



Field Notes

News from Traditional Arts Indiana

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Lyceum 2000

*Our Other Lives: Work and Creativity
in the Calumet Region*

TAI and the Indiana Historical Society hosted “a different kind of history conference” in the fall of 2000, one modeled after the lyceums common in the Midwest in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Like its predecessors, this lyceum brought residents of Indiana’s Calumet Region together for “mental, moral, and physical expansion combined with wholesome entertainment” (1912).

Participants and audience members left the lyceum, held September 30–October 1, mentally stimulated by lively roundtable exchanges, morally uplifted by the deep individual commitment to community or artistic practice, wholesomely entertained by the history of Gary as told in word and song and physically invigorated by a Sunday tour of churches, historic neighborhoods, and an international harbor. After the tour, two long-time Calumet Region residents announced they were canceling future trips in order to explore closer to home.

The Lyceum’s theme brought together chefs, musicians, artists, collectors, re-enactors, actors, community activists, and spare-time historians to reflect on regional, communal and personal

The Lake Erie docking at the international harbor at the Port of Indiana, one of the stops along the Lyceum bus tour.
— Photo by Inta Carpenter



Greek cooking master class proudly displays finished baklava. (l-r, front row: Elin Christianson, Becky Crabb, Mary Halkias, Irene Batalis; back row: Cynthia Ogorek and Peter Youngman)
— Photo by Erin Roth

“[Teaching the master class] was the best time of my life I have ever had working with people. I swear! They were a great group of people!” — Mary Halkias, Merrillville resident and master Greek cook.

meaning pursued through work and their creative “other lives.” Local residents and others across the state gathered to learn about the Calumet Region and celebrate its rich and diverse heritage. The music roundtable introduced an African American jazz musician and a Serbian/Croatian tamburitza musician, both from Gary, both musicians during an era of segregation. A friendship has grown from their common interests in preserving their musical heritage, and they continue to correspond by sharing information and photographs from Old Gary’s music scene.

We are in the planning process for the next Lyceum to be held in southwest Indiana spring of 2002. Plan to attend this engaging event; come explore Indiana’s vast regional diversity.

On the Road . . .

Voices of Perry County Project Winds Down

Over fifty Perry County residents and TAI staff gathered in November to listen, share, reminisce and reflect. Those present shared stories about their first jobs, and presenters shared slides and excerpts from interviews. The Tell City Historical Society hosted the evening as part of their monthly meeting.

Work and Life: *Voices of Perry County*, a community oral history project to document the county's work traditions, successfully trained community volunteers, students, and teachers in the skills of oral history research and recorded nearly 40 interviews.

Two teachers from Perry County schools enthusiastically summarized their successful oral history projects — history lessons straight from those who lived it. Antoinette Kranning's fifth graders at Perry Central Elementary explored the county's small, independently owned general stores. Some only exist as memories. Students did their own research, invited storekeepers into the classroom, and created replicas of the stores using a variety of materials from Popsicle sticks to appliance cardboard boxes. In response to the community's enthusiasm about the project, Kranning said, "It really makes the kids feel important. It just goes to show that the value of research is great."

Joan Goble and Penny Hardman, teachers at Cannelton Elementary, coordinated a year-long oral history project called *Echoes of Cannelton*. After students received training from TAI staff and teachers, they recorded interviews on tape in the classroom with older residents. Visit their website at: http://ftp1.att.virtualclassroom.org/vc_33/.

Tapes, transcripts, and photographs from the *Voices of Perry County* project are being archived at the Indiana Historical Society, the Tell City Historical Society (TCHS), and the Perry County Museum (PCM). Funding for this project was provided for by Indiana Human-



Clifford Gunn, woodworker and 33-year veteran of the Tell City Chair Company, holds an exact replica of a popular company chair he made while working in the Sample Room. The Tell City Chair Company, an established manufacturer of fine furniture for five generations, closed its doors in 1996. — *Photo by Erin Roth*

ties Council, TAI, PCM, and TCHS. Project Director Chuck Poehlein and others plan to continue interviewing, using equipment purchased with grant funds.

From the Field . . .

[Excerpted from Inta Carpenter's fieldnotes, recorded after the initial Lyceum planning meeting and informal tour of the Calumet Region.]

November 17, 1999

The most obvious impression is that this was a day of incredibly rich aesthetics — Milan [Opacich's] shop, St. George's Serbian Orthodox Church, John Cain's [Director of Northern Indiana Arts Association] house, the Bakery restaurant (whose entrees came in swirls of color and motion). And yet, we were supposed to be in an "economically challenged" area of the state, where we were told we would more than likely fear for our lives than enjoy it. And indeed we have seen empty storefronts. But it is in some sense a folklorist's dream and vindication: in fact, creativity is the common denominator of being human. But so is the possibility of corruption,

From the spoken word to the hand-made object, individuals express themselves in ways firmly grounded and deeply connected to community.

Traditional Arts Indiana, a partnership of the Indiana Arts Commission and the Indiana University Folklore Institute, works locally with individuals and

organizations to promote and facilitate cultural documentation and public programming. The National Endowment for the Arts, the Indiana Arts Commission, Indiana University, and private donations support the work of TAI. For more information, contact Erin Roth, Program Manager, (812)855-0418, <tradarts@indiana.edu>.

The TAI Team

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Fieldworkers 2001: Inta Carpenter, Maria Del Pilar Muriel, Kathy Roberts, Erin Roth

passivity, disregard rather than the kind of rebellion and agency that creativity entails. Milan repeatedly used the words “my hero” to describe significant people in his life. Others throughout the day also told us of personal heroes, other Regionites. We certainly have met people who are committed to this area, who feel and connect with its energy and the obvious benefits of living here. And we are lucky to have guides along the way, for there is much here to discover.

April 20, 2000

As I read back on these notes, I realize much I left undescribed: John took us to Crown Point to visit the arts center satellite there, to his main place for NIAA in Munster, to the Hammond “sub-station,” as he calls it, housed in an old building donated by NIPSCO, drove us through Hammond, where we saw the huge mural of the ministerial couple on the side of a Baptist church. Milan took us to St. Sava Orthodox church — grand and majestic. Ron Cohen [IU-N Professor] drove us around the next day — a sweeping tour that left the impression of continuity from one town to another. They all merged for me, but to Ron were distinct. He showed us remarkable architectural experiments, in both design and construction. I remember leaving the area feeling let down to be returning to the familiarity of Bloomington, to be leaving the urban complex with its overlapping and interlocking scenes.



Home of Paul Myers, third generation resident of Marktown, a town designed as a community for workers of Mark Manufacturing Co. in 1917, by architect Howard Van Doren Shaw. The narrow European-style streets and stucco houses contrast with its neighboring industrial sites, Amoco Oil and LTV Steel. Marktown is located in East Chicago and was one of the stops along the Lyceum bus tour. — Photo by Inta Carpenter

Creating, Changing, Renewing

Portraits of Indiana's Traditional Artists

LadySax — Ernie Shelby
Merrillville, Indiana

Ernie Shelby's first passion is music. Shelby was surrounded by the animated sounds of her mother's Pentecostal church choir and the blues she and her brother would hear when her father sneaked them out of the house to a local gathering place. Now an accomplished alto saxophonist, owner of her own recording company, poet, songwriter, and singer, Shelby supports her music through her day-work as fiscal officer for Project Learn, a Chicago non-profit that administers fifteen daycare and Head Start centers. Through her company EDSAS, she also provides bookkeeping and tax preparation for a variety of churches, daycare centers, and individuals.



Ernie Shelby and her sax, here singing solo at the Richardson wedding reception at Marquette Park in Gary, July 2000.

— Photo by Erin Roth

Shelby performs regularly with the Gary-based blues band Fabulous Kings and solos for weddings, churches, clubs. Currently she is producing a recording of female voices from the Calumet Region through her recording company Dimples Co, named for her distinctive dimples when she plays.

[Shelby participated in the Lyceum 2000. The following is excerpted from one of the roundtables.]

Inta Carpenter: Who were your role models?

Shelby: I figured only Liberace played the piano because I think I saw Liberace on Ed Sullivan. Granddad came by and he could play the piano. I figured we were descendents of Liberace. (For some reason, I felt all farmers were brothers and sisters. Whatever your occupation was, I felt you were kin-folk, because it looked like all the railroad guys were brothers, so all musicians, to me, all piano players were kin-folk in some kind of way.) When granddad came

out and he started playing, it was like, “We belong on Ed Sullivan.”

And then after a while I found that Mom played. She’s my main role model because she’s a female. Every now and then when all the men-folk were out, she would tickle the keys. She got on that piano and I said, “My mother is Liberace’s sister!” And I would go to school and tell people, “We’re kin to Liberace!”

Finally I realized. I saw Fats Domino on T.V. and I said, “He’s *really* Liberace’s brother.” Finally I figured out by the time I was maybe five or six, just because you all do the same thing, you’re not brothers and sisters. And because I didn’t see black/white, I didn’t see old/young, I didn’t see north/south, I didn’t see anything. And I think that really created the love for music. You might say I wanted to be in Liberace’s family — was the main reason I got started. But it was in our home at all times and you couldn’t really avoid it.

The Bulletin Board

- *June 9–July 1, 2001* Intensive three-week field school Documenting Local Culture focusing on the experience of disability in the Bloomington community. For more information, call or visit <www.indiana.edu/~tradarts/fieldschool.html>. The field school is sponsored by TAI, Indiana University Folklore Institute, Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, and the American Folklife Center.

- TEACHERS! <www.tapnet.org> For Summer 2001 list of training opportunities, follow the link to the “Teacher Training In Folk Arts, Folklife, and Oral History — Summer 2001.”

- *August 16, 2001* TAI Day at the Indiana State Fair at the Main Street Stage. Also visit the sheep barn to see a short video featuring Indiana’s 4-H kids and their sheep, a collaboration between TAI and IU video students.