

Children's Folklife

The Traditions of Oklahoma

by Jean Alexander

This year children visiting the Children's Area of the Festival of American Folklife will be able to experience what it was like to grow up in Oklahoma Territory and to discover the values and traditions that Korean-Americans have handed down to their children. In order for any culture to survive, its traditions and values need to be passed from parents to their children. This may be achieved through instruction, but also through observation of ceremonies and games.

In Oklahoma, children's games are based on preparation for adulthood and adult activities. Because much of Oklahoma's industry is agricultural, children necessarily learn farm and ranch skills at an early age. For example, the game of "roping dummies," that is roping metal calf heads placed in bales of hay, prepares them for roping real cattle when they are older. "Bucking barrels," a game in which children ride on large barrels bucked back and forth by adults, teaches them to balance and ride horses later when they must spend many hours in the saddle.

To make work in the field more enjoyable, ranchers will often devise games which teenagers can participate in with the adults as they work. For example, while the job of moving and stacking huge bales of hay in the hot sun is not the most pleasant of chores, ranchers learned to make a game of it. They organize the workers into two teams which compete against one another to stack the hay the most quickly. There are tricks and secrets to be learned, and special skills to be developed in stacking the hay neatly into large piles of more than 50 bales. With teamwork, hay can get stacked and fun can be had at the same time.

Other games and crafts are also important in preparing for adulthood. For instance, young girls are taught by their mothers and grandmothers to make various types of dolls. In this year's Festival, there will be Osage Indian cloth dollmaking and Cherokee Indian buffalo-grass dollmaking. As the girls play with their dolls, they begin to prepare for parenthood as they imitate their mothers and care for the dolls. They begin to pick up sewing skills as they learn to sew small garments for the dolls. Then, in later years, they are able to sew clothes for their own families.

While any culture is more than just its games or the making of a doll, it is hoped that the visiting children will come away from the Festival wiser about the traditions of Oklahoma children.

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The Traditions of Korea

by Douglas C. Kim

When I was first asked to assist in the planning of this year's Folklife Festival I was excited because the festival is a unique opportunity to illustrate some of the best aspects of Korean culture and tradition, but also challenged because it is very difficult for a Korean-American to decide what things best represent Korean folklife.

Born and raised in the United States by parents from Korea, I am less familiar with Korean culture than a native Korean. Yet there are age-old Korean traditions and values that have been passed down to me and are as much a part of me as my fondness for Big Macs. These things are the "Old Ways in the New World" that the Festival is all about.

There was lengthy discussion among the Korean-American participants in the Festival before we decided on the themes that we feel best represent our heritage, as we know it. We rejected the idea of constructing a small Korean farm village or wearing traditional clothing because we realized that *we* don't