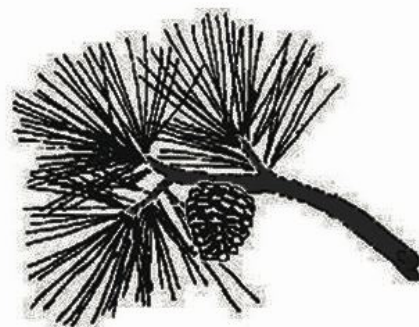




THE UNIVERSITY OF
MAINE

**Maine Folklife
Center**



**Threads of Our Lives:
Maine Folk Fiber Art**

**Public Program Handbook
2017**

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Introduction

About Threads of Our Lives

In 2016, the Maine Folklife Center (MFC) at the University of Maine, Orono, launched a traveling exhibit highlighting the diversity of folk fiber arts in Maine entitled “Threads of Our Lives: Maine Folk Fiber Art.” The exhibit was made possible through a National Endowment of the Arts grant the MFC received in 2015. The exhibit features four 3x7 free-standing panels: “Wabanaki,” “Settlers,” “New Mainers,” and “Community.” The panels illustrate how Mainers from various backgrounds are carrying on their fiber art traditions.

What Are Folklore, Folklife, and Folk Art?

Folklore and folklife are interchangeable terms used to describe informal traditional culture. The oral, material, and customary traditions we learn not from the classroom, but from our folk groups (families, friends, community). An example I find useful is Thanksgiving. You might say that your Thanksgiving is just a normal American Thanksgiving, but what exactly does that mean to you and how did you learn those expectations? Does it mean there is football on TV or played in the yard, or do you watch *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving*, or do you head off to early Black Friday shopping, or start decorating for Christmas? Does it mean everyone brings their signature dish or does one person do all the cooking? Do you have collard greens as a side dish or a salad made with Jell-O? Does the meal start with a prayer or a toast or with everyone saying something they are thankful for? Do you all sit down together at a specific time or eat when you get hungry? Is it extended family, your neighborhood, your nuclear family, or do you have a Friendsgiving? What would make it feel wrong to you? All of those elements are part of the folklore for the group you have Thanksgiving dinner with and are influenced by your region, background, family, and life experiences. There isn't an official, institutional guide to how Thanksgiving should be, which makes it informal. It's traditional because the knowledge and beliefs are passed from person to person, whether that is vertically from generation to generation or horizontally from friend to friend.

Folk art then is an art form that has been non-institutionally learned from a neighbor, relative, or someone else in your community and is influenced by your folk group.

How to Host a Public Program

There isn't really a right way to host a public program and you are the experts for what works at your libraries. A popular public folklore model is a narrative stage where between one and a handful of artists talk (or talk and demonstrate) with a moderator who can help keep the conversation going and steer it. However, all of the artists included here can also do solo talks and demonstrations.

Recommended artist honorarium is mileage + \$50/30 minutes of talk/demonstration (that doesn't include the artist's set up and clean up time).

About This Directory

We've included a picture, contact information, background on the artist, what type of programming they can do, and the quote we used from them in the exhibit (or that we wished we had space for).

If you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Katrina Wynn at the Maine Folklife Center: katrina.wynn@maine.edu.

Danielle Beaupré, Franco-American knitter and spinner

Glenburn, ME – daniellembeaupre@gmail.com



Danielle Beaupré is a Franco-American artist in Glenburn, Maine. She learned how to knit at a young age from her mémé. For Christmas, her family always enjoys the traditional knitted gifts Danielle makes for them, particularly the “linges à vaisselle” (dishcloths) and the “pichous” (traditional Acadian slippers).

Danielle is committed to passing on the Franco knitting traditions and is in the process of writing down the directions for traditional patterns that used to be primarily passed on orally or by demonstration.

A few years ago, Danielle also learned from a friend how to spin with a drop spindle. She has since organized two Tour de Fleece competitions with a local yarn shop in Bangor. Tour de Fleece is an international spinning competition that happens during the sporting event Tour de France.

Through the several knitting and spinning groups she has joined over the years, Danielle has enjoyed learning about other knitting traditions and sharing her own knitting traditions with other fiber artists.

Danielle can offer workshops on how to knit a “linge à vaisselle” and how to read a knitting pattern in French. She can talk about her knitting heritage, about drop spindle spinning, and Franco-American history.

Dani was quoted twice in the exhibit posters:

Settlers: “I still do feel very connected to my traditions because that’s how I first learned, so as I’m carrying on the crafts, I still feel very connected to my grandmother and my culture that way.”

Community: “You have so many people listening to [podcasts]. So if the person who is doing the podcast uses particular jargon or an abbreviation ... [people will] start using it in their own lexicon, they’ll bring that to their local knitting group, and it spreads and spreads.”

Lorin ‘Mim’ Bird, knitter

Rockland, ME – 594.6060 - contact@overtherainbowyarn.com



Mim Bird is a Yankee knitter, crocheter, spinner, and weaver who owns the yarn shop Over the Rainbow Yarn in Rockland, Maine (<http://overtherainbowyarn.com>).

Mim learned how to knit from her mother and her great-grandmother. She is interested in the history of fiber arts, and is very well versed in the history of knitting in particular.

Mim likes to challenge herself to reproduce antique knitted pieces such as Saint Adalbert’s gloves or a piece based off of archeological findings where she will spin the yarn as well as knitting the piece.

As a yarn shop owner, Mim strives to help people with their knitting as she believes one-on-one in-person interactions are the best way to learn and receive help.

Mim can offer a talk on the history of knitting and can teach classes on any type of knitting. She has a “learn to knit in 5 minute or less” guarantee that she can demonstrate any time. She can talk about New England/Maine specific traditions and why it’s hard to track them. Finally, she can also present about how the on-line world is changing fiber arts.

Mim was quoted in the “Settlers” exhibit poster:

“If you’re going to make it, make it special – even in a small way – if that’s all you have the time for. And learn the craft of it, so that you can be good at what you do. I think my Yankee upbringing has instilled all of those values in me.”

Stephanie Crossman, Vinalhaven net maker

Vinalhaven, ME – 863.4567 – gramj50@hotmail.com



Stephanie Crossman is a netting artist in Vinalhaven, Maine. She learned how to net from her husband's great grandmother, Gram J. when she moved to the island. Not long after, Stephanie started to net professionally.

As the fishing industry transitioned from using traditional nets to using mass produced machine made nets, Stephanie continued to net, but instead of making fish nets, she adapted the skill and started to make shopping bags and wearable art. She now also makes 3D netted sculptures often inspired by the local fauna and flora, such as jellyfish, lightening bugs, and moss.

Stephanie has a website (<http://www.mainenetbags.com/>) where she shows her artist portfolio and sells her work. She travels to shows and exhibits her work in galleries and at specialized craft shows.

Stephanie can demonstrate fish netting and talk about her experience learning traditional fish netting, creating her own designs, and the history of the fish netting industry.

Stephanie was quoted in the "Settlers" exhibit poster:

"I'm married to a native, who's probably eight generations back. ... I used to go over to visit his great-grandmother [Gram J.]. ... She was 92 years old at the time, and she still did fish netting every day. ... I would come over every afternoon and tie my fingers into the knots, and she would untie me and get me back on the right tracks."

Frances 'Gal' Frey, Passamaquoddy beader and basket maker

Princeton, ME – 796.8830

Frances 'Gal' Frey is a Passamaquoddy beader and basket maker in Princeton, Maine. She comes from a basket making family and learned beading from a friend. Gal specializes in a very detailed form of beading that she developed over the years. She uses very small beads to create realistic images of animals or people, and different size beads to create the illusion of perspective. Gal and her sister also make and bead leather dresses for the community just like their grandmother used to do.

Gal has also participated in the creation of reproductions of regalia for museums in Maine. She collaborated through the Maine Arts Commission with her sister to recreate a project done in the sixties. Both were done for the Tribal Museum at Pleasant Point. In 2010, Gal and a group of women, including two other Wabanaki artists (Jennifer Neptune and Rose Tomah) featured in our exhibit, worked on the replica of a seven-piece costume that belonged to a Maliseet chief. The replica is part of a permanent collection at the Maine State Museum in Augusta and is featured on the "Wabanaki" exhibit poster.



Gal can talk about Passamaquoddy beading and fiber arts traditions, and about the beading technique she developed.

Gal was quoted in the "Wabanaki" exhibit poster:

"I'm not really inventing anything. It's not a new design, it's incorporated in all of the old and the new, and putting them together."

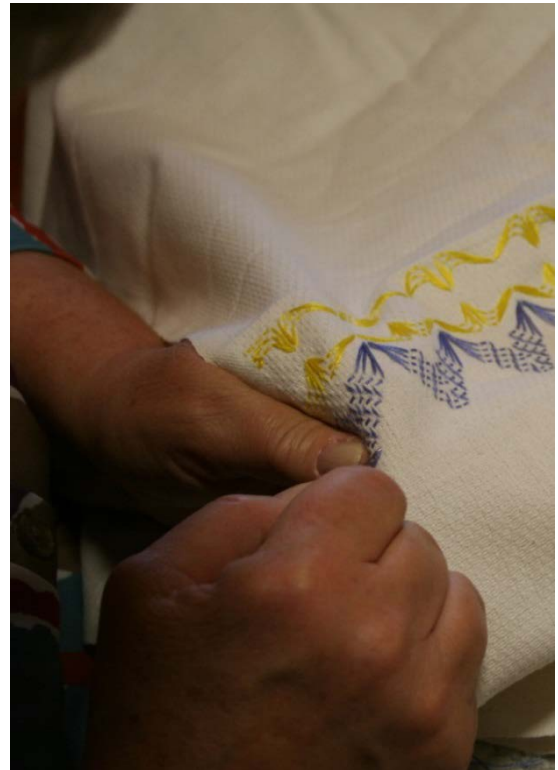
Carolyn Hildebrand, Swedish huck weaver

Stockholm, ME – raycarolynhilde@gmail.com

Carolyn Hildebrand is a Swedish huck weaver from Stockholm, Maine. Her family came as farmers from Sweden to settle in New Sweden, Maine in 1873. Her family moved to Massachusetts at the beginning of the twentieth century and Carolyn came back in 1976.

Carolyn strives to keep family traditions alive. She learned huck weaving from her mother in Girl Scouts and continues to do huck weaving today as part of her Swedish heritage. Huck weaving is an embroidery technique that distinguishes itself from other embroidery techniques by the fact that nothing appears on the back of the fabric.

Carolyn is active with the New Sweden Historical Society in Maine, and loves an occasion to revive and showcase Swedish traditions. She hopes to teach huck weaving to her granddaughter when she becomes old enough. A multi-talented fiber artist, Carolyn dabbles in many other kinds of fiber arts such as quilting, sewing, and other types of needlepoint.



Carolyn can demonstrate and teach Swedish huck weaving and talk about Swedish heritage in Maine. She taught huck weaving at the Cary Library during our inaugural tour, and it was a very successful program.

Carolyn was quoted in the “Settlers” exhibit poster:

“I enjoy doing it. It’s relaxing and I think that it’s nice to keep traditions in your family going.”

Simin Khosravani, Kashkooli apprentice rug weaver

Glenburn, ME – simin.khosravani@maine.edu

Simin Khosravani is an apprentice Kashkooli rug weaver, learning from her mother, Pari Rokh. Simin wishes to keep alive the traditions of her Kashkooli tribe, a Turkish-Iranian people. These traditions have been weakened by modern life, especially by the relatively recent transition from a semi-nomadic lifestyle to an urban lifestyle.

As an apprentice, Simin hopes to encourage others to learn so that future generation can have access to this traditional fiber art. The particular style of rug Simin is trying to master is called kilim. A kilim is type of rug made using a technique known as flat-weave, as opposed to other rugs that are made of knots, typically used on the ground or as a bed cover.



Simin can demonstrate Kashkooli rug weaving and talk about Kashkooli fiber arts, traditions, and history. Simin did talks and demonstrations for us at the Bangor Public Library and the American Folk Festival as part of our inaugural tour. She brought beautiful samples made by her family and her current weaving project and got a strong positive reaction from the audience.

Simin was quoted in the “New Mainers” exhibit poster:

“I feel bad because ... my kids, they only saw it in the bazaars, and they like it, and they say, ‘oh, this is great,’ but they don’t have a clue how to even start.”

Jennifer Neptune, Penobscot beader and basket maker

Old Town, ME – 314.3344 – jennifermiba@aol.com

Jennifer Neptune is a Penobscot beader and basket maker in Old Town, Maine. She learned how to make jewelry from another Penobscot artist and is known for her reproductions. Jennifer studies the art from her tribe by looking at pieces in museum now too fragile to be manipulated. Her reproductions contribute to bringing back, in spirit, these regalia and artifacts to the community so they can be used for ceremonies. Jennifer also beads other items such as medicine bags and necklaces, and uses the ancestral patterns of her tribe as a starting point for her inspiration. She sells her work at various well-known shows in North America.

In 2010, Jennifer and a group of women, including two other Wabanaki artists (Gal Frey and Rose Tomah) featured in our exhibit, worked on the replica of a seven-piece costume that belonged to a Maliseet chief. The replica is part of a permanent collection at the Maine State Museum in Augusta and is featured on the “Wabanaki” exhibit poster.



Jennifer can demonstrate beading and talk about Penobscot fiber arts traditions and history. Jennifer did talks and demonstrations for us at the Bangor Public Library and the American Folk Festival as part of our inaugural tour. She brought beautiful samples of her beading, a portfolio of previous projects, and her current beading project and received a strong positive reaction from the audience.

Jennifer was quoted in the “Wabanaki” exhibit poster:

“When we have tribal inaugurations, [the original collar and cuffs] come to our community to visit and [they’re] too fragile to wear ... so our community wanted one ... It’s not like bringing the original back, obviously, but it’s bringing something back, kind of in spirit, and I think, yes, people are very happy.”

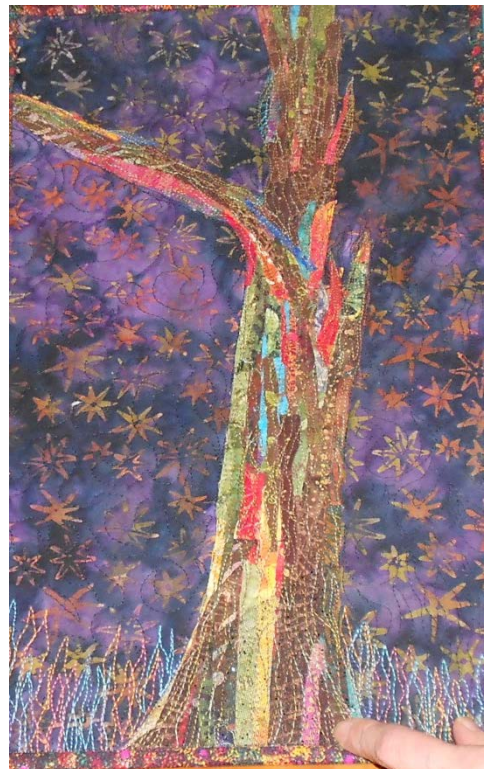
Rana O'Connor, Iranian-American quilter

Portland, ME – 232.5865 - roconnor@maine.rr.com

Rana O'Connor is an Iranian-American quilting artist in Portland, Maine. She got into quilting after helping her daughter with a school project. A member of several local quilting groups, Rana particularly enjoys designing art quilts.

Rana finds inspiration in photos and in the Iranian landscapes and art forms she was exposed to growing up. She is particularly drawn to the vibrant colors of Iranian tribal dresses as well as the delicate and detailed art of minakari (a type of Iranian miniature art) which she translates into her own work through her colors schemes and detailed piecework.

Rana teaches quilting classes in Portland and blogs about her work at <http://ranaquilts.blogspot.com>.



Rana can talk about art quilts, her design process for her quilts, and her Iranian upbringing.

Due to space constraints we couldn't include a quote by Rana in the exhibit, but we would have used this one if we could have:

"Growing up in Iran exposed me to different images, different color choices. ... One of the Iranian artworks that I love is [minakari] ... beautiful tiny miniature paintings ... I bring that into the work that I do. ... I do like sparkles. That's another Persian thing I think I love. You know there is mirror work in Iran a lot, and I think I just love that glitz and sparkles, so I put that in pretty much any quilt I can get away with it."

Elaine O'Donal, tatter

Gorham, ME – eyetat@tattedwebs.com

Elaine O'Donal is a tatter in Gorham, Maine. She learned how to tat from an elderly community member in Gorham. She has belonged to several lace making and tatting groups over the years and collects tatting books from all over. From a hobby, tatting has become a full time job for Elaine who displays her work at various shows. Elaine taught both her daughters how to tat and teaches tatting workshops. She designs her own pieces, which you can see on her website: <http://tattedwebs.com/>. Elaine recently discovered that her pieces were popular among the steampunk crowd, especially her fingerless mittens.



Elaine can demonstrate how to shuttle tat, and talk about tatting and lace making in general. Elaine did a talk and demonstration for us at the Lewiston Public Library as part of our inaugural tour. She brought a wide variety of samples and the audience was so interested in her work that she was asked to come back and teach tatting classes.

Due to space constraints we couldn't include a quote by Elaine in the exhibit, but we would have used this one if we could have:

"I was at a local founders' day type of festival right here in Gorham, and there was this elderly woman, and she had these incredible doilies, all frames and matted, and I'm like 'This is what I want to learn how to do,' and she goes: 'Oh come over to sit on my front porch some evening, and I'll teach you.' ... I spent an hour on her front porch, ... and I made one stitch in an hour, and the rest it was just all knots, ... and she kept saying: 'If you did it once, you can do it again.' [laughs] By the time I left there, like 'This woman is crazy! [laughs] I can't do this!' ... I picked it up, and I turned my knot in a stitch, and as they say, the rest is history."

Mei Selvage, Chinese painter and mixed-media artist

Portland, ME –415.9164 – meiselvageart@gmail.com – www.meiselvage.com

Mei Selvage is a Chinese painter and mixed-media artist. Growing up during the Cultural Revolution, Mei is interested in exploring the fiber traditions that were absent during her childhood. In the United States, Mei has been reconnecting with Chinese art traditions and taught herself through reading books and visiting museums. She started her journey as an artist when she moved to Portland, Maine.

With her mixed-media project *At Home*, Mei uses mudras and excerpts from her diary to explore her multi-faceted identities as a female, a Chinese artist, a spiritual practitioner, and an immigrant. *At Home* combines Chinese fabrics and ink painting to create Chinese accordion books paired with mudras displayed in embroidery hoops. As well as being a visual biography, Mei hopes that *At Home* fosters cross-cultural dialogues and understanding by inviting audiences reflect on the changing sense of home in an increasing mobile and global age when home for many people is no longer bound by physical birth or living places.

One of her artist books was exhibit in Peru and the *Portland Phoenix* wrote an article about Mei's trip: "[The Peruvian Connection: Maine Artist to Join Ingenious Art Exhibition](#)".



Mei can talk about mudras, her artistic practice, and her immigration experience. She has shown her art in libraries previously.

Mei was quoted in the “New Mainers” exhibit poster:

“All of my art has a Chinese accent, but it’s not purely Chinese either, because I live in America. I live in this world. I want people around me to understand it. So I always compare myself to a translator. I translate from the East to the West and vice versa.”

Kavya Seshachar, Indian crocheter and embroiderer

Cape Elizabeth, ME – kavya.vishwakarma@gmail.com

Kavya Seshachar is an Indian crocheter and embroiderer living in Cape Elizabeth, Maine. She learned traditional fiber arts from her family when she was a young child. Today, Kavya enjoys using the techniques she mastered to break away from tradition. From necklaces to framed pieces and article of clothing, Kavya combines an Indian color palette and techniques with American design aesthetics. A trained architect, Kavya likes to play with the space in her creations, mixing lines and curves, but also reimagining the negative space. Kavya is also passionate about working with recycled materials. Kavya blogs about her fiber art at: <http://fresh-as-mint.blogspot.com/>.



Kavya can demonstrate crocheting and embroidery, and talk about traditional fiber art traditions and aesthetics in India. Kavya did talks and demonstrations for us at the American Folk Festival as part of our inaugural tour. She brought beautiful samples made by her family and herself and her artist book. She got a strong positive reaction from the audience.

Kavya was quoted twice in the exhibit posters:

New Mainers: "I would definitely say that I have been influenced by the local Maine style of art I made a necklace for myself and [Mom] was like 'yes the colors are okay, but not really Indian style' ... because Indian is more of clean, perfect lines, and it's not about doing random things."

Community: "Indians from 15 countries have participated in this So, it's about 2,500 women all together, and all because of a Facebook page [With] making a signature blanket, that means there's a lot of coordination happening, because it needs to make one huge image. ... I'm so proud of the unity that we all had."

Carol Thomas, Franco-American knitter, crocheter, spinner, and weaver

Auburn, ME – 783.7866 – cthomas@bates.edu

Carol Thomas is a Franco-American artist in Auburn, Maine. Her family moved to the area to work in the fabric mills. Both her grandmothers were knitters, and she continues that tradition while learning new fiber arts with her youngest son. Over the years they learned how to weave and spin. Now Carol has her own business selling her woven creations called Generations Textiles (<https://www.facebook.com/GenerationsTextilesMaine/>).



Carol can demonstrate knitting and weaving, and talk about Franco-American fiber arts, aesthetics, and history.

Due to space constraints we couldn't include a quote by Carol in the exhibit, but we would have used these if we could have:

"We had to make things in order to survive, but that doesn't mean that we couldn't make them beautiful. So we will, within my tradition, we will make the practical things that we need, but they weren't ugly."

"It's very practical, very down to earth stuff. I mean some of the stuff I showed you earlier today is kind of flights-of-fancy with the lacy shawl and that sort of thing, [but] it's still useable, it's still very warm, it's still very practical."

The Valley Crafters, weavers and rug makers

Contact them on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/The-Valley-Crafters-164612696925194/>

The Valley Crafters are women from the Saint John Valley who meet to practice their fiber arts together in a studio located in Fort Kent, Maine. The women are a mix of Acadian, Franco, and Canadian heritage. When they are not weaving rugs or blankets on their looms, the Valley Crafters are braiding rugs, quilting, and reusing/recycling fabrics they turn into colorful rugs. The Valley Crafters enjoy keeping the fiber traditions of their families alive for future generations to see.



The Valley Crafters can offer weaving demonstration and talk about fiber arts in the French-speaking community of the Saint John Valley. They enjoy doing demonstrations as a group. One member, Anna Mae Raymond, drove the 2.5 hours down to the Cary Library to do a talk and demonstration as part of our inaugural tour. Anna Mae talked about fiber traditions and brought samples of her work and of the work other Valley Crafters along with a portable loom on which she gave a weaving demonstration.

Due to space constraints we couldn't include a quote by The Valley Crafters in the exhibit, but if we could it would have been this one from Anna Mae Raymond:

“Well, they, when they come here, they say it's a blast from the past. You know, people don't believe that we have this. ... we just come here to do what we like to do. And we want to keep the tradition of our grandparents, and my mother's, you know, our mothers', so that's what we like to do.”

Susan Watson, felter and locker hooker

Garland, ME – 404.2399 – susanwatson1@myfairpoint.net

Susan Watson is a felter and locker hooker (a type of rug hooking) in Garland, Maine. She comes from a family of sheep farmers and grew up on a farm. A sheep farmer herself, Susan processes the wool of her sheep and uses it in her creations. Her mother was a fiber artist as well and she was immersed in her mother's artistic creations. Her mother took Susan to a felting workshop one day and Susan was smitten. Susan finds her inspiration in Maine wild landscapes and the changing colors of the seasons.



Susan can demonstrate and teach locker hooking, talk about felting and how she designs her projects, from raising sheep to final fiber art piece, can demonstrate and set up a display of hooked rugs, and the materials used to make them, and can also set up an exhibit that includes the other types of fiber art that she creates.

Due to space constraints we couldn't include a quote by Susan in the exhibit, but if we could it would have been this one:

"I started as a soil scientist, so I was out in the wilderness day in and day out, and you'd be surprised when you do that year in and year out, how much of that is clocked into your sub consciousness of 'this is the season for this to be leafing out, and for that to be blossoming, and for that to be fruiting,' and you're clocking that in as you're walking through./ [After my job changed] I missed the being out in nature day in and day out, and I felt that I was only seeing it through a windshield after that. ... I started doing the felting, and it just seemed that I had to have that color and texture expression somewhere, because I wasn't getting it at work anymore."

Sally Wilson, knitter and embroiderer

Freeport, ME – sawilson53@gmail.com

Sally Wilson is a Yankee knitter, embroiderer and rug hooker in Freeport, Maine. She learned her fiber arts from her mother and her aunt, and taught both her sons how to knit and mend their own clothes.

Sally says of her style that it is very New England. She is also inspired by the fabrics and styles of her Scottish ancestry.

Sally enjoys meeting with her local knitting group several times a week, and says that knitting is part of her daily routine. She takes great pleasure in knitting for her friends and family.



Sally can demonstrate and talk about knitting, rug hooking, and New England aesthetics. Sally did a talk and demonstration for us at the Lewiston Public Library as part of our inaugural tour. She brought samples of her knitting and rug hooking, and talked about her heritage, aesthetics, and her knitting community.

Sally was quoted in the “Community” exhibit poster:

“When you finish a project, you have to wear it into the shop, and then everybody just oohs and aahs over it. It’s such a motivating experience to be that connected, just because you like to knit.”