1990

Speaker Bios- 1990

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Shortly following the Minneapolis symposium Peggy Gilfoy died, leaving Milton Sonday as President. The publication "Textiles as Primary Sources" was dedicated to Peggy. Lotus Stack became Vice-President.

A few adjustments in the duties of various officers and the structure of TSA have evolved and changed in the past two years with the guidance and approval of the Board. The TSA Board has been meeting regularly and editions of the Newsletter have been produced and mailed.

Our biggest problem in the past two years was the membership list. We apologize for any misunderstandings which might have occurred as the result of a confused list. When Peggy Gilfoy died her briefcase containing TSA files could not be found. A membership list was reconstructed based largely on records kept by the Indianapolis Museum of Art which had been acting as our bank under Peggy's direction. Before the meeting in Minneapolis TSA was a one person operation. After several Newsletter mailings and a membership renewal, a reliable list of members emerged. But this highlighted the next issue: it was very difficult to have a membership person in Wisconsin, a newsletter publisher in Maryland, a Treasurer in Los Angeles and a bank in a fourth state. The solution at the moment is that Mary Jane Leland is Treasurer as well as Membership Chairperson. Since Peggy's death the Minneapolis Institute of Art has been acting as our bank under the watchful eye of Lotus Stack.

TSA was incorporated in May of this year. Our lawyer is J. Benjamin Ahrens in Minneapolis. We are incorporated in Minnesota, but this does not in any way restrict our activities nation-wide. We are applying for tax exemption, working on a final draft of the bylaws and about to open our own bank account.

Since TSA is only now beginning to function smoothly, I recommended that the officers and board be reelected, as it were, for another term and that we hold a formal election with proper nomination of officers at the General Meeting in 1992. A vote was taken which supported this suggestion.

The purpose of TSA is to provide an interdisciplinary forum for the exchange and dissemination of information on textiles in their cultural, socioeconomic, artistic and technical contexts. Activities are to reflect the diversity of our membership which we encourage to include as many aspects of textiles as possible. There are no qualifications for membership. We will hold a symposium on even numbered years and publish a newsletter on a regular schedule. Other activities will be planned as we can manage them or as you suggest them. We are supporting the Network originated by Susan Bean. Plans are underway for the symposium in 1992 and an alternate year activity. But, the bottom line is this: TSA will only be as good as you make it.

We are fortunate to have had the cooperation of a number of dedicated hard working individuals and a body of members who are enthusiastic about the goals of the Society. Thank you each and everyone of you for our support.

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SPEAKERS

Rita J. Adrosko is Supervising Curator in the Division of Textiles, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Patricia Rieff Anawalt is Director of the Center for the Study of Regional Dress at the Fowler Museum of Cultural History, University of California, Los Angeles, California.

Lisa L. Aronson is Assistant Professor at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York.

Suzanne Balzerman teaches in the Department of Design, Housing and Apparel and is Registrar for the department's costume, textile, and decorative arts collection in the Goldstein Gallery at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Elizabeth Barber is Professor of Linguistics and Archaeology at Occidental College, Los Angeles, California.


Susan S. Bean is Chief Curator and Curator of Ethnology at the Peabody Museum of Salem, Massachusetts.

Carol Bier is Curator at The Textile Museum in Washington, D.C.

Katherine A. Bowie is Assistant Professor with a joint appointment in the Department of Anthropology and the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Wisconsin.

Stanley Chapman is Pasold Reader in Business History at the University of Nottingham, Nottingham, England.

Sandra Lee Evenson is completing her Master's Degree at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Lynn Felsher is Curator of Textiles and Adjunct Instructor in the Textile and Surface Design Department at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York City, New York.


Roy W. Hamilton is Assistant to the Curator of Asian Ethnology at the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Negley Harte is Senior Lecturer in Economic History in the Department of History at University College London and Director of the Pasold Research Fund at the London School of Economics, London, England.
Silk in European and American Trade before 1783
A commodity of commerce or a frivolous luxury?

This outline is taken from my as yet unpublished book on The English Silk Industry 1700-1825, and especially from the chapters on raw silk and tussah. In addition, I have widened the scope for this talk to discuss the subject more generally. In terms of general economic history the quantities of silk produced and sold are miniscule but there are a lot of instructive points to be made which are of general importance - as well as some very pretty objects. The latter are "documents" in the French sense as well as works of art - a point that many people have heard as make only too often. One aspect which I shall state now and, no doubt, several more times in different ways is that we must understand for what a particular fibre was used and how that use may change. Since for all clothing and furnishing there were, effectively, four fibres this should seem self-evident but it does not always seem to be. On the other hand, statistics compiled in a period when in no sense were they compiled scientifically or objectively I prefer to treat with great caution. They can point research in a useful direction but not much more. The Customs compiled yearly statistics of imports and exports in the Port Books now in the Public Record Office in London [1]. They used the great pound, however, and an out of date Book of Rates. So what? The statistics did tell me to which countries English silks were exported and which were the most important markets, of which more anon.

Sources of raw silk:
The Warp

Even at this first stage an appreciation of the real object is of great importance. The silk for the warp had to be of higher quality than that for the weft since it took the strain of the loom in weaving. Not every country which grew silk could produce a suitable quality. In the 17th-18th century there were two main sources. The first was China and it was imported into Europe with other goods by the English, French and Dutch East India Companies.

The quality was usually excellent but it arrived spasmodically [2] making it difficult for silkmen and weavers alike. The second and more important source was Piedmont, an easy market for Lyon in the second half of the 17th century but as the English industry expanded competition in Piedmont between the French and English grew increasingly tense - and the price rose. Raw silk was also exported already thrown as organdize [3]. The pressure of demand led both countries to look for other sources in the 18th century. The English tried growing silk in Georgia and South Carolina but although the climate was suitable slave labour was not. [4] The white mulberry cannot be grown in Northern Europe as a commercial enterprise. Whether or not the myth is true that James I of England encouraged the planting of mulberries is irrelevant because what grew nicely in England is the red mulberry, delicious for humans but not for silk worms. The French were much more practical and began to grow silk in Provence where both labour and climate were suitable. This did not entirely satisfy their needs but reduced French dependence on Piedmont.

[1] The figures here are in pounds sterling, and the price is the current sterling rate converted to the pound sterling in the years concerned. The pound sterling was at a constant rate of 2.405 to the dollar.

[2] This is well documented in the Port Books. The figures are somewhat spastic.

[3] In the 18th century the English imported raw silk from France and also from Russia.