

Folklore is a convenient name for a highly diversified body of lore, folk wisdom, and folk art that is passed on from generation to generation, most often without benefit of the printed page and without formal instruction. Involved in this process of popular transmission is a body of material passed on orally, such as folk tales, fables, jests, anecdotes, legends, folk beliefs, folk medical prescriptions, folk speech, proverbs, riddles, children's verses and rhymes. Reckoned with these oral traditions, also, are materials communicated musically, such as folk songs and ballads, and songs accompanying the dance.

A second major category of material involves things which are enacted such as dances, pageantry, folk theatricals, and folk customs and magical practices, with or without verbal accompaniment. A third and final category, consists of things which are made. Material folklore involves the manufacture of needful things for farm and fireside as well as the arts and crafts which enhance life.

However folklore comes into being, its persistence over long periods of time, and its spread to far places, it is usually marked by variation occasioned by time and circumstance, and by the predispositions of the people to whom it comes and by whom it is passed on. Folklore is most intimately connected with life itself, and mirrors the triumphs and trials of the human spirit. From some points of view, folklore is fact refracted through human temperament, and enlarged upon by the wondrous and inexhaustible powers of the imagination.

WHAT IS FOLKLORE

by
Wayland D. Hand
*Director, Center for the
Study of Comparative
Folklore and Mythology
University of California,
Los Angeles*

7



South Carolina, Sea Island Basket Maker. Baskets made of sea grass bound with strips of split palmetto. Photo: Ralph Rinzler.