

THE FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL AND "MUSEUM GUIDES"

By S. Dillon Ripley

This is the sixth year in which the Smithsonian Institution has presented a Festival of American Folklife. In past years, I have commented that a museum should be an open experience, with people flowing in and out of the buildings, experiencing a sense of connection between their own lives, the history of their culture, and the activities of the Festival.

I would like to call your attention to an addition to this year's Festival that will heighten this experience. At numerous locations where skills and crafts are being demonstrated, you will notice small signs entitled "Museum Guides." These will direct the visitor to locations within the museums where a correlative view of the products and skills seen at the Festival may be reviewed in an historic context. For example, the current Indian presentation focuses on tribes from the southwestern region of the United States. The visitor will see various examples of the lifestyles and crafts of today's Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache tribes from Arizona and New Mexico, and meet some seventy-five members of these tribes. The "Museum Guide" will invite a comparison of the Festival's view with the exhibits of American Indian artifacts and lifestyles in the National Museum of Natural History.

Maryland is this year's featured State, and Festival visitors can see demonstrations of Maryland metal crafts such as brass and iron founding, pewter and silversmithing, tin and copper-smithing. The "Museum Guide" will direct the visitor to similar and sometimes identical products of this craftsmanship in the National Museum of History and Technology. At Hains Point, the Festival will show, thanks to the assistance and cosponsorship of the National Park Service, ships and crafts related to the last remaining commercial sailing fleet still in operation in the United States. The history of these and other crafts can be seen in the National Museum of History and Technology's Hall of Maritime History.

In another area of the Festival, union workers will show examples of present-day skills and crafts of needletrades workers, lithographers, carpenters, wheelwrights, and molders. In some cases, the tools and machinery used today clearly date from another era. In other instances, new tools and machines, new skills and crafts have been developed. The "Museum Guide" will invite the visitor to explore the exhibits within the buildings and perhaps to embark on a fascinating journey of discovery which may lead, in turn, to other museums and libraries.

So as we look toward the nation's 200th birthday, and as we begin to plan programs and exhibits, we may hope for a new beginning of cultural awareness. Perhaps this small addition to the Festival of American Folklife will beckon you to join in a re-appraisal of the American experience in its many and varied forms and styles, past and present.



*Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution,
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