

CULTIVATING THE CRAFTS: AILEEN OSBORN WEBB AND THE  
INSTITUTING OF AMERICAN CRAFT, 1934-1964

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## Preface

I was first introduced to the Webb family as a summer intern at Electra Havemeyer Webb's Shelburne Museum. I had a long-standing interest in American folk art and craft and while an intern was fortunate to spend my time working with the museum's fascinating collection of wildfowl and fish decoys. It was about a year later that I became acquainted with the astonishing story of Aileen Osborn Webb. I was particularly impressed with her genuine commitment to doing good and her life-long thirst for knowledge and artistic excellence. Her own work as an artist in the fields of ceramics, woodwork, watercolor and enamels certainly influence her sensitivity to the plight of the contemporary craftsmen in an industrialized society.

Throughout this project I have had many generous individuals who have inspired me and taught me life lessons I shall always be grateful for. I wish to express my deep gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Tara Tappert, whose guidance and enthusiasm for me and my work have been immeasurable. Cynthia Williams, Director of the Masters Program in the History of Decorative Arts, Corcoran College of Art + Design/The Smithsonian Associates has been a constant source of support and a wonderful advocate for her students. I would also like to thank Jeanine Falino for her time and interest in this project, who so generously agreed to serve as my second reader.

During the research process I encountered several exemplary scholars who have passed on their knowledge to an eager graduate student. I wish to

thank David Shuford, American Craft Council; Paul Smith, American Craft Museum; Julie Eldredge Edward, Shelburne Farms; Marissa Bourgoin, Archives of American Art and Leslie Klingner, Biltmore Estate.

One of the pleasures of doing biographical research, was that I was able to engage family members of Aileen Osborn Webb in their own communities. Researching in Shelburne, VT and Garrison, NY gave me new insights into the worlds Aileen was a part of and I was fortunate to experience such genuine interest and support in my research from her family. I especially would like to thank Fred Osborn III, and Alec and Marshall Webb and their families for warm hospitality for I am greatly appreciative.

Surrounded by my friends and family, I was nurtured through the challenging process of pursuing a Master's Thesis. I wish to thank Alexia MacClain and her family and my mother and sister for their unwavering support and encouragement for it has meant everything to me.

In closing, I dedicate this thesis to my father whose spirit, like Aileen Osborn Webb's seems to surround and inspire me wherever I go.

## Introduction

Aileen Osborn Webb (1892-1979) was a lover of the arts. She loved watercolors. She loved pottery. She loved wood carving. As a member of an American philanthropic dynasty, she was inspired throughout her life to improve the quality of life around her. Out of her passion for the arts and dedication to service came a crafts empire.

Throughout her career as America's foremost advocate for the crafts, Aileen Osborn Webb experienced success through a deep social network long-established by her family. As a member of one of the great Hudson River Valley Families she operated in influential social circles that included the Roosevelts and Morgans. Like these wealthy society leaders she was instilled with an expectation of service. During the Great Depression inspired by friend John McClure, a farmer from Asheville, North Carolina she founded a crafts cooperative. Later her childhood friend Anne Morgan, the daughter of financier J.P. Morgan helped her develop a national crafts organization. Other projects such as the magazine *Craft Horizons*, edited by literary luminary Rose Sliva and the Museum of Contemporary Craft, overseen by craft administrator and architect Dave Campbell, benefited from Webb's impressive social connections. When she worked to project the crafts onto a global stage, her friend, crafts advocate Margaret Patch, ably assisted her in her efforts. All of these figures were substantial allies in Aileen Osborn Webb's vision for the crafts.

At the foundation of Webb's service was a marriage of art and philanthropy. The core of her artistic tastes was an appreciation of beauty that was inspired by the Arts and Crafts Movement. Like her family, who served in administrative posts in museums, hospitals and politics, she also committed her adult life to service of others. She realized her visionary goals by developing a crafts empire with building block components dedicated to marketing, education, exhibitions, conferences, and international diplomacy.

Aileen Webb's crafts career spanned more than four decades and took her from the American crafts traditions of the Great Depression, through early American and European modernist influences, to the studio craft movement and later Abstract Expressionism and Funk Art. Throughout this period Webb encouraged the public to remain aware of emerging artistic movements and to appreciate new aesthetic developments in the crafts as they came.

The evolution of Aileen Webb's crafts vision grew steadily in terms of scope. She first immersed herself in the local needs of her community in Putnam County, New York during the 1930s. She later made the leap from rural to urban crafts marketing by opening the shop, America House in New York City in 1940. When she set her sights on elevating the crafts and their makers a national organization for craftsmen was not far behind. Encouraged by the success of national conferences in the 1950s, Webb founded the World Congress of Craftsmen and its World Craft Council (WCC) in 1964. Established at the height of the Cold War the WCC had peace through international dialogues on craft at the heart of its mission.

Elevation of crafts and craftspeople and the belief that crafts could transform everyday life were the core ideas that sustained Webb from the beginning of her career in the 1930s until its close in the 1970s. Celebration of the human spirit and beauty of creation were central to her mission. Her efforts to professionalize the field were instrumental to gaining respect and admiration for the crafts and key to each of the institutions she helped establish. Her commitment to the craftsman and to excellence in the crafts field contributed to her status as a revered icon of the American crafts movement.

## Chapter 1: The 1910s and 1920s: A Philanthropic Beginning

Born into a prominent American family of philanthropists who were successful industrialists, financiers and scientists, Aileen Osborn Webb was the premier craft patron of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her ascendancy to this position was seeded in a comfortable and privileged childhood in Garrison, New York and Manhattan where she was surrounded by individuals who advocated giving back to the communities that had made them so successful. Long before Webb was born in 1892, the Osborn family had established a firm precedent of *noblesse oblige* which served as a model for future generations of the family.

The Osborns were related to some of America's most distinguished families, among them, the Vanderbilts, Sturgeses, Phelpses and Dodges (see family tree, Appendix 1). As these families rose to prominence during the mid-to-late-nineteenth century, they also established a history of philanthropy. Aileen grew up with people who prized committed, not just cursory, contributions to improve society. It was through the example of her family that she was encouraged to pursue a cause she believed in. By the dawn of the American Depression she had found her life's work, "helping to develop the status of crafts within the United States."<sup>1</sup>

Aileen Clinton Hoadley Osborn was born June 25, 1892 at her parents home, "The Birches," in Garrison, New York. (fig.1) By her own admission she was the progeny of one of the "Hudson River Families," individuals of prominence who were leaders in their communities and lived in graceful country

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<sup>1</sup> Webb, Aileen Osborn, "Almost a Century," (unpublished memoirs), 1977, 67.

estates.<sup>2</sup> (fig. 2) Aileen's interests were formed by a general curiosity of the world and a fondness for nature and the artful beauty found there. In her 1977 unpublished autobiography, *Almost a Century*, written just two years before she died, one of Aileen's earliest recollections foreshadowed a life spent as an arts advocate. "The first time I was conscious of myself as a person I suppose I was about five. I still have an inner memory of myself sitting at a round white nursery table, painting with great pride little blue forget-me-nots with yellow centers."<sup>3</sup>

The wealth that surrounded Aileen Osborn was largely made possible by many successful family businesses, chief among them the Phelps Dodge Corporation. Established in the mid-nineteenth century as a partnership between Anson Phelps and his son-in-law William Earl Dodge Sr. (respectively Osborn's maternal great-great grandfather and great-grandfather) the firm oversaw several industrial operations, including: "brass mills in Connecticut, western mines, lumber operation, railroad interests and active trading operations."<sup>4</sup> It was under Dodge's son, William Earl Dodge Jr. who became a senior partner in the firm in 1864, that a transition was made establishing the Phelps Dodge name as the "great copper mining company, with its Copper Queen Mine for many years the largest producer in the world."<sup>5</sup> It was Osborn's maternal aunt, Mary Melissa Hoadley

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<sup>2</sup> Webb, 51.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>4</sup> Osborn, Jr., Frederick. "Six Generations, 1800-1960," Osborn Family Archives, Garrison, NY, 1960, 30.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 31.

(“Aunt May”), the unmarried heiress to the copper fortune who provided Aileen Osborn with the financial resources to later develop her crafts empire.<sup>6</sup>

The men in Aileen Osborn Webb’s family influenced her immeasurably. They set an extraordinarily high standard of philanthropic and civic involvement and lived lives “full of good works.”<sup>7</sup> Her paternal great-grandfather, Jonathan Sturges, her maternal great-great-grandfather William Earl Dodge, Sr. and her paternal grandfather, William Henry Osborn, were all eminent art patrons of the Hudson River School and were acquainted with Frederick Edwin Church—William Osborn was a close confidant of the artist.<sup>8</sup> The relationship crossed social and professional lines. Osborn both lent money for Olana, Church’s Hudson River Valley estate, and he named his son (Aileen’s father), William Church Osborn, after the artist.<sup>9</sup> Sturges was a patron and friend of Hudson River School artist Asher B. Durand. He commissioned a painting of his wife by Durand and he collected an impressive number of Hudson River School and American paintings.<sup>10</sup>

William Church Osborn, a man who stood more than six feet tall and was considered a “gentleman” by his family, spent a lifetime pursuing philanthropic

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<sup>6</sup> Osborn, Jr., 25.

<sup>7</sup> Webb, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Osborn, Jr., 30.

<sup>9</sup> Howat, John K. *Frederick Church*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, 45.

<sup>10</sup> Osborn, Frederick. *Voyage to a New World, 1889-1979: A Personal Narrative*, Garrison, New York: Privately Printed, 1979, 15.

activities.<sup>11</sup> While he was a lifelong member of the Citizens Budget Committee (a ‘watch dog’ organization to monitor New York City’s treasury), a founding member of the Hudson River Conservation Society, and helped run the Children’s Aid Society and the Hospital for the Ruptured and Crippled, his first love was his service as Trustee and President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>12</sup> This philanthropic work reflected his burgeoning interest in the Impressionist paintings he saw in the shop window of dealer Durand-Ruel as he walked from his house at 36<sup>th</sup> Street to the subway at 14<sup>th</sup> Street. His son, Frederick Osborn, writes that around 1904 or 1905 he passed by the window and in it viewed “a painting of scenery which stirred his imagination...he went into the store...was told it was by Claude Monet who was the rage in Paris, and that Durand was introducing Monet in New York.”<sup>13</sup> After a week-long trial in his home he bought the painting for four-or five-thousand dollars and it served as a foundation for a small but personal collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist work. His sensitivity to his surroundings led him to match the many canvases he had collected, including Monet, Pissarro, Manet and Gauguin, with “walls lines with a sort of pinkish gold brocade which was a wonderful background for the pictures.”<sup>14</sup> Upon his death in 1951, both his family and the Metropolitan Museum of Art were beneficiaries of

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<sup>11</sup> Webb, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Osborn, Jr. 17.

<sup>13</sup> Webb, 8.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, 11.

his largess as he “left each of his four children a Monet and several other paintings, then gave the balance to the....Museum.”<sup>15</sup>

The money made by the Osborn men allowed the Osborn women to establish a philanthropic foundation upon which future generations of women would build. The women in Aileen’s life reflected the emerging roles that female progressives assumed during the Gilded Age. They represented “a critical mass of wealthy society women who emerges as individual art activists, founders of institutions and collectors.”<sup>16</sup> It was the sturdy example of their “patterns of volunteer service” which would motivate subsequent generations of female philanthropists.

The women of Aileen Osborn’s childhood provided her with an inspirational model of Gilded Age philanthropy and significantly inform her life’s work as the country’s premier crafts advocate. Aileen’s mother’s philanthropic activities figure prominently in her recollections of her life as a girl. Alice Dodge Osborn was a celebrated advocate of the Bellevue School of Nursing. Inspired by her mother-in-law, Mrs. William H. Osborn, who served as the School’s first president in 1873, Alice Osborn herself would later ascend to the presidency of this organization.<sup>17</sup> The nursing school, associated with Bellevue Hospital, was the nation’s first nursing school inside America’s oldest hospital, and was based upon Florence Nightingale’s pioneering principles of modern nursing. Alice

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Corn, Wanda M. “Art Matronage in Post-Victorian America”, *Cultural Leadership in America: Art Matronage and Patronage*. Boston: Trustees of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1997, 11.

<sup>17</sup> Webb, 8.

Dodge Osborn would go on to serve as President of this institution for over 35 years and it would stand as one her greatest accomplishments. A recollection regarding her work with Bellevue reads, “When Tammany Hall and Mayor Hylan tried to appoint an unqualified superintendent, and otherwise interfere with the proper running of the school she gave battle indignantly, courteously and with eminent success.”<sup>18</sup> Additionally when it became apparent that the accommodations for the nurses were “inadequate, she built and gave to the school a fine building eminently suited to the purpose.”<sup>19</sup> Her other endeavors included work as a board member and later President of the Traveler’s Aid Society, involving herself with this organization after the death of her sister Grace Dodge, who founded the New York City chapter in 1914. The Travelers Aid Society, founded in 1851 in St. Louis, served as a financial and community resource to pioneers going west and to new immigrants. By the dawn of the twentieth century it had expanded to meet the needs of stranded travelers, especially women and children.<sup>20</sup> In her memoirs, Aileen Osborn Webb remembers her mother as a caring person, “She loved helping people, and never gave up once she became interested in someone with a problem—alcoholics, spendthrifts, or a would-be opera star.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Osborn, Jr., 32.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Travelers Aid International. “About Us.” History and Programs. [www.travelersaidinternational.org](http://www.travelersaidinternational.org). Accessed on December 14, 2007

Alice Dodge Osborn's generosity of spirit and fortune were mirrored by her sister, Grace H. Dodge, who devoted her life to the many philanthropic causes which interested her. She founded the Teachers College of Columbia University, the Traveler's Aid Society, and the Y.W.C.A., and was a recognized leader in her time. She received high praise from the industrialist, J. P. Morgan, a relative by marriage, who noted that "She had the finest business brain in the United States, not excepting that of any man."<sup>22</sup>

Recognizing the potential of an active civic life among women of her niece's generation, Grace Dodge authored a book of advice for women. Outlining desirable ambitions, the book, *Thoughts of busy girls*, edited by Miss Dodge and published in 1892, included many topics, among them sensitivity and appreciation of art in all its many manifestations. Miss Dodge states, "Does art influence life? Most certainly it does. It is food for the mind, body and soul. The eye has an appetite for beauty, the ear for a sweet sound, and the mouth for a pleasant taste."<sup>23</sup> The passion with which she extolled art and the broadness with which she defined it (everything from "science" to "cookery" to "painting") reflect an individual consciousness of life's beauty and a philosophical outlook on life shared by her niece, Aileen Osborn Webb.<sup>24</sup>

Alice Dodge's other sister, Mary Melissa Hoadley, known affectionately as "Aunt May," also never married but lived a life isolated from her sisters,

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<sup>21</sup> Webb, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Osborn, Jr. 35.

<sup>23</sup> Dodge, Grace H. *Thoughts of busy girls*. New York: Cassell Publishing Co., 1892, 84.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

moving to England as a young woman. Along with the inheritance made possible by her share of the Phelps Dodge fortune, “Aunt May” shared other characteristics with her niece, “independence, competence in practical affairs, and kindness.”<sup>25</sup>

Improving the quality of life for all citizens was a central tenet of Progressive-era politics. This was the era in which Aileen Osborn was raised. Her father was a staunch Democrat and “very civic minded” taking “part in the affairs of the city and the state.”<sup>26</sup> In 1911, shortly after the announcement of her engagement to Vanderbilt Webb, who was also socially and politically-oriented, a student at Princeton and the descendent of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, Aileen, her parents and her fiancé traveled to the Democratic Convention in Baltimore, where Wilson was nominated. (fig.3) The future President Woodrow made an immediate impact on her. Aileen later stated, his speeches reflected “...wonderful words and English, thrilling new thoughts on international development with which I agreed, and which were inspiring to me.”<sup>27</sup>

One of Aileen’s earliest civic endeavors was with the New York Junior League. This organization, established in 1907, was an example of one of many socially-oriented projects of the Progressive era. Improving the community in which one lived through charitable work by its members was central to the

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<sup>25</sup> Osborn, Jr., 37.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>27</sup> Webb, 50.

League's mission.<sup>28</sup> According to Webb, the process of membership involved “a meeting every autumn, of carefully, handpicked socially eligible girls, [we] elected a president and vice president, and [then] turned them loose to run a play or pageant to make money for charity.”<sup>29</sup>

Along with her involvement with the Junior League, Aileen was also planning her marriage to Vanderbilt Webb. (fig.4) The couple were married on Saturday, September 10, 1912, in Garrison, New York. Several prominent society families attended, including Mr. and Mrs. George W. Vanderbilt and Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Pulitzer.<sup>30</sup> Following the wedding, the newlyweds spent their honeymoon night at Olana, and then retreated to the Webb estate, Nehasane, in the Adirondacks.

After her marriage Aileen Webb continued her involvement in philanthropic activities, serving as president of the New York Junior League in 1921.<sup>31</sup> During the 1910s and 1920s, Webb was also busy raising her four children: Derrick, William, Barbara, and Richard. Through her civic duties with the Junior League, Webb developed the skills and knowledge that would help build her career as the chief patron and advocate of the American Craft

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<sup>28</sup> The Association Junior Leagues of International, Inc. mission states: “an organization of women committed to promoting voluntarism, developing the potential of women, and improving communities through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers. Its purpose is exclusively educational and charitable.” More on the League's history can be found at [www.ajli.org](http://www.ajli.org).

<sup>29</sup> Webb, 34.

<sup>30</sup> “Miss Osborn Weds Today,” *New York Times*, September 11, 1912.

<sup>31</sup> Webb, 36.

movement. She later noted, “all my life has been geared toward managing people, and to organizing them.”<sup>32</sup>

During the 1920s Aileen Webb’s training in the Democratic Party provided experiences that propelled her toward her future significant philanthropic work. At this time she was elected Vice Chairman of the Putnam County Democratic Committee and “worked hard for the next two or three years, organizing women’s clubs, holding monthly meetings with speakers who would come up all the way from New York.” One of the “most exciting” meetings she organized was a picnic at Whipporwill Farms where Eleanor Roosevelt “made her first political speech.” Both members of “Hudson River Families,” Webb and Roosevelt were friends, so an invitation to speak at Aileen Osborn Webb’s luncheon was appropriate. Though Roosevelt was observed to lack confidence as a public speaker at this stage in her life, she already displayed “charm and persuasion in great evidence.”<sup>33</sup> Later work in New York Governor Al Smith’s 1928 campaign for President further developed Aileen’s speaking and management skills. These years served as a strong foundation for her life’s work “helping to develop the status of the crafts within the United States.”<sup>34</sup>

Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of cultural production identify three types of capital: economic, symbolic and cultural. Through her childhood and young adulthood, Aileen Osborn Webb developed an understanding of cultural agency

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 67.

and through her wealth, extensive social connections, pedigree, and cultural development, she was in an ideal position to elevate the crafts on a national and later international stage.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> In her dissertation, Art Historian Sandra Alfoldy references Bourdieu's theories as a model for analyzing Aileen Osborn Webb's role as a "cultural agent." Alfoldy states, "Webb understood the power relations contributing to the position she occupied as a cultural agent." Alfoldy, Sandra Elaine, *An intricate web(b): American Influences on professional craft in Canada, 1964-1974*, Concordia University (Canada), 2001: 22.

## Chapter 2: The 1930s: Marketing in the Crafts

When the Great Depression hit the United States in 1929 every town in America felt its repercussions both big and small. Americans worked throughout the 1930s to ease the burden of those deeply affected citizens and to rebuild their communities from the ground up. To provide relief for the country, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt established the New Deal, aiding communities in recovery efforts, by providing such socially-conscious programs as the Works Progress Administration and the Farm Security Administration.

During the Great Depression, Aileen Osborn Webb and her family assisted in the work-relief projects they felt needed them the most. Her eldest son, Derrick Webb, spent the summer of 1937 in Asheville, North Carolina working with the Farmers Federation, a cooperative established in 1920 by farmer and preacher James Gore King McClure. Its mandate was to “create a better market for selling produce.”<sup>36</sup> At home, Aileen Osborn Webb helped in her own community. During the Depression she volunteered her time assisting employment efforts in Putnam County, New York, where she made her home. Undoubtedly it was her prior political efforts which put her in a position to do so. Operating out of a small office in Carmel, New York, men regularly came in, shouting and banging on the counter, “I don’t want charity, but a job.” Webb cites this experience as the “first steps” of her crafts career.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> In his establishing the agriculture cooperative, Farmers Federation, James McClure “built warehouses and developed markets for farmers, who would sell to the warehouse and buy from the co-op.” James and Elspeth Clarke Oral History, University of North Carolina at Asheville, D. Hiden Ramsey Library, Special Collections/University Library, Asheville, NC, 2002.

In a letter to her son Derrick, Aileen Osborn Webb asked what she could do to stem the rise of unemployment in her community. Citing “the same problem that faced Mr. McClure in Asheville,” she described the business that she envisioned. Putnam County Products, a small agriculturally-based operation, was incorporated in New York State in 1936. Eventually the business included “canning, weaving, wood products and even stone products” all the while “catering to the tourist trade and the summer trade and hoping to keep them as winter customers.”<sup>38</sup>

Doing her part to combat the severe economic consequences of the depression, Webb, along with her friends, Nancy Campbell and Ernestine Baker, ran articles in the local papers making people aware of their new venture. The shop, situated in Carmel, New York, was established, “for the sole purpose of selling whatever a person living in Putnam County would make, or produce.” During its formative years Putnam County Products sold agricultural products such as eggs, and it also offered merchandise that included “home crafts of [the] needle” made by local women, and also “articles made in wood” by the farmers in the area. “Though this was a surprise, it was, to me at least,” Webb commented, “a delightful one for it coincided with my personal interests.” Webb’s own artistic interests included pottery making and woodcarving. (figs.5-6) She later

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<sup>37</sup> Webb, 66.

<sup>38</sup> Aileen Osborn Webb to Derrick Webb, March 13, 1935, Aileen Osborn Webb Papers, Shelburne Farms Archives, Shelburne, Vermont.

noted, “I have always loved some form of creative work, and always turned to it for solace, though that is an old-fashioned way of putting it.”<sup>39</sup>

Once the Putnam County Products shop was open and steadily bringing in customers, Webb, Campbell and Baker decided to open a tea room and an additional shop, called Wooden Bowl opened in 1937 in Lake Mahopac, New York. Though seasonal, the Wooden Bowl offered an additional marketing outlet for handicrafts and aided in the economic recovery of the region. Always ready for a challenge, Webb noted that she and her friends quickly “realized that the great problem for the rural craftsman was successful year-round marketing when the country summer people closed up and went to the city.”<sup>40</sup> Success through effective marketing became an essential tool in Aileen Osborn Webb’s career-long crafts advocacy.

As Aileen Osborn Webb’s craft-focused Putnam County Products was experiencing success during the 1930s, Biltmore Estate Industries, a handicraft-based business located in Asheville, North Carolina was also flourishing. Owned and operated by Fred L. Seeley, the owner of the famed Grove Park Inn, the business was initially established at Biltmore Estate, the palatial country home of George and Edith Vanderbilt, family by marriage of Aileen Webb. (figs.7-8)

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Biltmore Estate Industries, inspired by the ideals and aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts Movement, served many purposes. It provided employment for the children of the estate employees, it educated them in the skills and techniques needed to produce hand-made

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<sup>39</sup> Webb, 69.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 70.

furniture and textiles, and it provided a place to sell the products to the public.(fig.9) After George Vanderbilt's sudden death in 1914, Edith Vanderbilt, sold the business to Seely who later renamed it Biltmore Industries.(fig.10) It flourished under his savvy marketing and continued to operate after his death in 1942. As a guest at Vanderbilt and Aileen Webb's wedding in 1912, one wonders if Edith Vanderbilt was solicited for any advice by her niece, Aileen, when some twenty years later she set up her own handcrafts business, Putnam County Products.

Throughout the 1930s Aileen's curiosity and passion for the crafts grew and she became interested in developing a dialogue with other crafts groups. In August 1939, representing Putnam County Products, she organized a meeting at Shelburne Farms, the palatial country estate of the Webb family on the shores of Vermont's Lake Champlain. Every known state or group devoted to crafts was invited and multiple organizations were represented. Among those in attendance were Associated Handweavers, Columbia County League of Arts and Crafts, Connecticut Craftsmen, Maine Guild, New Hampshire League of Arts and Crafts, New York Society of Craftsmen, Vermont Craftsmen and Putnam County Products. Consistent access to quality crafts by an eager public was a general concern among all crafts groups. Webb later commented "they all felt that if a market could be developed the improvement in the quality of craft goods would be automatic."<sup>41</sup> This would spark an ongoing conversation among regional

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<sup>41</sup> Aileen Osborn Webb to Mr. Bertram Hegeman, July 15,1940, Aileen Osborn Webb Papers, American Craft Council, New York, New York.

crafts organizations on how best to market the contemporary craftsman and his products.

A fortuitous meeting occurred between Aileen Osborn Webb and David Campbell at the 1939 Shelburne meeting. The Director of the New Hampshire League of Arts and Crafts (later re-named the New Hampshire League of Craftsmen), Campbell was a Harvard-trained architect and a dynamic leader. Webb found a compelling and passionate ally in David Campbell and in her quest to elevate craft in America. Webb regularly sought Campbell's collaboration.

As the 1930s drew to a close, Aileen Osborn Webb began to see an alliance of regional crafts groups that would come together, seeking to establish a unified voice increasing effectiveness in their advocacy of the craftsmen and his work. Webb's enthusiasm for crafts and her belief in its vitality to all communities propelled her future work.

### Chapter 3: The 1940s: Advocacy and Outreach

Following the successful 1939 Shelburne meeting, Aileen Osborn Webb was energized and inspired to continue building upon her previous successes promoting American craft. With the goal of elevating the status of crafts in society, Webb kept the craftsman central to her mission. Throughout the 1940s this dynamic advocate and promoter of American craft constructed an empire that by the end of the decade encompassed a national craftsmen's organization—The Handcraft Cooperative League of America was incorporated in New York State in August 1940; an urban crafts store—America House opened in New York City in October 1940; a mouthpiece for the new organization was established—the first mimeographed sheet of *Craft Horizons* was distributed to the America House consignors in 1941; and a training institution—The School for American Craftsmen opened its doors at the end of the second world war, at Dartmouth College, in December, 1944. These various entities were the “building blocks” that Webb used to bring a professional face to craft in America.

Following the Shelburne meeting Webb and other crafts advocates established the Handcraft Cooperative League of America.<sup>42</sup> The League's mission was to “develop a market for crafts, to raise the standard of crafts and to educate the public to a realization of the value of crafts in the general economic scheme.” Webb noted in a 1940 letter to Bertram Hegeman at Rockefeller Center, “Many of the rural groups reported good marketing outlets for the three or

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<sup>42</sup> “American Craft Council 1943-1993: A Chronology.” *American Craft* 53, no. 4 (August/September 1993): 137.

four summer months and no sales for the rest of the year.”<sup>43</sup> Given Webb’s own experience with Putnam County Products, her comment related to rural craft groups was personal in nature. The business of crafts and their efficient marketing was central to raising the standards of crafts throughout society and was a central goal of the League, as Webb envisioned it. “Our purpose is to develop a market for crafts, to raise the standard of crafts and to educate the public to a realization of the value of crafts in the general economic scheme.”<sup>44</sup> That Webb was so committed to these particular issues in the crafts distinguished her organization from that of the one established by Anne Morgan, daughter of renowned financier J.P. Morgan, a close family friend and fellow crafts advocate.<sup>45</sup> Marketing was not as central to Morgan’s American Handcraft Council, organized the year before, and the parallel organizations each existed for only a few years until it was agreed that consolidating efforts would be the most effective form of advocacy. In May, 1942, the two merged into the American Craftsmen’s Cooperative Council, Inc.<sup>46</sup>

The potential success associated with an urban marketing outlet for the crafts was eagerly anticipated by Webb. As she stated in 1940, “Our immediate object is to open a shop in New York by September for the marketing of hand

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<sup>43</sup>Webb to Hegeman.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> In 1939 Anne Morgan, along with several high-profile individuals, including Holger Cahill, organized the American Handcraft Council, incorporated in the state of Delaware, which worked to emphasize, “study, teaching, and support, financial and otherwise, of existing craft developments.” From “What’s New Under the Sun?” *Craft Horizons* 1, no.2 (May 1942): 1.

<sup>46</sup> “American Craft Council 1943-1993: A Chronology,” 137.

made goods at retail and wholesale.”<sup>47</sup> The dual goals of effective marketing and superior quality in the crafts were the foundation for America House, her urban marketing outlet, which opened to great acclaim at 7 East 54<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City in October 1940. (fig.11) Webb had hired architect Morris Ketchum, a graduate of the Yale Architecture School, to design the outlet. The completed interior emphasized clean, modernist lines. In order for America House to achieve its greatest success, Ketchum later identified concerns of location, store identification, lighting, sales, service, and management as among those most in need of addressing.<sup>48</sup>

One of the earliest marketing efforts attempted by America House was the mail order business, believed to secure “real profits” for the store. Catalogues were sent out in an attempt to attract a geographically broader audience and to entice all Americans with the hand-crafted merchandise sold at the store. The pottery of Edwin and Mary Scheier, Marguerite Wildenhain, and Beatrice Wood, were just some of the pieces a crafts patron could purchase from the catalogue-- a savvy marketing attempt by Webb to associate notions of quality and beauty with the America House brand.<sup>49</sup> (fig.12)

The marketing strategies at America House were not always strictly retail. Beginning in the early 1940s, Webb and her colleagues also organized several crafts exhibitions. From February 16 to the end of March, 1944, visitors to the

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<sup>47</sup> Webb to Hegeman.

<sup>48</sup> Ketchum, Morris. “An Architect Advises On Display or Planning America House.” *Craft Horizons* 2, no. 3 (November 1943): 4.

<sup>49</sup> America House catalogue, c.1949, America House File, American Craft Council Archives, New York, New York.

America House gallery could tour *Craftsmanship of New England*. The exhibition presented the best of regional contemporary crafts in a variety of media: furniture, tapestry, and stained glass. (fig.13) *The Hands of Servicemen*, on exhibit later that year, was a reflection of current affairs, and Webb's own desire to see servicemen equipped with useful skills. The show offered military craftsmen an aesthetic and meaningful opportunity to exhibit their work following their return from the War. (figs.14-15) *Show How*, another exhibit that year, was an educational exercise that emphasized the theoretical constructs and production techniques associated with the actual making of contemporary craft objects. The exhibit included ceramics by Vally Wieselthier and glass by Maurice Heaton, and by principle the show emphasized the democratic nature of craft. (figs.16-17) In 1945 Webb organized *Hands Across the Border*, an exhibit of the best in all media of contemporary Canadian craft. (fig.18) This show is the earliest indicator of Webb's internationalist vision for the crafts.

Subsequent America House exhibitions, such as *The Fascination with Wood* from 1945, reflect a broad exploration of a particular medium. (figs. 19-20) Included were historical objects which parallel the folk art collection of Aileen Osborn Webb's sister-in-law, Electra Havemeyer Webb. Objects similar to those in this show were later exhibited at her Shelburne Museum. It seems quite likely that Aileen Webb was aware and possibly even influenced by Electra Webb's collection, given that the Shelburne, Vermont estates of the two families were in such close proximity to each other.

From May through June, 1946 the galleries at America House profiled the work of two masters of their media: first Sandro Giampetro and then Donald Cordry. In Giampetro's exhibit, *Free Forms in Ceramics* the artist emphasized "the human equation" in the production process. This was a theme long espoused by Aileen Webb. (fig.21) *Creations in Tin*, an exhibit of work by Donald Cordry brought "good proportion and taste" to decorative objects around the home, suggesting that creativity was crucial to the design of crafts. (fig.22) The summer of 1946 concluded with the exhibit, *The Master Craftsman of Tomorrow*, that showcased only the work of craftsman under thirty, an anticipation of the "Young Americans" competition sponsored by the American Craft Council beginning in the 1950s. (fig.23)

Throughout these America House exhibitions Webb was creating shows that defined her belief in the potential of craft to elevate society's tastes. These exhibitions also provided useful skills to those interested in a career in the crafts, and served as a diplomatic tool among countries. Webb lastly sought to that documented the historic objects that influenced the best in contemporary craft and champion emerging craftsmen everywhere.

From her many volunteer activities with such organizations as the New York Junior League and the Putnam County Democratic Association, Aileen Osborn Webb knew the importance of communication within any institution. As the Council steadily grew throughout the 1940s, what began as a mimeographed sheet grew into the trademark publication for the national organization of American craftsmen. This magazine, *Craft Horizons*, served as a resourceful and

far-reaching vehicle in which Webb could share her vision for craft to all subscribers. Like other craft endeavors, such as the urban marketing opportunity of America House and the founding of a national organization in the Council, Webb sought to professionalize and elevate the standards in the field. Webb endeavored to align *Craft Horizons* with the most distinguished names in publishing. In 1951 *Craft Horizons* became associated with Westbury Publishing, Inc., which managed *The Magazine Antiques*, a leader in its field. It was during this expansion that *Craft Horizons* also increased its circulation, moving from a quarterly periodical to six issues a year.<sup>50</sup> With the hire of Mary Lyon as the first professional editor of *Craft Horizons* in 1947, the magazine reflected a commitment to excellence in the crafts. The later 1959 editorial appointment of renowned writer, Rose Slivka, firmly established *Craft Horizons* as the premier source for a broad exploration of the crafts. These employment shifts would have been in-line with Aileen Osborn Webb's vision for a professionalizing of all aspects of the crafts, and reflect her authoritative role as a member of the editorial board of *Craft Horizons* and founding editor of the magazine.<sup>51</sup>

In espousing *Craft Horizons*' constant aim to "help our readers widen their horizons," Webb utilized the enormous platform that the magazine provided to promote her dream for crafts in America. Through her frequent editorials, mostly appearing during the 1940s and 1950s, Webb offered special insight about the issues that most concerned her. Three of Webb's early editorials highlight the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>51</sup> "American Craft Council 1943-1993: A Chronology," 137, 139.

craft issues most germane to the era. In May, 1944, in “Is Wholesaling Compatible With Craftsmanship?,” Webb reflected upon the quantity production of craft in both individual and group formats, drawing upon her background in craft merchandising with Putnam County Products and America House. In this editorial she defines two roles played by individuals in craft production: the hand-craftsman, a person who creates handmade objects from a predetermined design, and often in great repetition; and the hand-artist a person who designs and produces a one-of-a-kind object. Throughout craft production, Webb underscored the importance of the handcrafted object, stating, “The refinement of execution and originality of design which marks the difference between the hand-made and the machine-made article must be maintained in quantity production. If not, the whole range of hand-made things will suffer.”<sup>52</sup> Webb endorsed wholesaling, “as an economic help to the individual...so long as the best designs are used.” Among craft groups, wholesaling could “become, if properly conducted, the mainspring of the American hand arts.”<sup>53</sup>

Keen to disseminate her views on the economic impact of crafts, Webb authored the editorial, “Craftsmen and the Minimum Wage Law,” in November, 1944. She introduced this issue with the realization that “all craftsmen, who are more than amateurs, and who wish to earn their daily bread through the hand arts, must admit that it is necessary to understand the economic implications inherent in the pursuit of their crafts.” She advised, “At present, the minimum wage laws

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<sup>52</sup> Webb, Aileen Osborn. “Is Wholesale Compatible With Craftsmanship?” *Craft Horizons* 3, no.5 (May 1944): 28.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

should be used by craftsmen as a yardstick for measuring their own wages.” Webb urged craftsmen to “maintain a wage standard which is in large part commensurate with the minimum wage of their region,” and reminded them that “they cannot consider themselves a group apart from the economic life of the country.” By forming solutions to these economic problems, Webb envisioned “a release... [of] the creative spirit and aesthetic factors involved.” Ultimately she encourages craftsmen to gain economic savvy in the situation, “analyze their output and make something fine and individual, which will complement, and not compete, with the output of the machine,” otherwise risking “attack by labor and government.”<sup>54</sup>

Continuing themes of craft production, marketing, technique, and artistic excellence, Webb authored the editorial “What Shall We Make?” in the May, 1945 issue of *Craft Horizons*. In her aim to elevate the status of crafts in America, Webb hoped to professionalize the approach taken by craftsmen to their careers. Webb advised the craftsman to “plan your production so that it has cohesion of idea, and functions in contemporary use, as well as being lovely to look at.”<sup>55</sup> As was often her approach in the crafts, she encouraged the craftsman to respond to the market and be sensitive to a patron’s “reaction and desires, fashion and color trends, the ideas of others; not for the sake of copying or to lower your standards, but rather to help raise your standards through the challenge of what you see about you.” Though she dislikes the word, Webb promotes the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Webb, Aileen Osborn. “What Shall We Make?” *Craft Horizons* 4, no. 3 (May 1945): 8.

idea of a “line,” meaning “a harmonious coordination of color, texture, and design of related objects which complement one another, even if they are not made for identical use.” With this savvy marketing approach Webb espouses that “merchandise must tell its own story, must ‘hit’ the possible purchaser in the eye, must awaken desire,” offering the example that “a breakfast service alone will never sell as well as if it were displayed on a charming tray with appropriate linen, glass and silverware.” Throughout this process, Webb highlighted the inherent qualities needed by craftsmen to achieve success in their final product, “thought, imagination, artistic and technical skill and merchandising knowledge” ensuring that the hand arts continue to be “a challenge to full endeavor instead of mere pastime.”<sup>56</sup>

The ability of returning GI’s to pursue meaningful lives after the war was frequently discussed in articles in *Craft Horizons*: “Craftsmen and the War...” highlighted skills being taught to these young men. The article stated, “The work is not to be confused with occupational therapy. Rather it is vocational and recreational, with high standards of design and execution being maintained by teachers and pupils.” It was significant to re-enforce to the soldiers, the “values, both cultural and economic, the hand arts may hold in their future life.” These initiatives, organized at Army, Navy, and Marine Hospitals, affiliated with the American Red Cross and assisted by such renowned craftspeople as Dorothy

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 8.

Liebes, a textile artist and trustee of the American Craft Council, maintained the gravitas and professionalism Webb advocated in the crafts.<sup>57</sup>

With her brother, Frederick Henry Osborn, appointed to the War Department's Committee on Education, Recreation and Community Services, Aileen Osborn Webb continued her exploration of craft's application to lives of returning GIs.<sup>58</sup> Combining the urgent need to accommodate the educational desires of the serviceman coming home, and her larger vision of educating the professional craftsman, in 1944 Webb began a dialogue that encouraged "a synopsis of a plan for rehabilitation through manual industry and the hand arts." Predicated on the idea that individuals could pursue an "independent living through craftsmanship," in December, 1944 the School for American Craftsman opened its doors on the campus of Dartmouth College, with the matriculation of a "New Hampshire Marine, discharged after combat duties." (fig.24) Assisting Webb through this process was David Campbell, Director of the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen, and a longtime administrator at the Council. It was the professional contacts of both Webb and Campbell, and Webb's authoritative role in American craft that would contribute to the School's establishment.<sup>59</sup>

By the 1940s, there were several degree-granting educational institutions devoted to educating craftspeople. Among them were the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Black Mountain College, and the New Bauhaus. With the founding of the

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<sup>57</sup> "Craftsmen and the War..." *Craft Horizons* 2, n.2 (May 1943): 10.

<sup>58</sup> Osborn, Jr., 31.

<sup>59</sup> "American Craft Council, 1943-1993: A Chronology," 137.

School for American Craftsmen at Dartmouth College in 1944 Aileen Osborn Webb put her distinctive stamp on training the contemporary craftsman. (fig. 25) The premise that an individual could make a living through the crafts was at the foundation of the School's philosophy. The School for American Craftsmen provided an education to any aspiring craftsmen willing to work for it. Elements including: "deftness of hand, appreciation of design and beauty...and the principles of economics, through the study of pricing and marketing"<sup>60</sup> were central to the success of the School and ideals espoused throughout Webb's four-decade-long career.

Throughout the School's initially rocky beginnings (it moved from Dartmouth, to Alfred University in 1946, with a final move to the Rochester Institute of Technology in 1950, where it thrives today), Webb maintained a commitment to see her vision for craft education executed through the school's mission. The core philosophy of the school emphasized, "creative purpose, acquaintance with material and process as a basis for the expression of design, respect for skill and technical excellence, recognition of the importance of constant evaluation, self-criticism and the belief by the student craftsman that the crafts are indeed art forms where creative imagination brings into coherent order material, process and function."<sup>61</sup> Their quality of education was impacted by the school's distinguished faculty, which included craftsmen such as Alden Wood, a

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<sup>60</sup> Webb, Aileen Osborn. "First Things First." *Craft Horizons* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1951): 7.

<sup>61</sup> Brennan, Harold, "The School for American Craftsmen," *Craft Horizons* 20, no. 3 (May/June 1960): 21-24.

woodworker and Linn Phelan, a ceramist from the Dartmouth campus. (fig.26)

The pragmatic approach taken by the School for American Craftsmen, reflected Aileen Osborn Webb's desire that students earn a living while in school. Products such as this wooden tray were experimentally sold at America House, thereby suggesting the inestimable skill of marketing and the economic viability of the contemporary craftsmen. (fig.27) As an crafts educational institution of its day, the School for American Craftsmen brought women to the Dartmouth campus as well as such celebrated European modernists as Frans Wildenhain and Hans Christiansen, both of whom were on the school's faculty. (figs. 28-30)

#### Chapter 4: The 1950s: Exhibitions and Conferences

In 1955 Aileen Osborn Webb brought soon-to-be *Craft Horizons* editor Rose Slivka to West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street in New York City. Standing by an old brownstone, she stated, “I believe we need a museum.”<sup>62</sup> Webb’s tireless effort to provide a professional exhibition forum along with the opportunity to engage in open dialogue on crafts issues of the day through national conferences were her defining successes of the 1950s.

With all of her children raised and following the death of her husband Vanderbilt Webb in 1956, Aileen Osborn Webb sought greater geographic proximity to her many crafts causes. It was at this time that she purchased a penthouse apartment on Manhattan’s Upper East Side. Here, Webb enjoyed her view of the New York skyline through the glass wall that separated the living and dining areas. Her grandchildren played on the terrace, a space large and durable enough for roller skates and scooters. She also pursued her life-long passion for pottery in her own private studio.<sup>63</sup>

The new apartment gave Webb the opportunity to commission those craftsmen whose work most appealed to her sense of beauty and comfort. (fig.31) She urged craftsmen to take stock of the times and respond to the integrity of materials, noting that “In this mid-century perhaps the tide is turning again, away

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<sup>62</sup> Slivka, Rose, “Aileen Osborn Webb, David Campbell: A Reminiscence” *American Craft* 53, no. 4 (August/September, 1993): 133.

<sup>63</sup> Morrison, Harriet, “With a Skyline View,” *New York Herald Tribune*, June 24, 1958, 24.

from the purely cold forms of the last few years to something warmer and more colorful.”<sup>64</sup>

Certainly color was predominant in Webb’s living room where she created a sitting area with off-white furniture that rested on a hooked rug by George Wells, a craftsman whom she patronized. (fig.32) The colors of the rug, “wine reds, mauve, rose, greens” complemented the rich, vibrant tones of a Monet painting that hung over the sofa. In keeping with the atmosphere of the apartment her dining room table and mauve cushioned chairs by Paul Aschenbach, possessed clean, modernist lines. (fig.33) A bathroom in her apartment featured objects from her many travels including sea shells from Africa. (fig.34) After her husband’s death, Webb also constructed the Glass House, a contemporary residence, just minutes from the rambling mansion built by her in-laws in Shelburne, Vermont. (fig.35) Here she furnished her home with modern furniture and a large slate mural by Glen Michaels. (figs. 36-37)

The 1950s was an exciting time as well for her crafts career. As early as the 1940s Aileen Osborn Webb had advocated the significance of exhibitions in tandem with educating the public about excellence in the crafts. That year she authored an editorial in *Craft Horizons* entitled, “On Exhibitions.” Here she presented several questions germane to organizing an exhibition. For example “Shall the exhibition be by invitation only or open to all? Shall there be awards? If so, who shall serve on the juries? How can jurying standards be set? Should sales be made from the exhibition?” Along with maintaining high standards of

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 24.

excellence in the crafts, an exhibition, like a crafts retail outlet, could have marketing benefits, and Webb realized this potential. An exhibition open to the public could be quite persuasive in elevating consumer taste in the crafts as well.

The need for exhibition space became a formal goal of the American Craftsmen's Council after its initial success exhibiting crafts at America House. In 1951, *Contemporary Furniture from the School for American Craftsmen* opened at the America House gallery. (figs.38-39) Aileen Webb demonstrated how inextricably linked education and marketing were to the success of the contemporary craftsmen, and she utilized the opportunity to exhibit the students work to gain public exposure for the emerging artists.

The early America House exhibitions served as an impetus to search for a more permanent and grander space. Under Aileen Webb's leadership, the American Craftsman's Educational Council pursued this with vigor. A partnership between the Council and the Brooklyn Museum in 1953 resulted in *Designer Craftsmen U.S.A.*, the first national survey of American crafts. Traveling to more than eleven museums this exhibition provided an opportunity to take stock of "weaknesses, strengths, changes, new developments and progress" in the field.<sup>65</sup> *Designer Craftsmen U.S.A.* was in fact a competitive exhibition where artists competed in such categories as Two Dimensional Award and Three Dimensional Award, along with monetary awards. Among the many fine craftsmen represented in the exhibition were George Wells, Edwin Scheier, Wharton Esherick, Harvey K. Littleton, Marguerite Wildenhain, Peter Voulkos, Arthur Pulos and John Prip. (figs. 41-47)

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<sup>65</sup> Giles, Dorothy. *Designer Craftsman, USA*. New York: Blanchard Press, Inc., 1953, 1.

By the middle of the twentieth century, tastes in American art were changing and new trends were emerging. Rose Slivka, the long-time editor of *Craft Horizons*, once noted, “While neither Aileen Webb nor David Campbell liked the abstract art of the 50s—did not understand it, did not approve of it—they had the imagination to know that they didn’t know and the humility to accept that being right or wrong was not what it was about.”<sup>66</sup> When funk art gained notoriety—a style Webb did not care for at all—she understood that though this genre of craft was not her taste, the larger public deserved the educational experience of observing current trends in the crafts and this was her appreciation of the larger picture.

Inspired by the successes in 1953 of *Designer Craftsman, U.S.A.* American Craft Council members in 1954 decided that plans for a new exhibition space should continue. A key individual who helped make this a reality was Rene d’Harnoncourt the celebrated Mexican and Native American craft scholar and advocate. At the time he was director of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) on 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, and he was also a Craft Council trustee. Mrs. Webb recalled, when presenting him the question of a proper location for the museum, his response, “Why don’t you buy this building at 29 West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street which we own?”<sup>67</sup> The result was a savvy and strategic positioning of museum marketing, where MoMA, a nationally recognized institution could help highlight the development of its new neighbor. (figs. 48-49)

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<sup>66</sup> Slivka, 135.

<sup>67</sup> Webb, “Almost a Century,” 96.

The boldness behind this initiative reflected the reality that no major institution devoted to the exhibition of contemporary craft yet existed in New York or anywhere else for that matter. This would be an opportunity to broaden and highlight the crafts on a national and even global stage. One of the museum's initial mandates stipulated, it "must serve as a show place for both established and new talented, national and international, media artists."<sup>68</sup>

On the evening of September 20, 1956, the Museum of Contemporary Crafts opened in New York City to great fanfare. (fig.50) The Museum's inaugural exhibition, *Craftsmanship in a Changing World*, featured 314 objects from 180 craftsmen in 19 states. This exhibition reflected the dynamic and inclusive goals of the museum and celebrated the renaissance of craft in America. In the exhibition catalogue's foreword, Aileen Osborn Webb states that the Museum's opening marks "an important milestone in the cultural and even economic life of the people of the United States" signifying the museum's efforts to operate in both cultural and economic contexts. Her tireless advocacy to elevate the status of crafts in America was reflected in her assertion that "crafts are more than the work of busy hands but are indeed a form of creative activity and a part of the total art picture."<sup>69</sup> The exhibition included the work of such craft luminaries as Lenore Tawney and represented the finest in contemporary design. (fig.51)

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<sup>68</sup> Webb, "Almost a Century," 100.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 2.

The Museum's formative years saw a rapid change in command, beginning with the directorship of Herwin Schaefer, present from inception when the museum was under construction in 1955. The museum was designed by David Campbell. After Schaefer resigned, Thomas Tibbs held the position only until 1960, and he was succeeded by the dynamic and visionary David Campbell, the American Craft Council president at the time. When Campbell died of heart-related complications in 1963, a beloved individual and leader was lost to the crafts cause. The appointment later that year of museum educator, Paul Smith, led to a sustained period of growth for the museum that lasted until his retirement in 1987.

Even though there were changes in command, the exhibition schedule at the Museum maintained its focus on an exploration of craft and a celebration of the human spirit. Aileen Osborn Webb's aesthetic ideal of beauty, influenced by an appreciation of nature and simplicity was well represented in the Museum's 1957 exhibition, *Furniture by Craftsmen*. Here the clean and modernist interpretations of furniture virtuosos George Nakashima and Wharton Esherick reflected the beauty of natural materials and remained true to their integrity, ideals espoused by Webb. (figs.52-53) An eye to future generations of craftsmen stimulated the establishment of the "Young Americans" exhibition series, which celebrated the masterful techniques and vision of individuals under the age of 30. Museum director Thomas Tibbs re-enforced the holistic and inclusive philosophy Mrs. Webb advocated for the arts, craft among them, with this statement on this series, "These young people view themselves as artists as well as craftsmen.

They are affected and influenced by the same forces as the younger painter and sculptor— by the whole climate of art in America. In this exhibition there is an emergence of a whole totality of art.”<sup>70</sup> The mastery of one’s chosen medium was highlighted and the essence of its beauty celebrated.

During the 1950s, Aileen Osborn Webb’s sister-in-law, Electra Havemeyer Webb was also exhibiting historic American craft and folk art, albeit in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century structures at her Shelburne Museum in Shelburne, Vermont, founded in 1947. These two women shared the viewpoint that direct contact with artistic objects could most effectively inspire the public to appreciate works of craftsmanship. Aileen Webb and Electra Webb through exhibitions of contemporary and historic craft conveyed the compelling artistic record held by American craftsmen.<sup>71</sup>

Progress towards Aileen Osborn Webb’s inclusive vision of the craft was marked by the development of national conferences during this era, the ultimate in dialogue among craftsmen. Beginning in 1957 with the “First Annual Conference of American Craftsmen,” held in Asilomar, California, Aileen Osborn Webb set forth the goals of the American Craftsmen’s Council for this unique format in the crafts. She hoped to, “meet, communicate and cooperate in solving problems; to formulate, through discussion and interchange of ideas, a basic understanding of the place of the craftsman in our contemporary society...and the craftsman’s practical problems of production, marketing and industrial

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<sup>70</sup> Tibbs, Thomas “Your Museum: Young Americans” *ACC Forum* 1, no.3 (February 1958): 2

<sup>71</sup> More about the institutional history of Electra Havemeyer Webb’s Shelburne Museum and Electra and her collecting interests can be found at [www.shelburnemuseum.org](http://www.shelburnemuseum.org).

affiliation.”<sup>72</sup> It was precisely the combination of the deep philosophical debates and the exchange of valuable, pragmatic solutions to the craftsmen’s concerns that made the Asilomar conference such a success. Additionally the opportunity to exhibit at the conference was significant as the Museum of Contemporary Crafts had just opened the year before and was enjoying great acclaim. (fig.54) It was the foundation for future conferences that deliberated on contentious issues in contemporary crafts, including, “Are the crafts more valid when designed and executed as unique objects or for industrial production? Is there a market for the handmade object? Is it education or economics that determines the consumer of good design and the handmade object? How can the crafts function in industry? What is the status of the maker of one-of-a-kind objects in society?”<sup>73</sup>

During these early national conferences Webb further reinforced the idea of universality among craftsmen. She stated, “I believe, and I believe this conference will prove, the problems of craftsmen are very much the same, the world over.”<sup>74</sup> Maintaining this philosophy, Aileen Webb would make her way into the 1960s with her most far-reaching and visionary action in the crafts, yet.

The 1950s provided a laboratory for Aileen Osborn Webb to experiment with ways of communicating both to the public and amongst craftsmen. The exhibitions created at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts created a dialogue with the nation that helped to define the quality of craft and recognize how central

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<sup>72</sup> American Craftsman’s Council. *Asilomar: First Annual Conference of American Craftsmen sponsored by the American Craftsmen’s Council*. New York: The Council, 1957, 5.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

it is to quality of life. The conferences she organized helped craftsmen to confront challenges of the day and dream about the future through workshops and forums where they could exchange their ideas about what craft mean to them and its potential for humankind.

## Chapter 5: The 1960s: Diplomacy through Craft

In June, 1964, Aileen Osborn Webb stood at the podium of the World Congress of Craftsmen on the campus of Columbia University in New York City. She delivered her vision for the conferences agenda and her goals for the twelve days ahead. She stated that she wanted “to provide markets for the work of each country’s craftsmen, to educate the people of the world to the value of craftsmanship, and to bring this about through proper leadership, and in a spirit not of competition but of cooperation.”<sup>75</sup> The strategic approach to the crafts that Webb had honed for years while leading the American Craft movement, including philanthropy, marketing and education would now be expanded to reach an international audience and reflect one additional goal of the crafts, diplomacy.

Aileen Osborn Webb had been germinating an internationalist vision for the American Craft Council for many years. Two early *Craft Horizons* editorials, one from February, 1947 and the other from January/February, 1953 served as indicators of future global efforts. In 1947, Rene d’Harnoncourt, the director of the Museum of Modern Art, a trustee of the American Craft Council, and a renowned art scholar, authored the article, “The Creative Arts and World Peace Through UNESCO.” The United Nations’ Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, otherwise known as UNESCO, held a conference in Paris at the end of 1946, and d’Harnoncourt was one of the members of the Preparatory Commission who drew up an advisory report to the Organization. The article, designed to both elucidate UNESCO’s complicated mandate and champion its

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<sup>75</sup> “First World Congress of Craftsmen,” *Craft Horizons* 24, no. 5 (September/October 1964): 8.

potential for a peaceful world, served to illustrate the international nature of the contemporary art world. One of the earliest statements relates to the power of art to attain peace: “Art transcends documentation by interpretation, and helps to give men and nations that intimate knowledge of each other as human beings, living within different conditions, but bound together in one human experience, which is essential for the achievement of a peaceful world.”<sup>76</sup> Recognizing the turbulence of the contemporary world and the “rapid changes in social and economic conditions,”<sup>77</sup> d’Harnoncourt highlights the capacity of art to assist the world in “its adjustment to new concepts and conditions”<sup>78</sup> by speaking to “human values that can be shared by all mankind.”<sup>79</sup>

As a means of facilitating peace through the creative arts, UNESCO was central to d’Harnoncourt’s vision. As stated, “UNESCO’s task in the field of art is to increase understanding between peoples and large cultural regions.”<sup>80</sup> The author advises UNESCO to be cognizant of the many factors that constitute the artist in the twentieth century: age, creative expression, arts education, cultural heritage, economy, means of production, access to raw, materials and hyper-specialization among artists. Among the chief concerns expressed is that

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<sup>76</sup>d’Harnoncourt, Rene. “The Creative Arts and World Peace Through UNESCO.” *Craft Horizons* 6, no. 16 (February 1947): 6.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

UNESCO will continually work to elevate the standards of integrity and workmanship among all artists, to continually aim for excellence in their craft.<sup>81</sup>

In the January/February 1953 issue of *Craft Horizons*, Aileen Osborn Webb authored an editorial entitled, “American Crafts Abroad.” In it she spoke of the misconceptions concerning American culture, “materialistic...highly mechanized...primarily technological.”<sup>82</sup> The alignment of her vision in the crafts with established governmental agencies such as the State Department was an approach often pursued by Webb, as later collaborations with UNESCO suggest. During the summer of 1952, at the request of the Department of State, Webb and the American Craftsmen’s Educational Council organized the exhibition, *Craftsmanship in the United States 1952*.<sup>83</sup> The show created an international dialogue on craft. Organized by the Council, the exhibition consisted of three large exhibits and one smaller one with two of the shows premiering simultaneously over ten days at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, and in the lobby of the State Department building in Washington, D.C. The shows later traveled to Europe and South America. *Craftsmanship in the United States 1952* served as a solid foundation for the subsequent global craft initiatives undertaken by Webb, and it demonstrated to the world the standards of excellence to which she aspired for all craftsmen.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 6-7.

<sup>82</sup> Webb, “American Crafts Abroad” *Craft Horizons* 12, no. 1 (January/February 1953): 7.

<sup>83</sup> “American Craft Council 1943-1993: A Chronology,” 138.

The international scope with which Aileen Webb envisioned her crafts empire was likely inspired by a fondness for traveling, instilled during her childhood. A sense of curiosity about the world was instilled in her at a young age. As a teenager she traveled throughout Europe. When she was seventeen years old she spent a year at a girl's school in Paris, gaining exposure to "opera, *La Comédie Française*, the museums and exhibitions."<sup>84</sup>

The global perspective that Aileen Webb maintained for the crafts was empowered when she befriended another crafts advocate, Margaret Merwin Patch in the early 1950s. Born in Bloomington, Illinois in 1894, Patch's biography mirrored Webb's. She possessed an interest in managing people. Her graduate coursework at the University of Chicago Graduate School of Commerce and Administration (1916-1917), included courses in Statistics, Commercial Organization, Business Writing and Finances.<sup>85</sup> She also had a background in women's political organizations such as the Michigan League of Women Voters, and her passion for the arts was satisfied when she studied painting at Cranbrook Academy of Art under Zoltan Sepeshy and Wallace Mitchell. Like Webb, Margaret Patch honed a successful career as a crafts administrator, first serving as Chairman of the Massachusetts Association of Handicraft Groups (later the Massachusetts Handicraft Guild), and then as an officer with the American Craftsman's Educational Council. It was in this capacity that the two women met.

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<sup>84</sup> Webb, "Almost a Century," 29.

<sup>85</sup> Biographical Material, 1916-1982 File, Margaret Merwin Patch Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

Both were widowed in the 1950s, (George W. Patch died in 1950 and Vanderbilt Webb in 1956) and both were eager to pursue the next phase of their crafts career.<sup>86</sup>

In October 1959 Margaret Merwin Patch proposed a “world trip to survey possible interest in a world craft organization.”<sup>87</sup> The proposal was approved by the American Craft Council Trustees and during the winter of 1959-1960 details for the trip were developed. With a letter of introduction by Aileen Webb, which outlined the association Patch’s trip had with a proposed 1964 international crafts conference and possible council, Patch set off around the world to document the handicraft traditions of more than 30 countries. She went to Asia, Europe, North Africa and Latin America. When she returned from her year-long survey, she brought back the names of 250 organizations that enthusiastically embraced the possibility of a global craft network. The next three years were spent developing the conference.<sup>88</sup>

When the first World Congress of Craftsmen convened on June 8, 1964 Aileen Osborn Webb’s global vision for the elevation of crafts among mankind came to fruition. (fig.55) In her address to the more than 900 conferees she highlighted the urgent aims of the world crafts movement: philanthropy, artistic excellence, and the diplomatic potential of the crafts. “During these two weeks people from forty-seven countries were seen at their best, reflecting...that all

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<sup>86</sup> Finding Aid, Compiled by Jean Fitzgerald, Margaret Merwin Patch Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 1993.

<sup>87</sup> World Craft Council File, Margaret Merwin Patch Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

men can lose themselves in a cause...absorption in a creative act, in whatever form and on a small or grand scale, can bring men together...men of all nationalities can work, play and act together for a common purpose.”<sup>89</sup>

On June 12th, just four days into the Congress, the World Crafts Council was formed. With its establishment, Webb began promoting her agenda of marketing, education, and human cooperation through craft on a global stage. Cyril Wood, a member of the board of directors for the Council and a director of the Crafts Centre of Great Britain, made the timely assertion that the creation of the Council is “an affirmation of faith that man does not live by atom bombs alone, but also by his hands and their works.”<sup>90</sup> This reference to the nuclear age and its associated anxiety about an uncertain future underscored Webb’s hope that a “spirit...of cooperation”<sup>91</sup> would contribute to the diplomatic potential of the craftsman throughout the world.

Though the World Congress of Craftsman and the World Crafts Council did not have political agendas, they did benefit from the advocacy of such human-rights organizations as UNESCO. Dr. d’Arcy Hayman, head of the UNESCO’s Arts Education and Cultural Development of the Community Section, delivered a rousing keynote speech that highlighted the positive hopes and cautious concerns for crafts in the global community:

“When we find difficulty in guessing whether a painting, teapot, a tapestry or a bookbinding was made in Italy, Venezuela, Sweden or Japan,

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<sup>89</sup> “First World Congress of Craftsmen,” 8.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 10.

it is wonderful in one sense, and sad in another. Wonderful that the whole world is forming into a community of man in which equal respect and appreciation is growing for the art forms of all peoples, and sad in the knowledge that the great and endless variety of art forms and traditions are being lost in the clean sweep of new technological and intercultural influence.”<sup>92</sup>

Some crafts leaders, like *Craft Horizons* editor Rose Slivka, espoused the merits of the individual craftsman in an international marketplace. She noted, “The international experience—the great inevitable experience of our time—will result not in homogenization of cultural expression but in the development of strong, creative, individual craftsmen throughout the world.”<sup>93</sup>

Art critic Harold Rosenberg commented, “In response to the dissipation of local cultures and the mass recruitment of modern industry, art has found in its own practices the discipline for a continuous formation of individuality...a direct means of communion with artists of other times, places, and cultures. Art aimed at self-creation has thus been inseparable from awareness of man’s changed relation to production....It is art for making artists.”<sup>94</sup>

Webb, throughout the duration of the Congress, continued her patronage and advocacy of individual craftsmen. A trip organized to the Long Island studio of textile artisan George Well, a craftsman whose work was represented in Webb’s own collection and included in the inaugural exhibition of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts. She relished the opportunity for personal touches during

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 12.

the Congress which included hosting a luncheon at her Garrison, New York estate in the Hudson River Valley.<sup>95</sup>

Topics on the agenda of the World Congress of Craftsmen included all the issues of the era: “The Relation of the Past to the Demands of the Present,” “Production and Marketing in One World,” “Education through International Communication,” “The Contemporary Scene,” “Design for Production,” “Art Concepts in Architecture,” and “Vistas for the Arts.”<sup>96</sup> These were also the prevailing themes when the American Crafts Council was formed some twenty years earlier.

Once it was established, the vision for the World Crafts Council was developed to ensure representation from each other charter countries at a general assembly to “convene every two years.”<sup>97</sup> It was decided on June 15th these representatives would elect a sixteen-person ‘directorate’ to act as the executive branch of the Council forming its core government. Aileen Osborn Webb concluded the conference with the hope that “a worldwide congress, such as the one just held, open to all craftsmen, can be called every five to six years.”<sup>98</sup>

For two of the nations in attendance the proceedings had lasting significance. Both the establishment of the World Crafts Council and the inspirational messages of Aileen Osborn Webb served as a catalyst for the establishment of unified national craft organizations in both Australia and

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>98</sup>“First World Congress of Craftsmen,” *Craft Horizons* 24, no. 5 (September 1964): 8.

Canada. The potential for handicrafts to transform the economic, cultural and diplomatic sectors of a nation was capitalized upon by these two nations.

Australia, which in 1964 had no national crafts organization but a rich visual history, sent Mollie Douglas, a nominee from the Potters Society of New South Wales, to represent its people. She was in wonderful company as she found herself at the conference with Bob Hughan and his wife, who were representing the Arts and Crafts Society of Victoria, Anita Aarons from Caulfield Technical College, and Narelle Townsend, who was a Sydney architect working in New York City.<sup>99</sup>

This was at a time when few Australian craftsmen knew each other. The opportunity to communicate and initiate meaningful dialogue ultimately led to the founding of the Craft Council of Australia in 1971, and to the nomination of Australian, Marea Gazzard, as the President of the World Craft Council, for which she served from 1980 to 1984. It was in 1981, under Gazzard's presidency, that the World Craft Council officially gained acceptance into UNESCO. The Council entered "under 'Category A: Arts Education and Cultural development of the Community,' which meant that UNESCO paid an annual subvention for the support of the council's programs."<sup>100</sup> In its diplomatic mission to further the economic and cultural potential for crafts throughout the world, this pivotal alliance with a branch of the United Nations was a significant achievement of the Council.

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<sup>99</sup> Cochrane, Grace, *The Craft Movement in Australia: A History*, South Kensington: New Wales Press: 1992, 112.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 112.

Norah McCullough was the official Canadian representative to the First World Congress of Craftsmen in 1964. Up to that date, Canada had been unsuccessful in its attempts to secure a unified national craft organization. When the Canadian Handicraft Guild was founded in 1906, it was inspired by the socially and artistically-oriented ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement.<sup>101</sup> Though initially a respected organization, it became the target of criticism from the increasingly professionalized attitude of mid-century crafts advocates and administrators such as McCullough. Over time the Guild experienced a schism among its members. There was a “division within its supporters between the senior members’ desire for tradition and the younger members’ need for change and new directions.”<sup>102</sup> Asserting that “handicraft associations have become so involved in sales promotion that taste and quality have been sacrificed,” McCullough underscored that the ultimate priority for Canadian craft should be excellence in execution, eclipsed by economic necessity.

Figures such as design writer, Sandra Gwyn, shared McCullough’s view, espousing a fresh, contemporary approach to the crafts, stating, “in 1963, when the home arts are all but moribund, when the *habitant* wood carver, the Maritime hooker of rugs, the country cabinet-maker have all given way to the sophisticated, art-school trained fine craftsman, and, less fortunately, to the ‘do-it-yourselfer’ with his cut-price craft kit, the Guild’s confused organization and outdated

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<sup>101</sup> Alfoldy, 35.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 66.

structure put it at an almost hopeless disadvantage.”<sup>103</sup> Figures such as McCullough and Gywn, advocates of “the sophisticated products of art-school trained craftspeople” would represent the agenda of contemporary crafts advocates who strove to break free from the traditional and historic approach held by the Canadian Handicraft Guild.

Like Aileen Osborn Webb, who built a modern, corporate-style craft infrastructure in the United States, McCullough, was one of the figures behind the development of the Canadian Craftsmen’s Association in the 1960s. That organization sought to professionalize the craftsmen and their craft throughout Canada. The Association McCullough helped to found served as a foundation for Canada’s future national organization, the Canadian Crafts Council, established in 1974. The Council experienced mixed successes in its formative years, as it inherited “the growing tensions between Francophone and Anglophone craftspeople, and the emerging self-identity of First Nations craftspeople.”<sup>104</sup> Such issues were reflective of cultural expression in the crafts of the late twentieth-century. Aiming to achieve a respectful, continuing dialogue among all craftsmen, the Canadian Crafts Council looked to the guidance of leaders like Aileen Osborn Webb who envisioned a harmonious community of artists as ambassadors of the human race.

The Australian and Canadian case studies suggest that by the 1960’s Aileen Osborn Webb was a internationally recognized leader in the resurgence of

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, dissertation abstract.

crafts among all peoples. Her inspiring presence during the First World Congress of Craftsmen helped to dramatically impact the direction that many national crafts organizations took as they aimed to effectively meet the needs of a global market.

## Conclusion

The transformative power of the crafts was instrumental to Aileen Osborn Webb's four-decade long career. Her earliest achievement in the field, the establishment of Putnam County Products, provided both economic relief and the opportunity for creative expression from the work of local farmers and artisans. Through this crafts cooperative she assisted those hurt most in her community by the Great Depression. She helped them transform their life for the better through the work of their own hands.

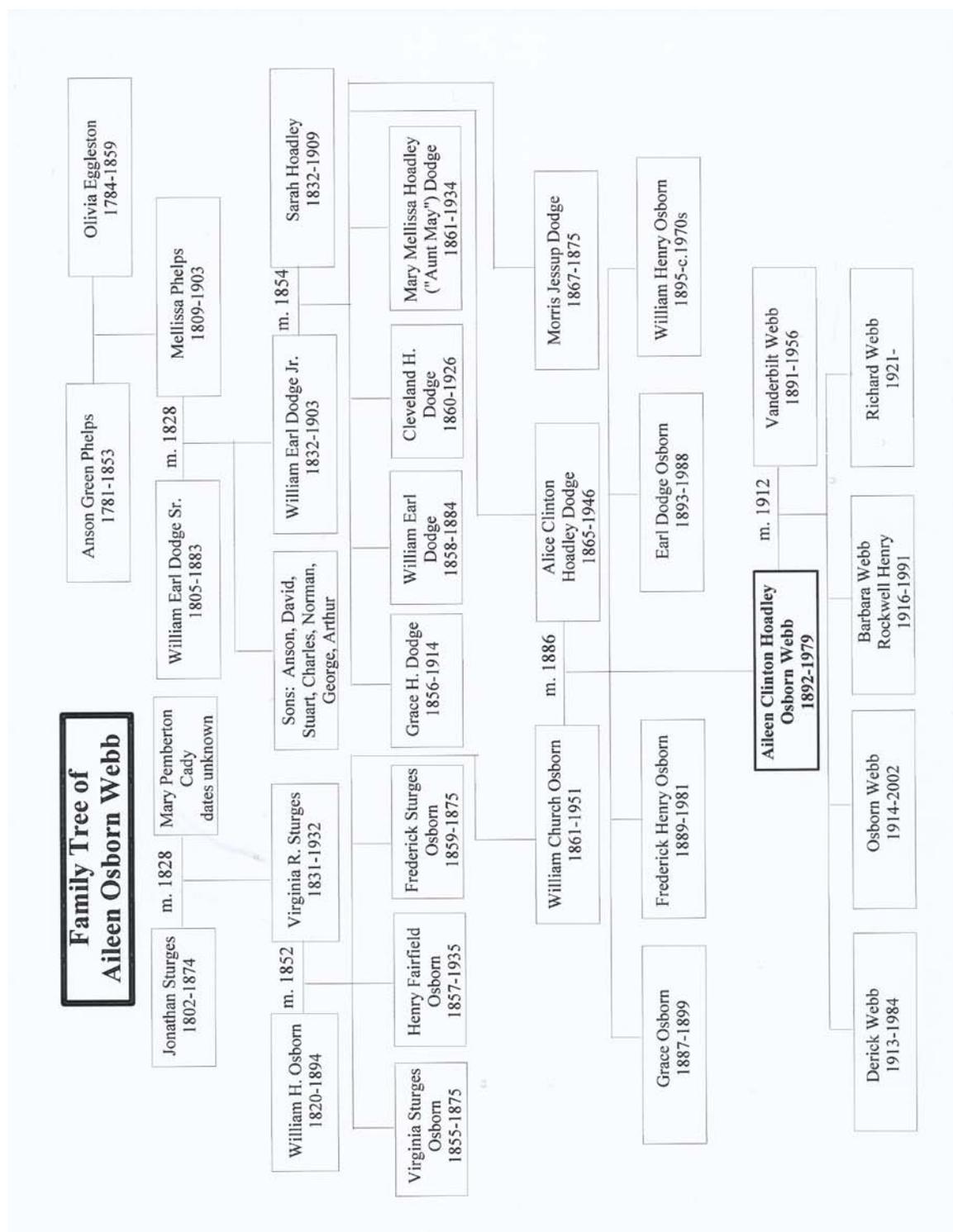
During the 1940s Webb sought to educate the general public and the returning World War II servicemen to the capacity for crafts to transform everyday lives. Through such exhibitions as *Show How* at the America House galleries such as *Show How* and the development of technical skills and approaches to marketing incorporated into the School for American Craftsmen's curriculum, she emphasized the democratic nature of the crafts as the art of the people.

Through her establishment of a formal and unprecedented institution to exhibit craft, the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, realized Aileen Webb's goal of elevating public taste and art appreciation. Exhibitions featured the best of contemporary crafts, highlighting the work of such figures such as George Nakashima and Wharton Esherick. These shows espoused Webb's belief in the potential for craft to transform and beautify the everyday world, and to lift the spirits of a people preoccupied with the Cold War.

The establishment of the World Craft Council in 1964 was the pinnacle of Aileen Osborn Webb's transformative vision for the crafts. Webb envisioned craftsmen as ambassadors for a harmonious world. She believed that creative approaches to the production of everyday objects could help meet both the artistic and economic needs of society. Aileen Osborn Webb's commitment to advocating craft's transformative nature to audiences around the world continues to make her a globally-recognized icon.

## Appendices

Appendix 1— Family Tree of Aileen Osborn Webb



**Family Tree of  
Aileen Osborn Webb**

Anson Green Phelps  
1781-1853

Olivia Eggleston  
1784-1859

Mellissa Phelps  
1809-1903

William Earl Dodge Sr.  
1805-1883

Mary Pemberton  
Cady  
dates unknown

Jonathan Sturges  
1802-1874

Virginia R. Sturges  
1831-1932

Sarah Hoadley  
1832-1909

William Earl Dodge Jr.  
1832-1903

Sons: Anson, David,  
Stuart, Charles, Norman,  
George, Arthur

Virginia Sturges  
Osborn  
1855-1875

William H. Osborn  
1820-1894

Frederick Sturges  
Osborn  
1859-1875

Mary Mellissa Hoadley  
("Aunt May") Dodge  
1861-1934

Cleveland H.  
Dodge  
1860-1926

William Earl  
Dodge  
1858-1884

Grace H. Dodge  
1856-1914

Henry Fairfield  
Osborn  
1857-1935

William Church Osborn  
1861-1951

Alice Clinton  
Hoadley Dodge  
1865-1946

Morris Jessup Dodge  
1867-1875

William Henry Osborn  
1895-c.1970s

Earl Dodge Osborn  
1893-1988

Grace Osborn  
1887-1899

Frederick Henry Osborn  
1889-1981

Aileen Clinton Hoadley  
Osborn Webb  
1892-1979

Vanderbilt Webb  
1891-1956

Derick Webb  
1913-1984

Osborn Webb  
1914-2002

Barbara Webb  
Rockwell Henry  
1916-1991

Richard Webb  
1921-

Appendix 2— Amended By-Laws— World Crafts Council

In September 1968, only four years after the establishment of the World Craft Council at the World Congress of Craftsmen in New York City, the bylaws for the organization were amended. Below is the transcribed constitution for the World Crafts Council from that date:

Bylaws As Ammended September, 1968

Article 1.

There is formed under the name:

“World Crafts Council”

Article 2.

The principle office of the corporation is in Geneva Switzerland.

Article 3.

The term “Country” shall mean a sovereign state, its territories or its colonies, United Nations Trust Territories, federations, confederations and customs Unions.

Article 4.

Purpose. The purpose of the Council shall be to provide services to craftsmen around the world. Such services shall include, among other things, the stimulation of public interest in and appreciation for the work of craftsmen; providing a clearing house for creative, technical, economic and social exchanges and a focus of cooperation among craftsmen. The Council will provide such services to both individual craftsmen and those who represent organizations of craftsmen whether or not such organizations are national or regional in scope. In

addition, the Council will indirectly or directly assist in the development of crafts and the training of craftsmen. The Council shall cooperate with other international organizations, foundations, societies, national groups, associations or individuals in carrying out its purpose. The Council shall have authority to do anything else that may be required to give effect to its purpose or that relates in any way to crafts and craftsmen.

Article 5.

Direction. The governing body of the Council shall be known as the Direction. It shall be composed of not less than 15 nor more than 21 Directors, elected by the General Assembly, each for a period of two years or until his successor has been elected. Within the aforesaid minimum and maximum, the General Assembly will determine the number of Directors to be elected. The Direction may nominate candidates for election as Directors, but other nominations may be made within the General Assembly.

However where, as provided in Article 12-a, a Zone is constituted, a candidate for the election of a Director may be nominated; this nomination to be made by majority vote of the representatives of the countries comprising that zone, either at a Zonal Assembly held before the biennial meeting of the General Assembly or by caucus at the General Assembly Meeting. The quorum for nomination, either at the Zonal Assembly or in caucus, shall be one-third of the representatives of the Zone.

In the event of no election of a Director from a Zone, the direction shall be empowered to select an acting Director from such Zone to serve until a Director is elected from that Zone as provided above.

Article 6.

The members of the first Direction shall be elected by the First World Congress of Craftsmen held on the campus of Columbia University June 8<sup>th</sup> to June 19, 1964.

Article 7.

The members of the Direction shall choose officers of the Council. The officers of the Council shall be a President, four Vice Presidents, a Treasurer, an Assistant Treasurer, a Secretary and an Assistant Secretary and shall be elected for the same period of time, as provided for in Article 5 for the election of Directors. The President, the Vice President, the Treasurer, and the Secretary, must be members of the Direction. Each of the officers of the Council shall have the functions and duties usually associated with such office. In particular, the President shall be responsible for the day to day functions of the Council and the supervision of the work of the Secretariat. The Direction shall meet biennially immediately following the regular biennial meetings of the General Assembly or at such other times as convened by the President upon a request of one-fifth (1/5) of the Directors, or at the request of one-fifth (1/5) of the representatives in the General Assembly. The meetings of the Directors shall be held at a place selected in accordance with the provisions concerning the holding of the meetings of the General Assembly, as provided for in Article 10.

Article 8.

Decisions of the Direction shall be taken by majority vote. In case of a tie, the President shall cast the deciding vote. The quorum for all meetings of the Direction shall be one-fifth (1/5) of the Directors. The Direction shall prepare proposals, projects, resolutions, or other matters for consideration and/or vote by the General Assembly of Members. It shall be in charge of the operation of the Council and shall have authority to make decisions binding the Council.

Article 9.

In the event that a vacancy shall occur in the Direction in the period between the regular biennial meetings of the General Assembly, the Director may fill such vacancy, if it has not been filled within two months by an extraordinary meeting of the General Assembly.

Article 10.

There shall be a General Assembly which shall be composed of one representative from each country, whose foundations, societies, groups, associations, subjects, nationals or residents are Members of the Council. However, a country which was not represented at the first meeting of the General Assembly, as provided for in Article 11, shall not have a representative in the General Assembly, unless the General Assembly has, by majority vote, previously approved such country's representation.

Such representation shall be either a resident or national of the country he represents and shall, insofar as possible, be selected by all the Members of the Council from such area, who are referred to in the first sentence of the previous

paragraph. Each country representative shall be entitled to one vote in the General Assembly. Decisions of the General Assembly shall be taken by majority vote. A quorum shall consist of representatives from one-fifth (1/5) of the countries whose entities, as referred to in the first sentence of the previous paragraph, are members of the Council. The meetings of the General Assembly shall be held biennially. The meetings shall take place at the seat of the Secretariat or at other places. In scheduling meetings elsewhere than at the seat of the Secretariat, regard shall be had to the geographical rotation of such meetings. An extraordinary meeting of the General Assembly shall be called at the request of one-fifth (1/5) of its representatives. A representative may select a resident or a national of the country which he represents or, if this is not possible, anyone else, to act as his proxy during any session of the General Assembly.

#### Article 11.

The meeting of the First World Congress of Craftsmen shall be considered as the first meeting of the General Assembly. Until a country has established a procedure for election or a representative to represent it in the General Assembly, the persons attending the First World Congress of Craftsmen from such country shall select among themselves, the person to represent such country. Such person may represent the country at future General Assemblies, until such time as procedure has been set up to elect a representative. If for any reason such person cannot attend any future sessions of the General Assembly, Members of the Council who are either nationals or residents of such countries, and are in

attendance at such future session, shall select from among themselves the country's representative.

#### Article 12.

The General Assembly shall consider and/or vote upon proposals, projects, resolutions or other matters presented to it by the Direction. It shall approve or reject reports prepared by the Direction, the officers of the Council or the Secretariat. It shall also have the power to cancel any Member's membership and to discharge any Director for good cause.

#### Article 12-a.

Zonal Organization. The General Assembly shall have the authority to determine, with the explicit consent of the involved countries, whether several countries should constitute a "Zone" of the World Crafts Council.

The delegates to the General Assembly from the countries constituting a Zone, as thus established, shall constitute the Zonal Assembly of that Zone.

In addition to the power of nomination for election of a Director provided for in Article 5, and of carrying out within the Zone the general programs decided upon by the General Assembly and the Direction, each Zonal Assembly may (a) adopt its rules of procedure covering zonal matters, such as selection of officers, appointment of committees, voting by proxy or mail; and (b) decide upon such programs within the Zone as it sees fit, keeping informed thereof the Direction.

#### Article 13

Secretariat. There shall be a Secretariat. It shall consist of person permanently employed to carry on the day to day work of the Council. The

Secretariat shall be headed by a General Secretary. The work of the Secretariat shall be supervised generally by the President of the Direction. However, the President may, if he sees fit, delegate his responsibilities to the General Secretary.

Article 14.

Membership. Membership in the Council shall be open to all individuals, groups, corporations, associations, societies, foundations or other types of organizations or entities which are, directly or indirectly, concerned or involved with or interested in crafts.

Article 15.

The following shall be the categories of membership and the fees to be charged for each category:

Individual	\$ 5.00
Family (husband & wife)	\$ 8.00
Student	\$ 2.00
Honorary group	\$ 10.00
(normally limited to universities schools, libraries and museums)	
Contributing	\$ 25.00

Upon the establishment in a country of a procedure for the election of a representative to represent such country in the General Assembly, each Member, who is a resident or national of such country, shall be entitled to one vote in such election.

All members shall receive a copy of the Council's Bulletin, provided that 10 copies of the Bulletin shall be made available to each Group Member for every 100 persons who belong to the Group.

Article 16.

Members of the Council, whether or not representatives to the General Assembly, shall have the right to speak during the general debate on any substantive matters being considered by the General Assembly.

Article 17.

Funds. The Council shall receive funds from its Members in the form of dues or other contributions. It shall also be entitled to receive funds from international organizations, either governmental or non-governmental, private foundations, charitable associations, corporations, other business entities, individuals or governments.

Article 18.

Amendment. No amendment shall be made to these Bylaws unless approved by two-thirds of the required quorum of the Member of the General Assembly.

### Appendix 3— A Suggested Plan for Rural Development

In 1975 Aileen Osborn Webb, President of Shelburne Farms Resources, Inc., (the company formed to preserve and re-invigorate the Vermont estate that Webb's in-laws founded in the 1890s), proposed a utopian vision, "A Suggested Plan for Rural Development." In this document she developed a plan to establish a crafts institute accessible to craftsmen from all over the world, an organization which embodied ideals long-espoused by Webb of: marketing, education, exhibition and a peaceful existence through the crafts. Drafted just four years before her death in 1979, "A Suggested Plan for Rural Development" can now be viewed as the last great vision of Aileen Osborn Webb, the pioneering crafts advocate. The project was proposed to be installed at the Great Barn at Shelburne Farms, an enormous facility that would house all operations under one roof. (fig.58) Though realized in part (a weavers group was established and products were sold throughout the Shelburne community), Aileen Osborn Webb's last great vision for the craftsmen was simply grander than logistics would allow.

The following is a transcription of the proposal for "A Suggested Program for Rural Development," proposed by Shelburne Farms Resources, Inc:

The same problems exist in every area of the world. They lie in the need to develop the resources available, and intangible in the development of the whole man, his health, his intellect, and his vision.

It has taken centuries for man to achieve his present uneven civilization. As a result of present communication each step, which develops a pattern of successful activities through planning and intensive use of resources in one

region, (though needed adaptations to fit circumstances), act as a pattern to others who wish to develop their own communities to the fullest extent.

It is in the hopes that the activities which take place on Shelburne Farms may prove beneficial not only to its own small section of Vermont, but as an object lesson of what can be done elsewhere to solve some of the problems of present-day living that the Shelburne Farms Resources, Inc., has been formed. It will work intensively, not only in developing the agricultural possibilities inherent in the land under its control, but its recreational and occupational possibilities as well.

Because of the facilities already available in a large structure known as the "Farm Barn", the first and immediate problem will be to develop its full use as an occupational resource while slowly bringing the land to its full potential. The balance of this memo deals than only with a craft development which could give real impact to the Vermont area and whose influences could be spread much farther even than the confines of the United States.

#### Property Description

To digress somewhat at this point with a brief history of the land to date seems necessary. Dr. and Mrs. Seward Webb bought 4,000 acres of land between the Rutland R. R. (at that time being built by Dr. Webb) and Lake Champlain. Subsequently part of the land was given to the Watson Webb branch of the family, leaving about 2,000 acres to Vanderbilt Webb. This is now owned by Derick Webb and controlled by him and six children through the Shelburne Family Corporation. Dr. and Mrs. Webb in the years between 1888 and 1900

developed the property as a single farm estate, building Shelburne House (101 rooms) on a bluff overlooking Lake Champlain; a breeding barn for Dr. Webb's hackneys, now belonging to the Watson Webbs; a work barn; a daily and the Farm Barn complex.

The land is located about three miles west of the village of Shelburne where Mrs. Watson Webb built her outstanding Shelburne Museum which attracts an attendance of 1000 tourists a day during the summer months. There are many motels in the vicinity. Houses would be available for permanent personnel with land available for gardens and further housing if necessary. Burlington, 8 miles to the North, is a growing city with industries such as IBM, General Electric and the University of Vermont. State highways connect it with the surrounding areas. There is an excellent, recently enlarged airport. Skiing areas such as Stowe, Sugar Bush, etc., are within 40 or so miles.

Farming operations now use part of the land, with a dairy herd of 300 Brown Swiss cows and related crops, all now centered in a modern pole barn. The old Farm Barn, though beautiful, is entirely unsuited for contemporary mechanized farming and is only used for some occasional storage.

The Farm Barn building which will be used as the center of all craft and some agricultural activities is an extraordinary building of quite fascinating architecture. It was built in the early 1900's with Robertson as architect.

In the center there is a large open courtyard of about two acres. In the barn were housed 40 pairs of horses, sheep, chickens, hay, repair shops, offices and equipment. Towers in the four corners were connected on the north and south

sides by two storey sections. The west façade which housed the horses, hay and grain areas are from 3 to 5 stories in height. The roofs are at all angles, the walls of red stone and shingles and the total impression is architecturally exciting. The building, thus, lends itself to a multiple use.

The housing is sound and in good shape but would need considerable interior alterations such as plumbing, etc., to make it useable. A rough estimate of the cost would probably be several hundred thousand dollars to make it useful for new purposes.

#### Basis for Action

For some months the ideas and plans found in this paper have been discussed by a small group in Vermont. The ideas developed have now been put down on paper, and craftsmen and craft educators are being asked for their opinions as to the ideas suggested and the feasibility of the plan. Without such a survey or the approval of craft leaders there would be no point in pursuing the many details necessary before an appeal for financial support could be undertaken.

The craft explosion of the 1960's and 70's is known to all who follow the news medias, to all educators and to those interested in the arts. To those deeply concerned with the future of the crafts this impetus presents many questions. How truly deeply seated is the present growth? How can the craft interest be channeled into permanent value to society? How can this practice give leadership

to the esthetic understanding and appreciation of true artistic values to all people?  
Is the present education meeting this requirements?

These are searching questions and the answer to them all lies in an answer to the last which is in the negative. The answers to the first four can only be in the positive if the training of the craftsman can be realistically broadened and the value of the craft potential made clear to all.

### Past and Present

The past American concept of the “good life” has been one which enabled an individual to get a job and make money which would enable him to “keep up with the Joneses” in whatever strata of society the individual wished or could achieve. The satisfaction of the inner man was not thought of importance because it was considered of no particular value to the achievement of the above “good life.”

Now the young are breaking down the old values through a revolution of their own which is having a profound influence on society. The basic tenet is that happiness comes from self expression and individualism. The arts and music, some form of communal or simple living is of vast importance to them. Many will find themselves ultimately up against the problems of making a living. Because of a lack of a full training and understanding of their problems many will sink back with bitterness into the same disliked regime they revolted against in their youth.

All who seriously consider the crafts must realize that only the very few become great artists but that all can make a living in one way or another through the crafts and satisfy their creative instincts as well. The present education in the crafts fails in most instances to make the possibilities involved clear. Unless this is done, the golden promise with which students start their craft education will vanish and they, and society, will be the losers. True technical and design knowledge are first necessary steps but how to practice such skills as a means of a better livelihood must be part of a craftsman's equipment. There is also the need of an opportunity for the study, not of techniques but of the basic meaning of crafts to our society. This lies in the field of thought, philosophy, imagination and the basic relationship of art to the community, to society and to education and should be developed in quiet study and writing.

It is realized, of course, that much which has been said above has been expressed before but the justification for the Farm Barn Craft Complex is that the many aspects of the craft problem have never before been made tangibly evident, under one roof, as a prototype institution covering the gamut of craft activities. For here you would find successful, practicing, trained craftsmen, apprentice opportunities, a retail selling area, a production unit, selling at wholesale and retail, and lastly and probably most important, as on-going opportunity for thought, development and philosophical discussion.

### The Proposal

The proposal would be to adapt the already existing Farm Barn on the Webb Property at Shelburne, Vermont, to house four separate projects under one roof and direction. These would be:

Rented individual workshops.

The School of Production Techniques.

The Sky High Facility for Creative Work.

Retail and wholesale selling outlets.

The space available would total 97,696 square feet with more available in the hay lofts if needed.

The south and north end wings are two stories high and end with four corner towers of three to four stories. These would be used as individual workshops, at least one in each media with living quarters above them. These facilities would be rented on reasonable terms to highly qualified craftsmen whose actions would be completely independent of any control though they would be expected to run profitably managed shops, open to visitors. For their protection, some form of limiting such visits to people truly interested in buy or ordering would have to be worked out. They would be able to sell through the retail selling area described below, or do special order work. They would be asked to take in one, or more if they wished, recommended apprentices and to give advice on the production ship program if asked. It is expected there would be eight or more such units with combined living units.

School of Production Techniques

The School of Production Techniques would be situated on the ground and first floor of the west area. The purpose of the School would be to teach craftsmen the more efficient way to work either in their own shops or ultimately in a small plant of their own. At the outset, the four basic areas of ceramics, fibers, metal and wood would be planned for with a possible glass unit and forging added later. They would work seven hours a day, five days a week, be paid a living wage and be expected to enroll for not less than a year nor to stay more than 18 months if they worked proved satisfactory. There would be a director for each media unit and these would form a managing committee to run the program.

The student workers would work not on objects of their own design, but on those decided on by a special committee made up of the Director, the Shop or Unit Managers and others who might be called in for advice. The criteria for choice would be controlled by good design, good function and the possibility of being made at a cost which would be comparative with the market. Students would sit in on sessions at which elections were made and the discussions incident to the decisions would be a valuable part of their training. There would be, at appropriate times, courses on record- and bookkeeping, market analysis, maintenance of equipment, new materials, changing tastes, etc. Students and other would be at liberty to present to the Special Objects Committee their own suggested designs. If one were chosen and put into production, a small royalty would be paid on all pieces sold. Sales from the workshops would be at wholesale only and displayed in a special area on the north end of the ground

floor. Buyers would be welcomed at all times but it would probably be necessary to have a New York showroom, perhaps as part of the projected ACC selling plans. In the south end there would be a retail selling and order taking area open to tourists. Each shop manager would have his own workshop studio in which he could do his own work even though he would have to spend considerable time in the shop.

Students would be a liberty to use shop equipment in the evenings or weekend for their personal work. Students would be expected to keep the shops running and clean. There would be dormitory space for single students at low cost and help in finding other quarters for men with families. There would be simple eating facilities and a common meeting room.

It is believed possible to so run the shops that the School will be self supporting. Any profits of shops and other rentals would go the upkeep of the whole complex. Financial estimates and further organization are being studied.

#### The Sky High Facility for Creative Work

This facility is more difficult to describe than are the other plans for the Farm Barn Complex, for its outpost cannot be known or scheduled. Its success will come from creative thinking in the form of writing, books, essays, special research or new plans which will relate society and the arts or agriculture in a happy harmony.

Hopefully to achieve these ends, the third floor will be divided into eight or ten comfortable units consisting of a study and living room, a small bedroom,

with running water and a bath and toilet shared with another unit. Each unit will have a small refrigerator and hotplate for coffee, ect. There will be maid service, meals during the week will be available in the Complex cafeteria. In addition there are good restaurants on Route 7 between Shelburne and Burlington.

The fourth floor will be divided into a common room with a piano, television and other games, several small conference rooms and a larger room for meetings holding approximately fifty persons. The library facilities of the University of Vermont will be available.

During the sixth months of May through October, the facilities of Shelburne House will be open for special seminars and conferences which will be under the supervision of the Director of the Complex, which may be rented for special fees depending on the rooms used and the services required.

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Richard Webb, interview by author, Sunapee, New Hampshire, June 27, 2007.

## Illustrations



Fig.1 Webb often turned to pottery for solace and as a creative outlet during her forty-year career as America's foremost advocate for the crafts.

Photograph of Aileen Osborn Webb in the potter's studio of her New York City penthouse apartment. Rita Reif, "A Mover in the Field of Crafts", *New York Times*, (January 8, 1966): 34.



Fig. 2 Aileen Osborn is pictured in the back left seat of the carriage, with a hat on her head reflecting the genteel life afforded by an affluent family during the Gilded Age.

Osborn Family Photograph, c.1900, Osborn Family Archives, Garrison, New York.



Fig. 3 Following the traditions of society's elite, Aileen Osborn Webb made her debut in New York City in 1910.

Photograph of Aileen Osborn Webb, c.1910, Aileen Osborn Webb Papers, Shelburne Farms Archives, Shelburne, Vermont.



Fig. 4 Aileen Osborn as a young, engaged woman (top); Aileen Osborn and Vanderbilt Webb during their engagement, probably Garrison, NY, c.1912 (bottom).

Photographs, c.1912, Aileen Osborn Webb Papers, Shelburne Farms Archives, Shelburne, Vermont.



Fig. 5 Aileen Osborn Webb threw pottery for most of her adult life, including this pitcher from the 1970s.

Aileen Osborn Webb, *Pitcher*, earthenware, 1970s, Richard Webb Collection, Sunapee, New Hampshire, photo by author.



Fig. 6 As a young bride, Webb nurtured many artistic interests including watercolors and wood carving as seen in this photograph of her sculpture, *Cats*, carved from walnut during the 1920s.

Aileen Osborn Webb, *Cats*, walnut, 1920s, Richard Webb Collection, Sunapee, New Hampshire, photo by author.

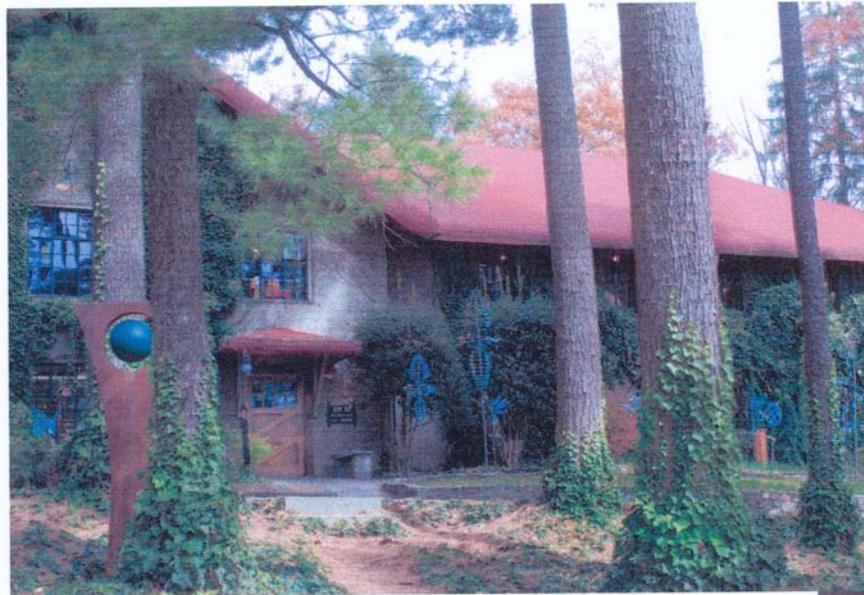


Fig. 7 *Above left*, Old-English style cottage used for Biltmore Industries under Fred L. Seely; *above right*, Fred L. Seely, who purchased Biltmore Estate Industries from Edith Vanderbilt in 1917.

Photographs from Melinda B. Willms, "Biltmore Estate Industries: Common Things, Done Uncommonly Well." *Style 1900*, (Summer 2008): 68.



Fig. 8 Though they were two of the wealthiest individuals in America, George and Edith Vanderbilt routinely embraced the simple pleasures of country life as seen in this photograph of the couple at Buck Spring Lodge on Biltmore Estate, c.1912.

Photograph from Melinda B. Willms, "Biltmore Estate Industries: Common Things, Done Uncommonly Well." *Style 1900*, (Summer 2008): 64.



Fig. 9 Biltmore Estate Industries, as seen in this early twentieth century photograph, was a crafts cooperative whose classrooms served as creative laboratories for the woodworking and textiles produced by children of Biltmore employees.

Photograph, of Biltmore Estate Industries, c. early 1900s, Asheville, North Carolina, from Melinda B. Willms, "Biltmore Estate Industries: Common Things, Done Uncommonly Well." *Style 1900*, (Summer 2008): 65.

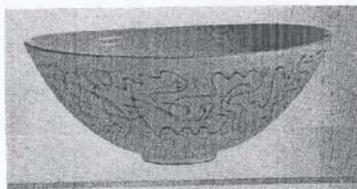


Fig. 10 Edith Vanderbilt photographed wearing a tailored suit likely made of Biltmore Homespun, c.1924

Photograph of Mrs. George Vanderbilt, c.1924, from Melinda B. Willms, "Biltmore Estate Industries: Common Things, Done Uncommonly Well." *Style 1900*, (Summer 2008): 67.

Fig. 11 America House, located on New York City's Madison Avenue, through its merchandise and exhibitions promoted excellence in contemporary crafts.

Photograph of America House, 1943, from Ketchum, Morris, "An Architect Advises on Display or Planning America House," *Craft Horizons* 2, no. 3 (November 1943): 3.



## POTTERY

Mary and Edwin Scheier attain a perfection of form that is difficult to equal. The bowl 13½" in diameter and 5½" high, \$100.00 and the large plate 15½" in diameter \$60.00 are fine examples of form, glaze and decoration.

Marguerite Wildenhain's stoneware is of outstanding individual quality. The decorated vase 8" high is \$15.00. The pitcher is 8¾" high, \$15.00 and the tea caddy 6½" high is \$17.50. The coffee set for two is \$30.00. The glazes on this high fire ware are subtle colors of blue, grey and brown.



Beatrice Woods' work is exceptional for the beautiful colors, interesting textures and fragile artistic forms. The stylish large cup and saucer in rosy pink is \$35.00. The rough texture vase 5" high is \$17.50. The squeeze bowl is 8½" long \$16.00 and the round low bowl 7" in diameter has a sparkling deep jewel like glaze on the bottom—\$14.00.

Page 6

Fig. 12 Crafts sold through America House catalogue, during the late 1940s featuring the ceramics of master craftspeople Mary and Edwin Scheier, Marguerite Wildenhain, and Beatrice Wood.

America House Catalogue, c.1949, America House Subjects File, American Craft Council Archives, American Craft Council, New York, New York.

Fig. 13 The *Craftsmanship in New England* exhibition highlighting the best of regional contemporary crafts featuring from left to right: a portable bar by Loiuise Taylor, decorated screen by Don Sheet, tapestry weaving by Clara Brigham, cross and candlestick by William Brigham, tray by Lois Warren and stained glass by Charles Connick.

Photograph of *Craftsmanship in New England* exhibition, 1944, America House gallery, New York, NY, from *Craft Horizons* 3, no. 5 (May 1944): 3.



Fig. 14 *The Hands of Servicemen* exhibition from 1944 featuring craft by the wounded men at Halloran Hospital done under the auspices of the Arts and Skills Unit of the New York Chapter of the American Red Cross.

Photograph of Aileen Osborn Webb viewing *The Hands of Servicemen* exhibition, 1944, America House gallery, New York, New York from *Craft Horizons* 3, no. 6 (August 1944): 3.



Fig. 15 *The Hands of Servicemen* exhibition from 1944 documenting the experiment of the Army Corporation teaching the finer points on craft and the industrial process to the wounded at the St. Albans and the Brooklyn Navy Yard Hospitals.

Photograph of *The Hands of Servicemen* exhibition, 1944, America House gallery, New York, New York, from *Craft Horizons* 3, no. 6 (August 1944): 3.

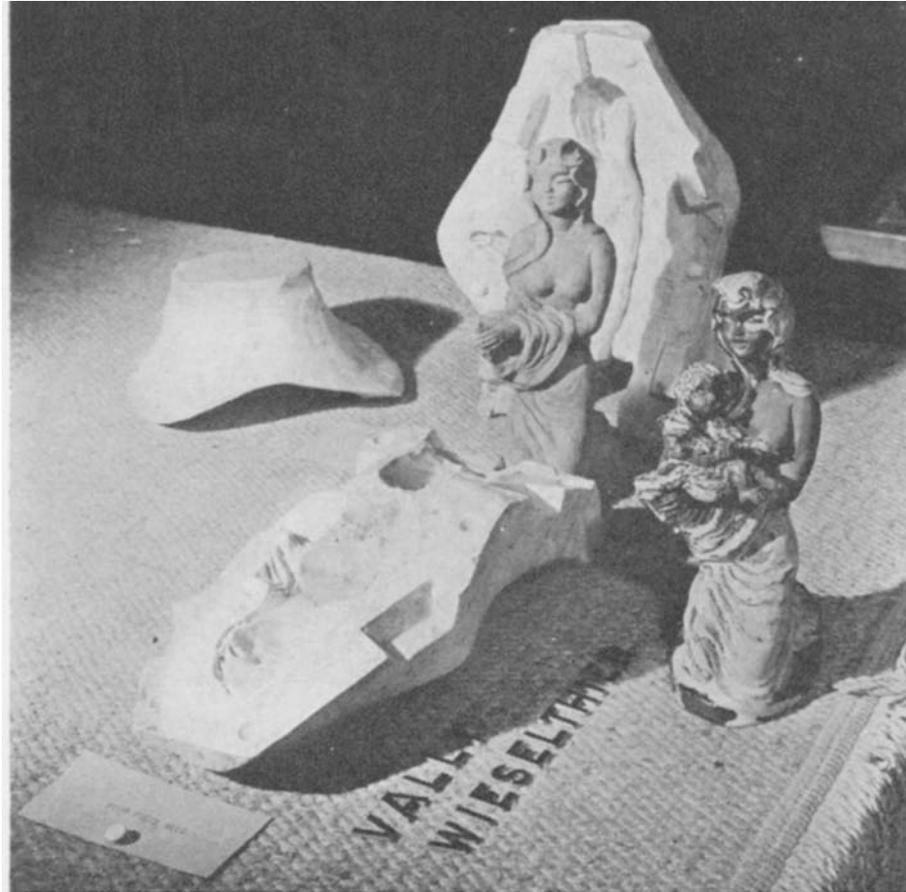


Fig. 16 *Show How* exhibition from 1944 suggesting the democratic nature of craft by demonstrating the process of making a ceramic mould, as created by Vally Wieselthier.

Photograph of *Show How* exhibition, 1944, America House gallery, New York, New York, from *Craft Horizons* 3, no. 6 (August 1944): 3.

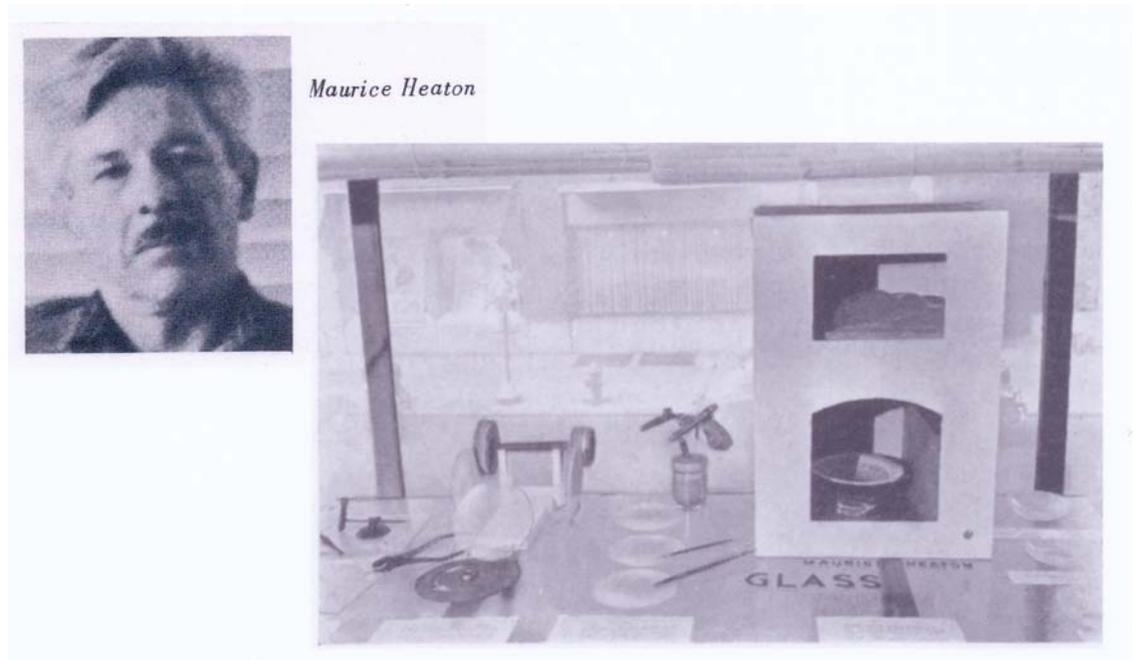


Fig. 17 Maurice Heaton (left) and the *Show How* exhibition from 1944 demonstrating the process used in his etching of glass (right).

Photographs of Maurice Heaton and *Show How* exhibition, 1944, America House gallery, New York, NY, from American Craftsmen's Council, *The Craftsmen's World: Third Annual Conference*. New York: The Council, 1959, 125; *Craft Horizons* 3, no. 6 (August 1944): 3.



Fig. 18 *Hands Across the Border* exhibition from 1945 featuring the best in Canadian craft in all media including silver, pewter, weaving and pottery.

Photograph of *Hands Across the Border* exhibition, 1945, America House gallery, New York, New York from *Craft Horizons* 4, no. 9 (May 1945): 30.

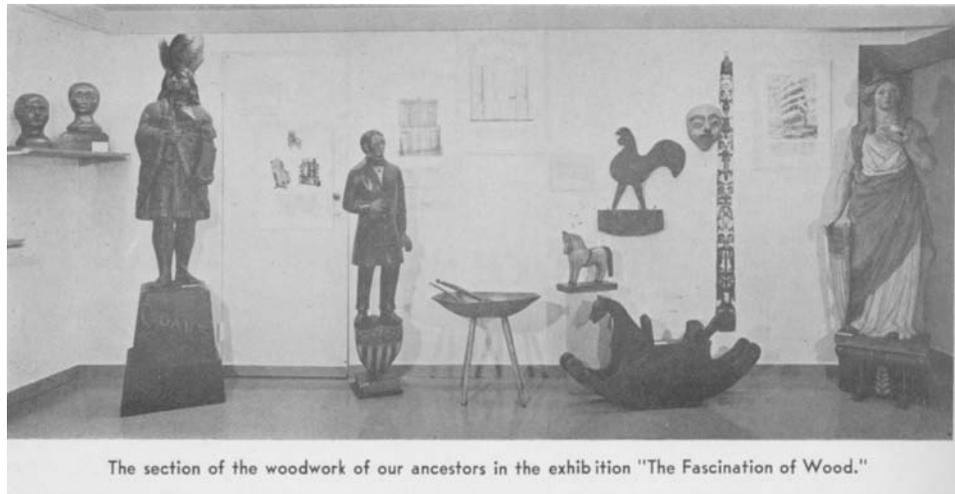


Fig. 19 *The Fascination with Wood* exhibition from 1945 showcasing examples of historic American woodwork.

Photograph of *The Fascination with Wood* exhibition, 1945, America House gallery, New York, New York, from *Craft Horizons* 4, no. 9 (May 1945): 31.



Fig. 20 *The Fascination with Wood* exhibition from 1945 showcasing the best in contemporary woodwork.

Photograph of *The Fascination with Wood* exhibition, 1945, America House gallery, New York, New York, from "News of the Educational and Cooperative Councils." *Craft Horizons* 4, no. 9 (May 1945): 33.

**THREE EXHIBITIONS**  
HELD AT AMERICA HOUSE, MAY THROUGH AUGUST

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IN MAY  
"FREE FORMS IN CERAMICS"  
by  
SANDRO GIAMPIETRO

"My central purpose in the development of Free Forms in Ceramics is to temper the excessive mechanical puritanism found in much modern architecture," says Mr. Sandro Giampietro. "In evaluating all creative work, I believe one must concentrate on the central values the human person lives by. This will create objects conceived and achieved in love and not in the deadly precision of efficiency. Free or any other forms can be reproduced through mass production and the use of power or even hand tools but until the human equation is valued more than the myriad trappings of our power driven age the objects produced will be filled with cold impersonality." This sense of personal creation combined with love of form and texture is strikingly evident in Mr. Giampietro's work. It has created much interest and many pieces were sold, including two to the Museum of Modern Art. They are high fired salt glaze and the colors are rich and satisfying. Photo by Wolinsky-Miller Studios.



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Fig. 21 *Free Forms in Ceramics* exhibition from 1946 highlighting the organic designs of master ceramist Sandro Giampietro.

Photograph of *Free Form in Ceramics* exhibition, 1946, America House gallery, New York, New York, from "Three Exhibitions." *Craft Horizons* 6, no. 14 (August 1946): 31.

IN JUNE  
 "CREATIONS IN TIN"  
 by  
 DONALD CORDRY



Donald Cordry is an American artist and designer living temporarily in Mexico. He works chiefly in metals, especially in tin. His painted roosters, his screen of diamond mirrors set in tin pictured above, his delightful lamp, makes one realize that a creative artist can bring charm, good proportion, taste, and an unusual flair to things of use as well as to those which are merely decorative.

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Fig. 22 *Creations in Tin* exhibition from 1946 celebrating the creativity in the decorative arts of craftsman Donald Cordry.

Photograph of *Creations in Tin* exhibition, 1946, America House gallery, New York, New York, from "Three Exhibitions." *Craft Horizons* 6, no. 14 (August 1946): 32.



Fig. 23 *The Master Craftsmen of Tomorrow* exhibition from 1946 designed to showcase the talent among emerging contemporary craftsman under thirty.

Photograph of *The Master Craftsmen of Tomorrow* exhibition, 1946, America House gallery, New York, New York, from "Three Exhibitions." *Craft Horizons* 6, no. 14 (August 1946): 33.



Fig. 24 Halgarten Hall on the campus of the School for American Craftsmen in 1945 housed the offices as well as metal and weaving shops for the school.

Photograph of Halgarten Hall in 1945, School for American Craftsmen, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, from "News of the Educational and Cooperative Councils," The School for American Craftsmen", *Craft Horizons* 4, no.10 (August 1945): 4.



Fig. 25 Interior of woodworking shop on the School for American Craftsmen campus.

Photograph of the School for American Craftsmen in 1945, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, from "News of the Educational and Cooperative Councils," *Craft Horizons* 4, no.10 (August 1945): 4.

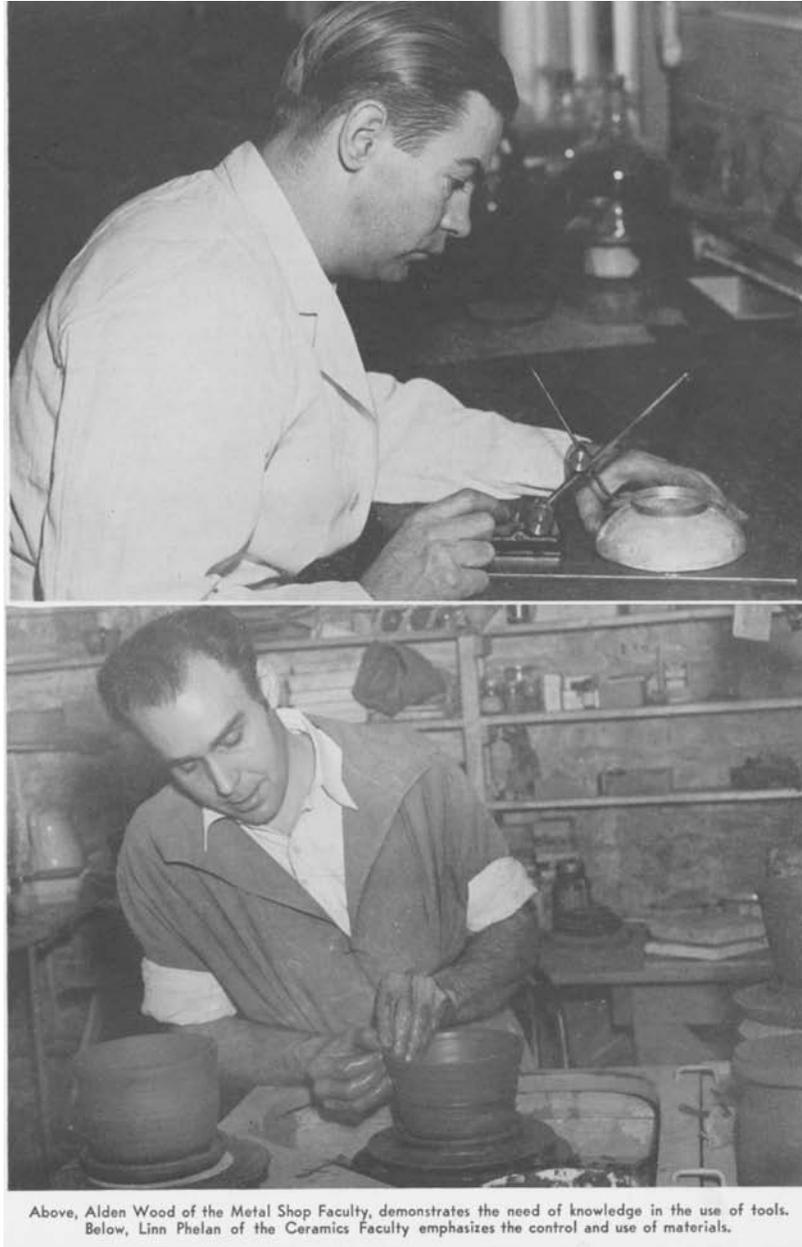


Fig. 26 Photographs showcasing the masterful faculty in the metals and ceramics departments of the School for American Craftsmen, 1945.

Photograph of faculty members Alden Wood (top) and Linn Phelan (bottom) from the School for American Craftsmen, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, 1945, from "News of the Educational and Cooperative Councils," *Craft Horizons* 4, no. 10 (August 1945): 5.



Fig. 27 A student putting the finishing touches on a wooden tray at School for American Craftsmen, 1945.

Photograph of School for American Craftsmen student, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, 1945, from "News of the Educational and Cooperative Councils," *Craft Horizons* 4, no. 10 (August 1945): 6.



Fig. 28 Images which showcase the development of a ceramic tile at the School for American Craftsmen, 1945.

Photograph of Marian Haille, School for American Craftsmen, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, 1945, from "News of the Educational and Cooperative Councils." *Craft Horizons* 4, no. 10 (August 1945): 9.



Fig. 29 This is a work of sculptured ceramic by European modernist Frans Wildenhain, a prominent faculty member at the School for American Craftsmen.

Frans Wildenhain, *Mythological Scene*, sculptured ceramic tile, 1950, from Harold Brennan, "The School for American Craftsmen." *Craft Horizons* 20, no.3 (May/June 1960): 24.

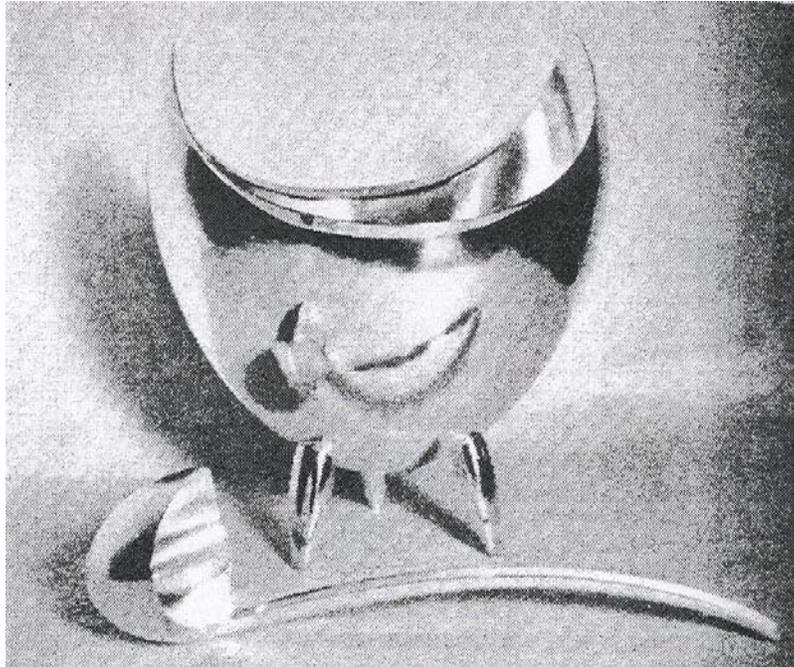


Fig. 30. This work of silver reflects the modernist lines of mid-century craft by the consummate artist, Hans Christiansen.

Hans Christiansen, *Punch Bowl and Ladle*, silver, 1951, from Harold Brennan, from "The School for American Craftsmen." *Craft Horizons* 20, no. 3 (May/June 1960): 24.



Fig. 31 After her husband's death in 1956, Aileen Osborn Webb began a new, more independent phase of her life when she moved into her New York City penthouse apartment, appointed with contemporary crafts which she commissioned.

Photograph of Aileen Osborn Webb at her penthouse apartment, New York, New York, 1958 from Harriet Morrison, "With a Skyline View." *New York Herald Tribune*, June 24, 1958, 24.



Fig. 32 Living Room of Aileen Osborn Webb's penthouse apartment, showcasing a hooked rug by George Wells designed to coordinate with the painting by Claude Monet hanging over the sofa.

Photograph of the living room in the penthouse apartment of Aileen Osborn Webb, New York, New York, 1966, from Rita Reif, "A Mover in the Field of Crafts." *New York Times*, January 8, 1966.

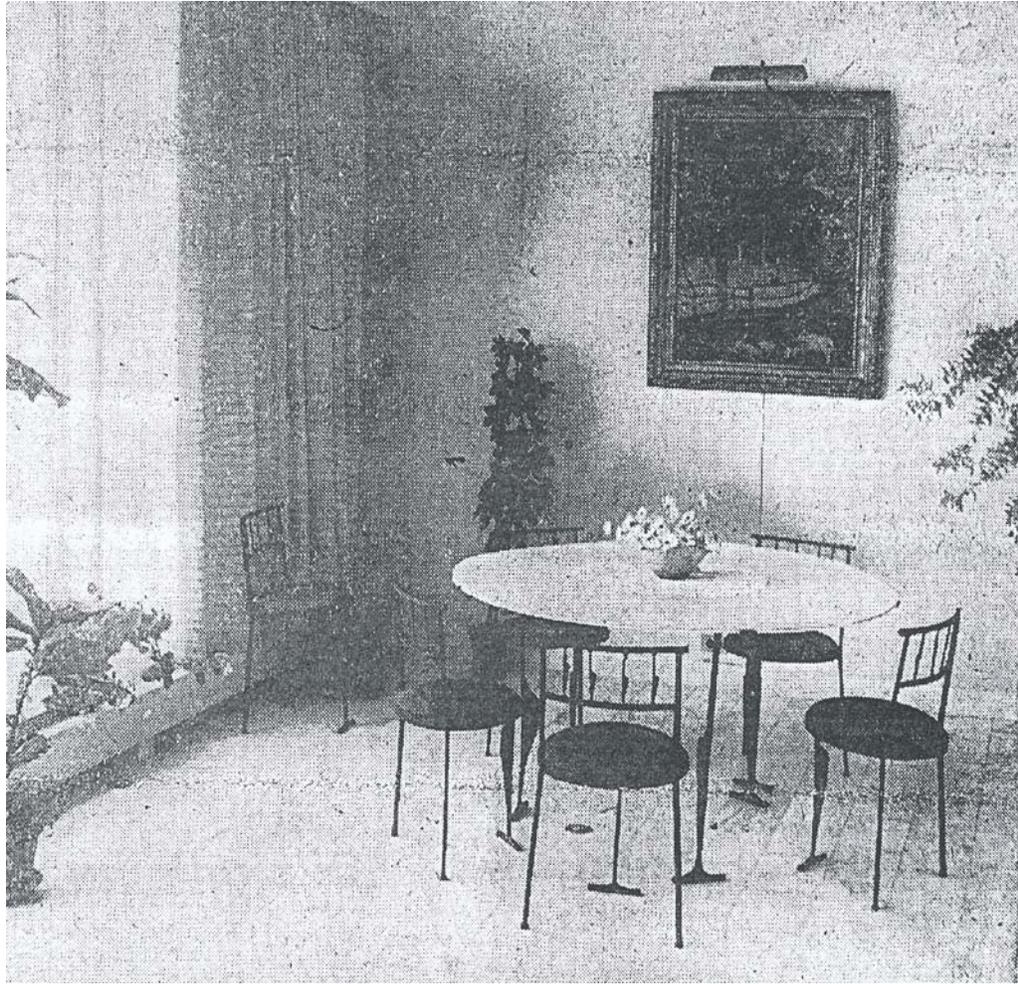


Fig. 33 The dining room of Aileen Osborn Webb's penthouse apartment which showcases the modernist table and chairs by Paul Aschenbach.

Photograph of dining room in the penthouse apartment of Aileen Osborn Webb, New York, New York, 1958, from Harriet Morrison, "With a Skyline View." *New York Herald Tribune*, June 24, 1958, 24.



Fig. 34 Bathroom in Aileen Osborn Webb's apartment, reflecting objects from her many travels including: bark and leaves from Garrison, New York, seashells from Africa, a sea fan from Caneel Bay and bits of glass from Shelburne, Vermont.

Photograph of bathroom in the penthouse apartment of Aileen Osborn Webb, from Rita Reif, "A Mover in the Field of Crafts." *New York Times*, January 8, 1966.



Fig. 35 During the summers, Webb stayed in this modern residence which she had built for her; it was not far from the pottery studio at Shelburne Farms, her husband's family's Vermont estate.

Photograph of the Glass House, Aileen Osborn Webb's Vermont residence, Glass, Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, Vermont, c.1960, photograph by author.



Fig. 36 Dining Room of the Glass House, which featured a Paul Evans table and Scandinavian chairs, Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, Vermont, 1966.

Photograph of the dining room of Glass House, Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, Vermont, from Rita Reif, "A Mover in the Field of Crafts." *New York Times*, January 8, 1966.



Fig. 37 Aileen Osborn Webb commissioned this work of contemporary craft, a slate mural, for her new Vermont residence.

Glen Michaels, *Mural*, slate, Glass House, Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, Vermont, c.1960, photograph by author.

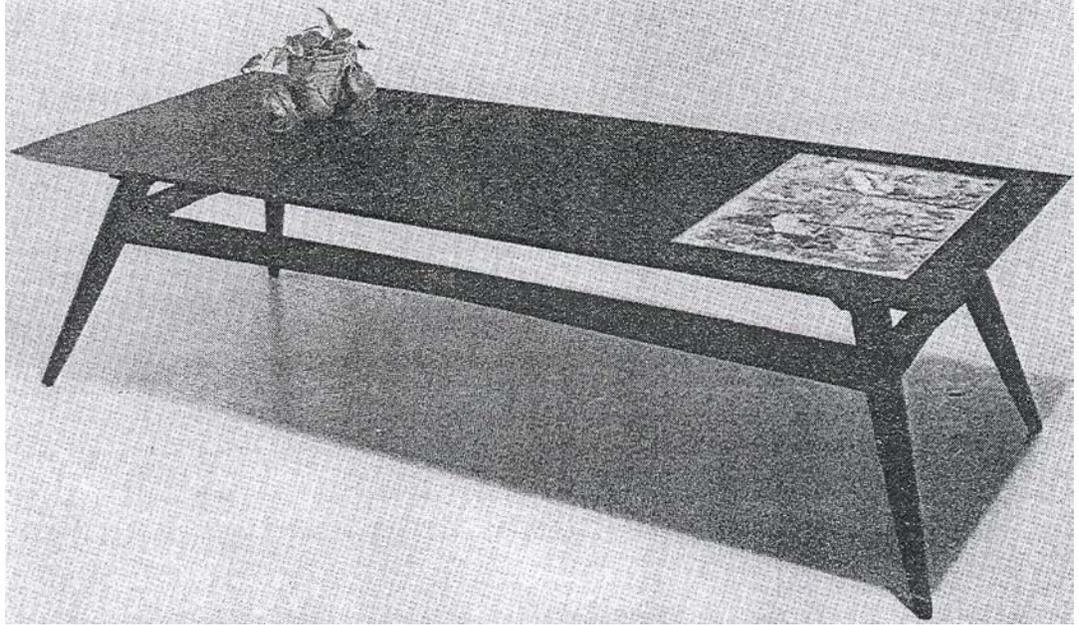


Fig. 38 Aileen Osborn Webb sought to develop marketing skills in the students at the School for American Craftsmen, by exhibiting their work at the America House gallery.

Photograph of modern table exhibited in *Contemporary Furniture from the School for American Craftsmen*, America House gallery, c.1951, from "Craftsman's World: Furniture from the School for American Craftsmen," *Craft Horizons* 12, n.1 (January 1952): 41.



Fig. 39 By exhibiting the work of burgeoning craftsmen, Aileen Osborn Webb helped to define the standards and appearance of cutting-edge crafts.

Modern side chair exhibited in *Contemporary Furniture from the School for American Craftsmen*, America House gallery, c.1951, from "Craftsman's World: Furniture from the School for American Craftsmen," *Craft Horizons* 12, n.1 (January 1952): 40.

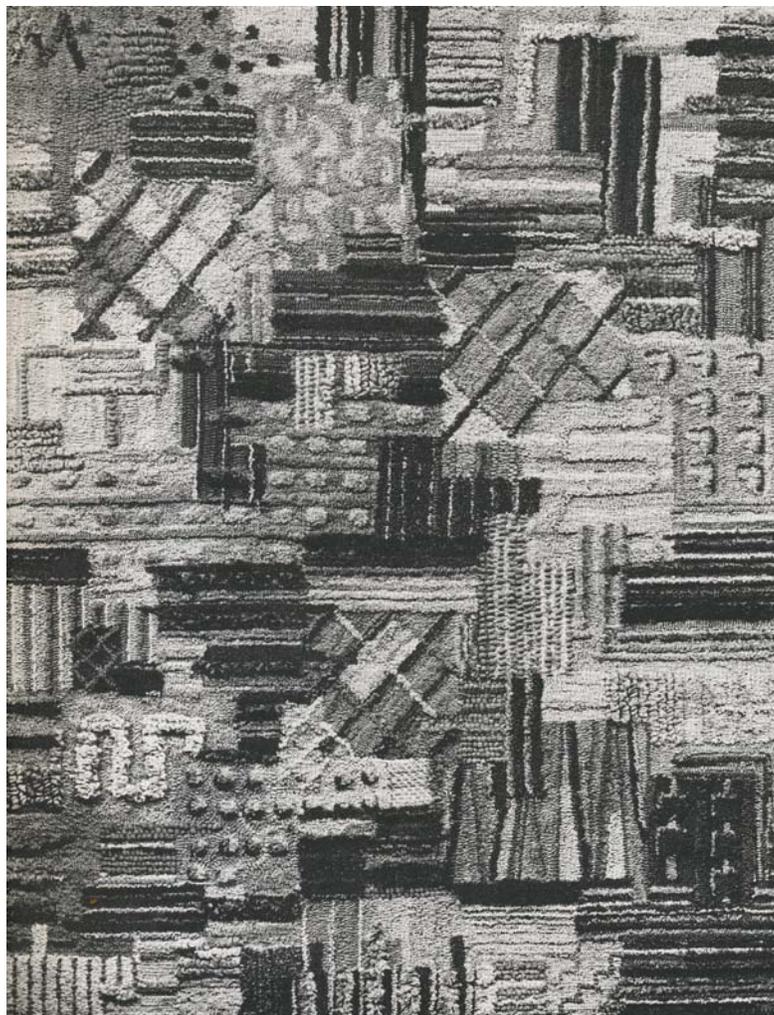


Fig. 40 This “Pastorale” Rug by craftsmen George Wells won the \$500 Two Dimension Award in *Designer Craftsmen, U.S.A.* This unique competition/exhibition hybrid was a model for future projects that Aileen Osborn Webb undertook.

George Wells, *Rug*, exhibited in *Designer Craftsmen, U.S.A.*, organized by the American Craftsmen’s Educational Council and the Brooklyn Museum, 1953, from Dorothy Giles, *Designer Craftsman, U.S.A.*, New York: Blanchard Press, Inc., 1953, 6.

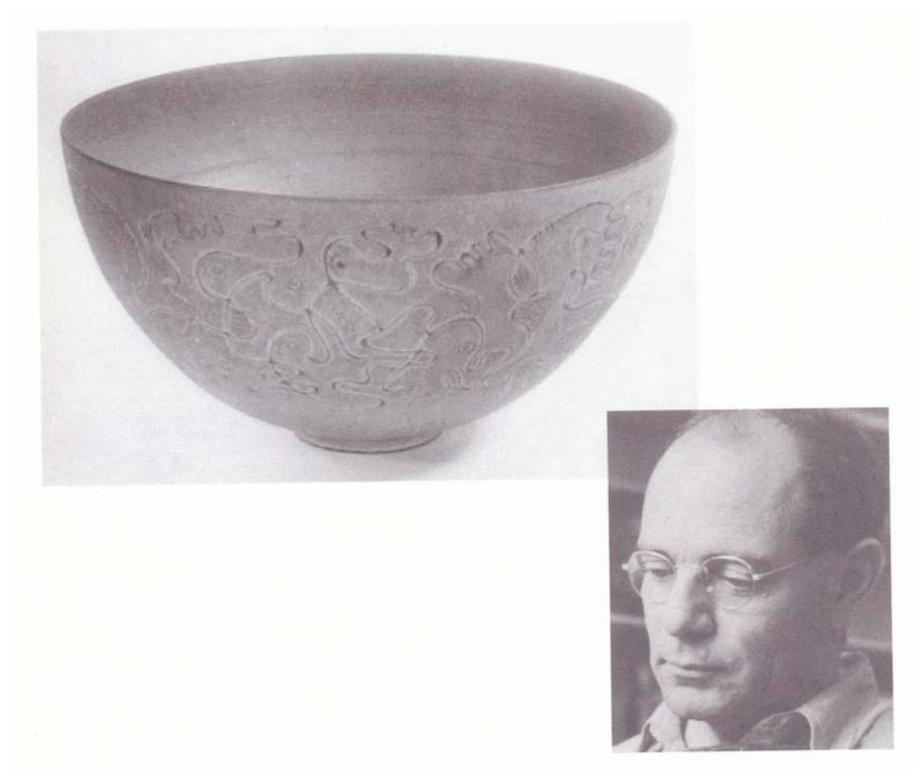


Fig. 41 Edwin Scheier, *Bowl*, earthenware, exhibited in *Designer Craftsman, U.S.A.*, organized by American Craftsman's Educational Council and the Brooklyn Museum, 1953 (top); Edwin Scheier, 1957 (bottom).

Photographs from Dorothy Giles, *Designer Craftsman, U.S.A.*, New York: Blanchard Press, Inc., 1953, 12 (top); American Craftsmen's Council. *Asilomar: First Annual Conference of American Craftsmen sponsored by the American Craftsmen's Council*. New York: The Council, 1957, 43 (bottom).

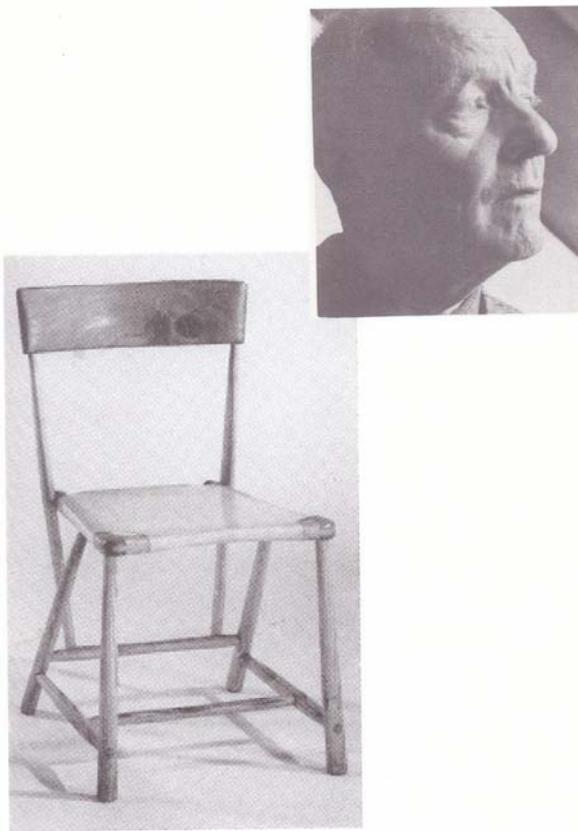


Fig. 42 Wharton Esherick, 1957 (top); Wharton Esherick, *Chair*, wood, exhibited in *Designer Craftsman, U.S.A.*, organized by American Craftsman's Educational Council and the Brooklyn Museum, 1953 (bottom).

Photographs from American Craftsmen's Council. *Asilomar: First Annual Conference of American Craftsmen sponsored by the American Craftsmen's Council*. New York: The Council, 1957, 154 (top); Dorothy Giles, *Designer Craftsman, U.S.A.*, New York: Blanchard Press, Inc., 1953, 53 (bottom).

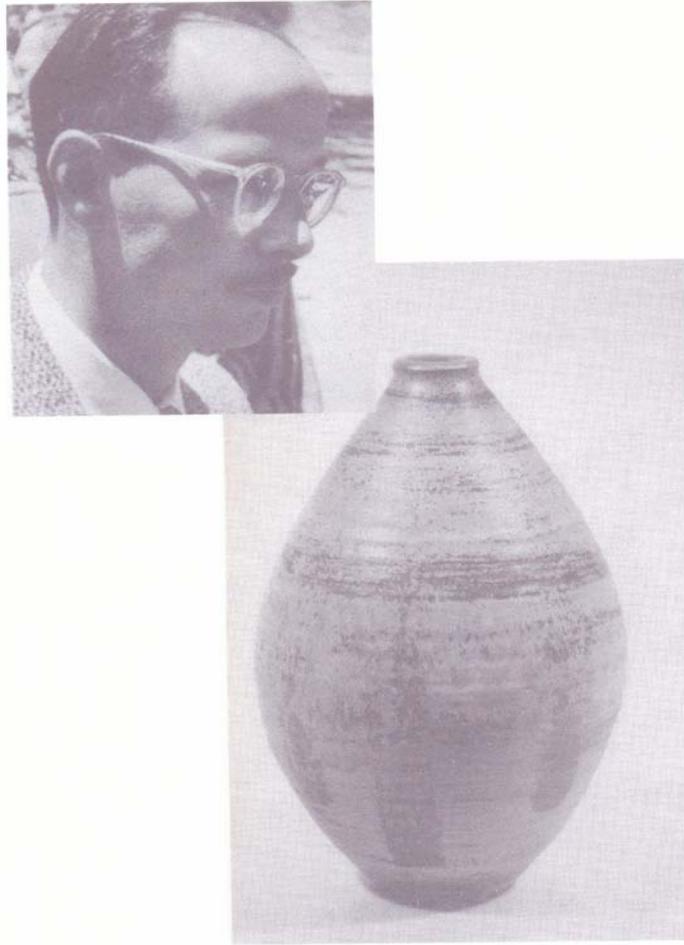


Fig. 43 Harvey K. Littleton, 1957 (top); Harvey Littleton, *Vase*, stoneware, exhibited in *Designer Craftsman, U.S.A.*, organized by American Craftsmen's Educational Council and the Brooklyn Museum, 1953 (bottom).

Photographs from American Craftsmen's Council. *Asilomar: First Annual Conference of American Craftsmen sponsored by the American Craftsmen's Council*. New York: The Council, 1957, 154 (top); Giles, Dorothy, *Designer Craftsman, U.S.A.*, New York: Blanchard Press, Inc., 1953, 40 (bottom).

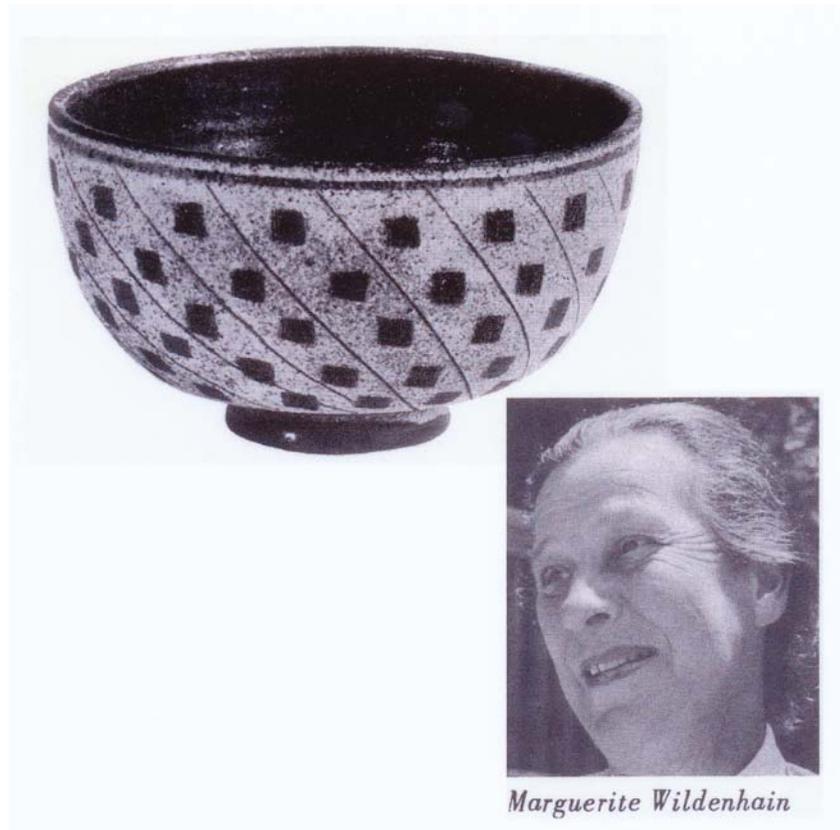


Fig. 44 Marguerite Wildenhain, *Bowl*, stoneware, exhibited in *Designer Craftsman, U.S.A.*, organized by American Craftsmen's Educational Council and the Brooklyn Museum, 1953 (top); Marguerite Wildenhain, 1957 (bottom).

Photographs from Dorothy Giles, *Designer Craftsman, U.S.A.*, New York: Blanchard Press, Inc., 1953, 30 (top); American Craftsmen's Council. *Asilomar: First Annual Conference of American Craftsmen sponsored by the American Craftsmen's Council*. New York: The Council, 1957, 11 (bottom).

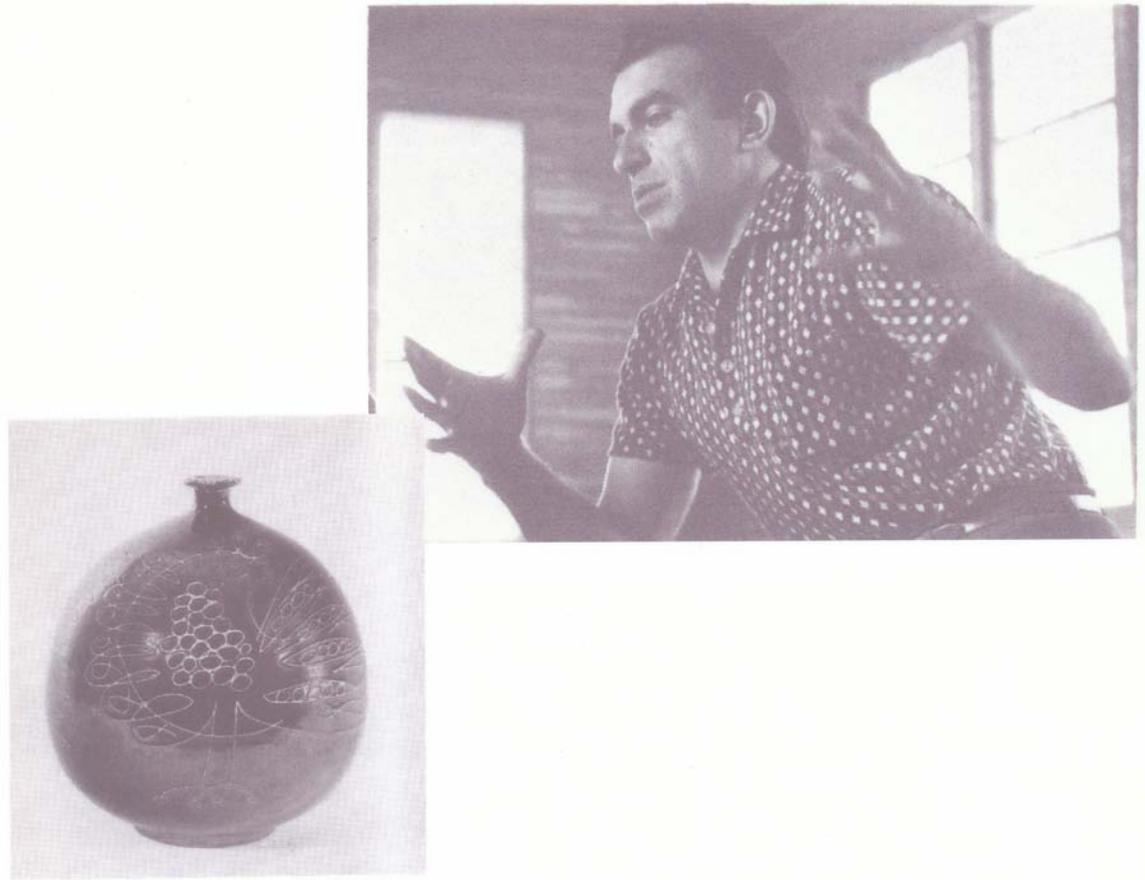


Fig. 45 Peter H. Voulkos, *Decorative Bottle*, ceramic, exhibited in *Designer Craftsman, U.S.A.*, organized by American Craftsmen's Educational Council and the Brooklyn Museum, 1953 (left); Peter H. Voulkos, 1959 (right). This work of craft won Voulkos a \$300 award for the competition.

Photographs from Dorothy Giles, *Designer Craftsman, U.S.A.*, New York: Blanchard Press, Inc., 1953, 14 (left); American Craftsmen's Council. *The Craftsman's World: Third Annual Conference*. New York: The Council, 1959, 28 (right).

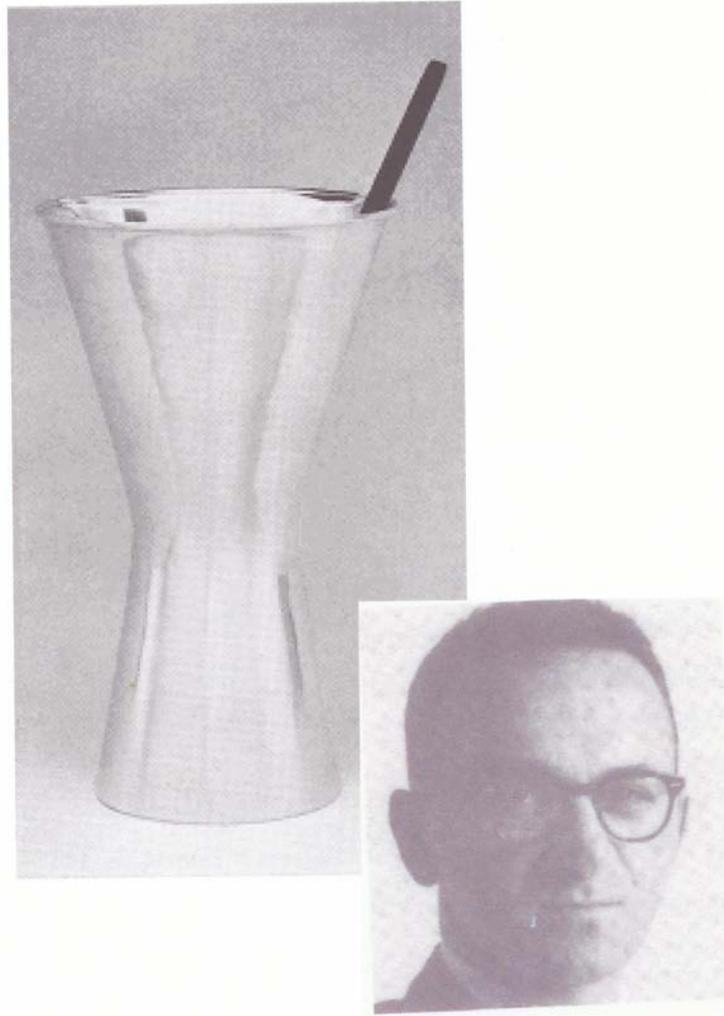


Fig. 46 Arthur J. Pulos, *Cocktail Pitcher and Stirring Oar*, silver, 1953 (left); Arthur J. Pulos, 1957 (right).

Photographs from Dorothy Giles, *Designer Craftsman, U.S.A.*, New York: Blanchard Press, Inc., 1953, 62 (left); American Craftsmen's Council. *Asilomar: First Annual Conference of American Craftsmen sponsored by the American Craftsmen's Council*. New York: The Council, 1957, 149 (right).



Fig. 47 John Prip (top) was a faculty member in the metals department at the School for American Craftsmen, and for many years brought an authoritative presence to instruction in the medium, such as *Pitcher and Cups*, metal, 1953 (bottom).

From American Craftsmen's Council. *Asilomar: First Annual Conference of American Craftsmen sponsored by the American Craftsmen's Council*. New York: The Council, 1957, 149 (top); Dorothy Giles, *Designer Craftsman, U.S.A.*, New York: Blanchard Press, Inc., 1953, 64 (bottom).

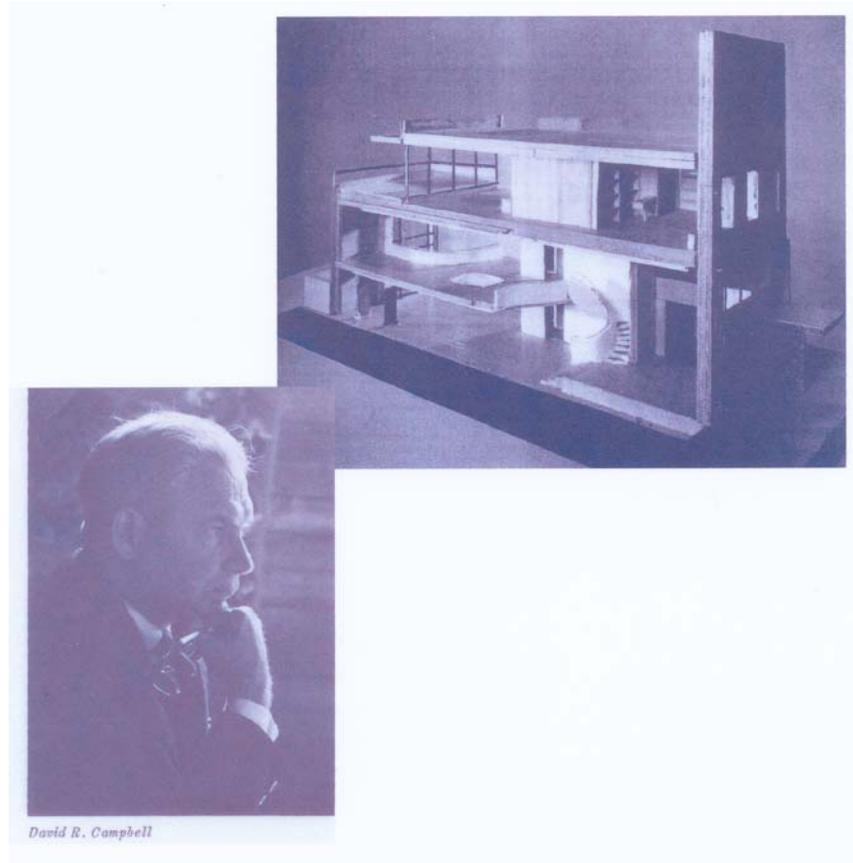


Fig. 48 As a Harvard-trained architect and passionate advocate of the crafts, David Campbell (left), the American Craftsmen's Council President, was the ideal choice to design the new Museum of Contemporary Craft (right).

Photographs of David Campbell and the model of the Museum of Contemporary Craft from American Craftsmen's Council. *The Craftsman's World: Third Annual Conference*. New York: The Council, 1959, 125 (left); Schaefer, Herwin, "The New Museum of Contemporary Craft." *Craft Horizons* 16, no.2 (March/April 1956): 15 (right).



Fig. 49 The facade of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, 44 West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York, New York, 1956 (left) and the foyer of the museum during the inaugural exhibition, *Craftsmanship in a Changing World*, showcasing in the bottom left-hand corner a metal screen of bronze and chrome by sculptor Harry Bertoia (right).

Photographs of Museum of Contemporary Crafts façade (left) and foyer, from Museum of Contemporary Craft File, Museum of Contemporary Crafts/American Craft Museum Archives, American Craft Council, New York, New York, 1956.



Fig. 50 The installation of the inaugural exhibition, *Craftsmanship in a Changing World*, at the Museum of Contemporary Craft significantly furthered Aileen Osborn Webb's mission to elevate the status of crafts throughout the world.

Photograph from *Interiors*, Whitney Publications, Inc., December, 1956.

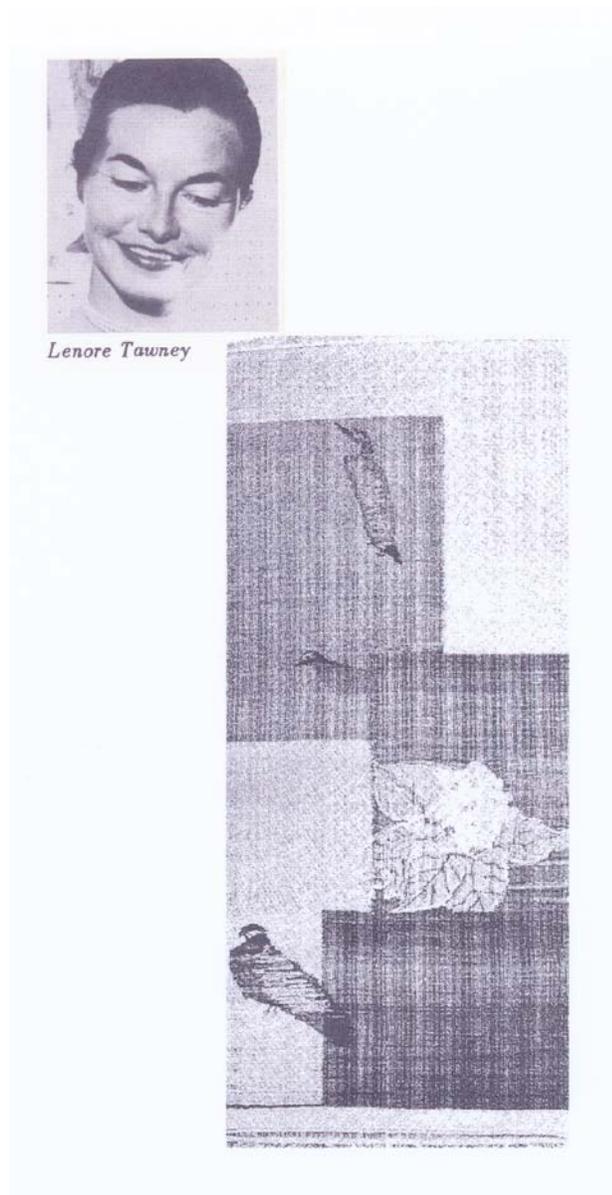


Fig. 51 An image of Lenore Tawney (top), a revered textile artist, and her commission for the inaugural exhibition of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, *Craftsmanship in a Changing World* (bottom).

Photographs of Lenore Tawney and her tapestry, *Birds and Flowers*, from 1956 in the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, New York, New York, from *American Craftsmen's Council. Asilomar: First Annual Conference of American Craftsmen sponsored by the American Craftsmen's Council*. New York: The Council, 1957, 34 (top); Museum of Contemporary Crafts, *Craftsmanship in a Changing World*, New York: The Museum, 1956, 33 (bottom).

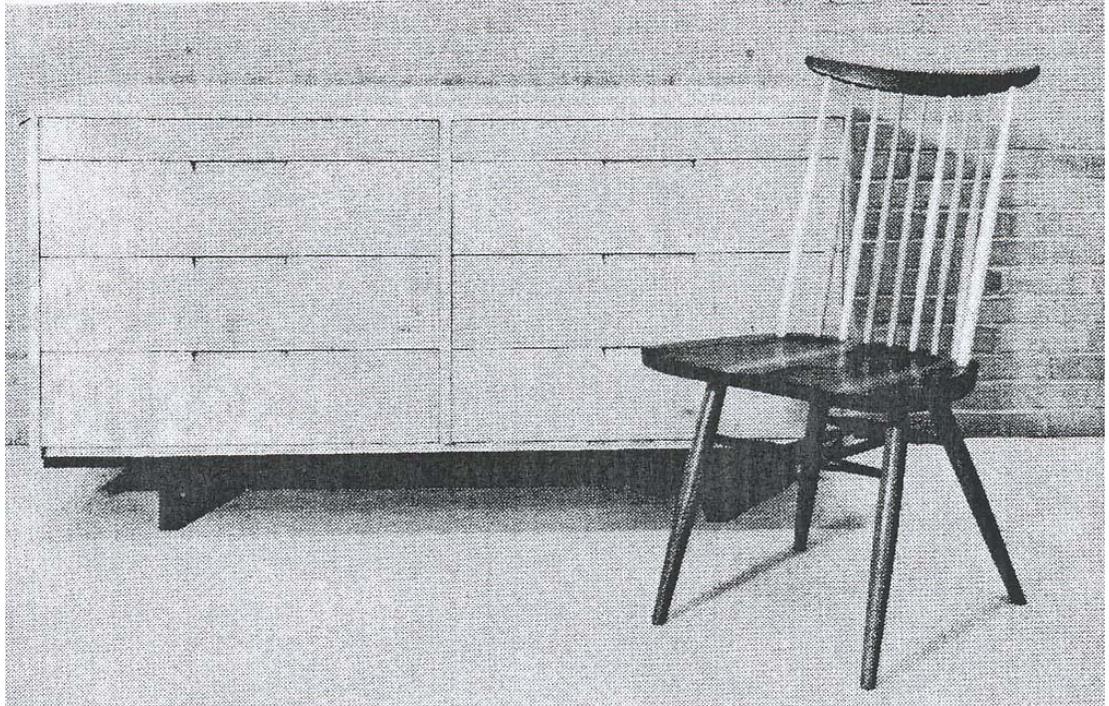


Fig. 52 The simplicity and integrity with which George Nakashima approached his furniture appealed to Aileen Osborn Webb's ideals of beauty.

Photograph of George Nakashima, *Chest of Drawers and Spindle Chair*, curly birch, walnut and hickory, *Furniture by Craftsmen*, Museum of Contemporary Crafts, 1957, from Museum of Contemporary Crafts. *Furniture by Craftsmen*. New York: The Museum, 1957, 15.



Fig. 53 A consummate craftsman, Wharton Esherick, was celebrated for his iconic work in furniture.

Wharton Esherick, *Telephone Table and Stool*, cherry and rawhide, *Furniture by Craftsmen*, Museum of Contemporary Crafts, 1956, from Museum of Contemporary Crafts, *Furniture by Craftsmen*, New York: The Museum, 1957, 9.



Fig. 54 The opportunity to exhibit the best in contemporary craft was for Aileen Webb, an ever-present idea from America House, to her museum, to the first national conference for craftsmen.

Photograph of Conference Exhibition, *Asilomar: The First Annual Conference of American Craftsmen*, Asilomar, California, 1957, from *American Craftsmen's Council. Asilomar: First Annual Conference of American Craftsmen sponsored by the American Craftsmen's Council*. New York: The Council, 1957, 162.



Fig. 55 Aileen Osborn Webb at the podium, First World Congress of Craftsmen, Columbia University, New York, New York, 1964.

Photograph from "First World Congress of Craftsmen, *Craft Horizons*, 24, no. 5 (September/October, 1964):8.



Fig. 56 Margaret Merwin Patch was a critical ally for Aileen Osborn Webb in her quest to host a global conference for craftsmen and shared her passion for the crafts and a talent for organizing people.

Photograph of Margaret Merwin Patch, c.1960s, location unknown, from Photographs, c.1915-1985 File, Margaret Merwin Patch Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



Fig. 57 Photograph documenting World Craft Council officers, from left to right: Mme. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay of India, Sam Ntiro of Tanganyika, Dr. Daniel F. Rubin de la Borbolla of Mexico, Cyril Wood of Great Britain and Aileen Osborn Webb, founder and president.

Photograph of World Craft Council officers, from Marilyn Hoffman, "World's Craftsmen Join Hands, Mrs. Vanderbilt Webb Heads Council." *Christian Science Monitor*, June 24, 1964.



Fig. 58 The Webb family estate was the site of Aileen Osborn Webb's vision for a global craft institution that never came to fruition.

Photograph of Farm Barn, Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, Vermont, 1890, photograph by author.