

**American Folklife
History 6203, Fall 2010
University of West Georgia**

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Office hours: Tuesday, 9-11:30 and Thursday 1:30-4:30 in the Center for Public History (Pafford 207) and by appointment

Class Objectives

This class introduces historians to the study of folklore and folklife and to new methods of studying American social and cultural history. The American Folklife Center defines folklife as “the traditional, expressive, shared culture of various groups in the United States: familial, ethnic, occupational, religious, and regional. Expressive culture includes a wide range of creative and symbolic forms, such as custom, belief, technical skill, language, drama, ritual, architecture, music, play, dance, drama, ritual, pageantry, and handicraft. Generally these expressions are learned orally, by imitation, or in performance, and are maintained or perpetuated without formal instruction or institutional direction.”

This class may count as a public history seminar, but it also be used as a history seminar to introduce students to new methods of historical inquiry and research.

The goals of this class are:

1. To understand the meaning of folklore and folklife and their value in studying American history and culture. One of the primary goals of the class is to understand what folklife resources are and what how these sources can enrich the study of American history and culture. As the field of history moves towards more cultural and social interpretations of the past, folklife research and scholarship can help enrich the work of historians and create a more multi-disciplinary approach useful for both historians and public historians. We will examine a variety of genres of folklore and folklife throughout the semester.

2. To learn how to conduct research and fieldwork to document folklife resources. This course will teach folklife research methods that will be useful for both historians and public historians. We will explore how to conduct and archive fieldwork, how to find primary documents related to folklife sources, and how to interpret and analyze folklife sources.

To gain a greater appreciation of the folklife resources in our own lives, families, and communities, students will be required to undertake several “mini-collection” projects during the semester, collecting examples of the genres we are discussing and presenting them to the class.

3. To practice integrating folklore and folklife resources into an original research project. Every student will produce an original research project using folklife sources. Students will be expected to provide appropriate documentation of their fieldwork and include it with their project.

4. To explore the presentation of folklife sources to the public. We will discuss current issues regarding the field of “public folklore,” particularly the ways in which we use folklife sources to present and interpret local and regional history. In addition to visiting fairs, festivals and local music venues, we will discuss on-line exhibits and other types of folklife documentaries and publications developed to share folklife traditions with the public.

Learning Outcomes

At the completion of this class each student will be able to:

1. Define folklore and folklife and identify the characteristics of different genres in the field;
2. Document folklore and folklife resources in his or her own life and in his or her family or community;
3. Conduct original research and write a research paper using folklife sources.
4. Develop his or her interpretations of American folklife resources as they relate to American history by explaining and defending them orally and in writing.
5. Critically evaluate how folklore and folklife are presented to the public, particularly in the context of local and regional history.

Required Books

Bartis, Peter, *Folklife and Fieldwork: A Layman's Introduction to Field Techniques*. Washington: D.C.: Library of Congress. This source is available on-line at <http://loc.gov/folklife/fieldwork>

Barron, Robert and Nick Spitzer, eds., *Public Folklore*. University of Mississippi Press, 2007. 13-97819841110409

Burrison, John, *Roots of a Region: Southern Folk Culture*. University Press of Mississippi, 2007.

Henry Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971. (Any edition would be fine)

Joyner, Charles, *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999. 025206772X

Prosterman, Leslie, *Ordinary Life, Festival Days: Aesthetics in the Midwestern County Fair*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Press, 1995. ISBN: 1560984082

Schoemaker, George H, *The Emergence of Folklore in Everyday Life: A Field Guide and Sourcebook*. Bloomington, Indiana: Trickster Press, 1990. 0915305038

Williams, Michael Ann, *Great Smokey Mountains Folklife*. University of Mississippi Press, 1995.

Course reserves:

Please note that additional readings will be on electronic reserve through the Ingram Library web page. Students may access these sources by visiting the Course Reserves page for this class and entering the password "folklife."

Additional recommended resources to utilize this semester:

American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, on-line resources and exhibits available at www.loc.gov/folklife

Folkstreams.net, A National Preserve of Documentary Films about American Roots Cultures streamed with essays about the traditions and filmmaking. The site includes transcriptions, study and teaching guides, suggested readings, and links to related websites. Available at www.folkstreams.net

“Folklife,” various essays on topics related to Georgia folklife, New Georgia Encyclopedia, Georgia Humanities Council, are available at <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Categories.jsp?path=Folklife>
This source provides overviews and articles topics that could be useful in research projects and exploring folklife related to Georgia. Please visit this website to learn more about our regional folklife traditions.

Course Requirements

Required Field Trips

All students will be expected to attend two field trips during the semester. The first field trip will be to the Georgia National Fair in Perry, Georgia, on Friday, October 8. All students are expected to go on this date. If you cannot, you must attend on your own and you will be expected to document your visit with a ticket. Please note that there will be no meeting on the previous Thursday night that week and the Friday field trip will count as our weekly class.

Second, each student will be expected to attend a field trip to one of two local music venues where students can experience regional music traditions. And of course, you are welcome to come to both events!

The *first option* is the Outpost Music Barn in Buncombe, Georgia, just south of Tallapoosa. Stage shows start at 7 p.m., and there is no admission unless there is a “national act,” although “donations are accepted weekly.” The Outpost features primarily Bluegrass and Gospel music. We will schedule a Friday night for whomever wants to go to attend together, as a group, or you may attend on your own, if you wish.. (For more information, you may contact owners Thomas or Betty Gray at 770-574-2759).

The *second option* is a Sacred Harp singing at Holly Springs Church outside Bremen, which is held annually on “the first Sunday in November.” This year, the Sacred Harp singing will be on November 7. Details about the Sacred Harp event and location are available under the class schedule.

Weekly assignments (30% of grade)

As you review the syllabus, you will note numerous small assignments due on a weekly basis. These assignments will require that you collect, document, and analyze examples of folklore within your family or community.

Many, but not all assignments, will require a written response paper, which should be word-processed, double-spaced, about two pages in length. Please check the weekly schedule for details on each assignment to determine whether a written assignment is required or not.

Essay: Presenting a community’s folklife traditions (10% of grade)

During the early part of the semester, we will explore how folklife is presented and interpreted to the public through fairs and festivals. The class will visit the Georgia National Fair in Perry, Georgia. In addition, students will attend a fair or festival in their community that features (or claims to highlight) elements of the region’s folklore or folklife.

Drawing on your visits to these two fairs (the Georgia National Fair and the fair that you chose to visit) and Leslie Prosterman’s book about the county fair, each student will write a three-page, word-processed paper which analyzes the extent to which local and state fairs represent a community’s traditions and how successfully these fairs present and interpret the region’s folklife resources to the

public. Please use specific examples from the fairs you visited. Photographs would be great! Utilize the book as part of your analytical framework, and reference it appropriately.

Research paper proposal (5% of grade)

Each student will turn in a two-page proposal for his or her research project, which will include the central question being asked, the research techniques you intend to utilize, a description of the folklore or folklife resources to be used, and a bibliography of at least five secondary sources on the topic.

Research paper (40% of grade)

Each student will complete a semester-long original research paper of approximately 12 to 15 pages, excluding photos and other documentation, due on the final exam date. This paper will involve the use of some type of primary folklife sources, which must include either original fieldwork that the student undertakes or archival folklife sources to explore an issue relating to history or public history. Details about the paper will be provided.

There are several potential avenues for student research. First, students are encouraged to think about how folklife studies and sources could contribute to their thesis or thesis/projects and craft a topic that would contribute to this work. Second, students may select any topic of interest.

In crafting research topics, students may draw upon several collections and recent initiatives at the Center for Public History. Over the past several years, the Center has compiled a large collection of oral histories related to Georgia foodways that would be useful for developing research topics ranging from chitlins to sweet tea. Currently, the Center is researching Georgia “roots” music in association with the Georgia Humanities Council for the Smithsonian New Harmonies exhibit which will be visiting Georgia in 2012-3 (see <http://www.museumonmainstreet.org/newharmonies/index.htm>) If students are interested in researching a genre of traditional music in Georgia, their research will contribute to this project and their papers may have the opportunity to be revised and edited for inclusion in the project website, Georgia music catalog, or possibly the New Georgia Encyclopedia. The Center also has strong oral history collections in regional music and in the occupational folklife associated with the textile and apparel industry that could be utilized for a research paper, among other collections.

In creating a project that involves original fieldwork, students should consider where they would archive their fieldwork. The Center for Public History welcomes regional folklife projects to be incorporated into its archive. There is also a collection of folklife projects from previous classes housed in the Center archives, and students are welcome to view these projects for ideas.

Class attendance and participation (15% of grade)

Students are expected to attend class and complete the readings in advance of class. As a graduate seminar, this class will focus primarily on discussion. All students are expected to contribute to class discussion. Excessive absences will lower your course grade.

Class Schedule

Please note that this schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor, but sufficient notice will be given to the students. Also note that there the schedule includes some “*recommended*” materials (including some on-line video documentaries or other resources) that will provide further insights into the topic under discussion that week.

August 12: Class Introduction

Please visit the webpage of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, available at <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/> Read “What is folklore” and one of the on-line exhibits.

Visit the website for the American Folklore Society at

<http://www.afsnet.org/aboutfolklore/aboutFL.cfm> and read “What is folklore?”

August 19: Defining folklore and folklife

Read:

- ✚ Schoemaker, chapter. 1;
- ✚ Burrison, introduction and chapters 1, 2, 5, and 6,
- ✚ Abrahams, “The Public, the Folklorist, and the Public Folklorist,” in *Public Folklore*

Bring to class: a newspaper article that incorporates folklore or folklife and a one-page written summary describing how this example fits the definitions of folklife that you have been reading

August 26: Folklore Studies

Read:

- ✚ Williams, *Great Smoky Mountains Folklife*
- ✚ McCarl, “Public Folklore: A Glimpse of the Pattern that Connects”, in *Public Folklore*

Recommended: Siporin, “Public Folklore: A Bibliographic Introduction,” in *Public Folklore*

September 2: Material culture and folk cultural regions

Read:

- ✚ Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States*;
- ✚ Schoemaker, chapter 12;
- ✚ Joyner, chapter 1

Bring to class: a written response of one to two paragraphs that describes an example of some type of folklife resource that Glassie discusses that you have seen or experienced

September 9: Doing fieldwork

Read:

- ✚ Schoemaker chapter 2-3 and 20;
- ✚ *Folklife and Fieldwork: A Layman’s Introduction to Field Techniques*, available on-line at <http://loc.gov/folklife/fieldwork>
- ✚ Roach, “The Journey of David Allen, Can Carver: Transformations through Public Folklore, and Proschan, “Field Work and Social Work: Folklore as a Helping Profession,” in *Public Folklore*; “A Statement of Ethics for the American Folklore Society,” available at <http://www.afsnet.org/aboutAFS/ethics.cfm>;
- ✚ Bruce Jackson selections on “Doing Fieldwork,” “Planning,” “Being Fair,” “Fieldworker Roles,” Points of View and Points of Departure,” all on reserve

Recommended:

- ✚ American Folklife Center’s “Cultural Documentation Guidelines,” available at <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/edresources/ed-trainingdocuments.html>
- ✚ Bess Lomax Hawes, “Happy Birthday, Dear American Folklore Society,” in *Public Folklore*

September 16: Folk art and craft

Read:

- ✚ Glassie, “Folk art,” on reserve;
- ✚ John Michael Vlach, “The Twentieth Century: Grandma Moses, Modern “Primitive,” on reserve;
- ✚ Burrison, chapter 4;
- ✚ “Folk Art and Craft” at <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?path=/Folklife/FolkArt&id=h-545>

Recommended: View the permanent exhibit “Shaping Traditions: Folk Arts in a Changing Society” at the Atlanta History Center. Exhibit curated by John Burrison.

Bring to class: An example of folk art or craft. Be prepared to describe how it meets the definition of folk art or craft. No written assignment about these objects is required.

Bring to class: Research proposal

September 23: Foodways

Read:

- ✚ Sam Hilliard, “Hog Meat and Cornpone: Food Habits in the Antebellum South,” on reserve;
- ✚ Donald E. Vermeer and Dennis A. Frate, “Geophagy in a Mississippi County,” on reserve;
- ✚ Catherine Palmer, “Chitlin Strut,” on reserve;
- ✚ “Church suppers: The Salzburger Gathering,” on reserve

Recommended: “*Food, Family, and Community: A Collection of Georgia Memories*,” Georgia Humanities Council, 2008. Copies available through the Center for Public History.

Bring to class: An *example* of traditional foodways from your family. No written assignment is required, but students will interpret their food to the class.

September 30: Occupational folklore

Read:

- ✚ Schoemaker, chapter 13;
- ✚ Review two American Memory websites that focus on occupation folklife, “Working in Patterson: Occupational Heritage in an Urban Setting,” at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/paterson/> and “Buckaroos in Paradise: Ranching Culture in Northern Nevada,” at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/buckaroos/>
- ✚ View “Afro-American Work Songs in a Texas Prison,” Film by Bruce Jackson, Peter Seeger, Toshi Seeger, Daniel Seeger, Copyright: Folklore Research Films, Inc, March 1966, 29 minutes, Black and White, available at <http://www.folkstreams.net/film.122>

Bring to class: a two-page written example of occupational folklore, which could be student/university folklore or an example from a particular occupation

October 7: No class (class time will be the field trip on Friday, October 8)

October 8: Field trip to the Georgia National Fair (Friday, so please plan accordingly)

Before visiting the fair, visit the website at www.georgianationalfair.com/
Be sure to click on the section titled “Competitions,” and read the descriptions for entries and schedules for livestock and agriculture, home arts and fine arts, and FFA and 4-H

Read: Prosterman, *Ordinary Life, Festival Days*

October 14: No class, fall break

October 21: Fairs and the public presentation of folklife

Read:

- ✦ “Rocky Ford Melon Day,”
- ✦ Schoemaker chapter 9
- ✦ Cantwell, “Feasts of Unnaming: Folk Festivals and the Representation of Folklife,” in *Public Folklore*

Bring to class: essay on “Presenting Folklife Traditions”

October 28: Family and Ethnic Folklore

Read:

- ✦ Schoemaker, chapters 14, 15, 16, and 18;
- ✦ Joyner, chapters 2-4;
- ✦ Burrison, chapter 3;
- ✦ “Ethnic Celebrations,” at <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?path=/Folklife/CustomsandLocalTraditions&id=h-774>

Recommended:

- ✦ “*Weaving Bitter with the Sweet*,” Film by Ann Ryneerson, Copyright: 2003, International Institute of Metro St. Louis, 30 minutes, Color, Available at <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,196>
- ✦ Kurin, Richard, “Presenting Folklife in a Soviet-American Cultural Exchange: Public Practice during Perestroika,” in *Public Folklore*

Bring to class: an example of folklore or folklife from your family described and analyzed in one to two pages

November 4: No class

Turn in research paper draft. These drafts must be the full paper length and include the introduction, content, conclusion, and bibliography. At least some photographs are encouraged as well, depending on your topic, as they will help me in offering useful critique for your research paper.

November 7: Sacred Harp Singing at Holly Springs Primitive Baptist Church, all-day singing beginning at 9:30 a.m., Bremen, Georgia. Directions are available on the “Fasola” website at <http://www.fasola.org/maps/?index=79&size=small>

Visit the following websites for more information and to prepare for the singing:

- ✦ “Sacred Harp Singing in Georgia” at <http://www.atlantasacredharp.org/>
- ✦ “What to Expect at a Sacred Harp Singing” <http://www.atlantasacredharp.org/beginner.html>
- ✦ “First Time at a Sacred Harp Singing” at <http://www.publica.com/beginnersheet.pdf>

November 11: Folk Music

Read:

- ✦ Schoemaker, chapters 10-11; 6
- ✦ Kip Lornell, “Anglo-American Sacred Folk Music,” on reserve;
- ✦ Joyner, chapters 10-12;
- ✦ Sheehy, “Crossover Drama,” in *Public Folklore*

- ✚ Review the “Atlanta Bluegrass Happenings” website at <http://atlantabluegrasshappenings.com/>

Recommended:

- ✚ Liner notes “I Hear a Sweet Voice Calling,” by Mick Buck, available at http://www.westga.edu/cph/index_12850.php ; produced by the Center for Public History.
- ✚ “Sweet is the Day: A Sacred Harp Family Portrait,” Film by Jim Carnes, Produced by Erin Kellen, Copyright: 2001, The Alabama Folklife Association, 59 minutes, Color, available at <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,44> Please review the associated research materials on the film website.

Bring to class: a two-page written analysis of the music event you attended, either the Sacred Harp singing or the Outpost Bluegrass Barn (or, if you attended both, you are welcome to compare them)

November 18: Oral and written lore: narratives, speech, beliefs, jokes, and riddles

Read:

- ✚ Schoemaker, chapters 4-6, 8;
- ✚ Jan Brunvand, “The Hook and Other Teenage Horrors,” on reserve.

Bring to class: a two-page description and analysis of a narrative which you have heard or shared

November 25: No class, Thanksgiving break

December 2: Religious folklore; Children’s folklore

Read:

- ✚ Schoemaker, chapter 7 and 17;
- ✚ “Revival Cooking,” on reserve
- ✚ Peter Opie, “The Lore and Language of School Children,” on reserve
- ✚ *Black Delta Religion*, Film by Bill and Josette Ferris, Produced by Center for Southern Folklore, Copyright: 1973, Center for Southern Folklore, 14 minutes, Black and White, 1973, available at <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,82>

Bring to class: an example of children’s folklore described and analyzed in two pages

December 9: Research paper presentations

Bring to class: Final research projects