



Field Notes

News from Traditional Arts Indiana

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Indiana State Fair Feature

TAI stepped up its programming this year at the Fair. The State Fair continues to be a place rich with programming possibilities and the State Fair staff a good partner.

State Fair Masters Designation Program

Four individuals were honored this year – George Harrell, master wool grader (Johnson County), Keith Ruble, master bowl hewer and log cabin builder and restorer (Vigo County), Mary Schuman, master baker (Marion County), and Nancy Schuman, master baker (Johnson County).

The Indiana State Fair (ISF) Board of Commissioners nominated several individuals and TAI interviewed some of these individuals. This year’s masters collectively represent over 100 years of dedication to the State Fair. Criteria for the award is based upon past commitment and service to the State Fair or county fair, level of skill achieved, and willingness to share knowledge with others.



George Harrell, 2001 State Fair Master, explains the skill of wool grading in the barn on his family’s fourth-generation farm in Johnson County.

— Photo by Erin Roth

“It takes a real eye.” — State Fair Master Wool Grader George Harrell.

The purpose of this program is to give deserved recognition to some of the talented and generous individuals who contribute to the making of the Fair. If you have someone to nominate, please contact our office.

TAI Day and Masters Ceremony

The Main Street Stage had a different look this year. Tables with umbrellas to shelter the audience from the hot sun and a smaller stage helped create a more intimate setting. Drums of West Africa, an Indianapolis-based drumming group performed two sets. Prince Julius Adeniyi, originally from Nigeria and his group performed in beautiful West African dress. Some audience members danced despite the damp start to the day.



2001 State Fair Master Keith Ruble hews a cherry bowl with an adz on the porch of a log cabin he restored at Fowler Park in Vigo County. Ruble is Supervisor for Vigo County Parks and Rec.

— Photo by Erin Roth



Mary and Nancy Schuman (l-r) learned to cook on the farm with their mother and in 4-H. Both pursued careers as Purdue Cooperative Extension educators. —
Photo by Erin Roth

Later that afternoon, First Lady Judy O'Bannon, ISF Executive Director Bill Stinson, IAC Executive Director Dorothy Ilgen, and the ISF President of the Board of Commissioners Bill McDowell spoke at the Awards Ceremony. Mrs. O'Bannon eloquently and passionately spoke about the four masters, who through their talent and generous dedication have given to us all. The award ceremony concluded with an on-stage interview with the four masters. We learned more about these remarkable people as they shared stories about their first State Fair or intimated the deep meaning and satisfaction they get from being involved with 4-H or demonstrating at the Fair.

New Harmony, a bluegrass band from Trafalgar, Indiana, closed out the day with two lively sets of tight harmonies and fast picking. Every table was filled for their performance.

Feeling Sheepish?

“Where the Woolly Things Are: Sheep Farming in Indiana,” an eight-minute video that showed continuously at the Fair, provided a context to accompany the ongoing displays and events that

take place in and around the Sheep Barn each year. Many of the sheep producers who show at the Fair stopped by the Wool Room to view the video and expressed some surprise when they learned Indiana University, NOT Purdue University, produced the film, in cooperation with the Indiana Sheep Association. (Most Fair exhibitors are Purdue alumni.) Filmmakers Claire Gruisin, Josh Stickler, and Kurt Laws interviewed 4-Hers, sheep producers, a master sheep shearer, and a weaver and spinner to tell the story of sheep farming. The video demonstrates the skill and knowledge that is involved in raising, showing, and shearing sheep, from sheep to shawl or shank. It is clearly a labor of love. TAI plans to continue working with IU Professor Ron Osgood's talented telecom students to produce a series of feature videos.



Five Star “J” Farms waiting the judge's decision during the 2000 Open Class Suffolk Breed Show. They won Reserve Grand Champion for their ram.

— Photo by Erin Roth

Traditional Arts Indiana (TAI) is dedicated to expanding public awareness of Indiana's traditional practices and nurturing a sense of pride among Indiana's traditional artists. TAI, a partnership of the Indiana Arts Commission (IAC) and the Indiana University (IU) Department of Folklore & Ethnomusicology, works locally with individuals and organizations to promote and facilitate cultural documentation and public programming. The National Endowment for the Arts, the IAC, IU and private donations support the work of TAI. For more information, contact Erin Roth, Director of Public Programming, (812) 855-0418, <tradarts@indiana.edu>

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Fieldworkers 2001: Inta Carpenter, Lynn Hadley, Andy Kolovos, Nick Lavengood, Maria Muriel, Erin Roth, Kathleen Widden



2001 Field school faculty member Rich Remsberg critiques Jorge Ibarra's (far left) photos. Field school student Karen Rader and faculty member Phil Stafford are in the background.

— Photo by Inta Carpenter

On the Road . . .

Field School Explores Issues of Community and Disability

“Who I am is somewhat affected by being in a wheelchair, but being in a wheelchair is not who I am.”

These words, uttered by David Carter, a Bloomington resident advocating the rights of the disabled in his community, echoed through the minds of participants of this summer's 3 week intensive field school, as they documented life stories and personal experiences of Bloomington residents touched by disability.

Nine participants came from as near by as Bloomington, and far away as Mexico and the Sudan. It was a lesson not only in the practicalities of documentation, but also in teamwork with participants of different generations and cultural backgrounds. Research yielded several hundred slides, a couple dozen interviews, a 5-minute edited video presentation, newly formed friendships, and several pages of unanswered and troublesome questions for the community to ponder regarding its relationship with its disabled members. The final presentation explored themes on disability and creativity, criminal justice, and mobility.

Faculty included staff from TAI, Institute for Community and Disability, and the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress.

From the Field . . .

[Excerpt from Ilze Akerbergs' fieldnotes. IU graduate students were invited to document the 2001 Indiana State Fair, to identify masters for next year's program.]

I eventually ambled over to the horse barn. While wandering, I noticed one pretty pony with her mane braided. As it turned out, it wasn't braided, but rubber banded into braids. A young woman came over and we started talking. It was her horse. She had on a shiny sequined blouse and dress pants. She was getting ready for the class 26 judging, happening any minute. After a while her mother came over. They were Amy (mother) and Amanda from Greenfield. Amy had entered the State Fair often, but mostly with cattle. This was their first year with horses.

Amanda's pony was a beautiful brown with extensive white speckles on her rump. Her mother braided the horse's mane – called “banding” – with rubber bands. She said that others just cut the manes short in a notch form. I trotted along with Amanda and Amy as they left to assemble by the gate. Amy never appeared flustered or annoyed that I was tagging along at such a stressful moment. The gathering point at the gate to the outdoor arena was filling with beautiful young women and an occasional young man, fixing their hair, hats and horses. Amy explained that they are judged by the way horse and owner relate to each other – their ease of communication, how well they have bonded with each other.

I was struck by how choreographed everything was. It seemed like a dance. The judge and contestants had very specific movements. It was like clockwork – you could have set a beat and music to it. After each contestant trotted with his/her pony under the watchful eyes of the judge, they all lined up. The judge walked completely around each animal, quickly walking to four points around the horse and stopping to observe and notate. Every time the judge would walk around one animal, all the contestants would synchronously walk to the other side of their animal and strike a pose. Meanwhile, the audience was deathly quiet, as if they were attending a tennis match. I whispered to the fellow next to me if this silence is normal for this event. He said, yes – the western judgings are often this way. The results of the judging came through, and I heard Amanda announced as 6th place winner.



Ain Haas at his home in Indianapolis, holding one of his handmade kannels.

— Photo by Ilze Akerbergs

Creating, Changing, Renewing

Portraits of Indiana's Traditional Artists

Ain Haas – Master Kannel-Maker

The Estonian kannel is a rarely mentioned instrument in America. But thanks to Ain Haas, the Indianapolis area has experienced a small boom. The kannel, a triangular, zither-like instrument, has a historically important place in Estonia, a small country by the Baltic Sea. Haas' parents fled to Sweden after Communists occupied Estonia during WW II. In 1958, when Haas was 8, they moved to Indianapolis.

During the 50 years of Soviet occupation, the small traditional kannels fell into disuse in Estonia, but kannel-making continued in some parts of the US. Haas learned to make his first kannel from a Chicago Estonian-American master. He built it using birch wood from a tree in his parents' yard.

Haas doesn't make his instruments for profit. He doesn't want to "sell it to a stranger and not know what he's going to do with it." Instead, he encourages those who want to play the kannel to learn how to make it themselves. A small community of people have learned from him and he continues to give generously of his time to help others. When he's not building instruments, Haas teaches sociology at IUPUI.

Documenting September 11

The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress has initiated the "September 11, 2001 Documentary Project" to collect and preserve audio-taped interviews that present stories of personal experiences in the wake of the terrorist attacks. For information on how to get involved, contact TAI.