

**Sounds of South Georgia Documentation and Radio Series Final Report
National Endowment for the Arts Access Grant
South Georgia Folklife Project
Valdosta State University
Laurie Sommers, Project Director
6-01-03 to 12-31-05**

This project used NEA Access funds to do fieldwork, location sound recording, and production for the Sounds of South Georgia radio series which focused on the traditional arts of diverse cultural communities in South Georgia. The 12-part series aired on Georgia Public Radio's program Georgia Gazette (packaged in five to eight minute segments) and reached an estimated audience of 66,000 per show statewide. Field documentation and radio shows are archived as part of the South Georgia Folklife Collection at the Valdosta State University Archives.

The series will meet NEA criteria of access, artistic excellence, and merit by highlighting the exemplary traditions of artists and communities in an underserved, rural area of a large southern state, involving diverse artists and creating new audiences for their work, showing the influence of these artists and traditions on the heritage of the region, and bringing these traditions to the attention of wider audiences within an educational framework. The series took an inclusive approach to the traditional arts of the region by looking at the traditional arts of the major groups who have migrated to the region. This radio series was part of a new initiative to focus on cultural diversity in the 41-county Valdosta State University service area through fieldwork and public programs.

With the results of the 2000 Census, it is clear that the cultural landscape the region is changing. Although complete ethnic breakdowns are still not available, Asian and Hispanic populations in Georgia have risen sharply in the past decade. The Metro Atlanta counties have received the most attention, but predominantly rural South Georgia is also changing. Tiny Echols County, for example, which borders Florida in south central Georgia, currently has the second largest Hispanic population in the state in terms of overall percentage of county population. Other cultural communities exist but there is little information available on their traditional arts, especially if they fall outside the "black" and "white" categories long used in the region. Even earlier folklore surveys, such as the 1977 South Central Georgia Survey by the American Folklife Center, paid little attention to ethnic diversity per se, but in the ensuing 25 years demographic and cultural change is more prevalent and visible.

A focus on traditional arts and culture of older, long established and newer cultural communities is timely and needed. Middle school teachers in a South Georgia county recently refused to take students to the currently touring Folklife of the Georgia Wiregrass exhibit because its few images of Asians, Native Americans, and Hispanics smacked of political correctness and weren't "South Georgia" as they believed it to be. Traditional arts are critical to creating a sense of place--a feeling of "home"--and as a means to explore cultural differences and similarities between groups.

Radio is an especially appropriate medium for several reasons. First, at the time of this writing Georgia was without a state folklorist and there was a pressing need to keep a statewide visibility for folk and traditional arts that a Public Radio program can provide. Second, radio brought the expressive culture of diverse and underserved artists and communities in rural South Georgia to wider audiences, thereby supporting these artists and communities.

1. What activities did grant support and what did it accomplish?

The grant supported new fieldwork with Mexican, Creek, Asian Indian, Lebanese, Saltzberger descendents, and Russian Jewish communities in South Georgia and built on previous fieldwork with Swampers, Primitive Baptists, Gullah, and African American farmers and Civil Rights

Movement Freedom Singers. The fieldwork resulted in 12 radio programs of 5 to 8 minutes in length which are being broadcast on Georgia Public Radio's news magazine show, Georgia Gazette. The programs aired twice and then were web archived on the gpb.org website for several months. Photos for selected programs were provided for the website. The entire series will be archived on the new South Georgia Folklife Collection website to be housed by VSU Archives [under construction in fall 2006]. The series took an inclusive approach to the traditional arts of the region by looking at the traditional arts of the major groups who have migrated to the region. Programs included the following topics: 1) Ham and Egg Shows (food and agricultural traditions of black farmers, auctioneering, Lowndes County and Ft. Valley, GA); 2) Lebanese Easter Traditions (foodways such as Lenten ka'ak cookies and Easter customs, Valdosta, GA); 3) Chesser Homestead Homecoming (Swamper foodways, sacred harp, hollering, ballad singing, Charlton County, GA); 4) Old Timey Harvest Day and the McIntosh County Shouters (ring shout, Gullah traditions, Riceboro, GA); 5) Las Posadas (Mexican Christmas customs, food, villancicos, Douglas, GA); 6) Russian Jewish Traditions and Seder (migration stories, foodways, family customs, Lowndes County, GA); 7) A Family of Freedom Singers (Rutha and Emory Harris, freedom songs, Albany, GA); 8) Creek Traditions (Bobby and Joseph Johns, woodcarving, stories, customs, Okefenokee Swamp and Southeast GA); 9) Primitive Baptist Big Meeting (dinner on the grounds and lined hymns, Cracker traditions of SE GA, Rome Primitive Baptist Church, Ware County, GA); 10) Diwali (Asian Indian Festival of Lights, food, rangoli, bhajan, Valdosta and Perry, GA); 11) Fiddlin' Bud Zorn (fiddle, black and white musical interchange, Valdosta and SW GA); 12) Migration Stories (various). NEA was credited at the end of each radio program.

2. Were you able to carry out approved project activities? If not, why not?

For the most part, we carried out approved project activities. Some of the proposed radio shows were replaced with others, although the final playlist had a good balance of long established and newly arrived cultural groups, as was the original intent. For several programs, research was conducted but it did not result in a radio program. In other cases, alternate topics presented themselves during the course of research and because of greater accessibility or suitability, replaced some of those originally conceptualized in the grant proposal. As a result, some of the project partner organizations changed.

The main change in the project is that the radio series was to be part of a new initiative to focus on cultural diversity in the 41-county Valdosta State University service area with future planned educational materials and a traveling exhibition, for which the radio modules were to provide audio components. Unfortunately, South Georgia Folklife Project funding ended June 30, 2005 due to budget cuts at Valdosta State University, so these plans were tabled.

3. Key artists and partnering organizations, and their roles

Partner Organizations: The following organizations facilitated field recordings of events in their facilities: Temple Israel, Valdosta, GA; Alabama Primitive Baptist Association and Rome Primitive Baptist Church, Ware County, GA; Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, Folkston, GA; Lowndes County Extension ; New Zion Baptist Church, Riceboro, GA; St. Paul's Catholic Church, Douglas, GA; Perdido Bay Band of Creek; Dasher Church of God, Dasher, GA; Atlanta Country Music Hall of Fame, Atlanta. In addition, Ft. Valley State University Cooperative Extension Program provided photographs and the American Folklife Center, Library of Congress worked with permissions for historic recordings of the Ft. Valley Folk Festival. Georgia Public Radio consulted on the scripts and aired the programs. Paul Butterfield Audio provided sound recording and audio editing consulting and transferred old recordings of Bud Zorn to CD.

Key Artists:

- Rutha and Emory Harris, Freedom Singers, Albany, GA, music and interviews
- Bobby Johns Bearheart, Chief of the Perdido Bay Band of Creek (Pensacola, FL); provided interview

- Tollie Lee, Primitive Baptist elder, Callahan, FL, consulting on hymn lining and big meeting traditions
- Clarke Lee, Primitive Baptist elder, Hoboken, GA, interview on hymn lining and big meeting traditions
- Robert Church, Perry, GA, interview on Ham and Egg Shows and the Ft. Valley Folk Festival
- Norman and Francis Golivesky, Valdosta, GA, interview on Jewish high holidays and family foodways
- McIntosh County Shouters, Eulonia, GA, interviews and recordings on ring shout
- Sandia Patel, Valdosta, consulting on Diwali traditions
- Bernice Roddenberry family, Folkston, GA, interview and consulting on Chesser family traditions, sacred harp
- Roberta and Noel George, Valdosta, GA, consulting and interviews on Lebanese Easter traditions
- W.H. "Bud" Zorn, Valdosta, GA, interview and recordings on fiddle traditions

4. Impact on/benefits to organization, discipline, field, community?

The chief impact will be the accessibility of these materials through the South Georgia Folklife Collection at VSU, especially online access to the archived radio programs and selected field materials. In many cases, this will be the only public access to materials on these groups and traditions. The project met NEA criteria of access, artistic excellence, and merit by highlighting the exemplary traditions of artists and communities in an underserved, rural area of a large southern state, involving diverse artists and creating new audiences for their work, showing the influence of these artists and traditions on the heritage of the region, and bringing these traditions to the attention of wider audiences within an educational framework.