

TIMBER FRAMERS NEWS

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Board Sets Major Goals For 1989

WHITHER THE GUILD? This question informed much of a weekend's discussion by the Board of Directors and the executive staff, who met September 24 at Great Chebeague Island, Maine to take stock and to set goals for the coming year and beyond.

Together with Conference Director Julie Benson, the Board also laid out the main lines of the 1989 Conference, expected to convene in the latter part of May at Millersville, Pennsylvania, and reviewed the progress of the Habitat project, choosing a house design from the short list of six put before them.

The essential discussion took form around an armature of concern for the achievements of the Guild three to five years hence. Some declarations were necessarily general—for example, to strengthen service to companies—while others were specific or matters of quantity, ranging even to a proposal to acquire land and build a national headquarters.

PPROMOTION of timber framing, of which the Guild has done very little since its founding in 1985, appears to the Board a chief responsibility of the moment. There remain altogether too many people who wonder what kind of log cabin a timber frame is, anyway, and who are capable of mistaking timber framers for lumberjacks. In addition to publishing and actively distributing the Professional Directory (now in preparation), the Board believes the Guild should publish a brochure fully explaining timber framing to the lay person, and should encourage the publication as well of a high quality design book, of the sort intended for coffee tables at Christmas. A publicist would be helpful to keep the media informed of significant activities of both the members and the Guild itself. A film should be produced, appropriately beginning with coverage of the Habitat project, to



FRONT ELEVATION

Front elevation of the house design by Katherine Cartrette of Mulfinger, Susenka (Minneapolis), chosen by the Guild's Board to be developed for the Habitat project. Some revisions are expected, beginning with the projecting shed-roofed bay on the right rear corner. A framing plan will be worked out by the Guild's design committee by the middle of December, and shop drawings are scheduled to go out to the volunteers by the end of January, 1989.

illustrate timber framing to interested audiences, which seem to be growing. As matters stand, a framer invited to speak has no general documentation and is restricted to personal resources. More timber frame work should be sought, finally, in public places, to improve the visibility of the trade.

TO IMPROVE SKILLS and maintain or even raise design and workmanship standards within the membership, the Board looked first at the idea of annual awards. This would seem a good way to recognize and stimulate good work, but the idea also includes the possibility of causing ill-feeling. The Board appointed a committee of three to consider various questions. Should judges be an outside panel? Would it be wise

to offer awards in relatively objective categories such as Original Joinery, rather than in a such a sweeping classification as Best Timber Frame?

The travelling workshop program, off to a hesitant start, will naturally continue, its activity level to follow the interest of the membership. There is one on offer now, another in the works and a third in the planning stage. In the very distant future the Board sees the outlines of an apprenticeship program. The question whether the Guild serves its members well educationally arises at nearly all directors' meetings, without a clear answer. This side of the Guild's life has developed much more slowly than anyone likes.

FOR PUBLICATIONS, the Board expressed hope the *News* would eventually mature into a substantial periodical, conceivably a bi-monthly with a circulation upwards of 7,000. Now a quarterly with circulation well under 1,000, the paper is restricted to Guild members for both contributions and subscriptions. Despite the page-rate of \$150 for published contributions, the flow of copy is highly irregular, and to stabilize and then increase it to supply a bigger publication will probably require a paid staff to write and solicit material. For now two or three board members will make a renewed effort to perform this function.

On the subscription side of the question, a campaign was proposed to reach out beyond the membership. Many timber frame clients would be delighted to receive a gift subscription to the *News* along with a completed timber frame, and there appears to be a considerable audience for timber framing who now receive house publications such as Riverbend's *Post* and Fox Maple's *Joiner's Quarterly*. These people should perhaps be tempted with a free sample copy and a list of complimentary subscribers should be established to include the A.I.A. and *Progressive Architecture*, and other groups who ought to be kept abreast of Guild members' work.

SAFETY AND HEALTH are beginning to emerge as proper subjects for Guild concern. Reports are heard now and then of raising injuries and more frequently of the near-miss—the dropped

1989 Conference Scheduled

NATIONAL Conference Director Julie Benson has announced the principal features of the 1989 Conference, scheduled for the third week in May at Millersville, Pennsylvania.

Thursday, May 18 will see the raising of the Habitat frame at Hanover, about an hour's drive from the conference site, with lunch and dinner to be catered by Habitat.

Friday, Guild president John Reed will open ceremonies with a brief keynote speech to illuminate the theme of the Conference, and a Habitat speaker will discuss the gift of the frame. Taking advantage of the assembled conference, the Guild's Annual Meeting will follow immediately, comprising a business meeting and an open forum. Committee reports will appear this time in the conference booklet, saving time at the meeting, with a question period provided for any discussion required. The Annual Meeting will run until lunch. Friday afternoon there will be two workshop periods. The fifth annual slide show will be screened after dinner.

Saturday morning the assembled conference will hear the featured speaker, and there will be one workshop period before lunch. In the afternoon there will be one workshop period in the first half, then in the second half a period set aside for committee meetings or free time.

The Trade Show will run concurrently Friday and Saturday. Saturday night will be devoted to visiting and entertainment, with some possibility of a second production of the star-studded Timber Framers Revue.

Sunday morning another plenary session is scheduled, subject to be determined, followed by closing ceremonies. The dedication of the Habitat house—which by now will have been transformed by hundreds of volunteers from a timber frame to a completed house—will take place in Hanover Sunday afternoon, and the hope is that many Guild members will be able to attend the ceremony on their way home from the Conference.

A list of possible speakers and workshop presenters was developed and reviewed by the Board of Directors at their Chebeague meeting. These names represent a small multitude of fields—wood structure and behavior, forestry, house design, timber frame history, French timber framing, tools, techniques, construction details, safety, health, business theory and practice, social and environmental issues, design theory, engineering and legal issues. From this rich trove a featured speaker and a dozen to fifteen workshops will emerge.

—Norman Deplume

brace or joist plunging through the deck two stories below. The dust from production cutting and planing of timbers indoors, meanwhile, cannot be beneficial to human respiration, and the problem is compounded by the tools, most of which are portable and thus not compatible with conventional dust-collection equipment. These matters will become more pressing, the Board believes, as OSHA develops and applies more stringent standards (whose purpose we applaud). They should have a regular place at the conferences and in the *News*, and the least that Guild leaders can do is to set a good example—to establish the use of safety equipment at raisings, and prove it at the slide shows—and to encourage members to acquire first aid training and licences.

A PAID EXECUTIVE Director will likely be running the day-to-day affairs of the Guild, the Board expects, probably within two or three years. It is becoming “too big a show to be run on a volunteer basis,” as one director sees it, and there is evidently “a trigger point.” Indeed, as another pointed out, “we could use a paid director right now if wanted to get going on all the things we talk about.” The job will probably grow out of the position of Conference Director (now paid as a part-time position) and the additional funding for it conceivably could come from the efforts of the very person chosen, supposing someone clever enough stepped forward. Organizational skills would be the paramount qualification, the Board believes, although someone from within the Guild would be best, since some quality, undefined but doubtless to be cherished once lost, would disappear with the arrival of a professional organization person.

FINANCIAL STABILITY, a state devoutly to be wished by timber frame companies, is no less an object for the Guild itself. Assuming a membership roster of 750 (which may change at renewal time January 1), the Guild now spends \$53 annually for each member, while it collects a membership fee of \$25. The difference is made up mostly by revenues from the national conference. These the Treasurer would rather see used to fund new and expanded activities of the Guild, and in any event these funds could evaporate if the Guild later on settled into a pattern of biennial rather than annual conferences.

The only reliable system to fund a steady level of activity, the Board agreed, is to adjust

Equipment for Sale

Timber frame shop equipment for sale.
Arkansas Post & Beam, 501-623-8258.

Design Work Wanted

Designer available for freelance work. Familiar with timber frames. Annemarie Mitchell, Oakbrook Manor, Apt 3C, Ravena, NY 12143, telephone 518-756-3986 evenings.

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LETTERS

Dedication

THREE CHEERS for the Habitat project, it's off and flying! Let's all try to make this one work. I always seem to be too busy for things like this, but I'm committing to it this year. Which brings me to a point I feel is important to all Guild members. In the past, I couldn't understand why the Board of Directors didn't solve more issues. I (among others) would say, "Why isn't more being done?" or, "What do I get out of the Guild?" Well I realized with the help of some insight, that the Guild isn't the board members, the Guild is you, me and every member and we as a whole have to address the issues and form committees. Obviously we all aren't going to agree on all subjects, but all members should voice their opinions on all issues new and old, and create more. Let's not just pay \$25.00 to wear the Guild's membership. Be a Guild member, use the *News* to voice your opinion so everyone knows how we feel. Dedicate time every week, even if it's just an hour. Help on Project Habitat or organize your own ideas. Start workshops, or go to them in your area. Send in to Tips and Techniques and share your ideas. Let's go to the conference next year, and never have to ask, "What's the Guild doing for me?" again. We are all in this together, so let's work as a team.

SCOTT G. HAMILTON

NORWAY, MAINE

membership fees. Thus the directors voted to raise the individual membership fee to \$50 annually, provided that anyone finding the increase unaffordable be invited to offer so many hours of work for the Guild in lieu of the increase. Additional sources for funding were proposed. Donations to specific programs (such as the forest resource effort) could be sought, and Guild "products" like inscribed clothing and calendars might be offered for sale.

But the largest source of new funds would likely be company memberships. The original theory of membership in the Guild required it to be an organization of individual persons, and the fee was set correspondingly at a modest \$25. The opportunity to give additional support was provided by a category of "contributing" memberships, but this device has not proved fruitful. The idea of corporate membership, last year broached and tied to the Professional Directory proposal, came adrift somehow, but now has reappeared. Within the Guild about 300 firms are represented, and it seems possible a good many would be willing to pay much higher membership fees. This question will come before a council of business heads which Guild president John Reed intends to organize. If a new category of corporate membership were to be established, the question would also come before the membership at an annual meeting, in the form of a proposed amendment to the By-laws. A concurrent effort should be made to increase general membership, by encouraging company heads to help employees join, and possibly by direct mail solicitation. At least two members of the Board imagine an ultimate membership level at around 1,200—a figure supposed to ensure a stable and financially viable organization.

WHAT IS THE Guild's responsibility to the membership in the matter of business information? Certainly, the Board believes, the Guild should continue to provide business guidance in the same way that it provides other technical information, through workshops and seminars at conferences and elsewhere. But there is a difference, as one director observed, between people who seek to be pointed in the right direction, and others who want "a transfusion." It is originally a member's responsibility to seek out what information might be available from public sources—libraries or small business organizations—rather than the Guild's to pro-

vide the information automatically. Even the larger of the companies whose members belong to the Guild, it was argued, began as one or two-person operations and grew by dint of personal effort and inventiveness. Nonetheless, it evidently behooves the Guild to strengthen the companies for the sake of the craft.

INFORMATION remains disturbingly lacking on the characteristics of the membership—particularly the dimensions and production levels of the companies—after three years of rapid growth. And on the other side of the coin, little is confidently known of what the members really expect from the Board of Directors, save what might be whispered or shouted in the ear of one or another director, or what is garnered at the conferences. (Even then, of the 550 who attended Elizabethtown this year, only 94 returned questionnaires on their assessment of the conference.) Survey information from the early days is badly outdated and new survey efforts seem to languish in committee. A fresh effort must be made, and this time it will be linked to the membership renewal forms that will go out annually beginning in December. If this process is made routine, an up-to-date picture of the Guild can be drawn early each year.

STANDARDS for timber frame structural design and workmanship, a topic of lively debate within the Guild since the charter conference, continue to elude confident treatment. The idea of a book of standards, proposed repeatedly, immediately raises the question who is qualified to write it, and how precisely standards could be written in any case given the variety of special cases in construction. On the other hand, a compilation of good-practice examples, together with a few examples of bad practice, could serve the essential educational purpose without entraining unwanted difficulties. Such a book is already under consideration by at least one timber frame company, as it happens, as part of its own marketing program. Meanwhile it seems appropriate to the Board that the *News* carry articles showing evidently faulty or unworkable framing "seen in one's travels," with no punitive intent, but with the service of confirming that not all timber framing is unquestionably sound.

In an increasingly elaborate regulatory environment, and with timber framers pressing to build in urban areas as well as in familiar rural isolation, it seems merely a matter of time before building codes take account of timber framing practices. The directors believe the Guild should be prepared for this eventuality and possibly anticipate it by approaching the authorities with recommended standards in hand. This is a question for long-range development by a subsequent board or boards.

INTERNATIONAL information exchange—now that the members have received wisdom from abroad in three successive conferences—should be encouraged in the other direction, the directors agree. For instance, a Guild representative might attend the German Master Carpenters' conference in 1990. The first question is to discover whether the *Bund Deutscher Zimmermeister* will reciprocate the Guild's invitation to Franz Lips, who came to Elizabethtown this past June. There is noticeable interest among the membership in foreign timber framing, and the Guild should continue serving this interest by adding published articles to the offerings at the annual conferences.

HISTORICAL research, which has been honored mostly in the breach over the past couple of years, must be given an organized basis in the work of the Guild, the Board acknowledged. The building description standard form, proposed some time ago by Scott Murray, is to be produced by the Board and distributed to the membership for cataloguing threatened or particularly interesting old timber framed buildings. These could serve also as distinctly educational subjects for published articles.

HEADQUARTERS for the Guild has been Southern New Hampshire simply out of the early history of the group, and particularly the residence of the person to take on the administrative tasks of mailing and record-keeping. These tasks have now nearly outgrown Executive Secretary Sharon Bosies' personal quarters, to the point where a proper office will soon be necessary, and this or the next board will be forced to choose a location to serve until the next quantum leap in size. Given the very subject of the Guild's work, the directors are beginning to consider whether a permanent structure may not be the most appropriate solution in the long term. The word "Guildhall" was allowed to be uttered. A building comprising offices as well as a public hall and a teaching workshop would be immensely useful to the Guild—for administration, for maintaining relations with the public, for education. Should the Board now establish a fund for the purchase of a site? Where should it be?

WHAT is the annual conference for? This question from Rudy Christian brought the directors up short at the outset of their discussion of plans for the 1989 conference, eliciting a series of declarations, not without some good purpose. "There is a side to the Conference with fairly large negatives," Rudy declared. It is "getting out of focus," and the participation of the membership is declining. "We are losing it," he warned.

The other directors disagreed. John Reed said, "The purpose of the conference is to rekindle the spirit of brotherhood and share knowledge—and this purpose is being served." Jeff Arvin read from a benevolent report on the Elizabethtown Conference (by Kevin Ireton in *Fine Homebuilding*), then summarized: "The mountain men come down once a year—I like that—everything beyond that is gravy." Charles Landau quoted Randal O'Toole, the forestry expert who sees many conferences and who found this one "the best he's seen." Ben Brungraber praised the opportunity to teach (and, by implication, to learn) and added: "It's like a hundred times Benson Woodworking." Tedd Benson, for his part, said, "I like the notion of the rendez-vous. It's quite enough. But I learn a lot out of each conference. I've been to a lot of conferences—this one is very different. But I am not a satisfied person. The work gets harder. So I'm proud—and anxious—to continue."

John Libby remarked that "if there was anything that could burn a hole in the earth it would be this group of people," and that the best work of the conference is to help the younger companies. Bruce Gardner said, "I was shocked at the first one. And the second one, and the third one. Pleasantly so. Everyone ready to help me. The conferences are never perfect and isn't that wonderful. We could do worse than to repeat our worst." Ed Levin compared coming into the Guild after working alone to "crossing the Red Sea to the Promised Land," and said the purpose of the Conference is to do the things that families try to do. Rudy had the last word: "What comes out of our getting together may not be identifiable but it sure feels good. I also see the Conference as a great danger: like it or not we are teachers with grave responsibilities."

Much was then made of the notion of a theme for the '89 Conference. "Responsible Structure" was the verbal formula, and during a drawn-out after-dinner meeting in a dimly-lighted room efforts were made to link each speaker and topic to this theme. In the clearer light of the next day these connections proved less convincing but also perhaps less urgent.

HABITAT discussion took the final hours Sunday morning on the island. The Guild having agreed in June to cut and raise a frame on a house lot belonging to Habitat for Humanity, the charitable housing group, six house designs had been gathered by a design committee. These were put before the Board and ex-

plained and evaluated. The Board then chose one to be sent back to the designer for revisions and to be used for the development of a framing plan. This design, by Katherine Cartrette of Mulfinger, Susenka (Minneapolis), shows little kinship with mass housing designs yet with little simplification requires nothing extravagant in the way of construction. The Board feels that it will represent timber framing well and that it is easily capable of interesting variation in case the number of timber frame volunteers justifies cutting two frames.

Just how many framers will contribute a stick needs to be established by a mailing that will also determine skill levels (self-professed) so that appropriate pieces can be assigned. Companies as well as individual guild members will be invited to participate. Although the project is on schedule from the Guild's point of view, responsibility for publicising the Guild's contribution to the project will not, as originally assumed, be taken by the Habitat organization, except locally. This represents more work to be done as well as the effort of deciding what is appropriate publicity. In any event, the Board agreed to send a representative to work with Habitat on the question.

—Ken Rower

Wood For the Future

REPRESENTATIVES from the U.S. Forest Service, Congressional staff and a wide variety of interest groups met September 19 at the University of Virginia at Charlottesville to discuss the future of the national forests. The two-day forum was sponsored by the American Forestry Association (AFA) and the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) to review the charter of the Forest Service as the national forests approach their centennial in 1991. In addition to the government contingent, those invited included environmentalists, mining, oil and lumber industry representatives, forestry, grazing, fish and wildlife interests, hydrologists, and this timber framer (resplendent in three-piece suit), representing the sole woodworking or timber-using group in attendance, the Timber Framers Guild of North America.

The Guild's entry into the public policy arena dates from our 1988 national conference at which the American Forests seminar illuminated the depletion of old-growth forests and the effects of acid rain (see "Forest Experts Confirm the Worst" in *News 9*). At the conference, the Board of Directors approved a position paper written by the Forest Resource Committee calling for sustained-yield management of old-growth timber on public lands (published in *News 9* and *American Forests*, September, 1988; also available from the Guild office). Our public stand as a timber-based industry calling for sustained yield of old-growth added a new voice to the old-growth debate, and got us an invitation to Charlottesville. Our position falls somewhere between the lumber industry, which apparently would like to liquidate the 10% of the ancient forests still standing in the Northwest, and strict preservationists who want to lock up the remaining old-growth resource as wilderness.

The forum proceeded in the neoclassical elegance of the University of Virginia. The daytime meetings were held in the Birdwood Pavilion in a rural setting amidst rolling hills outside of town. The single evening session took place in the Rotunda (the heart of "Mr. Jefferson's Academical Village"), with cocktails in the kidney-shaped stair hall, dinner in the west oval room, a historian's tour of "The Lawn" (did Edgar Allan Poe really live in apartment number 13?), and finally brandy and conversation back in the oval room.

AGAINST THIS background, the event had to be a model of civility. This proved both blessing and curse. The proceedings were directed by mediators from the University's Institute for Environmental Negotiation, whose brief from the organizers was to avoid a "shoot-out." With this in mind, they asked participants to check their six-guns at the door and specified a format designed to avoid controversy. The attempt to defuse a potentially contentious situation worked all too well, resulting in a series of largely bland exchanges full of generalities.

But seen whole the forum was a success, especially from the Guild's point of view. The significant proceedings took place outside the official sessions: at meals and during walks around the grounds small groups could be found in animated discourse. In this way, men and women who frequently must shout past one another at Congressional hearings managed to have some genuine two-way conversations, paving the way for future productive interaction. For me, two such encounters stand out: an introduction, by Don Knowles of the Senate Committee on Interior, to the workings of the legislative and regulatory process, illustrated with pointed examples of how *not* to lobby; and a talk with George Leonard, Associate Chief of the Forest Service, who promised to read our letter carefully and reply in writing.

The Guild's advocacy of a sustained yield of old-growth on national forest lands did manage to get a hearing on a couple of occasions during the official proceedings. In addition, our position paper was distributed to the group, and I was able to discuss the issue with people representing a wide spectrum of interests. Many of the principal players in the old-growth drama were introduced to the Guild as representative of wood-using industries, an important new interest group in the debate over the national forests.

The Charlottesville meeting may have opened some doors to the Guild, but we still have to make the effort to walk through them. A great deal of work remains for the Forest Resource Committee on the old-growth issue. We are continuing to get the word out via publication and distribution of our position paper and through press releases.

We have begun to gather allies among fellow woodworkers and wood-users and will expand this search to the lumber industry and the environmental movement. And we plan to continue the dialogue with the Forest Service begun in Charlottesville.

—Ed Levin

CALENDAR

Timber Frame Workshops

Tedd Benson
February 6-11, 1989
Port Townsend, Washington
Timbercraft Homes
Port Townsend, WA 98368
206-385-3051

Seminars

Jack Sobon
Designing the Timber Frame House
February 25-26, 1989
Presbyterian Camps, Saugatuck, Michigan
On-site accommodations
Timber Framers Guild
Box 1046, Keene, NH 03431
603-357-1706

Robert Meadow
Hand Tool Techniques
December 3-4, 17-18 and ff.
Saugerties, New York
The Luthierie
2449 W. Saugerties Rd., Saugerties, NY 12477
914-246-5207