

Norman Kennedy's Visit by W.W.

Norman Kennedy's visit to the Colorado Springs went very well and the guild members who were lucky enough to interact with him gained new perspectives on our interests.

The waulking held at Penrose House was attended by 25-30 people. Norman's talk of his experiences learning to weave in Scotland and developing his skills in the United States was fascinating but the real draw was when we sat down at the table with a length of 11 yards of wet cloth. Attendees were encouraged to join in with pounding and passing the cloth as Norman sang old Scottish ballads and songs to set the beat. It was a trip to another time as we turned loosely woven fabric into fulled blankets without the benefit of machinery by working together. People traded in, replacing those of us that wore out, and everyone got a chance to try their hand at waulking. The evening concluded with the blankets being stretched on a plank of wood and Norman giving the clothe a traditional Scottish blessing as he rotated it "sunwise".

There were 14 people that took advantage of the spinning workshop on Tuesday and Wednesday at the Penrose Carriage House. Though I was not able to attend I received many complementary comments for the workshop from those who took part. Norman's teaches the old way of spinning and started everyone off with the absolute basics of how to prepare the wool by picking and carding. Most of us have learned our spinning from books and Norman is the first to point out how wrong most of those techniques are. Learning the correct way to hand card alone was worth the price of the workshop!! The second day was filled with working with flax and cotton and it was a great opportunity to work with those fibers most of us never touch. It seemed most of those that tried these fibers enjoyed the experience but will probably not make it their new focus.

Norman spent the rest of his time in the Springs sightseeing and getting to know our local spinners and weavers. He spent quite a bit of time at Green Valley Weavers and Knitters where he was very impressed with the quality of our local shop. While he was visiting the shop some of us had rare chance to see spinning history. A local spinner and teacher, Sharon Dalrymple, was lucky enough to find a great or walking wheel for sale in Denver. She brought the wheel, which was in pieces and had been used a living room display item, to the shop for Norman to take a look at to see if all the pieces were there. Within an hour Norman had the wheel put together, adjusted and was busy spinning fine cotton thread on this 19th century antique. Those of us that were present saw spinning on a type of wheel is rarely seen outside a museum.

As we were talking, we were told these types of wheels are common in New England and Norman has a friend that has connections with Amish and Mennonite communities that has several for sale. If enough people are interested I have decided I will make a trip to Vermont to transport wheels and looms to Colorado. These wheels looms are in good working condition with prices in the \$400-600 range. If anyone is interested contact me and I will try to make this happen by September.

Weather unfortunately precluded Norman performing in Woodland Park while he was here but he has already expressed interest in returning for another visit. He is a wonderful and fascinating man with a wealth of knowledge concerning our passions of weaving and spinning. He expressed his thanks for receiving such a warm welcome and meeting so many wonderful people.

At right, photos of Norman Kennedy's visit by Robin Wilton.