

Foreword

The living art that the American people make of their own experience is not taught in our educational institutions, performed in our concert halls or housed in our museums. Folk songs and dances may be taught in schools and interpreted by professionals in concerts; material culture appears in museum exhibitions and collections, but living folkways are drenched with the rich, vital style which only the living tradition bearers themselves can impart to the performance of a song, to the execution of a complex craft technique, to the telling of a tale. The Festival celebrates folk cultures as they persist in thousands of styles among millions of people who inherited folkways as part of their life styles.

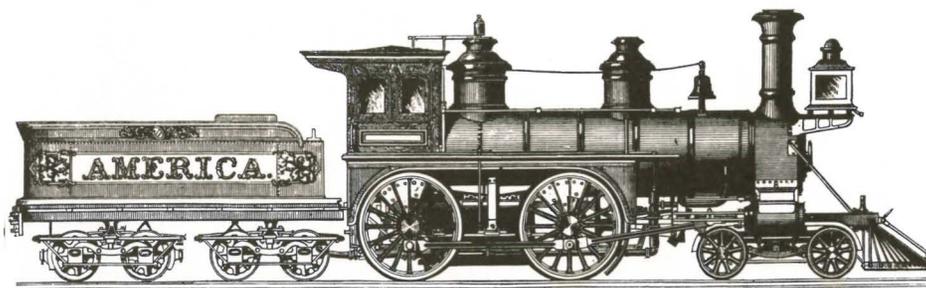
The Festival was established in 1967 by Secretary Ripley with the phrase: "Take the instruments out of the cases and make them sing." The Smithsonian had the objects; the mandate was to find the people who create and use them.

Our quest has been neither demographic nor ethnographic. The search is to locate people who are strong living practitioners of music, food, dance and craft traditions.

Much of the material demonstrated and performed at the Festival is heard regularly in homes and backyards, community halls and churches across the country. Most of the material is performed unreflectively, some is taken for granted by the participants themselves, and some is treasured.

Among communities of sacred harp singers everyone can lead the singing and read the shape notes, even youngsters. But each group has one leader who can lead and read better than the rest. The Karpathos Greeks in Baltimore may have good lyra players and pipers of their own, but they may send

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to Canada for a virtuoso when a big wedding is in the offing.

Each community has its own values, recognizes its own cultural leaders and living treasurers. It takes a bit of cultural detective work for us to identify the community values and reflect them accurately. More than 50 field surveyors have helped bring together this year's 900 participants. The role of the Festival is to find, encourage and celebrate the cultural minorities that make up the American majority.

The separate programs are convenient but overlapping groupings: we are all Working, Regional and Ethnic Americans who have participated in family and children's folklore. The Festival is the place for you to meet the champions of these traditions but also to contribute. The National Park Service and the Smithsonian Institution invite you to participate in this event bringing to it your own songs, stories, dances, recipes, superstitions and jokes at the same time that you come prepared to learn those of others.

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For a century and a half the train has been a powerful symbol. Its impact on folk creativity has been as dynamic as has its effect on the transportation industry. At this year's Festival it serves as an appropriate symbol, unifying the six program themes. It is a folklore image that originates in Working American's area, but affects us all. Regional Americans are descendants of some who came to this country to build "the iron road." As a unifying force, the train joined the two coasts bringing people together. As a dividing force, it cleaved the prairies, decimating the buffalo, pushing Native Americans from ancestral lands to narrowly defined reservations. The train was a passage to freedom for Blacks, the source of song and lore for poets and bards. At the Festival Mrs. Elizabeth Cotten, the 82-year old singer-guitarist will sing her childhood composition, "Freight Train," a beloved folk song now heard round the world. Other songs of transportation will be shared in the Working Americans area where railroaders will also tell stories and demonstrate skills. The train is a focus, generating heroes, heroines and dreams.

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