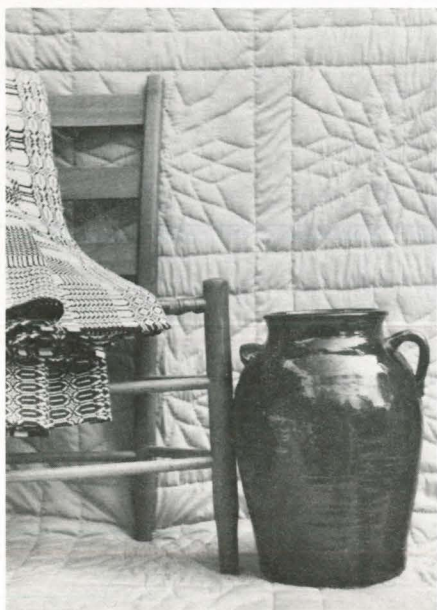


Crafts in a Folklife Festival—Why Include Them and How to Evaluate Them

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Fifteen years ago, when planning the first Folklife Festival, we were aware that the Smithsonian holds the world's most extensive collection of objects relating to American history and everyday life. Many of these objects – some made relatively recently and others in past centuries – were made by folk craftworkers. It seemed appropriate, therefore, to tie these objects to the tradition-bearers themselves. And so it was that we gathered from around the nation craftworkers – as well as musicians, dancers, and storytellers – and christened the event a “folklife” festival rather than simply a folk festival. Secretary Ripley, in commenting on the object orientation of a later Festival, noted: “The possibility of using a museum that is essentially a historical documentary museum as a theatre of live performance where people actually show that the objects in the cases were made by human hands, and are still being made, practiced on, worked with, is a very valuable asset for our role as a preserver and conservator of living cultural forms.”

Many of the objects crafted, exhibited, and sold at the 1981 Festival are very similar to items on view in the Museum. In fact, some of the objects now in the permanent collections were purchased from Festival craftworkers in the late 1960s. While some of the folk craftworkers employ modern labor and time-saving techniques, in every case they blend these with the preindustrial technologies of earlier generations. Such technologies as well as the forms of the objects themselves, are the product of family and regional folk traditions.

The craft component at this Festival has three subdivisions:

- 1) a demonstration area where craftworkers will be explaining their work; traditional Southeastern music – played, in part, on instruments made by the demonstrators – will also be featured;
- 2) an exhibition of carefully-selected items commissioned specifically for the Festival and reminiscent of forms and styles made by the craftworkers' forebears; these objects will be sold at auction July 1-5 at 3:00 P.M.;
- 3) a general sales tent, planned with the Smithsonian Museum Shops, where an exceptional array of traditional crafts made for the Festival will be on sale daily.

The largest category of sales items is handmade pottery. This includes both earthenware and stoneware from ten different potteries. Stoneware is generally more durable than earthenware, being more highly fired and less likely to chip. It will, however, crack when exposed to sudden temperature changes. Though suitable for baking, it cannot be taken from the refrigerator and placed directly into a pre-heated oven. Similarly, stoneware teapots should be pre-warmed before boiling water is poured into them. Neither the stoneware nor the earthenware should be used over an open flame or on a stovetop, although both are suitable for washing in a dishwasher.

The glazes on the pots vary from centuries-old salt glaze (seen on North Carolina's Jugtown and Melvin Owens pottery) and ash-and-slip Shanghai glaze (seen on Georgian Lanier Meaders' ware), to commercially available white and colored glazes seen on most of the remaining ware (especially from Teague and Cole potteries in North Carolina and Bybee pottery in Kentucky). The orange ware from North Carolina's piedmont region (Seagrove, Westmoore, and Jugtown potteries) is typical of earthenwares made up and down the East Coast as early as the 17th century. The orange-red color is that of the clay which is sealed with a clear glaze originally made with red lead. Today, when lead is used, it is fritted (pre-fired and fused) before it is actually applied as a glaze, and therefore poses no health hazard.

The Festival's pottery inventory includes decorative serving pieces, covered and open casseroles, pie plates, bowls, pitchers, gravy boats, platters, mugs, candle holders, sugar-and-creamers, teapots, cookie jars, and cannister sets. A few humorous curiosities or vessels with transposed uses are included. Among the former are moustache mugs and frog mugs (a frog peers up from the bottom) from Seagrove Pottery. Strange and continuously perplexing to scholars are the stoneware jugs bearing faces. There is considerable resemblance between some examples found in this country and items of Ghanaian as well as Zairian origin. American examples of face jugs spread up and down the East Coast from new England at least as far south as South Carolina during the last century. Three variants of the face jug from the kilns of the Brown Family, Burlon Craig, and Lanier Meaders are included in the exhibition and sales areas. The latter individual was documented on film and in a soon-to-be-released monograph by Smithsonian folklorists; many of Lanier's face jugs have been erroneously attributed as antiques and have sold at folk art auctions for hundreds of dollars.

Perhaps the most representative piece of old time Southeastern pottery is the churn. Today, though a few country families still churn butter by hand, these serve mostly as umbrella stands, punchcrops for large gatherings, and fireside adornments in urban households. Churns vary in size from approximately two gallons to the more standard three and four gallons. Occasionally an unusually large churn is produced such as the eight gallon Shanghai glazed rarities made by Lanier Meaders for the exhibition.

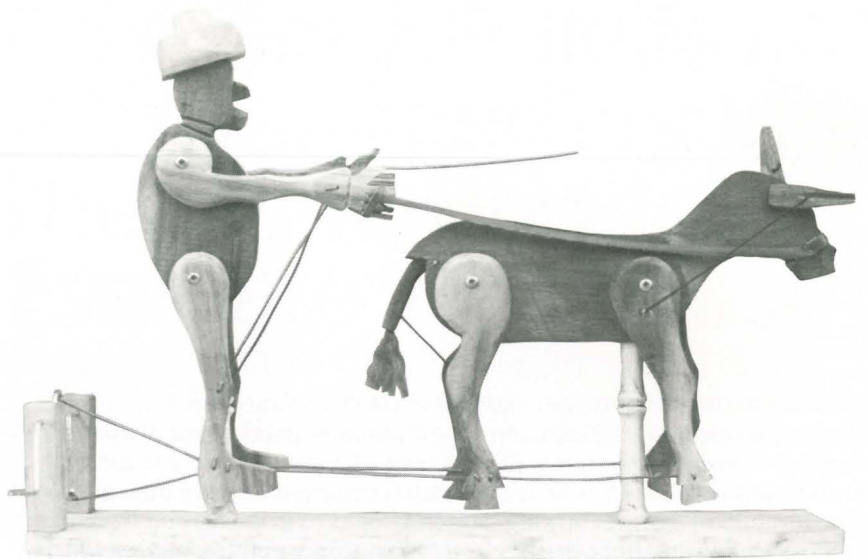
Of all the woods available to Southeastern carpenters, whittlers, and basket-makers, oak is perhaps the most important. Chairmakers fashion the vertical members of a chair from green oak and then use seasoned hickory or sometimes an alternative hardwood for the stretchers which join and stabilize the legs. As the chair ages, the green verticals shrink around the pre-seasoned stretchers, nature's own glue holding the chair together more firmly than any mixture made by man. The chairs are then seated with either oak splits or with strips of hickory bark gathered at just the right period after the sap has started flowing in early spring. Arkansas chairs made by the Bump family at Royal and the Christian and McCutcheon families at Mt. Judea are available at the Festival.

Basketmakers use oak splits (just like the chair splits) to fashion ribs and weaving elements. Most of the oak split baskets on general sale at the Festival are by Arkansan Don Gibson. Other sales and exhibition baskets include Afro-American coil baskets made in the Sea Islands of South Carolina and a limited number of American Indian baskets. A small number of rare and very handsome double woven cane baskets made by North Carolina Cherokees and by Mrs. Ada Thomas, the sole remaining Louisiana Chitimacha basketmaker, will be found in the exhibition and will be sold only at the auction.

A variety of country brooms is also included in the exhibition and sales areas. Among the most durable and useful are the corn brooms made by Tennessean Omah Kear.

For those who would rather cover the floor than sweep it, rag rugs in a number of styles and sizes are available both from Amish and other traditional weavers in Maryland and from Mrs. Lola Rhodes of Hendersonville, North Carolina. Other woven textiles include coverlets from the Goodwin Guild of Blowing Rock, North Carolina. These bedcovers in cotton and wool include an overshot version in the whig rose pattern and a double-weave version in the lovers knot pattern with a pine tree border. A cotton coverlet with a subtle





honeycomb pattern is also available. The original drafts for these patterns were collected from Appalachian home weavers by John Goodwin (1889-1974) during the early part of the century. Mr. Goodwin's daughters and grandson – the fourth and fifth generations of Goodwin weavers – continue to operate the family flyshuttle looms at Blowing Rock.

A limited number of toys carved by Willard Watson, cousin of the noted North Carolina guitarist, Doc Watson, has been obtained for the exhibition. A small number of large wood carvings by Donny Tolson and Earnest Patton also may be seen in the exhibition. Donny Tolson's carvings are reminiscent of those of his father, Edgar Tolson, whose work may be seen in the Smithsonian Museum of American History as well as in the Whitney Museum in New York City. These items will be sold at auction.

Metal work in the exhibition comes from a variety of locations. In the D.C. suburbs, Erwin Thieberger continues to confect tinware pieces similar to those he made prior to World War II in Poland. Southern blacksmiths like Phipps Bourne of Virginia and Philip Simmons of South Carolina continue to make hand wrought items such as fireplace tools and chandeliers similar to those of craftsmen a century ago. The work of these individuals is available at auction.

The Festival's collection of traditional Southeastern crafts is the largest the Smithsonian has ever assembled for sale. Produced by each craftsman especially for the Festival, these items are not generally available from the Museum Shops. However, they may be obtained throughout the Festival from 11:00 a.m. until 5:30 p.m., June 24-28 and July 1-5. The only additional opportunities to purchase crafts will be at the daily 3:00 p.m. auctions which will take place in the crafts area July 1-3 and at the Festival Stage July 4 and 5.