

Field Notes

A Quarterly from Traditional Arts Indiana

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Traditional Arts Indiana Celebrates One Year!

Traditional arts are arts that are remembered and loved, that are constantly renewed, that are in harmony with our human instinct to create. For a year now, folklorists in Indiana have been talking to and documenting the people who draw their inspiration, technique, and aesthetics from the land, from home, from family and community.

We've been up in the northwest corner eating roasted lamb and dancing to kolo music at a Serbian festival, down in Seymour watching Mary Brandt carve chains; we've had our hands mehndi painted in Indianapolis and we are learning more about the pottery traditions along the Ohio River. Nearer to our home-base of Bloomington, we've marveled at the intricacies of fishermen tying flies and the versatility of carvers—be it limestone, wood, or scrimshaw.

All this has been made possible through a partnership between the Folklore Institute and the Indiana Arts Commission. IAC's director, Dorothy Ilgen, is an advocate of traditional arts and has secured funding for our documentation both from the National Endowment for the Arts and from her own state organization. She works closely with Inta Carpenter at the Folklore Institute, who is project director of Traditional Arts Indiana.

Last September, Erin Roth, a graduate of the Western Kentucky University Folklore Department, came on board as project manager. She oversees the myriad day-to-day activities that keep the project running—from

connecting to other local and state partners to raising funds to training fieldworkers to doing her own field documentation.

We've discovered that a lot of people in the state are interested in traditional arts and we are pleased to have established partnerships with state, regional, and local organizations. Traditional Arts Indiana is well on its way, and in the pages that follow, we give you a taste of our first year's work.

IHS to Archive TAI Materials

Early last fall, we found common cause with staff at the Indiana Historical Society: Bob Taylor, Director of Education, Glen McMurray, Librarian, and Trina Nelson-Thomas, Director of Educational and Public Programs. The IHS agreed to archive our collected materials—slides, logs, transcripts, tapes—as well as put information about them on the Society's website. Their contribution ensures public access to the wealth of information about traditional arts in Indiana.

On the Road

The process of identifying artists is inspiring but labor-intensive, time-consuming, and costly. We had little survey work on which to build and no current networks through which to work. The materials in our archives from the 1980s—when the Indiana Arts Commission had a folk arts coordinator on staff—offered solid evidence of artistic excellence. We are eagerly bringing this historical record up-to-date.

Fieldwork in our first year has been carried out by contract fieldwork specialists,

folklore alumni and current doctoral students, volunteers, and by project manager Erin Roth. Over a period of 130 fieldwork days, researchers interviewed more than two hundred individual artists.

Fieldwork class launches TAI

In the summer of 1998, six students signed up for a fieldwork class taught by Inta Carpenter. They identified over sixty artists within a thirty-mile radius of Bloomington and in the process had a chance to hone documentation skills and confront sometimes ticklish definitional puzzles.

Back to the future

Nearly 25 years ago, a team of folklore students, led by Professor Richard Dorson, explored the Calumet Region, asking: "Is There a Folk in the City?" Today we no longer question the possibility of finding urban traditions. We are confidently retracing the footsteps of the so-called Gary Gang to see what's changed and what's stayed the same. Last spring, some twenty local residents brainstormed with us during an evening meal hosted by NIPSCO.

Now, thanks to support from IU's Intercampus Research Grant, Inta Carpenter and Andy Kolovos are combing through the materials from the 1970s. They are collaborating with Steve McShane and James Lane, history faculty at IU-N, to organize the archival materials, undertake follow-up fieldwork, design a small exhibit, and plan a public event with the Indiana Historical Society.

Exploring the Ohio River Valley

In close partnership, Erin Roth of TAI, Chuck Poehlein from the Perry County Museum, and Mark Ress from the Tell City Historical Society secured one of two \$10,000 community partnership grants from the Indiana Humanities Council to document the

changing nature and meaning of work in Perry County. TAI will draw attention to the traditions associated with Perry County's heritage of fine furniture making, pottery, and chair caning. Following training for community members and k-12 teachers and oral history documentation, the project partners will produce a community radio series and organize a public discussion forum. This work is part of a larger effort to survey the entire Ohio River Valley.

Who are the people in our neighborhood?

The Allen County - Ft. Wayne Historical Society is looking at its past, exploring its present, and envisioning its future as it prepares for a Multicultural Millennium Exhibit. Erin Roth has provided training workshops for local community members/scholars in basic fieldwork methods and together with others is interviewing individuals from the Jewish, African, and Filipino communities.

Traditional arts in classrooms

One of TAI's primary goals is to work with teachers and students in Indiana schools to create curriculum materials that bring traditional artists into the classroom. This fall, Gregory Hansen will work with teachers and students in four Seymour 4th grade classrooms. The Southern Indiana Arts Council supported his residency with funding from Cinergy and the John Mellencamp Fan Club.

As a part of a U.S. Department of Education "Gear-Up" grant, TAI will provide ethnographic research, in-service training, and curriculum development to three Orange County junior/senior high schools over the next five years. Orange County Gear Up is a local initiative, in partnership with Indiana University, to enhance local education, encourage students to pursue higher education, and increase parental/community school involvement.



First Lady Judy O'Bannon
during mehndi application

Governor's "Festival of Ideas"

German woodcarver Allen Berg, Indian mehndi painter Shital Parmar, and the Essence of Praise gospel group carved, painted, and sang under the shade of oak trees on the grounds of the governor's mansion. First Lady Judy O'Bannon received her own mehndi painting.

Making music at the state fair

The Drina Band from the Calumet Region and the Rhine River Valley Brass Band entertained Indiana State Fair goers with their traditional Serbo-Croatian tamburitza and German polka sounds on the 1999 Folklife Music Stage.

Artes Latinos and Indian Classical Dance

The IU Latino Cultural Center is collaborating with TAI to develop a directory of Latino resources in Indiana. Their efforts are funded by an Indiana Humanities Council International Awareness Grant.

In the urban scene of Indianapolis, we found Preeti Vasudevan, master Bharata Natyam dancer and instructor, who is a member of the growing Indian community, some 2,000 families strong.

Notes from the Field . . .

"Sally Haake, the quilter Sister Ruth Gehres recommended, said I should call her from the Spiritual Life Center, a building built in 1998 on the former site of a much disputed old school. The building was built in part from the money the quilting ladies of the church had saved over the years: \$80,000. I was duly impressed by this.

"I tape recorded an interview with her while we sat down in the quilting room beside three lovely quilts still in progress. The room was designed to accommodate three quilts, held on handcrafted all-wood frames. These frames were designed to roll the quilt around both sides of the quilt, a wheel with a ratchet somehow held it into place. Fluorescent lights, somewhat diffused, provide good lighting for the mostly older quilters. A wood cabinet holds an inconspicuous television, a controversial addition to the quilting room. Through Sally, I saw the skill and expertise that goes into quilting. I also tried my hand with the needle and stiff thread. So much more difficult than I thought it was. I was especially struck by the importance of community around the quilt—sharing about their lives as well as sharing 'information' about people in the community who are not present. (Sally smiled when she said she didn't see this as gossip because it is not done maliciously.)"

— Erin Roth

TAI Staff and Researchers

Inta Gale Carpenter, Project Director
Erin Roth, Project Manager
Velma Carmichael, Office Support
Andy Kolovos, Calumet Project Assistant
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Ethan Sharp, Hallie Stone, Joanne Stuttgen,
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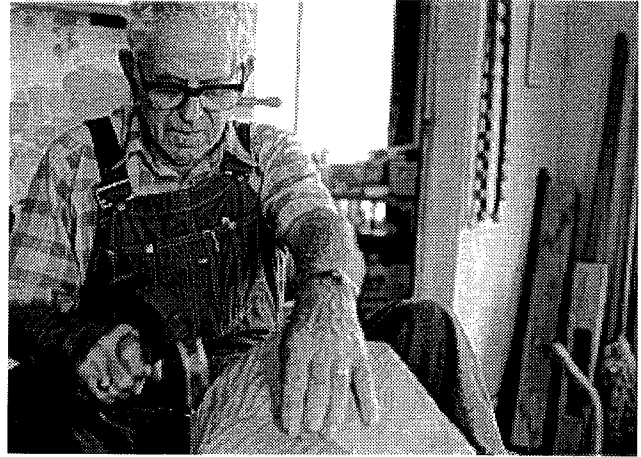
Creating, Changing, Renewing
Portraits of Indiana Traditional Artists

Bridging the years

This summer, Betty Belanus, former Indiana state folk arts coordinator, introduced Erin Roth to Bill Day, a retired West Lebanon farmer who had been making bowls in his “chop shop” for over 25 years. Belanus worked with Day in the mid-1980s, when Indiana’s Folk Arts Program was in full swing, and later at the 1991 Smithsonian Folklife Festival. A few days after their visit, Bill Day was killed in an automobile accident.

Well into his retirement years, Day used native hard woods and a hand adz, foot adz, and scraper to chop bowls. After light sanding, he cured the bowls for two days in edible oil. His talents brought him honor and a loyal following. He demonstrated each year at Dollywood’s Pioneer Village in Tennessee and the Indiana

State Fair. He was featured in the Smithsonian’s book *Crafts in America*. He will be remembered for his terrific sense of humor and his passionate devotion to making bowls.



“When I started out, each tree had its particular use. Red oak for a certain thing, white hickory for something else, red elm and hedge for another. I know about trees, because I’ve worked with them all my life.” — Bill Day
(Photo: Erin Roth)

Traditional Arts Indiana
A Partnership of Indiana University
and the Indiana Arts Commission
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