



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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November 17 Meeting Preview: Nick Wright and Thom Mond on Tibetan Rugs

On November 17, Nick Wright and Thom Mond will jointly present "Tibetan Rugs: New Scholarship and a Broader Picture."

Tibetan rugs and textiles burst onto the Nepalese market in the late 1970s and early '80s, as Tibetans were allowed to travel to the holy sites of Buddhism in India. As of the mid-'80s, the distinctions between Tibetan and Chinese rugs were not yet understood, despite Philip Denwood's 1974 book *The Tibetan Carpet* and a groundbreaking Textile Museum exhibition in 1984. Using woven examples, Thom and Nick will consider the history of that period as well as more recent research bearing on issues of structure, typology, color palette, age, and provenance within Tibet.

A retired medical/public health epidemiologist, Nick Wright bought his first rug, an Afghan Ersari, on a visit to Lahore in 1968. At the time, he was living in Sri Lanka as a resident consultant to the Ministry of Health. Later, during health consultations for the World Bank in Nepal, he was attracted to Tibetan rugs and the material culture of Tibet. He has been involved in the rug trade since 1984, and helped coordinate ACOR 4 in 1998.

In 1989, having earned degrees in anthropology and art from the University of New Hampshire, Thom Mond made his first journey to Tibet, where he became intrigued by Tibetan art and material culture, particularly carpets. With a handful of other dealers, he spent years dedicated to gathering Tibetan material at its source. He has served on vetting committees for Caskey Lees Tribal/Asian Arts shows in New York and San Francisco, and for the *HALI* Fair, in London.



Nick Wright holding a Tibetan rug, and Thom Mond showing a Tibetan saddle at the February 2014 NERS meeting

November 17 Meeting Details

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Place: Durant-Kenrick House, 286 Waverley Ave.
Newton, MA, 02458

Directions: From Boston and east, take Mass Pike to exit 17 and follow signs for Boston/Newton Centre, making a U-turn over the Pike. At Newton Centre sign, go RIGHT on Centre St. for 0.1 miles. Go LEFT on Franklin St. for 0.3 miles. Turn RIGHT on Waverley and go 0.2 miles. House is on LEFT.

From Rt. 128 and west, take Mass Pike to exit 17, turn RIGHT onto Centre Street and follow directions above.

From Watertown Square: Take Galen Street (Rt. 16) toward Newton Centre for 0.4 miles. Continue to Washington St. toward West Newton/Newton Centre, making a U-turn over the Pike. At Newton Centre sign, go RIGHT on Centre Street and follow directions above.

Parking: On Kenrick Street. Parking places at the end of the Durant-Kenrick House driveway may be used for dropping off people or supplies, but **NOT for parking during the meeting.**

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

September Meeting Review: Gerry Roy on Quilts

On September 22, NERS opened the 2017–18 season at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, with a talk by quilt collector, dealer, and creator Gerry Roy. Aiding him was Assistant Curator Jenn Swope. While Gerry led the presentation and clearly had been involved with quilts for much longer than Jenn, he labeled her a “quilt sponge” for her absorption of knowledge about these textiles.

Gerry started his talk by noting that a quilt is “a top, a bottom, and a middle, joined by a running stitch.” Without those components, it’s not a quilt. He added that the work of basting the layers together was often done by men. The quilting needle, he explained, is about an inch long, offering enough length to penetrate the layers, but not so long that it will bend; this allows stitches to be of even length top and bottom. A quilt needn’t be hand-stitched, however; sewing machines came into widespread use after the Civil War.

He then turned to the construction of patchwork quilts. Using small samples, he illustrated how joining individual pieces of fabric requires quarter-inch seam allowances **(1)**. Rectangular and square pieces are simple to join; girls as young as three were taught how. Triangles and other shapes are more complicated, particularly given that the quilters did not have the measurement tools used today. One additional patchwork technique that Gerry highlighted was “foundation piecing,” in which the pieces are attached to a foundation layer of fabric.



1. Detail of the back of a patchwork square, showing seam allowances

Pieced blocks could be assembled in many different ways. Gerry showed a patchwork top **(2)** that had never been joined with a bottom and middle layer. If finished, it would have become what he called a “scrap quilt,” because the pieces that went into it were apparently left over from other projects. Nevertheless, these leftovers were likely to be of new, not used, fabric, since it wouldn’t make sense to put extensive effort into something that wouldn’t last. This top was made in Pennsylvania in 1880, and was signed by the quilter Helen W. Cropsey. Gerry noted that such signatures are very uncommon.



2. Gerry Roy, Lauren Whitley, and Jenn Swope unfurling a signed “scrap quilt” top (Roy Collection)

After exploring pieced patchwork quilts, Gerry turned to the other most prominent quilting technique—appliqué—in which the pieces forming the pattern are sewn onto a background fabric. This technique allows for more freedom of design, because the pieces can take virtually any shape and don't have to be joined to one another on all sides.

Gerry first showed an appliqué quilt that he dated to between 1875 and 1880. Next was an example of buttonhole-stitch appliqué, popular in the 1940s.

He then spread out what he considered a masterpiece of appliqué quilting (3). Its maker had not signed it, reflecting her feeling that to do so would have been “prideful.” Close examination highlighted the amazing artistry of the quilting and piecing, in addition to the appliqué itself, in enhancing the design.

An audience member asked why some quilts were so large, when there weren't even queen-sized beds at the time. Gerry answered that bed sizes weren't standardized, and that quilts typically reached the floor on both sides. He also noted that quilts were laid flat on the bed, and did not go over the pillows.

Another type of appliqué quilt featured *broderie perse* (French for “Persian embroidery”), a style in which pieces of expensive printed fabric are sewn on a plain background. Gerry's example, made between 1790 and 1830, was actually a coverlet, not a quilt, and featured a tree-of-life design on a linen background.



4. Hattie Dwyer's velvet “crazy quilt” (Roy Collection)

Gerry then showed a type of tied coverlet known as a crazy quilt, created with velvet fabrics by a Boston milliner named Hattie Dwyer (4). Dating from around 1890, it represents a style fashionable between 1875 and 1920. Its (again unusual) signature had allowed Gerry to learn about its maker: specifically, that she sold groups of velvet scraps to quilters for the production of similar quilts. (Even wealthy households would have been unlikely to own such an array of different velvets.) The varied and lavish materials of Hattie Dwyer's quilt and others like it indicate that these quilts, unlike Gerry's previous examples, were made primarily for display purposes, reflecting a new demand for decorative objects by a growing middle class.



3. Detail (showing quilting) and larger view of a splendid appliqué quilt, Ohio, ca. 1860 (Roy Collection)



In the last section of his talk, Gerry showed some favorites from his collection. The first of these, on a white ground, had repeated yellow baskets. Next came an example of English paper-piecing, in which fabric pieces, to maintain their shape, were basted onto paper before being attached to one another. Typically the paper would then have been removed, but this example still had paper scraps from many sources, from handwritten letters to printed advertisements.

Of a Pennsylvania wool-challis patchwork quilt dating from 1840 to 1850, Gerry pointed out that its quilting stayed within individual blocks. Quilting, he said, didn't begin to cross boundaries until sewing machines came into use. Regarding the dyes used in the quilts and the colors obtained, he noted that, as in rugs, greens were particularly difficult to achieve, and that purple tended to be used sparingly because it was produced from an expensive dye source.

He then displayed a “four-poster” quilt (5), which a label on the back dates to 1856, and explained that it had to have been made in the eastern United States because four-poster beds didn't go west. This example had a masterful rendering of the design known as Mariner's Compass, particularly impressive because its odd number of points—fifteen—would have been especially difficult to execute.

Regarding Amish quiltmakers, Gerry explained that they made decorative quilts to be put out for visitors, but that their everyday “utility” quilts—which he prefers—have more variation. He showed an example made between 1910 and 1920 (6).

His final selection was a contemporary needle-turn appliqué quilt (7) that he had designed and sewn himself (although he then had it machine-quilted by someone else). Gerry's creation had no block repeat; every unit was unique. Clearly, Gerry is not just a collector, dealer, and scholar of quilting, but also a creative and accomplished practitioner of the art form.

Our many thanks to Gerry for his presentation to NERS on a “non-rug” topic—a presentation filled with information and visual appeal for quilt veterans and newcomers alike. Our thanks, too, to Jenn Swope, Lauren Whitley, and the MFA's Textile and Fashion Arts Department for kindly hosting our meeting.

Jim Adelson

- 5. “Four-poster” quilt with Mariner's Compass design, Pennsylvania, 1856 (Roy Collection, soon to be MFA)
- 6. Amish “utility” quilt (Roy Collection)
- 7. Needle-turn appliqué quilt designed and sewn by Gerry himself

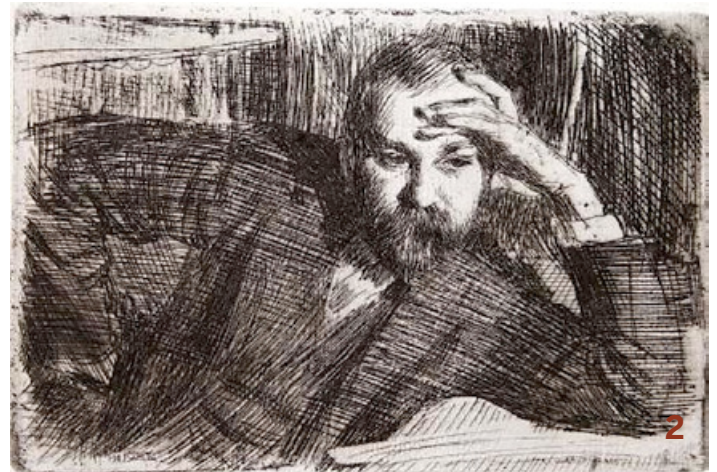
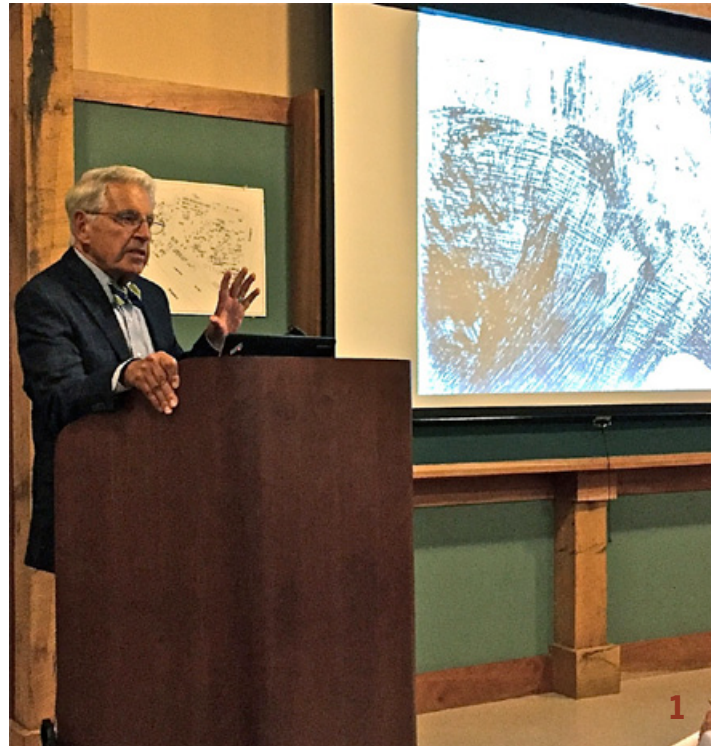
October Meeting Review: Tom Farnham on Fredrik R. Martin

At the Durant-Kenrick House, Newton, on October 20, Tom Farnham again addressed NERS **(1)**; on this occasion he spoke about the Swedish dealer, collector, and scholar Fredrik R. Martin, a leading figure in oriental carpet studies at the beginning of the twentieth century. A brilliant but unscrupulous character, Martin rose to striking prominence, and then, almost as quickly, vanished from public consciousness—"much neglected," as Tom put it, before adding, "but I don't think he deserves to be."

A 1907 etching by his countryman Anders Zorn depicts a pensive Martin **(2)** the year before he published his landmark *A History of Oriental Carpets before 1800*. In 1909, as a result of the work's success, Martin was invited to become one of two Commissioners General for the upcoming 1910 Munich exhibition *Masterpieces of Muhammedan Art*. The other was Friedrich Sarre, a prominent orientalist and art historian.

Both Martin and Sarre were determined to select the contents of the exhibition based on artistic appeal; the 3,572 objects they chose were displayed in eighty rooms **(3)**. The labels and catalogue entries deliberately provided minimal information, because the two wanted viewers to respond to the objects themselves rather than focus on historical details. The exhibition proved to be both a triumph and a trial for Martin. He sought to resign from his Commissioner General role "for health reasons" (actually he was having severe emotional problems), but his fellow exhibition organizers continued to list and laud him for his contributions.

After introducing Martin during his heyday, Tom took us back through his earlier years. He was born in 1868 to a politically and socially well-connected family. From an early age, his professional interests were limited; he wanted to work in a museum, and was passionate about beautiful things and travel. In 1891 he participated in an archaeological dig in Siberia, about which he wrote the first of some thirty books. Extensive travels followed, affording him many acquisitions, nominally made for the Nationalmuseum, in Stockholm, but in reality for Martin himself to sell. As Tom explained, this period was particularly favorable for Middle Eastern travel and art acquisition: European railroads had been extended through Turkey and into Iran, and the Ottoman and Qajar governments were



- 1. Tom Farnham begins his NERS presentation**
- 2. Fredrik R. Martin as portrayed in a 1907 etching by the famed Swedish artist Anders Zorn**
- 3. One of eighty rooms in the 1910 Munich exhibition, *Masterpieces of Muhammedan Art*.**

collapsing, their protection of their artistic heritage lax.

Martin went on a buying spree, acquiring a phenomenal array of classical carpets. Among them were an eighteenth-century garden carpet now in the Metropolitan Museum (4) and a seventeenth-century dragon carpet, in the Textile Museum, Washington. In 1897, Martin staged a huge sales exhibition in a lavish, purpose-built pavilion, and succeeded in selling most of these carpets. In the same year, he also wrote three books and worked on his PhD thesis. (Tom noted that Martin typically had such bursts of energy and frantic activity, followed by periods of lethargy.)

Martin, Tom continued, had an uncanny ability to recognize good, better, and best in carpets. How he acquired such

discernment is unclear: there were few published resources at the time, the one exception being the catalogue of the first great carpet exhibition, held in Vienna in 1891. With his knowledge and confidence, Martin was willing to buy not just complete carpets, but also fragments; these included a piece of a sixteenth-century Khorasan compartment-and-sickle-leaf carpet now in the Metropolitan Museum (5),



4. Kurdish garden carpet, 2nd half 18th century, successively owned by Martin, Carl Robert Lamm, and James Ballard, and now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art



5. Fragment of a large Khorasan compartment-and-sickle-leaf carpet, 2nd half 16th century, owned by Martin and now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art

and another from the border of a Mughal carpet featuring fantastic animal heads; Martin sold this fragment to the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm (6).

Martin's best customer was the Swedish industrialist and collector Carl Robert Lamm, whom he first contacted in 1894 and to whom he sold some four hundred objects. Sixty-five of these were rugs; they included a circa 1600 Kirman fragment, now in the Textile Museum, that is thought to be from one of the oldest vase carpets.

Carpets were not Martin's only artistic interest; starting about 1902, he began to focus on manuscript paintings and calligraphy, knowingly obtaining—whether through a corrupt librarian or by his own thievery—works belonging to the royal library of the Topkapı Palace. In that year Martin had gotten himself appointed Dragoman to the Swedish Legation in Constantinople (as Europeans still called Istanbul), despite the fact that a dragoman was expected to speak Turkish, Arabic, and Persian, none of which Martin knew. (He was, however, fluent in English, French, German, and, later, Italian, and reasonably comfortable in Russian.)

With the 1908 publication of *A History of Oriental Carpets before 1800* and the success of the 1910 Munich exhibition, Martin's fortunes were, as Tom put it, "coming up roses." His acclaim further swelled in 1912, when the three-volume catalogue of the exhibition came out and he published his second massive art study, *The Miniature Paintings and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey from the 8th to the 18th Century*.

That year, Martin bought a villa in Settignano, Italy (near Florence), intending to set up a center for the study of Islamic art (7). His timing, however, was bad: World War I broke out not long thereafter. The Italian government, suspecting him of being a Turkish spy, curtailed his travel. With the economic collapse that followed the war, Martin—now estranged from his family and deep in a period of lethargy—ran into severe financial difficulty and spent his time avoiding creditors. A beloved servant named Moro

helped him maintain the villa as best he could. When Moro died, in 1930, Martin was devastated. He donated his last remaining art asset, his collection of Islamic ceramics, to the Ceramic Museum in Faenza. His property was liquidated at auction in 1931, and, a homeless vagabond, he made his way to Cairo, where he died in 1933.

Tom concluded his talk with the observation that, in studying Martin, we certainly must acknowledge his thefts and desecrations. Nevertheless, Tom stressed, we should not overlook the fact that, as an educator, Martin did more to foster knowledge of carpets than any other dealer, collector, or scholar of his day.

After his presentation, Tom took questions from the audience. Why as a native Swede, one inquirer asked, did Martin publish his carpet book in English? Tom didn't know, but observed that Martin wrote all his most important works in English, and his lesser ones in Swedish. As to where Martin got his information on attribution and dating, Tom thought that, given the dearth of prior rug scholarship, much of it must have come from dealers. Had there had been any attempts to repatriate stolen items? Tom didn't believe so, in part because of the difficulty in establishing whether an item had actually been stolen or just inappropriately sold. From the audience, Lawrence Kearney characterized Martin's era as "the golden age of looting."

Our considerable thanks to Tom for sharing his knowledge of F. R. Martin—an early, influential, and fascinating personality in the history of carpet studies.

Jim Adelson



6. Border fragment of a Mughal carpet with scrolling vines and animal heads, Lahore, ca. 1610–20, sold by Martin to the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm



7. Martin's villa in Settignano, Italy

Five Star Quartet!

Here are four sumak bagfaces, each showing part of an infinite repeat of Lesghi stars, so arranged that the central stars form a “quincunx” pattern. The bagfaces are all of about the same size, just under two feet (30 cm) square. How would you rate each of them on a scale of one to ten? On what criteria do you base your ratings? One or more may have been published, but before you rush off to your ruggie library, exercise your own judgment!

Please send your answers to the above incredibly well-posed questions to lickannenberg@gmail.com. Additional comments welcome. Please use “Five Star” in the subject line. The deadline for responding is January 1, 2018. A summary report on the results of the poll will be published in the February issue of this newsletter.

Lloyd Kannenberg



Alpha



Beta



Gamma



Delta

Looking Ahead: Grogan & Company Rug and Carpet Sale, December 7

Michael Grogan reports: Our December 7 auction will feature approximately sixty lots, ranging from small collectible rugs to decorative nineteenth-century room-size carpets. Several of the rugs trace their provenance to early Hajji Baba members: three, including a Marasali prayer rug (**below right**) are consigned by the heirs of Francis Keally, Sr. Exhibition hours begin Monday, December 4.



**Kuba rug, late 19th century,
estimate \$1500–2500**



**Persian shrub-carpet fragment, ca. 1800,
estimate \$1000–2000**



**Shirvan Marasali prayer rug,
ca. 1900, estimate \$2000–3000**

MFA Open Study Room, December 13: Nomadic Rugs and Textiles

On Wednesday, December 13, from 7 to 8 p.m., NERS members are invited to join Lauren Whitley and Jeff Spurr in looking at nomadic holdings in the collection of the MFA. This event follows a recent inventory conducted in anticipation of a possible future exhibition. Attendees will view examples of Shahsavan, Turkmen, and Baluch weavings, as well as surprises from Persia and the Caucasus. The event is informal, and discussion is encouraged! Please meet in the Textile Study Room/Textile and Fashion Arts office. If you need directions, contact Catherine Tutter at ctutter@mfa.org or (617) 369-3963.



Detail of a Shahsavan sumak mafrash (MFA 27.168)

Other Rug, Textile, and Related Events

Auctions

Nov. 7, London, Sotheby's, Rugs & Carpets, including the Christopher Alexander Collection
Nov. 25, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell, Collectors' Carpets

Exhibitions and Fairs

Long-term installation, Dallas, Dallas Museum of Art, Works from the Keir Collection of Islamic Art
Until Jan. 21, Toronto, Aga Khan Museum, Highlights from the Bruschettini Collection
Until May 7, New York, Metropolitan Museum, Portable Storage: Tribal Weavings from the Collection of William and Inger Ginsberg
Nov. 19–Feb. 11, Houston, Museum of Fine Arts, Bestowing Beauty: Masterpieces from Persian Lands

Future NERS Meetings

February 23, First Parish, Lincoln: Raoul ("Mike") Tschibull, "Why Warp-Faced Covers Are Collectible: Jajims of the Transcaucasus and Iran"

March 23, Durant-Kenrick, Newton: Louise Mackie, "Symbols of Power: Luxury Textiles from Islamic Lands"

Photo Credits

p. 1: Nick Wright (left), Yon Bard (right) **pp. 2–4:** Julia Bailey **pp. 5–7:** Julia Bailey (1), Tom Farnham (2, 3, 7), MetMuseum (4, 5), D. Walker, *Flowers Underfoot* (6) **p. 8:** Lloyd Kannenberg **p. 9:** Michael Grogan (top), MFA (center) **p. 10:** RugRabbit **p. 11:** Sharon Lichtman

Remembering Jürg Rageth



Jürg Rageth (1953–2017), lecturing

The Swiss are sometimes thought notable for paying particular attention to details. Jürg Rageth would have had to plead guilty to reinforcing the stereotype. His thorough examination of the details applied to his various rug studies, to his analyses of flamenco guitar styles and Swiss architecture, and even to his meticulous frugality. But in contrast to negative nitpickers, Jürg brought a joyous enthusiasm to every discovery and hypothesis.

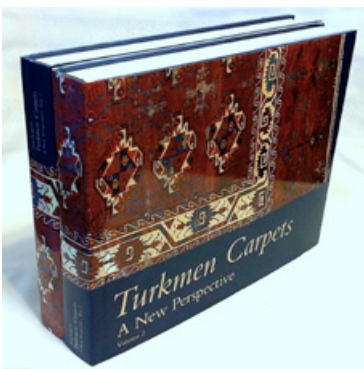
By 1982, after an initial fascination with Central Asian weaving, he had chosen to become a dealer, specializing in Anatolian kilims. His interest in the designs and history of these kilims motivated him to see what facts might be available in support of theories about design development. That led him to educate himself about radiocarbon

dating, which, in the 1990s, was a relatively uncharted and somewhat controversial area of textile study. His endless curiosity and infectious enthusiasm resulted in an exhibition, a symposium, and the 1999 publication of *Anatolian Kilims and Radiocarbon Dating*.

By then, he had already organized the carbon dating of a group of Turkmen weavings, and was involved with the project that would consume the rest of his life, culminating in the publication, in 2016, of *Turkmen Carpets: A New Perspective*. In the course of that work, his interest led him from carbon dating to dye analysis to the history of insect dyestuffs around the world to the history of tent architecture in the Ancient Near East to amateur etymology to the history of ancient symbols and their survival into the modern world to . . .

Had he not become ill, Jürg would likely still be adding to the scope of the Turkmen project, refining his theories and developing new ones. His finished works are valuable in themselves, and demonstrate that there are still parts of the puzzle out of which sense can be made if one has enough dedication. It is reassuring to know that such passionate (obsessive?) dedication can be coupled with a sense of humor, a multifaceted appreciation of the pleasures of this life, and genuine excitement about continuing to learn.

DeWitt Mallary



Jürg generously made his quickly out-of-print *Turkmen Carpets: A New Perspective* (left) available for free download: www.turkmencarpets.ch/

In Memoriam: Phil Lichtman



Philip L. Lichtman (1937–2017), intent on rug repair

After the MFA meeting, Sharon Lichtman told me the sad news of the death of her husband, Phil—like her a longtime NERS member, and a prolific, clever, and witty contributor to *HALI*, *Oriental Rug Review*, *Rug News*, and this newsletter. Phil passed away on June 28, at the age of 80, from complications of strokes. His career was in engineering; he designed and built components of high-performance cars, telescopes, and surgical instruments. Among his many avocations was a passion for oriental rugs. Sharon has provided the following reminiscence of Phil's involvement with them:

Phil's love for oriental rugs began when he was growing up in Washington, D.C. He used to find discarded rugs in the alleys behind houses when wall-to-wall carpets became the vogue. His aunt's old hand-me-downs helped decorate his first apartment. In his twenties, after selling stock from the company that bought his telescope business, he invested unwisely in the stock market, but wisely in oriental rugs. Those rugs—including a Melas with a pattern well-suited as a racetrack for our growing sons' toy cars—have seen a lot of use over the decades.

Though Phil insisted he was "not a collector," the rolled-up rugs in our home were too numerous to walk on or hang up. A self-trained mechanical engineer, he likewise became a self-trained oriental rug repairer/restorer, thanks to the many people who patiently (or impatiently) answered his persistent

questions, and to books about every imaginable aspect of repair and preservation. His engineering bent of mind led him to develop ingenious ways of repairing even the trickiest areas. Matching colors perfectly in all kinds of light was an irresistible challenge. He turned his copious rug notes into a hundred articles—published not for fame or fortune but for the pleasure of exchanges with other rug aficionados.

For his rug workshop, Phil appropriated half our kitchen, including the table. Alongside the basement milling machine, drill press, and lathes, there were boxes with thousands of skeins and spools, glues, dyes, scissors, hammers, combs, and so on. Every rug was shaken and stomped on monthly, with pheromone traps nearby so no moth would dare show its face on the premises.

Phil kept all our rugs in good repair but especially delighted in restoring quirky, worn old rugs with holes, which he usually bought inexpensively at auction. Had he tried to make a living from this methodical work, it might have earned him fifty cents an hour. But as an avocation, it was invaluable to him.

Phil is survived by Sharon, their three sons and two granddaughters, and his brother. The family hosted a memorial gathering at their home on July 13. We in NERS remember Phil with fondness and admiration, and we join in offering our condolences to Sharon.

Julia Bailey

Editorial contributors to this issue: Julia Bailey (editor), Jim Adelson, Sharon Lichtman, Lloyd Kannenberg, DeWitt Mallary
Distributor: Jim Sampson

NERS 2017–18 Steering Committee: Joel Greifinger (Chairman), Jim Adelson, Julia Bailey, Yon Bard, Richard Belkin, Lloyd Kannenberg, Richard Larkin, Ann Nicholas, Jim Sampson, Kia Shahin, 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 Holliston 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 6125, Holliston, MA 01746; or by contacting Jim Sampson at jahome22@gmail.com.



The New England Rug Society

P.O. Box 6125
Holliston, MA 01746

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