

KENTUCKY CRAFT HISTORY AND EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, INC.

Interview with Mary Stuart Reichard
Interviewer is Susan Goldstein
May 20th, 2013

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Goldstein: This is Susan Goldstein and I am interviewing Mary Stuart Reichard in my home on May 20th for the Kentucky Craft History and Education Association. With the funding being provided by LexArts. LexArts is the Lexington Arts Council. Mary Stuart, I know you and your family have a long history in Kentucky and a history that involves handmade work in the family. Can you give us a little background on that?

Reichard: As I reflect on that, everybody in our family was creating something. My mother made our clothes. She made her own clothes. We went through an era when she was creating the lampshades in our house and they were made of fabric that was a style that my mother and my grandmother, both, particularly liked because the lamps had chimneys. They were oil lamps that had been converted to electricity and so there was a certain style of lampshade that fit on those lamps. There were many things. My grandmother was just as creative and she shared her creativity, not only with her daughters, but she had a Girl Scout troop, so she was involved in the community. She was involved with an organization of mothers and they sponsored a young women to attend the University of Louisville and my grandmother took it upon herself to make all the clothes for this student who was coming to Louisville and could not afford to be dressed for going to college. So it definitely is something that's been running in our family.

Goldstein: But you go back many, many generations, is that right?

Reichard: Yes, my sister and I do spinning and weaving and on one Sunday afternoon, we had our grandmother sitting at our house, we were sitting outside on the front porch and I had just purchased a fleece and washed it and we were teasing the fibers apart to card and spin and grandmother sat there chuckling and I said, "What's so funny about doing this? This is what we're doing" and I said, "Do you want to do this?" and I tried to hand her some wool and she said "Oh, no, I'm not doing that" But she said, "That's what I used to do with my grandmother". That her grandmother spun wool and her grandmother was a weaver and we do have a piece of coverlet that her grandmother had woven. And now that we mention it, you've said May the 20th. This is my grandparent's wedding anniversary, today. (Laughter, Goldstein and Reichard) They were married in Lexington.

Goldstein: What year?

Reichard: In 1918 and they were married at the Phoenix Hotel and their main gift they received the morning of their wedding, as grandmother described it, the old women that lived across the street on, I think, Maxwell, came across with a huge bowl of strawberries as her wedding gift.

Goldstein: Oh wow.

Reichard: So, from then on, my grandparents had strawberries and cream on their wedding anniversary, so. I think of that every time I hear this date. (Laughter, Reichard and Goldstein) But, so anyway. The family created things that they needed with what they had. I mean, they purchased items too, but if they were able to create something with what they already owned, they did.

Goldstein: Now, your background is also in both art and science?

Reichard: Yes.

Goldstein: Can you talk to us about how that came about and where it took you?

Reichard: Well, I think a lot of that may have gone through spending a lot of time with my family, with my mother who loved gardening and being a Girl Scout and going out to Girl Scout camp and we learned so much about nature.

Goldstein: I had asked you and I can ask you again, about your background in science and art. The fact that you studied that in college and where that took you.

Reichard: Studied science. I was very interested in the biology. I didn't realize you actually majored in that, because I loved the outdoors. I love plants, trees. Many of those things and we were raised taking all the science classes that we could in school.

Goldstein: And this is in Louisville.

Reichard: In Louisville. Our father was a chemical engineer and at one point taught at the university, the Speed Scientific School. And so, he wanted to make sure we also had all the math that went along with that and I think I got to a point where, the math part of science was more than I really wanted to do and I could still do a lot of science without taking calculus and beyond. I, you know, even a biology major has to take physics and chemistry and those were enjoyable, but the biology part of it was lots more enjoyable for me. And then at the same time, started taking art classes. My intent, initially, was not to minor in art, but I took art classes for fun and really enjoyed it. I had design, drawing, ceramics and when I went to meet with an advisor, they said, "Do you realize that you have so many art credits that that will actually be your minor and if you take one more class, just one, you will be able to get a teaching certificate that qualifies you to teach both art and biology". That one class made a huge difference, because the person that taught that class was the art supervisor in the Louisville Public Schools. And so, my first teaching job was art, not biology.

Goldstein: Was that because that was available?

Reichard: That was because I was the only person in this class, taking this class, that was creative and creating something unique and different and I wasn't just copying what all the other people in the class were doing. She was determined that that's the person she wanted in the art room. My first job was teaching art in a middle school in a neighborhood that was basically an inner city school.

Goldstein: How did you feel about that experience?

Reichard: It was a very educational experience. I had a lot of diverse student population. I had a tremendous number of students, but I learned some very important facts that you need to be able to teach many different ways. You need to be able to say things in many different ways to communicate with the students and as my perspective of the art teacher was the art teacher should never touch the student's work. I had been in previous classes where the art teacher didn't like what I had drawn, they corrected, in their mind, what I was doing. And I vowed I would not ever do that to students' work. It was a very valuable experience. The students I had were from backgrounds that the parents were not involved. The parents never came to school. I don't believe I ever met a parent. And their parents did not appreciate the art pieces that they took home. So I started teaching them how to do things that were applicable to maybe their environment. So I taught them how to cut out circles so that if their mother was baking a pie or a cake, they could create a parchment circle that could go on the bottom of the pie pan. I showed them that this is art that this could be applied when you go home. I taught them how to do quilt squares and showed them how they could apply that and then they could make this into, it could

be a quilt for a bed, it could be a pillow top. But they put together something that when they took their art home, someone in their family could recognize this is a piece that was valuable to their family. Unfortunately, it's sad to say, but if they took home something that was a wall piece or a piece of ceramics, many times they were made fun of or not recognized having done a quality piece of work. It was a very interesting experience.

Goldstein: And how long did you continue teaching?

Reichard: I taught in that school two years. And I had the idea that if I got a job, which I found an opening in a private school, that it would be an entirely different experience. That I would have much more support from the faculty and from the administration and the families. And so I did get a job in a private school. I was teaching biology and some other science classes, physical science and such. And I discovered there were some strong similarities between the inner city school and the private school. At that time, it was the late 1960s and there was very little parent support.

Goldstein: So you were talking about the similarities that you found between the inner city school and the private school. Can you reflect on that?

Reichard: Yes, in addition to the lack of interest and support from the parents, even the administration, at that time in the 60s it was a girls school, it was not coed. The administration was not interested in a biology class, taking a field trip. They did not have adequate microscopes for studying biology. It was really quite surprising. And they said, "Well, sorry, you just have \$3.50 per student for your activities fee and you'll have to make do" which we learned biology, but it could have been so much better and in the ensuing years, that school became coeducational and I'm quite sure that it's changed dramatically. They parents have definitely become involved and they definitely see the value of young women having the same opportunities of education as young men. In spite of those things that I found completely lacking, I was able to communicate with my students that there was a lot to be discovered in this world and it was important for them to know about it. One year, I introduced the biology to the students by having them read Rachel Carson, the Silent Spring. At least one of those students now is still very much an activist on nature and protecting our environment, protecting the neighborhoods and several others eventually ended up being fascinated enough with science that they majored in biology and oceanography. In spite of the equipment, there were some things that I felt like were real accomplishments.

Goldstein: Impressive. Now, I know you and I've always known you as an artist. I wasn't even aware of your background in the sciences. Did you change paths dramatically at some point?

Reichard: All along, I was creating. I was doing needlepoint. I was sewing. That was just something I did for my own enjoyment. After teaching the science. I retired from teaching. I had two children, my husband graduated from medical school. He was in the army for a couple years. There was definitely just a time of transition for our family and for me. During that time I used my science as a volunteer scout leader for the Girl Scout camp at the army post. But I also used my knowledge of the arts teaching workshops to the officer's wives. I've gone back and forth between the biology and the art over the years. And then as we came back to Louisville, it was a number of years before I actually got more active in these things. A friend of mine, when my children were small, recruited me to be a volunteer at the science center. And I did that for 8 or 9 years. But my children in elementary school, they needed an extra afternoon activities time at the school, so I taught one year ceramics, the next year was going to be macramé. I've gone back and forth between the science and the art all along.

Goldstein: Now, did your involvement in the Guild pull you towards the arts, not only as an artist, but an arts advocate?

Reichard: It did. Before I got involved with the Guild . . .

Goldstein: That's the Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen.

Reichard: . . . I had already started volunteering with the Little Loom House and was . . .

Goldstein: Is that a historical . . .

Reichard: It's a historical site in Louisville and it was the home of Lou Tate Bausman and she taught weaving there. She collected coverlets. There are three little cabins and she went all around Kentucky and in Appalachia collecting the patterns for the coverlet weavings from people and then they would write it down for some of those patterns, they're written on little pieces of paper that have been taped together. Some of them had been written on grocery sacks, but they're long strips of paper as to how the loom should be warped in order to create the coverlets. And so this historic foundation, it's a nonprofit, has collections that Lou Tate began many, many years before I became involved. I became involved with that foundation after her death. But at that time, though, I was still going with my sister to the Guild fairs to help assist her in her booth and she kept saying, "Why don't you jury for the Guild?" and so eventually, I did.

Goldstein: Okay. Sorry. Remind me where we are?

Reichard: Of when I got involved with the Guild. I would go to the art fairs with my sister when she had a booth and I would help her in her booth and I would be taking something with me to create, but I wasn't juried, so I wasn't selling anything in her booth and she kept encouraging me saying, "You know, you really just go ahead and need to apply to the Guild and then we can do this booth together". So eventually, I did that. And then once I became a juried member, it was a very short amount of time until I was elected to the board. Because the Guild members already knew me because I'd attended so many of the fairs. And that was a very quick, unfortunately, a very quick transition from being exhibiting artist to being a board member and then the president of the board. And once you become the president of an organization, then your priorities shift as to what you should be doing and so it was really not possible for me to have a booth and exhibit when I was the president. There were always issues to check on, to relate and I felt, as president, it was very important for me to get to know as many members of the Guild as possible. And of course, the fair was the prime time, because you had so many of the exhibiting members there. While I was president, I made a tremendous effort to get to know as many, if not all the members and I took photographs of them with their artwork or in their booth and if they didn't come to the fairs, I called them and talked to him. I went to different parts of the state to meet members, because if I was hearing from people I wanted to know who I was talking to and I wanted to understand what their issues were and how I could represent them better on this board. It really took a lot of time and many, many phone calls. And this was before the period of cell phones, before making all these phone calls, now days is so much easier than it was at that time. It was always on a land line somewhere. (Laughter, Reichard)

Goldstein: So, when you were president . . .

Reichard: Yes.

Goldstein: It was a period of turmoil? Would you define it as that? Or did that just, or was there something that escalated?

Reichard: With the Guild, during the time that I was active in it, there was turmoil with some people. Some people perceived that they were more right than somebody else. Many times some of the members wanted to direct the board. They were not on the board, they wanted to direct the board the way they thought the board should function to benefit them. And so I felt that my role as the president was if I got to know all of the members as well as possible, then I would be able to communicate with them while their idea was very good, why it was not feasible for us to do some of the things that they wanted to do because we either were not that financially endowed or it was only favoring, perhaps, the people that lived in one location over another. Many times the issues that arose in the Guild were just communication problems and because of them the communication disconnect, there were many misunderstandings. So I spent a lot of time talking to people personally.

Goldstein: And did you feel successful? Did you feel it was beneficial and that you were successful?

Reichard: I felt it was really beneficial. Did I fix everybody? No. (Laughter, Reichard and Goldstein) I wouldn't say. But I became very close with a number of the artists and to this day, they knew that I was there to do the best for them that was absolutely humanly possible and they respected me for that. There were always going to be times where people still didn't want you to tell them the truth (Laughter, Reichard and Goldstein) and be honest with them. But I felt at that time, we accomplished that and that I wanted them to know that I really respected them and what they did and what their artwork was and how they expressed it. I invested in many pieces that belonged to these people, that I valued them enough that I would pay money to buy their work. I have many pieces in my home. It was very important for me to feel like I had put 100 percent effort into this job that I'd accepted.

Goldstein: What do you feel were the most outstanding achievements during the period when you were president? Was that the time when the foundation was being laid for the artisan center and were there other things that you focused on?

Reichard: Well, one that that redirected a lot of thinking about the Guild and the town of Berea was that right after I became president, a tornado hit Old Town Berea and the community was not . . . this kind of started my activism. The community wasn't paying any attention to the fact that these people's homes had been damaged, their studios had been damaged and there wasn't any effort to find financial resources to help these artists. And I'd had experience. I'd lived in Louisville, Kentucky in 1974 when the tornado hit. We had a farm in Meade County. Tornadoes hit Meade County all the time. I consulted with the County Judge of Meade County to say, "Tell me what the process is to get help for the people in your county that have been damaged by this tornado". And he explained to me the process that he had to go through. So I called the County Judge of Madison County to say, "Now, we haven't seen you in Berea yet, can you explain to me how you're going to help the people in Old Town Berea? Because they've had a tornado damage and destroy their homes that this is where they work and where they live" and he said, "Well, I haven't been invited". So I said, "What does that mean?" And he said, "Well, the Mayor of Berea has not called me and asked me to come". So I just called the Mayor of Berea (Laughter, Reichard) and said, "It's my understanding that we can't get help for these people. Berea College seems to be taken care of their own trees and buildings that were damaged, but the people in Old Town don't have the same kind of insurance and they don't have an

endowment to support them so. I haven't seen you in Old Town either Mr. Mayor" and he said, "Well, there have been words" And I said, "Excuse me?" And he said, "Well, there's history" and I said, "Well, there might have been words and there might be history, but there's still people in your town and they do need your help". And so eventually we got help for them that way and then we also got help for the artists . . .

Goldstein: Now, the Guild's office was located there.

Reichard: And they had damage too. And we had a supporting member of the Guild that contributed money to help the Guild repair the roof and the windows, which was very helpful to us. Some of the artists got funds from the artist's relief funds through the American Craft Council. And then the town of Berea helped too. And then that's when they started realizing that maybe they needed to value Old Town more and we even got a grant writer to come and write a grant application to the ARC, the Appalachian Regional Commission, I believe. For a renovation for the Old Town area. That didn't occur at that time, but it has occurred if you visit Berea today. So once we got involved with that then there became discussions that were broader. People came from EKV, Eastern Kentucky University. They were part of an economic development plan and wanted to talk to us about economic development in the artist community and in Old Town and so we started having gatherings at Ken Gastineau's house, up above his studio. So we had people from Eastern Kentucky. We had people representing the Guild and we have community leaders coming to these gatherings, sitting around in Ken and Sally's living room talking about what we could do. And then that evolved into, we need to get people off I75 into this town to see what our artisans and craftsmen do. And that was really the seed that started. I mean it really started with the tornado and evolved into this big idea that maybe we needed to have an artisan's center that was a state supported thing in Berea or near Berea or out on I75. There were many ideas. And someone said they'd been to West Virginia and there was this wonderful center there called Tamarack. And the economic development people from Eastern, they started working on a plan and doing some research.

Goldstein: Was Cheryl Stone instrumental at that time?

Reichard: No. It was Tim Glotzbach and, maybe it was Cheryl Stone.

Goldstein: Yea, her name was different then. Actually Tim (Glotzbach) worked for Cheryl.

Reichard: Yes. That I didn't recognize that last name.

Goldstein: It may have been Cheryl Moorhead at the time. (Laughter, Reichard and Goldstein)

Reichard: I'm not really sure, I remember Cheryl. So they put together a plan to do research for this and invited me, if I wanted to go and pay my own way, to go with them to visit Tamarack and then go on to visit a visitor's center at Monticello in Virginia. So I said, "Yes, count me in!" (Laughter, Reichard) And it was fascinating. We had an architect from Whitesburg, Bill Richardson, and we had Ken Gastineau and Tim Glotzbach and Cheryl. I'm trying to think who else was with us. We took more than one trip. Wally Hyleck from Berea College was on the trip. They had invited representatives of the town, government and no one accepted that invitation. It seems like somebody from Department of Tourism was supposed to go, but they didn't go. But anyway, we had a fascinating trip and we had very, very valuable meetings at Tamarack and they were very, very honest with us about what worked and what didn't work and what they had done to resolve some of their initial issues. They were really wonderful resource and research for us.

Goldstein: And I'm assuming you had the governor's support.

Reichard: We did. The governor at that time was Governor Patton and he was very supportive of him finding ways market the artwork and the crafts the artisans were creating.

Goldstein: What exciting times.

Reichard: It was a very, very special, valuable time. So after our research, then we came back to Berea and the college was involved and the town and they have had a design () and they brought in community and campus designers to meet with all of the constituents. So artists and craftsmen, the Guild, the town council were invited. Everybody was invited for their input. People from the states, people from the Art and Craft Foundation in Louisville. People from Frankfort. People from Craft Marketing, from the Kentucky Humanities Council. It was quite an event. It went on for about, I believe it was three days, of interviewing people and getting everybody to come together to brainstorm what could we, should we do and then put together a design and a plan to present to our state legislature. The moment was then. If it was ever going to get funded, it needed to be done at that time. We had a governor that was very enthusiastic about it. We had the town of Berea and Berea College were all in positive communications with each other. They were in positive communications with the Guild. And it happened. The state legislature voted . . . Oh, one group I forgot. The Department of Transportation. You can't do any of this without the Federal Department of Transportation, because it's a federal highway. It was a very, very exciting time period. And the state voted \$12,000. It doesn't sound very much, but it was an affirmation that they were on the right track, doing the right thing.

Goldstein: So these were very exciting times. Between the tornado and the artisan center, you were busy with projects.

Reichard: It was. I was driving to Berea sometimes as many as three or four times a week from Louisville. It's hard for me to believe that I spent that much time on the road, but it was very important for me to be in Berea for those meeting. I mean, I've never been to a city council meeting in Louisville, but I've been several to the meeting in Berea. It was a really important time. And our artists became more . . . they realized they needed to be more politically involved. After that, I think, Ken Gastineau ran for town council and was elected. I mean, the communications improved between the artists and the town of Berea. And the communications between the artist and the town and the college, all improved because they'd come together to work on a project together. It was really an amazing time and I've appreciated having the opportunity to be part of that.

Goldstein: Now, I know following your presidency of the Guild you continued on as an arts advocate with other organizations in many ways, but before we go there, can you give me, just talk for a moment or two, how you feel the Guild has evolved? You brought in notes that you showed me previously and can you just reflect on the generality of the direction of the organization? How you found it and where you feel it has . . . what it has become?

Reichard: These are just my reflections. As president of an organization, I kept trying to figure out why some things worked and other things didn't and why things weren't working and try to go back through the history of the Guild to see where it has started and where it had evolved to. The origin of the Guild was with the Art Train and then the people that put together the plan and had the Art Train go throughout the state showing off our craftspeople to many different towns. Visiting the whole state of Kentucky. Those people put together this place to create the

Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen. The people that were involved in this were financial supporters, they were the first members. They were university art professors. They were the artists and craftsmen that were demonstrating that rode the train around the state. So we had a three part organization. As the decades evolved, at first the president of the board and different people, there were many representative to this organization from each of those areas. The financial supporters, the educators and the artists. And each of these groups neglected to keep checking to see if it was staying in balance. The financial supporters didn't bring anymore friends in that could help pick up tabs when they needed more money. The educators stayed members, but they didn't continue to be active in the organization and they didn't show the other people who were hired at the universities that they, too, needed to be part of the Kentucky Guild. They needed to help support this organization. So over 25, 35, 40 years and beyond, now, it's almost completely an organization of artists, working artists that are trying to support themselves. And to be a working, producing artist and try to run an organization and see the big picture and do the marketing and fundraise, it's too much. Had that balance stayed there, you would have had a lot more marketing through the universities and you would have had a lot more fundraising done by people who actually know how to do fundraising and have much broader experiences. So that's kind of my picture of how the organization has evolved. And they're many other evolutions of things that are going on in the art world anyway. We've added the technology that we all know, we all have cellphones now and we have DSL lines and airports for our computers. At the time when I was president and on the board of the Guild, Berea did not have any DSL lines coming into the community. The phone company had not upgraded things. You couldn't have call waiting. There were a lot of these conveniences that had come to our phones in Lexington and Louisville and larger cities that had not come to the small towns and there was a frustration between artists in the cities versus how the Guild was being run in a small town. It was still being run in the way of a small town. It's a small business. It still does not have the advanced technology that I'm sure that it has some of now.

Goldstein: So the pressure to change things or do things differently came from people outside of Berea? ()

Reichard: During my experience, it was people outside of Berea that were expecting the Guild to jump and do things the way they saw things happening in other communities. As things have evolved, the Guild has competition from many area now. It used to be the only art fairs that were existing around the state were in Berea. There was a spring fair and a fall fair. People scheduled their trips around it. They got bus tours together. They made all sorts of plans to come to Berea. And then before we knew it there were annual art fairs at Saint James Court or at different universities or schools that were in direct competition with the Guild. Which is a continuing situation.

Goldstein: Of course, although you wonder what the current value is, certain things have become obsolete and there are other things that the Guild still has the offer, one of the things I really became aware of is how instrumental and important the organization was in establishing the crafts in Kentucky and drawing artists here and helping them maintain a living and keeping them here.

Reichard: And early on the Guild also offered the artist an opportunity to buy health insurance and that helped motivated people to join because it's very difficult for an independent artist to afford insurance, unless they have a spouse that has another job where they can get health insurance. And so for a while, at that early, the Guild was able to offer that and I noticed that this is something that the Guild is now able to do. That doesn't have anything to do with Guild management. It has to do with state law as to whether they allow it to have insurance packaged

through the Guild. But that has been, apparently the law has been changed so that people can now. That's just occurred in the last year, I believe.

Goldstein: So after you finished the presidency of the Guild, I know you became a member of the board of the Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft, which we both served on.

Reichard: Yes.

Goldstein: Can you tell us a little bit about that experience and were you involved in other projects?

Reichard: I really enjoyed serving on the board of the Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft and it was a different organization, because it seems to be fewer craftsmen involved in that organization and more fundraising with a huge emphasis on fundraising, because they're supporting a building, an expensive building and art galleries and shows, traveling shows, not just Kentucky art, but traveling exhibits and so they're trying to accomplish that one step, maybe two or three steps beyond where the Guild was able to go in supporting and providing a place to exhibit the art and the craft. I think it's an important component. The state of Kentucky needs both. My function on that board was to be on their education committee. And that was within the organization and some with the artists too. They do have an artist membership that is at a lower level than the regular membership for that organization and they try to be supportive of the artists and they have an artist that's selected by the art side of the organization that sits on their board.

Goldstein: So the educational component of that organization is still very strong?

Reichard: It is. The educational component of the Art and Craft Foundation . . . actually, they changed the name. Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft is geared mostly toward schools and programs in schools and placing artists in residence in schools. So they do have classes in the museum and they also provide artists to go to schools and do special projects there and then supervise them. So they're doing a whole different level of supporting the arts in a totally different way than the Guild ever did. The Guild encouraged members to be artist in residence through the state program, but they didn't really sponsor anyone in that, so.

Goldstein: Is there any other organization or project that you're involved in that you'd like to share with us.

Reichard: I think at the moment my new focus is really teaching sewing and spinning and knitting to my granddaughters.

Goldstein: Oh, how exciting.

Reichard: I now have 4 granddaughters and they're getting to be an age where they're fascinated by the things that I have made and watching me knit and watching me spin and feeling the fibers and sewing. One of my granddaughters likes to make dolls and so she gets her little sister to lie down on a piece of fabric, of course she has a willing mother, and traces around her little sister and then makes a doll that's as big as her little sister.

Goldstein: Now, are your granddaughters aware of your family tradition?

Reichard: Only, just a little bit. The oldest one of the granddaughters is seven so. One is seven, five year old twins and a three year old. So, they're just slowly growing into this. They'll find out about it after they've already developed a love for it.

Goldstein: Well, you've certainly given so much of yourself to the art organizations and to society, both you and your sister, Annie, who we previously interviewed. And I thank you so much for sharing your experience.

Reichard: Thank you. I enjoyed it. It's been nice talking with you.

END OF INTERVIEW