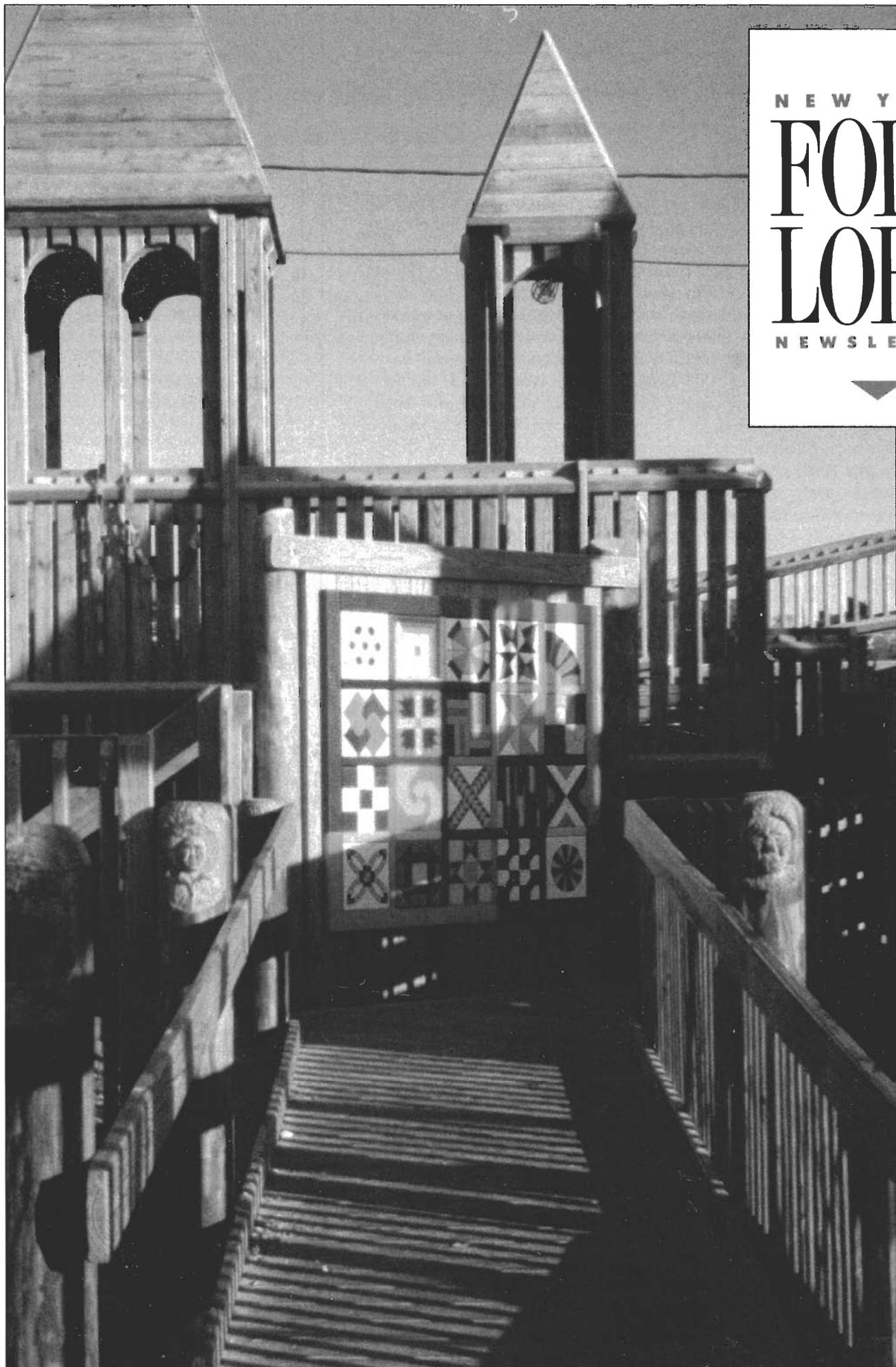


NEW YORK  
**FOLK  
LORE**  
NEWSLETTER



*Spring 1994*  
*Vol 15 No 1*

## 1994 Fall Conference to Open on NYFS 50 Anniversary

**T**he NYFS will begin its 50th anniversary celebration Thursday October 6, 1994, at the Albany Institute of History and Art where the Society was founded 50 years ago to the day. Our annual Fall Conference will open Thursday evening with a reading of the four papers that were read at the founding meeting, followed by 1994 commentaries and a reception. The conference itself will continue Friday through Sunday at Russell Sage College in Troy, just outside of Albany. It will focus attention, both scholarly/critical and celebratory, on the early years of the New York Folklore Society and on important themes that have contributed to the development of the field in the post-World War II period.

We will include strong components for and about children, with both scholarly presentations and participatory activities, so it will be child- and family-friendly conference. A Friday night concert and Saturday night dance party are also in the works. NYFS president Ellen McHale is heading up the planning committee for the conference. The full program and registration forms will be included in the NYFS summer newsletter.

This promises to be a particularly stimulating and exciting conference, so please put the dates in your calendar now (October 6 – 9, 1994) and look for details this summer.

## Help Arts Funding Grow Contact Your Legislators Today

**O**nce again it is time to let our state legislators know that increased public funding for the arts—and folk arts in particular—is essential. The outlook is better now than it's been in several years, *but* a substantial increase in the budget for the New York State Council on the Arts will occur *only* if we ask for it, one legislator at a time. By the time you read this, there won't be much time left before the April 1 deadline, so please take a moment today to call or write your New York State Senator and Assemblymember.

The governor has proposed a slight increase for NYSCA this year to \$32.3 million for programs and administration. Now it's up to the legislature to add to the increase. The New York State Arts and Cultural Coalition (NYSACC), which leads the advocacy effort, is requesting \$38 million. This would restore NYSCA funding to 62% of its 1989-90 peak. The Folk Arts Program would most likely receive a proportional increase. Here's what you can do:

- If there's still time, visit your legislators in their home offices. If possible, bring a few people with you—folk artists or constituents—so the legislators can see the grassroots support for folk arts.

- Call and write letters to your local legislators.

- Tell them what NYSCA-funded programs have done for their communities in the past, thank them for their support, and tell them what an increase could mean in their district; how it would affect organizations that you care about.

- NYSACC is calling for a \$38 million allocation to NYSCA. Ask your legislator to *actively* support restoration of funding to folk arts, and the arts in general, during this year's budget deliberations.

Please act now. If you don't know who your legislators are, call your local League of Women Voters. If you have any questions, suggestions, or inspiring stories, call us at (607) 273-9137. Thank you!

# NEW YORK FOLK LORE NEWSLETTER

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# Reflections on the NYFS 1993 Fall Conference

Fran Powers

Since attending the Fall Conference this year, I have had time to reflect on the experience. It has given me a new perspective on the powerful influence that folklore and folk art can have in our schools on developing children's understanding of the many cultures in our world. As a teacher, I have had an opportunity to attend many performances and demonstrations at our school given by experts in a variety of fields. Although these presentations have added a richer experience in the education of our children, something has always seemed to be missing; the important link between the presentations and work being done in the classrooms.

It was during a discussion with folklorists and folk artists at the Fall Conference that I began to realize the need for ongoing communication between folklorists and teachers. Many participants during this discussion shared their frustrations of going into schools to give a presentation to children who had been given little to no background. There was also a major concern that there was no follow-up in the classrooms after the presenters left the school. When this happens we miss a wonderful opportunity to make that important link between school and the larger community, and an opportunity to give children more authentic experiences. What better way to do this than by bringing into the classrooms experts in the field?

However, this should not be done through "one shot" presentations. Teachers and folklorists need to work together over time. We need to identify what the roadblocks are and, together, design solutions.

*Fran Powers teaches at Millard Fillmore Elementary School Moravia, New York 13118*

Anne M. Gefell

I came to the Folk Arts in Education: Foxfire Plus conference as an oral historian anxious to incorporate much of the work I have done gathering oral history narratives with adults on the St. Lawrence River into area school programs. In 1984 in the Ithaca area I taught to 4th grade students a self-designed mini-course in oral history entitled "Recording Our History: A Foxfire-Type Project." Upon analysis with information from the conference I critiqued that course in a way I had not done before. I discovered that though it proved a bit short of "pure Foxfire" it had incorporated many of the core practices. So as an unknowing Foxfire student myself, then on the design end in creating the course, I found that I had incorporated on my own many things that I was encouraging my students to do, and that Judy Kugelmass was encouraging us to do in the Friday and Saturday sessions of the conference. My experience teaching in this way was rewarding for me and left me with not only fond memories of the experience itself, but with the reminder that with patience (with oneself as well as others) and encouragement, children will choose to "create" rather than "imitate." Until now I had been unaware that the Foxfire approach that had begun from a small scale project a quarter of a century ago had blossomed and was being integrated—albeit gradually—into mainstream schools. I also recognized from our discussions that though there is great potential for widespread use there are also pitfalls associated with this quick success of the Foxfire approach. I understand the Foxfire approach as a very decentralized approach to teaching and learning, where flexibility and patience are expected by all participants, and where the learning is inspired from a desire to truly "learn" rather than to "please."

The main discussion of the two

day conference on Folk Arts in Education seemed to focus on an issue that came to be known as "Amanda's Question," raised first by Amanda Dargan. I interpreted it this way—can folklore and folk arts be incorporated into a Foxfire teaching/learning situation without ignoring the creative integrity of the art form and its connection with the folk artist and community life and traditions? Or put another way—can folklore and folk arts be used to enrich educational experiences without diluting the art form as cultural expression?

Because a central focus of the Foxfire method emphasizes a multidisciplinary approach to teaching that is inspired by what students want to learn, it appeared that presentation of the art form is

Continued on Page 10

## NYFS Joins Arts Wire

The New York Folklore Society is now part of Arts Wire, a national computer-based communication network for the arts community. Created by the New York Foundation for the Arts, it allows individuals and organizations all around the country to share information and ideas quickly and easily about an unlimited range of subjects—whatever anyone wants to talk about. If you have a computer and a modem, you can join Arts Wire for a reasonable fee, and the folks that run it will provide you with a manual and plenty of hand-holding to help you get started. Once hooked up, you can send and receive e-mail messages to and from individuals, you can read and participate in discussions of particular topics, you can keep up to date on late breaking news about the arts nationwide. A number of interest groups specific to New York State are being established now. A folk arts group, either New York or national, may be along soon. If you'd like more information, contact Arts Wire directly (David Green, 212/366-6900; e-mail: green@tmn.com), or John Suter at NYFS.

Our e-mail address is flsx@cornellc.cit.cornell.edu.

# The Georgetown, TX Creative Playscape: Folklore & Community Action

Deborah H. Clover



Entrance to the Georgetown Creative Playscape, Georgetown, Texas.

Photos by Deborah Clover

One would expect to find folklore on a playground: children's games, the rhymes they chant while playing, and more are readily observable in such an environment. But a different kind of folklore can be found at the recently constructed playground in Georgetown, Texas. Here, a woodblock quilt represents the cultural diversity of the community and stands as a testimony to the ability of folk traditions to serve as a medium for interaction and exchange between differing cultural groups.

The Georgetown playscape was designed with input from community residents and constructed using community volunteers under the guidance of the Ithaca, New York-based firm of Leathers & Associates. A leader in the community-built movement, L&A has worked in over 900 communities worldwide to construct similar play environments. Unlike those projects, however, this playground had an historical theme. My job as folklorist and history consultant was to assist in the project's research, design, and implementation. Specifically, I was to find a way to reflect the multicultural nature of the community in the physical structure of the playground. I also wanted to incorporate the women's perspective. The physical nature of the overall project dictated a need to look to the material culture of the community for the traditions that would lend themselves to portraying this history and diversity. My desire to reflect the heart of the people led me to consider their folklore.

Georgetown is a small city (population approximately 15,000) located in the south-central region of Texas. Ethnically diverse, 20.9 percent of the total population is Hispanic and 5.2 percent African American (1990 census figures). The Anglo popu-

lation is composed of people from British, Swedish, German and Czechoslovakian ancestry.

In working with each of these groups, my first challenge was to find a material tradition that was common to all but that exhibited variations that reflected the varying ethnic identities of those involved. After some preliminary research, I decided to draw on the quilting traditions found in each of these cultural groups.

Initial inquiries revealed that, while there was a tradition of quilting in each group, there was little sharing between the groups, and the quilters were largely unaware of out-group traditions. A primary objective for this project became to explore the quilting traditions of the different cultural groups, and to bring together a multicultural team of women to share, discuss and learn from one another. In so doing, this team would create a woodblock quilt for the playscape reflecting the ethnic identities and varying aesthetic preferences of Anglo-, African-, and Mexican-American communities.

Fieldwork for this project was done in two phases: research and planning in August of 1993 and construction in November of that year. The short time-frame and the prevailing goal of creating a multicultural quilt in the structure influenced the direction of my fieldwork. Through interviews and photography, I documented a number of quilts from each cultural group in order to: (1) develop a cross-cultural comparison of the overall of

aesthetics of pattern, design, and color selection; and (2) to discover what elements, if any, held special ethnic identification for the various groups represented. This was the information that would inform our design. A secondary goal was to learn about the context and process of the quilting for each of the groups. Where necessary, fieldwork was supplemented by library research.

The majority of my research focused on "old" quilts found in the community (from the early 1900s through the 1950s). A few of the documented quilts were made more recently but followed an established tradition continued from grandmother to mother to daughter. During field research, I discovered that Anglo women, regardless of heritage, more often quilted together in "quilting bees" than did their African- or Mexican-American counterparts.

All three groups displayed certain commonalities. Each employed piecing and appliqué and



Birdie Shanklin and Deb Clover work on designing the border for the wood-block quilt to be created and installed on the playground.

most tops were quilted rather than tied, or "tacked" as it was called in the African-American tradition. Across all cultural groups, the quilts were identified as "utilitarian" and were sometimes referred to as "poor quilts." They were made from whatever resources were available: scrap fabric, worn out

Deborah Clover is Vice President of Leathers & Associates, Inc. in Ithaca, NY. Among her varied responsibilities, she works as a folklorist and history consultant on community-built playground projects around the US. She is also continuing independent folklore research work in Georgetown, TX, where she is collaborating with two Mexican-American women to research and document Mexican-American quilting traditions. She holds a B.A. in Folklore from SUNY, Empire State College, and has a long background in community organizing.

clothes, or, occasionally, feed sacks.

When asked if certain patterns were culture-specific, informants responded that no, all groups used the same patterns. However, the quilters did note that names of patterns change according to region. For example, the "Lone Star" in Texas is known as the "Star of Bethlehem" in the eastern US. Similarly, names varied across cultural lines: The Anglo "Grandmother's Flower Garden" was called "Bed of Roses" by African-American quilters and "El Jardin de las Viejitas" or "Old Lady's Garden" by Mexican-Americans. Despite a few distinctions in patterns, many "traditional" patterns were used by all groups.

Among Mexican-American quilters, however, these "traditional" patterns came into use in the 1940s and 1950s when contact between Anglo and Mexican groups increased. Prior to WWII, I was told, quilting was done in the "simple" style or pieced in a random fashion with no real pattern. Various shapes and sizes were pieced to "fill in the spots."

My research on African-American quilts in Georgetown was more book dependent than the other two groups. This research indicated that the study of African-American quilting is sometimes controversial. Some scholars trace the aesthetic to African textile traditions emphasizing vertical strips, bright colors, asymmetry, and improvisation. Others argue that African-American quilts display a broader range of diversity with more commonality to Anglo quilting traditions.

The African-American quilts photographed in Georgetown exhibit both aesthetics. One was a "string quilt." Unlike Anglo string quilts, it was not made in blocks, but incorporated strips and shapes of varying lengths and widths into one overall design. This was similar to the "simple quilts" described by the Mexican-American quilters, reflecting both asymmetry and improvisation of color and design.

More ethnic identification occurred around color. Several informants commented on the importance of color in identifying a quilt with a particular group. The

colors referred to were the colors of the respective national flags, and both Mexican- and African-American informants believed that their groups used brighter, more vivid colors than did their

Anglo counterparts. We drew on this evidence of color distinctions in the final design of our playground quilt.

The woodblock quilt for the Georgetown Creative Playscape was designed to take the aesthetic traditions of Anglo-, African-, and Mexican-American quilters and combine them into one quilt. We created a sampler block quilt that employed "traditional" patterns suggested by the Anglo quilters and String blocks representing one of the first patterns taught to girls in both Anglo- and African-American groups. A Star-pattern, unique to Mexican-American tradition, was also included.

The blocks were joined with brightly colored strips arranged asymmetrically. The border was also composed to two colors and asymmetric. The color selection and layout were carefully considered and designed to create larger contrasts of light and dark as well as movement through the quilt, drawing on the tradition of improvisation. We were careful not to emphasize any one tradition. Rather we combined all equally into one piece, representing all the cultural traditions of the larger community.

Chosen colors were bold and combinations were carefully chosen to represent all ethnic groups in the community: red, white and blue for Czechoslovakia and the UK; blue and yellow for Sweden; red, yellow and black for Germany; red, green and white for Mexico; and red, yellow and green for a number of West African

countries. We also used quilt patterns to decorate other parts of the playground structure, particularly the "headers" at entry and exit points of various pieces of play equipment. This integrated the



**Team of women touch up the wood block quilt during the final hours of construction of the Georgetown, Texas, Creative Playscape.**

quilt concept into the entire structure.

Quilts as a means of expressing the cultural diversity and history of Georgetown made good sense. Quilting provided a tradition that highlighted distinctiveness as well as commonality. For all involved in this project, quilts function as powerful symbols of connection—to the past, to family, to continuity. The chosen fabrics often represented pieces of an individual's or a family's history. Finally, the quilts symbolized cooperative work, whether among immediate household members or among a larger network of neighbors and other community members.

The Georgetown Creative Playscape brought women together to explore their own and other's traditions in new ways. In this sense, the playscape quilt formed the foundation for new bridges within the larger community. The woodblock quilt we created, and

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# Folklore & Storytelling: Notes on the NY Folklore Forum

Amanda Dargan

**S**tories told well bear power," said City Lore's director Steve Zeitlin at the November 12, 1993 downstate Forum on Folklore and Storytelling, sponsored by the New York Folklore Society and hosted by Bank Street/City Lore Center for Folk Arts in Education. "[Stories have] the power to affirm the individual, the particular, what is distinctive to a particular place and a particular time in history." Moderated by the Center's co-directors, Nina Jaffe and Steve Zeitlin, the forum brought together approximately thirty persons representing such diverse fields and backgrounds as folklore, oral history, education, professional storytelling, music and dance therapy, folk arts presenting, museum education, and theater.

During the afternoon, the participants drew on their various backgrounds to discuss the relationship between folklore, storytelling and society. Some of the themes included the role of narrative in humanizing media, the question of voice and of who can speak for a cultural group. Some of the participants spoke about their personal motivations for telling stories or presenting storytellers. The storytellers spoke about the relationship of the storyteller to text, the importance of respecting the sources of stories and of sharing one's own relationship to the story with the audience. All of the participants were struck by the important role that storytelling can play in schools and their communities.

Nina Jaffe opened the forum by suggesting a focus for the discussion: to look at storytelling and folklore in society and to ask how this work relates to education, to school communities, and to the life of schools. Steve Zeitlin then presented a paper which gave an overview of the growing interest in

storytelling both by academic folklorists as well as storytellers and lay people. He suggested that the approaches to storytelling that emerged over the past few decades have, in their totality, changed the views of the role of storytelling in society, and that these fields should be working in closer consort.

As the discussion unfolded, participants focused on the question of voice. Storyteller Marline Martine suggested that children of African-American descent are constantly exposed to stories which are not positive or affirming of their cultural background. She felt that there is strong need to promote traditional family stories which can give these children a more positive self-image.

For Melissa Heckler, Director of the New York Storytelling Center, the issue of whether or not one has the right to tell stories from a culture other than one's own is one that she has grappled with often in her career as a professional storyteller. In telling stories from other cultural groups, she has found it important to understand that you cannot speak for another culture and that you cannot tell their stories without speaking about your own relationship with them. She also cautioned against telling stories considered sacred and restricted by their bearers: "For many, many communities where stories are still part of people's sacredness, their investment has been a long initiation process . . . and they get very upset when somebody comes by and puts that story into a tourist bag and tells it in another kind of context."

One participant suggested that storytellers should always respect the origins of their stories and should tell their audiences when the story is sacred in a particular culture. David Gonzales, cohost of the radio show "New York Kids," argued that stories have different

meanings for their tellers and listeners and their sacredness lies in the relationship between particular storytellers, listeners, and texts.

The issue of sources emerged as another crucial issue. One participant complained that professional storytellers often pretend not to know the sources of their stories or refuse to share them. She suggested that even when storytellers do not know the sources of their stories, they should share whatever lineage they carry with their stories—whether they learned it from a parent or a friend—since this is often as interesting as the stories themselves. Lonetta Taylor Gaines, a storyteller and member of the graduate faculty at Bank Street College, argued that providing the sources of our stories professionalizes the field of storytelling:

"I think just on an academic level, beyond how we view the sacredness of the stories or the meaning or the words, just on an academic level, to give honor to the origins, to cite references is something that we do as a part of professionalizing the career, the path of storytelling. In that way we become part of an ongoing documented continuum of people who have told stories over the eras.... I want to encourage us to always pay homage to the origins and to cite references in whatever artistic manner we choose."

Folklorists at the forum brought to the discussion of origins the importance of including information about the cultural context of storytelling performance. A folklorist observed that "in our role as folklorists, we're usually not performing stories, we're usually presenting storytellers; and often we're presenting storytellers who have performed these stories in the context of their families or their communities or their occupational group. And so for us the problem often is how do we make them comfortable and how do we create a situation with the audience—that's not their normal audience—that still allows them to tell their stories in a style to which they are accustomed."

The power of stories to heal, to affirm, and to empower followed

Amanda Dargan, a member of the NYFS Board of Directors, is folklorist for the Bank Street/City Lore Center for Folk Arts in Education.

as a central focus of discussion. One teacher spoke about the power of personal stories to bring children to common ground of understanding and experience. Peggy Pettit described her work with older women in the Elders Share the Arts' "Pearls of Wisdom" program:

Maybe that's the moment where a person can be visible is in the act of storytelling. They have been invisible people—now they are visible. They have been unrecorded people—now they are recorded. And that's sort of what I'm doing with the elderly people I'm working with. You know it's not slave days anymore but the confusion is just as intense. Be cause women are still caretakers and their one moment of freedom is in the act of telling a story because you can always change the end. You have control—the thing you don't have in regular life—you don't have control over whether or not you can pay your rent for instance. But you have control when you create your own story.

Educators in the forum described their personal experiences using storytelling in the classroom, how children who may problems expressing themselves in written language often find their voice when encouraged to use oral language. They expressed a need, not only to bring storytellers into the classroom to work with children, but to train teachers in the value and uses of oral language in their teaching. Several participants spoke about the difficulty of making oral language and the personal experiences and cultural backgrounds of students central to classroom teaching. They described schools as "separating institutions" and higher education as giving its students entry into the teaching profession at the expense of their families, social life, and cultural background.

As the session drew to a close, Nina Jaffe announced that one outcome of the forum might be a workshop on storytelling to further the work of teachers as storytellers. As Nina Jaffe put it, "it will be a place where teachers, and

## Site Seen



Photo by Mary Zwolinski

**T**his is the yard of Vivian Plocarz of Chicago. I came upon her house one day while walking off lunch with a friend in Vivian's neighborhood. The front of the house was pretty fantastic—a very elaborate Virgin Mary shrine, plastic flowers, bowling balls.... My friend and I decided to investigate the back of the house and followed an alley to a yard surrounded by a big wooden fence. Through the cracks we saw a virtual garden of plastic toys, flowers, bird houses, See and Says, saints, faded lawn ornaments, and you name it. It was all quite systematically organized.

I finally met Vivian who gave me a grand tour of the outside, and the inside (decorated in the same style but with plush things and Christmas lights). She told me that she had a very unhappy childhood; her parents died and she was raised by a mean brother-in-law who never allowed her to have toys. Thus her current fascination with them. She calls it her "garden" and enters contests annually, although she hasn't won.

At first Vivian's yard kind of scared me but now it's my favorite place in the whole world. Whenever I'm back in Chicago I make a point of going there. During the tour, she showed me how to flip the latch on the fence. It may sound strange, but I go there and sit for about half an hour just to sort of meditate. I never see her—she doesn't answer the door. I used to take other people there as a "treat" to show them something really special and secret but no one cared as much as I did. I took my eight year old niece there last year and she was thrilled. I guess it's a matter of taste.

Mary Zwolinski  
Troy, NY

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## NEW VIDEO

### *The Legacy of Lead Belly*

Produced & Directed By Gossa Tsegaye, *The Lead Belly Society* and Gossa Vision, Ithaca NY. VHS, 30 minutes

The Legacy of Lead Belly is a documentary focusing on Lead Belly's beginnings in rural Louisiana, his musical career, and ultimate worldwide recognition. Contrary to his publicized image as a violent, rough-and-tumble demon who twice sang his way out of southern prisons, the real Lead Belly is revealed as a family man who was dedicated to making a better life for himself and those around him.

Lead Belly struggled tirelessly to leave behind a permanent contribution in his music. The documentary features an intimate profile of the legendary musician and interviews with family members as well as with historian Shelby Foote, Lead Belly biographer Charles Wolfe, and guitar expert George Gruhn.

Rare, early film footage, photographs, and much of his music—singing and playing his unique 12-String Stella guitar—bear witness to the perpetual power and significance of Lead Belly. "Irene, Goodnight," "Rock Island Line," "Midnight Special," and "Bourgeois Blues" are but a few of his highlighted songs. For information about the video contact the Lead Belly Society at (607) 273-6615.

## NEW RECORDINGS

### *Tom Doherty: Take the Bull by the Horns*

Produced by Rebecca Miller.  
Green Linnet Records, Danbury CT (1993)

Born in 1913 in Montcharles, Co. Donegal, Tom Doherty is one of the few remaining exponents of the melodeon—a single row button accordion. He plays in an old style common to the north of Ireland and possesses a store of rarely played tunes learned from a diversity of sources. Tom Doherty and his music offer a glimpse into a way of life that is fast disappearing: a rural lifestyle

steeped in oral tradition and a culture where music, song and dance serve as a cohesive community force.

The melodeon is a ten key, single row diatonic instrument and an older and simpler cousin to the modern button accordion. Played throughout Ireland in the late 1800s and into the decades of the 20th century, the melodeon displaced the *uilleann* pipes and concertina as favored instruments to accompany traditional ceili dancing. Unlike the pipes which are sensitive to climate changes and the thin, reedy sound of the concertina, the melodeon offers a loudness and consistency of pitch well-suited for both outdoor crossroads dances as well as in dancehalls in the days before amplification.

At a young age, Tom developed a forceful playing style with an inner lift and propulsive dance rhythm. After nearly 75 years of playing, Tom Doherty continues to perform the old dance music from Co. Donegal with seemingly endless energy. He is accompanied on *Take the Bull by the Horns* by Maureen Glynn Connelly (keyboards), Mary Coogan (guitar, tenor banjo), Felix Dolan (piano), Maureen Doherty Macken (flute, tin whistle), Mick Moloney (guitar, tenor banjo), and Brendan Mulvihill (fiddle).

### *Tang Liangxing: High Mountain, Flowing Water*

Traditional Chinese Pipa Music  
Produced by Peter K. Siegel, A Henry Street Folklore Production  
Shanachie (1993)

How can the same instrument evoke "birds singing in flowers," "the angry sound of rushing water," "the pillowtalk of newlyweds," and "a million brave soldiers on horseback?" These are phrases a 19th century author used to describe the *pipa*, sometimes known as the "Chinese lute." In the music of a master pipaist like Tang Liangxing, one might indeed hear all of this and more.

Over time, pipa players have developed a dualistic aesthetic philosophy, used to guide musical expression; the gentle *wen* and the aggressive *wu*. Many traditional art forms of China are closely connected with themes from nature, literature, and history. Pipa music is part of this larger tradition and, like most forms of phrases traditional

music, programmatic representation (i.e., the use of music to convey images and stories) is very important. Most of the extramusical themes relate to either *wen* or *wu*. The pipa was felt to be an ideal instrument to express this polarity, due to its wide dynamic range, and specific instrumental techniques were developed to stimulate the imagination of listeners.

A native of Shanghai, Tang Liangxing has enjoyed a distinguished musical career. This recording represents a broad spectrum of solo repertoire and styles reflecting not only Mr. Tang's individual artistry but also the depth of the tradition which he represents.

## BOOK REVIEWERS NEEDED

We are seeking qualified individuals who are interested in reading folklore-related books and writing reviews for *New York Folklore*. Books currently available are listed below. Address your request to the Editor, *New York Folklore*, PO Box 48, Lenox Hill Station, New York, NY 10021. Please specify which book(s) you are interested in reviewing as well as your area(s) of special interest. Requests will be filled on a first-come first-served basis. Book reviews are due two months after receipt of the book.

- Susan D. Crafts, Daniel Cavocchi, Charles Keil, *My Music* (Wesleyan University Press/University of New England Press, 1993)
- Archie Green, *Wobblies, Pile Butts, and Other Heroes: Laborlore Explorations* (University of Illinois Press, 1993)
- James S. Griffith, *Beliefs and Holy Places: A Spiritual Geography of the Pimeria Alta* (University of Arizona Press, 1992)
- Bruce Jackson, *Disorderly Conduct* (University of Illinois Press, 1992)
- Stanley Norcom, *Grindstone: An Island World Remembered* (Robert Edwards, 1993)
- Neil V. Rosenberg, ed., *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined* (University of Illinois Press, 1993)
- William B. Waits, *The Modern Christmas in America* (New York University Press, 1993)
- Rosemary Levy Zumwalt, *Wealth and Rebellion: Elsie Clews Parsons, Anthropologist and Folklorist* (University of Illinois Press, 1992)

## NEW BOOKS

### *While Standing on One Foot: Puzzle Stories and Wisdom Tales from the Jewish Tradition*

By Nina Jaffe and Steve Zeitlin  
Illustrated by John Segal  
Henry Holt and Company (1993)  
128 pages, \$14.95

Calling on thousands of years of Jewish folktales, legends, rabbinical stories and literature, Jaffe and Zeitlin show the wit and wisdom that are cornerstones of the Jewish tradition. Posed as a question, each story turns on a conundrum that young readers can try to solve; finally, the sometimes obvious, sometimes puzzling, always interesting answers are supplied in the tales. While recounting each one of these wondrous stories, the authors also trace its history and explain how it illustrates Jewish life.

### *Go See the Powwow on the Mountain and Other Indian Stories of the Sacandaga Valley*

By Don Bowman  
Illustrated by Deborah Delaney  
The Greenfield Review Press, Greenfield  
Center, NY (1993)  
116 pages, \$12.95

The stories in this book reflect the never-before documented lives being lived by small communities of Iroquois and Abenaki people in the Sacandaga Valley of New York State in the years before the dam which flooded their valley was constructed in the 1940s. One of the men hired to clear the valley and a trusted friend of these original Adirondackers, Don Bowman, watched and listened well to the tales they told. Edited and annotated by folklorist Vaughn Ward, *Go Seek the Powwow*, includes a preface by storyteller Joe Bruhac, followed by Ward's introduction to Don Bowman's life and work. As Bruhac puts it, "(This book) not only introduces a wonderful storyteller to a larger public, but it is also an elegy for a way and a place that have gone and a reminder to us all that Native roots run deep."

### *From the Ground Up: A Report on Grassroots Theater & Community Building*

No issue is of greater concern in the United States today than the question of community. How can we define what community is at the end of the 20th century? Are traditional ideas of community still valid, though few of us have direct experience of them, or are new ideas of community more relevant, though not yet fully formed? Is a sense of community even possible any longer? Can people bridge social, cultural, economic and ethnic divides to enrich and strengthen local life?

In response to these questions, Roadside Theater of Whitesburg, KY, and the Cornell University Department of Theatre Arts have published *From the Ground Up*, a 92 page report which examines the use of theater as a tool and model for community development. It is based on "Grassroots Theater in Historical and Contemporary Perspective," a 1992 symposium organized by Cornell and Roadside.

Grassroots theaters have been at the forefront of exploring and preserving community identity throughout the nation's history and especially since the 1960s. Grassroots theaters begin with a commitment to a place and draw upon an understanding of the people, history, culture, politics, even ecology of that place to inform their work.

Co-author of the report and Roadside Theater director Dudley Cocks notes that "community cultural development is the foundation for community economic development. It's a relationship that disadvantaged communities have to insist on to have any prospect of improvement." Over the last thirty years, grassroots theaters have grown quietly in areas such as rural Appalachia, the barrios of the Southwest, and the heart of the South Bronx, giving voice to and helping to empower those most frequently overlooked by the greater society. Collectively, they are becoming recognized as one of the most vital movements in theater today.

*From the Ground Up* adds to these efforts by bringing together for the first time in one publication the histories of

African-American, Latino, and European American grassroots theater and linking them with contemporary practice. It also serves as a practical guide by examining the issues and concerns of those currently active in grassroots theater and looking ahead to how these will play out in the future.

"Grassroots Theater in Historical and Contemporary Perspective" was the first national gathering devoted to surveying the range of grassroots theater. Participants came from twenty-one states, spanned four generations, and interacted across cultures, languages and geographic regions on an equal basis. It was the culmination of the Community-

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## OBITUARY



### *Minor Wine Thomas, Jr.*

Minor Wine Thomas, Jr., age 76, died on October 23, 1993 in Nassawadox, Virginia. Thomas was an important teacher of material culture and folk technology. He was a member of the New York Folklore Society. Thomas will be remembered by many in folklife studies and the history museum field as a gifted and talented teacher. He taught an innovative history of folk technology course for the Cooperstown Graduate Programs from 1964 to 1982, when he retired. He was also the director of the New York State Historical Association from 1975 to 1982. An avid sportsman and marvelous storyteller, Thomas is best remembered for his humorous accounts of hunting and fishing and for his lifelong dedication to the scholarly study of the elusive fointwinder.

## REFLECTIONS

continued from page 3

not necessarily the intention for use in the classroom setting, but that the focus is to adapt the form or parts of the form for use in skill acquisition and in fostering cooperative learning experiences.

Since folklorists see in their mission a responsibility for the survival of an art form as well as its analysis, many seemed uncomfortable with this. The notion that use and over use people other than folk artists could lead to misrepresentation and misinterpretation of an art form and in some cases of the artist and his/her personal work, was a main concern.

Throughout the discussion, folklorists emphasized the importance of presenting a folk arts form in the context of its origins as well as of its use today in a particular community where it has cultural, ethnic or religious meaning. Their advice to teachers who planned to integrate folk arts into multi-disciplinary programs was to always include the folk artist(s) in the presentation.

Whereas I see the classroom teacher as accepting the adaptation of a folk art form for use in another way, the folklorist is more likely to resist uses which would present the form in a changed or adapted form by someone other than the folk artist.

Yet adaptations seem inevitable. And if these adaptations of traditional culture are used in a way respectful of the original form *and* its historical evolution, then everyone benefits. The form becomes more widely known, learned, and hopefully more fully investigated in an historical context as well as in its present day use.

## FORUM

Continued from page 7

storytellers, and folklorists, and folk artists, and people within the community can come together and start a network and build more of these connections." At the end of the meeting, Nina Quoted a article by Chinua Achebe and added, "Maybe the next step is to 'Let one storyteller stand, and let another storyteller stand behind,' because, really, all these voices need to be heard."

## CREATIVE PLAYSCAPE

continued from page 5

the quilt patterns found throughout the playground, remind community members of a tradition both historic and current, created through the collaborative effort of many people, and celebrating the diverse elements that comprise the Georgetown community. In a city that had been legally segregated until the mid-60s, the sharing that occurred during the playground's construction and the resulting "product" express the value of the multicultural community and possibilities for future interaction.

The project spurred new interest in the histories and traditions of the different groups as quilts were taken from storage and brought to light once again. Women, and men, talked about their past and the lives of their forebears. Mexican- and African-American women, who previously did not exhibit or attend Georgetown's annual quilt show, are entering quilts of their own this year and extended families have revitalized quilting in their homes.

While the children of Georgetown live their own folklore on the playground, the quilt created by adults in their community forms a visual bridge across cultures and generations. For me, the project illustrates the ways in which folklore research and application can be used as a tool for community action and empowerment and how folklorists can act as community and cultural activists.

## BOOK REVIEWS

continued from page 9

Based Arts Project, a multi-year collaboration between Cornell University's Department of Theater Arts, Roadside Theater, and the Junebug Productions of New Orleans in which the ideals and practices of grassroots theater were introduced into the university theater curriculum and into the communities of Ithaca, NY.

*From the Ground Up* is a record of the symposium and includes contributions on Native culture and history, African-American theater from the 1820s to the 1950s, the New York State Plays Project of the 1920s and 1930s, the history of Hispanic and Latino theater in the US from its origins to the Depression, and the Federal Theater Project of the 1930s. It also contains excerpts from small group discussions, as well as introductory and closing essays written especially for the volume. The report was organized by Dudley Cocke, Harry Newman, a playwright, and Janet Salmons-Rue, Director of the Community-Based Arts Project.

Since 1975, Roadside Theater has been creating original plays about the central Appalachian coalfields. In addition to its regional performances, they have toured the United States and several foreign countries. Copies of *From the Ground Up* can be obtained from Roadside Theater, 306 Madison Street, Whitesburg, KY 41858, (606)633-0108.



Jeannine Fairburn paints quilt patterns on blocks of wood to be assembled into a "quilt" for the Georgetown Creative Playscape.

# NEW YORK FOLKLORE SPECIAL ISSUES

This year, the New York Folklore Society is releasing landmark special issues on African-American culture and traditions and gay and lesbian folklore. We encourage you to either become a member or order your copies now using the order form on this page.



## Through African-Centered Prisms Vol. 18, Nos. 1-4, 1992

This special issue, guest edited by ethnomusicologist Barbara Hampton of Hunter College in New York City, brings together important scholarship and reflection by fifteen leading African-American scholars and activists representing the disciplines of folklore, history, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, film, music, and literature.

Topics range from "Modernity and African American Intellectual Tradition" and "African American Folklore in a Discourse of Folkness" to "Hip Hop Music and Popular Music Criticism" and "The Dynamics of Cultural History and Folklore in the Films of Spike Lee". The writing is varied and challenging.



## Prejudice and Pride: Lesbian and Gay Traditions in America Vol. 19, Nos. 1-2, 1993

*New York Folklore* is devoting an entire special issue to the study of lesbian and gay traditions and culture. Edited by outgoing New York Folklore editors Deborah Blincoe and John Forrest, this is the first journal issue in the field of folklore to focus exclusively on gay and lesbian matters.

"Prejudice and Pride" brings together pioneering humanistic scholarship and grass roots writing and imagery. Artists, musicians, activists, folklorists, anthropologists, historians, and literary critics explore such topics as gay spirituality, lesbian self-made myth, the social significance of drag, Amazon rage, and queer politics. The articles are risky, passionate, reflective, and readable.

**T**he New York Folklore Society is dedicated to furthering cultural equity and crosscultural understanding through its programs serving the field of folklore and folklife in New York State. The Society seeks to nurture folklore and folklife by fostering and encouraging folk cultural expressions within communities where they originate and by sharing these expressions across cultural boundaries. ▼ The Society publishes the scholarly journal *New York Folklore* and the *New York Folklore Newsletter*. You will receive subscriptions to both as benefits of membership. ▼ We provide technical assistance to organizations engaged in folk arts programming and produce conferences and other programs with statewide scope that address issues concerning folklife. ▼ We welcome your involvement and support. ▼ Thank you!

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**See announcement, pg2**

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**T**his year marks 50th anniversary of the founding of the New York Folklore Society! The celebration begins with our Fall Conference in October (see the announcement on page 2). We hope very much that you will join our celebration—here are three ways you can take part:

▼ **If you have photographs, documents, or memories** related to the past of the New York Folklore Society, we would like to hear from you. You may be able to contribute to the record of our history and to our celebration.

▼ **Come to the Fall Conference.** It will be a stimulating, enlightening, and fun occasion, and there will be time to meet old friends and new who have been connected with NYFS over the years.

▼ **Become a member for 1994.** You'll be helping us out, and you'll receive free two issues of *New York Folklore* (use the order form inside).



**Photo by Mary Zwolinski. (see Site Seen, page 7)**

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