He also commented that the rug may have been made for the local market, since its narrower width was favored for Persian houses, in contrast to the proportionally wider (e.g., 8' x 11' or 9' x 12') dimensions of rugs made for export to the West. Among motifs on the rug were European-style roses, a common feature of nineteenth-century Qajar art in other media.

The second, smaller, Bijar (2) had been made as a saddle cover, but its opening was subsequently closed up, skillfully enough that the change was discernible only from the back. It had a deep indigo ground and a repeating design of small motifs in jewel-like colors. These motifs were densely grouped at the bottom and sides of the field, and more loosely distributed in the area where the rider would have sat.



1 and 2. Gerard's Bijars: his carpet (in the company of early American furniture, ceramics, and homespun blankets), and his saddle cover, its function suggested by the varied density of its ornaments

On an adjacent wall was the surviving half of a three-medallion “summer carpet” from Gujarat, India, made ca. 1750 (3). Measuring about 4 1/2' x 6', it was beautifully embroidered in silk on a white, finely quilted cotton ground. Such “carpets” functioned as sitting cloths for wealthy owners and were used either in place of or over wool carpets during the hot summers of India. Gerard speculated that the several visible stains on his fragment had in fact come from spilled food.

Contrasting with the large scale of the “summer carpet,” the next item, eight feet long but a mere two inches in width, was a double-sided band, probably from the Bukhara area (4).

It had likely been made as a woman’s plait cover, part of an elaborate headdress worn on ceremonial occasions. Its repeat designs were simple and geometric, and its color palette was limited to dark red and greenish blue, bordered by lesser amounts of ivory and pale brown; these color pairs reversed on the other side. Despite the simplicity of pattern and palette, the medium in which the band was woven—ikat-dyed silk velvet—made for an intensely rich effect. Gerard pointed out that double-sided ikat was a luxury material, difficult to produce and requiring a sophisticated workshop.



3 (left). Half of a “summer carpet,” Gujarat, mid-eighteenth century, embroidered in silk on a quilted cotton ground
4 (right, whole view and detail). Woman’s plait cover, Bukhara, late 19th century, double-sided silk-velvet ikat

On another wall in the same room was an admirable set of three belts embroidered in cross stitch, presumably from the Lakai of Uzbekistan (5). While all three were roughly contemporaneous, the one in the center was more naturalistically drawn, and stood out from the other two. Jeff Spurr offered the opinion that belts of this type may have been crafted in urban areas by forcibly settled Lakai people.

The final example in this room was a velvet cushion cover, or *yastık* (6). When it had first come to light, it was thought to be from Ottoman Turkey, since the design repertoire and colors are typical of Ottoman work of the late sixteenth century. It is more finely woven than Turkish examples, however, and recent research suggests that it was in fact produced in Italy for the Ottoman market, and so part of the large East-West trade in luxury textiles. Gerard noted

that there are numerous Italian silk textiles in the Topkapı collections in Istanbul; usually these were fashioned into caftans for the sultans and their courts. But among velvet *yastıks*, Gerard knows of no other Ottoman-design example made in Italy.

Proceeding upstairs, we spent considerable time looking at two Turkish pieces hanging in the main staircase. The first was a fragment, probably a third or less of the original carpet, that Gerard said was his oldest pile weaving (7). When he acquired it, it had been assigned to the seventeenth century, but subsequent research has led him and others to believe it may date from as early as the late fifteenth (he hasn't yet had carbon-14 dating performed). The lattice design of this rug, he said, was popular in Timurid, Mamluk, and Ottoman silk textiles from the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries.



5. Silk-embroidered Lakai belts, Uzbekistan, 19th century



6. Silk-velvet *yastık* in Ottoman court style, Italy, 16th c.



7. Pile-carpet fragment with a textile-derived field pattern, Anatolia, possibly late 15th c.

Adapting the design of a luxury textile to a wool pile rug made for a more affordable, yet still high-style, item.

Hanging on the same wall was an unusual Turkish prayer rug (8). It had been woven in two halves, which were joined only after coming off the loom. There was no niche to indicate the rug's purpose; its prayer function was suggested by the depiction of two hands—an unusual feature in Turkish prayer rugs—and by a color change to green at the top of the field. The rug had other endearing design quirks, including the irregular spacing of the tiny motifs in its field. It was coarsely woven even by Turkish-village standards. Its two-part construction suggests the use of a narrow, easily transportable loom; Gerard surmised that it was the product either of nomads or of villagers who with their sheep traveled seasonally to *yaylas* (summer mountain pastures).

Regarding his collecting, Gerard noted that he had initially seen several of his pieces when attending an ICOC, an ACOR, or another conference. Often he was attracted to a rug but couldn't arrange to acquire it at first sight; years-long waits and lengthy negotiations were sometimes required before the piece was his. He admitted that he hadn't been able to limit his collecting to one or even a few areas. Much as he admired focused collectors, he often could not resist a beautiful weaving of whatever type. He was even willing to acquire pieces in areas he didn't know well and research them after purchase if he sensed they were outstanding.

After offering us this welcome chance to view and discuss the collection, Gerard and Anne provided lunch,

where lively conversation continued until we headed off to Springfield. Many thanks to both of them for sharing collection, collecting insights, and hospitality.

Jim Adelson



8. Unusual Anatolian prayer rug, woven in two halves

Exhibition and Catalogue of Ballard Carpets in the St. Louis Art Museum

From March 6 to May 8, 2016, the St. Louis Art Museum (SLAM) will present “The Carpet and the Connoisseur: The James F. Ballard Collection of Oriental Rugs.”

Ballard (1851–1931), having made a fortune from patent medicines, discovered rugs at the age of fifty-five. Through indefatigable travel, he proceeded to assemble one of the greatest collections in the US. Unlike his European contemporaries, he admired not only carpets made for the elite **(1)**, but also “vernacular” rugs, of which he acquired many distinctive examples **(2, 3)**.

Now divided between the Metropolitan Museum and the St. Louis Art Museum, Ballard’s rugs form the core of the carpet collections in both institutions. Those in the Met are more familiar, at least to those of us on the East Coast; “The Carpet and the Connoisseur,” featuring fifty-one of the 110 rugs that Ballard (or his daughter) donated to SLAM, should redress the imbalance.

Accompanying the exhibition is a catalogue by guest curator Walter Denny, with a biographical essay by historian Thomas Farnham. On Friday, March 4, at 11 a.m., Walter will give a free lecture in the museum’s Farrell Auditorium; any NERS member who attends can purchase early admission (on March 4 or 5) to the exhibition by presenting a ticket stub from the lecture. For further information, see the St. Louis Art Museum press release, slam.org/pressroom/?p=384.



1 (top). Fragment of a Mughal court carpet with pashmina pile and silk foundation, possibly Lahore, mid-17th c.

2 (bottom left). Medallion rug with offset knots, southeastern Turkey, 17th or 18th c.

3 (bottom right). Medallion rug with red ground and *çintamani* border, Turkey, 17th or 18th c.



February 26 Meeting: Review to Come, but a Sample Highlight Here



ALMA's "Tooth Rug," designed by dentist H. H. Srabian and woven at Ghazir Orphanage, Lebanon, in 1925

Unrelenting snow and wind forced a last-minute cancellation of the scheduled February 5 meeting at the Armenian Museum of America (which, despite no longer having "Library" in its title, is still widely referred to as ALMA). ALMA textile curator Susan Lind-Sinanian, the featured speaker, graciously agreed to give her talk later in the month, and on a snowless February 26 she presented "Stitching to Survive: Handworks of Armenian Widows and Orphans, 1896 to 1930." Jim Adelson's full review of the meeting will appear in the May issue of this newsletter.

One of many products of the Armenian diaspora that Susan showed is the curious rug pictured at left. Its imagery includes an anatomically correct section of a molar, a caduceus, and the five-pointed star of the American Near East Relief Organization (NER). It was designed by H. H. Srabian, a dentist for NER, and woven by young girls in Ghazir, one of four NER-operated orphanages in Lebanon. (Their names flank the roots of the tooth.) Lamenting the terrible dental health of the children in these orphanages, Srabian conceived of the rug as both a motivational poster and a contest prize: each year from 1925 until 1929, the orphanage judged best in oral hygiene got to take temporary possession of it. The stratagem worked: by Srabian's own account, it led to a five-year "increase of 36 percent of scrupulously clean mouths."

In 1952, Dr. Srabian presented the rug to the American Dental Association; it is now on permanent loan to ALMA.

Julia Bailey

(Information on the "Tooth Rug" is from H. Martin Deranian's "Dr. Srabian and His Dental Oriental Rug," *Journal of the Massachusetts Dental Society* [Summer 2005]: 60.)

Rug and Textile Events, March–April

Auctions

Mar. 12, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell, Vok Collection II
Mar. 13, Boston, Skinner, Fine Oriental Rugs and Carpets
Mar. 20, Boston, Grogan & Company, March Auction
Mar. 23, Vienna, Dorotheum, Carpets, Textiles, and Tapestries
Apr. 19, London, Christie's, Oriental Rugs and Carpets
Apr. 21, 22, London, Christie's, Arts of the Islamic and Indian Worlds

Exhibitions

Mar. 6–May 8, St. Louis, St. Louis Art Museum, "The Carpet and the Connoisseur: The James F. Ballard Collection of Oriental Rugs" (see p. 10)
Apr. 6–July 2, Milan, Gallery Moshe Tabibnia, "Carpets in Painting (XV–XIXth Centuries)"
Until July 31, Dallas Museum of Art, "Spirit and Matter: Masterpieces from the Keir Collection of Islamic Art"

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Future NERS Meeting

- May 22 (Sunday, noon)
Annual Picnic, Moth Mart, Show and Tell

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Ann Nicholas (Co-Chair), Jim Sampson, Jeff Spurr

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 6125, Holliston, MA 01746; or by contacting Jim Sampson at jahome22@gmail.com.



The New England Rug Society

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