

THE PERIPATETIC WEAVER

By HELEN J. SCHOBINGER

*God loveth sinners
dyers and spinners
Weavers even
May hope for Heaven.*

AND IN SUMMER weaving schools, weavers even, may taste a little bit of heaven. No slothful person, no one who wishes only to sit and dream, becomes a weaver. Only those who find fun in doing, a thrill in creating; who are fascinated by the intricacy of draft and tie-up, the accuracy of warping and dressing a loom; who feel the rhythm of throwing a shuttle, are dyed in the wool weavers. To them the vacation pleasure of seeing new places and faces is deepened and emphasized when a few weeks of weaving can be tucked into the holiday schedule.

Even a chance visit to a new city may net an unexpected and happy experience. A day in the Cincinnati Art Museum brought an introduction to Miss Lorinda Eppley. Once a painter, she now translates her free forms into exquisite laid in designs in various weights of linen, for beautiful table mats and runners. That visit and Miss Eppley's work will always remain a pleasant memory.

Accompanying a business-minded husband to Seattle in the last year of the War, I telephoned one of the members of the Seattle Weaver's Guild. She was instantly cordial and invited me to a Guild meeting down near the waterfront, where I met the lively Seattle weavers. Among them were the late Mrs. Margaret Bergman, known both for the loom she designed and for her multi-harness weaving drafts, and Mrs. F. A. Hubbert, decorator and designer who was at that time president of the Guild. From then on my days in Seattle were full and interesting. The Guild was making rag rugs for Army hospitals in Alaska; I helped a bit to put on warps and weave. I visited weavers whose work was strongly reminiscent of their Scandinavian background.

One interesting day included a birthday party in a charming modern Northwest home overlooking the water where the owner raised prize winning great Pyrenees dogs, saving their long white hair for spinning and weaving. The two looms in her studio were Bergman designed but made of beautifully finished rare hardwoods.

Mrs. Bergman took me across the bay in a bouncing little boat to her island farm home in Poulsbo, and as we discovered mutual friends in Sweden and the United States, she patted my hand and said, "Aren't we lucky to be weavers?"



Ester Perheentupa's Home School of Weaving, Hameenlinna, Finland

A month in San Francisco, again accompanying my husband on business, was livened by weaving in the Art in Action Department of a mid-city shop. Here potters and block printers worked at their crafts and the striking weavings of the artists in the San Francisco area were exhibited.

Up in the hills above Mill Valley was the studio of colorful "Mama" Gravander, wearing the full skirt and kerchief of her native province in Sweden, with her looms ranged along the windowed length of her long living room. After seeing the Dukagang samplers which each of her students make as a goodbye gift, I too took a quick lesson in the technique. My little sampler with "April 1944" woven in it hangs in my workroom, to recall a lovely sunny day at a loom overlooking the mountains, and the laughter and weaving talk around the big round table at coffee time.

My first weaving experience abroad was in 1938 and 1939 when the children were in school in Switzerland. In Lausanne no one seemed to know of any local handweaving. "In the Oberland, yes, in Italian Switzerland, possibly, in French Switzerland, no." But the typically efficient Swiss directory gave me an address—"Tissage a la Main, 38 Le Maupas," and I hurried there, map in hand. "We knew you would come to use our third loom; someone always does," said tiny Marie Ferrari as we made our arrangements for week-day weaving during the winter. The atelier was two steps below street level, and the tile floor and the stone walls echoed the beat of the battens with a noisy bang, bang, *bang!* My loom, the counterpart of Miss Ferrari's was a huge heavy timbered one with attached bench, overhead beater and fly shuttle. That loom was far too heavy to "walk" and when I was inside, tying up the treadles, I felt as if I were in a little world apart. But the balance was perfect, the loom worked like a charm, and before long I had learned to use a fly shuttle.

The third loom was a beautiful Swedish Kontramarsch in blond pine used by Miss Ferrari's associate, Andree Dubois. She wove the lovely rainbow hued glass curtains and the handsome draperies with horizontal bands, often shading from jade green to silver and back again, which were so effective in high ceilinged Lausanne drawing rooms. These were specialties of the house and the orders for them seemed

[Continued on Page 42]

PERIPATETIC WEAVER

Continued from Page 12]

endless. They also wove suitings and upholsteries, all very sturdy and well made. The Swiss seemed quite willing to pay good prices for textiles, but demanded durability. They used linens exquisite in texture and color, and beautiful wools, some of them blended and spun by hand in the nearby canton of Valais. Cotton, perhaps because it was imported, was more highly esteemed in Switzerland than at home, and there was a wealth of dull finished cotton yarns in glowing colors and uneven as well as even spins from which to choose. None of the yarns were inexpensive, but the quality was outstanding.

Then came the first trip to Sweden, with a month in Säterglantan in Dalecarlia, 200 miles northwest of Stockholm. The name means a cabin near the summer pastures, and Säterglantan is a 20-minute drive from the railroad up through birch forests to a clearing where two rambling red farm houses shelter loom house, showroom, guest quarters and sunny dining room. Below along the road were three sturdy log corn cribs on stilts made into guest houses, and I had one of these. It was lined with knotty pine, furnished with double decker bed, hinged desk and dressing table, homemade chairs. The rugs, the plaid cotton curtains and bed spreads, the linen sheets and 5 harness waffle weave towels had all been woven in the school.

There were about 20 weaving students that summer from the Stockholm School of Handarbetets Vänner with which Säterglantan is associated, and a few American and British weavers who were, as I, spicing a holiday with weaving study. There was such a variety of techniques to learn. We helped each other put on warps, and then each in turn, wove a sizeable sample. Lace weave, rya and flossa, dalldrall, spatsväv, Finnväv and bound weaving—the days were never long enough to do them all. We bypassed the strict Sabbath rules by analyzing samples of textiles while sunning on the grassy hillside looking down over the treetops to blue Lake Siljan. I am currently using one of those Sunday made drafts and it takes me back in memory to that lovely August when the thought of war so soon to break upon us, never cast a shadow on our happy weaving.

It was there in Säterglantan that I first saw the very modern Finnish textiles which Mrs. Brigham and Mrs. Linnell of Villa Handcrafts in Providence brought back from a flying trip to Helsinki.

But it was ten years later that I had the chance to spend some weeks in that lake studded country with its strong and friendly women who have done such outstanding things in their craft schools for the teaching of weaving. In Stockholm I had bought an excellent Finnish weaving book and when the trip to Finland seemed probable, I wrote to the author. Mrs. Henriksson answered that she had retired as Inspector of the 32 state weaving schools, but that she had spoken to the present Chief Inspector and they would gladly help me to find a place in which to weave during my stay in Finland. Within an hour of my arrival in Helsinki last August, Mrs. Henriksson called at the hotel with an attractive young interpreter, Miss Lehtmäki, the business head of the state craft schools, to take me back to her apartment for coffee. We were completely surrounded by hand weaving there, coffee cloth, cosy for the coffee pot in elaborate Finnväv, couch and pillow covers, most of them gifts from associates and students, for Mrs. Henriksson had been a weaving teacher since the tender age of 16 and very active in establishing weaving instruction in the highly organized system of craft schools throughout the country. At once they began planning my six weeks stay, and I was quite content to leave my program in their kind and capable hands. In Helsinki I was to visit Dora Jung, Finland's most famous damask weaver, whose beautiful work had been shown in the New York World's Fair, and who had only recently returned to her studio after being twice bombed out. I was to see the local workshop of the state schools where neighborhood women could rent looms for small sums for the weaving of special projects—a length of cloth for a coat, linen for a daughter's wedding chest. Then in climax "We have arranged that you will live in Hämeenlinna with teacher Perheentupa. You may weave in her private school until the big Wetterhof school opens late in the month." I was delighted, for Ester Perheentupa's books were also part of my treasured weaving library.

By tiny wood burning train, by small steamer through endless forest bordered blue lakes I travelled to Hämeenlinna, a pleasant inland town built by the Swedes centuries ago around a castle which housed one of their mad kings. Miss

Perheentupa's modern house with its many-windowed weaving wing, surrounded by lush garden, is on a new boulevard, Lahdensivuntie, "street along the curve of the bay." She herself is a definite, matter of fact person with much bounce and energy and a delightful smile. But alas, she speaking no English, and I no Finnish, sat smiling at each other, but getting nowhere, until all out of breath arrived Miss Savola, English teacher and one time resident of Michigan. She was to be a kind fairy throughout my stay. The arrangements were concluded in short order and I was installed in a neat little room overlooking the garden and the lake. Weaving began at once on looms that were so like my own Swedish one that work seemed easy. With the universal language of the weaving draft, plus sign language, a few words of Swedish and much laughter, Miss Perheentupa and I managed to understand each other surprisingly well. In moments of stress however, we would telephone one of her English speaking friends who would translate with some amusement until our difficulties were solved. And at least once a week, Miss Perheentupa would have guests for coffee who would take their turn at interpreting, too, so understanding each other was no problem.

There were about 20 looms in the weaving wing and several spinning wheels, warping mills and bobbin winders in the airy classroom downstairs. All the equipment and materials were of the best, and the girls kept every corner of that busy place in perfect order. Though it was summer, there were eight or nine girls in residence, living in a sunny

dormitory on the second floor and cooking their simple food on a wood stove in the basement. From 8 until 5 they wove on orders for Miss Perheentupa's clients, interrupted occasionally by a cheery call from the door when they would drop their shuttles, pick up notebook and pencil and scuttle, stocking footed, downstairs for a class in pattern analysis, or spinning, or draft writing. Only one of the students knew more than a few words of English and she, a student in the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, was spending part of her holiday, weaving pale green draperies for her bedroom at home. Her lovely rich voice singing some of the Sibelius ballads would rise above the beat of the battens. But even without words, the girls were all helpful and smiling, and all of them volunteered a good morning whether it was 9 A.M. or 3 P.M.

No matter what I wove, they would pause by my loom and breathe "Kauniss"—tho' it was their weaving so uniformly exquisite in detail, even in beat, which was "kauniss," beautiful. Most of the weaving in the work room was done on 8 harnesses, though 6 and 12 were sometimes used. The number of harnesses seemed of no concern to the girls who read and wrote drafts and tieups for any number with equal ease.

At last the Wetterhof school was open, but by that time I was in the midst of weaving a Karelian border with 4 harnesses and 16 frames of doups, and nothing could have pried me from so fearsome and fascinating an occupation.

[Continued on Page 44

Continued from Page 43]

Besides, I could well see that the close and personal attention which Miss Perheentupa, formerly weaving head of Wetterhof, gave me could never be expected in the big state school for teachers.

But I shall never forget the day we visited the great school. Miss Anni Blomstedt, the director, a little reminiscent of Queen Victoria in figure and in utter dignity, swept along at the head of a little procession, with me at her elbow, and several teachers behind. As a classroom door opened, every student rose and remained standing while Miss Blomstedt showed me their work. In a ring of 30 or more spinning wheels, they were spinning beautifully even linen yarn. At small looms they were doing damask and lace and intricate patterns—and on larger ones, the pieces which would later be displayed for sale in the beautiful shop on the street floor, bolts of glass curtains, upholsteries, rugs in variations of flossa and half flossa, luncheon sets and cushion tops, towels and pillow cases. It was a most amazing display of industry and range of techniques.

As the train pulled into the station when I was leaving, Miss Perheentupa leaned toward me, "Neiti Savola, Engelsk idag" (English lesson today from Miss Savola), she said in a nice mixture of Swedish and Finnish, and sure enough, I have had two letters since then, written in English. My hat is off to a person who, not satisfied with an impressive weaving knowledge, begins the study of a new and difficult language at middle age. Who knows—some day I may go back

to Hämeenlinna now that Miss Perheentupa no longer needs an interpreter, and learn more about writing multi-harness drafts.

A session at Cranbrook summer school in Michigan, with Robert Sailors instructing, was an experience few in his weaving class would have missed. His detached criticism based on experience and the success of his prize winning entries in many textile shows, combined with the qualities of a slave driver, plus an evident desire to be helpful, spurred his class on to efforts and results beyond their usual reach. The entire emphasis of the course was on the use of color and texture, and the threading of all samplers was on simple twill. Mr. Sailors' ambitious program for the 6 weeks included lines of samples in rya and rope rugs, draperies of several weights, upholsteries, suitings, with one larger project to be made at the end as a sort of thesis. The goal per day was a two yard line of 6 inch square samples warped, threaded, woven, cut-off, stitched, pressed and mounted. It was understandable that lights burned longer in the weaving studio than in any other on the Academy Street. It was understandable, too, that as the weavers, with only the briefest of after-dinner cigarettes, pushed through the relaxed crowd on the dining hall steps to go back to work, there was an audible murmur "There go the loomies!" But in spite or because of the pressure, every weaver seemed to feel that that summer course was one of the most inspiring and exciting he had ever had.

Mr. Sailors' own work exhibited in the show cases, and in progress in his loom just beyond the studio, included fascinating examples of the imaginative use of unusual materials and vivid color.

Of great interest too were the weavings of Mrs. Saarinen whose work had in the beginning set the standards for the department. There were her typically Finnish rug in the gallery of long rya fringes of grey linen overlaying a brilliant scarlet foundation, the characteristic weft spaced glass curtains hanging in her own home, the sun yellow rya rug in the windowed end of her husband's architectural studio.

To be remembered too was the day when Marianne Strengell, the head of the department, invited us to view the sketches and the colorful swatches she had woven for the furnishing and decoration of the new and luxurious Cincinnati Terrace Plaza Hotel—all of which were to be developed on power looms. And to be recalled with pleasure too, was her charm and friendliness as in apron and rubber gloves she joined two of us in the dye room. She was dyeing samples for a client; we, our combination samplers of wool rayon, silk and cotton, each of which would take the dye in a different degree.

However, it is not only at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, with its fabulous surroundings, its fine buildings, its wonderful Milles sculpture on every side, that summer weaving instruction is to be found. There are many centers in the United States, as well as in Europe, where able teachers and the stimulating companionship of other weavers will spur the student to greater appreciation of, and skill in the craft, along with a delightful and unforgettable holiday. Then indeed we will all have had our little share of Heaven. • • •