



ARMENIAN RUGS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Volume V, Number 1 * San Francisco, California, USA * August, 2008

BARRY O'CONNELL LECTURE IN SEATTLE

On Friday, August 17, 2007, several Bay Area members of the Armenian Rugs Society met in Seattle, Washington, to attend a meeting jointly sponsored by Emmanuel's Rug and Upholstery Cleaners (currently headed by ARS member Thea Sand, the fourth generation of her family to run the business), the Seattle Textile and Rug Society, and the Armenian Rugs Society. Meeting us in Seattle were Jack and Joan Agajanian Quinn of Beverley Hills, who had arrived a day earlier and were already touring local museums. That evening, we joined Thea and our speaker, Barry O'Connell (author of *Oriental Rugs and Persian Rugs: the O'Connell Notes*, and numerous other articles and on-line rug blogs), at a marvelous Afghan restaurant, where we had a fine meal and an opportunity to renew old friendships and make new ones.

The next morning we made our way to Thea's shop for a tour and a chance to meet some of her family members and long-time employees. Everyone pitched in to help decorate the area where the meeting would be held, hanging rugs, offering suggestions for the arrangement of rugs, and taking photographs (the Seattle photos in this newsletter were taken by Nancy Kushigian—thank you, Nancy). Several of us had brought Caucasian rugs to share, and some of these went on display as well.

Later that same day we returned to the shop for the



Barry O'Connell with Armenian carpets

meeting. Thea had put together a wonderful array of hors d'oeuvres, there was plenty of wine, and as rug enthusiasts trickled in, ARS members even managed to sell a few copies of *PASSAGES*, the catalogue from our 2002 exhibition in San Francisco, and of Vahram Tatikyan's groundbreaking book, *Ancestral Carpets of Karabagh*. Audience members had come from up and down the west coast, including Canada—impressive! Thea also provided a cake, to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of Emmanuel's—the business was founded in Seattle in 1907 by John Manoug Emmanuelian, an Armenian immigrant originally from Aghin in central Turkey.

Barry's talk for the evening was titled "The Armenian Rugs of Erivan and Borchaly in the Nineteenth Century: A Reconstruction of Armenian History" and provided a fascinating exploration of Armenian rug-making and of the comings and goings of the Armenian population of the Caucasus. For years, Barry has been



Show and Tell

continued on page 3

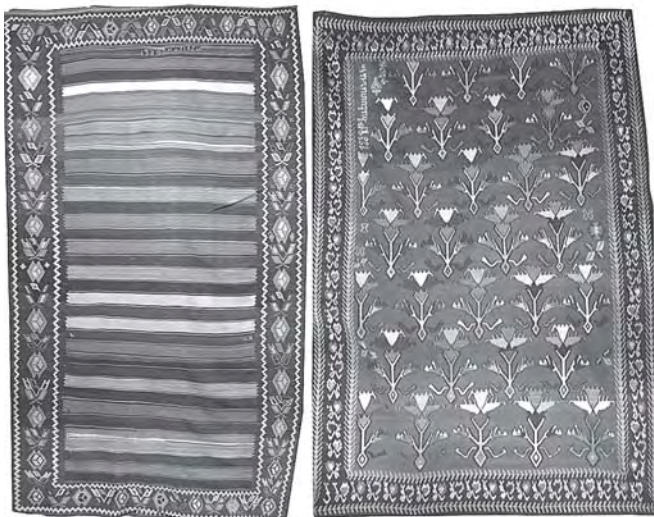
MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



John D. Megerian

On behalf of the ARS board, I would like to wish all of our members and friends a wonderful year! The Armenian Rugs Society has entered a new era and our goal is to recreate a multi-national society with a diverse group of members. The ARS would like to give a special thanks to Mr. Dikran Hagopian of North Salem, New York, for his generous donations to our society. Mr. Hagopian

and his family have donated two Karabagh Kilims containing Armenian inscriptions, dated 1930 and 1931 respectively. These rugs will be displayed at our next ARS event in the Megerian Showrooms in New York in the fall of 2008. We hope that Mr. Hagopian himself will be present at our next event in order to tell us the story of how he came across these unique antique Armenian rugs. The rugs will be safely preserved by the ARS and will be shown at future exhibitions with credit being given to the Hagopian family. We hope this will serve as a precedent for fellow ARS members and



Here are the two kilims donated to the Armenian Rugs Society by Mr. Dikran Hagopian and his family. For a color view of the kilim on the right and a translation of the inscription, go to www.armenianrugssociety.com/archive_armenian_rug_month08.html, and click on "May." The kilim on the left will be the Rug of the Month sometime this fall; check the website later this year for details and a color view of this piece.

friends to enrich our society by donating unique Armenian antique rugs.

As the ARS is in a stage of expansion we have many ambitious plans for the years to come. We are in the process of planning a large exhibition to take place either in the United Nations in New York City or the Sardarabad Museum in Armenia. Our goal is to preserve Armenia's rich cultural history regarding Armenian rug weaving while familiarizing other cultures about our heritage and traditions. We look forward to a successful year and encourage all members to participate in the revival of the Armenian Rugs Society.

—John D. Megerian

ARMENIAN GOVERNMENT HONORS RAFFI MEGERIAN

In December, 2007, the Honorable Tigran Torosian, President of the Parliament of the Republic of Armenia, presented Raffi Megerian, President of Megerian Rugs and father of new ARS president John D. Megerian, with a Gold Medal of Honor for his part in the revitalization of handmade rug



The Hon. Tigran Torosian and Raffi Megerian

production in Armenia. Although others have tried to revive this traditional craft since Armenia gained independence from the former Soviet Union, Megerian has been the most successful, with over twenty rug weaving facilities and thousands of employees internationally. Torosian also expressed his gratitude to Megerian for the family's efforts to preserve this important aspect of Armenian identity and culture.

Megerian expressed his gratitude for this honor and stated that he accepts the medal not only on behalf of his family but also for everyone involved in carpet production. He further stated that all Armenians must support their nation and their heritage, adding his opinion that government support is essential to continuing progress.

—extracted from a press release provided by John D. Megerian

continued from page 1

collecting information on oriental rugs and has created what he describes as "a constantly evolving body of work," much of which he has made available on his various websites—visit <http://www.spongobongo.com> and <http://www.persiancarpetguide.com>. In this lecture, he presented a comprehensive account of the transition from the Persian Caucasus to the Czarist Caucasus and the effects of this transition on Armenian rug-making.

Barry has combined information from an incredible array of sources and has formulated some extremely original ideas about Caucasian rugs. He has studied the history of the area in remarkable detail, and has delved into information often ignored by rug scholars as they try to determine who wove what types of rugs: Government population counts of different nationalities in specific towns, and the wars and other historical events that



Levon Der Bedrossian, our hostess Thea Sand, Araxi Bexdjian, Joan Agajanian Quinn, and Carol Lax Hoerner

forced movement of those populations, sometimes leaving and then later returning to the same location; taxation rates imposed on dyers of different color yarns and on other craftsmen fabricating goods used in making rugs; economic conditions that led weavers who had made rugs only for their own use to make rugs to sell, often in designs inherited from other populations who had at one time inhabited the same towns; variations in rug fabrication (wefts, selvages, colors, etc.) by those same tribes and nationalities; religious bases for the choice of profession; minerals and other natural resources (often used as mordants) found in different localities of the near east (making a strong case for which colors of yarn were produced in which areas—different mordants will create variations in yarn color, even using the same natural dyes). One can thereby draw reliable conclusions as to where a rug originated and who wove it. Barry also speculated as to the factors that make a person

identifiably an Armenian—or that make a rug Armenian. He has concluded that many types of rugs were woven by groups other than those generally thought to be the weavers; specifically, he believes Armenians wove more rugs and more types of rugs than other scholars think they did. The evening ended with a question and answer session, much discussion, and a show-and-tell.

This is an extremely brief synopsis of a talk so rich in information it is nearly impossible to include more than a fraction of everything covered. Barry is a scholar with an astounding ability to bring together facts from many seemingly unrelated sources and present a new and original way of looking at information we thought we had thoroughly digested long before.

To end the visit to Seattle, ARS members spent Sunday morning visiting landmarks including the Space Needle and Pike's Place Market, then met Thea and Barry at the Seattle Art Museum for lunch and a look around the museum. Thank you, Thea, for putting together this wonderful weekend, and thank you, Barry, for a truly fascinating lecture!

—Lorraine Amirian Parker

JOINT MEETING OF THE ARS & THE SFBARS

S. Peter Poullada, president of the SFBARS, describes our recent meeting in the SFBARS newsletter as follows:

"I am happy to say that we have all benefited from our increasing cooperation and joint activities with the fun-loving and enthusiastic members of the Armenian Rugs Society. We had another terrific joint event on May 14th, 2008, at the Simonian Gallery and Showroom in San Mateo, attended by over fifty people, with tasty catering from the chefs at La Mediterranee (San Francisco and Berkeley—SFBARS [and ARS] member Levon Der Bedrossian, proprietor) and from members of the Armenian Rugs Society. The show and tell on tribal weavings of the Zagros Mountains went on for over an hour, and some fabulous pieces were displayed. We hope that this joint event can become a spring tradition among Bay Area carpet aficionados."

We also had the rare opportunity to see *People of the Wind*, the marvelous 1976 film showing the yearly migration of the Babadi, a branch of the Bakhtiari tribe, to their summer pastures high in the Zagros mountains. Many thanks to the Bay Area Rug Society for putting together this wonderful evening!

NEWS OF THE CALIFORNIA RUG

Many of you will remember Vicki Fraser, who brought a small rug on a quarter-scale loom (a model of the larger California rug loom) all the way from her home in Mendocino, California, to San Francisco. There, with Angela Risser, she demonstrated oriental rug weaving at our 2002 *PASSAGES* exhibition. Vicki generously shared her knowledge and gave many of us the opportunity to work on the smaller rug.

The California rug was being made using entirely pre-industrial methods: Cotton spinning and plying, and wool fleece preparation, spinning and dyeing. Mordant was applied using the ancient middle eastern 28-day cold water method rediscovered by Nest Rubio, a master rugmaker and dyer from England who taught Vicki the process. All dyes were made from natural materials, and even the loom was designed and built by Vicki's son, Simon. Over fifty miles of California-grown cotton were spun by hand to produce the warp and weft of the rug; spinning just the warp took three years.

Vicki first conceived the idea for the California rug in 1981 while studying at the Royal School of Needlework. In 1994, Vicki began the lengthy process of making the rug, and at a celebration held in Mendocino in August, 2007, the rug was finally cut off the loom.

The finished rug is 5 feet by 15 feet, and the proportions match those of the state. Although a contemporary design, the rug incorporates traditional

Oriental rug features including multiple borders and a central field, each of which represents an aspect of the state, from the ocean to the plants and crops to the various businesses found here. Vicki also depicts the legendary figure of Califia, after whom the state was named.

The California rug was most recently displayed at the Conference of Northern California Handweavers in Sacramento, and we hope it will soon be possible to see it again. Congratulations, Vicki, for a job beautifully done!



For color photos and more information, go to www.californiarug.org.

ARS NEWS

In February, 2008, following the resignation of Levon Der Bedrossian as President, Vice-President John D. Megerian was appointed President of the Armenian Rugs Society. Based in New York, John is CEO of the Megerian Rug Company, his family's business (see news about his father, Raffi Megerian, elsewhere in this issue). To read more about John, go to www.armenianrugssociety.com and then to the "News"



page. We welcome John's youth and enthusiasm, and we are hoping for an exciting year!

This 9' x 12'6" Heriz rug was recently donated to the ARS by Mrs. Nancy Mueller of the Bay Area. During the past few years, rugs have also



been donated by member Ara Simonian of Glendale, California, and by Richard Hagopian of the San Francisco Peninsula; these rugs were sold at auction, with all proceeds going to the ARS.

Plans are now being made for the ARS biennial meeting, to be held in New York the weekend of October 3-5, 2008, at the Megerian Rug Co. headquarters. The Megerian family is arranging for a display of rugs, speakers, a dinner, and visits to well-known rug dealers, auction companies, or museums. If you wish to attend, please e-mail John D. Megerian at john@megerianrugs.com, and he will send you information on the schedule, hotel accomodations, admission charges for members and non-members, and other details as soon as they are finalized. That information will also be available on our website, www.armenianrugssociety.com.

FROM THE EDITOR

Since there hasn't been a newsletter for a while, this issue is a fairly quick run-through of Armenian Rugs Society events over the past few months. We have also mentioned the noteworthy activities of a few members. If we have inadvertently omitted your adventures or your epiphanies, please accept our apologies; it's not easy to keep up with a group as full of interesting, talented people as the ARS!

After being editor since we revived the newsletter shortly after the *PASSAGES* exhibition in 2002, I think it's time for me to retire. It's been great fun, but I need to move on. After this issue, I'd like to hand the newsletter over to someone else.

We therefore need a new editor for the ARS newsletter—someone fluent in English, as many ARS members don't read Armenian (We also have many non-Armenian members, for whom an Armenian-language newsletter would be completely inaccessible). We also hope to find someone competent in Photoshop and Pagemaker (or the equivalents). The newsletter has been published one to three times a year, and there is also the possibility of sending the newsletter electronically (so those of you who haven't given us an e-mail address are invited to do so when you renew your membership). The newsletter could also be put together by a team, as we have done here: Our newsletters could never have been produced without the computer and design skills of Jay Jones, who has given unstintingly of his time and expertise; and without Joe Bezdjian, who has always given generous access to his computer equipment and supplies, and unfailingly of his time, his ideas, and his gift for diplomacy. Thank you!

Anyone interested in becoming editor of the Armenian Rugs Society newsletter is invited to e-mail me at zlorr@yahoo.com. Aspiring writers are always welcome!

—Lorraine Amirian Parker

NEW EXECUTIVE BOARD

John D. Megerian, President
Joseph Bezdjian, Vice-President
Karleen Hall, Secretary
Lorraine Amirian Parker, Treasurer

MEMBERSHIP REMINDER

Although we let membership renewal notices slide after the wildly successful membership drive spearheaded by Carol Lax Hoerner in 2006, we're now trying to catch up. All current members will soon receive a mailing from the ARS asking for 2008 membership dues.

Beginning in 2009, membership will be renewed once a year, in January. We will maintain our regular dues of \$50.00 per year for an individual, \$60.00 for a family (couple), and \$100.00 for a corporate (or business) membership. Donor (\$250.00) and Patron (\$500.00) dues will also be offered. Members who join at one of these two upper levels will receive a letter acknowledging their special gift; this letter will be acceptable as a donation receipt for income taxes. We are dropping our "mailings only" category.

From now on, members who do not remain current with their dues will be dropped from the mailing and e-mail lists, and board members who fail to renew will be dropped from the board as well. All memberships are payable in United States dollars, and should be sent to The Armenian Rugs Society, 931 No. Amphlett Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94401, USA. (Note our new street address number.)



Here is member Thea Sand (whose photo also appears elsewhere in this issue). She has just returned from an international exhibition of handknotted rugs in Kish, Iran, in conjunction with a trip to Dubai and Oman; this photo was taken in Iran.



USA
San Mateo CA 94401
931 N. Amphlett Blvd.
Armenian Rugs Society



The Armenian Rugs Society, founded in 1980, is dedicated to the preservation, documentation, and advancement of the artistic and cultural contributions made by Armenian rug weavers to the rich and vibrant history of textile arts.

DATES TO SAVE:

October 3-5, 2008 - ARS Biennial meeting at the Megerian Rug Company in New York.

October 29, 2008 - Art historian Lauren Arnold will speak on "Oriental Carpets in Renaissance Paintings." This talk will be held at Rugs and Carpets, 931 North Amphlett Blvd, San Mateo, and is being sponsored by the West Coast chapter of the ARS; details to follow.

Details are inside, or check our website at www.armenianrugssociety.com.