

# NORWEGIAN TEXTILE LETTER

Vol. VIII No. 1

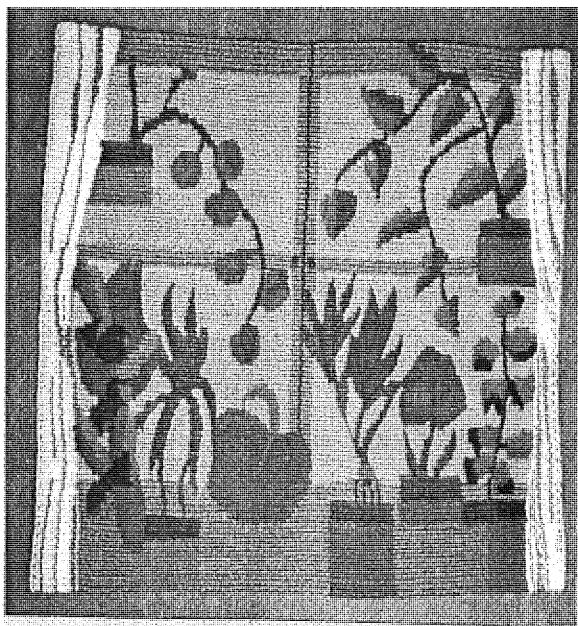
November, 2001

## NORWEGIAN TEXTILE FOLK ARTS TODAY

*By Lila Nelson*

Interest in the folk arts of Norway were on the upswing in America during the last quarter of the 20th century, and continued with increased momentum, particularly in the Midwest, during the last decade.

Prior to that time, the only major source of information on Norway's rich folk legacy was Janice Stewart's *THE FOLK ARTS OF NORWAY* (1953) augmented by such supplementary offerings as the 93 page pictorial *TREASURY OF NORWEGIAN FOLK ART IN AMERICA* (1975) by Donald Gilbertson and James Richard, Jr.



*Tapestry by Lila Nelson*

Interest, however, had been developing, due in no small part to the rebirth of Vesterheim, the Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah, Iowa, now considered one of America's most comprehensive collections from any ethnic community. Numerous studies and exhibits from that institution culminated in two major efforts. The first, a collection of essays entitled *MATERIAL CULTURE AND PEOPLE'S ART AMONG THE NORWEGIANS IN AMERICA*, edited by Marion Nelson and published in 1994 by the Norwegian-American Historical Association, was the catalyst for a conference on the role of ethnicity and material culture in general in America. The second was an exhibition of 210 examples of Norwegian and Norwegian-American folk art culled from 76 institutional and individual lenders from America and Norway which traveled to four major American cities and Oslo, Norway, and was accompanied by a 276 page study/catalogue.

Norwegian textile folk arts demonstrated their general appeal in America when, at the Convergence hosted in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1994, over 65 participants responded to a 7:00 a.m. meeting of people interested in that subject. As you know, that marked the birth of our offspring The Norwegian Breakfast Club, dealt a momentary setback by recent events beyond our control, but which is evidence by its growing enrollment of a continued appreciation of Norwegian textile traditions.

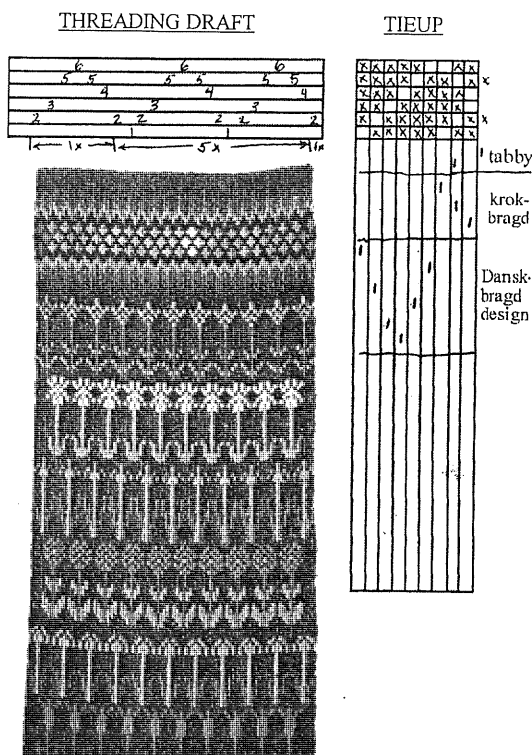
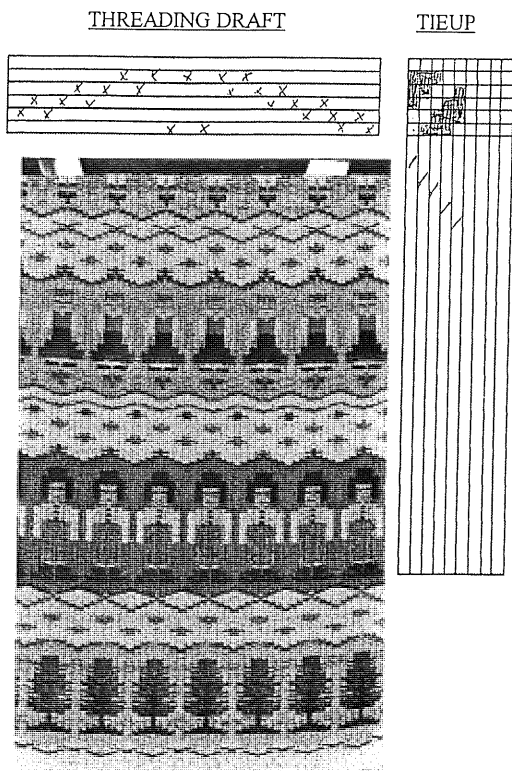
Another group to develop from this upsurge is the Scandinavian Study Group (something of a misnomer since we've concentrated primarily on Norwegian traditions thus far). An offshoot of the Minnesota Weavers Guild, it has since its inception in 1995 chosen one technique on which to focus for a specified period. Tapestry, overshot, krokbragd, band weaving, and rya have been studied thus far. Enrollment

# Scandinavian Study Group

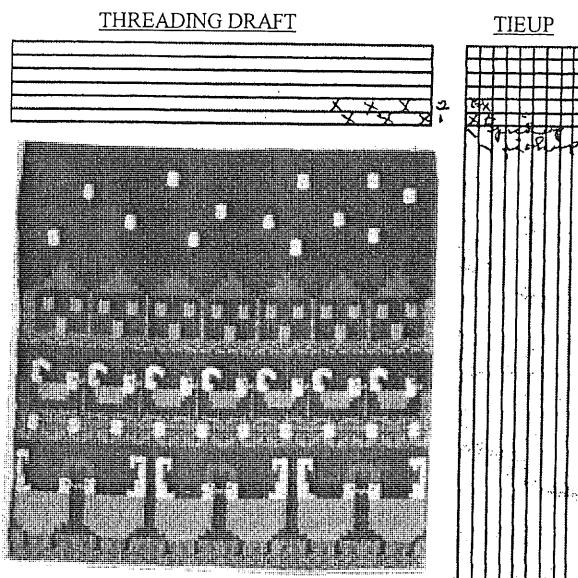
of the Weavers Guild of Minnesota  
Bound Weave

Weaver: Anna Smits  
Description: Wall Hanging - 60"x 22"  
Yarn Information:  
Warp: Cotton  
Weft: Wool  
Sett: 10 e.p.i.  
Technique: Boundweave, figures

Weaver: Jan Mostrom  
Description: Danskbragd Flower Garden  
Yarn Information:  
Warp: Linen  
Weft: Rauma Prydvevgarn  
Sett: 8 e.p.i.  
Technique: Danskbragd



Weaver: Lila Nelson  
Description: Chicken & Eggs  
Yarn Information:  
Warp: Cotton  
Weft: Wool  
Sett: 8 e.p.i.  
Technique: 2 shaft danskbragd



varies, the highest number being about 24, and meetings have continued on a monthly basis to the present day.

The technique which evoked the most evidence of interest and accomplishment was krokbragd and its variations. Its period of study was lengthened from one year to 18 months, with 14 members producing a total of 72 objects which were described in detail and photographed for inclusion in loose-leaf, acid-free folders. Copies of these booklets were made available to each member of the group as well as to the libraries of the Minnesota Weavers Guild and Vesterheim.

The diversity of the group output and the breadth of their experimentation is evident in a list of the variations on traditional krokbragd found in the 72 pieces, which included:

- Krokbragd using non-traditional materials such as cotton strips.
- Double point krokbragd with single point borders.
- Bound weave on rosepath threading.
- Rosepath on opposites.
- Point twill variations to produce figures.
- Danskbrogd with picked-up patterns on a ground of continuing krokbragd designs.
- Danskbrogd on rosepath and point twill.
- Danskbrogd on a five harness twill threading.
- Danskbrogd on a six harness twill threading.
- A straight four harness twill threading on which three-harness krokbragd, danskbrogd, and bound or plain weave could be woven.
- Danskbrogd on plain weave combined with discontinuous wefts for small pattern units.
- Tapestry with some elements of danskbrogd for surface variation.

The group also introduced krokbragd to the general public when it demonstrated weaving a copy of one of Vesterheim's coverlets on 13 Sunday afternoons during the exhibition *NORWEGIAN FOLK ART: THE MIGRATION OF A TRADITION* at the Minnesota Museum of Art in St. Paul during the winter of 1996-97.

In December of 1996 twelve Norwegian Breakfast Club members (several of whom were also members of the Scan Study Group) started a Danskbrogd Study Group with members sharing their work with all others in the group through samples and/or photographs, plus information on materials, drafts, and related information. The group functioned until the latter part of 1998, adding to the wealth of shared experiences about this little known variant of standard bound weave.



*Tapestry by Robbie LaFluer*

Both the geometric ("aklejev") and pictorial ("billedjev") folk tapestry traditions of Norway have shown an increasing popularity among Scan Study Group members. After concentration in the group's early history, it is the focus of attention for the present year as well. Interest has spilled over into the Minnesota Weavers Guild as a whole, with tapestry classes possibly on their future agenda. In addition, a small contingent of die-hards (this writer included) do ongoing tapestry study that continues in addition to the technique of choice for the group as a whole.

## NORWEGIAN TAPESTRY WEAVING OLD AND NEW

*By Florence Yoder Wilson*

(from NEEDLECRAFT the Magazine of Home Arts June 1930)

Searching the pages of history for the story of the beginnings of needlework, one is driven automatically back to weaving, and to that field for the expression of art which flowered with it, tapestry making. It is the first, and many think the highest form of art having to do with decoration of cloth.

So when we come to consider what other countries are doing in the way of handcrafts, tapestry making is naturally a matter of primary interest.

Norway, not only from the standpoint of present day activity, but from a consideration of her past, is easily the country which predominately presents tapestry making, not as a highly organized commercial and professional occupation, but as a distinct form of art, engaged in as an avocation by artist-craftsmen.

Not only are her ancient picture weavings considered the oldest in Europe, but through the efforts of several Norwegian women, the art has been revived, and their modern examples of hand-spun, hand-dyed and hand-woven tapestries hang in the museums of the world.

The story of the finding of the priceless early fragments discovered comparatively recently is equal in interest to the account of the revival of the art, begun many years ago, and so we will tell them both.

Long ago in Norway, a great lady was laid to rest after the custom of her country, in a Viking ship, together with her handmaiden, and her prized possessions. All of the intimate belongings with which she had been surrounded during her lifetime, were buried with her. Even the loom upon which she had been weaving a piece of tapestry to match the fabric of the pillows and

covers of her last resting-place, was not forgotten.

Centuries later the mound which had slowly covered her tomb was cleared away, and with infinite care and deepest reverence the remnants of wood and cloth were removed to the museum in Oslo, and painstakingly fitted together again, until the whole story of the past was revealed.

Of all of the interesting relics thus discovered which told a marvelous story of the manners and customs of the 800-840 A.D. in Norway, none were of greater importance than the loom and the fragments of tapestry which bore mute testimony to the industry and artistic genius of the dead queen.

Next in antiquity to the Oseberg weaving is the Baldishol tapestry, a prized possession in the Museum of Industrial Arts in Oslo.

It is closely bound by ties of sentiment and interest to this country. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the old Baldishol timber church in the town of Hedemarken in Norway, was torn down. Between two of the floors a piece of tapestry was discovered, which experts were not long in identifying as an ancient tapestry made in the year 1180. The fragment is about a yard and a quarter by two yards, and pictures the two months, March and April. April is represented by a gentleman "carrying a flower in his hand, and walking beside a tree as he listens to the singing of birds. In the arch above his head the Latin name for April is woven. The other (pane) shows a mounted knight going out on an expedition, and in the arch over his head we read the word March. Evidently these two figures, picturing the occupations of the springtime are allegorical representations of the two spring months and probably the whole tapestry had an allegorical figure for each of the twelve months of the year - a subject very common to the ecclesiastical art of the middle ages."

During the Coolidge administration a replica of the tapestry, made by Kristi Sexe, one of

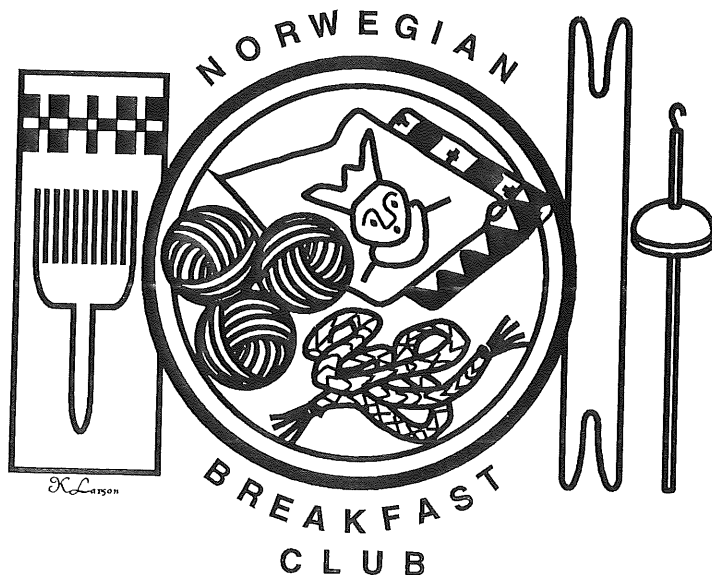
The looms are freestanding, a post-WWII adaptation of the Sami weavers of north Norway. They have one heddle rod that can be adjusted for height according to preference. The looms are made of pine and measure 70"W x 28"D x 66"H, although they come apart and can be shipped in a 12" x 12" x 72" box. The cost from Fireside, which the Museum is passing on directly, is \$365 plus \$35 packaging. Shipping is estimated at between \$25 and \$50, depending on location. There are also over 100 lbs. of carefully selected rocks on my back porch, but I encourage you to find your own weights.

If you are interested in purchasing a warp-weighted loom, please contact Kay Larson, 9390 Miller Rd, NE, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110, (206) 842-7734, [kaylarson@hotmail.com](mailto:kaylarson@hotmail.com). An exact shipping amount can be figured by using your zip code. Payment can then be made by credit card or check, payable to the Nordic Heritage Museum.

Seven looms remain, and will be sold on a first come, first served basis.

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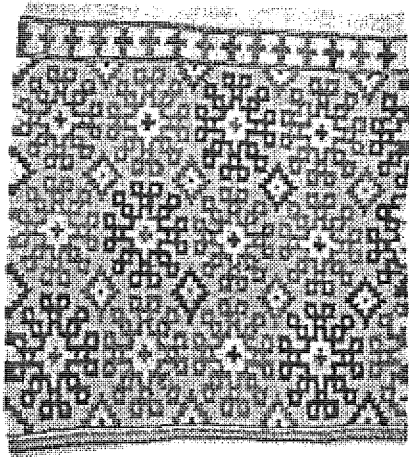
The Nordic Heritage Museum also has tote bags for the Norwegian Breakfast Club (now officially known as the Norwegian Textile Guild but still the Breakfast Club at heart). The totes have a zippered top and zippered pouch inside, and are made from natural colored canvas with red bottom panel and red handles, and a blue logo of a Norwegian weaver's breakfast on the side (below). To order, send a check to the Nordic Heritage Museum, 3014 NW 67th St, Seattle, WA 98117: tote bag \$7; shipping \$3.50 = \$10.50 (Washington residents add \$0.62 sales tax = \$11.12). Please indicate "textile tote bag" on check.



## The Woven Coverlets of Norway

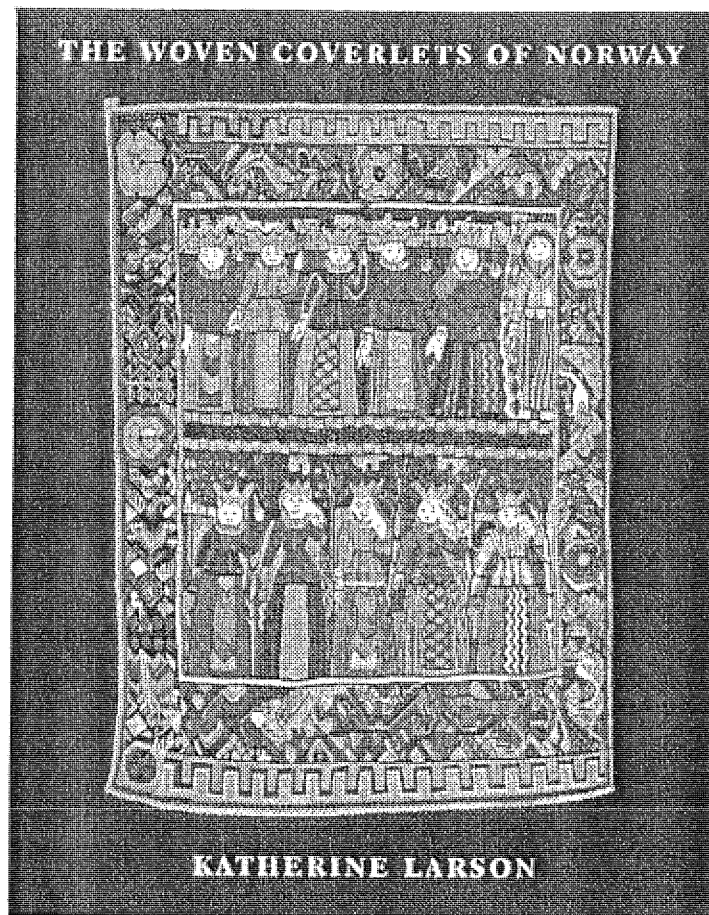
Katherine Larson

*The Woven Coverlets of Norway* Showcases one of Norway's most beautiful and enduring folk arts. A warm thick cover has always been important during Norway's long winter nights, but coverlets also decorated the family bedsteads in one-room farmhouses affording house-wives an opportunity to display their talents. Coverlets were a central feature in the important ceremonies of a person's life as well, wrapping an infant at christening, providing a cover for the marriage bed, and draping the coffin as a last offering of comfort to a loved one.



To explain the coverlet's importance as the pinnacle of the Norwegian weaver's art, Katherine Larson looks at the role textiles played in the lives of women prior to the 20th century. She takes readers through the yearly cycle in rural Norway and relates it to the many steps of cloth production in a pre-industrial era.

Larson describes traditional methods of preparing, spinning, dyeing, and weaving wool and flax, and the tools with which these tasks were performed. She devotes chapters to the different types of coverlets and their origins: tapestry, square weave, krokbragd, double weave, rya, and overshot. Numerous illustrations show patterns from ages past faithfully preserved in the coverlets of Norway.



In addition, the book includes a wealth of bibliographic sources and a complete glossary of weaving terminology.

**Katherine Larson** is a weaver and researcher in Seattle whose Norwegian-American background has inspired her study of Norwegian coverlets. Her book will appeal to anyone who owns or has ever admired an antique coverlet, and especially to Scandinavian Americans who are interested in their cultural heritage. The historical aspects of her work will be important to textile studies, women's studies, and art history.

*Published with the Nordic Heritage Museum, Seattle*

*September. 208 pp., 304 illus., 150 in color, 62 line drawings, map, table, notes, glossary, bibliog., index, LC2001018835, 9"x 11.25"*

*Cloth, ISBN 0-295-98130-X \$70.00(s)*

*Paper, ISBN 0-295-98131-8, \$40. 00*

*£50. 00 cloth, £28.50 paper, UK*



Textiles

Norway's first experts in weaving, was presented to the White House, as an expression of gratitude from Norwegian-American women, for the part played by Mrs Coolidge on the occasion of the Norse-American Centennial.

That Norway chose a home-spun, hand-dyed, and hand-woven tapestry, made by one of their own countrywomen, as being the highest form their expression of gratitude and friendship could take is indeed significant. It would indicate that the art of tapestry making had again reached a high standard of expression in Norway and that it was a form of art which came most familiarly from the hands of their women.

This is indeed true, for today the names of many Norwegian women are linked with the contemporary history of this form of art.

To Frida Hansen, a member of the Academie Francaise, and possessor of the Gold Medal of Norway, now well past her eightieth year, is to be given credit for the revival of the ancient art of Norwegian pictorial weaving.

During the eighties (1880's), Mme. Hansen, fired by a desire to make the glories of the past live again in weavings of the present, began her search for the secret of the making of pictorial tapestries. Working and studying for years, she searched throughout Norway, and at last discovered an old woman hidden away in the mountains, who taught her the lock-stitch and method which distinguishes Norwegian work from others in Europe. Later an old loom was found and after endless experiments with spinning and dyeing she succeeded in reproducing weavings in the old manner.

Her tapestries, made both from her own designs and those of the famous Norwegian painter Gerhard Munthe, are now owned by many royalties and by museums in capitals of Europe.

To one of her pupils, Berthea Aske Bergh, who displays a few of Mme. Hansen's tapestries in New York, at her shop of Norwegian arts and handcrafts, we are indebted for much of our

information. Mme. Bergh is herself a weaver of ability, and her lectures on Norway's art are familiar to museums and clubs throughout the United States. The lectures are accompanied by exhibitions of many of Mme. Hansen's original tapestries, and by pictures of the ancient masterpieces which remain in the museums of Norway.

*submitted by NTG member Vivian Mizuta*

## **“Artisan Clothing: Weaving and Design in Vadmel”**

**Welcome to Vinje, Telemark from June 23<sup>rd</sup>  
to July 5<sup>th</sup> 2002**

Specially planned course for weavers from North America and Norway to come together and enjoy the old craft of weaving vadmel at the farm Vesaas in Vinje. Vadmel (Norwegian) is also known as Loden (German), or fulled woolen cloth (English). It can be woven in different weights and fulled to meet the needs of a variety of types of garments. Each weaver will take a project from woolen yarn to a designer-made garment or outfit. Make your own outfit with a design specially created for you.

The course will be divided into two parts:

### **PART ONE: WEAVING AND FINISHING THE CLOTH**

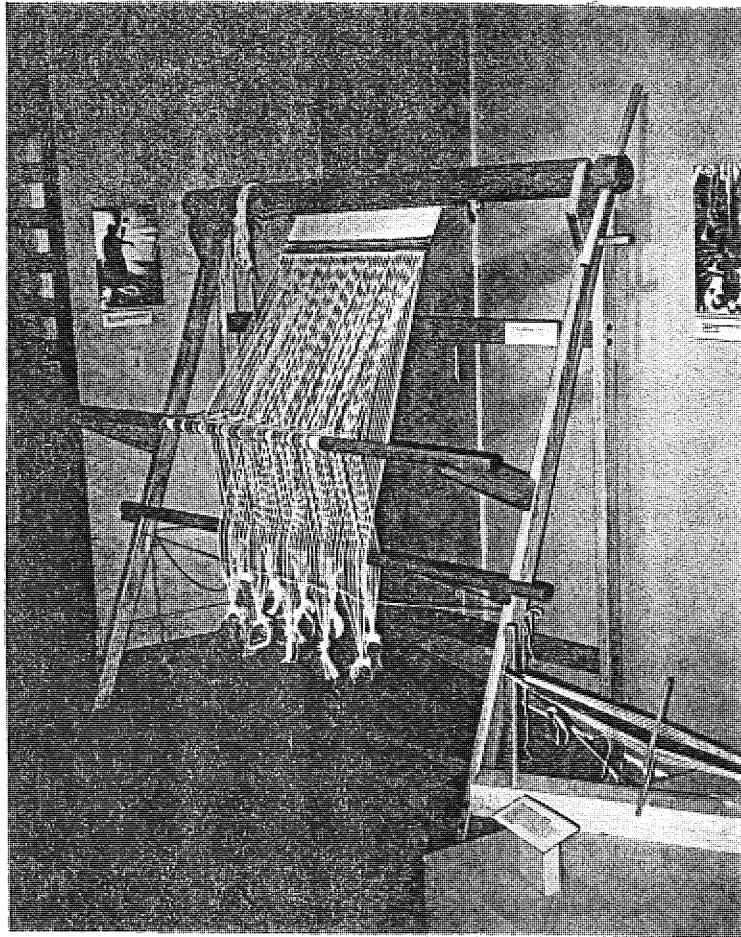
Part one includes the weaving and the processing of the material into vadmel cloth. Master weavers Eli Vesaas and Ingebjørg Vaagen will both be weaving teachers. At the farm Vesaas you will weave your special fabric that through the water fulling process will turn into the beautiful coarse woolen cloth. This old technique of turning the material into vadmel is done through a reconstructed outdoor fulling mill run by a water wheel. This is located on a stream not far from the Vesaas farm at the Mjonoy handcraft and cultural center. The finished cloth

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## WARP-WEIGHTED LOOMS FOR SALE

### Information Sheet

The Nordic Heritage Museum had 16 warp-weighted looms built by quality loom manufacturer Fireside Fiberarts of Pt. Ludlow, Washington, in preparation for workshops associated with the Conference on Norwegian Woven Textiles. These looms are now available for sale at cost plus shipping and handling.



Fireside warp-weighted loom as it appeared in the Nordic Heritage Museum's exhibition, *Woven Treasure: The Coverlets of Norway*.



## CONFERENCE ON NORWEGIAN WOVEN TEXTILES CANCELLED

Due to the terrorist attack in September and the subsequent withdrawal on September 20 of all our Norwegian speakers and workshop teachers, the Conference on Norwegian Woven Textiles and Pre-Conference Workshops, scheduled to be held October 1-6 in Seattle, was cancelled. The Nordic Heritage Museum deeply regretted becoming part of the wave of cancellations sweeping the country, but with over half the program missing on very short notice, it was impossible to proceed.

Initially, the Museum decided to wait six months before making a determination as to whether the conference could be rescheduled for fall of 2002. Many factors needed to be taken into account, including the dates of HGA Convergence in Vancouver, BC, the difficulty of coordinating speakers and teachers in a relatively short time frame, the continuing uncertainty in the international situation, and the attendant possibility of risking a future cancellation. With these factors in mind, the Museum has now decided that it is not possible to consider rescheduling the Conference in 2002, and is making the cancellation final.

The Museum sincerely regrets the disappointment this final cancellation may cause, and greatly appreciates the generous support offered by many conference registrants in the form of donations, museum memberships, book orders, and registrations left on hold until spring. Having made the decision to cancel instead of reschedule, however, the Museum will now complete the refund process.

As the organizer, I would like to thank all those who offered their valuable assistance during the planning process, a group that includes guild members in the Seattle area and across the country. I'd also like to acknowledge the enthusiastic response this conference was drawing from the many people I've had the pleasure of corresponding and conversing with over the past few years. The conference would have been a wonderful opportunity to gather and

enjoy our shared interest in Norwegian textiles, but I am certain that the Norwegian Textile Guild will continue to offer great conferences and textile tours in the future.

Kay Larson

### Classified Ad

**Rauma and Røros** Spælsau pure wool yarns from Norway for weaving and knitting. Eleven weights from Veving Nm 9 to Ryagarn for tapestry, band weaving, loom controlled weaving. \$4 for each sample card/weight.

New: Ullflor (carded wool), Forgarn (unspun wool), Spaltegrind kits for pattern band weaving, sweater patterns, rya botner (backing) in several sizes for hand knotting, rya patterns. Some items are special orders.

Telemark bunad and hair band patterns and yarns/two weights.

Mail order business and open by appt.

Syvilla Tweed Bolson  
512 Locust Road  
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