



Field Notes

News from Traditional Arts Indiana

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Indiana Fairs

TAI spent this summer at the fair. We dedicate this issue to our intensive fieldwork at three county fairs and programming at the Indiana State Fair.

County Fairs

Deep-Fried Snickers, Tilt-A-Whirls, and Pedal Tractor Pulls

TAI brought photographers and folklorists together this summer to document Indiana's county fairs. With funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and in partnership with the Indiana Historical Society, Traditional Arts Indiana's team of researchers recorded three county fairs in word, sound, and image. The researchers brought their unique interpretations to the evolving social event that is the Midwestern county fair.

Indiana is in a critical period in its cultural and economic history. As more and more Hoosiers leave the farm, local economies rely less on agriculture, and the rural, cultural landscape becomes more diverse. Historically rooted in the effort to strengthen agriculture by educating farmers and their families,



Sheep trying to keep cool in the Lake County Fair sheep barn. After the sheep are shorn, they are clothed to keep their coats clean for showing. — Photo by Rich Remsberg



Boy with mask participating in the sack race at the Lake County Fair. — Photo by Maureen France

county fairs have been important community gathering places of celebration and ritual, offering a wealth of opportunities to document a segment of life in Indiana during a time of change.

From the northwest corner of Indiana to its southern hills, researchers discovered that Indiana's county fairs are indeed vital to their communities. Enjoy our sample of fieldnotes and photos from this project.

Lake County Fair

An excerpt from Beth Campbell's fieldnotes August 1, 2002 . . .

Speaking of stuff, this is amazing! All of the finest efforts of the area's 4-H kids. Well, some are a bit half hearted, but really, by and large, this is an astonishing display. Plastic models, some in the shapes of trains, cars, and planes, others in the shapes of futuristic transport systems, inexplicable alien beings. A sheep cake, its wool made of marshmallows, its face and hooves of chocolate chips. A llama cake. Or is it a giraffe? We have a difference of opinion and the label does not specify. A Japanese tea garden cake, covered with a thick, smooth layer

“You want to win. Everybody wants to win!” — Kelly Rieckers, 2001 Jackson County 4-H Queen.

of something called “fondant,” the same substance swaddles the squat and stylized Japanese man and woman who pose on top. Posters line all the walls. How Not to Get Aids. How Not to Get Left Behind. How to . . . The smooth cement floor, worn shiny from years of passing, leads around and around, past a pink satin dress, a re-upholstered chair, case after case of plaster casts, sketches. Flower arrangements and seashell arrangements and arrangements that combine both. Leather stamped hair accessories, wallets, coin purses. Wreaths, tiled mirrors, crocheted doilies. Tables in the center of the building, surrounded by white picket fencing, hold model farm life dioramas, some belying terrific talent and ambition, others betraying slightly less talent or a mind not focused on the task. Or both. Tractors, outbuildings, hayfields, ponds, cows in pasture. Perfect white houses. Perfectly symmetrical rows of trees. An off kilter barn, its roof beginning to come away from the walls. Just past the dioramas, thirty or so cardboard boxes sit on the floor. Trophies wait inside the boxes, swaddled in Styrofoam sheeting and plastic bags, their lovely gold tops peeking out. Bunnies, eggs, cows, hens, roosters. A graceful woman in flowing dress, her arms reaching up and out in a pose of exaltation. Or victory. Or the



Photographer Maureen France documenting at the Dubois County Fair.
— Photo by Jens Lund

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>.

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prelude to a swan dive. I think of the eager kids who hope for one of these, of their anticipation, of where it will sit when it reaches home.



Boy holding trophies at the Jackson County Fair.
— Photo by Jeff Jacobson

DuBois County Fair

An excerpt from Jens Lund's fieldnotes
July 27, 2002 . . .

Drove to fairgrounds and connected with my contact Eric Shue of the 4-H Council. He's a young Jasper attorney, recently returned to the area to begin practice and newly elected to the council. As he was growing up in Dubois Co., he was active in 4-H. Among his comments are his and his colleagues' observation that there has been a major increase in 4-H-ers' livestock entries in recent years after many years of decline. This he attributes, paradoxically, to the fact that there are fewer people making their living from farming in the county, but that many people who have other employment and who still live in the country, now have the time and energy to put into their kids' livestock projects and the kids now also have time to work with show livestock, rather than doing regular farm work.

Went out to audio record some judging. Met David Boeglin, who is the 4-H Council's publicity chair. He explained to me some of the things that were going on, in particular, the “Community Judging.” This is a process of judging in which the



Folklorist Erin Roth joins Ken MacMahon and his grandson on his farm. — Photo by Jeff Jacobson

entrants are interviewed by the judges, who are performing the actual judging in the presence of the entrants. This educates (their term) the entrant as to why he or she receives the grade of ribbon that they are awarded and what criteria were used to make those decisions. The judge critiques each essential element of the entry and also fills out a graded evaluation form, which the judge presents to the entrant and keeps a copy of for future reference, when it is time to choose grand prize awards.

Jackson County Fair

An excerpt from Erin Roth's fieldnotes
July 24, 2002 . . .

Patrick sat with his friend Evan waiting for the lightweight class to finish. I asked Patrick if he was nervous. He said no. His mom sat attentively and recorded all the children's distances after each pull. Members of Future Farmers of America readied the pedal tractor, basically a tricycle that looks like a miniature tractor. The pedal tractor is hitched to a sled of weight with a pulley that when pulled forward cinches the weight up an incline. There is a limit to how far it can be pulled. But most kids don't even come close. If their legs are too long, they don't get the proper amount of leverage to pedal very far. Patrick, who has won many of these events, gave this advice to his friend Evan who had never competed before, "You gotta pull it till your face turns red." And Patrick knew what he was talking about. He was also built for the little tractor. Short, stocky and competitive. His mom said that she and her husband are very competitive and encourage Patrick. They travel to 5 competitions each summer – mostly in and around their hometown of Carothersville. Patrick's pull was impressive. And although his mother was trying to keep track of the other competitor's distances, because I'd been talking with her, she missed some of them. The suspense

mounted as Patrick kept asking his mom if he was still in the lead. She wasn't entirely sure, but it looked good. At least 20 kids participated in his class. They read off the names of the sixth, fifth, fourth, third, and finally second place. He looked anxious, standing by his mom, sort of pacing. She looked at me when his back was turned and, with a knowing smile, said he won. Patrick took the little trophy from the Jackson County Fair Queen when his name was called. He came back to his mom and dad with a huge grin on his face and the trophy held proudly. Another trophy for his trophy case.



Mariachi Acero performing at TAI Day at the Fair. — Photo by Inta Carpenter

Indiana State Fair

TAI Day at the Fair

We featured two of Indiana's great musical genres - mariachi and bluegrass. From East Chicago, *Mariachi Acero* performed songs from the traditional mariachi repertoire. Strong voices and energetic rhythms, punctuated with *gritos*, entertained crowds on TAI's Main Street Stage. The group of young people who make up *Mariachi Acero* are led by Larry Lane, the band director at East Chicago's Central High School. All the members are either current or former students of Central and second or third generation Mexican Americans. *Mariachi Acero* is named for the Region's steel industry — *acero* is Spanish for steel.

Performances by one of southern Indiana's fine bluegrass ensembles, the *Not Too Bad Bluegrass Band*, drew a large crowd of fans to the TAI stage. Band members from Lawrence, Brown, and Monroe counties played and sang traditional as well as original tunes, demonstrating the importance of the bluegrass tradition in southern Indiana.



Brandon Thompson performs on the TAI stage at the Fair.
— Photo by Inta Carpenter

Apprenticeship Presentation

TAI Day at the Fair also featured three of TAI's participants in the master-apprentice program. Angie Caldwell from Delaware County backed up her apprentices on guitar. Brandon Thompson of Jennings County played the fiddle and his sister Jourdan played mandolin. Angie has spent the past year encouraging the Thompson siblings to discover their own style and broaden their repertoire.

State Fair Masters Awards

For a second year, TAI and the State Fair recognized individuals or families for their dedication to the fair and mastery of a tradition. Recipients this year were Lee and Crae Eller, Belgian draft horsemen from Hamilton County, and the William and Arlene Canary family, historic dairy farming interpreters from Johnson County. Indiana State Fair Board President Terry Hoffman presented the awards during a ceremony on August 15 during TAI Day.

The Bulletin Board

- **October 12, 2002** Hoosier Storytelling Festival in Indianapolis, TAI sponsored artists demonstrating their tradition. For more info, visit www.geocities.com/~storiesinc/festival.html.
- Deadline extended to **October 18, 2002** for Indiana Governor's Arts Award Nominations. Nominate an artist, organization, community, etc. who has made a significant contribution to the arts. For more information, contact IAC staff at (317) 232-1268.
- Indiana Arts Commission's **Individual Artist Grant Program** deadline will be **February 3, 2003** for projects starting July 1, 2003. For more information, visit www.in.gov/arts or contact IAC staff at (317) 232-1268.