



# View from the Fringe

## Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



Vol. XVI, No. 4 April 2009

[www.ne-rugsociety.org](http://www.ne-rugsociety.org)

### April Meeting: Mike Tschebull on A Contemporary View of Old Caucasian Village Rugs

The full title of our next talk is *A contemporary view of old Caucasian village rugs: What is known or not known about them and why, what some of the design sources are, and how and why design and structure changed over an undetermined period, ending in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century*. Our speaker will be Raoul "Mike" Tschebull, who is a well-known figure in the rug world. He was co-founder of the New York Rug Society, an original member of the ACOR Board of Directors, and is a collector of weavings from what could be termed "Greater Azarbayjan." He is an NERS member and has spoken at several of our meetings, the last time on 2/24/06 about *Northwest Persian Weavings*. He was also curator of the NERS on-line exhibition *To Have and to Hold* ([www.ne-rugsociety.org/gallery/bags](http://www.ne-rugsociety.org/gallery/bags)).

Mike has a special interest in village and nomad weavings of northwest Iran and the Transcaucasus, which has taken him to Iran and the Caucasus to speak at conferences and to do field research. His best known publication on Caucasian rugs is the 1971 exhibition catalog *Kazak: Carpets of the Caucasus*, but over the years, he has written articles about Caucasian weavings for *Hali* on the development of four Kazak designs (issue 1/3), Zeikhur rugs (62), deconstruction of the McMullan cruciform Kazak (135), and most recently, about

#### April Meeting Details

**Date:** Friday, April 17

**Time:** 7:30PM

**Place:** Armenian Library and Museum,  
65 Main Street, Watertown

**Directions:**

Go to Watertown Square (out-of-towners, get off the Mass Pike at exit 17 and follow the signs.) Take Main Street (Rte. 20) westbound (left turn if coming from the Pike). The first light is Church Street, and the Museum is on the righthand corner.

**Parking:**

Go right on Church Street and into the municipal lot on the right. Most meters are free after 6PM, but check to make sure!

"Karagashli" rugs (156, pages 37-38; you might enjoy reading this article). This current talk will be an expansion of the points made in that last article, which concern primarily the relation between age and beauty: on the whole, the esthetically most pleasing pieces tend to be the older ones. Some examples will be used to illustrate the characteristics that distinguish a beautiful piece.

### May Meeting: Picnic, Show & Tell, and Moth Market

*See meeting details on page 9.*

The picnic will be held on **Saturday, May 16**, at Gore Place in Waltham, the grounds of the former governor's mansion. We'll have an enclosed 50 x 80 foot tent with water and electricity, plus a spacious barn with bathrooms, electricity, and all the tables and chairs we'll need, plus grounds galore to spread out on. It'll work perfectly, rain or shine, but we'll have to forego

wine and beer due to the place's legal restrictions.

**Bring your own picnic.** Bring your own lunch and munchies, and we'll provide the beverages, including soft drinks, coffee, and tea.

**Participate in our moth market.** We are inviting our members, dealers or not, to bring a few things for sale, and we'll hold our own small informal flea market (moth market in ruggie terms).

**Let's work hard to make this year's Show & Tell a great one!!**

Bring two or three of your favorite pieces to the picnic, even if they've been shared before.

All wonderful textiles are welcome!



## February Meeting: John Collins on Persian Bags

By Jim Adelson

*Numbers in brackets refer to illustrations on pp. 3-4.*

On February 20<sup>th</sup>, long-time NERS member and supporter John Collins hosted a talk on Persian bagfaces from the collection of Leslie Orgel at his Watertown gallery. The talk covered just the part of the Orgel holdings—from the Qashqa’i, Khamseh, Afshar, Kurdish, Northwest Persian, and Shahsevan groups—included in a book that John expects to publish this September. The talk also afforded John an opportunity to touch on a related subject of interest: what motivates collectors, and how they operate.

John started with some background on Leslie Orgel. Orgel was a prominent scientist, very influential in his field of molecular biology. He had been a co-founder of the Salk Institute, and had worked with some of the other leading figures in the scientific world such as Watson and Crick. Orgel first got interested in oriental weavings on a stopover in Iran en route to a conference, and began collecting in 1972. At its height, his collection included 250 bags.

According to John, the single most important criterion for Orgel in his collecting was visual appeal. He also focused on color, then wool quality, followed by a number of other factors, including age. Age was not a big thing—Orgel believed that most of his pieces dated from 1875 to 1925.

Persian bags were not the sole area of collecting for Orgel. He also collected Peruvian hats and mantles, and he also had an incredible rock collection. These observations prompted John to relate that he had started early himself, collecting and organizing a number of different things, beginning as a young child with the family mail, and including items like bottle caps—before moving to the more popular focus of coins.

John also repeated an observation that another dealer had made: there are two types of collectors, those who brag about the great bargains they got, and those who brag about the great pieces they had been able to acquire. John said he found this characterization to be true, and that Orgel was clearly in the latter category.

Within the Orgel collection, John turned his atten-

tion first to the Qashqa’i. He commented that they were a confederacy of Turkic-speaking peoples, but in fact all of the main South Persian groups included multiple tribes. John went through slides of 18 Qashqa’i pieces—mafrash panels, khorjin faces and complete bags, chantehs, and samplers. He contrasted the very precise, finely woven, highly structured pile designs on the front panels of the bags with the freer, more open styles of the kilim backs—open, solid fields; simple stripes; or “eyedazzler” designs. One example [1] had eight-point stars arrayed within a formal lattice on the front side, with a plain striped kilim on the back. Another particularly intriguing example was a sampler [2], showing the classic Qashqa’i four-armed medallion in deep crimson red in the center of the field. According to John, this particular medallion is rendered in the oldest form of the design, with clear, fluid articulation of the arms and more detail in various elements.

John next moved on to the Khamseh group. The Khamseh Federation started around 1860 with five tribes. However, in the short span of forty years, four of the five tribes disintegrated, leaving the Bassiri as the primary remaining tribe by 1900. One striking example was a double saddlebag [3], with silk highlights in some of the flowers. This piece had beautiful colors, including a muted yellow and soft reds. John commented that the color palette and wool quality in Khamseh weaving really deteriorated at the turn of the century.

Another fascinating example of Khamseh weaving was a bag with hunting iconography [4]. Within the small format of the bag are depicted falconers; dogs retrieving fallen birds; Islamic angels, also holding birds; three women waving; and a banner with an as-yet-undeciphered inscription.

John turned to the Afshar groups, noting that the Afshar also comprised many tribes. There were Belouch groups at the fringes of the Afshar region. Afshar weaving, even across multiple tribes, was structurally uniform in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but started to deviate at the turn of the century. John showed 16 Afshar pieces from the Orgel collection. One notable example was a pair of bags [5] with a border design unique to Afshar weaving;

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## February Meeting

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it also had an inscription, very uncommon in Afshar work. John commented that the Afshar lavished attention on the closures for their bags, but by contrast, the backs were very simple—typically a solid red. John summarized, “Afshars don’t do backs.”

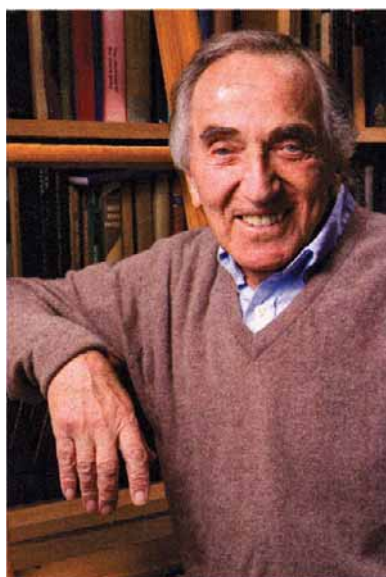
Another striking example was a large pair of Nerez Afshar bags, with a garden carpet motif in the center [6]. This piece was woven on a wool foundation, while more recent ones have a cotton foundation. Another unusual feature of this pair was a wonderful striped back.

John had 11 examples that he attributed to Kurdish weaving groups. In particular, he had “deconstructed” one geometric example [7], showing how the complex design could be read as an arrangement of squares, a set of diamonds, a structured lattice, a grid with inter-

section points, and a set of ribbons, all within the same design! John had spent a lot of time creating line drawings that illustrate these different interpretations of the design.

John finished up with 16 weavings attributed to Northwest Persia, including Shahsevan work. One example [8] was a Northwest Persian mafrash panel, with distinctive two-headed animals. In contrast to the widespread soumak examples, Shahsevan pile mafrash are much less common. He showed a Varamin mafrash side panel [9], and commented that in all his years in the field, he’d only seen one complete Varamin mafrash.

Our thanks once again to John Collins for hosting the meeting at his gallery, and for sharing the examples and insights. Keep a lookout for the book—John expects publication in September 2009, and will provide information on how to get a copy.



Top row, from left:  
Leslie Orgel

- [1] Qashqa'i saddlebag
- [2] Qashqa'i sampler

- Bottom row, from left:
- [3] Khamseh saddlebag
  - [4] Khamseh bagface with hunting iconography





## February Meeting

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Top row, from left: [5] Afshar saddlebag; [6] Nerez Afshar bag, with a “garden” design;  
[7] Kurdish bagface with multiple overlaid grids

Bottom row, from left: [8] Northwest Persian piled mafrash panel; [9] Varamin piled mafrash panel

## March Meeting: Jean Burks on “From Album to Crazy: the Quilt Collection at Shelburne Museum” By Jim Adelson

*Numbers in brackets refer to illustrations on pp. 7 and 10. All illustrations (except the lone-star quilt) courtesy of Shelburne Museum.*

On March 27<sup>th</sup>, Shelburne Museum Director of the Curatorial Department and Senior Curator Jean Burks spoke on one of the most American textile art forms—quilting. She began her talk focusing on the museum’s founder, Electra Havemeyer Webb. Electra was born in 1888, daughter to H.O. and Louisine Havemeyer, who were extremely wealthy and passionate collectors of European and Asian art. Electra shared their level of interest, but focused on new areas. Her interest in folk art was rare for her era; she was quoted

as saying “I want to collect something that no one else is collecting.” In 1910, Electra married James Watson Webb, heir to the Vanderbilt fortune. She spent some time at Shelburne Farms, the country estate of her husband’s family near Lake Champlain, and in 1947, bought an additional property in Shelburne to house the many objects in her collection. This new property became the Shelburne Museum and, consistent with Electra’s eclectic style, she moved 28 threatened buildings from various locations to the Shelburne site to become galleries.

Jean described how textiles became one of Electra’s

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## March Meeting

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main areas of collecting. Electra was assisted by Florence Peto, a historian, collector, and quiltmaker. There were very few collectors of quilts in the 1950s, and in addition to collecting, Florence made quilts from old fabrics. Their inventiveness also extended to displaying the quilts; they came up with a new approach, mounting the quilts on large, movable boards with a plexiglass covering, allowing museum visitors to look at the quilts close-up without touching them.

There were three main types of bed coverings in America: coverlets, counterpanes, and quilts. Coverlets had designs woven in wool on a cotton or linen background. Counterpanes employed a single piece of fabric, with an embroidered design. Quilts had a decorative fabric top (often pieced), a layer of batting, and a fabric backing, with stitching connecting the layers and providing a secondary source of decoration.

Jean dispelled a number of myths about quilts. The first is that they were created in quilting bees, where family, friends or even whole communities contributed to and assembled the quilt. While quilting bees occurred, there was much more production by individuals working on their own. The second myth was that they were made of imported fabrics, when in reality there was much use of homespun cloth. The third myth was that quilting was purely women's work, when in fact men were also involved in almost every aspect of the process. A fourth fallacy was that the artists made mistakes on purpose, to demonstrate humility—Jean counsels not to trust this interpretation. The final myth was that quilts were only made for special occasions. Jean pointed out that there were really all kinds of quilts, from utility to specialty.

For the rest of her talk, Jean summarized the main subcategories of quilts, illustrating each type with a few examples from the Shelburne Museum's collection. The first kind were chintz floral quilts. Chintz comes from the Hindi word "chittah," meaning spotted. Jean started with a central medallion example from the 1830s, with a magnolia in the center. She also showed a shaped quilt, with appliquéd pieces, and some of the design elements framed by a braided outline in an octagonal shape.

She then moved on to whole-cloth quilts, a style where the quilt top consists of a single sheet of wool or

printed cotton. This style was most common from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The whole-cloth quilts were usually made from English fabric, which was still imported through this period, and were often called "comfortables" or "comforters." Jean's examples included a piece made with a British garden print; a solid-colored, reddish-orange, shaped piece for a four-poster bed; and a piece with a pattern showing Greek architecture. Jean commented that the interest in Greece as the first democracy was very high during this period, and Greek motifs made their way into many art forms, including quilts.

Jean's next category was album quilts, which were typically constructed from 16-36 blocks that were assembled to form the quilt. The blocks were often contributed and signed by friends, and album quilts often commemorated major occasions. Contributors took the themes of their blocks from diverse sources ranging from biblical scenes to popular events. Some of the most famous works in this genre were Baltimore album quilts from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. At the time, Baltimore was the second largest port in the US, so there was access to many kinds of fabrics. Jean showed an example called the Major Ringgold quilt, made to memorialize an Army officer killed in the Mexican war in 1846.

Jean turned to appliquéd quilts. For this type, floral themes were among the most popular. There were many sources, and different flowers symbolized different things, although in many cases the source and symbolic meaning are unknown to us today. Jean's first example had a number of flowers, including strawberry wreath and woodbine, with each flower explicitly labeled. Some examples used other botanical-related motifs, such as vine tracery, tree-of-life patterns, and urns. Another quilt used a technique known as "reverse appliqué," where the design was cut out of a piece of white cotton and then overlaid on a colored fabric to reveal the design. Yet another example used a design derived from a well-known print of Washington's inauguration. Jean's final example in this category [1] came from Northfield, VT, with a sunflower design created with solid color pieces for the flowers' petals and stalks, and a calico swatch for each central seed section.

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Pieced quilts came next in Jean's talk. The first example used the "Mariner's Compass" design [2], with each compass a multi-pointed star, and the star repeated a number of times in the quilt. Jean then presented an example from Pawlet, VT, made in 1816, with a windmill-like design element with sawtooth edges. Part of this quilt's interest came from its asymmetry.

Jean progressed next to kaleidoscopic quilts. The word kaleidoscope came from the Greek, meaning "beautiful image viewer." Kaleidoscopes were immensely popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in many different designs, for all kinds of people: records show that some 200,000 were sold in Paris and London alone in a three-month period. When you study a kaleidoscopic quilt, you can deduce whether the quiltmaker was working from a design seen in a two-, three-, or four-mirror kaleidoscope.

Just like the kaleidoscopes themselves, quilts of this type were popular in many areas, and were made in England and Canada as well as in many parts of the US, including Northeast, Midwest, Amish, and Native American groups. Some of Jean's examples had complex, multi-piece stars as a major design motif. Another well-known design group was called "log cabin," [3] with the design built up with fabric strips placed atop one another, just as the logs were placed on each other to form a cabin wall. There were many variations of the log cabin design. Jean followed with a design that could be read several different ways—a four-pointed star, a bullseye, or a windmill were all workable interpretations.

The next category, crazy quilts, were constructed from blocks of irregular shape. This type became popular in the 1880s and 1890s. Jean showed an example from Middlebury, VT, that included elements that were painted on the fabric. She also had an example from Rochester, VT [4], featuring local birds and animals, and also more exotic animals that may have been taken from a Brattleboro book on quadrupeds.

Amish quilts [5] were known for designs created by larger blocks of very strong colors with saturated hues. The designs reflected the Amish philosophy, where the artists disdained more complex or extensive piecing, because investing too much time in such piecework represented idleness or over-absorption in material goods.

On the other hand, the Amish put incredible detail and artistry in the quilt stitching—that is where they could reveal their technical skill. Even among the Amish, there are notable variations among the geographic groups; for example between the Lancaster County (PA) and the Ohio Amish.

Jean's final category was contemporary quilts. Quilting is an art form that is very much alive today, and extremely inventive and accomplished works continue to be created. Jean showed examples from Canada and the US with floral themes, but on a much larger scale and more colorful and realistic depiction than earlier quilts. The Museum owns three quilts that are among those voted the "hundred greatest quilts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century." One of these is titled "In Praise of Poppies" [6], made by the British Columbian artist Emily Belak who was inspired by the floral paintings of Georgia O'Keefe, with a 3D rendering of petals that you can move. The next contemporary example depicted an orchid, and another the sunset lewisia. Jean's final example in this category was named "In Living Color," with a day lily theme.

Shelburne Museum mounts exhibitions that draw from their huge collection of more than 400 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>-century quilts. In 2009, the museum has an exhibition of the quilts of Florence Peto. It combines examples from the museum's holdings with ten quilts owned by the artist's great-granddaughter.

Following Jean's remarks, NERS members showed a number of examples from their collections. While detailed appreciation of quilts was new to many of the NERS attendees, there were also a few long-time aficionados and practitioners of the art form, so the show-and-tell examples were diverse and stellar.

The first example was also probably the newest, completed just two months ago by one of our members, Dora Bard [7]. This quilt had a pieced star, known as the "Lone Star" or "Star of Bethlehem," as its main design element.

Next up was a Lancaster County quilt, with a simple striped pattern in reds and blues. The fabric was wool, and the quilt was square, as most Lancaster Amish quilts are. The same collector had another Amish striped example, as well as a quilt with a design known as

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“grandmother’s garden” or “trip around the world.” He also brought several crib quilts: one from Pennsylvania; another early one dated 1836, originating perhaps from New York state; another with a triangular design known as “flying geese;” and finally a crib quilt with a log cabin design that both predated and anticipated the abstract painting of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Another collector then displayed a striking, contemporary crazy quilt. While the top side was interesting, it was really the back that was stunning, with an abstract, almost pointillist design rendered in cross-stitch. Every bit of its space was decorated, almost like a giant-sized needlepoint. According to the collector, it had taken the artist four years to make the quilt.

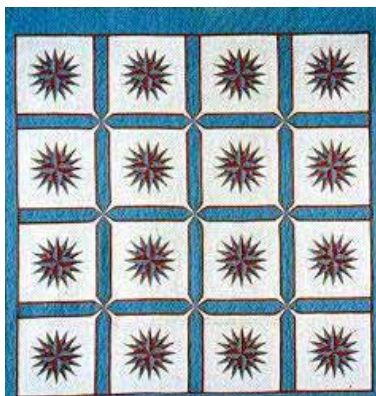
The next group of quilts took us back again in time, with a piece made from Centennial (1876) fabrics. The quilt had been obtained from the Lowell Museum, and was named “Ocean Waves.” The collector then showed another textile created for the Centennial, but this was a pocket, or small storage sack, assembled from some 700 pieces. She next showed a “kit quilt”—obtained and put together from a kit—that dated back to the 1930s. Next she displayed a rough, very old cotton

quilt, saying that the fabrics probably came from the 1840s. Her last example was a chintz quilt, perhaps from upstate New York.

The next group started with a doll quilt—a miniature piece assembled from many small rectangles of fabric just  $\frac{3}{4}$ ” wide. The collector next showed a full-size Pennsylvania lone-star quilt (ca. 1850), and then a crazy quilt that was mostly silk, but in terrific condition given its likely origin in the 1890s. Most silk quilts of the period have suffered considerable deterioration.

The very last quilt returned us to the present day. This contemporary quilt had a recognizable landscape, depicting the Harvard (Weeks) footbridge connecting Cambridge and Allston.

Our great thanks to Jean Burks for her introduction to the artistry of quilts, and for sharing some of the outstanding examples from Shelburne Museum. Her talk also provided the opportunity for some of our own collectors to present their quilted treasures. Jean was clearly impressed by the variety and quality of the pieces that members brought in—she closed the session earnestly saying that if any of the collectors decided to part with their pieces, the Shelburne Museum would like the chance to acquire them!



Top, left to right:  
[1] appliquéd quilt with sunflowers  
[2] mariner’s compass quilt  
[3] log cabin “barn raising” variation quilt

Bottom, left to right:  
[4] crazy quilt with birds, etc. (detail)  
[5] Lancaster County (PA) Amish quilt





## What in the World is This?

At first it looks like just another Persian rug in a hallway. But, if you look again, you'll see this incredibly long-wearing rug is actually a floor covered with painted tiles from the Malibu Tile Works. The tile factory was founded in 1900 by Frederick Rindge when he moved from Cambridge, MA to Southern California. Dating from the late 1920s, the "rug" has a stiff handle, mineral dyes, and density of four tiles per square foot. It is located in the loggia of the Adamson House in Malibu.

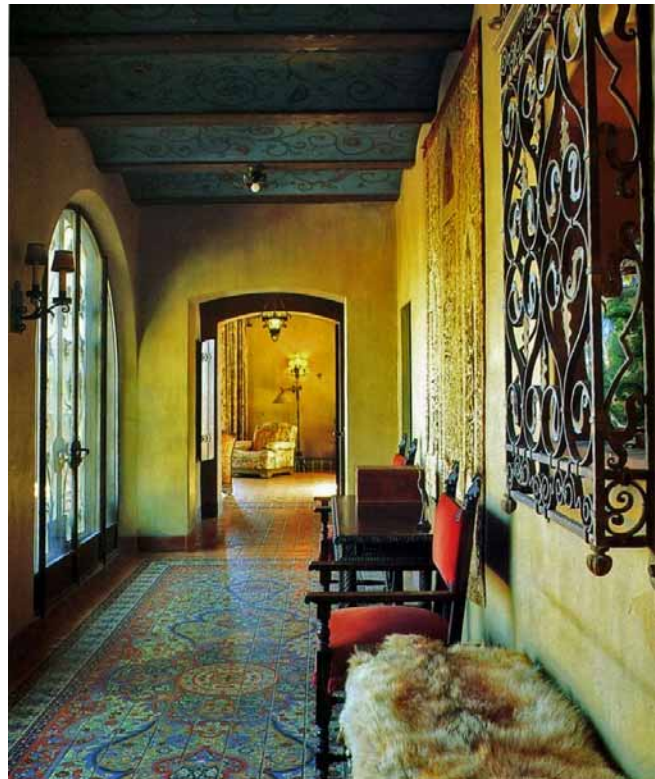
**Ann Nicholas**

In 1865, Maharaja Khande Rao of Baroda decided to offer a priceless pearl carpet at the shrine of Prophet Mohammad in Medina. The 5'-8" x 8'-8" carpet was made of diamonds, pearls (more than one million of them!), rubies and emeralds. It was valued at six million rupees at the time. Perhaps because of reluctance by the shrine's supervisors to accept a gift from a non-Muslim, the carpet remained in India.

In 1943, the then Maharaja of Baroda married a beautiful woman named Sita Devi, who took up her residence in Europe and most of the Baroda treasures, including the carpet, were transferred to her mansion in Monte Carlo. Sita Devi died in 1986. By then the fabulous Baroda treasures had been dispersed, but the pearl carpet remained, it was thought, in a bank vault in Geneva. Eventually, it vanished into the vaults of one of the multi-billionaire Arab oil magnates.

On March 19 of this year, the carpet emerged again at the Sotheby's Islamic arts auction held in Doha, capital of the Arabian Gulf emirate of Qatar, where it brought the record price (for rugs) of \$5.5 million!

**Yon Bard**



**Adamson House loggia, Malibu**



**Baroda Pearl Carpet (left)  
Detail (above)**





## Upcoming Rug Events

### Auctions:

**Grogan**, Dedham, 4/19 (including rugs)

**Skinner**, Boston, 5/9

**Rippon Boswell**, Wiesbaden, 5/23

**Christie's**, NY, 6/8

**Nagel**, Stuttgart, 7/14.

### Tours:

**Discover Transylvania 2009**, 5/29-6/6, organized by Alberto Boralevi and Stefano Ionesco. For information contact the latter at stefano\_ionescu@yahoo.it or [www.transylvanianrugs.com](http://www.transylvanianrugs.com).

## May Meeting (Picnic and Show & Tell) Details

**Date:** Saturday, May 16

**Time:** Noon to 4PM

**Place:** Gore Place, 52 Gore Street, Waltham

### **Directions:**

**From Watertown Square** (see page 1): Take Main Street (Rte. 20) westbound. After 1.5 miles turn left onto Gore Street at the second of two adjoining traffic lights (Shell station on right). Proceed 0.2 miles on Gore Street. Turn left (through center island) to Gore Place entrance.

**From Rte. 128:** Take exit 26 onto Rte. 20 Eastbound (it starts out as Weston Road and becomes Main Street). After 3.3 miles turn right on Gore Street at the first of two adjoining traffic lights (Shell Station on left). Proceed on Gore Street as above.

**From Newton:** Go north on Crafts Street. Turn right (traffic light) on North Street. Cross the Charles River and go straight. The street eventually becomes Gore Street. Gore Place entrance will be on your right.

**Parking:** Parking area on the estate grounds

**We welcome the following new members:** *Bruce Buckland, Karl Johnson, and Ruth Rubin.*

Newsletter contributors and helpers: Yon Bard (editor), Jim Adelson, Dora Bard, Mark Hopkins, Ann Nicholas, Janet Smith.

Comments/contributions/for sale ads to: Yonathan Bard, e-mail [doryon@rcn.com](mailto:doryon@rcn.com)

**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. Its meetings are held six to eight times a year. Annual membership dues are: Single \$45, Couple \$65, Supporting \$90, Patron \$120, Student \$25. Membership information or renewal forms can be obtained on our website [www.newenglandrugsociety.org](http://www.newenglandrugsociety.org), or by writing to **New England Rug Society, P.O. Box 582, Lincoln, MA 01773**, calling Mark Hopkins at 781-259-9444, or emailing him at [mopkins@verizon.net](mailto:mopkins@verizon.net).

### **NERS 2008/9 Steering Committee:**

Mark Hopkins (President)

Jim Adelson

Robert Alimi

Julia Bailey

Yonathan Bard

Tom Hannaher

Lloyd Kannenberg

Ann Nicholas

Gillian Richardson

Janet Smith

Jeff Spurr



## March Meeting

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[6] "In praise of poppies"  
Art quilt with tactile petals,  
made by Emily Belak in 1995;  
inspired by a Georgia O'Keefe painting.  
Voted one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's 100 greatest quilts



[7] Lone-star quilt, Massachusetts, 2009



**New England Rug Society**  
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