

As documented in a special supplement to the MidAtlantic Fiber Association Newsletter of October, 1984.

The history of the MidAtlantic Fiber Association (MAFA) is a short one, but considering its accomplishments, that is what is most remarkable about this organization. In the winter of 1980, when Carlana Sargent was president of the Princeton Weavers Guild and I was on the board, we had problems scheduling a workshop when another area guild planned the same workshop during the same week. This wasn't the first time that an absence of coordination had affected us, so Carlana and I decided we would act on an idea that had been tossed around for some time: We invited about a dozen guild presidents to come to my house one Saturday in April for lunch and a general discussion of a regional association of weaving guilds. It quickly became clear that day that this was an idea whose time had come. The enthusiasm was so great that by the end of that first meeting there was a name for the group—East Coast Weavers Conference, which was changed at the next meeting to MidAtlantic Fiber Association, a treasurer (Marion Rasnick, who still holds that office), an amount set for dues (\$10 per guild, which hasn't changed either), and an agreement to hold a weekend conference of speakers, classes and events modelled after the Midwest and New England regional conferences. The primary purpose of the group would, according to the April 26th minutes, be “to establish communication between guilds, and to maintain the communication with mutual exchange of ideas.” We also planned a newsletter to this end.

I can't find a record of exactly who was at that first meeting, but I've tried to reconstruct a list. Please let me know if there are corrections to any of what I'm writing here, because it would be nice to have an accurate account of MAFA's beginnings. To the best of my knowledge, those present were: Carlana and me, Sue Steiner and Eleanor Rhodes from Princeton Weavers Guild, Jean West from North Jersey Weavers Guild, Pat Sullivan and Karen Armour from South Jersey Guild of Spinners and Handweavers, Mary Lou Herrick and, I think, Flo Deems, from Handweavers of Bucks County, Bette McCarron from Philadelphia Guild of Handweavers, Marion Rasnick, Charlotte Seymour and perhaps Florence Kandiner from Palisades Guild of Spinner and Weavers, and Marion Alden and Sue Goldberg from Westfield Weavers Guild.

Carlana and I were given the job of investigating central Jersey locations for a conference in the summer of 1981. By the next meeting, one month later, word had spread, and we added Harmony Weavers Guild with Betsy Dillon, Judy Pfeiffer and Hallie Thayer and the New York Guild of Handweavers with Joan Pao and Barbara Aubrey. Julienne Krasnoff of Shuttle, Spindle and Dyepot came as a representative of HGA and was able to give us information about how similar organizations operated. At that meeting, we decided upon Rider College as the site for the conference, and just about everybody volunteered for an office or a big conference job. Things were definitely underway. In fact we already had dues from the original seven guilds.

Not too surprisingly, Carlana was elected president and I was named the conference coordinator, but we knew when we first started what we were probably letting ourselves in for. What was unpredicted, and remains to the present, was the number of extremely competent people who were willing to do all the work necessary to organize something like this.

By the third meeting, on July 12, 1980, Palisades Weavers Guild sent June Sundvik and Edna Riedell and Barbara Nappen and, I believe Carole Shirley were present from the Shore Fiber Arts Guild. I think Lisa Haugh and Joyce Fodor from the Central Pennsylvania Guild of Handweavers also began

coming then. Judy Pfeiffer submitted a logo at that meeting and plans for the conference were in full swing. Joan Pao was contacting possible speakers. One of her ideas was to invite Theo Moorman to be keynote speaker at our first conference. This was really exciting to those of us who had never had the opportunity to hear her and who thought of her as someone who had helped usher weaving as an art form into the '60s and '70s.

By the end of the summer, plans for the conference were almost complete. Many hours were spent coordinating the schedule, getting teachers and speakers, figuring out the details of how various events would work, worrying about money, and if people would come. At a meeting in October, Frances Irwin Handweavers, Lancaster Spinners and Weavers Guild, and Handweavers of Westchester joined. Some of the larger guilds were asked to lend the MidAtlantic Fiber Association (MAFA) enough money for the initial printing and mailing costs. (That money, about \$800, was returned to the guilds right after the registration money started to come in, in February.) While conference planning was going on, Carlana was busy trying to get association business matters in hand. She headed a group which wrote by-laws and met with an attorney, incorporated and began what was to be a long struggle with the IRS for non-profit status (finally granted, after a hearing which took place just before the second conference, in the early part of 1984).

Jean West, meantime, had taken on an amorphous job, which could probably best be described as "everything else." She kept and updated the 1000's of names on the mailing list and gave us the first "Guild Profiles," which listed the member guilds, officers, and meeting times. (We've continued to provide this each year, including a list of programs, so that members of one guild can know about and attend meetings of interest elsewhere.) She organized the procedures for conference registration and persuaded Lois Breslauer from Westfield Weavers to be the first conference registrar. Before the second conference, she gradually transferred us to computers, and for the third conference we should be using the computer much more effectively for mailing, registration, room assignments, class assignments, etc.

In November, we mailed an announcement of the conference to 1500 people, and asked them to return a tear-off if they wished to receive the registration materials. In January we mailed detailed information and registration forms to 750 who had responded. When registration began, we soon realized we had no worries about whether anyone would come. We passed the break-even point of 200 registrations in less than a week and registration was filled in 12 days. 301 were accepted and 64 names were placed on the waiting list. In 1983, we took 377, and registration was filled in 4 days. The 1985 conference has been moved to Glassboro College* so that we can accommodate 500. At the next general meeting on April 4, 1981, we numbered 21 guilds. Eleanor Rhodes, who was in charge of enlisting commercial exhibitors, had filled the exhibit space with 27 shops and suppliers, and more than enough people expressed interest in participating in the exhibit, fashion show and swatch swap to assure the success of those events.

About two weeks before the conference, there was terrible news: Eleanor Rhodes, who had originally given Carlana and I the push needed, died of the lung disease that had troubled her since we had known her. Bette McCarron and Kava Schafer stepped in and took over the commercial exhibits committee, which Eleanor had chaired.

The week of the conference finally arrived and MAFA committee people were everywhere at Rider, getting everything into place. When registration began at 1 p.m. on Friday, July 31, there were no waits, people were impressed with the heavy canvas bags we provided, and the conference began

very smoothly. A few keys didn't fit, and the food was just edible, but for the most part, 300 people caught the enthusiasm of the MAFA workers, and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. After four years, the funny and the tense moments are the memorable ones. I changed the site of the Saturday night picnic on Saturday afternoon after someone told me about the vast amounts of goose guano marring the original lakefront and helped the commercial exhibitors clear the exhibit space in two hours so that the fashion show could be the send-off event in the Rider all-purpose room. With help from the Rider staff, the runway, tables and chairs for 300 and a refreshment serving area was in place just in time.

After the conference ended, all of us who worked on it, including Kava Schafer, who had just been named as the next conference coordinator, were euphoric about our achievement, and, amazingly, ready to start all over again. The friends you make when you work really hard together on something. are really special, and that, I guess, is what makes it all worthwhile. Needless to say, there were many more people involved than I've been able to mention. In a future issue of this newsletter, I'll continue to tell the story of MAFA—there's much more to tell.

—Pat White

*Glassboro College is now Rowan University

Editor's Note ●●●

Special thanks to Pat White for this history of how it all began. Pat is a member of Philadelphia Guild of Handweavers, Handweavers of Bucks County, and the Princeton Weavers Guild. She is past chairman of the Certificate of Excellence Committee for Handweaving for the Handweavers Guild of America.

Pat has been weaving for 10 years and is a designer of one-of-a-kind clothing. She teaches workshops, exhibits extensively, and sells her woven garments.