

Perkins, Brenda



Wool Felting and Weaving

Brenda Perkins is a traditional artist. She grew up watching her mother sew and do needlework. Her mother could sew, tat, crochet, and quilt. Brenda and her husband, Dempsy, grew up attending school and church activities together. They shared a love for traditional activities including raising sheep, weaving, and felting.

Ms. Perkins became interested in learning the craft of traditional spinning and weaving in the 1980's when the price of wool declined, and the flock of sheep were no longer financially practical. The family went on a search to turn their problem into profit. They first began offering wool to hand spinners, which soon motivated Brenda to become trained in spinning and weaving. Since there were no older people in the area that still knew how to do these crafts, she went to her local library in search of books and videos on spinning and weaving. Brenda taught herself to clean, card, spin and weave wool and later honed her skills with the assistance of a friend. Because Brenda had grown up watching her mother card cotton for quilts, she was well prepared for learning to card wool.

Brenda enjoys sharing the art of spinning and weaving with others at festivals and teaching younger generations about traditional ways of life when spinning, weaving, and felting were the only means of making clothing and household linens. She spins wool and cotton on a wheel or drop spindle, felts hats and slippers, and makes soaps from lye, animal and vegetable fats, and homegrown herbs. She has presented her skills at schools, senior citizen luncheons, the Natchitoches - NSU Folk Festival, the Louisiana Folklife Festival in Monroe, Festival Acadians in Lafayette, and many other festivals and events around the state. Brenda holds a firm belief in continuing these old methods of folk culture. Brenda says, proudly, "We are trying to preserve some of our history for the younger generation." Because of her true talent with this craft and her hard work to preserve it, Ms. Perkins was inducted into the Louisiana Folklife Center's Hall of Master Folk Artists in July 2003.

Researched and rewritten by Amber Hendricks and Samantha Sullivan.