

Our Shared Cultural Resources

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The National Park Service serves the nation as more than just the custodian of America's national parks and historic sites. We have always had a broader mission: to serve as steward of the natural, cultural and historical resources that are our common legacy as citizens of America and of the world. This mission is one that parallels the Smithsonian Institution's obligation to maintain its great national collections, holding them in trust for the people of the United States. It is thus both natural and fitting that we serve together as co-sponsors of the Festival of American Folklife.

There are striking parallels between the responsibilities of museum curator and park superintendent, folklife researcher and historical interpreter. For all of us, stewardship is not simply a matter of standing quietly by and hoping that nothing damages or destroys our precious national legacy. If that were so our jobs would be much easier — we would be experts at maintenance and

repair, but would not concern ourselves with preventing problems or with revitalizing cultural or natural resources. Nor is stewardship simply a matter of locking away our national treasures, protecting them in pristine condition and prohibiting their use or enjoyment. That too would be far easier than our real responsibilities: to balance present needs and future hopes, to preserve our heritage while nurturing its perpetuation, to reach some harmony between the often conflicting demands imposed by nature and humanity.

As new parks have come into being during the past 15 years, Congress and the administrations of four presidents have explicitly recognized our responsibilities to engage in cultural conservation efforts; established parks are increasingly involved in assisting in the conservation of local cultures and groups. We recognize that history is not only battlefields and old mansions, but also the stories they signal.



We recognize that historic sites offer a wide range of stories to be told: a settler's cabin in Yellowstone or a textile workers' tenement in Lowell is as important a part of America's heritage as a Newport mansion or the childhood home of a president. And we recognize that culture is a process rather than a relic, that it is a complex phenomenon that thrives in a particular environment, and that the people living in that environment often have vital knowledge of the local resources and how they can best be managed.

This year's Folklife Festival offers continued evidence of the shared concerns of the National Park Service and the Smithsonian Institution. The Yaqui deer dance here reminds us of Yaqui participation in the exciting Fiesta held annually for 19 years at Tumacacori National Monument in Arizona. The French American musicians you enjoy here have also performed frequently in national parks such as the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park in Louisiana, Lowell National Historical Park in Massachusetts, and the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial park in Missouri. The Hawaiian program lets Washington visitors experience some of the traditional culture they might encounter in Hawaii's Volcanoes National Park or Pu'uhonua o Honaunau National Historical Park, the City of Refuge National Historical Park. We hope you will enjoy meeting the musicians and craftspeople in Washington, and that you will have the opportunity to see them again closer to home.