

**EXPLORING THE TRADITIONS AND HERITAGE OF YOUR COMMUNITY FINAL REPORT--  
1998**

**Grant Number 98-058G**

**Grantee. Valdosta State University**

**Project Director, Dr. Laurie Sommers, South Georgia Folklife Project, Valdosta State University**

The project included networking and limited fieldwork by Project Director Sommers in targeted communities, and a public workshop which highlighted traditional arts in south Georgia. The workshops approached the exploration of community “heritage and traditions” from the vantage point of folklore and folklife. The Project Director focused on “traditional culture” or culture which is learned informally, transmitted orally, and shaped by the distinctive religious, ethnic, occupational, and geographic characteristics of south Georgia. Many people mistakenly equate “folklore” with history (rather than as living traditions) or with falsehoods (“Oh, that’s just folklore!”). It is often taken for granted as “just the way we do things.” These workshops brought the scholarly approach to folk culture into focus, and encouraged informed documentation and programming, thus enhancing a broader appreciation and awareness of south Georgia’s heritage and culture. Oral interviewing techniques were introduced through a 30-minute video presentation, “An Oral Historian’s Work,” produced by the Maine Folklife Center. The workshop consisted of 1) introduction and then sharing of memories and traditions of participants, facilitated by the Project Director; 2) a slide presentation of south Georgia traditions; and 3) showing of the video “An Oral Historian’s Work.” Prior to each workshop, the Project Director visited the host site to discuss past, present, and planned heritage work in the community. She also took pictures of local traditions so the slide presentation would have some “local dimension.”

The intent of this project was to network with the key gatekeepers in the arts and cultural activities of various south Georgia communities. In this the project succeeded. Because the workshop title was changed to “Exploring Community Heritage” (at suggestion of Syd Blackmarr) in the attempt to reach a broader audience, it attracted a disproportionately large number of senior citizens and those who equated “heritage” with “history.” However, the workshop itself broadened the notion of heritage to include folklife and emphasized *living traditions* over historic ones. The project successfully reached its target audience of arts and humanities programmers, historical societies, community center personnel, cultural tourism promoters, educators, tradition bearers, and the general public. The workshops drew a small minority audience that reflected the nature of mailing lists and constituencies of the arts and cultural organizations in these communities. To reach such audiences, future workshops would need to be located in venues perceived to be

more accessible and approachable by minority audiences and special efforts must be made to target these audiences through personal visits and specific audience building initiatives.

**Location of Project Workshops:**

Thomas County, Thomasville	9-11:30 a.m.	1-23-99
Ware County, Waycross	7-9:30 p.m.	2-9-99
Ben Hill County, Fitzgerald	7-9:30 p.m.	2-18-99
Coffee County, Douglas	7-9:30 p.m.	3-4-99
Colquitt County, Moultrie	7-9:30 p.m.	3-23-99
Crisp County, Cordele	7-9:30 p.m.	4-10-99
Lowndes County	7-9:30 p.m.	4-13-99
Tift County, Tifton	7-9:30 p.m.	5-25-99
Early County, Jakin	7-9 p.m.	6-24-99
Early County, Kolomoki	7-9:00 p.m.	9-13-99
Colquitt County, Moultrie	7-9:30 p.m.	9-17-99

## 8. Audience Participation

A. Total Number in attendance all sessions=260

### B. Audience Profile

#### Sex

Male 35%

Female 65%

#### Age

Under 12 0%

12-18 0%

18-25 1%

25-35 3%

36-55 40%

over 55 56%

#### Educational Level

Elementary 10%

High School 30%

College 45%

Graduate 10%

Technical 5%

#### Ethnic Representation

Black 1%

Asian 1%

Hispanic 1%

Caucasian 97%

C. Represented groups: arts councils, historical Societies, historic preservation specialists, civic leaders, museum staff, traditional artists, educators

### **Audience Evaluation of Project**

The following questionnaire was distributed at the close of each workshop. Summary responses are included:

Audience Evaluation Grant # 98-058G Exploring Community Heritage

Evaluations of GHC projects are critical in providing quality humanities programs. Your thoughtful comments are important contributions to the creation and improvement of public humanities programs in our state. Thank you for your help!

Your Name:

Address:

Date and Location of Workshop:

SAMPLE = 90 surveys returned

1. I rate this program (circle one) excellent (67) good (20) fair (3) poor (0)

Comments:

She stirred me, making me want to think and talk about my memories of 90 years.

Very informative

It gave us a good way to begin and made people aware of traditions we have.

Didn't realize the scientific nature of folklore preservation and research.

Comprehensive and thought-provoking

To be introduced to the correct procedure of oral interview was valuable

2. Did the workshop cover topics as advertised? excellent (70) good (19) fair poor

Comments

Broad coverage of varied folk activities

3. I would rate the effectiveness of the hand-outs as: very useful (70) useful (18) not useful

Comments

Great documents to begin oral history

Excellent examples of material to support discussion topics

4. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the program? How could it have been improved?

Would like to see actual interview in progress, for example

More time for questions, audience involvement

More hands-on

Good visuals

Good knowledge and appreciation of subject

I especially enjoyed meeting people in the area whom I can call on and are interested

The slide presentation gave terrific insight into the different areas of heritage

More emphasis on latest technology for documentation

5. Would you like to see any follow-up programs from the South Georgia Folklife Project? What would be useful/helpful?

Your partnering with a local group

More school projects

Tying oral history to historic preservation building research

More information on minorities

Sharing work done by workshop participants

Sources for technical help: sound recording, archiving

6. Suggestions of traditions or individuals important to community heritage in your area

Other Participant Feedback:

Allow me to thank you, sincerely, for the quality presentation you gave at our Historical Society dinner program last Friday here in Moultrie. Especially do I appreciate the preparation and time

you gave to our having such an informative and entertaining evening. While not an aficionado of country music, I was impressed by the talents of Henry Rutland and his fellow musicians. I saw my New York wife tapping her feet and wishing she could get up and dance to that fiddle! I hope you feel that your efforts were rewarded. Everyone I spoke with felt this was the program we've had! I am confident that a formal letter of appreciation will be sent to you by the Society.

John E. Brown, Ph.D. Historical Society of Colquitt County, 9-20-99

Thanks for putting on the workshop last night. There was a good interest by the people present with some good ideas of things they wanted preserved. I'm encouraged to see people that care about the past...I also appreciate the stature that Sacred Harp gained last night among people that can make a difference. Your endorsement sparked some interest among people that would normally not have given it a second glance.

David I. Lee, Brantley County, February 10, 1999

Wonderful evening. Thank you so much. The plans to document the last year of turpentineing would be benefit enough from such an evening—but I know there will be more projects to come from you. I'm looking forward to all of them...

Christine Tibbits, May 1999, Tift County

Thank you so much for allowing the Colquitt County Arts Center to participate in the South Georgia Folklife Project. It was an instructive workshop that serves our community as a catalyst in the exploration of our traditions.

Jane Simpson, Colquitt County, March 25, 1999

I was inspired by the many options and suggestions adaptable to local projects.

Gwen Adams, Wilcox County, Feb. 17, 1999

The program was excellent and fueled my desire to document cultural traditions, both at the Okefenokee Heritage Center and personally.

Catherine Larkins, Ware County, Feb. 9, 1999

#### 9. Participating Humanities Scholars

Dr. Laurie Kay Sommers, Valdosta State University      S. GA Folklife Project Director,  
presenter

Ms. Teresa Hollingsworth Fl. Div. of Historical Resources, Florida Folklife Program, evaluator

Ms. Gretchen Geisinger, Valdosta State University, English, presenter

Mr. Henry Rutland, community scholar, Thomasville, presenter

**\*\*Please note:** Two additional humanities scholars were listed in the project proposal: Dr. Maggie Holtzberg (GA state folklorist) and Ms. Syd Blackmarr. Dr. Holtzberg left the state to assume another position and a replacement as not named until July, so she was not available to assist in the programs as originally planned. After the grant was awarded, Ms. Blackmarr stepped down as director of the Arts Experiment Station and began her own consulting business. She was unavailable for the workshop dates in this new capacity.

Ms. Gretchen Geisinger, (MA English, VSU) presented the results of an independent study project in conjunction with the South Georgia Folklife Project on culture and community in her hometown of Jakin, Georgia, during a July workshop. Because of the "local connection," this workshop attracted one of the best audiences, despite its location in a very small town. Geisinger used the techniques of folklife and oral history to explore continuity and change in Jakin from its founding to the present.

Finally, Mr. Henry Rutland, heir to one of south Georgia's great fiddling traditions, shared his substantial knowledge on the history and technique of south Georgia fiddling in Moultrie, an area where he is county engineer. This also brought a "local dimension" to the workshop. Localizing the workshops had been a persistent comment of evaluation forms.

10. Attach Report of Evaluation Committee (see report by Ms. Teresa Hollingsworth)

11. Media Involvement

A. Were media involved in promotion? Yes.

Press releases and PSAs were sent to local newspapers and radio/TV stations. Media sources were identified by the host organizations at each site. Sample newspapers include the following:

The Moultrie Observer

The Thomasville Times Enterprise

The Early County News

The Waycross Journal Herald

Donalsonville News

Tifton Gazette

Albany Herald

Douglas Enterprise

Fitzgerald Herald Leader

Ocilla Star

Valdosta Daily Times