

Faces” in the Piney Woods Final Narrative Report Summary
Prepared for Georgia Council for the Arts Folklife Program Grant FY04-41-271
South Georgia Folklife Project, Valdosta State University

“Faces in the Piney Woods:” Traditions of Turpentining in South Georgia, funded a student internship for Tim Prizer with the South Georgia Folklife Project (SGFP) to conduct field documentation on the occupational folklife of turpentining in South Georgia. Dr. Laurie Sommers, folklorist and director of the SGFP, oversaw the project. “Faces in the Piney Woods” focuses on traditional expressive culture associated with an occupation recently ended in South Georgia, and one that was a defining occupation of not only South Georgia, but also of much of the American South. Occupational folklife is the knowledge, customs, oral narrative, music, and lore of occupational folk groups. Accordingly, this survey focused on the lifeways and worldviews of former turpentiners and emphasizes folklife genres such as jokes, personal experience narratives, nicknames, foodways of the woods and turpentine camps, customs, home remedies in the woods (especially those involving turpentine), music, games and competitions held with one another while working, and local knowledge of the woods.

The field survey documented the occupational folklife of former turpentiners through 12 new interviews. In addition, two video sessions were held: 1) the turpentine fire still firing at the Georgia Agrirama, as part of the annual Folk Life Festival; and 2) demonstration of turpentine tools and techniques by Gillis Carter of Willacoochee. Additional research involved photo documentation, archival searches for relevant documents and photographs at the Georgia Forestry Magazine, Florida State Archives, and at the Lowndes County Historical Society and Museum.

After the project began, an African American fieldworker, LeRoy Henderson, was identified and added to the project. This caused some adjustments in the project travel budget, and also meant that the VSU videographer budget line was shifted to Henderson’s stipend. Honorarium for VSU videographer Bill Muntz and his student shifted to VSU in-kind support.

Although we had hoped to emphasize the personal experience narratives of turpentiners active in the past decade, more of the interviews dealt with the historic period of the camp commissary and quarters. Most of the interviewees did meet the project goals of interviewing African American turpentine workers.

Field materials will be placed in the South Georgia Folklife Project Resource collection at VSU’s Odum Library with duplicates at GCA. Georgia Southern Special Collections has also been contacted about housing copies of the materials. The collected material and final report are being made accessible to a larger audience through placement on a VSU website which has been developed by project director Laurie Sommers and VSU Master’s student, Paul Flowers, who worked on the project as part of a required internship. Future plans for the project after the grant period include collaboration on a naval stores exhibit with the Georgia Agrirama; a MA thesis on the topic by Tim Prizer;

and a co-authored book by project director Sommers.

The project has benefited from previous work on turpentine occupational folklife, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, and by simultaneous work by project director Sommers on a turpentining exhibit about Harley Langdale, Jr., for the Harley Landgale, Jr., College of Business at VSU, opening in fall 2004. Match was provided by VSU and by the National Endowment for the Arts through the Folk and Traditional Arts Infrastructure Initiative grant to the SGFP.

Included with the final project materials are copies of artist data sheets, tape logs and transcripts, and consent forms for the project interviews; copies of audio interview tapes, and the final fieldwork report. An itemized list of interviews conducted during the grant period is appended.