



Back issues of and single articles published in *New York Folklore Quarterly*, *New York Folklore*, and *Voices* are available for purchase. Check the tables of contents for availability and titles. To request an article for purchase, contact us at [info@nyfolklore.org](mailto:info@nyfolklore.org). Please be aware that some issues are sold out, but most articles are still available.

Copyright of NEW YORK FOLKLORE. Further reproduction prohibited without permission of copyright holder. This PDF or any part of its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv or website without the copyright holder's express permission. Users may print or download article for individual use.

NEW YORK FOLKLORE  
129 Jay Street  
Schenectady, NY 12305  
518/346-7008  
Fax 518/346-6617  
Email: [info@nyfolklore.org](mailto:info@nyfolklore.org)  
<http://www.nyfolklore.org>

# North by Northeast:

## NYFS Celebrates Mohawk and Tuscarora Traditions

BY LISA OVERHOLSER

The Hudson Valley Quadracentennial in 2009 spurred all kinds of special celebrations in cities along the Hudson River, from flotilla parades and festivals to art fairs, music performances, and exhibitions. The central focus of the Quadracentennial was Henry Hudson's voyage four hundred years ago up the river that now bears his name. Hudson, an English explorer under contract with the Dutch East India Company to find a quicker trading route to the Near East, set sail with a crew of Dutch and English sailors in hopes of finding that path. He may not have realized it then, but Hudson's explorations on the Dutch boat the *Half Moon* would significantly alter the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the northeastern United States.

An important part of the story is his party's contact with indigenous peoples. Among the Native American tribes in the Northeast at the time were a loose confederation of Haudenosaunee (Iroquois is the more common non-native term) tribes of New York State and Canada, as well as the Wabanaki tribes of New England and the Canadian maritime provinces. Cultural traditions like basket making and beadwork served not only functional purposes, but also strengthened familial and tribal connections and demonstrated the integral connection between the environment and the artists' heritage.

For its part in the Quadracentennial celebrations, the New York Folklore Society

commemorated these still-thriving cultural traditions with "North by Northeast: Baskets and Beadwork from the Akwesasne Mohawk and Tuscarora." At the core of North by Northeast was an exhibition held from September 25 to October 24, 2009, on the first floor of the historic, sixteen-sided Nott Memorial at Union College in Schenectady, New York. The exhibition displayed the work of Haudenosaunee artists from New York featured in the larger traveling exhibition, "North by Northeast: Wabanaki, Akwesasne Mohawk, and

Tuscarora Traditional Arts," curated by folklorist Kathleen Mundell, director of Cultural Resources in Rockport, Maine.

Helping us open the reception on Friday evening, October 2, was Kathleen Mundell, the curator of the larger traveling exhibition. After speaking briefly about the traveling exhibition, Mundell gave an overview of basket making and beadwork practices among Native American tribes in the Northeastern U.S. and explained how those traditions have changed over the years. Another highlight of the eve-



Basket by Sheila Ransom, Mohawk basket maker. Photo: Peggy McKenna



Lynne Williamson discussing some of the baskets in the North by Northeast exhibition at the New York Folklore Society's Field Trip.  
Photo: Lisa Overholser

ning was the blessing given by Mohawk spokesperson Tom Porter, who works as a Native American spiritual counselor in the New York prison system. Although we had to close the evening in darkness due to electrical problems affecting the entire university, the opening reception was nonetheless a warm, enthusiastic commencement to our month of events.

Among the Schenectady Greenmarket vendors on Sunday, October 11, were four Haudenosaunee who made the long drive to Schenectady to participate in the market. Artists included Mary Clause (Tuscarora beadworker), Judy Cole (Mohawk basket maker), and Carrie Hill (Mohawk basket maker). Curator Sue Ellen Herne brought a few items from the Akwesasne Museum to sell. Despite the cold, breezy weather, Greenmarket visitors welcomed

the opportunity to see the beautiful items at their tables and speak with the artists.

Later that day, as a part of the New York Folklore Society's annual Field Trip, Herne gave a thought-provoking talk on "Culture and Commerce" at the Old Chapel building on the Union College campus. She spoke eloquently about her own experiences navigating the tricky line between basket making as a cultural tradition and the commodification of that tradition. She came armed with some surprising facts and statistics. One particularly startling fact was her calculation that, by the time basket makers take into account the number of hours they spend preparing a basket and what they receive at a typical market, basket artisans make only about \$5.10 an hour. Statistics like this highlight some of the difficult choices that must be made by traditional artists.

Continuing the Field Trip, Lynne Williamson, folk arts director of Intercultural Resources in Hartford, Connecticut, gave a guided tour of the exhibit to New York Folklore Society members. Williamson, a contributor to the original traveling exhibition catalog, was able to provide a more in-depth look at some of the objects on display, pointing out aesthetic features and providing cultural background.

On Saturday, October 17, filmmaker Courtney Hunt came to the Reamer Campus Center Auditorium at Union College to speak about the making of her award-winning film *Frozen River*, Grand Jury Prize-winner at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival. Audience members viewed the provocative film and were able to engage in direct conversation with the filmmaker. This was a rare opportunity to hear a





Members of the Mohawk women's singing group Kontiwennehá:wi: Carriers of the Words. Photo: Lisa Overholser

noted director talk about film technique, the technical and conceptual issues she confronted in the process of filming, her writing process, and more. Joining Hunt in the panel discussion was Andrea Foroughi, associate professor of history at Union College. Expanding the conversation, Foroughi put the film into a wider sociocultural context and pointed out some statistical facts relevant to issues brought forth in the film, particularly regarding the difficulties facing households led by single women throughout history and some of the cultural differences between Mohawk society and mainstream American society.

The Mohawk women's singing group Kontiwennehá:wi : Carriers of the Words, recently nominated for a prestigious Native American Music Award, came to help us close the exhibition on Saturday, October 24. They gave a beautiful performance, filled with music and



Audience members examining sweetgrass at Sue Ellen Herne's Field Trip talk. Photo: Lynne Williamson



Sue Ellen Herne next to items displayed in the North by Northeast exhibition. Photo: Lynne Williamson



Sue Ellen Herne speaks about culture and commerce during the New York Folklore Society's Field Trip. Photo: Lisa Overholser

dance, and even had audience members up on their feet in an interactive demonstration of Mohawk social dances. The group sang in both Mohawk and English, and many of the members, including Teresa Bear Fox and Maxine Cole, spoke of the importance of preserving these traditions for themselves and their communities. Cole, a language instructor at Akwesasne, spoke about language instruction and the importance of language to cultural identity.

For more information about the exhibition, including more photographs and video clips, visit [www.nyfolklore.org/about/baskets.html](http://www.nyfolklore.org/about/baskets.html). ▼

Lisa Overholser is staff folklorist at the New York Folklore Society, where she manages the mentoring and professional development program and contributes to many other projects and initiatives. She holds a Ph.D. in folklore and ethnomusicology from the University of Indiana. She thanks Rachel Seligman, director of the Mandeville Gallery, for her assistance in organizing the North by Northeast exhibition.



To continue to receive *Voices*  
and enjoy the full range of  
New York Folklore Society programs,  
become a member!

See inside back cover for more information.



# Join or Renew your New York Folklore Membership to Receive *Voices* and other Member Benefits

## For the General Public

*Voices* is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal, published twice annually. Join New York Folklore and become part of a community that will deepen your involvement with folklore, folklife, the traditional arts, and contemporary culture. As a member, you'll have early notice of Gallery special exhibits and NYF-sponsored key events. Members receive a discount on NYF Gallery items.

## For Artists and Professionals

Become a member and learn about technical assistance programs that will get you the help you may need in your work:

Mentoring and Professional Development  
Folk Artists Self-Management Project  
Folk Archives Project  
Consulting and Referral  
Advocacy  
A Public Voice

## Membership Levels

### Individual

\$ 50.00	Basic Membership
\$100.00	Harold W. Thompson Circle
\$150.00	Edith Cutting Folklore in Education

### Organizations/Institutions

\$ 75.00	Subscriber
\$100.00	Partner
\$150.00	Edith Cutting Folklore in Education

Please add \$20.00 for non-US addresses.

**For payment, choose the option that works best for you:**

**Use our website, [www.nyfolklore.org](http://www.nyfolklore.org)**

**or mail a check to us at 129 Jay St., Schenectady NY 12305;**

**or call the NYF business office, 518-346-7008, to pay with a credit card over the phone.**