



# Armenian Rugs Society Newsletter

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**JAMES MARK KESHISHIAN**  
May 11, 1925 - May 15, 2003

James Mark Keshishian, 78, who for the past 30 years was president of Mark Keshishian & Sons, his family's oriental carpet business in Chevy Chase, Maryland and who was also a leader in Washington D.C.'s Armenian community, died May 15 at his daughter's home in McLean, Virginia. He had cancer.

Mr. Keshishian's business—started by his father first in London and then in the Washington area in 1931—provided carpets to high-profile government clients, including the White House, the State Department and foreign embassies.

He lectured widely about oriental carpets, was a senior appraiser with the American Society of Appraisers and was a founder and former president of the Armenian Rugs Society. His book, *Inscribed Armenian Rugs of Yesteryear*, was published in 1994.

He saw his rug collecting as a way of preserving his family's Ottoman Armenian heritage. He also raised funds for Armenian causes and was a founding member of Soorp Khatch Armenian Apostolic Church in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

Mr. Keshishian, who lived in Chevy Chase, was born in Belgium and raised in Washington D.C. He was a 1943 graduate of Wilson High School. During World War II, he served in the Army in the European and Pacific theaters and received two Bronze Stars. After the war, he graduated from the Ohio Mechanics Institute in Cincinnati and took business classes at George Washington University.

In the 1950's and 1960's, he was president of his family business, Senate Laundry, a commercial laundry service for many Washington hotels and hospitals.

He was a former national president of what is now the Association of Specialists in Cleaning and Restoration. His memberships included Congressional Country Club in Bethesda and the Cosmos Club.

His avocations included playing golf, smoking cigars and collecting rare Armenian coins, including some dating back as early as AD 163. He also was a Republican Party fundraiser.

Survivors include three children, Mark Keshishian, Lora Picini and Leon Keshishian; two brothers, Dr. John Keshishian and Harold M. Keshishian; and three grandchildren.

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Presentation of appreciation award to James M. Keshishian from the Armenian Rugs Society, Bay Area Chapter. *Left to right:* Mark Keshishian, Haig Klujian, Joseph Bezdjian, Jim, Harold Keshishian, Patrick Tchiloian, Dr. Paul Ryan and Kirk Keshishian, Washington, D.C., April, 2003.

### Message From Joe Bezdjian

Since our last newsletter, the ARS has suffered a great loss. Our beloved founder, president, colleague and friend, Jim Keshishian, passed away on May 15, 2003. He was fighting cancer, which finally caught up with him.

Last April, Haig Klujian and I went to Washington, D. C. to see Jim. Our visit was just one month before Jimmy passed away, and the only visit after the *Passages* exhibition. We met at the home of Jimmy's brother, Harold, and it was an emotional visit for everyone. Somehow, we felt that this would be the last time we would see Jimmy.

Jim was an inspiration to all of us. We will always remember his tireless efforts to promote our organization and Armenian culture and art. He loved to talk and tell stories about Oriental Rugs, particularly inscribed Armenian rugs. Jimmy, we will miss you. May you rest in peace.

Our secretary, Lorraine Amirian Parker, had a severe case of bacterial pneumonia. She has now returned to her busy life. Welcome back, Lorraine.

Our member and supporter, Peter Balakian, has a new book coming out in late September, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response*. We hear that

this volume will convince many people of the historical facts regarding the Armenian Genocide. Mr. Balakian will be in the Bay Area November 3-4 on a book tour.

*Passages* catalogues are selling well, but we still have enough for holiday gifts. Please contact the ARS for further information.

We are having a meeting on Wednesday, October 29, 2003. Our speaker will be Paul Ramsey. Paul lives in Denver, Colorado. (See biography on the next page.) His presentation is titled **A Group of Interesting Armenian Kilims**. These kilims, said to be from Karabagh, have a distinctive slit tapestry weave and many have Armenian inscriptions. The meeting will be held at the Simonian Oriental Rugs Showroom, 931 N. Amphlett Blvd., San Mateo, CA, at 7:30 PM. There will be refreshments. Bring your inscribed rugs and kilims and let the experts analyze them. We also invite members of the Bay Area Rug Society to this event—please join us on October 29th. If you live outside the Bay Area and happen to be here on October 29, please come to the meeting.

Finally, consider becoming a member of the ARS, or, if you are already a member, please renew. Your dues are the backbone of our society and are the means by which we fund our exhibitions. There is a membership form on the back of this newsletter.

See you on October 29, 2003!

## A Group of Interesting Armenian Kilims by Paul Ramsey

**On Wednesday, October 29, 2003, Paul Ramsey will be speaking to the ARS at the Simonian Oriental Rug Showroom, 931 N. Amphlett Blvd., San Mateo, CA, at 7:30 pm. Hors d'oeuvres and wine will be served. For information, call (650)343-8585.**

Paul Ramsey has been buying and selling oriental rugs for almost thirty years, during which time he has traveled in rug producing countries documenting rug production and trading in oriental rugs. He has photographed dyers and weavers, towns and tribes. Widely known as a traveler and specialist on the rugs and weavings of Iran, Turkey and Afghanistan, Paul is keenly interested in tribal and cottage-industry rugs.

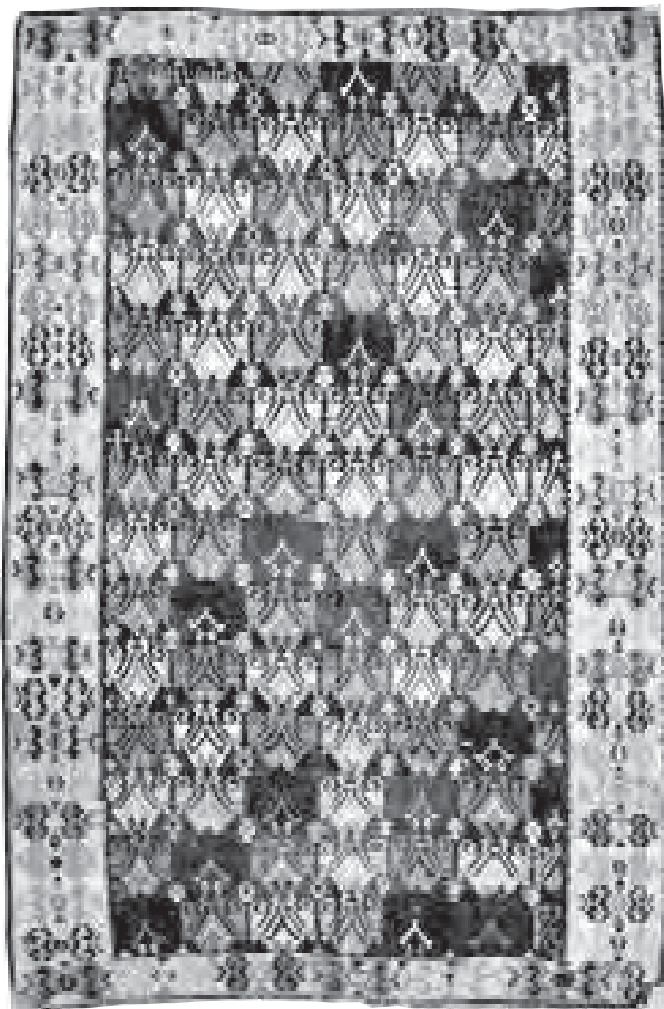
He was President of the Rocky Mountain Textile Society from 1983-87, and a Director of the Asian Art Association at the Denver Art Museum 1984-88, acting as president for two years. He is a founder of the American Conference on Oriental Rugs (ACOR), and served as President of the ACOR Board for three years. In addition to teaching his yearly course on rugs, "The Magic Carpet Ride," for over twenty years, he has served as consultant to museums and as co-curator of the exhibition *Prayer Rugs of the Caucasus* held at the Denver Art Museum in 1998.

Paul's retail rug store, Shaver-Ramsey, has been in Denver for twenty-six years. He will celebrate the first anniversary of Krimsa, his San Francisco store, this October.

## Notes From The Editor

Now that Jim Keshishian, the last of the founders of the Armenian Rugs Society, is no longer with us, we must ask ourselves what we want from the organization. We are currently based in the San Francisco Bay Area, and, in spite of having put together an impressive exhibition last year, those of us who have recently become involved in the group are still novices.

Although we would eventually like to mount an exhibition in Yerevan, drawing on the resources of the various museums in the Armenian capital, the next major event will be in Chicago within the next year or two. Do you have Armenian rugs to exhibit? Do you have expertise in the area of Armenian textiles and would you like to share your knowledge as a speaker at the symposium? Are you able to spend some time working with our Chicago members to make sure this exhibit is as successful as previous ones have been? Or do you have ideas for a theme for such an undertaking? Jim and others have suggested an exhibit wherein an inscribed rug and a non-inscribed rug that are similar are displayed side by side, showing that the two rugs could have been made in the same village and perhaps even by the same weaver.



Inscribed and dated kilim 1910  
(upper left corner)

Already, with major exhibitions such as *Weavers, Merchants and Kings* and *Passages* (and the accompanying catalogues), we have caused a re-evaluation of the role of Armenians in the weaving of oriental carpets. Let's continue our good work.

For me, there is the additional thrill of coming across a piece that turns out to be from one of the old Armenian towns which are part of my family's past. I wonder if my own great-great-grandmother might have been the weaver whose thoughts have been given form in this rug, whose hands tied the knots or spun the wool. As I run my hand over the rug, I feel the peculiar and very special sense of engagement these rugs can bring to those of us whose background is Armenian.

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If you have undocumented Armenian textiles, let the ARS know; we would like to include them in our rapidly expanding databank, maintained by Loretta Boxdorfer.