

'Sheep to Shawl' program presented



James Shearer demonstrates the fine art of shearing a sheep, made especially difficult by doing it on the uneven grass.

By SALLY BAIR
Feature Writer

Turning a freshly shorn fleece into a lovely woven shawl in the course of one day is no small task. Last Saturday at the Ephrata Cloister about 25 members of the Lancaster Spinners and Weavers Guild accomplished the job.

Beginning at 10:00 a.m. with the shearing of the sheep, they carded and spun the wool and wove it throughout the day. At 4:00 they auctioned off a beautiful woven shawl which brought \$35.00 for their efforts.

According to Guild member Judy Homan who organized the event, its purpose was "to educate the public in the process of producing a woolen garment."

Judy explained that in colonial days people would not have gathered under the trees for the purpose shown Saturday, but they often gathered in the winter months to "pass the time." A spinning bee was a social event, and helped the "long, tedious" job of spinning go faster.

To show the amount of



Helen Weit works at her spinning wheel, dressed in the garb of the Ephrata Cloister.

time spent in spinning in earlier days, Judy said, "It took seven spinners to supply one weaver." So the most time-consuming part of producing garments or textiles was in the spinning.

The grounds of the Cloister provided a beautiful setting for members of the Guild, most of whom were garbed in simple colonial style outfits. About fifteen spinning wheels were set up under the trees, and members socialized with each other and with spectators while they worked.

The spinners on Saturday were spinning "in the grease," that is, they did not take the time to wash the wool before weaving it. The garment would be washed after completion. The elimination of washing the wool obviously helped make it possible to complete the woven shawl that afternoon.

The first task of the day fell to James Shearer who sheared the sheep. He did the job quickly and with great expertise, explaining while he worked. He said it is important to keep the sheep from touching any one foot to the ground or it would fight and struggle to stand up. As it was, with four feet off the ground, his sheep cooperated nicely and appeared almost tranquilized.

The fleece was then "sorted." The sorting process is to remove the short, tag ends of the fleece around the stomach, legs and tail. These ends are full of dirt and grease and therefore undesirable for spinning. One participant said these short ends are good for mulching roses.

Next the wool was divided among the spinners who

carded it and spun it. The carding process is to get all the fibers running in one direction for ease of spinning.

There was an interesting variety of spinning wheels, both antique and newly hand-crafted as well as a wide array of spinning talents. In the friendly, informal atmosphere, spectators could freely have their questions answered and some even had the opportunity to participate.

Gradually as the spinners produced a quantity of thread it was transferred to the loom where the scarf was being woven. The warp of the shawl had been spun by Guild members earlier. To keep the garment uniform, only a few people did the actual weaving.

A highlight of the event was a demonstration of working sheep with border collies. Jim Shearer conducted the demonstration and succeeded in showing the efficient work of trained collies. He explained that the border collie responds to his natural instincts without commands when he has the flock in a large area.

He said the dogs are very obedient, very intelligent and very easy to train - also very easy to spoil. They have a lot of "herding instinct," he said, and they can be taught to work with many animals.

For the uninitiated it was a day filled with learning and seeing how our ancestors created their textiles. For the participants, it was a day of socializing, hard work and the satisfaction of creating a hand woven garment from the raw product.

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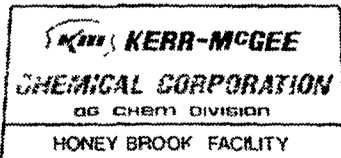
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