Haudenosaunee Days of Sharing at Explore & More Children’s Museum

St. Joseph’s Tables in Western New York

Music and Food in Multicultural Syracuse

Bridging Folk and Fine Art at the Castellani Art Museum

Telescope Houses in Buffalo

Hog-Rassle Old-Time Square Dancing
From the Director

This October, the New York Folklore Society welcomes our colleagues in the American Folklore Society (AFS) to Buffalo. Held each year, the American Folklore Society’s conference draws hundreds of folklorists and allied scholars from throughout the world. This year’s conference will draw scholars from Australia, Canada, China, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, India, Korea, Japan, Latvia, Malaysia, Norway, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, Zambia, and nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. The folklore, folk arts, and folk culture of New York State will be highlighted through performances, presentations by community scholars, and artists’ demonstrations; and Buffalo and Western New York State will provide field trip experiences. New York was the host for the 2002 meeting (Rochester), and a number of that year’s planning committee members are working to craft an interesting and engaging meeting this year. The “New York committee” has created a dynamic schedule of presentations and papers. If you are not currently a member of the American Folklore Society, please plan to attend at least part of the Buffalo AFS meeting. The schedule can be found at https://www.afsnet.org/page/2018AM.

The staff and board of the New York Folklore Society are laying plans for the Society’s 75th anniversary in 2019. Founded in 1944, the New York Folklore Society was created by folklore scholars who wished to create a vehicle to encourage folklore documentation and preservation in New York State. Those early visionaries were led by Harold Thompson and Louis Jones, who held initial joint appointments as both Presidents of the New York Folklore Society and of the New York State Historical Association (NYSHA), which has been known as the Fenimore Art Museum since 2017. At one point, the membership of the New York Folklore Society eclipsed that of the American Folklore Society (founded in 1888) and included many former students of Harold Thompson and Louis Jones. The Society was founded with a social justice focus, and its founding members were active with early civil rights, progressive education, and leftist politics. They were collectors and popularizers of folklore; they used folklore and folk arts to inform theater, literature, music, and other expressions of American culture and arts. A roster of early New York Folklore Society members reads like a “Who’s Who” of folklore, including Charles and Ruth Crawford Seeger, Pete Seeger, Moritz Jagendorf of the Ferrar School, Ben Botkin of the Archive of Folk Culture at the Library of Congress, Edith Cutting, Alan Lomax, Ruth Rubin, Carl Carmer, and Norman Studer and Norman Cazden of Camp Woodland. The Society supported a Yorker prize for student writing, and its biannual meeting discussed folklore in education, folk music and the folk revival, civil rights, and the inclusion of immigrant and ethnic expressions. 2019 will be a great year to reflect upon the Society’s successes and to lay the foundation for the next 75 years!

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From the Editor

To celebrate our 25th anniversary, we’ve created a logo for the Folklife Center in Glens Falls. It’s a simple design—our name linked with Crandall Public Library and a five-pointed star, tipped to soar. Yet, at closer look, it reflects a larger community heritage.

Folklife Center
CRANDALL PUBLIC LIBRARY

This year is also the 125th anniversary of our parent organization, Crandall Public Library, its birth occurring in 1892–1893, thanks to the combined efforts of a minister, an educator, a historian, and a wealthy businessman.

The idea for a community library was promoted well before its inception by Rev. George B. Gow (1832–1913). He was a Baptist minister and founder of the Glens Falls Lyceum, where local questions were discussed before large audiences, and later, in the local newspapers. Gow planted the seed, which would be sown as Crandall Free Library, in a paper read before the Lyceum several years before its inception. Rev. Gow would become the first president of the Library Trustees.

The educator Sherman Williams (1846–1923) came to Glens Falls as the school superintendent, who built the community’s modern school system and developed a summer school for teachers from around the country—both models for the state. His interest in the development and influence of libraries drove him to find a benefactor in Henry Crandall and to the creation of a larger community heritage.

“This I’m an advocate for anything, it’s to move. As far as you can, as much as you can. Across the ocean, or simply across the river. Walk in someone else’s shoes or at least eat their food. It’s a plus for everybody.”

—Anthony Bourdain (1956–2018)
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of the Crandall Trust. Dr. Williams became Chief of the Schools Libraries Division in the State Department of Education and was an officer of the Library Trustees for some 30 years.

The historian James A. Holden (1861–1918) was a prolific writer on historical topics and a charter member of the New York State Historical Association. He was also a newspaper editor, manager of the Empire Theatre, author of the charter for the City of Glens Falls, and an officer in many local organizations. He deposited his books and papers at Crandall Free Library as the Holden Collection for public use. Holden became State Historian and was the secretary of the Library Trustees for some 25 years.

The library, however, bears the name of Henry Crandall (1821–1913), the wealthy businessman who bankrolled the library almost entirely in its first 25 years. Even today, the resting place for his fortune, the Crandall Trust, contributes to the library’s budget. He also provided the original library space in a building he owned in the current City Park, opposite the Soldiers’ Monument. For many years he was the honorary president of the Library Trustees, while other trustees (especially, Sherman and Holden) saw to the oversight and daily operations.

Henry Crandall insisted that the library be a “Free Library,” one that would promote the “intellectual, moral and material welfare” of the community and beyond. From the beginning, he wanted it to be free and open to all:

“If I give money for a library I want the books to be absolutely free to anyone who has interest enough in reading to call at the library for them, and I would not wish to be required to give any guarantee whatever. I would be willing to have the books go as far away as any person cares to come, even if it was as far as Quebec.”

Henry Crandall was a self-made man, coming from very humble beginnings. He saved his first thousand dollars by the age of 30, by working as a teamster hauling logs in the Adirondack woods. With this money he began a lumbering business on the Hudson River, moved to Glens Falls in 1850, and invested heavily in real estate to make a fortune. About 1880, Crandall retired from active business life and devoted his attention to public matters and philanthropy, including a Boys Savings Club, two parks, and a library.

The five-pointed star of our logo is the same star atop the monument in Crandall Park where Henry and his wife Betsy Crandall are buried. It was the logging mark used by Crandall in his lumbering business to identify the logs that he floated down the Hudson to the mills here in Glens Falls.

The Board of Trustees at Crandall created the Folklife Center on July 23, 1993, as its own department within the Library, charged with the mission to preserve and present the cultural traditions of the upper Hudson Valley and southern Adirondacks of upstate New York.

Crandall’s five-pointed star reminds us of those who supported the need for free access to the world of ideas that public libraries embody. In this 25th year, we aspire to carry on the 125-year legacy of these early supporters of Crandall Public Library—broad discourse on a variety of topics, interest in the local but also the international, collaboration with other organizations, working with the next generations to carry on the work, and free access to anyone interested enough to participate. Through our gallery exhibitions, research room with its archives and special collections, and our many cultural programs, we invite our many publics to join us in our continued journey of discovery.

Todd DeGarmo
Voices Editor

CORRECTION: The captions for photographs on pp. 32 and 33 of VOICES FW2017 incorrectly identified performances as by The Bread and Puppet Theater. They were Teatro SEA productions.
Faced with the looming crisis of climate change, scientists are turning to the wisdom of indigenous people to enhance their understanding of biodiversity and stewardship of the environment. Beyond just gaining an understanding as a Western scientific project, folklorists and educators, whose work has brought them into contact with bearers of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) in the “ethnosphere” or “constellation of world’s cultures,” know there is much to learn from non-Western modes of perception and epistemologies of knowledge, as reflected in the artwork, oral tradition, and stories of indigenous peoples.

The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy of Western and Central New York and Canada consists of Six Nations: Seneca, Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga, Mohawk, and Tuscarora, brought together centuries ago through the efforts of a man called the Peacemaker. Known as the People of the Longhouse, the Haudenosaunee people are playing a contemporary leadership role in not only designing successful arts and cultural organizations of their own, but also engaging a variety of museum directors, curators, and educators through their art, music, dance, and storytelling performances—as well as collaborative efforts, which are helping to shape the direction of educational programming in a region known for its waterways, lush forests, animal life, and the rich cultural, political, and ecological legacy of their people.

The first in a three-part series, this article features interviews with and profiles of Haudenosaunee artists involved in New York State Folk Arts programs at Explore & More Children’s Museum (E&M 2018) in Buffalo, New York—the city chosen as the site of the 2018 American Folklore Conference, entitled “No Illusions, No Exclusions.” In the spirit of “common ground,” this article offers these Native...
American perspectives, as well as that of the Senior Manager of Learning and Education at Explore & More, and myself, a New York folklorist, who has worked with the museum on Haudenosaunee Days of Sharing for over a decade. My focus on the long view and detailing the process of engagement, outreach, and practice of collaborative work from 2009 to the present is intended to shed light on the diversity, strength, and vitality of Haudenosaunee artistic communities in the region and what representation in museum programs might look like, while posing questions about the future. In this regard, the article also points to efforts currently underway by Explore & More to deepen connections, develop partnerships, and design programs, installations, and exhibits that spark empathy and create awareness of Haudenosaunee worldviews and environmental issues. As Falk and Juan (2016) wrote in their article, “Native Eyes: The Power of Coming Together,” documenting the collaborative efforts between the Arizona State Museum and the Tohono O’odham Nation to call attention to indigenous knowledge and the shared resource of water: “Museums need to acknowledge the expertise of their community partners. All partners need to practice respect for what each brings to the table. This should be the norm as the result can be powerful, meaningful programs that honor cultural knowledge and link unique communities together.”

As points of comparison, subsequent articles in the series intend to offer yet another perspective on TEK by featuring native-run art centers like Ganondagan’s Seneca Art & Culture Center (Ganondagan 2017) in Rochester, New York. The historic site of the largest Seneca village in the area, Ganondagan has grown, over the past 20 years, from being a designated historic site with an interpretative center, recreated bark longhouse, and walking trails, to including a major art and cultural center. Moreover, it has forged alliances with the Rochester Museum & Science Center (RMSC 2018) and Memorial Art Gallery, several local colleges, and the Environmental Field Team (EFT), whose mission is focused on preserving, restoring, and enhancing natural resources.

The third article will look at yet another facet of TEK in the region by highlighting the efforts of indigenous activists and community scholars, who have created programs beyond museum walls in centers of higher learning, common spaces, and along waterfronts. Calling attention to traditional Haudenosaunee teachings and sensitive environmental issues, plants, waters, and water quality, they stress how stewardship of natural resources ultimately connected to peace and justice issues, underscored in the Great Law of the Peacemaker.

Through these different lens, the articles will serve not only as a record of local efforts and collaborations involving the TEK of Haudenosaunee, but as a prelude to discussions, one that will take place on October 18, 2018, at a forum revolving around TEK in museums and art centers, co-moderated by Lisa Rathje, PhD, executive director of Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education, and myself, at the American Folklore Society’s (AFS) Conference in Buffalo. A number of the artists featured in this article will be participating in the forum. In this way, both the articles and forum seek to fulfill the promise of Common Ground, by providing a virtual as well as physical commons, in which the sharing of ideas might act as a platform for educators to think about the place-based knowledge of indigenous people in their own regions and possible ways the knowledge can be incorporated into the educators’ own organizational programs and school curricula.

On yet another level, by taking up issues related to decolonizing museum education and affirming how indigenous epistemologies are foundational to outreach curriculum, the articles and forum demonstrate some of the ways in which the theme of this year’s AFS 2018 Conference in Buffalo, “No Illusions and No Exclusions,” is altogether appropriate and pertinent to today’s world, our work in the field, and what’s more, the continued health of the natural world.

**Coming to Explore & More**

Set to open in a new $24 million building along Buffalo’s waterfront, Explore & More Museum (E&M) is very much a part of the city’s efforts to revitalize and showcase the region’s natural resources along the shore of Lake Erie. Starting out as a collective of women in less than 2,000 square feet of the lower level of a repurposed school building in the southern tier of Erie County, Explore & More is now poised to reach tens of thousands of visitors from childhood and up, as well as school systems in the region. Stressing the direction of the museum and the commitment of its administration to working with members of the Haudenosaunee community on exhibits and curated houses planned in their new four-story building at Canalside, Amelia Blake, Senior Manager of Learning and Education noted:
E&M at Canalside is designed for and about WNY [Western New York]. Each of our Play Zones and exhibits are representative of the community we live in. This includes the representation of the cultures that make up that community. By showcasing how the Seneca/Haudenosaunee cultures interact with the environment, we hope to encourage children and adults to learn the importance of caring for our environment, as they [the Native peoples] have done so for centuries. (Blake 2018)

In my capacity as a college educator, media artist, and New York State Folk Arts consultant, I have worked with Haudenosaunee communities, artists, and Explore & More Museum educators on Haudenosaunee Days of Sharing. My perspective and passion for the programs are informed by the fact that I was born in western New York, in close proximity to Seneca or Onöndowa’ga:’ (Oh-nah-dob-wauh-gahwuh) reservations, where the names of rivers, towns, and parks mark the presence of the Haudenosaunee and their legacy. Over the years, my own perception of the environment has deepened, from direct experiences with and mentorship by Haudenosaunee storytellers, scholars, and friends.

Marian Miller, a Seneca elder, storyteller, and beadworker who served as an interpreter and trail guide in the early days at Ganondagan, was the first person to introduce me to the cosmology and worldview of the Haudenosaunee. Through my visits with her and trips to Ganondagan, I heard their Creation Story and learned how Skywoman, whose precipitous fall to Earth, landing on the back of a turtle, was softened by the help of animals and birds. As Marian noted, there is a dance that honors Haudenosaunee women, which resembles the movement of Skywoman’s feet, causing the earth on the back of that turtle to grow. I also learned that Skywoman carried seeds of foodstuffs, medicine plants in her hand from the Skyworld. Considered a gift from the Creator, Corn, Beans, and Squash, called Jöhehgöh Gaga:’ and meaning the Three Sisters or Sustainers of Life in the Seneca language, allowed the Haudenosaunee to survive long winters by providing all the essential nutrients for life. Planted together in mounds, The Three Sisters’ Garden at Ganondagan showcased some of the ways in which ecologically sound, centuries-old practices allowed beans to replenish the nitrogen in the soil depleted by the corn.

Through the oral tradition and stories, songs and dances about Skywoman, the Three Sisters, medicine plants, and animals, Haudenosaunee children learn to appreciate and give thanks for the diversity of the natural world at an early age. Visually, the beadwork designs that adorn the traditional dress, as well as personal items of the Haudenosaunee dancers and singers at Ganondagan, reflect

G. Peter Jemison (Seneca, Heron Clan), artist and Site Manager of Ganondagan State Historic Site and Seneca Arts and Cultural Center, will be giving the Thanksgiving Address, or Ganö:nyö:k, at the opening ceremony of the 2018 American Folklore Society Conference in Buffalo and participating in the forum on TEK in museums and arts centers. Photo taken at Ganondagan by Christine Zinni, 2015.
ecological elements of the Creation story by depicting plants and local clan animals and birds that comprise essential parts of their cosmology. Recitation of the Thanksgiving Address or Ganö:nyö:k (Gaw-nó:tayón), as it is known in the Seneca language, sharpens this focus on the biodiversity of the region even more, as it is said at all Haudenosaunee gatherings and ceremonies. At Ganondagan and different Haudenosaunee events that I have attended, the Ganö:nyö:k acknowledges and gives thanks for the particulars of regional environment—from plentiful waterways that course through the area, to medicine plants like wild strawberries, to the maple trees that provide shade and nourishment, to the two-legged birds and four-legged animals that cohabit the area, to the thunderous and plentiful rainfalls that keep the earth moist and fertile and plants green, and to the sun, moon, and stars that continue to support life.4

Fortunate to study works with noted Haudenosaunee scholars, thinkers, and activists—John Mohawk (Seneca), Barry White (Seneca), Rick Hill (Tuscarora), Oren Lyons (Onondaga), and Don Grinde (Yamasee) who founded the Indigenous Studies program at the State University of Buffalo—I learned from them the ways in which Haudenosaunee cosmology informed the rich legacy of political thought and philosophy propounded by the historical figure called the Peacemaker who brought the “Great Law” to their people.7 Through oral tradition and practice, the cosmology continues to suffuse the philosophy and practices of the Haudenosaunee. In this intellectual and cultural hub for Haudenosaunee research, and through seminar sessions and conferences in the department, I also have met members of Indigenous Women’s Initiative founded by Agnes Williams (Seneca), and witnessed firsthand the Haudenosaunee women’s leadership roles and activism in advocating for “Nature’s rights” and the cleanup of toxins in the waterways affecting their reservations and the region at large.6

After accepting a lectureship position to teach Native Studies at SUNY Brockport in 2007, I was contacted the following year by Claudia Newton, former education director at Explore & More, and folklorist Claire Aubrey. The museum had received grant funds from the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and the New York Folk Arts Program to create programs. I was asked to do outreach to indigenous artists and community members for their annual Haudenosaunee Day of Sharing for Culture Week. Along with stipends to the artists, funds from the grant would be used for documentation of artists’ work that would go into activity booklets to provide broader context for the workshops in the programs. Artist-driven decisions about the themes in the programs and content in the booklets were intended to counter stereotypes and engage visitors to the museum in learning about the history and beliefs of the Haudenosaunee through storytelling, material culture, music and dance performances, and workshops. More than “just facts,” these exchanges underscored the TEK of Haudenosaunee artists and different ways of seeing, perceiving, and understanding the workings of the natural world.7

Life in the Longhouse—A Spiritual and Sensory Experience

In 2008, Claudia put me in contact with Peter Jones (Onondaga, Beaver Clan), a
renowned clay artist brought up on the Seneca Cattaraugus Reservation, who had previously worked with the museum on individual workshops. Discussions with him followed, along with documentation of his work using local clay; he demonstrated a method of using coils to create traditional Haudenosaunee pottery and stamping tools called rockers, made from bones and antlers of animals, stone seashells, and wood, to create patterns for the decoration of the pots. His workshop at the Haudenosaunee Day of Sharing would create awareness of the Earth and local animals and shells. In this regard, it was determined that the activities related to his workshop in the booklet for the 2009 program would familiarize children with how the Haudenosaunee peoples’ lives in traditional longhouses were based on ecologically sound aspects of their food practices and related to their pottery. Thus, in so many ways, Peter’s workshop not only helped children tune into the historical practices of the Haudenosaunee, but also conjured up parts of the Creation Story, in which the Creator of Life picks up a handful of dirt and says, “the Earth is alive!”

The Haudenosaunee population around the city of Buffalo is predominantly comprised of members of the Seneca, Tuscarora, and Tonawanda Nations. Contacts at the Tuscarora Nation School near Niagara Falls lead me to noted beadworker
Doreen Rickard, an elder from the Tuscarora Nation. A beadworker and leatherworker, she decided to give a workshop that involved a simple leatherworking activity for children and recognition of some land, water, and air clan animals. Through these means, Doreen also raised awareness of the environment and the particular animals that inhabit the region—from deer and bear, to turtles and beavers, to herons, hawks, and snipes.

Along with the tactile experiences of pottery and leatherworking, we stressed the sensory experiences of taste in this program. On Peter’s recommendation, I contacted Arlette Stevens (Seneca) who ran a restaurant just down the road from where he lived on the Seneca Cattaraugus Reservation. A meeting and interview with her led to recipes for and inclusion of two kinds of traditional corn soup and strawberry drink for the program. It also created the opportunity to include one of my mentor Marian Miller’s stories about “How Wild Strawberries, Ojsdôda’sha’ (o jis don dot shah) Brought Peace,” which highlights the healing properties of the plant.

The Gift of Sustenance: Corn or Oneö’ (o nay oat)

Dewhurst and Hendrick’s (2016) article on “Dismantling Racism in Museum Education” notes the erasure of the beliefs, cultures, and bodies of people of color. In 2010, with another year of funding from NYSCA and the New York Folk Arts Grant, we were able to work with Haudenosaunee artists and community members to organize the Haudenosaunee Day of Sharing program for Culture Week again and highlight some of their traditional practices as they relate to the natural world, countering, in so many ways, parts of that erasure.

I contacted Ronnie Reitter (Seneca, Wolf Clan), who I knew through her work as a storyteller in the Bark Longhouse at Ganondagan and interpreter on its trails, as well as educator at the Rochester Museum & Science Center. Ronnie specializes in storytelling, beadwork, traditional clothing, and corn husk arts. Her workshops involved making corn husk dolls, while her stories underscored the roles that different elements of the corn plant played in the everyday life of Haudenosaunee people—from food, to matting for beds and insulation of the traditional longhouse, to items of play—hence, accentuating gratitude for this singular gift of Creation that allowed the Haudenosaunee to survive, as well as noting lessons about waste.

There were enough funds to support a dance group to give a performance and short workshop in the program. Niagara River Dance Troupe, lead by elders Nina and Orville Greene (Tuscarora), who taught their son Randy and other members of their family, as well as other members of the Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, to perform traditional songs and dances. Ceremonial dances are not permitted in public settings, so the troupe performed social dances in which a lead singer uses a water drum called Ga’nohgo:ôh (Ga’wbl-noub-gont) and backup singers use horn rattles on’gâ’ gasdawes’â’ (oh-honhl-ge-gahs-donh-wenh-shah) to give thanks, honor gifts of Creation, and reinforce traditional teachings. For example, as Randy notes, in their Round Dance, dancers move to the right, then shift to the left—this movement is meant to teach the importance of balance in all things. As Randy called attention to beadwork on the regalia of the dancers and singers—from their dresses, leggings, headdresses, barrettes, collars, breechcloths, leggings, and moccasins—and noted how it emphasized their appreciation of and connection to the animals of the region and also signified their clans.

We also reached out to Tuscarora elders/storytellers Jay and Teresa Clause and their daughter Jill, who is also a beadworker and member of the Indigenous Women’s network. For their workshop, Jay and Teresa brought artifacts and prepared traditional Tuscarora corn soup, made from green corn. They talked about the significance of different heritage corn seeds. Jill related the Haudenosaunee Creation story, showed different beadwork items that reflected elements of the story, and also gave a workshop in which children made beaded bracelets. In this way, through collaborative work with these multigenerational artists in 2010, in our program and activity booklets,
learners were introduced to the narrative of the Haudenosaunee Creation Story and Oneö—one of main gifts of substance and survival for the Haudenosaunee, as well as for immigrant groups that settled in the region.8

A Word on the Process
Outreach to community members and organizations, identification of artists, and meetings or telephone conversations with them to plan workshops took several months, as many of the Haudenosaunee artists live on reservations that are 30-60 or more miles from the city of Buffalo. That coupled with research and fieldwork documenting artists’ work and interviews and events went into each 12-page activity booklet, co-authored with the artists, and with Claudia Newton and former Artistic Director Jeannet de Jong’s help, executed in 11x 8-inch format with color pages on the cover and back. At every step of the publication and program, artists participated in the decision-making process and representations

The Niagara River Dancers at the Sanborn Family Farm Festival. Photos courtesy of the Greene Family archives.
of their work. Moreover, the booklets were not simply handouts to children and adults at the programs, but meant to further engage learners in conversations with the artists and staff about Haudenosaunee history, beliefs, and traditions. From my experience working with the Haudenosaunee community, I was aware of issues involving use of image and representation of worldview and beliefs. Each interview segment and activity page in the booklet was sent to each artist for feedback and approval, while the booklet as a whole was sent out to everyone for a consensus of approval before printing. As can be well imagined, this collaborative process was lengthy, but necessary and correct, as it corresponded to Haudenosaunee views about respect for individual perspectives, but also consensus among the group before something moves forward.

The Play Stations in the museum are geared primarily to pre-school–8th grade children. Further challenges in the booklet were to appeal to young children but strike as much of a balance as possible to appeal to multigenerations. For this reason, text aimed to provide background on the Haudenosaunee—their beliefs, practices, and knowledge—could not always be covered as extensively as one might find in a book geared primarily for adults. Each booklet did contain numerous images and drawings by Jeannet de Jong. For instance, based on photos of Ronnie Reitter’s corn husk dolls, Jeannet created a coloring page that was meant to engage younger children in conversation with Ronnie and help them recognize and learn about different elements of traditional Haudenosaunee clothing and about plants, birds, and animals depicted in her beadwork designs.

The Three Sisters: Medicinal Plants and the Thanksgiving Address, or Ganó:nyö:k

With continued funding from grants, along with fundraising efforts on the part of the museum, in 2011 an expanded effort included reaching out to Buffalo’s Native American Culture Center and Services (NACC). Ruchatneet Printup (Tuscarora), coordinator at the Center, introduced me to beadworker Vivian Bradley (Six Nations, Canada, Turtle Clan), who designed a workshop in which children made strawberries from felt and learned that wild strawberries or Ojisdöda’shå’ were considered medicine plants with healing properties by the Haudenosaunee. Like Jill’s workshop the year before, through this activity, the children were introduced to beading techniques. Ruchatneet also contacted his son Gahnew Printup, whose group called The Bundled Arrows Singers and Dancers (a reference to the Peacemaker’s teaching and call to unity among individual Haudenosaunee Nations) performed social dances in which many children were happy to participate.

Jill Clause shared traditional stories that stressed gratitude and human relations to plants and animals—like the Three Sisters or Ganó:nyö:k, which are considered gifts from the Creator that sustain and nurture the Haudenosaunee. She noted how plants served as food, clothing, works of arts, games, and healing in traditional Haudenosaunee society, and how gratitude for
Hiawatha Wampum Belt, symbolizing the original five nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy: the square on left represents the Seneca Nation (Keepers of the Western Door of the Longhouse); the tree in the middle, The Great White Pine, symbol of the Confederacy and Onondaga Nation (Firekeepers of the Council of Chiefs); and the square on the far right, the Mohawk Nation (Keepers of the Eastern Door). The other two squares represent the Cayuga and Oneida Nations. The Tuscarora Nation entered the Confederacy (1722) after it was formed. Belt crafted by Richard D. Hamell. Photo courtesy of Richard D. Hamell.

Jöhehgöh, or Three Sisters, the Sustainers. Courtesy of Rochester Museum & Science Center.

Vivian Bradley’s beadwork collar. Photo by Christine Zinni.

these gifts is expressed in the telling and retelling of the Creation Story and the Ganö:nyö:k or Thanksgiving Address. Her workshop also involved a planting activity, which corresponded to activity pages in the booklet on the Three Sisters and introduction of Seneca words.

Once again, although the preparation of the booklets was a long process, with several rounds of interviews and documentation and representation approved, amended, or enhanced, the results were booklets that were co-authored by the artists and a program that was determined in collaboration with them.

Creation Story and the Tuscarora Nation’s Picnic Field Days

Through my work with Tuscarora artists, I was encouraged to attend the Tuscarora Picnic and Field Day in July of 2011, which I had heard had been celebrated in a clearing in the woods, near the Tuscarora Nation School in Niagara Falls for 173 years. The three-day event features competition, dances, vendors, and arts and crafts. Traditional corn soup was made in large cauldrons, a practice that involved community members getting together earlier to hull, pound, and prepare the kernels. During the picnic, I documented Jill, her children, and parents in traditional dress joining in the dance competitions; tables that involved beadwork competitions; and a display and newsletter published by the local Haudenosaunee Environmental Network.

Through Claudia Newton’s connections with Vince Schiffert, an educator at the Nation School, in the fall of the 2011, I attended a corn-braiding session at Norton and Marlene Rickard’s farm on the Tuscarora Reservation with a friend from the Seneca Tonawanda Reservation. From documentation, discussions, and interviews at these two events, we worked collaboratively with different members of the Tuscarora community to develop activities in the 2012 booklet, which accompanied the Haudenosaunee Day of Sharing program related to
the practices around planting, processing, and preparation of corn.

Once again, Jill’s bead workshop stressed elements of the Creation Story. In our 2012 program, she related it to the beadwork designs on her collar or yoke and the regalia she wore at Tuscarora Field Days, which were documented in the booklet. Another activity in the booklet centered about the process of making traditional cornbread from planting of the heirloom seeds, husking the ears of corn, braiding the corn for stages, hulling and drying and lying with ashes, pounding kernels and boiling loaves. Jill brought in some cornbread and strawberry drink for children and their parents to taste.

Randy Greene and his family, who also entered competitions at the Tuscarora Field Days, gave a dance workshop at this program. Noting how his performances were meant to honor the Earth and gift of Creation, he underscored some of the ways in which dance brings happiness. My motto is “Live, Eat, Pray. Love and Dance!” he said.

In the intervening years between 2013 and 2016, Jill Clause, Randy Greene, and several other Haudenosaunee artists were asked to give workshops and performances during E&M summer outdoor programs, along the waterfront, as well as individual events during the year. During this time, I was asked by the museum to do research and outreach in Yemeni and Burmese communities for the NYSCA Folk Arts Programs for the museum’s Culture Week.

In 2017, in collaboration with Amelia Blake, Senior Manager of Learning and Education in the museum’s transition to its new site at Canalside, I reached out to artists on the Cattaraugus and Allegany Reservations to help create another Haudenosaunee Day of Sharing. To this end, Onondaga clay artist Peter Jones; Samantha Jacobs, Seneca beadworker, involved in revitalization efforts of language and gardening on the Cattaraugus Reservation; and Alan George (Cayuga), wampum holder at the Longhouse on the Allegany Reservation and his son Jake (Seneca) gave workshops. (Profiles of these artists are included at the end of this article.)

Working together on booklets, the format was changed to a smaller size that children could carry with them and have signed by the artists. With Samantha’s help, we strived to incorporate more Seneca words for children to learn. In comparison to past years, the amount of text was lessened, but the amount of imagery was enhanced to appeal to and involve younger audiences, encouraging them to interact with the artists and ask more questions.

The 2018 program was part of museum’s process to reach out to indigenous communities in the region and incorporate their history and culture into the design of exhibits and programming at the new building along the waterfront. As Amelia Blake noted:

This process began in 2016 with a meeting with the Seneca–Iroquois National Museum. E&M staff shared our exhibit plans with the staff from SINM [Seneca–Iroquois National Museum 2013] and incorporated feedback on how to incorporate Seneca culture throughout the Museum. One idea that came from this meeting was the design of “Little Slip” in our Moving Water Play Zone. This area is designed for our youngest visitors and will evoke Seneca and

Wild strawberries, a medicine plant indigenous to the area, said to be brought to the Earth by Skywoman in the Haudenosaunee Creation Story. Beadwork by Annette Mary Clause, an accomplished Tuscarora beadworker who has won many national awards for her designs since the age of 18. Mary has taught classes at the Tuscarora Nation School and has influenced many other Haudenosaunee beadworkers in the area over the years.
Haudenosaunee cultural traditions. Haudenosaunee artist Lyle Logan (Seneca/Deer Clan) created a unique work of art which overlays Little Slip, simulating a water table or basin where children can play and learn. Clan imagery and other important symbols are incorporated along the base of the tables/basin and hang from the ceiling above. The imagery is designed to highlight Haudenosaunee culture and beliefs and the significance of water in sustaining the region’s plants, animals, and birds and maintaining a delicate ecological balance. (Blake 2018)

In early 2017, E&M made the decision to showcase the Seneca Nation as one of our three community-curated houses within the new museum. Underscoring the fact that the museum staff will be working with individuals and organizations within the Seneca Nation “at every step of the process to ensure our community-curated houses are planned, designed, and executed in a way that respectfully highlights the beauty and traditions of the Seneca,” Amelia states that artists are critical in this process, “because children and families easily relate to art. It is a common ground between cultures and a beautiful way to visually represent cultures in a new light.”

The Traditional Ecological Knowledge of the Haudenosaunee will not only be reflected in the design of the museum’s water exhibit and the curated “house,” but also in exhibits and programs which, according to Blake, “explore how Haudenosaunee culture interacts with the environment in which we live and how this differs from other cultures.” Three Sisters’ Agriculture will be a part of this learning experience at the museum, because as Amelia notes, “the Haudenosaunee culture has a unique way of growing vegetables—the Three Sisters planting, where in the same mound, they grow beans, corn, and squash. Each plant helps the others grow stronger and create a balanced meal once eaten. This type of planting will be represented in the new Museum.”

Aiming to “provide the best in play experiences where all children, families, and the community can explore, learn, and develop together,” Amelia emphasizes the fact that “in order to help fulfill our mission, we want every visitor to see themselves in our Museum—this includes representing the different cultures and communities that make up our diverse region!”

As Hoffman, Lemmon, and Shultes (2018) underscore in their article about “Breaking Down Stereotypes at the Iroquois Indian Museum,” museums can be vehicles for initiating change by presenting different points of view. The voices, viewpoints, artworks, and expressive culture of Haudenosaunee storytellers, artists, and musicians of our region not only help to counter stereotypes, but point to ways in which visitors to museums and art centers can further appreciate, understand, and act as good stewards of our fragile environment in a time of rapid environmental change.9

Amelia Blake, Senior Manager of Learning and Education at E&M, at strawberry workshop at 2018 Haudenosaunee Day of Sharing. Photo by Christine Zinni.
Notes

1. This term is in current use. For instance, the National Park Service defines Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) as “the on-going accumulation of knowledge, practice and belief about relationships between living beings in a specific ecosystem that is acquired by indigenous people over hundreds or thousands of years through direct contact with the environment, handed down through generations, and used for life-sustaining ways…. It encompasses the worldview of a people, which includes ecology, spirituality, human and animal relationships, and more” (NPS 2016). See, also, Robbins (2018) and his reference to anthropologist Wade Davis’ use of the term ‘ethnosphere’ to indicate the collective sum total of all thoughts and dreams, myths, ideas, inspirations brought into being by human imagination since the dawn of consciousness.….  

2. “Native Eyes” (Falk and Juan 2016) is exemplary in its focus on the process of building partnerships and programs that raise not only cultural awareness but also environmental awareness. Mike Muraswski’s (2016) “The Urgency of Empathy and Social Impact in Museums” and Marit Dewhurst and Keonna Hendrick’s (2016) “Dismantling Racism” are also excellent articles based on best practices and pedagogy found in the *Journal of Folklore and Education* issue on “Intersections: Folklore and Museum Education.”


4. Peter Jemison (Seneca, Heron Clan), Artist and Historic Site Manager at Ganondagan will be opening the American Folklore Conference in Buffalo with the Ganonynnok.

5. Among other places, the story of the Peacemaker and his teachings are contained in books authored by scholars from the American Studies Department at SUNY/Buffalo. See José Barriero’s (2010) *Thinking in Indian: A John Mohawk Reader* (published posthumously after Mohawk’s death in 2007), as well as Lyons’ and Mohawk’s (1991) *Exiled in the Land of the Free and Mohawk’s (2005a)* Introduction to *Basic Call to Consciousness*. I note the influence of this time in the American Studies Department in my essay “Becoming Storied” (Zinni 2017).

6. Agnes has been involved in longstanding work on environmental issues. See *Emerging Activist Leadership Conference* (EALP 2010), a video produced in collaboration with Agnes Williams and the Indigenous Women’s Network (IWN 2014), through a Ford Foundation Grant.

7. See “Native Knowledge Article: What Ecologists are Learning from Native Peoples” (Robbins 2018).

8. Haudenosaunee used shell beads and quills before the introduction of glass beads by European contact. See Richard Hamell’s (2017) work on wampum belts and Rick Hill’s (2017) drawings of early beadwork.


Bibliography


Blake, Amelia. 2018. Personal correspondence with Christine Zinni (May and July).


**Further Reading**


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**Field Days on the Tuscarora Reservation**

Since 1840, Tuscarora people of all ages have gathered together to celebrate their annual Picnic and Field Days on the Tuscarora Reservation near Niagara Falls, New York. Held in a large glen north of the Tuscarora Indian school near Route 31, it features Native drumming and dancing, raised beadwork competitions, a contest for Miss Tuscarora, and footraces, as well as a fireball “medicine” game for healing. Traditional Tuscarora corn soup and cornbread is made in large cauldrons in the center of the clearing, and strawberry drink and Indian fry bread are also available. The Haudenosaunee Environmental Youth Corps (HEYC) have a table at the Picnic where they discuss the projects they are working on with young people. The Youth Corps “seek to envision and build environmental and cultural restoration at the community, Nation, and Confederacy levels,” by involving Tuscarora youth in a variety of projects from retracing the migration history of the Tuscarora people by canoe and foot, to restoration of wetlands, and raising awareness of local plants and animals. For more information on the activities of the HEYC, see the website: http://www.hetf.org/projects

![Making traditional corn bread at the Tuscarora Picnic. Photo by Christine Zinni.](Image)
Jill Clause

Raised headwork is highly prized in our Tuscarora community. It gives a three-dimensional look. We live in a beautiful colorful world! It is so nice to see flowers, birds, and leaves in beadwork. You also will see designs based on the Sky Dome, Essential Fire in our Longhouses, and the Celestial Tree.

Something that I loved about the Creation Story, even as a young girl, is that it helped me understand my place in the natural world—in the natural order. It talks about Grandfather Sun—how He got to be here, the Moon—how She got to be there, Mother Earth, the back of a Turtle, women’s place—it all falls into place. You can adorn yourself with the Creation Story through your beadwork. You can wear it on your sleeves and on your leggings. In this way, beadwork is not only about wearing something beautiful and being beautiful, but acknowledging the natural world that we live in: the strawberries, birds, flowers—everything that we value as Haudenosaunee people is there.

I am a Tuscarora Turtle woman with traditional values. We are a matrilineal society. Everything has been passed down from our mother as far back as times go. I hope that what we as a people have preserved can help the children in this world. I like to work with children with wire and beads. My grandmother, Sarah Dubuc was a wireworker. She had 13 children. Beading was her passion! She never taught me. I just looked at her work and learned. I hope to share with children at Explore & More what I have learned from her.
PETER JONES (Onondaga, Beaver Clan) is a renowned potter and sculptor whose work has been exhibited at numerous museums, including the Smithsonian. Most recently, he has been honored with the First Nations Award for his artwork. He was able to hone his skill as a potter and learn ancient techniques from a Hopi teacher, Otellie Loloma. Peter is known for incorporating what he calls “Indian Humor” into his work.

I use clay as a medium because I can work with it directly and form it into whatever I wish to express. The artwork that I make is based on my heritage and my experiences growing up on the Cattaraugus Indian Reservation.

I create pottery and ceramic sculpture using two methods. Much of my work is wheel thrown and kiln fired, but I also use native clays to make hand-built, coiled pottery that is pit fired in a wood fire. These pots reflect our original Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) pottery, which was made with local clay gathered from streambeds and altered with the addition of crushed shell, crushed granitic rock, and sand to create a clay body that was useful and durable after it was fired.

Clay itself has long been recognized as having healing properties. It has been used on wounds, bee stings, and in cooking to remove poisons from certain foods. Working with clay has also been found to be useful to maintain and heal mental health.

When I began researching our Iroquois pottery and teaching myself how to make it, my objective was to build a core group of potters throughout the Six Nations Confederacy. I learned how to make a pot from start to finish with nothing more than a supply of clay, a few handmade tools, and fire. This was over 25 years ago, and over that time, through trial and error, I have developed methods of making and firing pots that have proven to be quite successful. I have offered classes and workshops throughout the Six Nations Communities to share with others what I have learned. My instruction begins with finding the natural clay, processing it, and forming pottery with it.

When people think of Native pottery, they think of Southwestern pottery. I want to change this and make it clear that the
Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) people had a pottery history, too, and that our pottery continues to have cultural resonance among us. Our identity is vital to our survival as a people.

Our people are also victims of trauma, whether intergenerational or generational. To create with clay and to make old-style pottery and clay ceremonial pipes connects us to a way of life that we admire. When people are working with clay—whether it be my own people or children and adults in museum and art center settings, they are focused on producing something that is uniquely theirs, something that they imagine in their mind's eye and that will result in an object that has meaning to them. It is relaxing and allows your mind to think creatively. Aggression can be taken out on the clay, as you pound it and work it into a usable state. If a pot breaks, it can be repaired or rebuilt. There are no mistakes; there is only learning, as in life. Clay work involves the elements of earth, wind, water, and fire—the basic elements of life that, when combined correctly, yield an object of beauty and function.

Bringing back something that has been lost to time has given me a sense of satisfaction, and I am intent on passing this on to others. Those learning to create pottery are participating not only in reviving an ancient art but also by connecting to their inner selves. These lessons are valuable to making us whole as a people again.

I think Haudenosaunee people's involvement in all aspects of the representation of our culture is important to convey a true and realistic interpretation of who we are. In the past, museums have been built to house artifacts as proof of our existence, as though we were no longer a people. It's important that we speak up and take part. As for what the children gain by meeting and watching a “real” Native person work and live—it gives them a different perspective that we are a living, viable culture in the 21st century.
Artist Statement of Samantha Jacobs

Samantha Jacobs (Seneca, Turtle Clan) of the Turtle Clan learned beadwork, as a child, from her mother. After years of traveling the Pow Wow Trail, she became proficient in leatherwork, as well as beadwork. Samantha was an active member of the Buffalo Creek Dancers, which functioned as both a performance and educational group, traveling the country to perform. As a community educator, she has expanded her repertoire to include other traditional arts like tufting and quillwork. She showcases her beadwork in juried art shows and is a member of the Native Roots Artist’s Guild. She has won awards for her beadwork designs in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

I incorporate the motifs symbolic of the Creation story into my work, because the knowledge and cultural heritage of my
People find the foundation of who we are from the story. I see beadwork as an opportunity to showcase my skills as an artist, but also as an educational opportunity. For those who see the beads, it is a chance to understand more about who we are as Haudenosaunee—an opportunity to see the iconography of what we hold dear, what we believe in, and what we give thanks for.

The Three Sisters, in Seneca, more correctly termed Jöhehgöh, is translated as “Our Life Sustainers.” We acknowledge not only the sustenance provided, but also the supportive nature and delicate balance of the food system of Jöhehgöh in our Thanksgiving Address and in our motifs found in our art.

Wild strawberries known as Shesah Ojisdöda'sha' are considered a medicine, because they are the first berry of the year. The Haudenosaunee give thanks for and acknowledges strawberries during the Thanksgiving Address and when they ripen in June. Strawberries are also prominent in Haudenosaunee beadwork designs. A five-petal flower in beadwork design is sometimes used to represent the original Haudenosaunee Nations: Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca.

Traditional ecological knowledge involves understanding that there is a balance to the world, knowing not to take more than what you need, learning to do no harm, and seeing these concepts firsthand as instrumental to learning and carrying them forward. These traditional concepts are foundational to understanding the relationship that we as people have with the environment.

I feel it is important that museums and art centers invite indigenous artists to share their knowledge and beliefs. Being able to talk and work with knowledge bearers, such as indigenous artists, gives the public at museums and art centers chances to ask questions and interact on personal levels that could not happen in any other form. Each interaction is a teachable moment. What’s the purpose of a museum if it’s not to learn and pass on knowledge? Nothing beats learning from the source.
ALAN GEORGE (Cayuga) of the Bear Clan is a wampum holder and Faithkeeper of the Allegany Seneca at the Coldspring Longhouse on the Allegany Reservation. His son, Jake George (Seneca) of the Turtle Clan is a member of the Seneca Nation, a language teacher, and wampum helper alongside his father. They are both champion Smoke Dancers, who strongly believe in their traditions.

Most of our social dances are about what the Creator has provided us and honor all parts of nature—the plants, and animals. I learned both the ceremonial and social dances from elders in my community. I have a format when we do our social dances in public: in our first dance, we honor our women, because we are a matrilineal society, and they are our lifegivers, sustainers, and clan mothers. It is said that when women are dancing, they are caressing Mother Earth. We also perform a moccasin dance, which honors our ancestors, who passed our customs and traditions on to us. We have a fish dance, one of the ways we acknowledge and give thanks for life in the waters. Our social dances were given to us as “medicine,” because of hard days we had worked. During the evening, dancing relieved those hardships. These dances are taught and learned from generation to generation; they keep our cultural ways intact and offer thanks for Creation.

We use a water drum made out of wood that has water in it, and as you hit it, the vibration goes into the motion of air and carries the sound. I recall when I was young, my dad would start singing, and other singers would show up from three-quarters of a mile away. When you beat on the drum, it is like a heartbeat. We use horn rattles from cows in our social dances and turtle rattles for our ceremonial dances, and Great Feather for medicine society. On back of a turtle, the thirteen squares represent 13 moons; there are 28 marks on the turtle’s sides, the number of days in our months. That is why we say, “the world is on a turtle’s back.” That is how the Creation story started; birds saw her (Skywoman) fall, and they put her on the back of a turtle. Muskrats went down as far as they could into the water to get earth.
I feel it is important that indigenous artists/musicians and dancers be involved in museum programming, because the first impression that non-native people often have is that we are savages. Once they find out what we do is taking care of the Earth and thanking it, it helps to ease the tensions. That is how education can help. A lot of times, it is taken for granted that all of nature will be available all the time, but if we ruin it, it won't be there. In the Thanksgiving Address, which has been given for a long time, the first thing we do as people is to give thanks to the people who have come to the gathering and if someone is sick, we ask the Creator and the four Messengers to help. Then, we give thanks to the Earth and everything put on the Earth, so they can be happy with us. We always start with what is on the Earth, then we go up to the Sky, Sun, Moon, and Stars, and the Four Messengers, and our teachers, and the laws they gave us to live by. Then we give thanks again to the Creator, as we still use the things He provided, because when He thought of the people He wanted each one of us to be happy as we walk this Earth. We thank Him for that.

The same social dances were performed in all the Six Nations of the Confederacy, as it was considered one longhouse. All the dances are still done in all longhouses, and we are all included from oldest to youngest. When a child participates in a dance, he instinctively knows he is part of something that is good, and it gives him enjoyment to be part of something that is true—a sense of the truth. There is also a connection to the older people in our dances; they are a part of that as well, and it is still going on today.

I feel our song and dance performances in different schools, museums, and centers, for different age groups, are good ways to cultivate respect and understanding of Haudenosaunee traditions—because when young preople grow up, they will have a different view of Native people. Hatred and animosity will not be there. They will acknowledge us. We don't say our world is the best; they (non-native people) have their own way. We don't try to push our way of life on people. We make it available for educational purposes, and people find out we are not different than they are, and when they do these things, the mind changes.

If I walk into a museum, they have history and talk of certain things that happened that we know from experience—from oral tradition. A lot people don't know that when you plant a garden—and I was told by an elder that you could take your shoes off and walk in the garden and your feet will know—the feeling you have from all the earth, the plants, and roots will heal you. The medicine pine trees, if you have problems, will solve them for you. There are medicines planted on this Earth for every illness that is known to man. This is the knowledge I possess. I can only speak for myself; I can't speak for different people.
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Let’s Go to the Beach!  BY DAN BERGGREN

“…in every curving beach, in every grain of  sand there is the story of  the earth.”—Rachel Carson

What is it about sandy places near water that draws people? No matter where they’re located, the results of  weathering and erosion are very popular around the world. Narrow or wide, these gently sloping strips of  land lie along the edges of  oceans, lakes, or even rivers. There are world famous ones on the Greek Islands, Virgin Islands, Hawaiian Islands, the Riviera, the Maldives, and the Seychelles. And there are small, little known places that no one mentions for fear of  giving away a family vacation secret.

New York State, with over 7,600 freshwater lakes, ponds, and reservoirs—and more than 70,000 miles of  rivers and streams—is bountiful in beaches. There are ocean beaches like Cooper’s, Jones, and Coney Island; and beaches on the Great Lakes—the eponymous Ontario Beach and Sunset Bay Beach on Lake Erie. Even the Finger Lakes have beaches, like Otsego’s Glimmerglass State Park. Twenty-five of  the Department of  Environmental Conservation’s (DEC) campgrounds in the Catskills and Adirondacks have beaches, and two are even named for the beaches—Golden Beach and Moffitt Beach. There are municipal beaches that are extremely well populated, like Lake George’s Million Dollar Beach and out-of-the-way ones like the town beach at Minerva Lake (more on that later). One of  most unique and remote locations comes at the end of  a DEC-maintained hiking trail to Blue Ledge in the Adirondacks, known for its steep cliff that’s always in the shade. A sandy beach right alongside the mighty Hudson River awaits the hiker at the end of  the 2.5-mile trail—it’s not much bigger than a large living room. It’s the perfect spot to rest, enjoy the scenery, listen to the roar of  the river, and depending on the season, see a raft or kayak go bouncing along the rapids.

Okay, it’s time for  a true confession: I was a beach boy. No, not one of  The Beach Boys who formed in the early 1960s and still perform almost six decades later, but a boy of  14 who worked at a beach one summer long ago. Recently, I returned to Donnelly Beach on Minerva Lake and reminisced about that time and place. Essex County’s Town of  Minerva had a program that ran throughout July and August, giving two weeks of  employment to two teenagers at a time. More importantly, it gave us the opportunity to learn about working, having responsibilities, earning a wage, and developing a sense of  civic duty. Each morning, I’d arrive at seven to pick up trash, rake the beach, check fireplaces in the campground, and restock supplies in the bathhouse and bathrooms. After helping the lifeguard carry and position the rescue boat, I could turn my attention to one of  the longer-term projects like painting picnic tables or keeping the lake trail clear. Of  course, there was also the opportunity to take a midday dip, then have a sandwich brought from home, or splurge on French fries and a hot dog from “The Stand,” while visiting with friends. What more could a teenager ask for? And as a bonus, with the money I earned from that summer’s beach boy duties, I bought my first guitar.

The good people of  Minerva Township didn’t always have a beach. In fact, there wasn’t even a lake. It was in 1930 that the Town Board voted to approve construction of  a dam on Jones Brook to form a lake on property owned by the local Baptist minister, the Reverend F. M. LaBar. The following year, work was begun on this project. It gave much needed employment to Depression-era families, beginning with cutting trees and excavation that left behind a couple of  islands in the midst of  this local wonder.

Francis Donnelly, who had come from a family of  public servants, was assessor at the time. A few years later in 1934, he became Town Supervisor, an office he held for 46 years—the record for  the longest consecutively serving elected official in the nation. He spent much time and energy on the project, including having the beach area changed from the northwest end of  the lake, where car access was rather steep, to the southern shore. This required sand to be drawn out on the ice in winter, to fall into place during the next spring’s thaw. In 1958, the beach was dedicated to Francis and renamed Donnelly Beach.

A few families have small camps near the beach, and others have been coming for generations to set up their tent or camper, but day use of  the beach is the biggest attraction. In addition to things you’d expect like swimming and boating, there are tennis and basketball courts, picnic tables under the pines, pavilions to host gatherings like family or alumni reunions, a bandstand where concerts are held, a playground with swings, and on special occasions, firework displays that originate on one of  the islands in the middle. There is “the cove,” where boys and girls demonstrate their bravery by swinging from a rope into the cold, deep water. At “the point,” you can get away from the crowd to have a quiet conversation and maybe a kiss. A peaceful trail leads down near the dam that made this lake possible. In the winter, there are ice-skating and hockey.

Donnelly Beach is not only an intensely personal memory of  my beach boy days, it’s a friendly public place I still visit and enjoy, whether it’s to see friends and former neighbors, present programs for the historical society, or give concerts in the bandstand. The pride and hard work of  all those who care for this place is apparent. Francis Donnelly would be pleased to see its progress and to know how many people continue to enjoy his efforts and those of  the hard-working folks of  Minerva.  

Dan Berggren’s roots are firmly in the Adirondacks, but his music has taken him throughout the United States and abroad. Dan has worked in the woods with a forest ranger and surveyor, was a radio producer in Europe, professor of  audio and radio studies at SUNY Fredonia, and owner of  Sleeping Giant Records. An award-winning musician and educator, Dan is also a tradition-based songsmith who writes with honesty, humor, and a strong sense of  place. Visit www. berggrenfolk.com to learn more about Dan and his music. Photo by Jessica Riehl.
“This Must Be The Place”  
BY MOLLY GARFINKEL

Some of the best words are untranslatable. In German, *fernweh* means the yearning for a place one has never been. Literally a “farsickness” or “aching for distance places,” it is the antonym of *heimweh*, “a great longing for the distant home or a loved one living there, with whom one felt secure.” We experience these seemingly opposing impulses sometimes separately, other times simultaneously; when overlapped, we are compelled to unplug and go far away, so that we can feel at home—in our own lives—once again.

By most accounts, this condition finds its cure at Sunny’s Bar in Red Hook. Crossing the threshold from Conover Street into the pub and realizing that you’ve reached the edge of the world, the seeker becomes still. After sipping a beer and soaking in strains of blues from the back room, the restless inevitably find repose. Wanderlust and homesickness take their cues to head back out the door into the waterfront winds that dance down the street toward the bay, their wake flicking daylight through the windows and off stainless steel coffee urns, beer bottles, and pint glasses. In the evening, the sunset splashes itself across the bar and pastel walls where the late Sunny Balzano’s abstract canvases hang with quiet confidence over contented customers who all want to stay a while, maybe forever. In German, this would be called *gemütlichkeit*; in Swedish it is *gömmilighet*. The Dutch and Danes, respectively, recognize it as *gezelligheid* or *hygge*. Though they vary in precise meaning and context, these terms all convey something convivial, familiar. They also indicate something deeper—the intimacy of reuniting with a friend, time passed with loved ones, or the togetherness that gives people feelings of belonging.

Like well-crafted words, prized places are evocative, idiosyncratic, precise, and untranslatable. Sunny’s Bar is one of them. As seasoned musician and bartender Mara Kaye says, “You can’t fake this. You can’t build a bar that smells like this. You can’t build a bar that feels like this. This is the pay off of time.” It’s true. And Sunny’s wouldn’t make sense anywhere but Red Hook. A longtime resident and patron insisted that the winds and waters around the peninsula provide Red Hook with a different atmosphere from the rest of New York City, in both literal and figurative senses. Cut off from convenient MTA connections, it has its own biorhythm. It takes a certain type to tolerate the area’s mischievous meteorology and remote location, but Red Hook isn’t just a laid-back coastal cul-de-sac. The raw immediacy of the coastline and the vastness of the sky offshore together yield a unique vitality. Red Hook, as a Caribbean proverb goes, “lives on an eyelash,” a fragile ecosystem entirely exposed to the elements. Here, a sense of community is key to surviving the tacit ceasefire with nature, and Sunny’s is a critical piece of that delicate peace. It is the stalwart watering hole, music venue, living room, studio, temple, confessional, and rallying point for community members near and far who value the bar and surrounding terrain for their common characteristics—scrappy and soulful, elemental and ever-evolving, textured and polished in the way that only comes from weathering many storms.

Sunny’s Bar and the building next door have been in Antonio “Sunny” Balzano’s family for over one hundred years. The now eponymous establishment was first opened in 1890 as John’s Bar and Restaurant, eventually becoming a go-to breakfast and beer spot for the sailors and stevedores who worked the local waterfront when Red Hook was a shipping hub. In 1934, Sunny was born in the tenement adjacent to the restaurant. He and his siblings were raised in that upstairs apartment, and Sunny lived there until he passed in 2016.

His father, Rafael, ran John’s Bar and Restaurant until falling ill in 1980. Sunny, who had been living as an artist in India, returned home to pursue his painting while helping with the family business. He found John’s nearly unchanged, but the longshoremen were long gone, containerization having shifted shipping to New Jersey. When industry left, the neighbors went, too. Sunny’s uncle ran the restaurant, but only opened the place during the day; patrons were hardly hanging down the doors. Soon the neighborhood’s ample and affordable industrial spaces drew artists and musicians to Red Hook. The newcomers started hanging out at John’s Bar and Restaurant, and Sunny, despite his uncle’s misgivings, eventually developed them into an occasional but popular nighttime bar crowd. Live theater and musical performances were part of the draw, much to his uncle’s chagrin.

Still focused on his painting, Sunny only took full command of business operations when his uncle died in 1994; two years later, the bar’s liquor license expired. Sunny saw a new opportunity. He eliminated the food menu and turned the bar into a music and gathering space that only opened on Friday nights. With no license, he offered alcohol in exchange for “donations.” The formula worked, and the speakeasy and its immensely likeable steward became the spiritual center of Red Hook. But the liquor board wasn’t charmed, and in 2001, Sunny and his wife, Tone Balzano Johansen, were forced to shutter the bar. The resulting, resounding disappointment of their patrons, friends, and neighbors made them realize that they had something worth fighting for. A year and what seemed like miles of red tape later, Sunny’s got a new liquor license. By May 2002, the bar officially reopened, but only on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and whenever the couple felt like it.

Its sporadic schedule notwithstanding, Sunny’s has become a venerable venue. Musicians, major and minor alike, continue to pack the back room to overflowing. Smokey Hormel is the regular Wednesday...
headliner; Saturdays are for showcasing the beloved bluegrass jam (headed by Tone on guitar); and Stevie from the band St. Lou plays a set every Friday. Around these esteemed acts, Sunny's musical roster is stuffed with blues, folk, and jazz outfits that more than hold their own. The stools, booths, back room, and yard are usually packed; the house is cash-only, and beer is the preferred poison. On nights when cash and shots are flowing, the bar has been known to nearly run out of everything but stories.

In the last five years, the community anchor has become vulnerable to rising sea levels and waves of gentrification washing down Brooklyn from points north. During October 2012's Hurricane Sandy, the bar was severely damaged and Tone nearly killed; three months later, Sunny's was still closed and losing income, but not heart. A message on their website read, "we are hurt but OK in the grand scheme of things, so please try to devote your attention to those who need it most." The message included a link to redhook.reversers.org.

Thanks to karma, Tone's can-do spirit, and massive outpouring of love from the neighbors and fan base, the bar raised $100,000 and rebuilt. Sunny passed away in March 2016, at the age of 81, and a year later, Tone found herself trying to fundraise $65,000 to beef up a down payment on the building, which most joint shareholders in the extensive Balzano family hoped to sell. A few short months before the hurricane, the late Anthony Bourdain paid a visit to Sunny's (with Sunny's younger brother, Ralph, a memorabilia collector who lives in the iconic bric-a-brac-covered house around the corner). Bourdain guessed that investors and developers must have been chomping at the bit to buy the property and turn it into a serious moneymaker. Sunny responded with a sigh, "Once a month they come in here. And it pisses me off when they do. Cause they have ideas to do things with this place that have nothing to do with what it's about… This [bar] is so much of what we're about that there's no money that could pay for this."

Sunny's sentiments aside, Tone had to be pragmatic to stay the course, and to also stay sane and sanguine. "You see, it is so important to me to get across that things like this *can* be done," she says, banging a fist on Sunny's favorite table in the bar: It's a frickin' damned shame that CBGB shut down! All these places. Someone has to actually have the guts and the gumption to fight. And you don't have to be strong to do this. I've cried my way through it. I feel that we roll over and die a little too quickly these days, but we need to stick in there and fight for the stuff we believe in, and fight for the places that mean something.

After an intensive half-year social media effort and a series of fundraising events, including an art auction, a Kentucky Derby party, and a Mother's Day raffle, the community once again heeded the call. Money, glasses, and spirits were raised, and a year later, the significance of this all-too-rare real estate success story continues to resonate with New Yorkers across the five boroughs. This is especially meaningful given the recent arrival of the NYC ferry to Red Hook. Increasing traffic may mean big shifts for the neighborhood in the coming years. For now, the best part is that nothing about the bar has changed at all. They don't take credit cards, they don't have Wi-Fi, and a limited supply of chips and peanuts are the only menu items. Despite the anxieties of two recent and very close calls, Sunny's remains accountable to its community of supporters who seek a steadfast sanctuary and ever-unpretentious place to unwind. If ever there were a way to thank a community of regulars, this would surely be it. If there ever were a place you could reliably call home away from home, this would surely be it.

Molly Garfinkel, director of the Place Matters program, researches community and public history, urban traditions, and perceptions of space and place.

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On March 19, the Roman Catholic Church honors St. Joseph, the head of the Holy Family, husband of the Virgin Mary, and stepfather to Jesus. For some Italian Americans, particularly those of Sicilian descent, they have marked the day with a true sacro-gastronomic feast in the preparation of a St. Joseph’s Table to honor the saint. The origins of the table, as the story goes, began when Sicily experienced a severe drought for an extended period, sometime near the end of the 13th century. No crops could grow, and people were dying of famine and disease. The people prayed to God and asked St. Joseph, a patron saint, to intercede on their behalf and send rain. Miraculously, rains came, crops were planted, and grew. At harvest time the people prepared an outdoor feast from their bounty in thanksgiving for answered prayers, which gained the name tavola di San Giuseppe. The meal was open to all people, with a special welcome to travelers and strangers, to extend God’s compassion that had been shown to the hosts of the tavola or tavolata.

The tradition took root and grew and, in addition to honoring the saint, the table became an individual offering of thanksgiving for answered prayers or “favors.” In Sicily, the devotional votive offering was prepared by a matriarch who, usually working together with other women, assembled a temporary domestic altar/tavola for the saint’s intervention on her behalf. The “giving” of a finely decorated tavola, often set on handmade tablecloths and laden with Sicilian culinary specialties, was accompanied by the distribution of food to family, friends, and the larger community, as part

of the intimate vow of the devotee. The practice traveled with Italian immigrants to the United States, becoming established in communities with primarily Sicilian populations, and gradually being extended to include a generalized Italian American community and identity.

With Italian Americans comprising almost 15 percent of New York State’s population and New York State listing the largest number of Italian Americans in the United States (Verso 2009), St. Joseph’s Tables enjoy a rich history and ongoing tradition here. Although the most well-known and documented celebrations are in the greater New York City area, our smaller cities and towns in New York State also possess this heritage, which remains important to their identity and local culture.¹ We came to know the St. Joseph’s Table from our respective experiences growing up in or near Italian American communities in western New York and subsequently working together as folklorists, documenting traditions and foodways from the 1990s to the present.

Here, we offer a portrait of the Catholic Feast of Saint Joseph in semi-rural western New York State, demonstrating a common history and trajectory with other communities in the state and in the United States, while also noting localized adaptations that have changed the way the feast is practiced and perceived. One of these is the sense of place in Italy and western New York that has played a central role in the migration stories of Italian Americans in the region and continues to anchor the feast in strong spiritual connections to, and gratitude for, the bounty of the land. We also trace a general movement from home-based, or domus-centered, celebrations tied to an individual’s personal vow, to church halls, community centers, and restaurants, with an accompanying change from a Sicilian to pan-Italian celebration. Lastly, we look at changes to the celebration of St. Joseph’s Tables in the first part of the 21st century,
in response to the closing of ethnic churches built by Italian Americans, the move of older parishioners to suburban neighborhoods, and the diffusion of younger generations to large urban centers. In this environment, efforts of Italian Americans to retain memories, identity, and solidarity can take on heightened importance amid changes beyond their control. At the same time, these changes can lead to recasting of the feast as not only pan-Italian but also as a pan-ethnic event in both religious and secular venues.

**Essential Elements of a Table**

The foods on a St. Joseph’s Table carry layers of meaning and symbolism, which have evolved through time and across oceans. They primarily represent the common food of the peasants who prepared the first offering after the legendary harvest. By the 16th century, March 19 was established as the saint’s feast day, anchoring it squarely in Lent. For traditional Catholics, this means no meat may be eaten; thus, fish, snails, and other seafood take their place along with hard-cooked eggs and frittatas for the protein dishes.

Vegetable selections combine traditional Italian *verdure* and American additions: chard, mustard greens, spinach, broccoli, cauliflower, artichokes, asparagus, peppers, eggplant, and tomato sauce may all be used. Fennel is said to be one of the first crops that the drought-stricken people were able to eat after the rains came. It is cooked in many of the dishes but also appears on the table in its fresh form to remind one of the blessed rains. Similarly, a dried fava bean might be placed nearby as a remembrance of the legume’s role in saving the people from starvation during the drought. Cardoon (*cardoni, cardune*), or burdock, is known in Europe and America; here, it is traditionally gathered in the wild in spring, before the stalks get too tough and large.

Pasta, rice, bean, and lentil dishes again reflect foods available in everyday life. A white spaghetti dish with fennel and onions may not be sprinkled with cheese, but instead with breadcrumbs, signifying the sawdust that would be ever present in St. Joseph’s life as a carpenter. Perhaps the easiest symbols to recognize are in the breads, which are formed into shapes relating to the saint. They include his staff, his beard, a crown, sandals, a hammer, the baby Jesus, a cross, a heart, St. Lucy’s eyes, and whatever other form might pertain to a particular favor being asked. Unlike simple breads, these are made with more eggs, sugar, and anise flavoring, all which help sustain travelers on their way. They might be broken apart to give away, or smaller loaves or rolls may be made especially for this purpose, to be given, along with an orange, to each guest.

Sweets include fig or seed cookies, pastries, cannoli, and sweet fried dough in different shapes and sizes, such as *pignolata* (honey balls), *sfingi*, and *scocchi* (tied in a bow and dusted with powdered sugar). Cakes decorated with religious images or prayers are also common.

A table is completed with a devotional altar to the saint, either combined with the food offerings or as a separate installation. Fresh fruits and vegetables, lilies (referring to the Virgin Mary) or other flowers, candles, samples of all the foods, and the special breads surround a statue or portrait of St. Joseph. Family photographs or keepsakes may appear, in reference to the particular petitions that have been answered. The altar and foods are blessed by a priest, who will offer a litany, or set of prayers, in honor of St. Joseph. “Light of patriarchs,” “Foster father of the son of God,” “Model of workers,” “Guardian of virgins,” and “Patron of the dying” are several of the descriptors, to which people respond, “Pray for us.” Attendees will often share a glass of wine following the prayers. The finest white linens and tablecloths decorate the altar and *tavolata*, often fashioned by the matriarchs’ own hands or neighboring seamstresses and needleworkers.
A Sense of Place: Relationship to the Land

We document the region midway between Buffalo and Rochester, stretching from Lake Ontario southward 60 miles, and east to west 50 miles. The city of Batavia (population 15,300) is the largest municipality. It has been a significant crossroads at various times—first as a meeting place for Native Americans, then as the site of the Holland Land Office from 1801, which was the primary agency for land redistribution to white settlers. It then became a major railroad hub in the late 19th century. Industrial opportunities in this period included work in railroading, farm machinery, machine tools, canning, and the garment industry. The region’s agricultural and natural resources assets were equally attractive, supporting generalized farming, as well as subclimates conducive to fruit orchards and vegetables growing in the black, fertile “mucklands” and Genesee River floodplain. Gypsum and salt mining, and stone quarrying were other sources of employment. In the surge of immigration between 1880 and 1920, Italian arrivals to western New York found work in all of these areas, with a particular attachment to the land being present early on and persisting through the present day. Throughout the region, gardening and foraging provided needed sustenance to families, and supplied familiar and specialty ingredients for ethnic and celebratory foods.

Charles Ruffino of Batavia, a second-generation Sicilian American, remembers the extensive gardens in the small urban neighborhood known as the “Southside”:

We all had gardens; we had very intricate growing processes, potatoes, tomatoes corn, like that...The property between the Mancuso’s family on Hutchins, that was all garden, the Fricanos, LaRussas, and the Federicos even had a vineyard that was across from the church; that was all gardens. (Ruffino 2012)

Daniel Sanfratello, a retired school teacher and descendent of Sicilian immigrants who lived across the street from the Ruffino family, recalls that ties to the land carried over in his family:

Dad had three gardens on the Southside. He gave away a lot of the produce he grew. When we left home in his car, often times there was produce in the vehicle for dispersal. He and his tomato-growing friends competed to see who could grow the tallest plant.” (Sanfratello 2017)

These recollections illustrate how Sicilian immigrant families were connected to one another through owned and/or shared adjacent gardens and neighborhood space, much as it had been in their homeland. These naturally porous borders also mediated relationships with neighboring Abruzzese, Calabrese, and Poles.

Sister Mary Agnes Zinni, a former prioress of a Benedictine monastery in Texas, whose immigrant parents Grazia and Francesco came from the Abruzzo region of Italy, also grew up on the Southside. She recalls how she, her brother Nicholas, and two other siblings would play in the garden as children and how people in the neighborhood exchanged foodstuffs and homemade wine:

The center of my universe was my home, church, and school. There was usually a fence that stood between the gardens, but people shared whatever they grew. If a neighbor raised corn and they didn’t need it for themselves, they would share some with neighbors. We might give them some tomatoes. We would cultivate them and also buy them by the bushel from people that came around in a truck. That is what people did. We didn’t have to buy much or go shopping for many foods. You either had to have money in the bank or in your hands! (Zinni 2017)

Similarly, in the region’s smaller towns like Mt. Morris, Cuylerville, and Retsof, Italian immigrants’ extensive gardens and vineyards, and the foodstuffs they produced, were an early cultural signifier that persists to the present day. A 1926 poster advertises the Sterling Salt Mine’s annual...
vegetable and flower garden competition, listing several Italian and other immigrant contenders. Families in nearby Leicester and York cultivated a local pepper known as the Retsof pepper, and said to have been carried to this country in seed form with Italian immigrants. It is still available today from their descendants through an informal, word-of-mouth network.

Another distinctive set of narratives centers on Italian immigrants’ knowledge of local indigenous plants from working in agricultural production, and how that knowledge continues to be employed. Many community members recall that their parents and grandparents knew where to forage for burdock, dandelions, wild fennel, and Jerusalem artichokes for the St. Joseph’s Table. Kay Martino Ognibene, born on the Southside of Batavia, noted that her immigrant parents, Concetta and Paul, hailed from the Abruzzo region. They had a plot of muckland—affectionately known as “black gold” to local people—and were intensely engaged in subsistence farming:

My family (the Martinos) had their mucklands on a side road in Elba. My mother, Concetta, she was the one who used to go out and pick the greens. She ran my father’s muckland farm for about four years after he died. She had to run it! My parents did not make a salary or anything from the land. It was just for home.

I married into a Sicilian family (the Ognibenes). They had 12 acres down the road from our plot of land in Elba and later purchased my family’s land. The Ognibene family kept buying land in Elba and Bryon on the Main Road.

Lucy Gullo’s Saint Joseph’s tavola, 1946. Participants include first-generation descendants of immigrants from Vallelunga, Sicily, living on Batavia’s Southside. From left to right: Lucy Frederico, Frances Marchese, Mary Riso, Pauline Riso, Anne Gullo, Rosemary Maile, Junior Frederico, Gaetano Gullo (husband), Vincent Jim Gullo (son), Thomas Gullo (son). Roger Burnett, Lawrence Ognibene, Joseph Sanfratello, Mike Marino, Tony Fricano, and Angelo Fiorrino. Photo by Brownie LaRussa. Archival collection of Christine Zinni.
Altar and display of foodstuffs at Josefina Ognibene’s tavola, circa 1953, made in fulfillment of vow to St. Joseph for bringing her son Lawrence (far center right; to the left of the young boy in back, below altar and mirror) home from the war. Participants include: members of the Pirro, Gullo, Ficarella, Gauteri, Del Plato, Cecere, and Irrera families, a network of descendants of immigrants from Vallelunga, Sicily, living in close proximity on Batavia’s Southside. Photo courtesy of Kay Ognibene.

By the 1970s, they had purchased over 600 acres of land for commercial purposes and became one of the largest muckland farm operations in the area. (Ognibene 2013)

Kay’s neighbor Carol Lombardo Mruczek recalls how her mother and aunts would collect wild fennel early in the spring and that the plant is still gathered by cousins in her family. Bernice Falsone Hotchkiss of Mt. Morris collects wild burdock in May and freezes it for the following year. In addition, Bernice is very particular about where she gets her supplies for her table, a process that stretches over the entire year. Asparagus and cauliflower are bought from specific farmers up to 60 miles distant; the eggplant is secured from a cousin’s farm 200 miles away.

In a predominantly farming region, where security and wealth are closely connected to the bounty of the land, the immigrants’ knowledge and effective use of the land aided their progress to citizen status. From all accounts, gratitude for the land that provided sustenance was one of the main elements of the traditional Saint Joseph’s feast celebrated in Sicily and was maintained in the rural Italian American experience.

“St. Joseph, Bring My Son Home from War”

Oral histories that we collected recall the practice from the 1940s to the present day, confirming the gifting of the altar as a primarily women-centered event, often performed as a vow made in response to specific prayer being answered. Many of those interviewed remember that their mothers and grandmothers would plan weeks in advance for their tables. A
significant number of tables were given for protection and safe return of sons that had gone to the Second World War and continued for decades afterward. Thomas Gullo’s immigrant parents came from Vallelunga, Sicily, like a number of his neighbors and relatives on Batavia’s Southside. His mother Lucy, a skilled seamstress and member of St. Anthony’s Altar and Rosary Society, who together with Grazia Zinni, a needleworker, made altar cloths for the large side altars of Saint Joseph and Mary at the church, vowed to the saint that she would make a domestic altar and a table in his honor if he helped bring her son Tommy and a relative Jim home from the war. A relative, neighbor, and professional photographer captured the celebration of their return at Lucy’s Saint Joseph’s tavola in 1946.

Kay Ognibene recalls how her mother-in-law’s vow benefitted the local community, but also extended back to the ancestral home in Italy:

I remember my brother-in-law Lawrence was in World War II, and she promised she would make a table. She would spend all her money, whatever she had, as much as it cost her on this table, to bring him home safe, for her son Lawrence to come home…. I remember my mother-in-law sending money to Italy for the poor girls…who were in the orphanage. She sent money there for as long as I knew her….that was part of her vow. (Ognibene 2013)

Gerald Scorsone of Mt. Morris recalls the tradition there from the 1940s to 1960s, where Italian American families would know to look for open doors on certain streets in town, as a sign that a table was being offered. Gerald recounts his boyhood memory, along with a bit of strategy involved in visiting the homes:

We used to go home to home, just like they did when the travelers would come…. the women were all home, and they would start cooking and baking months ahead of time…. you’d put a little of this on your plate, a little of that, then you go out the kitchen door. You either took it home with you or you ate standing up…. I remember Mr. Inguaggiato’s pignolata was always excellent; I think he used real honey. It was really good. So I’d make sure I’d go down there and get some pignolata…. So you started to learn: “Oh, Mr. Macarella, his fish is excellent,” so you go to Mr. Macarella’s and you get some of his fish. That’s what I remember when it was at different homes. (Scorsone 2012)

St. Joseph Leaves Home

Beginning in the 1970s with the increasing age and death of many women of the immigrant generation, as well as the emergence of Italian (and other) ethnic revivalism in the United States, there was a movement toward parish-sponsored tables, presented at public venues such as
their own social halls and parochial schools, community halls, and fire halls. While still retaining strong Sicilian roots, the tables became more generally identified as pan-Italian celebrations and a focal point for the church community as a whole. In the predominantly Italian parish of St. Anthony’s Church in Batavia in 1978, places were set for 200 people; 375 attended and there was still a surplus of food, even though there was “no soliciting, no advertising, and no charge for the meal…” (Saint Joseph Cookbook Committee 1985, iii–ix). The following year, in 1979, the number of attendees jumped to 575, peaking at 700 guests in 1981.

The gifting of an altar and celebration of St. Joseph’s Day at communal sites provided encounters with others outside the boundaries of kinship and neighborhood ties. As such, its openness made it a site for the expression of ethnic pride as well as the negotiation of cultural difference. Testimonies of parishioners reflect the community’s active engagement in its own representation, emphasizing hospitality, caritas, and memories of ancestral roots. Sam Pirro of Batavia reports:

No one left the table without taking home a small loaf of bread and a good feeling about carrying on this satisfying tradition of thanksgiving and sharing. Outstanding hospitality is a tradition of ours. It is wonderful that people of the parish are interested in preserving this ancient tradition. (Saint Joseph Cookbook Committee 1985, iv)

St. Anthony’s communal church setting also opened itself to the increased participation of Polish neighbors that had married into Italian American families in Batavia. Marsha Palmer, one of the head organizers of the feast there from the mid-1980’s, recounts:

Funny, I am of Polish descent. My maiden name is Ostrowski, but my husband got me involved in Saint Anthony’s. Rose Ruffino took me under her wing and taught me the tradition. Everybody on the committee for the communal church table pitched in. Men like Chuck Ruffino would help by running the dough-mixing machine, and women would braid the dough into different shapes and bake it in the communal oven. As things dwindled down over the years, there were five or six on the committee, and I became the chairperson and another woman of Polish descent, Joan Kozel, was my co-chair. Joan and I kind of filled the generation gap between the older Italian ladies who knew the tradition and...
Bernice Hotchkiss, mentioned earlier, who has been offering a table for more than 40 years. An integral part of her life from childhood, Bernice prepared her first table as a young mother in 1968, when her aunt asked for help with her own offering:

I said, “Sure.” At the time I wanted another baby, and I told Aunt Minnie. She said, “Make a prayer to St. Joseph.” I did, and then I had twin girls! So I kept doing the table…. I learned my version of it from the first generation of ladies that came over from Sicily. (Hotchkiss 2012)

Bernice prepares a collection of dishes using only the brief, handwritten list in a small notebook kept by her mother and aunts; the recipes are committed to memory. These include three macaroni dishes (with lentils, red beans, or fennel), caponata (sweet/sour eggplant salad), peas and fava beans, codfish salad with black olives, assorted fried vegetables and fish, and sweet fried dough. She also prepares a smaller adjacent table with several more plates and devotional items. In the middle stands a painted plaster statue of St. Joseph, the baby Jesus in his arms. The statue belonged to Bernice’s grandfather, and it has presided over this meal for several generations.

Gerald Scorsone baked the shaped breads for Bernice’s table each year and represents another variation of the tradition. He operated a restaurant and banquet center in the area for many years and hosted three tables there between 1996 and 2000. These events, though not officially public, were not entirely private as the word spread among the Italian American community and beyond. While Gerald was responding to a personal desire to host a table, he was finely attuned to its essential nature as a community effort:

You never tell anybody they can’t help you… I had a reason why I did a St. Joseph’s Table. And then I let it be known to some of the older ladies of the community that I was going to do one. And they volunteered to come and help, and you don’t turn them away,
because they have a reason, their own reason for coming... So, I had myself, and maybe a little over 12 ladies. (Scorsone 2012)

Gerald continued to explain the somewhat delicate balance he had to strike as the principal, male chef in a traditionally female domain, adapting the individual Italian women’s recipes and practices to an industrial kitchen setting. He was also incorporating volunteers outside of the Italian American community who did not have deep knowledge of the preparation and presentation of the foods. His account of making *sfingi* or ribbons, a strip of dough that is twisted into a bow, fried, and dusted with powdered sugar, illustrates the process of negotiation to achieve the best result in this setting:

> Now, how thin should the dough be? How wide is the strip? How long do you fry it? You get 12 ladies together, and you’ve got a problem! ... I had my wife there. And she goes along and she says, “Okay, everybody make one... Now we’re going to take them over to the fryer.” Now, at Peter’s Party Complex, we had industrial fryers... It wasn’t a kettle at home. So it cooks faster, the temperature stays even, it’s a whole different ball game. And they wouldn’t believe me ‘cause I’m just a “young kid”—“what do you know? My mother did it this way!” So my wife, in her infinite wisdom, took everybody’s [strips] and put them in the fryer. And then when they came out, she said, “Now, do you think that looks good? Which one looks the best?” “Oh, well that one over there looks really good.” “Okay, this one here is Angie’s. Angie, you tell them how thick you made it, etc.” And, that solved that problem. And that continued for everything we did. (Scorsone 2012)

For women volunteers outside of the tradition, whom Gerald described as “well dressed—they didn’t come with their aprons,” he chose a task that he perceived as easier and didn’t require specialized expertise: forming the hundreds of small dough balls for *pignolata*, then frying them.

This tactic was successful; the food was prepared to his standards as a tradition-bearer, and the newcomers experienced a sincere participatory role in the event:

> They were just so thrilled. And that’s the whole idea of St. Joseph’s. You don’t say, “well, look it, this is going to be very professional, and it’s going to be done exactly this way.” That’s not the issue. The issue is, from their heart, they wanted to do something... People would come up and stop at the place, and they would bring me five pounds of sugar...or they’d give me two pounds of flour or whatever, a five-pound bag of flour. And that’s all within their heart; that’s what they feel they can afford and that’s what they can do. (Scorsone 2012)

Gerald’s tables included participants acting the roles of the Holy Family and the saints entering in procession; blessings, prayers, and a response in Italian; and a list of shut-ins who received a meal delivered
by attendees. The events reintroduced the tradition into public awareness and provided an ad hoc reunion of people who had grown up with tables given throughout the town. The first of the tables hosted 300 guests; by the last, 500 people attended.

The inclusion of non-Italians in the regional celebrations likely began with the first tables. By the late 20th century, intermarriage between ethnic communities had become commonplace, notably with the neighboring Polish community in Batavia, and with the Anglo population throughout the region. Parish- and community-sponsored tables reflect a more mixed ethnicity in featured foods and other items, as well as in the attendee list. We can see these elements in the table at St. Cecelia Church in Oakfield, New York, 10 miles north of Batavia. It began as an individual vow by the Cardinale family in the 1940s, then continued in the church by Frances Matla and her daughter Diane. In 2011, the altar featured Sicilian staples of a statue of St. Francis, specialty breads, fruits, and flowers, but also incorporated family photographs and personal items as a tribute to the Cardinales. Likewise, the homemade foods included traditional dishes (pasta, oranges, olives, fish), as well as Polish pierogi, and a proximity to Easter in the form of a lamb cake.

**A Moveable Feast: Where Is St. Joseph Today?**

Individual families in some towns continue to present tables, primarily for use by the families and their close friends. In Mt. Morris, Bernice Hotchkiss’ table is the predominant expression of the tradition, with a unique twist. By 1990, as participants had aged and could not always travel to her home, she had transformed her table into a take-out affair, delivering the meals to shut-ins, friends, and family. Bernice, her sister, and several women work for two to three weeks to prepare all the dishes. They gather in the morning on March 19 with about a dozen family and friends: we watched on that day in 2012, as the table was completed and Fr. Ed Dillon came to offer the blessing. After a ceremonial sip of wine, the group swung into action. The women circled the table, filling Styrofoam boxes with a portion of each dish, and passed them over the back of the sofa to grandson, Tim. From there, the boxes went to the men in the group, who wrapped them in plastic and loaded them into waiting cars. Bernice and one or two others drove about a 25-mile radius for the rest of the day, delivering...
meals. She hit a high point that year of just over 200 meals.

Sunny’s Restaurant and Lounge in Batavia, a longtime Italian-owned and operated business, sponsors a yearly St. Joseph’s Table dinner, in collaboration with the Paolo Busti Italian American Cultural Foundation. Profits go to the Foundation’s high school senior scholarship fund. The dinner was well attended for several years, with a small statue of St. Joseph and several specialty breads positioned near the bar. Michele Fuller, from the nearby town of LeRoy, is the president of the Foundation and along with Annette Cicero LaBarbera, one of the primary organizers of this event. Sunny’s uses Michele’s grandmother’s recipes to prepare the dishes, and she sees her efforts as part of continuing the vow originally made by her Calabrese grandmother, Maria Rose Mitisi, in the 1940s, in exchange for the saint’s intervention in helping Michele’s mother, Francesca, overcome tuberculosis, as well as bringing Michele’s Uncle Vito home from the war. Michele notes:

I remember the feast being bigger than Christmas in some ways. My grandmother had a table for 40 years. We came from an immigrant neighborhood in LeRoy where people did not have much money. My grandmother liked to hear the Italian American children in the nearby school sing about how Saint Joseph was a carpenter. My grandmother’s generosity was remembered by everyone in the town. The table was open to everyone in the community. She gave everyone a bag with homemade cookies when they left. It was a communal thing. People in the community would bake bread and cookies. The bread and cookies would come from all over. People in the Italian section, on Mill Street and Baker Street in LeRoy, would light their ovens at the same time…. My grandmother had an altar with candles and when the table was finished, she would take everything off but leave the candles on. They were lit for 40 years, and she never had a fire! (Fuller 2018)

Saint Joseph’s Day celebrations and communal bread-making activities are still carried on in LeRoy by Michele’s relatives and friends like Pepe Palmer. Michele now spends the winter months in Florida where she continues the tradition by setting a “smaller” table for the hundred or so family members and snowbirds from Batavia and Leroy. She says:

We don’t have the altar now, but we keep the tradition and cook the meatless food. The table is dedicated to people with cancer and health problems. The priest comes and blesses the table. I’ve had people come and say, “Can you
ask for a favor for me; can you make a promise for me?” (Fuller 2018)

As in many Roman Catholic dioceses in our country, the last 15–20 years have seen increasing consolidation, closings, and sales of church buildings in response to a flat or declining population and church membership. In Batavia, this resulted in the closure in 2011–2012 of St. Anthony’s Church (Italian heritage) and the merging with Sacred Heart Church (Polish) a few blocks away, into Ascension Parish. Of the four different feasts—St. Joseph and Our Lady of Loretto of the Sicilians, Saint Nicholas of the Abruzzese, and St. Michael of the Calabrese—held to honor diverse patron saints of ancestral villages in Italy, which were previously celebrated by Saint Anthony’s parishioners, only Saint Joseph’s has remained. Through 2014, the events committee was led by Marsha Palmer, of Polish descent, who had been organizing the St. Joseph’s feast at St. Anthony’s since the 1970s, and offered a buffet-style arrangement with foods cooked by parishioners. Marsha continued to organize the feast at Ascension Church for two or three years after Saint Anthony’s closed, but beginning in 2015, the table has been a ticketed event, catered by an Italian restaurant from Buffalo, with proceeds (50/50 cash and basket raffles) benefitting local charities, veterans, and food pantries. Marsha continues to make the Saint Joseph bread for the event. In 2015, the parish advertised, “The Altar and Rosary Society of the parish will teach the younger generation
Loaves of bread will be provided to the sick and the homebound of the parish…” Although the event demonstrates how the parish is working to unite the former congregations, the closing of St. Anthony’s has been difficult for its members, many who have decided not to attend the formerly Polish church and are looking outside the neighborhood for a spiritual home. While the catered events has been well attended, a number feel that they would rather attend a function that follows in the tradition of having it open and free to the public and strangers.

One parish that is attracting them is Our Lady of Fatima, six miles north in Elba, the site of original mucklands that provided sustenance to many of their immigrant Italian ancestors. This church was built in the 1940s by a congregation of mixed ethnicity (mainly Italians and Poles) and has maintained a table since the 1990s. The Elba parish is now combined with St. Cecelia’s, mentioned earlier, located another six miles to the west, and holds the single St. Joseph’s celebration between them (St. Cecelia’s last table was in 2012). The celebration includes a Mass with children representing the Holy Family in the procession and subsequent feast; several are the children of the Zambito family, who are lead organizers. Traditional foods grace the altar, along with onions (a significant muckland crop) and general produce and fruits. Polish Easter items also feature prominently: a butter lamb, lamb cake, and pussy willows. Italian dishes mingle with a variety of meatless contributions from parishioners, and the event now includes basket raffle fundraisers.

Near the end of this celebration in 2014, we noticed Hispanic farmworker families, arriving for Spanish-language Mass—families who are supported by the same mucklands that sustained Italian immigrants. They were not excluded from the event, but neither were they expressly invited to participate and had not become involved in the tradition, as has happened in some metropolitan areas. However, a parish bulletin, from March 2018, reports that proceeds from this year’s table will support a new outreach center established in the former rectory, stating that “…the Hispanic Ministry has been given dedicated office space” there. The newsletter further notes the new ministry is in response to Pope Francis’ campaign to, “‘Share the Journey’ of migrants and refugees, encouraging a ‘culture of encounter’ to warmly welcome immigrants and refugees, promote awareness and action on their behalf and help build connections within our community.” It appears that the celebration of St. Joseph, patron of migrants and wanderers, may be evolving yet again to cultivate understanding and unity between these newer Hispanic Catholics and their fellow parishioners.

Concluding Thoughts

Inherent in the idea of a living tradition is the reality of change and adaptation over time. St. Joseph’s Table celebrations in our region have retained an Italian (but not necessarily Sicilian) identity, while increasingly responding to changing demographics through integration of “outside” elements into the altar displays, foods, and spiritual rituals. In church- or civic-sponsored tables, the primacy...
of the personal vow gives way to a “memory site,” which honors the ancestors’ devotion and seeks to educate and enculturate the next generation. Even in such communal efforts, a table depends on key individuals and their sense of spiritual devotion, ethnicity, duty, pride, charity, or other motivation to continue to make it happen. Perhaps one of its core elements, that of welcoming the stranger into the feast, will prove one of its strongest assets in sustaining the tradition.

Notes

1 In general, the existing scholarship on the tradition in America tends to focus on denser populations in metropolitan areas. Noted research, publications, and documentaries have been completed by Lydia Fish (1975, 1991) in Buffalo, New York; Joseph Sciorra (2008, 2012, 2015) in Brooklyn, New York, and Gloucester, Massachusetts; Luisa Del Giudice (2009, a, b) in Los Angeles, California; Ethelyn Orso and Peggy Kaveski (1975); David Estes (1987), Orso (1990), Carolyn Ware (1992), and Leslie Wade (2000) in Louisiana; and Kay Turner and Suzanne Serif (1987); and Circe Strum and Randolph Lewis (2007) in urban and rural locations in Texas.

2 Men certainly have roles and tasks in the celebration, often in the arena of building or assisting with altar assembly and other logistics. See more on these different responsibilities: needlework on altar cloths by women from Batavia’s Altar and Rosary Society and Tommy Gullo’s recollection of men building altars in C. Zinni’s essay (2014): “Stitches in Air: Spirituality and Service in Batavia, NY” in Embroidered Stories, edited by Edvige Giunta and Joseph Sciorra; as well as her essay (Zinni 2009a) on the work of Italian American stonemasons in the region in “The Maintenance of a Commons” in Uncertainty and Insecurity and in a New Age, edited by Vincent Parillo; and Joseph Sciorra’s “Private Devotions in Public Places: The Sacred Spaces of Yard Shrines and Sidewalk Affairs” in Built with Faith (Sciorra 2015, Ch.1, 1–60). Numerous accounts also designate the makers of pasta sauces as the men in families and communities.

3 This pattern is found in many communities across the country.

References


Fuller, Michele Rapone. 2018. Interview conducted by Christine Zinni, July.
Karen Canning is the Founding Director of GLOW Traditions, a regional traditional arts and folklife program for Genesee, Livingston, Orleans, and Wyoming Counties in western New York. The program was established in 1997, as a shared program by the counties’ arts councils. She frequently collaborates with community, educational, business, and civic entities to document and present diverse folk arts of our region, such as Hispanic holiday traditions, American folk music, world dance traditions, Native American arts, and occupational folklore. Canning is actively involved in statewide initiatives to support New York’s traditional cultures. Recent projects include serving on the advisory panel for the Upstate Regional Folklife Survey (New York Folklore Society and folklorists from Buffalo and Corning); participation in a folklore archives digitization and accessibility project with City Lore (NYC); and presentations of dance, music, and occupational folklore with artists from across the state (with Brooklyn Arts Council; Traditional Arts of Upstate New York; Erie Canal Museum). Canning holds a Master’s Degree in Ethnomusicology from Wesleyan University, with a specialty in indigenous Mexican popular music. She is a cellist, strings instructor, and a member of Panloco Steel Band. Photo courtesy of author.

Christine Zinni is a descendent of Italian and Polish immigrants. She grew up on Batavia’s Southside and was a participant in Saint Joseph’s Day Tables held in the homes of her Sicilian neighbors. Years later, she returned to the area and started documenting some of the practices she recalled in written and visual form. Through these efforts, she met Karen Park Canning, from whom she has simultaneously learned and collaborated with on folk art projects. On a regular basis, Zinni’s work as a folklorist, videographer, and educator, the focus was on folk art projects. She is the creator of i-Italy.org, a richly illustrated online resource of oral traditions and folklore. In 2018, she was awarded a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities to write a book about the cultural traditions of traditional Italian Americans. Zinni’s book, “Stitches in Air: Needlework as Spiritual Practice and Service in Batavia, New York,” is scheduled for publication in 2021. Photo: Taken in Athens, Greece, 2018, prior to teaching Food and Culture of the Aegean Program, by Yannis Zervos, Director of the Athens Centre, and courtesy of the author.
Decoy Carving and Duck Hunting

BY NANCY SOLOMON

From the earliest days of hunting and fishing, hunters have tried to lure waterfowl into range of their nets and weapons with decoys made of rush, reed, or wood. Decoys were essential tools for both the commercial and recreational hunter. During the 19th century, baymen worked as professional duck hunters, shipping wildfowl to New York City, where duck meat was highly valued as an epicurean delight and where feathers were equally valued. Indispensable to the hunter were decoys, used to attract birds in flight to the hunters’ “gunnin’ boats” or shoreline duck blinds. Carvers made decoys out of wood, cork, and other materials. Working decoys were painted with simple broad strokes, and finished with a hand-carved wooden head. The decoys were attached to a simple anchor by a length of cord or line to prevent the decoy from floating away. They were simple, but highly effective tools.

Like many baymen, George Rigby’s ancestors made a portion of their livelihood from commercial hunting and as hunting guides. His father worked at Wildfowler Decoys, based on Long Island, and was one of the first members of the Long Island Decoy Collectors Association. George is also active in the South Shore Waterfowlers Association. His grandfather was an active sportsman who also worked as a hunting guide. He often took his grandson hunting, a tradition that started when George was eight years old. His grandfather was also a duck boat builder.

George Rigby, Sr., was an active hunting guide, taking small groups of sportsmen for a day of hunting. Those days typically began at 4:30 a.m. and lasted until the early evening. Most of his customers were local residents. Rigby preferred hunting to clamming. Like many hunters, he made his own decoys, using them every season.

George Rigby, Jr., began hunting at an early age, along with decoy carving. He remembers going at two or three o’clock in the morning with his uncle, carrying a double barrel shotgun down to the beach where houses stand today. When he was in school, he would ride his bike down to the beach at 4 a.m. and would go to the Connetquot River on the east side of Roberts Creek every weekend. “We used to go down in my duck boat and shoot broadbill in Bellport Bay and Smiths’ Point,” in Great South Bay. His hunting friends included Bill Joeckel, who is also a well-known duck hunter and decoy carver. Another friend, bayman John Buczak once said on the radio that, “Whoever is shooting sure knows what they’re doing.” George describes: “A perfect day for hunting—a sunny day is no good—ducks only move in cold, nasty weather. The colder the weather, the better it is for ducks. Ice is good.” George also likes just being there. “It’s just fun being out there.”

Like other hunters, George also carves his own decoys. He has won over 100 ribbons for competitions from Long Island to
California. His award winners include a canvasback. George explains, “I used a hatchet to carve it out with a chisel and a drill press to hollow it out. I painted it with gesso and combed it with a baby comb through wet paint. It was time-consuming, and I still have that duck; it’s one of my prized possessions.”

For working decoys, “I have some that I made years ago that I still use. I use a lot of cork, which I bought from a friend of mine. My good ones I make out of that. You can buy the cork, which is the best to use. The wooden ones are a little tougher. The cork—I use a keel and keep the head separate. You have to rig them differently, because the tide is against the wind.”

Although some traditional carvers make show decoys, George prefers making working decoys used in hunting. “I kind of stick to my old ways. If you’re going to use a machine, why bother? I still use a paintbrush and an oil or latex paint. Some guys use airbrushes. I used to work at Wildfowler Decoys, painting the birds. But I haven’t made any show decoys in a long time, because the competition is crazy.”

George worked at Wildfowler when he graduated from high school, so he could save some money and buy a boat to work on the bay.

Like other traditional baymen and carvers, George now has to work part-time on land as a contractor, but he prefers to make his living off the water. He worries about the regulations and whether he will be able to continue his way of life. In addition, more waterfront homeowners lodge complaints about the hunters, forcing many of them to remote places where dangerous storms can place them in jeopardy. Fortunately, waterfowlers generally hunt in groups, providing safety for each other. In addition, some have bay houses, where they can escape the wind and any storms, if necessary. The Seaman’s bay house, rebuilt after Superstorm Sandy, is also home to the Merrick Rod and Gun Club. The Pattersquash Gun Club, established in 1922, will rebuild their bay house, one that was also destroyed by Sandy. All that remains is for the wildfowl to return, an uncertainty as our local climate changes.

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A child growing up in Tucson, Arizona, I was greatly inspired by “Tucson Meet Yourself,” the folk festival started by “Big” Jim Griffith and continued today under the leadership of Mariel Alvarez. I remember attending when I was perhaps 11 years old and being astounded by the huge variety of foods, music, dance, and crafts that one could sample. If it were not for the event we affectionately termed “Tucson Eat Yourself,” I would never have known that Tucson had, for instance, Afghani, Filipino, or Norwegian communities, much less able to try their foods. I would also have missed out on some great opportunities for dancing to Tohono O'odham nāsila and Mexican norteña music.

In college, I performed there myself with the group of Indian Americans with whom I studied bharata natyam dance, right around the time I took my first folklore course from Dr. Griffith. A seed was planted that eventually bore fruit, as years later I came to work in public folklore myself.

Two decades after leaving Tucson to study folklore, I find myself on the other side of the country teaching ethnomusicology courses at Syracuse University (SU). Syracuse is a bit of a hard-luck, postindustrial town. It’s a great place to live for those of us with a stable income and decent housing; less so for the 32 percent of the population living in poverty—in fact, recent reports indicate that the city is not only the 13th poorest in the country, but has the United States' highest per capita rate of refugee acceptance is third highest in the nation—seven percent of Syracuse's population has arrived as refugees since 2000 (Baker 2016). If we were to count those who came prior to 2000, it’s possible that as many as 1 in 10 Syracuse residents has a refugee background. Many Syracusans are also proud of their city's tradition of activism: once a stop on the Underground Railroad, its abolitionist history is commemorated in public monuments like the one on Clinton Square dedicated to the “Jerry Rescue,” during which average citizens defied the Fugitive Slave Act (1850) to break ex-slave William “Jerry” Henry out of jail and help him to reach Canada. It was also a center of 19th-century feminist activity, as noted suffragist Matilda Joslyn Gage and her famous, freethinking son-in-law L. Frank Baum once lived in Syracuse, as well as of 20th-century antiracist activism, as home to the Syracuse Peace Council (“the oldest local, autonomous, grassroots peace and social justice organization in the United States,” founded in 1936 [http://www.peacecouncil.net/history]). Furthermore, I had been observing the growing interest in projects featuring refugee food traditions, particularly in the left-leaning university neighborhood where I live. It seemed to me that conditions were ripe for a test run.

I began my course planning nearly a year in advance by getting in touch with Adam Sudmann, the driving force behind the aforementioned food projects. Adam once worked at producing corporate food events for fashion houses in New York City, but grew tired of that world. He moved to Syracuse and joined Onondaga Community College's Food Studies Management program, then started a teaching restaurant called With Love (see http://withloverestaurant.com) on Syracuse's north side. With Love is an
incubator for mainly immigrant and refugee chefs to learn the restaurant business, so chefs and menus rotate approximately every six months. Adam also started the biannual pop-up food court called My Lucky Tummy (see http://www.myluckytummy.com/), which brings together a roster of immigrant and refugee chefs to cook for and converse with sold-out crowds of 400+ persons. Adam liked the idea of pairing music with food, especially if I could find a way to fund the performances. His contacts in local refugee communities proved invaluable when I did exploratory fieldwork to identify possible artists during the summer prior to the course. Our partnership also led me to contact SU’s new Food Studies program—an ideal program partner because of its dedication to the study of food and society. Faculty member Elissa Johnson was soon on board with the idea of incorporating the events into her class on food and identity. Through additional meetings with Adam and Elissa, I developed a plan in which my students would interview various refugee and immigrant artists, document their traditions, and present them at two events. First, we would provide a musical program for the opening reception of the 2017 Convening of Welcoming Economies, a network of Rust Belt economic development initiatives seeking to benefit from the opportunities offered by the influx of immigrants to struggling cities. Second, my class would put together a performance focused on music and dance traditions of Burma to take place on “the hill,” in collaboration with Elissa’s class, who would work with the Burmese chef-in-residence at With Love to document her food traditions, as well as to actually produce Burmese food for a reception to follow. We received major funding for the programs from SU’s Humanities Center, along with the support of the Food Studies program and my own Department of Art and Music Histories. I saw these events as “test runs” for a potential, larger folk festival down the road.

In addition to these events and the detailed program notes we created for each one, some samples of which appear on the next pages, my class worked to put information, including bios, articles, photos, and videos, on a course website. We hoped this website would attract attention to the project, thus boosting a potential future expansion, as well as generate publicity for the artists, many of whom hope to find ways to perform more widely and more regularly. (Please explore the site, http://sjhutchi.expressions.syr.edu, but note that not all artists we worked with appear on the site, and not all artists on the site ended up participating in the performances. Construction is ongoing.)

The logistics of it all were daunting at times. We worked with a roster of artists from the Congo, Myanmar (both Chin and Karen ethnicities), Syria, Bhutan, Puerto Rico, and Burundi, and chefs from Syria, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Pakistan. Some spoke little or no English, and like many refugees in Syracuse, some had experienced severe trauma. Working with consent forms and W-9 tax forms, communicating locations and directions, writing appropriate questions, and coordinating schedules were challenging for students—and, I imagine, for many of the tradition bearers as well. Nonetheless, both informally and in class evaluations, students reported great gains from the process at the end of the semester, and we were pleased with the events we produced. Student Grant Nygaard noted with surprise that, even in the time of Google, “It was humbling to find very few legitimate articles and info in English about an entire culture.” In light of his previous writing experience, journalism student James Groh at first struggled with the self-analysis that ethnographic writing required, but ended up discovering that “objectivity and reflection are compatible and even work together to make a story stronger.”

Steven Marshall had expected Syracuse to not be terribly diverse, so was pleased to find it was in fact “a place teeming with a plethora of cultures.” He concluded, “going out and learning about the many things that make humans unique is good for the soul,” and so was the class.

Further outcomes were manifold and sometimes unexpected. In the final program, we experimented by combining a Syrian Muslim musician with a Middle Eastern Christian dance troupe. The dancers performed to a popular Syrian recording to honor the newly arrived refugee, and it was a joy to see his face light up, as he recognized the song and sang along. Since the conclusion of the class, one student has ended up exchanging English lessons for oud lessons with our Syrian musician. Another is hoping to implement some of what she learned when she returns home to Botswana to start an arts center in her village. My husband engineered a recording of the Congolese musicians for them to send home to a family wedding, and then coordinated collaboration between them and local activist/musician Colleen Kattau. I sometimes still receive cryptic text messages that come to me, mediated by a smartphone Arabic–English text translator. In short, at least for a short time, this experiment in student-led public folklore succeeded in building the bridges I had hoped for.

References

Sydney Hutchinson is Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology at Syracuse University and author of several books and numerous articles on Caribbean, Mexican, and Latin@ music and dance. Currently in Berlin, initiating new research on Cold War musical and musicological exchanges between Cuba and East Germany, she is also completing a new textbook on Caribbean music and a monograph on merengue histories and Dominican–Haitian relations. When not writing, Hutchinson cares for small children and/or yodels. Photo courtesy of the author.
Ahmad Alkhlef (Syrian Musician)
By Anya Patel

Ahmad Alkhlef has played the oud since he was very young, as he comes from a long line of musicians. He also makes ouds himself. The oud is the predominant instrument of Arabic music. It can be translated to English to mean “piece of wood.” Key physical features include a pear shape, twisted strings, wooden construction, a short neck, and a rounded back. It is a stringed instrument, with differing numbers of strings depending on the mode; the five-string model is preferred by many performers, including Alkhlef.

Alkhlef’s identity is tied heavily to his music. After having to flee his home in Homs, Syria, the music and instruments he creates serve as a connection to home, even as he is no longer able to be there. Despite religious or sociopolitical differences, music has always served as a way to unite the Arab people. Moreover, there is even a word in Arabic, tarab, for the rapture and euphoria created by music within its listeners, and it plays a key role in identity for many Arab people.

About the type of music that he prefers to play, Ahmad explains:

There is no favorite song or music for me. I can play everything, but sometimes, a musician will want to sing for a specific person who wants specific music. But most Arabic music, you can tweak and make it into what the specific time calls for. You have to feel it.

The events that caused Alkhlef to leave the Middle East are tragic. He watched the explosion that caused the destruction of his home in Homs, Syria, when a missile flew overhead and decimated the very place he slept. He moved to Jordan, but safety eluded him and his family there as well: one day he set out to the bakery and found himself being shot at. Fearing for the safety of his loved ones, he packed his bags and moved to Syracuse—but not without a reminder of the horrific events going on at home. To this day, he and his wife suffer...
health concerns from pieces of shrapnel from the explosions in Syria and the effects of the war.

However, Alkhlef does not let this get him down; having found safety in Syracuse, he remains close to home via his music and instruments. Though he has seen some influence on his music from the proximity to American culture, and he has stated he wouldn't mind learning the guitar, he feels as though Arabic music and the oud, in particular, reduce the distance between him and home. Unfortunately, it has been difficult to acquire the specific types of wood and tools necessary to build his instruments in Syracuse.

By creating a mix of vocals, instrumentation, and percussion (often with the aid of a percussionist, such as his son), Alkhlef brings true Arabic music to the United States, to Syracuse, and to our event tonight.

Alkhlef’s YouTube channel also contains videos of his music and performance, and can be found by searching his full name (Ahmad Alkhlef) on YouTube or following the link:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCiCzJzhKbETLEXsUbT9fjw

Imaculee Kandathe and Olivier Byinshi (Congolese Musicians)

By Caroline Chipman

Nyasama “Immaculee” Kandathe and Olivier Byinshi hail from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The DRC is located in central Africa and surrounded by South Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Zambia, and others. Being one of the larger countries in the Africa, the DRC is home to about 78 million people, who speak an array of different languages, like Kinkingo, Lingala, Tshiluba, and Swahili. French is the official language of the country since its colonial period under Belgian rule, and
it has the world’s largest population of French speakers after France. Today, the DRC is very unstable as a result of the second Congo War, which started in 1998.

Nyasamaza and Olivier, like many others, left their country, became refugees in Kenya, and eventually came to America for safety. Both became involved with music at a very young age, influenced by their local Presbyterian church, where they spent much time as kids attending Sunday school and hearing music from the gospel choir. Olivier, who was introduced to the piano through his church, learned solely through hearing and repeating artists’ singing, pairing it with a melody. He now studies in the Onondaga Community College music program, where he particularly loves learning jazz. Olivier also performs gospel music on the piano at church every Sunday. His cousin Nyasamaza is a singer/songwriter, who also has lived in Syracuse since 2012. She has been involved in music since she was five years old, influenced by her family’s participation in their local church choir. In the DRC, she recorded an album and performed often, using the stage name of Immaculee Kandathe. She continued performing gospel music in Kenya, which, along with the Swahili language, served as a lingua franca for the Congolese refugees who spoke different languages. In Syracuse, Nyasamaza enjoys performing and singing gospel, jazz, and popular-style songs, emphasizing lyrics that promote peace in her country.

Immaculee’s music video for her song “Umpindure” is available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CY2jm_2TzSQ

Matupi Chin Dancers of Syracuse (Burma)
By Grant Nygaard

The Matupi Chin dance troupe from Burma consists of a group of young refugees from the Syracuse area. Today, they will perform their traditional “Star Dance.”

Burma, also known as Myanmar, is a state in Southeast Asia that is bordered by India and Bangladesh to its west, Thailand and Laos to its east, and China to its north and northeast. The country has a population of around 51 million people and has 14 provinces and 9 states. It is also a very diverse state, with over 135 different ethnicities. The major ethnicity is the Burman or Bamar people; many of the smaller ethnic groups have rebelled
over injustice and human rights violations in what is considered one of the world’s longest running civil wars.

The dance troupe is from the Chin state, which is largely inhabited by the Chin minority group. The Chin state is located in the southwest portion of the country and is characterized by its sparse population and mostly rural, agrarian economy. The Chin make up a relatively small percentage of Burma’s overall population, but have a complex network of subgroups that includes over 50 different dialects and a diverse range of cultural practices that differ from the majority. Also, although the Chin come from Burma, they do not necessarily identify as Burmese, which is synonymous with the Buddhist majority, as most Chin are Christian.

According to scholars, a significant way that the history of the region is told is through song, as a form of oral history. The music itself most often predates the Christian invasion of the region, making it a unique expression that has been passed down for generations. While there have been changes in the music over time, the lyrical themes are what make the music constant.

Although a lot of these languages/cultural practices bear similarities, they have differences due in part to the heavily forested, hilly geography, which made it hard to travel to other nearby regions. Even today, there is no one road that links the northern and southern portions of the state. Isolation created an environment where different languages and traditions developed.

Members of the dance troupe performing today identify as Matu people of the southern Chin region, which includes the city of Matupi. The Matu region is known for its remoteness, even within the Chin state. Like the rest of the region, the Matu are overwhelmingly Christian. Jacob Ngawi, a local Matu Chin refugee, leads the dance troupe. He explains that there are around 500 Matu Chin refugees who currently call Syracuse their home, and the community is always growing. Because the Matu Chin are such a small ethnic group, having so many in a community like Syracuse is very rare (the other large population in the United States is found in Indianapolis). We are lucky to be able to observe and experience their cultural practices today.

The meaning and significance of the “Star Dance” is intrinsically linked to the identity of the community and how they present themselves to other groups and peoples. According to Jacob, the dance is used as a ceremonial tool during Chin cultural celebrations, as well as to showcase their unique culture to the world outside of Burma. It is also typically performed on February 20, Chin National Day. This dance is unique to the Matu Chin, while other Chin ethnic groups have their own versions. The dance has been passed down by parents to their children, as a way of preserving their culture and identity. It is so important to their heritage that a performance must be approved for quality assurance by older members of the community, before it is brought out in public.

Today, the Star Dance will be performed by 10 dancers, 5 men and 5 women, all youth in the local Matu Chin community, who are taught by Jacob. The dance is accompanied by piano alone. It varies in length, but can stretch to as long as 12 minutes with an experienced group.

Jacob Ngawi: Profile of a Matu Chin Dancer
By Casey Pritchard

Jacob Ngawi, now 22, began dancing at the age of 15. He learned to dance the same way as everyone else did—from the generation before him. A year after he began dancing, when he was 16 years old, he had to leave his home and come to the United States. He told me that his journey was scary. When he arrived in the United States safely, he settled here in Syracuse. Now that he has been dancing for quite a few years, he is taking on the responsibility of teaching the younger generation how to participate in their cultural dances. One thing Jacob said he enjoyed about America was our education system. He told me that it took him about five years to learn English, and he just graduated this past May. And, of course, Jacob said he loves Syracuse’s snow! Jacob looks forward to going to Refugee Day every year with the other Matu refugees. It is a wonderful opportunity for Chin refugees from all over the United States to come together, perform their dances, and celebrate their culture.

Assad Almajid (Syrian Chef)
By Allison Mannheimer

On Monday, October 23, 2017, the Sky Armory in downtown Syracuse will be transformed into a venue filled with diverse cultures from around the world. The Welcoming Economies Convening takes place over three days, during which people from around the globe meet to discuss topics ranging from politics to programs and highlight notable people in the field who are paving the way for future generations. From 6:00 to 8:00 in the evening, conference attendees will be able to experience something Syracuse has become increasingly known for—diversity. Guests will be treated to performances from multiple refugee populations within the city, as well as food prepared by refugees, highlighting the countries they were forced to flee from. This article focuses on one specific chef, Assad Almajid.

Assad was born in Damascus, the capital of Syria. He began working in his father’s shop when he was nine years old, learning about sweets and ice cream. He would spend every day after school working with the ice cream, and every morning until midnight on the weekends. He loved working with his father, but dreamed of starting his own business one day. If he stayed in Damascus, he would only be able to make $500 a month, which would not be a sufficient living salary. So, Assad chose to get his Master’s Degree in business.
Dubai is a city of money. I decided to go there, work a couple of years, make some money, and come back and start my own business. I’m the type of person that doesn’t want to get help starting my own business.

That persistence paid off. When he returned to Damascus, he opened his own chocolate factory. It became extremely successful. Most of his sales were from exports; he sold a majority of his chocolate to other countries in the Middle East. Everything was going well, until the war broke out.

The Syrian War initially began as an attempt to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad after the government used deadly force to halt protesters who opposed him. Violence escalated, and it became a civil war. The war has lasted so long because other countries have involved themselves in Syria’s war. The United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and others have taken sides in the war. Many countries have interests in controlling Syria because of its location in the Middle East. Russia has been backing President Assad, while the United States is backing opposition forces.

The Syrian War initially began as an attempt to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad after the government used deadly force to halt protesters who opposed him. Violence escalated, and it became a civil war. The war has lasted so long because other countries have involved themselves in Syria’s war. The United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and others have taken sides in the war, adding military, financial, and political support to the fight. Many countries have interests in controlling Syria because of its location in the Middle East. Russia has been backing President Assad, while the United States is backing opposition forces.

The United Nations reported that over five million people have fled Syria since the war began (see http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocusRel.asp?infocusID=146). This has left neighboring countries, such as Lebanon and Jordan, struggling to manage the influx of refugees to their population. Assad Almajid and his family were a few of the refugees who made the choice to leave their home in hopes of finding safety. Shortly after the war broke out, Assad’s flourishing chocolate factory was destroyed by the bombings. His family made the decision to leave Syria and fled to Jordan. Assad was unable to work in Jordan legally unless he did labor, so he could not restart his chocolate factory in that country. After three and a half years in Jordan, his family was accepted into the United States as refugees.

Over ten thousand refugees have come to Syracuse since 2000, which is a significant portion of the population. According to Syracuse.com, Onondaga County “accepts refugees at the highest per capita rate in the state and the third-highest rate in the nation” (Baker 2016). In June 2016, Assad, his wife, three daughters, and son arrived in Syracuse. Although he was not able to choose where in the United States that he moved, he said he studied the area, the people, the weather, and the buildings and felt Syracuse would be the right place for his family. He plans to stay in Syracuse for the long term and has purchased property to start realizing his dream of owning a business again.

Assad now owns 2727 James Street, near the Key Bank. Instead of a chocolate factory, Assad will make sweets and barbecue, similar to his father’s business, which Assad grew up working in. He is looking forward to finally opening his shop, known as Sinbad’s Sweets and Ice Cream (see https://www.facebook.com/SinbadSweet/), but knows that it may take some time before it is ready to go. Everything is ready, his supplies, the refrigerator (on its way from Turkey), and his employees. However, permits take a long time to approve before the work can be done to legally open the shop. It’s also difficult to market and find ways to promote his product. Assad explains, “People prefer what they know. They don’t know my product. I need to teach people my product.”

In order to reach Syracuse, he has taken any chance he can get to share his product with others. At Welcoming Economies, guests were treated to Assad’s Syrian ice cream, made by hand. Assad made ice cream for 300 people. Guests may have tasted a bit of a crunch, since his ice cream machine and hammer are still on the way to Syracuse, so it might not have been as smooth as it typically would be. While the base ingredients are similar to most ice cream, including milk, heavy cream, and sugar, additionally, there is mastic gum (also called Arabic gum), tahlib, rosewater, and pistachios, making it extremely flavorful. Its nuttiness, combined with a subtle floral aroma, was a taste many guests had not experienced before but will look forward to tasting again in the future.

Habiba Boru
(Ethiopian Chef)
By Fallon Siegler

Practically every Ethiopian meal starts with injera, a flat, fermented pancake that is pivotal to Ethiopian cooking. It is made with a grain called teff, which, until recently, was exclusively grown in the area. Next, a stew of some sort, called wat, or a vegetable dish is poured onto the injera. These dishes are generally abundant with spices like berbere, a mix that usually includes pepper, garlic, ginger, cumin, and other spices. Injera is used to scoop the stews, vegetables, or salads, and once gone, everyone eats the injera at the bottom of the dish, which is now soaked in the juice and spices of the stew. Some Ethiopian beverages include arera, the liquid part of yogurt; tedj, a honey wine that is highly alcoholic; tella, or beer; arak’i, a beer-like drink; and coffee. Coffee is extremely important in Ethiopian culture; one is not supposed to drink it by oneself. As part of the culture, one will invite friends and neighbors over for coffee.

When it comes to eating in Ethiopia, it is about more than just the food; it is about togetherness. In a practice called gorsha, one friend tears off a piece of injera, dips it into the stew, rolls it and puts it into their friend’s mouth. Sharing meals is important in Ethiopian culture, as it creates bonds with strangers and reinforces bonds with friends and family. Eating in a circle together also strengthens those relationships. Habiba Boru keeps these traditions alive, but she did not learn everything she knows about Ethiopian cooking in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is located in eastern Africa, to the west of Somalia. A military group called the Derg disrupted the country in 1974, transforming the country into a communist state. This takeover, subsequent drought, and massive famines...
created a huge number of refugees. Among them were Habiba and her family. Habiba and her parents split from her grandparents and siblings, and they found themselves at a refugee camp in Kenya in 1992. Here, her mother would make and sell different wats, injera, and samosas. She called her business “Habiba’s Hotel,” as “hotel” is synonymous with “restaurant” there. Habiba learned much of her cooking knowledge from her mother, starting at the age of seven:

If you’re a young girl in a household, they used to say back home, “If you don’t cook you will not find a husband.”

So, every time my mom used to say that, so I have to learn to cook, obviously. Down the road I want to get married, and if I don’t know how to cook then no one’s going to marry me. I’m so glad that I did that, because if I didn’t do that, look at me today, I wouldn’t be able to do what I’m doing, what I love to do.

Habiba arrived in the United States in 2000, and her love for cooking never faltered. Her favorite dishes are doro wat and misr wat. Doro wat is a chicken stew that is normally made for a special occasion, like a wedding or for guests. It is made from chicken, berbere, onions, and hard boiled eggs, as well as other traditional stew ingredients. Misr wat is a red lentil stew.

Since 2000, Habiba has worked largely with the Syracuse refugee community. She works at the North Side Learning Center, helping them connect to the rest of Syracuse, through services like housing, translation, immigration, and social services. Additionally, she works as a job developer at RISE (Refugee and Immigrant Self-Empowerment), another refugee program, where she helps refugees find jobs.

She still incorporates cooking into her life, however. Her children also love misr

Karen dancers rehearse at the Karen Buddhist Monastery of Syracuse on September 24, 2017. Photo by James Groh.
and *doro wat*, as well as *alecha*, which is a mixture of beef, carrots, and potatoes. Recently, Habiba has used her talents in a life-changing way. Earlier this year, she got a call from her parents and discovered that her father was going blind. She wanted to take her children to see her parents at their home in the United Kingdom before that happened. However, she was unable to afford the expensive trip. Through Adam Sudmann’s *With Love Kitchen*, though, she was able to raise money for the trip through cooking.

Despite her work with the community, Habiba has aspirations of cooking professionally one day:

When my mom was in a refugee camp, where nobody even dreams of doing stuff like that, in times of struggle, she managed to build a small space out of sticks and mud and called it Habiba’s Hotel. My dream is to make that dream come true and open Habiba’s Restaurant or Habiba’s Kitchen one day. It’s just not easy to do that; it takes a lot. I hope miracles happen. I’m going to try and work so hard to achieve this.

Ethiopian food brings people together, and Habiba continues that tradition here in the Syracuse community.

Karen Buddhist Monastery Dance Group (Burma)
By Jasmine Kim

The Karen (Ka-REN) are an indigenous people from the Thailand–Burma border in Southeast Asia. They are one of the many ethnic groups in Burma. Most Karens practice Animism and Buddhism, but all religions are welcome, and about 30 percent of Karens are Christians. In Syracuse, the Karen community preserves Karen culture by creating and maintaining strong social ties within the community.

Karens are known for their hospitality and friendliness, which they willingly extend to everyone, as well as for their energetic and jubilant festival dances and colorful traditional clothing. Dances are a way in which they create community when they have no permanent homeland. Karen dance in the Syracuse community not only signifies unity, it also represents Karen nationalism. In history, the people of Burma suffered from persecution by their own nation’s army and tyranny. Due to this struggle, many people moved out of their homes and villages and into refugee camps. In this context, dance gives them hope, and they imagine their community to be complete again. Karen dance helps them to construct a notion of a larger togetherness.

Today, we will see a performance by members of the dance group of Syracuse’s Karen Buddhist Monastery. Three members of the dance group lived in a refugee camp, eventually left Thailand, and came to Syracuse. Terdah is the leader of the dance group, as she teaches the younger boys and girls to dance. Her niece, Mu Mu, is also a member of the dance group, as well as a high school sophomore and volleyball player. Poe is also a sophomore in high school who dreams of becoming a doctor. Along with the rest of their group, these dancers will be performing two songs: “Naung Swa Po Awa” and “Lwe Aye Bar.” Both songs are about the Karen community and freedom. Mu Mu explains, “We want to show how Karens cultivate [dance] and what [our] dance looks like, so they will recognize us as Karen people.”

Bhim Biswa (Nepali Bhutanese Musician)
By Daniel Solomon

Until 2008, Bhutan was a Buddhist kingdom located between China and India. It is considered to be one of the world’s most isolated countries. Its government enforced a strict cultural regulation policy to limit the influx of foreign influences, including tourism, in an effort to preserve the country’s Buddhist culture. Until the 1960s, the country did not have electricity, paved roads, cars, telephones, or a postal service. Only during the late 1990s did it begin to allow access to television and the Internet. In the early 1990s, however, with the aim of ensuring a homogenous culture, Bhutan stripped the ethnic Nepalis residing in Bhutan of their citizenship and forced an estimated 108,000 (registered) refugees from southern Bhutan into seven camps in eastern Nepal. These 100,000+ people in camps made up roughly one-sixth of the population of Bhutan.

Homes in these camps were small huts with bamboo roofs, dirt floors, and no running water. Camp conditions are on record as having improved between 1995 and 2005, but initially many of the people relocated to these camps succumbed to malnutrition and diseases. In addition, the Bhutanese refugee population was denied the privileges of citizenship in Nepal and was only granted limited access to work opportunities.

In 2000, Bhutan and Nepal agreed to allow some Bhutanese refugees to return to Bhutan, but due to inhabitants who were born in the Nepalese camps not having established Bhutanese citizenship, they were denied repatriation. In 2007, a core group of eight countries came together with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and offered to help resettle Bhutanese refugees from the seven camps to allow them to begin new lives elsewhere. By 2015, it was reported that just two camps remained, and the refugee population stood at less than 18,000 people.

Bhim Biswa, who resettled in Syracuse in 2009, recalled his personal experience of resettlement during an interview conducted in November 2017:

I am from Bhutan, Bhutan is my country. We are Bhutanese Nepali. For political reasons…more than 100,000 people were taken out of the country. We ended up coming to Nepal and became a refugee camp. We lived there for 20 years. Then we tried to go back to Bhutan; Bhutan didn’t let us in. We didn’t have a place to go; then, an
international organization came and said we’d like to resettle you. So many people went to Canada, the USA, Denmark, New Zealand, Australia, so … we are divided. But more than 60,000 came to the USA.

When asked about the tension between Bhutan and Nepal, he stated matter-of-factly that: “Nepal is Nepal, a different country. We are not from Nepal, we are from Bhutan. Only we talk the same language, but we are Bhutanese, not Nepalese. So, we are kept in the refugee camp, we are isolated. They really hate us.”

Having spent nearly 20 years of his life growing up in a refugee camp, he expressed, throughout our interview, an incredible amount of gratitude for having been allowed to be resettled in the United States: “So as we come here today, tomorrow we got the same rights. Same opportunity like everyone.”

My interview with Bhim took place inside of the home recording studio he has built in the basement of his family’s home in North Syracuse. The tour of his studio began with a demonstration of the madal drum, the first instrument he’d learned to play. The madal is a small two-sided hand drum held sideways in the lap while seated. One of its heads (the “male” head) is larger than the other (the “female” head.) The smaller or “female” head produces a ringing tone when struck and is typically tuned to the tonic note of the music being played.

Bhim began learning music by playing with like-minded friends living in a refugee camp. “In 1995, I was like teenager. At that time, it was really difficult. We didn’t even have a guitar, no teacher at all.” His first experiences of making music were playing the madal in a group called the Druk Youth Band. “Druk,” he explained, “is a beautiful word for the Bhutan.” Over years spent practicing music with the youth group after school, he learned to play bass guitar, drums, harmonium, piano, and then, guitar. He stressed that the group’s music-making experience was “not something we learned from teachers; we learned from each other by hearing. I don’t know notation or anything.”

While some may view a lack of formal musical training as a handicap, Bhim values the hands-on approach he took to learning music. Despite not having taken lessons, he
Participating with a Christian youth organization while in Nepal resulted in Bhim being granted an opportunity to participate in recording projects. He was invited to play guitar and sing on recordings. The experience of recording in a simple multitracking studio seeded the dream of eventually having his own recording studio, where he could compose his own musical arrangements. “My first time recording,” he joked, “we recorded to a seven-track tape recorder.” Several years later, and thousands of miles away from where he’d first begun playing music, he is now fully equipped with the means of recording multitrack arrangements and collaborates with local musicians as well as friends located in different regions throughout the United States.

He demonstrated a number of his recordings, introducing the style as adhunik music, a modern variety of Nepali romantic pop music, which gained popularity on Nepalese radio in the 1990s. He described his ideal musical production as “music that the people will like,” explaining that “some younger people enjoy pop music while older people enjoy the folk-styled music,” and that he strives to compose and record music which resonates with a majority of the Bhutanese people. His music’s lyrics, he explained, are a reflection of his gratitude and devotion to God, and he beamed with joy while telling me of the blessings he and his family received by way of being given an opportunity to resettle and thrive as American citizens.

St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church Dabkeh Dancers (Middle East)
By Anna Leach

Dabkeh is a traditional folk dance form that is widely popular among many groups of people in countries such as Palestine, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel. Dabke is performed in joyous settings, such as weddings and other family celebrations. Men and women can dance together, but traditionally, women do not dance without men in the group. This tradition has changed over the years, with more modern groups practicing and performing with only female dancers. The typical formation is a semicircle, with everyone holding hands or linking arms and moving in a counterclockwise direction. A major feature of the dance is the stomping. There are also small steps and hops, with the “leader” of the group, who is the best dancer, performing the most elaborate moves. The other dancers follow the leader and can copy his or her steps.

Dabke continues to be a significant part of musical life, as people have migrated from Arab countries and settled around the world. It is a tradition that is being passed down to younger generations in order to help them learn about their family roots and also to make sure the dance form is maintained. Modern dance teams are taught by older dancers, who may have performed while still in their home countries. They also watch videos of other groups for inspiration, though those groups also learn the traditional steps from their predecessors. Like any traditional form of expression, dabke aids in connecting generations while also educating youth in a changing society affected by globalization.

The St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church of Syracuse serves as a place for the Arab American Christian community to gather. The parish was established originally on November 10, 1929. In the ’50s and ’60s, despite a large-scale fire, the parish continued to grow, and organizing continued to become more structured. At this time, the first annual social event for the Central New York Arabic speaking community, the Annual St. Elias Mahrajan, was established. Growth continued throughout the ’50s and ’60s, as more societies within the church (from choirs to youth organizations and men’s societies) created a more formal programming ecosystem. The new facility on Onondaga Hill opened on Saint Elias Day in 1969.

Today, the church congregation is still primarily influenced by those of Arab heritage, from new Americans to those whose families have been rooted in Central New York for years. Through regular programming, including the annual Syracuse Middle Eastern Festival, St. Elias continues to serve as a resource for many generations of Middle Eastern Christians.

Profile: Dabke Dancer Samira Mahshie

For 18-year-old Samira Mahshie, dance was always destined to be part of her life in some capacity. When asked how she initially was introduced to dance, her answer was immediate: “Definitely my parents,” she says. “All younger kids are expected to dance. There’s no ifs, ands, or buts.”

Mahshie, who dances with the Saint Elias troupe, says dabke is a relatively simple dance from a technique perspective, using a mix of crossing legs, kicking feet, and stomping. All the dancers are women at present; this is reflected in the style as well, the movements overall more “elegant” and “flowy,” incorporating more general smoothness, plus more involvement of the hands (as opposed to in the men’s style, in which hands are held behind the back, the focus being on flashier footwork).

The group, comprised of all women, is one indication of the transition phase the group is currently weathering, according to Mashie. Since she has been dancing, at its height, there were as many as 14 dancers. At present, there are only four. And Mashie is on the “cusp” of the age range, technically too old at 18 and as a college
Mahshie. Those elements of joy and unity are huge parts of what attracted her to the form originally, and it’s something that has kept her dancing, too.

“It’s a really happy dance. You do it to celebrate, to have fun, let loose,” Mahshie says. “It makes everybody happy. It doesn’t matter if you’re Palestinian or if you’re Syrian or if you’re Lebanese—as long as you dance, it’s kind of like we’re all the same.”

Student to still be involved. However, there is a new generation on the horizon; in the next few years, she says a new group of 12 to 14 young dancers from families within the congregation will take her (and many other of the current members) places. Mashie’s own involvement in dance came through the church as well; her great grandfather immigrated to Syracuse from Palestine, and her family has a history within the Saint Elias community. She considers herself primarily an American (she cannot speak a “lick of Arabic” but “[does] know the swear words,” she jokes), and many of the other girls currently dancing are the same. She says dabkeh has still provided her a way to connect to her family and her heritage.

It has also allowed her to learn more about other Middle Eastern cultures, due to the diverse nature of the congregation. This especially comes through in the song choices, Mahshie says. For example, often, the group has to be careful to choose songs (often, one Syrian, one Palestinian, one Lebanese) to “appease everyone,” but through that, she is exposed to all these different musical traditions. Making these choices also helps unify the church audience, as each can feel represented in their own ways and then learn as a whole about others.

“I think a lot of people also like to hear the music that we’re doing,” Mahshie says. “It’s really popular songs that we do when we dance, so a lot of people will be able to understand them or know what’s going on at least.”

This idea of centralized community and simple fun is central to dabkeh, according to Mahshie. Those elements of joy and unity are huge parts of what attracted her to the form originally, and it’s something that has kept her dancing, too.

“It’s a really happy dance. You do it to celebrate, to have fun, let loose,” Mahshie says. “It makes everybody happy. It doesn’t matter if you’re Palestinian or if you’re Syrian or if you’re Lebanese—as long as you dance, it’s kind of like we’re all the same.”

Members of the St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church of Syracuse perform dabkeh dance at Syracuse University on December 2, 2017. From left, Elaina Elamir, Grace George, Aliah Mahshie, and Samira Mahshie. Photo by Anna Leach.
Spring Burial: The Legend of the Service Tree

BY STEVE ZEITLIN

“We grew up thinking that if there wasn’t pavement under our feet, we were lost,” Marc Kaminsky said facetiously, as he sat with his longtime friend George Getzel, who lay dying in a hospital bed at Calvary Hospital in the Bronx, talking about spring. They were two Bronx kids, now two aging, brilliant intellectuals. They knew each other from their time at Hunter College School of Social Work in the ’70s. Struck by George’s tranquility in the face of mortality, Marc asked his friend, filmmaker Menachem Daum, to videotape their conversation, and Marc sent a copy to me.

In his better days, George told Marc, he loved to visit the New York Botanical Garden in all four seasons. Each time it would be a totally different world—the garden was a symbol of nature and birth, and growth and decay.

“You discover this natural world,” Marc remarked. “You take this literal fact and use it as a symbol of immortal life.”

“I was especially close to the service tree,” George continued. “It’s an indigenous tree in northeast America. It’s a tree that’s barely a tree—it might be considered a bush—but it’s a tree. It actually fruits, it has a sweet little fruit that comes out of it when spring warms up, but it’s the first tree that blossoms in the woods. It has soft, large flower petals, light pinkish-white, and if you can reach out and smell it, the tree has the most delicate perfume—really beautiful. It only blooms when the earth around it is unfrozen.

“Our ancestors—at least the ones in North America—had a real problem when people died during the winter, because they couldn’t bury them; the ground was too hard. So what they did was wait till the service tree bloomed, and then they knew they could bury the dead because the ground was soft enough. Otherwise, the bodies would have to be kept in coffins stacked in barns. That touched me deeply.

“So for the last few years, when I could still walk, I’d been trying to hit one of my holy places—the service tree. I would go into the Bronx botanical garden to walk on a trail through 50 acres of virgin forest that had never been cut, and there is the service tree, and I try—it has a life of flowering of, like, three days—so I always try to imagine, ‘Is the ground soft?’ ‘Will I make it?’ And sometimes I make it and sometimes I don’t, and the service tree’s spent flowers are on the ground, but I think that it is emblematic of my notion of immortality in life: a brief time, a beautiful fragrance, and then passing, disintegrating, falling to the ground, and renewal.”

Alone with his mortality in the hospital late one night, George spontaneously texted Marc some of his spiritual musings. Marc later lined the text out as a poem. It ended:

Humankind calls out for compassion
For one’s self and then the other
The spent perfume of the petals
Of the service tree
Fall to the forest bottom
When earth loses its chill

“The last four lines” Marc told him, “sound like the poem that Zen priests wrote just before they died.” It was as if George were musing about an eternal spring, with ground soft enough to accept his body, a universe that still had a place for him, even after his death.

“So here I am in bed, and I’m fading away, I’m losing weight, there are changes,
and people visit me, and they say, ‘I really want to go to the botanical gardens with you,’ and then a little sadness comes over me—’cause that’s not possible anymore.”

George was a faculty member at the Hunter College School of Social Work, now the Silberman School of Social Work, for more than 30 years. As someone who avoided the limelight, he wouldn’t have wanted anyone to walk in his footsteps. “If anything I do is truly worthwhile in my eyes or in the world’s eyes, I don’t want to be copied,” he said. “I just don’t want it—I’m me, you’re you. But I do want to inspire.”

And so, as spring rolls around after a bitter winter, I was inspired to call the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx and ask if they knew about the service tree. The Garden arranged for horticulturalist Jessica Schuler, Director of the Thain Family Forest, to meet my wife and me at the reflecting pool the next Saturday. We traveled into the woods that she knew so well, and we stood in front of the tree George had loved. Though it was the first beautiful day of spring, the service tree had just a tiny splash of pink on the buds. Perhaps, the ground wasn’t yet soft enough to bury the dead.

I told Jessica about George, whom I never met, and his metaphorical interpretation of the service tree. Jessica told us the tree’s Latin name is Amelanchier arborea, but that it had had a variety of common names and etymologies in early North America: shadbush, because it often grows in riparian forests at the edges of rivers where the shad run. It was also called “Juneberry,” because it often fruited in June. And it was called “serviceberry tree,” because it bloomed when the ground was no longer frozen, and it was time to bury the dead and hold a service.

Back in the hospital room, Marc felt that the space around himself and George was getting greater and greater, and that on the other side of that space was death, but that the space of life was also looming larger. George continued to express his deep and thoughtful perspective on life in the face of imminent mortality, making connections between blossoming and withering, growth and decay. “I remember holding my wife’s hand when she was dying,” George told Marc, “and having a great sense of intimacy, the same as when I held my hand over her belly when she was pregnant. There’s this mixture. Even in the face of the grim realities of life that nauseate you and shatter your dreams, I’ve found—with difficulty—deeper meaning.

“We all hold down to something that we would hope would have permanence,” he continued. “Something that would lead us beyond our grave and have something of eternity tied to it. We discover that the idol—be it money, position, your own children, the neighborhood you live in—it’s not forever and it falls apart and isn’t what you thought it was when you were a young man. It becomes moth-eaten and dissipates, and then with that—and here is where I think the faith of an older person, the circumstance of an older person, is useful—it’s followed by new growth, new possibilities.”

George Getzel died on January 7, 2018. The serviceberry tree he loved so well will bloom again next spring.

Please email your thoughts, stories, and responses about the poetic side of life to <steve@citylore.org>. Steve Zeitlin is the Founding Director of City Lore. He is the author of The Poetry of Everyday Life: Storytelling and the Art of Awareness (Cornell University Press, 2016).
“Hog-Rassle” is a term used by some old-timers in rural areas to describe a square dance evening where the participants behave in a disorderly manner. The term generally seems to be used by those who disapprove of dancers who don’t go by the rules. The participants, on the other hand, see themselves as interjecting fun into an otherwise repetitive, predictable tradition. By doing the unexpected, adding one’s own moves or pranks, or just dancing in an extra exuberant manner, a dancer can bring laughter to the whole set. Such behavior is strongly discouraged in carefully regulated versions of square dance, as found in organized club, recreational, and school settings; but in many rural dances, watching and experiencing the unexpected is not only tolerated, it is enjoyed by most as part of the fun.

The rural caller and musicians often add their own version of the unexpected: a call that will deliberately mix everyone up or a humorous musical reference, which will...
make the dancers smile. Existing literature on the topic of square dancing rarely mentions divergence from the expected norms—except in disapproving terms. My discussion of this interesting aspect of rural entertainment is based on some 40 years of observing traditional dances in the rural northeast, on interviews with participants, and on historical accounts reaching back to the early 19th century.

A search for the source of the term does not turn up much. Cassell’s Dictionary of Slang gives us:

**Hog-wrestle** n. (also hog-stomp; 20c+; US) a noisy, inelegant, low-class dance. (Green 2005, 725)

In a 1926 article, “Quadrille Calls,” for the American Dialect Society, Edwin Piper puts the term in perspective with other popular labels for traditional dances, which have commonly included squares:

*Dancing party, party, dance, ball, hop, bowery, shindig or shindy, stepping-bee, hog-rassle, hoe-down, barn-dance, assembly…* Ball for the ceremonious, *hop* for the informal, a *bowery* if danced in a bower; an *assembly* for a dancing school, a *shindig* for row-dies; *hog-rasslin’*—utter contempt. (Piper 1926, 391)

Peter Young, in his study of Ontario, Canada’s dance halls and summer dance pavilions gives us a vivid use of the term by one old-timer. The reference here is to a hall in Brighton, Ontario:

The Spring Valley Dance Pavilion may sound like an innocent enough dance hall, but don’t let the name fool you,” says Basil McMaster. “It could just as easily have been labelled, ‘The Bucket of Blood,’ or, as some of us called it, ‘Hog Wrestle’,…

This roadside hall is not written up in local history books. No, the Spring Valley Dance Hall was everything that the pavilion at the Presqu’ile Hotel—Quick’s Pleasure Palace—was not. To begin with, access was easy. You simply walked a few steps north of town (less than a mile) and *voila*, Hog Wrestler awaited you … the emporium operated between the mid-’20s and the mid-’30s, finally going down in a blaze of glory when fire destroyed the hall.

…Entertainment was usually in the form of a fiddle player and caller, often accompanied by a pianist. (Young 2002, 164)
In contrast to these references to dances, an on-line search for “hog wrestle” will turn up mostly sites dealing with a type of county or state fair competition, where four men are required to catch a hog in a muddy pen and deposit it, butt first, into a large barrel. The ultimate reference to wrestling a hog, of course, goes back to the common but tricky task on many a farm of having to catch a pig.

The first time I heard the term was from an old-timer in the 1970s in the Geneseo, New York area, a man who was describing a type of rural round and square dance that he didn't care to attend. He preferred a more controlled affair—perhaps, even the highly regimented square dance clubs, which had evolved in part to get away from the unruly behavior attached to some dances after the Second World War.

There are numerous references in old newspapers extolling the virtues of a properly managed dance:

The ball held in the Opera House, Friday evening of last week…was certainly one of the most satisfying affairs we have witnessed in a long while. The gentlemen were handsome and courteous, and the ladies as tidy, as pretty, and as merry as could be; and each had suspended from their waist an elegant program of the dance. Nothing but delight could be the result.

From the Avon Springs Herald, October 13, 1892

Certain callers become known for keeping the crowd under control:

…Happy Bill's orchestra became famous in a day when the old fashioned square and contra dances, the waltz, the polka and the schottische were popular. Bill was especially gifted at calling the changes for square and contra dances. He had a voice and often sang his call, and always insisted that every figure should be executed properly; sharp raps of his violin bow always called the dancers back to their places if a blunder was made. Bill's music was right, his calling was right, and he insisted that his dancers should dance correctly.

From Obituary of Happy Bill (Jared Wells) Daniels Cortland Democrat, November 30, 1923

Old time fiddler and caller, Mark Hamilton of Black Creek, New York, contrasted the dancing of his parents' generation with his own: “Years ago, their square dancing, the round dance, all their dance was done graceful. The square dance, they never played 'em awful fast. And those men and women, they'd make so many graceful steps—they didn't just run around and around. And when they'd meet their partner, they always bowed…”

This was the ideal.

By the 1940s when Mark was playing dances around Allegany and Cattaraugus...
Counties, he was seeing the rise of excessive twirling, swinging, and many improvised moves, along with a general rowdiness, which he attributed to the Second World War generation:

That started over here to Bolivar during World War II, right where I was playing. When they’d do the right and left, they done that—hold on and twisted their hands up. But that’s not the proper way. But as long’s they want to do it, I don’t care whatever they do. That twirlin’ started in about the same time . . . but it got so they took so much time twirlin’ that they wouldn’t get enough time to get around while you was callin,’ you know . . . That fancy stuff was when the moose juice gets to workin’ and just to show ‘em off. (Hamilton 1992)

The first hint I had that I was living in hog-rassle country was at the first dance I attended after moving to western New York in 1976. It was in a Lion’s Club hall, which had a busy bar at one end of the room. It was only about the second or third set into the evening when a woman went flying out of the set and crashed into the wall. Clearly, the crowd was drinking, and this would hardly be an elegant affair.

A few months later, I noticed a PennySaver ad for a barn dance at a new horse stable, just out of town. For a partner, I took a new college librarian who had done a little recreational square dancing and was starting to enjoy the newly arrived contra dance scene in Rochester. But this barn dance was something else. She got pulled and yanked and bumped, and swung and twirled until she was dizzy and had to sit down. Some of the men, in particular, danced with great energy and a lot of impromptu moves, all of which she found to be too unpredictable—even rude. And it was clear that she never wanted to go to another one of these dances.

A similar experience was described by a young LeRoy school teacher in 1816:

Friday, August 30th…I went to Mr. McPherson’s to quilting, and they danced in the evening. I have heard about the Scotch balls, but I never attended one before; indeed I never wish to again. There was no more regularity among them than there would have been among so many little Children 6 years old. I thought sometimes I should be pulled in quarters, if a gentleman asked me to dance there was no excuse would rid me of them, but dance I must. (Beach 1816)

An energetic swing was clearly referred to in the following, from 1874, long before any proper dance manuals admitted to its existence:

When Pat and partner arrived at that particular phase of the mazy dance, known...
as “Ladies to the right!” both went in for all there was in the figure. Neither of them we are certain missed a single demi-semi-quaver, and the final “balance and swing pardners” was illustrated with marvelous pigeon wings and wound up with a velocity perfectly bewildering and yet in a blaze of glory…

Jamestown Daily Democrat, February 22, 1874

From Arthur E. Crocker’s written memories of mid-19th century Broome County, we have the following:

…During all this last change all the young men would vie with each other in jumping the highest and spreading his legs over the greatest amount of space and making the most noise, and generally showing his favorite steps. Every movement would be in time to the music, and before the dance would be over every dancer would be in a profuse perspiration.

“Reminiscences of Finch Hollow,” compiled by Rena Crocker Leezer, 1973

From Arch Bristow’s Old Time Tales of Warren County, we have another good example:

There are some steppers among the crowd at the Kansas House tonight. Nathaniel Martin is dancing with Nancy Hare. There are few who can outdo him on the dance floor … He’s limber as an eel, his feet move like lightning. He gets in a lot of stuff that’s all his own, fancy bows and quick, clog steps. How he does spin Nancy around when the caller shouts, “Swing your partners!” …

Eighteen sets should be dancing to-night, but the onlookers take up so much room only fourteen sets can manage to dance. And they have to cut down on the real fancy swinging. No room for a fellow to swing his girl off the floor.” (Bristow1932)

Most of the dances that I attended over the next decade or so—and continue to attend occasionally—have not been particularly outrageous. Especially those in rural grange halls or school gyms, where no drinking is allowed; these have been lively, but generally well managed. The energy level is always high, and there are those who add extra turns and swings—but nobody (except a child, perhaps) is lifted off the floor. I don’t think any of the participants would have classed them as hog-rasses. These dances are, of course, officially labeled “Round and Square Dances” and have been pretty much a continuation of what many of the now older aged participants had done in local high school gyms, often following basketball games in the 1950s and early 1960s.

One day, however, I heard that a band I didn’t know was playing a dance at the South Hornell Grange—about 40 miles south of Geneseo. I took my tape recorder and video camera and figured I could do some documentation of a different dance crowd and new musicians. It was clear when I arrived that this was indeed a different crowd. There were several teenagers drinking beer and maybe something stronger out in the parking lot. The only obvious grange participation seemed to be minimal: the man collecting the admission at the door, one set of older couples at the end of the hall, and those running the food counter inside. This was largely a younger crowd. As the band started and the leader called for sets on the floor, I set up my camera and got ready to let it run. Somebody needed a partner, and very quickly, I was in the midst of a set that danced like no others I had ever experienced. I was pulled and yanked, and in the midst of more twirling and wild swinging than I could imagine. I had found a hog-rassle.

Even at the tamer dances, which I have documented the most, elements of the impromptu abound—a surprise call that mixes everyone up, extra twirls and vigorous swinging, ganging up on one individual in the middle of a circle, inventing a new way to do some particular figure, etc. These are important elements of the old-time rural dance, which are not permitted in the carefully taught modern or western square dance clubs or in most recreational square dance settings.

It is just these impromptu moves that bring these dances alive to those who enjoy them. The called danced figures here are much simpler and more repetitive than those of the club dance; but the level of fun is, I think, much higher, as the individuality of certain dancers, the joy of the unexpected and pleasure from both being watched and watching become significant elements of enjoyment.

A favorite dance at the Hopewell Grange went to the tune of “Coming ‘Round the Mountain.” The first gent swings in turn with the second, third, and fourth ladies, each time bringing that lady back to his place where they circle with his own partner. Eventually, with all four ladies circling around the gent, the call is:

Drop your hands, stop right there,
Tickle his ribs and muss his hair!

Done as called, the figure is funny enough, as the four ladies tickle the gent and mess up his hair. But the Hopewell dancers often went beyond the call. The gent’s shirt tails might be pulled out, his pant legs rolled up, and shoelaces tied together. On occasion, extra ladies might join the circle. There was one set that I especially remember, which involved two teenage couples. As the circle started to grow around one of the young gents, more girls joined in from the sidelines and then a couple guys jumped in. When “Drop your hands…” was called, the fellow in the middle bolted for the door, with all the others chasing after him. This brought the whole dance to a stop for a few moments, amid great laughter, until the set could be reassembled.

Another dance that has often encouraged a similar group response is “Kiss Her In The Moonlight.” Generally done to the tune of “Listen To The Mockingbird,” this call had become a great favorite throughout the region by the 1940s, and remained so to more recent times. In this figure, each couple in its turn promenades the outside into the middle of the square. At the call, “Kiss her in the moonlight,” or “Kiss her if you dare,” some self-appointed person usually turns the overhead lights out. As the couple kisses or hugs in the middle, others in the set—and sometimes from outside the set—will rush the couple, add more kisses, muss their hair, roll up a pant leg, pull out shirt tails, and the like.
A favorite embellishment among some western New York dancers is for a gent or lady in the grand right and left to turn an unsuspecting dancer 180 degrees around so he or she winds up going the wrong way—the gent moving in the ladies’ direction and the lady in the men’s. It all works out when they get back home and usually brings smiles to all in the set. And, lastly, sometimes a surprise is generated by the caller. After repeatedly following the main figure with an “allemande left” call, the caller may suddenly switch to “allemande RIGHT”—creating momentary chaos and extra fun.

Improvisation is central, of course, to many of the world’s dance traditions. Here, however, we are dealing with a set dance tradition with expectations that it should be done right. The fun in the old-time rural dance may just come from doing some of it wrong.

References
Beach, Candice. 1816. Diary transcript held by the Leroy Historical Society
A Telling Image: Bridging Folk and Fine Art Visitor Repertoires in Exhibit Design through Contemporary Murals in Folk Arts Contexts

BY EDWARD Y. MILLAR

In the absence of a permanent installation delineating between the folk art gallery and the fine and contemporary art galleries within the same museum, temporary delineations—such as murals—provide an important bridge for museumgoers. As visitors to the museum are asked to engage with both fine art and folk art exhibits and their respective lexicons, sets of meanings, and paradigms, curators are responsible to provide interpretive direction not only within the exhibit but between them. Building into exhibit design the interpretive materials, which can function as a step transition between folk art and fine art, enables visitors to more easily identify linkages and differences between folk and fine art, facilitating a more meaningful interaction with both. The installation of two contemporary art murals—drawing from tradition—during two recent folk arts exhibitions at the Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University (www.castellaniartmuseum.org) served as a bridge between folk art, fine art, and the interpretive sets of meanings necessary for visitors to engage with them.

Building Blocks and Crafting Connections

Designing an exhibit is a lot like playing with blocks—figuring out how the many individual pieces of varying shapes, sizes, colors, and connections can be fit together to make one cohesive whole. For example, how an interpretive panel in one section connects to a fieldwork photo in another, to how the title of the exhibit relates to a displayed work. Every component of an exhibit must be both distinct from one another but also still circle back to the “big
idea”: the overarching message expressed through the exhibit’s purpose and scope (Chambers 2009, 68; Serrell 2015, 8). As a curator, one of my main responsibilities in exhibit design or assembling the various blocks (to continue that analogy) is to equip visitors to the exhibit with an instruction manual: to provide a mixture of specialized and contextual information that enables them to have meaningful interactions with the displayed works.

Covering all of the interpretive elements of an exhibit from its written content to the overarching structure and layout, the instruction manual functions as a set of guidelines that educate rather than dictate. These guidelines prepare visitors with the meanings, lexicon, and paradigms necessary to interact with a work in an informed and approachable way, without declaring opinion of the work or being “preachy” (Serrell 2015, 117). Any interpretive component of an exhibit, whether textual, visual, or audial, conveys information about the works on display and how it all fits into wider sets of meanings. In essence, the instruction manual teaches visitors “how to look” (Hernandez 1987, 70) at folk art or fine art as an informed observer: that is, holistically and not in isolation.

Yet, as anyone who has ever had the pleasure to assemble “ready-to-assemble” furniture can attest, whether the instruction manual is vigorously hurled into the fireplace (sometimes, literally), followed as infallible doctrine, or somewhere between, can vary greatly from person to person. This is an acute challenge where folk arts and fine arts are displayed within the same museum, as the repertoires and interactions asked of visitors with each varies: though common to both, we hope for visitors to walk away at least with more from their experiences than the wall of an exhibit being “a nice shade of green.” Where the similarities and differences are poorly articulated on the curatorial side, we run the risk of a visitor interacting with folk art as fine art, privileging the aesthetic expression of the individual while overlooking their role within their community and community tastes (or vice versa). A further challenge is added in needing to maintain internal cohesiveness and museum identity between folk arts and fine arts exhibits—lest the museum feel like two divergent spaces in one.

At the Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University, one recent approach we experimented with to face this challenge has been to foreground visual interpretive elements, in the form of installing temporary, contemporary art murals rooted in the traditions in addition to the encoding of the space through the narrative murals, Erwin’s visual signature communicated further inside knowledge—on who had installed the exhibit—leading visitors to draw a further connection between his inclusion in the exhibit and family ties to beadwork. Erwin is a well-known artist within the Tuscarora community, with his work displayed throughout the Tuscarora Nation House, a mural installation at the local school, and in the Tuscarora Exhibit at the New York Power Authority’s Niagara Power Vista.
featured in that specific exhibit. Narrative murals designed and installed by Erwin Printup, Jr., to accompany the Made of Thunder, Made of Glass II beadwork exhibit at the Castellani Art Museum in 2016, merged two traditional Haudenosaunee folk narratives and incorporated a breadth of traditional motifs used in beadwork. Calligraffiti murals installed by Muhammad Zahin Zaman, as part of the Appealing Words cross-community calligraphy exhibit in 2017, blended three forms of traditional calligraphy and graffiti into one new contemporary script. These murals functioned as a visual bridge between the interpretive elements found in the folk art and fine art galleries, facilitating a step transition for museumgoers between the two repertoires of meaning.

**Exhibit Interpretation: A Visitor’s Manual (Not Doctrine!)**

All of the interpretive elements that are curated in an exhibit do more than communicate ideas or information: they also identify and direct the viewer toward linkages between them. For example, a sentence on a panel describing the relationship between the edge-shape of a qalam (reed pen) and the ability to transition quickly between wide and narrow strokes in the Arabic Calligraphy section of the Appealing Words exhibit also, more generally, tells the reader that the shape of the writing implement influences the design of what is written. So, even if a visitor reads only this one section and one panel, it plants a seed of information applicable to all of the other calligraphy traditions in the exhibit. In another example, fieldwork photographs of paint being sprinkled onto water starting an ebru (Turkish paper marbling) work shows not only that specific technique but also guides the viewer to reflect on the sequence of techniques that led to the finished work on display.

This model stands in contrast to the “whatever interpretation” constructivist approach in museum interpretation that Cheryl Meszaros identifies (Meszaros 2006, 12), in that although visitors are not necessarily expected to make use of the provided interpretive materials and/or make the same connections in the same way that I might, as the curator

Muhammad’s calligraffiti technique blends three calligraphy traditions—Arabic, English, and Bengali—into one, adapting and altering them into his own typography. For example, *nuqta* dots used in Arabic calligraphy in measuring proportion, are instead seen here as used to fill letter space.
developing the exhibit, they are expected to “move about” within a specific repertoire of meaning conveyed by the curator. This encourages self-reflection on the visitor’s part of how they construct meaning when interacting with displayed works (Meszaros 2006, 168), in effectively setting parameters or boundaries of conclusions while also acknowledging the curator as not having the only authoritative interpretive opinion (Chambers 2009, 75).

The type and tone of interpretive information, which curators provide for fine art and for folk art to museumgoers, differs in perspective in one key way. The instruction manual accompanying fine and contemporary artworks encourage visitors to have a meaningful interaction with the visuals of the work, firstly, and secondly, the meanings or situations (where provided) that led to it. The use of limited information labels (containing perhaps nothing more than the name, year, and title of work) minimizes “noise” so as to not affect a viewer’s visceral interaction with a work. This perspective extends through to when contextual information is included, such as an artist biography or description of the meanings expressed in the work: the end focus is still on how those experiences resonate through the visuals of the work. In other words, the fine art instruction manual points to the world of meanings seen.

The instruction manual for folk art, on the other hand, encourages visitors to interact with the meanings (and situations) leading up to and revolving around the works, firstly, and secondly, how the displayed work itself looks. For example, labels for a set of beaded picture frames by Bryan Printup in Made of Thunder, Made of Glass II, which featured blue jays and cardinals, focused equally on community folk belief about them, Bryan’s relationship to that knowledge, and on how that influences why they were included by him. If working from the visual foregrounding of the piece—and with limited context—visitors would be unable to draw a connection between the sets of meanings (community and personal preference), which led to their creation on the picture frame. In other words, the folk art instruction manual points to worlds of meanings seen and unseen.

In partial contrast to Jo Farb Hernandez’s conclusion “…that distinctions between folk art and fine art should be eliminated whenever possible… and doing away with the need to explain what “folk art” is doing in a “fine art” museum” (Hernandez 1987, 74), commonalities between folk art and fine art should be deconstructed and articulated as a transitioning point, leading to their differences. The elimination of distinctions between folk art and fine art—both the specific works and in the instruction manuals—should not be the finishing line but the starting point to explore those differences, why they matter, and how they complement one another.

For example, the relationship between a folk artist to community issues is similar but distinct from a contemporary artist’s reactions to the same community issues. The former operates within a shared repertoire of technique, form, and function to react to those issues, and the contemporary artist forges new connections, expressions, or alterations of tradition in reacting to shared issues. This articulation is important in educating visitors on the divergent ways that similar meanings and experiences can be expressed: removing them would detach the bonds that link artist, meaning, and the circumstances leading to the created work, resulting in further—not less—objectification. Highlighting their links and distinctions better prepares visitors for interacting not only with the fine and folk artworks on display, but also “welcoming” them into the values of the museum in including both (Meszaros 2008, 166). The use of contemporary art murals rooted in tradition within the folk art exhibitions did precisely that: simultaneously deconstructing and articulating similarities and differences between fine art, folk art, and their repertoires of meaning.

Reading Pictures: Narrative Murals

In the spring of 2013, the Castellani hosted Gerry Biron’s Made of Thunder, Made of Glass II exhibit, which brought together historic and contemporary beadwork from Haudenosaunee and Wabanaki communities, and paired them with contemporary portraits of featured beadworkers by Gerry Biron. Drawing on the historic beadwork collection of Gerry Biron and Grant Wade Jonathan (Tuscarora), contemporary beadwork, and painted portraits of featured beadworkers, Made of Thunder, Made of Glass II involved both fine art and folk art through its exhibit materials.

As part of the exhibit’s installation at the Castellani, we partnered with Erwin Printup Jr., a Cayuga/Tuscarora illustrator, to design and install temporary murals for the exhibit: an idea born out of brainstorming sessions with Gerry Biron, Grant Wade Jonathan, Bryan Printup, and Erwin. The themes of Erwin’s illustrations—for example, in Giving Thanks: A Native American Good Morning Message—often draw on traditional Haudenosaunee narratives and motifs. Erwin had also previously been involved with the Castellani Art Museum, featured in an exhibit of Native American illustrators at the Castellani in 2008, entitled Many Winters Ago. Aside from his works as an individual artist, Erwin had a unique connection to the Made of Thunder, Made of Glass II exhibit: his mother, sister, and niece were all beadworkers featured in the exhibit.

Initially, a few design ideas were tossed around—from the layout of the pedestals in the shape of a turtle to referencing the Great Turtle from the Haudenosaunee creation myth through to the hanging of beaded birds from the ceiling—but logistical or design concerns intervened. Difficulties in settling on the design were rooted in concerns of suitability (and objectification)—if the physical space of the gallery was going to be altered in a meaningful way, the design and its meanings needed to fit purposefully and clearly into the exhibit. The murals needed to both be distinct from
the exhibit to maintain its role as a transition for visitors into the exhibit from their preceding space and also be clearly interwoven, so as not to be mistaken by visitors as an “ambience only” installation (Serrell 2015, 167). Ultimately, the design and installation of the temporary murals were left up to Erwin, who designed three murals, installed over a period of two weeks, using a mix of vinyl and black electrical tape.

The three murals were spread throughout the gallery: one large mural in the main entryway, one in the secondary entryway, and one large central mural at the other end of the gallery. Each of the entryway murals featured a variety of traditional motifs commonly found on beadwork, from sky domes to flowers to fiddlehead ferns, creating a direct visual bridge to the designs visitors would expect to find on the beadwork featured in the exhibit. The designs used in the “Welcome Mural,” as Erwin called it, were intended specifically for this purpose: to immerse visitors in Haudenosaunee culture through exposure and grounding in a shared visual repertoire. For visitors to the exhibit who were already familiar with those motifs and were members of the Haudenosaunee community, the three murals provided more than a visual refresher, as together they told two Haudenosaunee folk narratives: The Creation Story and the Grapevine Legend.

Written descriptions for the murals were developed in collaboration with Erwin, who had learned the narratives from a storyteller in his community—the text was not installed next to the murals but included in the exhibit catalog only. On one level, this enabled the visual qualities of the murals to be foregrounded and maintain the function of the mural in being a bridge between the folk art and fine art instruction manuals for the visitor through focusing on visual repertoire. On another level, codifying this space by communicating a specific, insider message helped to carve out and articulate the exhibit gallery space itself as being for community insiders.

The following descriptions are taken from the Made of Thunder, Made of Glass II exhibit catalog:

**Creation Story (Welcome Mural)**

Three semi-circles form a sky-dome design, each depicting the sky-world that encompasses all of creation and its inhabitants. Sky woman, whose fall through a hole in the sky-world led to the peopling and creation of Turtle Island (North America), is represented as a flower in full bloom. The flower roots emerge and bridge the sky-world with creation, speaking to the roots of tradition in past, present, and future peoples. The seven circles...
which unite and support the earth holding the flower draw from the Great Law of the Haudenosaunee, encouraging visitors to reflect and be mindful of how their actions would impact seven generations.

Grapevine Legend (Welcome Mural)
The grapevine legend, depicted by the two figures united by the yet-unbroken vine over a raging river current, evokes the traditional story of the separation of the Tuscarora from the other Five Nations of the Iroquois. Geometric designs underneath the scene draw on early patterns on Iroquois pottery to represent a shared foundation in Mother Earth.

Double Scroll and Fiddlehead Fern (Welcome Mural, alternate)
This entryway design merges the flowing river currents of the Grapevine mural, with the double curve or double scroll design of the fiddlehead fern, found throughout the beadwork of the Northeastern Woodland nations. It reminds us of the common experiences and connection to nature, and the diverse meanings drawn from them.

Great Turtle Mural
The Great Turtle mural concludes the Sky woman creation story in the Welcome Mural, providing the final rest and reprieve from her descent through the sky domes. On its back, the Hiawatha design represents a global message of unity and peace in the model of the Haudenosaunee, throughout Turtle Island (North America) and Mother Earth.

These written descriptions were written in a way to directly connect the visuals of the murals with the narrative knowledge they represent. Rather than summarizing or retelling the entire Creation Story or the Grapevine Legend and then pointing readers to where it is represented visually in the murals, this writing approach focused on using the visuals of the murals to retell that specific portion of the narrative. Although this resulted in a fragmented presentation of both narratives, it helped visitors to the exhibit to think directly about the relationship between image, meaning, and the shared repertoire of knowledge necessary to understand them—as they moved to engage with the beadwork in the rest of the exhibit.

Seeing Words: Calligraffiti Murals
In fall 2017, we curated an exhibit at the Castellani entitled Appealing Words: Calligraphy Traditions in Western New York, which brought together four different types of traditional calligraphy—Arabic, Hebrew, Japanese, and Chinese—medieval manuscripts from the collection and two contemporary interpretations of traditional calligraphy. In bringing together numerous calligraphy traditions into one exhibit, Appealing Words provided a comprehensive introduction to traditional calligraphy practiced locally, and through its development, connected those calligraphers with one another.

The works of Rosemary Lyons, a Buffalo-based contemporary illuminator and calligrapher, and Muhammad Zahir Zaman, a Buffalo-based calligraffiti artist, formed an integral part of the exhibit's interpretive plan. In situating their works in relation to the traditional works in the exhibit, their accompanying interpretive materials provided a crucial resource in articulating why their works are contemporary art drawing from tradition, rather than a tradition in contemporary practice: for instance, the act of giving traditional forms new purpose, context, and content. However, interpretive materials also drew connections between folk art's community dynamic and their own work's relationship to their communities and associated social justice movements.

Muhammad Zahir Zaman's experience with calligraphy began by learning traditional Arabic calligraphy from another local calligrapher, but he felt restricted by the breadth of rules. He instead began to explore calligraffiti: a more free-form interpretation of Arabic calligraphy, which has recently been spreading throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Calligraffiti alters the traditional script with a more open and free-flowing approach, merging it with graffitii aesthetics and techniques—in addition to providing new context in being public, in outdoor installations. After meeting El Seed during his Coney Island installation, Muhammad began work on developing his own calligraffiti script and approach, eventually developing his own typography tied into his personal identity as a Bangladeshi American: fusing the Arabic, Bengali, and English scripts into one new script. As part of his calligraffiti installation, Muhammad installed two large murals in his section on the far side of the exhibit gallery.

The two murals installed in the exhibit were directly integrated into both his own section of the exhibit and the wider theme. A large, nearly floor-to-ceiling circular installation of a quote attributed to Jalaluddin Rumi, a 13th-century Sufi mystic and poet, reading: “Love will come through all languages on its own,” tied together the cross-community structure of the calligraphy exhibit. Accompanying the circle, geometric lines and triangles spray painted onto the wall were installed by Muhammad to create an aesthetic balance to the ringed quote. On the neighboring wall, two large nuqta—brush stroke “dots” commonly used for measuring and ornamentation in Arabic calligraphy—accompanied by a contemporary alteration: a paint-drip flowing from the bottom dot. Beneath the nuqta, Muhammad wrote Peace and Salam twice: once in English in his own typography and once in Arabic in a free-flowing script.

His other works in the exhibit, consisting of two works on canvas and three planks, featured messages relating to issues reflecting personal experiences of community identity. The series of three separate wooden panels, entitled My Country, My Home, featured the phrase written repeatedly using red, white, and blue hues: made in the wake of growing Islamophobia in the country and the impact it has had on his identity as a Muslim American. Their installation as neighboring but separate planks also helped to communicate this feeling of division—inviting viewers to imagine what the three would look if made whole. The two works on canvas bore cross-community messages in picking up themes of love, devotion, and humility common to all of
the major religions, with the colors on each canvas rooted in the elements mentioned in their message: blue for *As the water covers the sea, your love covers me* and an earthy brown for *I am from the dirt, and I will go back to the dirt*. These works were installed over the murals, with the letters flowing from the wall, to the canvas and planks, and back onto the wall, creating a three-dimensional installation.

The placement of Muhammad’s calligraphy next to the traditional Arabic calligraphy works by helping to provide a visual bridge with Arabic calligraphy in both aesthetics and meanings. Although the vast majority of Muhammad’s works are written in English in his own blended typography, Muhammad uses the same flat-angle brush (or pen) used in Arabic calligraphy, maintaining the same signature movement between wide and narrow strokes. On many of his works, Muhammad writes the same phrase over and over and over again, creating a layering cascade of words and letters: a way of writing through the issues or emotions that he is feeling at the time.

This use of calligraphy as meditation and reflection through repetition of impactful phrases was shared by the Arabic calligrapher in the exhibit, Amjad Aref. Amjad mentioned in an interview that through his daily reading of the Quran, he might come across a particular *sura* that resonates with him at that time, and in order to commit it to memory and reflect on it further, he would write it out in calligraphy.

Convergences and divergences between the traditional Arabic calligraphy in the exhibit and Muhammad’s calligraphy were articulated in the interpretive materials on three levels: through visuals, text, and audio recordings. Visually, visitors were asked to draw direct connections and differences between calligraphy and Arabic calligraphy through the placement of the murals and works side-by-side. Through written label and panel descriptions of calligraphy and Arabic calligraphy, visitors read about the applications of both forms of art—and where they might be encountered. Finally, through the audio vignettes in the exhibit, visitors could hear Muhammad articulate and identify similarities and differences between his calligraphy work and traditional Arabic calligraphy—and also an overview of traditional Arabic calligraphy by Amjad.

By appealing to these three levels of engagement in a variety of forms and starting from the shared visual engagement of the fine art interpretive materials—just as in the beadwork exhibit—visitors were eased into and provided with the tools necessary to navigate the folk art works and meanings in the exhibit.

Muhammad’s works were installed partially over the murals intentionally: while obscuring the full text of the murals, Muhammad and I felt that it gave an interwoven feeling to both the mural and his featured artworks. This installation was actually Muhammad’s first major mural and has since gone on to be a part of major mural installations at other venues in Buffalo, including the Burchfield Penney Art Center and the Buffalo Arts Studio.
Casting a Wide Net: Reflections on Interpretive Material Design

In the Made of Thunder, Made of Glass II beadwork exhibit and the Appealing Words calligraphy exhibit, the installation of contemporary art murals, drawing from traditional art, was featured as a bridge for visitors between folk art, fine art, and the interpretive materials provided in each exhibit. Instead of throwing visitors into the deep end and barraging them at once with new ways of meanings alongside the new works themselves, the murals helped visitors test the waters by tapping into a common level of engagement—visual—to lead them into new sets of meanings. Foregrounding the visual elements of the instruction manual acknowledges that the sights, which visitors see, are interpretive materials in themselves, informing and influencing how subsequent works are experienced. By decentralizing and dispersing the meaning-making opportunities of the instruction manual between different categories, visitors are taught that the conclusions and meanings will be at the confluence of those disparate pieces—rather than found wholly in one.

This approach to casting a wide net of interpretive materials and multiple points of engagement for visitors to interact with ensures that at least some degree of contextual information is being communicated to visitors, even if they were to idly saunter past with no more than a passing glance. Just because text is written on a panel does not mean that it will be read; nor does the inclusion of fieldwork photos mean they will be paid attention; nor will providing audio vignettes mean they will be listened to. If all three categories of text, visual, and audio interpretive materials are included in various ways, however, there is a good chance that one might stick, pulling them into the wider net of holistic exhibit experience.

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Edward Yong Jun Millar is the Curator of Folk Arts at the Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University and an Adjunct Faculty in Niagara University’s Art History with Museum Studies program. Ed graduated from Seton Hall University in 2012 through the Honors Program curriculum, with a BA in Anthropology. Ed received his MA in Folklore from Memorial University of Newfoundland in 2014, with interests in occupational folklife, folk arts, public folklore, folklife in literature, ballads, folklore and popular culture, game design, and foodways. Since joining the Castellani in July 2015, Ed has curated a host of folk arts exhibitions and programs, with a particular focus on connecting similar traditions and practitioners across multiple communities. Most recently, Strung Together: Zither Encounters, was a music program in June 2018, which mixed performance and presentation, in a roundtable format developed by the three local musicians featured, who each play a type of zither: Recep Ornek, a kanun player from the Turkish community; Eva Pan Pin, a guqin player from the Chinese community; and Julie Dulanski, a hammered dulcimer player from the Western New York community. Photo of the author by Kiyomi Millar.

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Buffalo, New York, has a remarkable collection of great buildings from its late 19th-century and early 20th-century expansion: monumental buildings designed by the likes of Louis Sullivan, Fellheimer and Wagner, and later, Frank Lloyd Wright. Many of these architects were the period’s leading designers, outsiders from Chicago and New York City hired to announce the arrival of this forward-looking city at the connection of Lake Erie and the Erie Canal. These noteworthy buildings and the grain elevators that financed them have been thoroughly documented and praised, but another, vernacular building type is less noted—the Buffalo telescope house.

Telescope houses were also products of the city’s rapid development and designed—at least initially—by outsider
designers and architects. Often started as wood-frame worker cottages, the buildings were typically produced from designs in pattern books or other standardized development tools by German and Polish immigrants or the companies that employed them.

They did not stay as designed for long. The combination of small residences, narrow but deep lots, growing families, and limited resources led to a distinctive expansion pattern: buildings that were enlarged through rear additions that were incrementally reduced in scale. The result was houses that seemingly could be collapsed into themselves, like a telescope or “spyglass.”

The old joke is that every time the family had another child, the family would tack another room on the end of the house. When the extensions were not bedrooms, they were kitchens, workrooms, and even separate apartments.

Of course, telescope houses are not located only on Buffalo’s East Side, or even only in Buffalo. Such houses are a building tradition dating back at least to the early 1800s, but they are so concentrated on the city’s East Side that they are the predominant building type on many blocks there.

Although Buffalo is undergoing a concentrated resurgence, the common maladies of Northeastern and Midwestern American cities, including deindustrialization, institutional racism, and limited social services, continue to linger on the East Side. These problems are plainly visible in the built environment. Once dense streets are now full of derelict lots, and small fields now flank many of the deep houses. The resulting wide open views make the special design of Buffalo’s telescope houses more visible, but they also reveal the tenuous condition of many of the buildings—and the neighborhoods as a whole. How they and their occupants will weather the city’s future is unclear.

All photos by the author.
Rochesterians are up in arms about news that “smash plates” are now on the menu at the Bridgestone Arena in Nashville, Tennessee. Eager to set the record straight, they took to the Internet to provide context that the menu had excluded. “Native to Rochester, the garbage plate has been a staple of the community for around 100 years. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery,” one local tweeted (Shaw 2018). Most feedback has been less kind. Nashvillians just want to know what a garbage plate is and why it exists. “Why are human beings eating something called a garbage plate, let alone feeling territorial about it?” Brad Schmidt, columnist for the Tennessean, writes (Peace and Greenwood 2018; Schmitt 2018).

Folklorists and food scholars know why. “A cohesive group in which people feel a sense of belonging makes up a
The Rob Salamida Company sells spiedies at many Broome County events and is best known for their nationally available spiedie marinade. This employee’s shirt, spied at the Gusto! Italian Festival in Endicott, succinctly explains what a spiedie is: “It’s a tasty treat of marinated meat, charbroiled and fed on Italian sliced bread.”

community, and food oftentimes acts as a tool for creating that feeling as well as for drawing boundaries for those not sharing such a feeling,” Lucy Long wrote in Food and Folklore Reader (Long 2015, 3). Especially in places with changing economies and populations, communities use food-related traditions to reinforce a sense of regional identity. Stripped of their regional context and named something new, “smash plates” are something of an affront.

As a folklorist, I am interested in more than individual food items. Rather, I’m interested in “foodways”: the whole process of production and consumption, including the events and occasions during which food is consumed or otherwise utilized. While giving a talk about these ideas in the Catskills, I was surprised to learn that attendees were almost entirely unaware of my favorite fieldwork finds: spiedies, grape pies, and garbage plates.

**Spiedies**

**Binghamton, Broome County**

These hearty sandwiches are more functional than fun; the quirkiest thing about spiedies might just be their name. “Spiedie” (pronounced speedy) comes from the Italian word spiedo, meaning spit, or spiedini, referring to cubes or balls of meat cooked on a skewer. Cubed lamb, pork, or chicken is marinated in what is essentially Italian dressing (usually olive oil, lemon juice, red wine vinegar, sugar, garlic, bay leaf, cayenne pepper, thyme, basil, oregano, salt, and pepper), then skewered and grilled. The preparer wraps Italian bread or a hoagie roll around the skewer and uses it like a mitt to make the sandwich.

Spiedies caught on, appropriately enough, because they were speedy. First sold outside local bars and grocery stores to Endicott Johnson factory workers for lunch, they’re now available across the tri-city area (Binghamton, Endicott, and Johnson City). Spiedies’ portability make them ideal for vending for events and fairs, so much that commercialization is very much part of their traditionality. Rival businesses have created intense local competition for each other, and commercially manufactured marinade is available nationwide, but spiedies’ simplicity makes them easily replicable at home, too. And every fan has their own preferred recipe. Some use venison instead of lamb, for example, or add a handful of mint to the marinade.

Binghamton celebrates the sandwich during the annual Spiedie Fest and Balloon Rally. Although the event began as a cook-off, it’s now a nationally known draw for balloon enthusiasts, and spiedies only play a supporting role.

A recipe for chicken spiedies was included in the Foodways column by Lynn Ekfelt in Voices 30-1-2, Spring-Summer 2004.

**Grape Pies**

**Naples, Ontario County**

Grape pies originated in Naples, New York, south of Rochester in the Bristol Valley. As the town’s name might suggest, there is a long tradition of grape growing and wine making here. Route 21, which dips in and out of town, is lined with vineyards. Until its closure in 2009, Widmer Wine Cellars employed community members and attracted a considerable number of tourists (Sherwood 2009). Hazlitt 1852 Vineyards bought the complex soon thereafter and made it home to their Red Cat Cellars, bolstering the town’s grape-centric identity.

The Naples Grape Festival celebrates that identity every September. Grape-
themed crafts and foods, the most famous of which is grape pie, attract thousands of visitors. Locals, including many past winners of the festival’s annual pie competition, hawk their own versions of the Finger Lakes delicacy from their front yards.

The pie’s jammy filling is traditionally made with Concord grapes, which must be carefully peeled, boiled, and deseeded (Ekfelt 2002). Each maker has their own preferences, though, and the number of sellers at the festival forces bakers to innovate and offer something unique: hand pies, for example, or decorated crusts. Despite not being particularly easy to make, the pies are popular throughout the Finger Lakes.

A recipe for grape pie was included in the Foodways column by Lynn Ekfelt in *Voices* 28-3-4, Fall-Winter 2002.

### Garbage Plates
#### Rochester, Monroe County
As the story goes, the name for this one-plate meal caught on when a late-night reveler asked for a “garbage plate,” trying (and failing) to remember the name of a meal that piled on everything that the kitchen at Alex Tahou’s Hots and Potatoes could make. After Alex’s son, Nick, took over the restaurant in the mid-1940s, the sloppy neologism was made official. Now, Nick Tahou Hots is home of the uncontested ur-form of garbage plates, which contains some combination of the following: fries or home fries, beans, macaroni salad, white or red hots (pork- or beef-based hot dogs), a hamburger or cheeseburger, a grilled cheese, a fried egg, spiced meat sauce, mustard, and onions.

Competitors in the Naples Grape Festival Grape Pie Contest enter their pies anonymously, and a panel of judges rank each based on taste, texture, appearance, and flavor. Winners earn the right to officially call their version the “World’s Greatest Grape Pie.”

Hoping to attract customers, festival vendors offer fun, portable variants of grape pies. Mo-Jo’s sells these filled sugar cookies.
A hundred years after Alex opened Hots and Potatoes, garbage plates of all kinds are on menus across the city. Dogtown offers a vegetarian version, and The Red Fern offers a vegan version. The Cub Room even offers an upmarket version that includes pancetta and a duck egg. Mark’s Texas Hots, Tom Wahl’s, and Bill Gray’s offer more straightforward interpretations that have won over most locals. Few Rochesterians name Nick’s as their favorite.

A recipe for the meat sauce for a Garbage Plate was included in the Foodways column by Lynn Ekfelt in *Voices* 33-1-2, Spring-Summer 2007.

As a newcomer to New York, I assumed that attendees at my talk would have at least heard of these oddities. Weird and wonderful foods usually attract outside
interest exactly because they’re a little weird. Sometimes their otherness appeals to tourists, or even actively increases tourism. If a community attracts few visitors, though, their local delicacies won’t attract new fans.

Grape pies are the most well known of the foods discussed here, but if you live outside of the Finger Lakes and have not been to the Grape Festival, you might not know about them. The Grape Festival attracts regional visitors, and although Naples brings in tourists from elsewhere for other reasons, they’re not there for the food. The same is true in Binghamton. Spiedie Fest attendees are regional, too, and the ones who come from a distance are more interested in balloons than big sandwiches.

Garbage plates don’t have their own festival yet, but they do have a certain pride of place in the hearts of Rochesterians. The city’s minor league baseball team, the Red Wings, becomes the Garbage Plates for every Thursday night home game. If nothing else, the frequency with which they appear on menus suggests they are more than a novelty. Rochester’s particularly thick upper crust might discourage garbage plates’ broader popularity. After decades of sustained economic difficulty, Rochester is fighting for a cultural and economic revival, and garbage plates neither look nor sound like anything that belong front and center on a tourism website. If seen there, they might accidentally encourage the idea that upstate New York is, well, garbage. “Both perceived images, or people’s perceptions about a particular place, and projected images, those images created by media and other information sources, are important for destinations that are trying to utilize gastronomy as a tourist attraction,” according to Dallen Timothy and Amos Ron (2013, 281) in “Heritage Cuisines, Regional Identity, and Sustainable Tourism.” It makes sense, then, that Rochester is better known for its craft beverages and high-end restaurants.

Because of the aforementioned economic difficulty, upstate New Yorkers often don’t move to other parts of the state when they pursue a career, start a family, or retire. They move to other states altogether. One works as the general manager of Nashville’s Bridgestone Arena’s food service (Peace and Greenwood 2018). Buffalo wings, upstate New York’s most famous export, made it big when a Buffalonian who
relocated to Florida opened a small chain of restaurants. By 1980, recipes and articles appeared in national publications, and in 1983, Hooters adopted one of those recipes and opened their doors. The rest is history.

Foods inevitably change when they are shared between generations, communities, or individuals. Even when—sometimes, especially when—regional specialties don’t make it far from home, they will always reflect class, gender, ethnic, and local identities. By proverbially peeking over the neighbors’ fence and learning about what they eat, we can better understand the complicated places we live.

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Hannah Davis, the Upstate New York Regional Representative for Folk Arts for NYFS, in partnership with the New York State Council on the Arts, expands on Lynn’s work and recipes in reviewing the grape pie, and the two other food items spotlighted, the “Garbage Plate,” and the Spiedie. This article draws from Hannah’s research and presentations on upstate food traditions, including “Spiedies, Grape Pies, and Garbage Plates (Oh My!): A Serious Look at Upstate New York’s Silly-Sounding Foods,” presented at the Catskills Folk Lyceum, supported by the Roxbury Arts Group, on October 14, 2017.

Voices Foodways
Lynn Case Ekfelt authored a popular Voices “Foodways” column from the inception of Voices through the Fall–Winter 2008 issue. Her column on the “World’s Greatest Grape Pie” is one of the most requested from our back issues. Retired from her position as a special collections librarian and university archivist at St. Lawrence University, Lynn is the author of Good Food Served Right: Traditional Recipes and Food Customs from New York’s North Country (Canton, New York: Traditional Arts in Upstate New York, 2000), available in our Gallery.

Hannah Davis, the Upstate New York Regional Representative for Folk Arts for NYFS, in partnership with the New York State Council on the Arts, expands on Lynn’s work and recipes in reviewing the grape pie, and the two other food items spotlighted, the “Garbage Plate,” and the Spiedie. This article draws from Hannah’s research and presentations on upstate food traditions, including “Spiedies, Grape Pies, and Garbage Plates (Oh My!): A Serious Look at Upstate New York’s Silly-Sounding Foods,” presented at the Catskills Folk Lyceum, supported by the Roxbury Arts Group, on October 14, 2017.


Hannah Davis, Upstate Regional Representative for the New York Folklore Society, holds an MA in Folk Studies from Western Kentucky University and a BA in Folklore and Ethnomusicology from Indiana University. She previously worked as a program coordinator at Traditional Arts Indiana.
I started collecting records in 1952, when I was 15. In those years, I listened to several programs featuring Irish, Scottish, and old-time country dance music, including Don Messer from Prince Edward Island, Jim Magill from Toronto, Abby Andrews from St. Catherine’s, The Shamrock Show from Niagara Falls, Jerry’s Hayshakers from Boston, Irish Melodies from Rochester, and “Ontario Roundup,” a country and western show from Toronto, which featured country dance music at the beginning and end.

I had always been interested in radio and even built a little Heathkit radio along the way, which actually worked. So, in 1974, when the collection had built to a level of vocals and instrumentals that could sustain a radio show, I found that Greece Athens High School had just gone on the air with the radio station WGMC and was looking for volunteers who could contribute culturally to the community. It was then, on October 16, 1974, that the “Irish Party House” show was born. Starting out, it was a fun time on the radio, because in addition to our own requests, Irish events calendar, and news from Ireland, we had to prepare general public service announcements and local news of the day. When the station installed a significant power increase in 1980, it cost a few dollars, and that caught the attention of the school board, who thought that it would be a good idea to charge us volunteers for air time. It turned out to be a wonderful rallying point for the Irish community in Rochester, and our fundraisers were a great success.

The successful establishment of the radio show allowed us to be included on the distribution lists of the latest releases from all the major labels of Irish music. This worked even in Ireland, when on our several trips over to visit my wife’s parents, I used to visit the major distributors and music stores in Ireland.

In the first decade of the 21st century, I added an extra hour to broadcast some Scottish music and the Celtic-related music of Canada. This was called the “Ol’ Fiddler Show.” All the time, the collection was building to a level of 10,000 pieces of media, evenly split between old 78s, vinyl albums and cassettes, and cds. The collection became known as one of the largest private collections of Irish music in the world, and
I was constantly answering questions on recordings and artists, and sharing information with collectors and researchers worldwide. It had turned into a busy and satisfying hobby, but it was becoming difficult to manage the collection, the radio shows, and my web site (www.tedmcgraw.com).

Now in my 80s, I realized that I had to make a decision about the future of all this material, so I set some goals that a future caretaker should meet:

1. Keep the collection together.
2. Store it properly.
3. Catalog the collection, using one of the library standards.
4. Make the material available to researchers and others who are interested in the material.

Much discussion and careful planning led to the selection of the Ward Irish Music Archive in Milwaukee as the future caretaker of this important collection. Ward met my goals and was interested not only in the Irish material but also the Scottish music and the Celtic-influenced music of Canada. They also have an active sharing program with other archives.

After a good run of 43 years, I retired the “Irish Party House” and “Ol’ Fiddler” radio shows in June 2017. I’m still consulting on Irish music and playing the button accordion. And there are enough copies and duplicates of the collection here to last a lifetime!

Ted McGraw is a physicist, engineer, Irish musician who plays button accordion, radio broadcaster, Irish music researcher and collector, chair of the North American Archive Committee of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, and member of the New York State Folk Arts Roundtable. Photo by Trish Minty.
Buffalo, New York, has always been something of an anomaly. It is the second most populated city in New York, but it has never quite prospered in mainstream popular culture quite the same way that Toronto, just across Lake Ontario, has. Although it does claim professional sports teams in nearly all the major leagues, and the birthplace of the ubiquitous Buffalo Wing, the city itself has struggled in modern times to compete as a major economic hub, or a tantalizing tourism destination.

That was not the case in the early 20th century, however, as the city hosted the Pan-American Exposition, a major World’s Fair that covered 350 acres of land. Due to the city’s proximity to the famous Niagara Falls, as well as the ease of travel due to nearby railroad lines, Buffalo was seen as an ideal location to host this wonder of wonders. No one could have foreseen the tragedy that was about strike.

Today, the Pan-Am Expo is mostly remembered as the site of the assassination of our 25th president, William McKinley. The doomed president was always reluctant to surround himself with muscled guards and genuinely enjoyed meeting the public and shaking hands with the average working man. It was the lax security that led to his being shot twice by Leon Czolgosz while in the Temple of Music, a concert hall built specifically for the Pan-American Expo. McKinley would die of infection eight days after suffering these wounds.

This dreadful murder was not the only storyline of the exposition. Annie Edson Taylor, turning 63 years old, sought to become rich and famous as the first woman to survive a plunge over Niagara Falls. Despite all odds, she survived her trip over the falls in a custom-made barrel, with only minor injuries. As one might expect, she was never quite able to translate this experience into much financial gain, though.

One of the darker chapters in Buffalo history also occurred at the Fair’s close in late 1901. After being attacked by his performing elephant, Jumbo II, Frank Bostock decided that he would execute his prized elephant in front of a sold-out crowd. What he did not expect was that the thick hide of an elephant would not conduct the electricity he had planned to use in killing Jumbo II, and was laughed out of the arena and forced to provide refunds in the thousands.

All of these tales and more are recounted in Margaret Creighton’s *The Electrifying Fall of Rainbow City: Spectacle and Assassination at the 1901 World’s Fair*. This is an incredibly well researched portrait of a time when all the wonders of the modern age seemed like magic and of a brief time in which the city of Buffalo was the center of the universe. Highly recommended.

—Chris Linendoll
Northshire Bookstore, Saratoga Springs, NY
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Explore Buffalo!

The 33rd Annual New York State Folk Arts Roundtable convened in Buffalo in May 2018, and we checked out the sights in a prelude to the American Folklore Society’s 2018 annual meeting in Buffalo this October. This photo essay is just a taste of what we saw and what AFS participants can explore for themselves. *All photos by Todd DeGarmo, unless otherwise noted.*

Downtown Buffalo
Walking about Buffalo’s West Side
Photo by Tom van Buren.
A Visit to Stitch Buffalo
1215 Niagara Street, Buffalo, NY 14213

Mission: To advance social justice for refugee women in Buffalo, New York, by creating opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and economic empowerment through the textile arts.

Vision: To create a fully equipped textile arts studio for community classes with a small retail space, and to provide a permanent home for The Refugee Women’s Workshop, a community of 55 women from Bhutan, Burma, Nepal and Angola who sew handcrafted goods for sale within the community.
Eating in Buffalo
A Visit to the West Side Bazaar—Bringing the World to Buffalo

25 Grant Street, Buffalo, NY 14213, westsidebazaar.com

The Bazaar is an international market, food destination, and business incubator for vendors from immigrant and refugee communities (Burma, Iraq, Rwanda, Bhutan, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Mexico, Ethiopia). You’ll find Thang’s Family Restaurant, Rakhapura Mutee & Sushi, Kiosko Latino, Abyssinia Ethiopian Cuisine, Nine & Night, M Asian Halalk Food, Gourmet Lao Foods, 007 Chinese Food, and Wa Wa Asian Snacks. For retail shopping, there is Gadget Bazaar, Gysma’s African Style, Nepali Clothing & Cosmetics, Moonlady Arts & Crafts, Julienne Boutique, Macrame by Nadeen, and Zigma Naturals.
At the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library
1 Lafayette Square, Buffalo NY 14203, www.buffalolib.org

The **Mark Twain Room**, featuring the original hand-written manuscript of the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Mark Twain lived in Buffalo from 1869 to 1871, and was the co-owner and co-editor of *The Buffalo Express* newspaper.

**Rare Book Display Room** – Through March 2019: **Omar Khayyam’s Rubaiyat:**
*The Persian Poem that Became a Sensation in English Translation*
Submission Guidelines for
Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore


The New York Folklore Society is a nonprofit, statewide organization dedicated to furthering cultural equity and cross-cultural understanding through programs that nurture folk cultural expressions within communities where they originate, share these traditions across cultural boundaries, and enhance the understanding and appreciation of folk culture. Through Voices the society communicates with professional folklorists and members of related fields, traditional artists, and a general public interested in folklore.

Voices is dedicated to publishing the content of folklore in the words and images of its creators and practitioners. The journal publishes research-based articles, written in an accessible style, on topics related to traditional art and life. It also features stories, interviews, reminiscences, essays, folk poetry and music, photographs, and artwork drawn from people in all parts of New York State. Columns on subjects such as photography, sound and video recording, legal and ethical issues, and the nature of traditional art and life appear in each issue.

Editorial Policy

Feature articles. Articles published in Voices represent original contributions to folklore studies. Although Voices emphasizes the folklore of New York State, the editor welcomes articles based on the folklore of any area of the world. Articles on the theory, methodology, and geography of folklore are also welcome, as are purely descriptive articles in the ethnography of folklore. In addition, Voices provides a home for “orphan” tales, narratives, and songs, whose contributors are urged to provide contextual information.

Authors are encouraged to include short personal reminiscences, anecdotes, isolated tales, narratives, songs, and other material that relates to and enhances their main article.

Typically feature articles range from 1,000 to 4,000 words and up to 6,000 words at the editor’s discretion.

Reviews and review essays. Books, recordings, films, videos, exhibitions, concerts, and the like are selected for review in Voices for their relevance to folklore studies or the folklore of New York State and their potential interest to a wide audience. Persons wishing to review recently published material should contact the editor. Unsolicited reviews and proposals for reviews will be evaluated by the editor and by outside referees where appropriate. Follow the bibliographic style in a current issue of Voices.

Reviews should not exceed 750 words.

Correspondence and commentary. Short but substantive reactions to or elaborations upon material appearing in Voices within the previous year are welcomed. The editor may invite the author of the materials being addressed to respond; both pieces may be published together. Any subject may be addressed or rebutted once by any correspondent. The principal criteria for publication are whether, in the opinion of the editor or the editorial board, the comment constitutes a substantive contribution to folklore studies, and whether it will interest our general readers.

Letters should not exceed 500 words.

Style

The journal follows The Chicago Manual of Style. Consult Webster’s Third International Dictionary for questions of spelling, meaning, and usage, and avoid gender-specific terminology.

Footnotes. Endnotes and footnotes should be avoided; incorporate such information into the text. Ancillary information may be submitted as a sidebar.

Bibliographic citations. For citations of text from outside sources, use the author-date style described in The Chicago Manual of Style.

Language. All material must be submitted in English. Foreign-language terms (transliterated, where appropriate, into the Roman alphabet) should be italicized and followed by a concise parenthetical English gloss; the author bears responsibility for the correct spelling and orthographies of non-English words. British spellings should be Americanized.

Publication Process

Unless indicated, the New York Folklore Society holds copyright to all material published in Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore. With the submission of material to the editor, the author acknowledges that he or she gives Voices sole rights to its publication, and that permission to publish it elsewhere must be secured in writing from the editor.

For the initial submission, send an e-mail attachment or CD (preferably prepared in Microsoft Word and saved as Rich Text Format).

Copy must be double spaced, with all pages numbered consecutively. To facilitate anonymous review of feature articles, the author’s name and biography should appear only on a separate title page.

Tables, charts, maps, illustrations, photographs, captions, and credits should follow the main text and be numbered consecutively.

All illustrations should be clean, sharp, and camera-ready. Photographs should be prints or duplicate slides (not originals) or scanned at high resolution (300+ dpi) and e-mailed to the editor as jpeg or tiff files. Captions and credits must be included. Written permission to publish each image must be obtained by authors from the copyright holders prior to submission of manuscripts, and the written permissions must accompany the manuscript (authors should keep copies).

Materials are acknowledged upon receipt.

The editor and two anonymous readers review manuscripts submitted as articles. The review process takes several weeks.

Authors receive two complimentary copies of the issue in which their contribution appears and may purchase additional copies at a discount.

Submission Deadlines

Spring–Summer issue November 1
Fall–Winter issue May 1

Send submissions as Word files to Todd DeGarmo, Voices Editor (e-mail preferred): degarmo@cran dalllibrary.org

or

New York Folklore Society
129 Jay Street
Schenectady, NY 12305
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Funders
Programs of the New York Folklore Society are made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature and the following: The National Endowment for the Arts, The William Gundry Broughton Charitable Foundation, The Hoyt Foundation, Stewart’s Shops Foundation, Schenectady County Initiative Program, World Learning, The Kid’s Arts Festival

The New York Folklore Society thanks the people and organizations that supported our programs and publications in 2018. Your help is essential to our work. If your local library is not listed among the institutional subscribers here, please urge them to join.
The New York Folklore Society is launching a NEW WEBSITE

The NEW YORK FOLKLORE SOCIETY is celebrating 75 years of nurturing traditional arts and culture in New York State through education, support, and outreach. After all those years, we decided it’s time for a new look. Expect an updated, streamlined appearance and the same strong commitment to the folk communities of New York.

Visit us at www.nyfolklore.org!