

## Janet Meany: Every Loom Has a Story

A small grant in 1978 got me interested in looms and their makers. My task was to interview and photograph a group of twenty-two active weavers in Two Harbors, Minnesota, a community of about 4,000. Two Harbors was settled in the 1800s by immigrants from Northern Europe and Scandinavia. They brought many crafts with them, particularly weaving, and built looms from memory out of wood available in nearby forests.

I often visited them with a weaver from the area who was my mentor, Rora Strom. Our visits usually began with coffee and conversation. At last the loom would be revealed and photos could be taken! In some instances, after much coffee, we'd be denied the opportunity to enter the weaving area. ("Oh no, there's too much of a mess in there!")

Usually the looms were in a basement or attic or in a separate building, the sauna, possibly, or other outbuilding where the weaver could work only in the summertime. A loom that was considered the oldest and most traveled in the community had metal rings hung by leather straps to hold the shafts. Another loom had birch bark on the ends of the warp beam. A tractor wheel turned the cloth beam of still another loom.

All of the looms we photographed were made locally and without any universal design. It was difficult to determine the country of origin of a loom design as a neighbor often constructed it for a nearby weaver, building it like the looms he remembered from his home country.

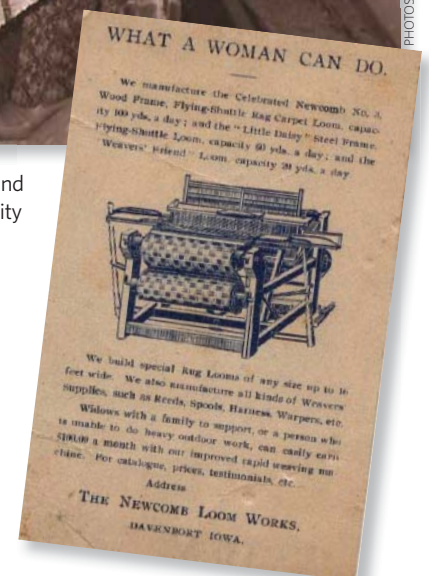
Looms in Two Harbors were shared, long ago moved from one farm to another by cart. When a loom was borrowed, the owner would travel to teach the borrower how to use it. The women helped each other with warping and often held "rag-cutting bees." I attended one of these all-day gatherings, which included lunch and coffee in the afternoon, and brought my own basket of rags to be cut. I soon became aware that we were supposed to work on our hostess's rags! So I left my basket in the car.

My love for old looms has only grown since Two Harbors. In 1986, Theresa Trebon of Sedro Woolley, Washington, and I founded the Newcomb Looms Historical Society, where weavers could register their Newcomb looms. This was later expanded to the Historic Looms of America. I now maintain a Loom Manual Library where weavers can order copies of old instruction books and historical information about their looms. Through the generosity of countless individuals, the collection contains materials from over fifty loom companies. By far the most requests are for manuals from the Union Loom Company of Boonville, New York (claiming to have made over 40,000 looms). The other most-asked-for manuals are those from the Newcomb Loom Company, Davenport, Iowa (over 35,000 Newcomb Looms were built



Rora Strom served as mentor and leader in the weaving community Two Harbors, Minnesota.

Women who can't do heavy outdoor work are advised to weave by the Newcomb Loom Company, makers of The Weaver's Delight loom!



over ninety-five years); the Reed Loom Company, Springfield, Ohio; the Deen Loom Company, Harlan, Iowa; and the J. L. Hammett & Company, Cambridge, Massachusetts. A number of queries also come about Structo table looms, which continue to show up at rummage and estate sales.

We can all identify with the exciting moment of finding an old loom at a sale, in a newspaper ad, in a barn or antique shop, or on eBay. I cannot count the number of times I have answered a telephone call to hear: "I've found an old loom! I've always wanted to weave, but there are no instructions!"

If you are interested in registering your Newcomb loom, e-mail Theresa at [trebon@comcast.net](mailto:trebon@comcast.net). You can download some loom manuals at [www.handweaving.net](http://www.handweaving.net) or contact the Loom Manual Library at [www.weaversfriend.com](http://www.weaversfriend.com). 