

**South Georgia Folklife Radio Project (Wiregrass Ways)
Final Report, FY98-0209-FOLKLIFE GRANT
Georgia Council for the Arts Folklife Program
Submitted by Laurie Kay Sommers, Project Director, Valdosta State University**

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION OF COMPLETED PROJECT

1. What authentic aspects of Georgia's folk art(s) or folklife did this project involve? Include a list of traditional artists that were involved in the project, along with descriptions of their work.

The project funded new and follow-up fieldwork with a variety of individuals in south Georgia in preparation for a 13-part radio series titled "Wiregrass Ways." These include:

David and Clarke Lee, Hoboken; fifth generation sacred harp song leaders who are reviving the regional sacred harp style. The 1997-98 period included new fieldwork with the Georgia-Florida-Alabama convention (an all-day sing held at Hoboken) and singing school.

Tollie Lee, originally from rural Brantley County but now living in Callahan, FL; elder of the Sardis and Piney Grove Primitive Baptist churches, discussed hymn lining and Lloyd hymnal singing, as well as hollering

Bernice Chesser Roddenberry and daughter Judy Drury, Folkston; documented making palmetto brooms for the annual Chesser Homestead Open House at the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, and also singing their own style of sacred harp along with Roddenberry's other daughters

Jack Roddenberry, Folkston; makes "gater poacher" wooden boats and also continues the tradition of hollering; son of Bernice Roddenberry

Roxie Chesser Crawford, St. George; raised in the Okefenokee and an invaluable source for Okefenokee lifeways

Alton Carter, Folkston; lifelong turpentine and currently one of the few active turpentiners left in the United States

Elliot West, Folkston; lifelong turpentine, currently in the employ of Alton Carter

Henry Rutland, Thomasville; fourth generation fiddler who knows a number of old regional tunes as well as country and bluegrass; nephew of Georgia Slim Rutland; current head of South Georgia Grass, a bluegrass band that plays for hunting lodges during the season

DC Watkins, Valdosta; founder of the Mt. Zion Music Hall in rural Lowndes County which hosts weekly jams of old-time country, bluegrass, and gospel

CE Pullen, Boston; head of Pullen Grass, a bluegrass group and also instrument maker; he has made two banjos

Red Lindsey, Adel; long-time fiddler and current member of Pullen Grass

Frank Harrell, Nashville; retired air force major, native of Amsterdam, GA; continues family tradition of jam and jelly making with a cottage industry in his home

Louell Jackson, Valdosta; quilter, cook, and fisherwoman raised in rural Echols County.

Linda Paulk, Willacoochee; owns Puddin' Creek Cane Syrup

Inez Paulk, Willacoochee; retired farmer and turpentine, father-in-law to Linda Paulk; mentored her in syrup making

Maria and José Ruiz, Willacoochee and Colima, Mexico; resident workers at Linda and Warren Paulk's farm; assist with syrup making, among other things.

Jimmy Parker, Nashville; tobacco auctioneer and partner in Planter's Warehouse

Robert E. Deatherage, Nashville and North Carolina; partner in Planter's Warehouse and excellent source for oral history and personal experience narratives of Georgia/North Carolina tobacco connection

Lewis Watson, Sr., Nashville; former tobacco farmer and retired partner at Planter's Warehouse

Elder Ervin Peterson, Albany; minister for St. Luke's Primitive Baptist Church in Valdosta

Lonnie and Mary Johnson, Valdosta; have sung gospel in the style of the Consolers for 27 years

The Voices of Harmony, Valdosta; Pat Sirmans, Chanel Baker, Wanda Collins and Pearl Phillips, four women who sing a mix of traditional and contemporary gospel

Additional recording was done at the Fiestas Guadalupanas in Valdosta, which included an ad hoc migrant worker ensemble made up of Mexican and Guatemalan migrant workers from Camilla.

2. What did this grant allow you to accomplish that you might not have been able to do otherwise?

This grant funded further fieldwork with a variety of important south Georgia traditions. In addition, it facilitated a working partnership with producers Melissa Gray and Teresa Sanders at Peach State Public Radio in Atlanta, thus leading to a high quality, technically sound radio production. The series of grants from the Georgia Folklife Program also laid the groundwork for a successful NEA Folk and Traditional Arts Infrastructure Initiative grant and the forthcoming South Georgia Folk Arts Center at VSU. The two Georgia Folklife grants introduced VSU administrators to the kinds of benefits a professional folklorist can provide in terms of service to the university and region. It also showed NEA that VSU had a track record in folklife activity.

3. Explain how this project contributed to the public's understanding of folk art/ folklife. Describe cultural interpretation provided.

The radio series to air beginning this coming September on Georgia Gazette will reach a large audience across Georgia. With five minute programs, there is not time for a great deal of interpretation, but care was taken in selecting a variety of authentic and representative folklife forms and folk groups in south Georgia. Some audience members will be exposed to these traditions for the first time; for others, the programs may serve to highlight and reinforce ongoing traditional practices. Laurie Sommers also gave public presentations on the project at a Multicultural Education conference, VSU Honor's Program lecture series, and the Unitarian Church. The project also generated quite a bit of media attention. In addition to articles in VSU publications, feature articles appeared in the Valdosta Daily Times and an AP piece sent to papers throughout the state. WALB TV Albany will run a feature on the radio series in July or August.

4. Describe how folk cultural specialists were involved in planning and implementation of the project.

Wiregrass Ways was researched and written by Dr. Laurie Sommers, a Ph.D in folklore who has worked in public sector folklore since 1982. In 1995 she initiated the South Georgia Folklife Project.

5. How was the project received?

The series has not yet aired, and copies of the series were just recently mailed to all traditional artists involved. There has not yet been time for extensive feedback. Thus far, the direct only comment I've received is a phone message from CE Pullen: "I got your tape, and it was fantastic."

COMPLIANCE DOCUMENTATION

1. DAT and CD copies of Wiregrass Ways already submitted by Peach State Public Radio
2. Scripts enclosed
3. Copy of letter mailed to all individuals featured in the series enclosed
4. Project PR submitted to Maggie Holtzberg in May
5. Letter from Brian Adler regarding Honors Program presentation enclosed
6. Field documentation to be submitted under separate cover as discussed with Dr. Maggie Holtzberg