



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



Vol. IX, No. 7 May 3, 2002

Next Meeting: Picnic, Show & Tell, and Moth Market

On Saturday, May 18, our annual Show & Tell meeting will get underway at noon in the form of a casual, informal afternoon picnic in a delightful outdoor setting. This repeat of the last three years' smash hit will again take place in a finished old barn complete with bathrooms, kitchen and meeting facilities, and plenty of parking, that's situated on an expanse of rural orchard acreage adjacent to the Concord River in Concord, MA. It'll be a great setting, rain or shine. Here's how the event will work:

Bring your own picnic. Pack up your own sandwiches and munchies, and we'll provide the beverages, including soft drinks, coffee, tea, beer and wine. If you can, bring a blanket or a lawnchair or two to make things comfortable. We'll provide tables and chairs.

Participate in our moth market. We are inviting our members, dealers or not, to bring a few things for sale, and we'll hold our own small informal flea market (moth market in ruggie terms). In case of inclement weather, we'll move things indoors.

Share up to two of your treasures. Please limit yourself to two pieces for the Show & Tell session. That way we'll keep the event from becoming an overly-long marathon. So load up your most spectacular recent (or not so recent) finds and you'll have plenty of time to share them with the group.

Next Meeting Details

Date: Saturday, May 18

Time: 12 noon to 4PM rain or shine!

Place: Barn at 418 Monument Street, Concord

Note: \$10 charge for non-members

Directions:

Coming from the East: From Rte. 95 (128) take Rte. 2 west. At the 2nd traffic light where Rte. 2 turns left, continue straight following the signs to Concord Center. Go to the Concord Center rotary, proceeding until the Colonial Inn is directly in front of you. Turn right at the Inn onto Monument Street. Proceed past the North Bridge parking lot and over the Concord River bridge. After crossing the river, go past the fourth house on your right (no. 418) and turn into its driveway. Follow the signs for parking. **Do not park along the street!**

Coming from the West: From Rte. 2 make the first left turn following Rte. 62, and proceed through Concord Center. Upon reaching the dead end at the Concord green, turn left. Where the road dead ends at the Colonial Inn, turn right onto Monument Street and proceed as above.

ACOR 6—The Greatest Ever

By Mark Hopkins

No question about it: ACOR 6 was a smashing success. Our final total was around 515 attendees, nearly 100 larger than ACOR 5. But despite that it didn't feel any bigger; it was the same friendly, informal social gathering as before.

Among the many focus sessions, a new feature—small hands-on sessions called Out of the Cedar Chest proved to be a great hit. NERS members Mike Tschbull, Gerard Paquin, and I each did two sessions, in which we showed and discussed pieces from

our collections. The idea proved so popular that we'll repeat next time for sure, and probably enlarge it.

Three in-house exhibitions (Midwest collections, Baluch weavings, and Persian flatwoven bands), were wonderfully vetted, attractively hung, and well attended. Dealers' Row was in a rug fair setting with well-lit booths rather than in the rooms as in previous conferences, and both dealers and registrants loved it. We hosted 72 dealers from 11 countries,

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Collector's Profile—Anne Rugh By Ann Nicolas

Anne displays oriental rugs on almost every flat surface in her Victorian home in Portland—floors, walls, top of the old piano, back of the couch, and even the top of a double bed. Her tribal rug collection includes many South Persian pieces. Avoiding describing herself as a collector, she explains, “I gather rugs, they come to me. I do not pursue them.” That’s easy for her to say: for the past few years she has worked part-time in John Collins’s gallery in Newburyport and before that at Tad Runge’s shop in Yarmouth, Maine. There’s plenty of opportunity to gather fine rugs in those places.

Anne is drawn to the energy and vitality of tribal pieces. Besides their tribal origin, a common theme in her rugs is botehs. There are many variations in boteh design, and she surely has most of them represented. “Honking big botehs,” she calls them—squarish ones, sweeping curvilinear ones, flowery ones, the mother and child design, simple solid ones, on and on. Exploring each rug for yet another boteh variation became my secret delight as she showed her rugs to us. One favorite of Anne’s is a finely woven Afshar sofreh with glistening wool and a handle like cloth. “My first sexy piece,” she revealed. “When I bought it, I knew I was gone on rugs.” The main field has repeating rows of flowery botehs in many delicious colors on a white field with an end finish of short diagonal stripes in all the boteh colors. For Anne to consider buying it, a rug needs to have great wool, be alive and forthcoming, and have an interesting backside. “With tribal pieces you don’t know immediately if they are for you,” she reflects. “Rather they creep up slowly and drape themselves around you.”

Her interest in rugs began about ten years ago when her grandmother’s estate included some oriental rugs. She wondered if they were valuable or of special interest. Mostly using books, she began educating herself, and soon realized she was getting more and more intrigued with rugs. Perhaps it was the memory of oriental rugs on her grandmother’s floors. Or maybe her long-held fascination with textures and

textiles. Or even the memory from her college days of having a proper tea with genteel gray-haired ladies wearing hats, white gloves, and nylons in rooms with oriental carpets. Whatever the reason, she began looking at rugs in shops, where she met NERS member Tad Runge. Wanting to gain more experience in understanding rugs, she began working part-time for Tad.

Working provided more exposure to good rugs, but it also increased her need to understand them. Her favorite reference books for oriental rugs are: Eiland, Pinner, and Denny’s *Oriental Carpet and Textile Studies*, PRJ Ford’s *Oriental Carpet Design*, Cecil Edwards’ *The Persian Carpet*, and Jon Thompson’s *Oriental Carpets*. More challenging has been coming to terms with being both a collector and seller of rugs. She enjoys the tension of the buyer/seller interface and the selling process. Yet sometimes she grows too fond of a rug, and when it goes away, she feels bad. Undoubtedly the biggest challenge was accepting that she could not afford every great rug she sees.

Having met many “rug collectors,” Anne divides them into groups: gatherers, hunters, and collectors. Gatherers buy what they like, but are not driven to pursue a new purchase; hunters buy what they like and search avidly for new pieces; and the collector is focused on what he pursues. One day during a big snowstorm she was working at John Collins’s gallery. Thinking that no one would possibly drive through the weather to look at rugs, Anne began sorting through a pile of recent inventory additions. As she relished a particularly fine tribal piece, two collectors came through the door wondering what new pieces John had gotten lately. Who but a really ardent collector would come out in a near blizzard just to check out recent arrivals?

Many people who collect rugs also collect other things, but not Anne. For years she had concerns about collecting material objects. Perhaps it was related to the time after college when she worked for

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Collector's Profile—Anne Rugh

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Radio Liberty in Europe and felt the need to pack up and move easily. Referring to oriental rugs as neatly portable personal effects, she confesses that she has now made peace with acquiring possessions. Besides portability, rugs also fulfill her enjoyment of contemplation and fondness for texture. “Remember to display rugs where you can reflect on them,” she advises. “And don’t forget those places where you sit for a long time like near the telephone. Or in the bathroom.”

She has an enduring love of texture and textiles, first becoming intrigued with Italian fabrics, Bauhaus textiles, and Irish weavings when she lived in Europe. While showing us her rugs, she would often invite us to feel this great wool or comment on another rug’s yummy handle. To visualize texture,

she has experimented with photographing rugs. Unlike many rug photographs, which show a rug laid out flat to capture the colors and pattern, hers often focus on small segments. My favorite is a jumble of bagfaces lit so the texture and color variations are the picture’s focus. She believes a good rug photo should always convey texture.

All through the interview and dinner afterwards she referred to how a great rug drapes itself around you. A metaphor from a tactilely oriented person, I thought. Then she picked up a couple of small rugs and draped them in heaps on the floor. No longer confined to a two-dimensional space, the rugs’ textures were enhanced, the colors had new variations, and the patterns were rearranged. It was like the first time I saw a movie with 3-D glasses—a magical experience.

Collectors’ Fragments, Part 3 Edited by Ann Nicolas

While living in Morocco, on occasional weekends we would travel up to the Middle Atlas Mountain area to escape Rabat’s routine. Our Saturday trips typically included a stop for lamb brochettes in Oulmès followed by a quick tour of the Saturday souk in Aguelmous, but our real destination was the weekly rug auction in Khenifra.

We always timed our arrival in Khenifra to coincide with afternoon prayers, after which the auction started. My wife Suzanne and I would circulate separately and look at the items before meeting to discuss the quality of the goods and to decide on our bargaining strategies. Our daughter Catherine would accompany one or the other parent before settling at a dealer’s shop for tea and a Nancy Drew mystery.

One June afternoon, when Catherine was about eight years old, both Suzanne and I were interested in a fifteen-foot-long tent-hanging that was rolled up under a chair at a shop. The Beni M’ter tribe had mostly abandoned the tented life by the 1920s, so a high quality tent-hanging was a rare find. After a five-minute discussion, we returned to the dealer to find the hanging gone, sold to a Meknes dealer who had already spirited it away. Discouraged, we asked

“Which dealer? Which shop in Meknes?” No answers were forthcoming. The next week, we went to Meknes—twice. We combed the shops. No Beni M’ter hanging. We left for home leave in the US with dreams of “the one that got away.” On returning in September, we began frequenting the Meknes shops again. Still no luck among the reputable dealers. Finally, we approached a dealer of tourist goods near the entrance to the shops. Making our way past the garish, overpriced items in the first two rooms, we entered the last, tiny chamber. There, rolled up in a corner, were two interesting pieces. According to the dealer, one had already been sold to a foreign collector. We asked to see the other. The dealer unrolled the remembered Beni M’ter hanging. Then, thinking to sway our opinion, he proudly declared that the weaving was unique and “You will never see another one like this!” Catherine, who by then had recognized the long lost item, whispered in my ear, “Daddy, we saw THAT ONE before!”

After innumerable cups of tea and a lunch break, we bought the Beni M’ter hanging. It was a treasured—and long-awaited—addition to our collection.

Al Saulniers



Last Meeting: Jeff Spurr on Collecting Rugs and Textiles in Late Nineteenth Century Persia: Ronald Graham's Photo Album

By Jim Adelson

On April 19th, NERS long-timer Jeff Spurr jumped in and ably filled the speaker vacancy forced by the illness of our planned speaker's (Saul Barodofsky's) mother. Amidst the numerous offerings of Skinner's first major rug sale of the year, Jeff gave a short, engaging talk on the photo collection of a British diplomat posted to Iran at the very end of the 19th century.

The diplomat, Ronald Graham, arrived in Tehran as a 27-year-old in 1897. Graham was Eton-educated and part of the first generation of professional diplomats. Tehran was his second post, after Paris, and he stayed for two full years before moving on to his next post in St. Petersburg. These were all early stops in a long and successful diplomatic career that included service as Ambassador to Italy from 1922 to 1931 and as Director of the Suez Canal during WWII, before his death in 1949. Graham's stint in Tehran also coincided with the zenith of the British Empire, just before the Boer War marked the first step of decline and retreat. Britain's activities in Persia were part of "the Great Game"—the competition with the Russian Empire for influence in Persia and the Middle East.

Graham had a Kodak camera with which he took his own pictures. He also acquired commercial photographs as well as several probably commissioned by the British Legation, all taken by a local photographer named Antoin Sevruguin, the foremost commercial photographer in Persia at the time. Upon leaving Tehran in the summer of 1899, Graham constructed a photo album to memorialize his stay. The album included some 280 of his own pictures, 9 enlargements of those pictures, 101 commercial prints, and 32 commissioned prints.

Graham's album documents virtually all aspects of life in Persia except for Graham's own professional work. The album opens with two watercolors. The first shows the Elburz mountains and Qulhaq, the summer setting for the British Legation. The second depicts Tehran itself, accompanied by some of the

cards for Graham's farewell dinner.

The first photo is a landscape, showing the dominating Mt. Demavand and the valley of the Lar river. The next set of photos displays a number of public and prominent buildings, and local and national officials. Graham's captions identify many of the officials, including Ambassador and Lady Durand, and some Persian political figures. The photos capture activities such as hunting and fishing that appealed to the Brits, and locally popular horse racing and polo. The British had reintroduced this sport in 1894; even though polo had long been played in Persia, it had disappeared with the political turmoil of the 18th century. The photos document specific public events such as the birthday of the Shah or the hanging of the previous Shah's assassin. There are also a number of photos of various segments of the population, including nomadic encampments with characteristic black tents, street scenes with beggars and deserted children, and exotic groups, such as the Dervishes.

Graham had many contacts with weaving activities, and these show up in several photographs. He visited the Ziegler carpet works in Sultanabad. This Anglo-Swiss firm, based in Manchester, England, had entered Iran in 1867, started its commercial weaving activity in 1881, and had more than 100 weaving villages by the 1890s. In the photo album there are commercial images of weaving, as well as Graham's own snapshots. The photos depict weaving in a manufactory-like setting, with large-scale looms and many weavers working simultaneously on the same carpet. The photos also show village-style weaving, with smaller looms and fewer weavers at work. There are also pictures of people inspecting, measuring, and packing carpets. Jeff Spurr quoted Lady Durand's observation on the Ziegler work at Sultanabad: "It is curious to think that America and Europe are supplied with carpets from this out of the way place."

Graham's photos capture a number of aspects of rug commerce at the time. Many rugs were sold

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Last Meeting

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by Dalals—itinerant dealers, a lot of whom were Jewish. One example showed a massive suzani from Bokhara being sold by Jewish merchants in Tehran. In fact, many of the weavings available in Tehran came from far outside the country, ranging from Turkmen pile and textile pieces to woven clothing from Syria.

Graham made the most of his opportunity to acquire items while in Tehran. Jeff showed Graham's pictures of his apartment, summarizing: "In true Victorian fashion, he festooned his rooms with everything under the sun." Graham's photographed acquisitions included Turkmen main carpets and smaller pieces, as well as tent bands, Central Asian suzanis, Caucasian rugs, the occasional Persian rug, and non-

textile items such as Safavid metalwork and assorted hunting trophies.

Jeff concluded with a little bit of information on the album itself, indicating that the Sackler has it on loan from the current owner, who acquired it in London around 1970 for two and a half pounds sterling. In Jeff's view, Graham's use of his Kodak camera, together with other pictures that he accumulated, materially augments our visual knowledge of the place and the time.

Many thanks to Jeff for the insights that his comments and the reproduced pictures provided. And thanks, too, to Skinner for their willingness to host another informative and well-received joint session with NERS.

President's Report

Our Sixteenth Year Was Another Great One!

It's been quite a season for the Society. There were some surprises, a few disappointments, and enough worthy events and achievements to conclusively offset them.

I'm pleased to report that we finished our 2001-2002 season in as strong a position as we've ever been. Our membership totals out at 174, the largest ever. Our treasury is sound. Our members have been pitching in to help as never before. And we are truly the *New England Rug Society*; with members in all six New England states, plus four other states beyond that.

To put things in a national perspective, there are 26 rug societies in the U.S. and Canada, and we are currently the fourth largest. For comparison, the biggest membership belongs to the Textile Museum Associates of Southern California, which is affiliated with The Textile Museum in Washington, DC, and includes members with a very wide variety of textile interests. The other two larger than us are the International Hajji Baba Society of Alexandria, VA, and the San Francisco Bay Area Rug Society.

That said, let's look in retrospect at the season just passed. The first meeting, of course, was cancelled owing to its coincidence with the terrible September 11 tragedy. Bertram Frauenknecht, our

speaker who was about to fly to Boston, was never able to leave the ground in Munich, Germany. And in a most appropriate gesture, **Jo Kris** and the Skinner team thereafter postponed the September auction for a bit until things settled down.

In October we were blessed with a visit from the internationally respected Elena Tsareva, textile curator of the Russian Ethnographic Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia, who gave us fresh insights into the origins of Turkmen design motifs.

Shortly after that, we learned that Skinner had decided to cancel its December auction, which was supposed to have been preceded by a joint meeting featuring the irrepressible Saul Barodofsky. With some fast footwork, we rescheduled Saul for the Skinner April sale, and with the able assistance of NERS members **Laney Balkin**, **Mike Kendall** and **Kyle Hedrick**, we held another of our Good Rug/Great Rug sessions.

Julia Bailey hosted us at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts on a January Saturday with a personally guided tour of her Persian textile exhibition, an event that netted rave reviews. In March, the Armenian Library and Museum of America once again opened its doors to us, and **Mike Tschbull** gave us an interesting review of Kazak carpets from the Caucasus.

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President's Report

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Three weeks later **Al Saulniers** provided us a fresh look at Moroccan rugs and textiles that had many members wondering how they could have previously overlooked such a fascinating weaving group.

Then we received another surprise; the peripatetic Saul Barodofsky called to cancel his commitment to talk at the Skinner April sale on account of his elderly mother's illness. NERS member **Jeff Spurr** therein leapt into the fray and offered to give us a wonderful talk which is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. We accepted with gusto.

Without doubt the most significant member achievement of the season is that of NERS Steering Committee member **Bob Alimi**, who took up the challenge of developing our web site. It's a beauty, in case you haven't yet paid a visit there. (The address is www.ne-rugsociety.org). Bob has done a fabulous job of making our site both interesting and useful, and it has already attracted new members.

There are many kind souls who deserve special appreciation besides Bob. I want to thank NERS members **Buzz** and **Louise Dohanian** and **Lloyd Kannenberg** for volunteering to store the society's audio-visual equipment and schlepp it to meetings. **Jo Kris** was her usual supportive and generous self in arranging our joint NERS/Skinner meeting. And Gary Lind-Sinanian and his wife Susan were once again our gracious hosts at the Armenian Library and Museum of America.

The members of our NERS Steering Committee have once again been most generous with their time and talents in helping to spread the workload around. **John Clift**, with the able assistance of **Tom Hannaher** and **Gillian Richardson**, excelled as usual in keeping our refreshment tables loaded with fine wine, soft drinks, and finger food. In addition, we owe **Tom** special thanks for providing his company's projector for **Al Saulniers'** PowerPoint presentation,

a gesture that saved us several hundred dollars.

Yon Bard has now rounded out his sixth highly successful year of editing our newsletter, a challenging task for which we remit many thanks. **Jim Adelson** and **Jeff Spurr** did their usual remarkable job of reporting our speakers' messages for those who couldn't attend. **Sheryl Read** once again contributed her popular member profiles. And **Julia Bailey** took care of acknowledging our speakers' efforts with letters of thanks.

Kudos also to Committee Member **Janet Smith** for again taking on the nitty-gritty work of producing and mailing the newsletter, maintaining the nametags, and generally being on hand for whatever task needed doing.

In addition, we thank **Ann Nicholas** for writing member profiles for the NERS newsletter and originating her interesting new column, *Collectors' Fragments*.

Finally, our warm thanks to NERS members **Mike Tschbull**, **Julia Bailey** and **Jeff Spurr** for waiving the customary honorarium that we pay to those who speak to our group. It is this kind of generosity that allows us to keep our dues low and the quality of our offerings high.

What's most gratifying to all of us who put in the hours that keep the New England Rug Society moving ahead is the enthusiasm and generosity of our members. It's always heartwarming to see how our members pitch in to get the menial tasks done painlessly..... setting up for meetings, schlepping the heavy stuff, and clearing the decks after we're done and ready to go home. Warmest thanks to all of you for pitching in and helping us to be what we are. We look forward to seeing you all at our May picnic where we'll celebrate another successful year and the beginning of yet another great season.

Mark Hopkins

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Upcoming Rug Events

Auctions:

Nagel, Stuttgart, 5/7

Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden, 5/11

Sotheby's, London, 6/11

Christie's, London, 6/12

Skinner, Boston, 6/9 and 6/22; Bolton, 6/20
(including rugs)

Sotheby's, New York, 9/27.

Conferences:

The tenth ICOC is scheduled for 4/17-21/03 in Washington, DC.

Exhibits and Fairs:

International Tribal Antiques Show, Park Avenue & 67th Street, New York, 5/18-20

HALI Antique Carpet and Textile Art Fair, London, 6/6-9

Challenging Assumptions, the Rugs of Women from the Villages of Hamadan Province, A.E. Runge, Jr. Oriental Rugs showroom, 108 Main Street, Yarmouth, Maine, 6/8-29. This exhibit and sale will highlight the 75 village rugs illustrated in NERS member Tad Runge's recently published book *One Woman One Weft*. It is the first of its kind in the US to display this well known but unheralded category of oriental rugs, and the largest exhibit of Persian Hamadans ever undertaken. Its goal is to prove that

the poor village women, who wove these rugs in their homes to supplement their families' meager earnings, created imaginatively designed and very attractive high quality rugs during the period from the late 1800s until 1940. For additional information call 207-846-9000 or visit Tad's website www.rungerugs.com.

The Best Workmanship, the Finest Materials: Prayer Carpets from the Islamic World, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, 485 Broadway, Cambridge, MA, 8/3-12/15. This exhibit brings together prayer carpets from the eastern Islamic world and considers them from two perspectives: the structural design dictated by the weaver's technique, and the decorative design governed by iconographic and aesthetic traditions. Drawn mainly from the Harvard Museum collection and from important collections in the New England area, the rugs in the exhibition date to the 18th and 19th centuries and represent a fine range of both technique and design. Together, they suggest the variety of aesthetic experiences possible within a single medium and type. The exhibition is organized by Mary McWilliams, Norma Jean Calderwood Curator of Islamic and Later Indian Art, and NERS member Amanda Phillips, curatorial intern, Department of Islamic and Later Indian Art. **There will be a special gallery talk for members of the New England Rug Society in the early fall.** More details will be forthcoming.

ACOR 6

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and their offerings were abundant and resplendent.

The nearby Indianapolis Museum of Art hung a beautiful exhibition of Moroccan textiles and rugs, and we had several related focus sessions, including one by NERS member Al Saulniers.

Another new feature was a costume contest in which contestants strutted about in all manner of Central Asian ethnic garbs. The NERS had one dubious prize winner: Lawrence Kearney appeared, tongue far in cheek, with costume so ridiculous that

the judges awarded him first prize in a spontaneously created category entitled Most Tasteless. In addition to the spectacular rugs and textiles and colorful social events, it was little touches like this contest that made ACOR 6 a real kick.

Just about everyone I talked with thought it was the best ACOR yet. ACOR 7 has already been committed for Seattle, WA, in the spring of 2004. That should be a great one too, and we urge all NERS members who haven't yet attended an ACOR to make that one their debut. You won't regret it.

NERS information can be obtained by writing to **New England Rug Society, P.O. Box 582, Lincoln, MA 01773**, calling Mark Hopkins at 781-259-9444, or emailing him at mopkins@netway.com.

Website www.ne-rugsociety.org



NERS Adopts a Kilim

The NERS has just assumed a whole new role: foster parent. We've adopted a beautiful old kilim from western Anatolia.

This latest bit of charity is in response to a clever fundraising program called Adopt-a-Kilim conceived by NERS members Bethany Mendenhall and Charles Lave, the ultimate beneficiary of which will be Josephine Powell's planned Center for Anatolian Ethnography and Textile Studies in Istanbul, Turkey.

Josephine, whom many NERS members will remember from her fascinating talk on 11/15/96, has amassed an important collection of Anatolian rugs and textiles, along with thousands of photographs documenting the life of Turkey's nomadic tribes. Fundraising is now underway to create a facility where these priceless artifacts and visual records will be permanently housed and displayed.

In the meantime, there are many important kilims in Josephine's collection that require cleaning and

restoration...and that is where the Adopt-a-Kilim program comes in. Prospective donors are invited to look through a book of kilim photographs, each marked with the donation needed to restore it, and make their choice. When the piece is finally hung on display, the donor's name will be inscribed on its placard.

At ACOR 6, the NERS made a \$300 donation and adopted the beautiful old Yüncü kilim shown in the photograph below. Its field is a rich, deep, abraded red surrounding a dramatic medallion done in ivory, brown and midnight blue. Size is 4'9" x 6'3".

This is an extremely important program that warrants participation by all of us, and we urge individual NERS members to consider adopting a kilim as well. You can get details on how to do so by emailing Bethany Mendenhall at *bmendenhall@cox.net*. Be generous; it's for a wonderful cause!



New England Rug Society
Post Office Box 582, Lincoln, MA 01773



The NERS Kilim