

The Regions of the United States: An Inevitable Approach by Mack McCormick



There is, at Anaconda, Montana, a great towering smokestack that pokes up from the snow covered hills. It can be seen for miles, a thick blunt mark against the big sky. They say around there that their smokestack is so big the Washington Monument would fit inside it.

That giant artifact plus the copper mines and smelter it represents, when seen in combination with the miles of wire-fenced and rail-fenced fields of wheat, offer even the most casual tourist an overwhelming sense of the region. At a local restaurant the menu lists a Cornish "Cousin Jack" meat pie; the counter is lined with working cattlemen; a poster at the cash register announces next weekend's timber carnival and logging contest close by in Idaho.

Moving from one part of the nation to another the observer is aware of the changing regions. The physical terrain varies, the climate, the crops, the look of the cities is different. The spoken

word changes markedly. The passerby becomes aware that in each area he is witnessing a distinctive combination of human textures set against the land. The mosaic is, in part, due to the land itself—the use made of it, the wealth it offers, the response it evokes.

And, too, it is many subtle things: the way people greet a stranger, the kind of jokes told, the local games, the foods that prevail and countless other characteristics that combine to give one a sense of the region. The passerby observes it, the native and resident are part of it.

We are all aware of the regions, yet it is a troubling matter to attempt to define what a region is.

There are many sets of facts from which to generalize a definition: settlement patterns and the distribution of barn types; centers of musical style or clusters of traditional craftsmen offer sets of facts. The natural features, the manufacturing districts, the agricultural regions, the urban belts offer yet other sets of facts.

Cultural geographers often work with large regions, providing broad generalities about the cultural landscape that give us as few as four or five regions for the entire nation. On the other hand, the

folklorist tends to think in terms of specific communities: the Little Dixie area in Missouri, the Cajun people of the Louisiana bayous and rice prairies, the Vanderpools of northeastern Pennsylvania.

We can focus on a particular trait—the folkways of the Sea Islands or the persisting tradition of Sacred Harp singing in a few places—or we can generalize about the human character of the entire Tidewater South.

What results then is a series of overlapping regions, each formed and shaped by different concepts. They are not in agreement, but there are harmonies that tend to occur as one leafs through what seem at first contradictory sets of facts. There are recurrent patterns, consonances as well as contrasts, and from this stream comes our chief sense of regionality.

II

The members of the Sons of Columbus Hall at Aliquippa, Pennsylvania are culturally linked with the Italian community at Tontitown, Arkansas. Yet, at the same time each group is part of its region. The game of bocce they play on weekends may be identical, but the style of dress, the kind of work they do,

even the shadings in the Italian they speak have to do with the place where they live. One is steel town, the other a community of gentle hills filled with vineyards.

Aliquippa is part of the industrial belt that runs through the Ohio River Valley; an unmelted, unhomogenized region, almost southern hill country but part of those northern towns where people are steel workers and glass blowers. Lullabies are heard in at least ten languages.

Tontitown is in the Ozarks; the people are farmers. Signs in the grocery store tell about dances where country rock bands vie with a vigorous string band tradition. On occasion, poke salad is part of the diet. In good weather the congregation of a nearby church will hold a brush arbor "sing."

III

Next year, in a summer-long sequence, the Festival of American Folklife will look at all the regions of the United States with programs that touch upon the uniqueness of each major region, the human textures that characterize it and set it apart.

For our definition of what makes a region we are contemplating a fresh yet inevitable approach. As opinions and

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theories from folklore, geography, the agrarian and urban and physical sciences are brought together, each must face a test:

It must ultimately offer us a concept of a region which the people who live there would agree with—either by overt action or by subjective attitude that reveals their sense of place. We have, therefore, no regions with firm and fixed boundaries, but a sense of areas separated by transition zones. There are

no sharp division points, but only a subtle merging of one place into the next, one cultural landscape fading into its neighbor, overlapping, unbounded, unhomogenized.

In making program decisions about the regions—this year treating two major regions in a two-week festival—we listen to the people in each place, striving to learn what sets their life apart from those who live around that giant smokestack in Montana.

What they offer us—the people themselves, their special ways of life, their foods and tools and music, will next year become a 12-week-long event through the Bicentennial summer.

After 200 years, we can genuinely celebrate the fact that we remain a diversified people. In that lies the chief potential of a nation.

A Community Rodeo: Kendleton, Texas

Photo by Mack McCormick



Northern Plains Books—

Beckwith, Martha Warren. *Mandan-Hidatsa Myths and Ceremonies*. New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1969. Reprint of a work originally issued in 1937.

Blegen, Theodore. *Grass Roots History*. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1969. Reprint of a work originally issued in 1947.

Deloria, Ella. *Dakota Texts*. New York: G. E. Stechert and Company, 1932. Out of print.

Dorsey, George A. *Traditions of the Arikara*. Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institution, 1904. Out of print.

Fitzpatrick, Lilian. *Nebraska Place-Names*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1960. Reprint and revision of a work originally published in 1925.

Hostetler, John A. *Hutterite Society*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.

Pound, Louise. *Nebraska Folklore*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1959. Out of print.

Rydjord, John. *Kansas Place Names*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972.

Sackett, S. J., and William E. Koch. *Kansas Folklore*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1959.

Sneve, Virginia. *South Dakota Geographic Names*. Sioux Falls, South Dakota: Brevet Press, 1973.

Welsch, Roger. *Shingling the Fog*. Chicago: Sage Publications, Inc., 1972.

Welsch, Roger. *Sod Walls*. Broken Bow, Nebraska: Purcell's, 1968.

Welsch, Roger. *Treasury of Nebraska Pioneer Folklore*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.

Coastal California Books—

Adams, Charles C. *Boontling: An American Lingo*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1971.

Black, Eleanor, and Sidney Robertson. *The Gold Rush Song Book*. San Francisco: The Colt Press, 1940. Out of print.

Clark, Margaret. *Health in the Mexican-American Culture: A Community Study*.

Children's Folklore

Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959.

Dwyer, Richard A., Richard E. Lingenfelter, and David Cohen. *The Songs of the Gold Rush*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964.

Gudde, Erwin G. *1000 California Place Names*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971.

Kroeber, Theodora. *Ishi in Two Worlds*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971.

Lee, Hector. *Tales of California*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1974.

Miller, Elaine. *Mexican Folk Narratives from the Los Angeles Area*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1973.

Moore, Willard B. *Molokan Oral Tradition: Legends and Memorates of an Ethnic Sect*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973.

Schneider, Gretchen A. *Pigeon Wings and Polkas: The Dance of the California Miners*. New York: Johnson Reprint Co. 1969.

Taylor, Archer. *Proverbial Comparisons and Similes from California*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954. Out of print.

Western Folklore is a quarterly journal published by the California Folklore Society that is devoted to international folklore scholarship. However, many articles on California folklore appear in its pages. Persons interested in subscribing can do so by contacting the Secretary-Treasurer, California Folklore Society, University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 94720. The Society also publishes a newsletter titled *From the Sourdough Crock*.

Records

Alexander, Dave. *The Dirt on the Ground*. Arhoolie 1071.

Alexander, Dave. *The Rattler*. Arhoolie 1067.

Country Blues in California, 1947-1954. Muskadine Mus. 103.

Evans, Virg. *The Flying Fiddler*. American Heritage AH 10-346.

Kenny Hall. Philo 1008.

Kenny Hall and the Sweets Mill String Band. Bay 727.

Oakland Blues. Arhoolie 2008.

Robinson, L. C. "Good Rockin." *Ups and Down*. Arhoolie 1062.

Vern and Ray. *Sounds from the Ozarks*. Old Homestead 10001.

Several of the Library of Congress Archive of American Folk Song recordings contain material collected in California, some of it indigenous and some by informants from outside the region who were taped in California. The following albums all have one or more numbers by traditional musicians from California.

American Fiddle Tunes. AAFS L62.

American Sea Songs and Shanties I. AAFS L26.

American Sea Songs and Shanties II. AAFS L27.

Anglo-American Shanties, Lyric Songs, Dance Tunes and Spirituals. AAFS L2.

Anglo-American Songs and Ballads. AAFS L12.

Anglo-American Songs and Ballads. AAFS L20.

Anglo-American Songs and Ballads. AAFS L21.

Child Ballads Traditional in the United States I. AAFS L57.

Child Ballads Traditional in the United States II. AAFS L58.

Railroad Songs and Ballads. AAFS L61.

Songs and Ballads of American History and of the Assassination of Presidents. AAFS L29.

Songs of the Mormons and Songs of the West. AAFS L30.

Versions and Variants of Barbara Allen. AAFS L54.

Volunteer, Sophie Ripley (left) teaches corn shuck doll making in the Children's crafts tent.

The children's area was created to celebrate children's folklife—those things that children teach each other and pass from one generation to the next through friends and siblings. Some of these traditions are demonstrably hundreds of years old. Some are fairly recent and are spreading voraciously.

To demonstrate children's folklore, young participants have been selected in cooperation with schools, scout troops and camps from the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia. Festival visitors are invited to join participants in presentations in the crafts tent, game ring, hill and sand area and around the stage.

Crafts Tent

Children's folklore includes aspects of material culture: not only items which are made like slingshots, dolls and

paper airplanes, but also items which are collected, traded, bought or won like comics, trading cards, toys, rocks, stamps and coins and other precious possessions like records, transistor radios, bicycles, jump-ropes, balls and favorite clothes. Money is also important and children have many ways of acquiring and spending it. In the Crafts Tent participants can make cootie catchers, water bombs, airplanes; dolls from corn husks, yarn, paper, clothespins and material; carve, whittle, draw, and learn crafts from other areas of the Festival. Folk artists who specialize in drawing stories about their heroes, battles, games, and other aspects of their lives will participate.

Games

Games tend to predominate among children's activities. They take many

