

Alabama Folklife

Vol. 6, No. 1

News and Information about Alabama's Traditional Culture

Fall 1999

Grant Awarded to Research State's Gardening Heritage

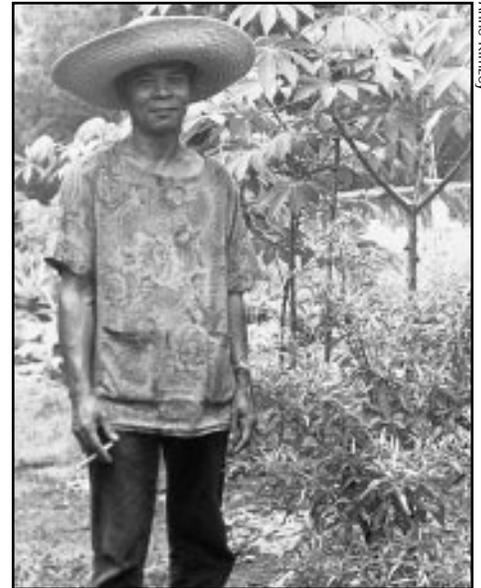
The Alabama Folklife Association received a grant of \$15,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts' Heritage and Preservation Program for a fieldwork survey of folk gardening traditions in Alabama. The project, a collaborative effort with the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, will result in the production of a portable exhibit that will travel to schools, museums and libraries throughout the state.

"In the Garden: Traditional Culture and Horticulture in Alabama" is the working title of the exhibit. During the research phase of the grant, folklorist and project director Anne Kimzey will be travelling the state with cameras and tape recorder to document a variety of topics related to gardening for the purpose of contributing to the preservation of

Alabama's gardening heritage.

"A garden is the artistic creation of an individual gardener," said Kimzey. "But a gardener often represents a community aesthetic as well as his or her own." Gardens themselves may be an ephemeral art form, but many of the traditional preferences, beliefs and practices associated with gardening endure, she explained.

Among the many horticultural topics to be examined are: flower, fruit tree, herb, ornamental and vegetable gardening; traditional aesthetics such as swept yards, whitewashed tree trunks and flower beds; traditional cemetery plantings and associated community rituals such as Decoration Day; gardening groups such as garden clubs and flowers societies; and horticultural arts such as flower arranging.

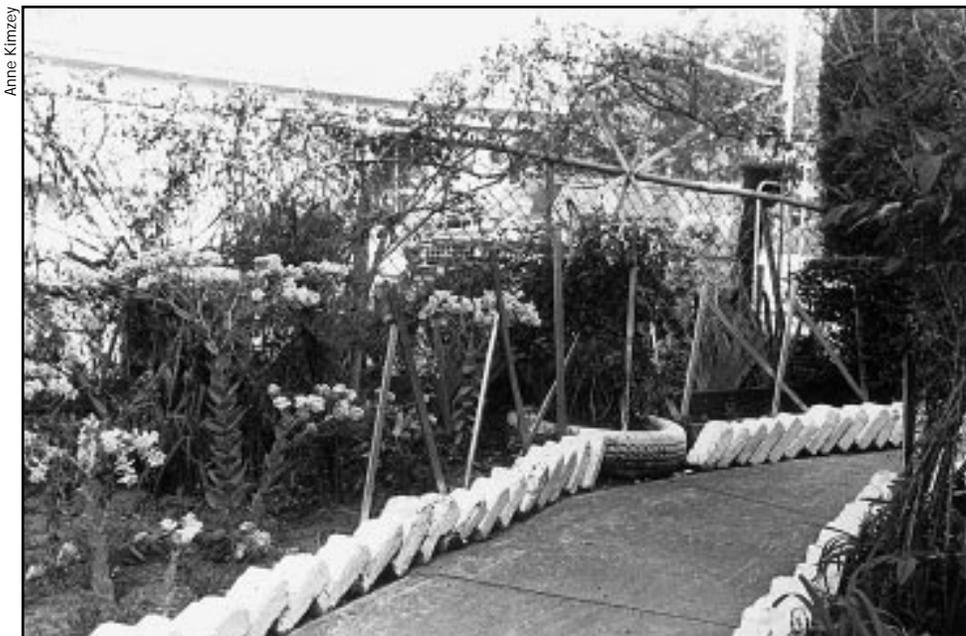


Anne Kimzey

Kong Phong of Irvington grows plants from his native Cambodia in his Mobile County garden.

How people decorate their yards is another topic of interest, including the use of manufactured or found

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Anne Kimzey

Georgiana Jenkins decorates her Montgomery flower garden with metal strips, a whitewashed brick border and a tire planter.

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objects. The use of tire planters, whirligigs, birdbaths and bottle trees fall into this category. Structures such as grape arbors, fences and borders also add functional and design elements to a garden.

Collecting the traditional lore of gardening is another goal of the project. Plant lore, weather lore, planting by the signs and certain beliefs, such as "never say thank-you when someone gives you a plant or it won't grow" are all within the scope of Kimzey's research.

People have cultivated the environment since prehistoric times in Alabama. Therefore, background research on the history of gardening in the state will be necessary to provide a context when looking at today's methods in order to explore changes or continuity.

For example, accounts of early settlers described the plants grown by American Indians in their gardens, as well as gardening practices, such as the use of gourd birdhouses to attract purple martins. The birds were useful for controlling pests such as insects and driving away larger birds that threatened crops. New settlers adopted this custom and the gourd martin house remains a fixture on the Alabama landscape today.

Other folk methods of deterring garden pests, such as deer, birds, rabbits, and insects, bear examining. Some of these include such tactics as: erecting scarecrows, hanging aluminum pie plates, hanging a dead crow from a tree, placing hair from a hairbrush in the garden, attaching deer hide to fence posts, or planting certain repellent plants next to desirable plants.

Kimzey is also interested in learning about the gardening traditions of some of the recent immigrants to the state to see if they have been influ-

enced by the practices of the existing culture, or if they have influenced their new neighbors.

Immigrants to Alabama have often brought their plants with them. In the 16th and 17th century when the Spanish settled in Florida and what is now Mobile, they brought orange, fig, and peach trees and oleanders. Many Alabamians can tell about particular plants their grandparents brought with them from the old home place in Georgia or South Carolina. And sometimes these grandchildren have descendants of those very plants (passed along from cuttings) in their own gardens.

Newer immigrants to the state who have difficulty finding the fruits and vegetables required for their ethnic cuisine, often grow their own from seeds provided by relatives overseas. In Bayou La Batre, gardens of the Southeast Asian refugees, who now make up more than 30 percent of the town's population, have a distinctive look.

Alabama Folklife

Alabama Folklife is published twice-yearly by the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, which is a division of the Alabama State Council on the Arts and is dedicated to the research, documentation and presentation of the state's folk culture.

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Those with impaired hearing may call the Alabama Relay Center at 1-800-548-2546 for TDD access. The information contained in this newsletter is available in other formats upon request.



Mary Ward Wisnewski examines entries in the flower show at the 1998 Alabama National Fair in Montgomery.

Anne Kimzey

New Publication Documents Primitive Baptist Hymns

The Alabama Folklife Association announced its recent publication of *Benjamin Lloyd's Hymn Book: A Primitive Baptist Song Tradition*. The hardback book documents the history and current use of Benjamin Lloyd's *Primitive Hymns*, the historic hymn book that was first compiled and published in Alabama in 1841 and has been used by Primitive Baptists ever since.

Packaged with the book is a compact disc that features 20 performances of hymns by Primitive Baptists in Alabama, Georgia, and North Carolina. Extensive liner notes, containing reproductions of the texts from the hymn book, accompany the CD.

Joyce Cauthen, the project's coordinator, contributed an essay on the "old way" of singing practiced in the Sipsey River Primitive Baptist Association, which is a group of African-American congregations located mainly in West Alabama. Their manner of singing, also called "Dr. Watts singing," is a survival of the kind of psalm singing done in churches in the American colonies prior to the adoption of written music and the use of musical instruments and choirs in the 18th century.

Beverly Patterson, author of *Sound of the Dove: Singing in Appalachian Primitive Baptist Churches*, contributed an essay exploring how Anglo-American Primitive Baptist Churches forge their own religious identities by the way they sing.

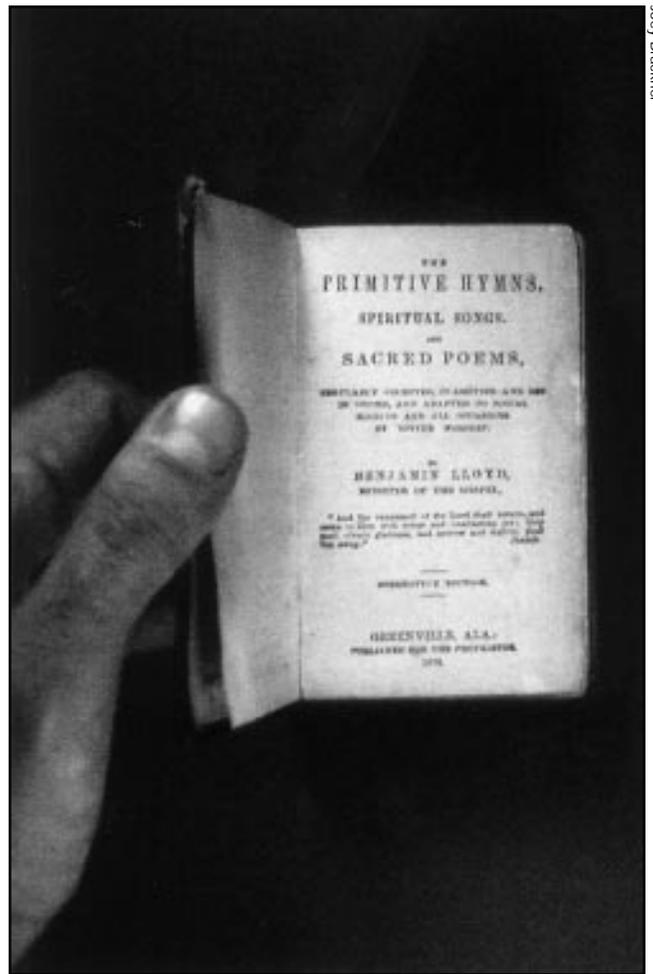
William Dargan, chairman of the music department at St. Augustine's College, examined singing in African American congregations, particularly those

included on the CD, and contributed transcriptions of seven performances of hymns. Oliver C. Weaver, Jr., produced a biography of Benjamin Lloyd and discussed his historical significance.

In the following essay, Joey Brackner enlarged upon Lloyd's biography and presented a history of the book and the people who have kept it in print for more than a century. Brackner also contributed a descriptive list of extant editions (1842-1996) of the hymn book.

In his introduction, John Bealle summarized the essays and discussed the significance of the Lloyd's hymn book. Bealle served as copy editor and developed an extensive index to the book.

The singing on the CD shows variations in musical style that developed in different communities as a result of a century of singing from a word-only hymn book. It features both black and white congregations singing from the same book with an amazing variety of approaches to the hymns. All are skillful singers whose love of the old hymns are evident in their performances. The CD was produced by Joyce Cauthen, who also served as project director and editor of the essay collection.



The 1876 edition of Benjamin Lloyd's *Primitive Hymns*

The publication of *Benjamin Lloyd's Hymn Book: A Primitive Baptist Song Tradition* was supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Folklife Program of the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

To order a copy, send a check for \$25 payable to the Alabama Folklife Association, c/o Jackie Ely, Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, 410 N. Hull St., Montgomery, AL 36104. (334) 242-3601.

To order other
Alabama Folklife
Association products,
see page 15
of this newsletter.

State Arts Council Awards Grants

The Folklife Program of the Alabama State Council on the Arts (ASCA) announced the recipients of folklife project grants and folklife apprenticeship grants for the current fiscal year (FY 1999):

Project Grants

- Alabama Folklife Association - \$4500 for a documentary about Sacred Harp music.
- Birmingham Kwanzaa & Heritage Foundation - \$2000 for a summer folklore camp.
- Fort Toulouse Foundation (Wetumpka) - \$2400 to bring Native American artists to a fall festival.
- Gorham's Bluff Foundation (Jackson County) - \$2500 for the collecting and archiving of folklore fieldwork.
- Jemison-Carnegie Heritage Hall (Talledega) - \$1250 for a folk arts exhibition.

- North Jefferson Quilter's Guild (Mount Olive) - \$2000 for a quilting exhibition.
- Rural Members Association (Aliceville) - \$2500 for a Blues and Gospel program for local children.
- Society of Folk Arts and Culture (Eutaw) - \$4500 for a children's program during the Black Belt Folk Roots Festival.
- Southeastern Arts Alliance (Dothan) - \$2700 in support of the Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers' television broadcasts.
- University of Alabama's Center for Public Television (Tuscaloosa) - \$4500 for a documentary about Mobile's Creole community.
- University of West Alabama (Livingston) - \$2000 for video documentation of Alabama ghost tales.

Apprenticeship Grants

- William Bailey of Poarch for Creek Indian language arts.
- Calvin Bodiford of Luverne for old time music.
- Sharon Bounds of Northport for fiddle music.
- Jerry Brown of Hamilton for traditional pottery.
- Gwen Chafin of Arab for white oak basketry.
- Art Deason of Centreville for Christian Harmony singing.
- Amanda Denson of Haleyville for Sacred Harp singing.
- Nora Ezell of Tuscaloosa for quilting.
- Gene Ivey of Ider for fiddle making.
- Annette Jordan of Eutaw for pine needle basketry.
- Jerry McCain of Gadsden for blues harmonica.
- Sheila McFerran of Madison for Irish step-dancing.
- Eric McKinney of Fort Payne for guitar.
- Robert Muse of Florence for banjo.
- Lureca Outland of Boligee for quilting.
- Jeff Sheppard of Glencoe for Sacred Harp singing.
- Solomon Sholanke of Birmingham for African drum.
- Enoch Sullivan of St. Stephens for Bluegrass Gospel.
- Gary Waldrep of Albertville for Bluegrass.
- J. C. Williams of Eutaw for white oak basketry.



Amanda Denson leads a song from the 1991 Denson revision of the Sacred Harp, first revised by her family in 1936. She teaches singing schools through ASCA's Folklife Apprenticeship Program.

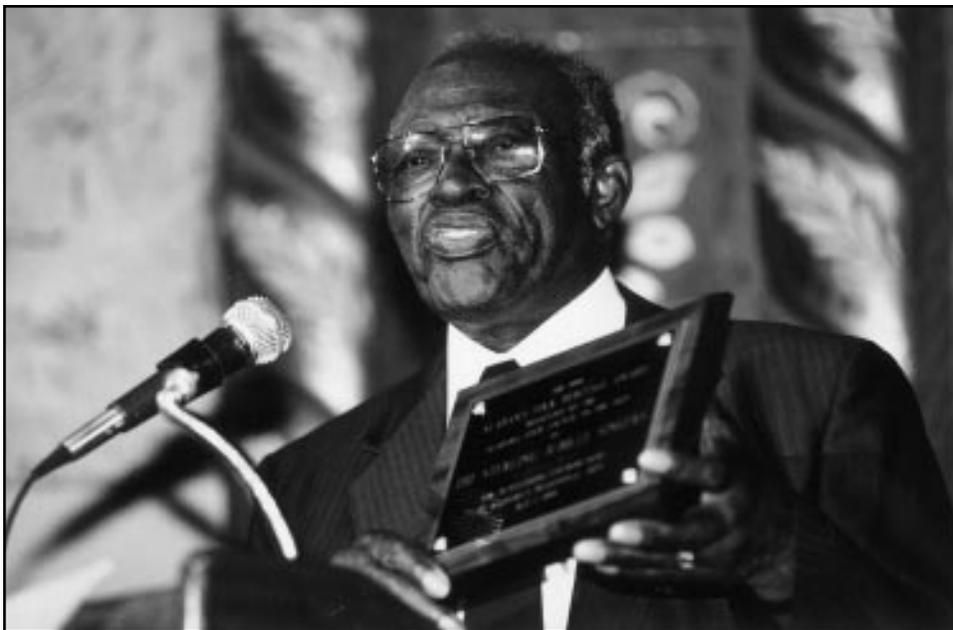
Gospel Quartet Receives Heritage Award

John Alexander's Sterling Jubilee Singers received the Alabama Folk Heritage Award, the state's highest honor for achievement in the traditional arts, in a ceremony May 1, 1999 at the Davis Theater in Montgomery. The awards presentation was sponsored by the Alabama State Council on the Arts and included several other prestigious state arts awards.

Governor Don Siegelman and First Lady Lori Siegelman attended the event. "I offer congratulations to this year's award recipients," said the Governor. "Through their unique gifts and talents they have played a significant role in improving the quality of life for all Alabamians."

The original Sterling Jubilee Singers first organized in 1929, making the group one of the oldest gospel quartets in the state. They were trained by singing master Charles Bridges, who helped develop the *a cappella* singing style that attracted a large number of singers in Jefferson County at a time when African-Americans flocked to jobs in the coal, steel and railroad industries.

Also known as the CIO Singers, the Sterling Jubilees had a long asso-



Mike McCracken

John Alexander accepts the Alabama Folk Heritage Award for the Sterling Jubilee Singers.

ciation with the Steel Workers Union, singing at union meetings and conventions and broadcasting a radio program sponsored by the CIO.

John Alexander's Sterling Jubilee Singers preserve the close harmonies, dramatic pacing and many of the arrangements of the original group. They have carried the tradition in performance to Birmingham's City

Stages, the Smithsonian Institution's Festival of American Folklife and numerous schools and churches.

Their CD recording *Jesus Hits Like The Atom Bomb* is available on the New World Records label and can be ordered at a cost of \$ 15 (plus \$2.50 shipping and handling) by calling the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture (334) 242-3601.

ASCA Web Page

www.arts.state.al.us has information about the Alabama State Council on the Arts, the Alabama Folklife Program, the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture and the Alabama Folklife Association.

Spirit of Steel to Celebrate Labor Songs

A book and CD package titled *Spirit of Steel: Music of the Mines, Railroads and Mills of the Birmingham District* will include essays and 21 recordings exploring railroad work songs, fiddle tunes, blues, labor songs and gospel quartet singing in the context of industrial Birmingham in the early twentieth century.

Upon its publication in the fall of 1999, *Spirit of Steel* will be made available at no cost to schools and

libraries, while the supply lasts.

The project was supported by the Alabama Folklife Program of the Alabama State Council on the Arts, the Alabama Humanities Foundation and the Birmingham Regional Arts Commission. For more information, contact Paige Wainwright at Sloss Furnaces (205) 324-1911 or Joey Brackner at the Alabama State Council on the Arts (334) 242-4076, x-225.

Exhibit Showcases Alabama's Traditional Crafts

"Made By Hand and Handed Down: Traditional Expressions of Alabama" will be on exhibit in the Alabama Artists Gallery at the offices of the Alabama State Council on the Arts in Montgomery through September 2, 1999.

Focusing on traditional expressions of craft made by Alabama artists over the last 20 years, the exhibit features more than 75 pieces, including baskets, walking sticks, stoneware, woodcarvings, quilts, boats and musical instruments. Among the artists showcased are national and state heritage award winners: potter Jerry Brown, quilter Nora Ezell, quilter Bettye Kimbrell and basketmaker Lomia Nunn.

"Made By Hand" is an adaptation of "A Celebration of Alabama's Traditional Folklife," an exhibit curated by Alabama Center for Traditional Culture director Henry Willett for Talledega's Jemison-Carnegie Heritage Hall Museum in April.

"Alabama enjoys a rich and diverse folk art heritage shaped by

the many people who have settled this state, from the indigenous American Indian population to more recent arrivals from Nigeria and southeast Asia," said Willett. "The objects carefully crafted by the artists represented in this exhibition all bear testimony to the ways the communities who have settled this state have related to their environment, utilizing Alabama clay, indigenous wood and animal hides to fashion these works of art."

According to Willett, "It is this innovative and creative shaping of traditional designs, through practiced skills, into unique and vital objects of beauty and utility wherein lies the dynamic aesthetic of traditional expressions of Alabama."



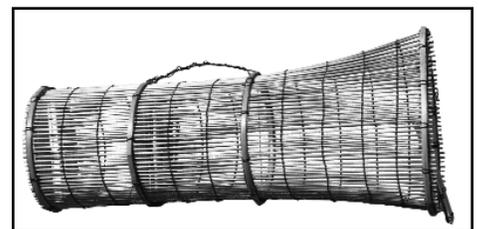
Pine Needle Basket by Odessa Rice who learned the craft from her neighbors in Greene County.



Cedar Indian Head by Sam Martin, Jr. from the collection of Jack and Georgine Clark



Bettye Kimbrell of Mt. Olive was raised by her grandmother who taught her to quilt.



Kinn Kranh grew up in the Battambang province of Cambodia. He was resettled in Bayou La Batre in 1981. He makes a variety of bamboo fish traps designed to catch small fish in inland waterways and estuaries.



Norman Smith ran a utilitarian pottery shop in Chilton County for over fifty years until his death in the early 1990s. During his lifetime, he produced thousands of utilitarian jugs, churns, crocks, jars and pitchers.

Peggy Bulger to Direct American Folklife Center

Peggy Bulger, longtime supporter of public folklife activity in Alabama, has been appointed Director of the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. She succeeds Alan Jabbour who is retiring after heading the Center since its creation in 1976.

For the past ten years, Bulger has been employed by the Southern Arts Federation, initially as Regional Folk Arts Program Coordinator and, more recently, as Senior Program Officer. From 1976 to 1989, she was Folk Arts Coordinator with the Bureau of Florida Folklife Programs in White Springs, Florida. At the time of her hiring in 1976, Bulger was one of only a handful of state folk arts coordinators, at the vanguard of a rapidly growing movement. It was Al Head, executive director of the Alabama State Council on the Arts and champion of public folklife programs, who hired Bulger in Florida in 1976 when he was directing the Stephen Foster Center in White Springs.

Bulger was awarded a Ph.D. in Folklore and Folklife from the University of Pennsylvania in 1992, and an M.A. degree in Folk Studies from Western Kentucky University in 1975. She is a past member of the Executive Board of the American Folklore Society and is currently the Society's President-Elect. She is the

co-author of *South Florida Folklife* (University of Mississippi Press, 1994) and *Musical Roots of the South* (Southern Arts Federation, 1992).

"As a folklorist who has utilized the impressive resources of the American Folklife Center, I look forward to working with the Center's dedicated staff and the advanced technology of the Library to make the American Folklife Center and its collections available to all," said Bulger.

"The United States is a nation blessed with a diversity of culture and human creativity," she explained. "There is a growing awareness concerning the essential role played by folk heritage, folk culture and folk arts in our nation. A healthy America demands a respect for, and pride in, the variety of cultures and traditions that comprise our national profile. The American Folklife Center is a center for the people, ensuring that these cultural resources are preserved and cele-



Kleko Guest

Peggy Bulger

brated throughout the years to come. I can think of no other job that is more important."

The American Folklife Center was created in 1976 by the U. S. Congress to "preserve and present American Folklife" through programs of research, documentation, archival preservation, reference service, live performance, exhibition, publication and training.

Schmidt Named Director of Georgia Folklife Program

Folklorist Aimée Schmidt recently left the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, where she worked as folklife coordinator, to accept a position as director of the Georgia Folklife Program of the Georgia Council for the Arts.

Schmidt was employed as a folklife specialist with the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture from 1994-97. While in Alabama she

curated the exhibit *Alabama: Culture and Community*, which was on display for a year at the State Capitol building.

In her new position, Schmidt will administer the grants programs for folklife apprenticeships and projects. She worked previously in Georgia on a 1993 documentation project for the Ichauway Plantation and at the 1996 Cultural Olympiad's

Southern Crossroads festival.

"I'm excited to be here in Georgia and I'm looking forward to the challenge of developing grassroots support for folklife in the state," said Schmidt.

Schmidt is a graduate of the University of Mississippi in Oxford where she earned her B.A. in History and her M.A. in Southern Studies.

Alabama Composers Key Figures in Southern Gospel Music

by Stephen Grauberger

Soon after the Civil War the Reubusch-Kieffer Company in Dayton, Virginia began printing newly-composed books of music based on a system of seven geometric shapes corresponding to do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti notes of the musical scale. This style of music is sometimes called "new book" gospel music.

According to music scholar Charles Wolfe, "The newer songbooks were designed not so much for formal church service, but for special singings and for 'singing conventions' in which many of the singers in a county-wide area might gather to try their hand at sight reading the songs in the new books. In some areas, competitions were held to see who could sight sing or direct songs they had never seen before." In addition to learning the skills of sight singing, devotees of this music have been, since the beginning, the primary authors of most songs written for these publications.

A number of Alabamians have participated in this pursuit. Most

songwriters of southern gospel songs are not well known outside their own communities of gospel singers and rarely receive any remuneration from the publishers. However, the tradition is strong and venerated.

Probably the best-known Alabama songwriter is G. T. "Dad" Speer who grew up near the town of Double Springs. "Dad" Speer taught hundreds of singing schools and composed nearly 600 songs over the years. He is known for a number of popular gospel songs including "Heaven's Jubilee," "The Dearest Friend I Ever Had," "I Want to Be Ready," and "He Is Mine and I Am His." G. T. Speer, and his wife Lena, created the Speer Family, a well-loved professional gospel quartet that traveled throughout the South and performed on radio and television.

Among active Alabama seven-shape songwriters today, T. L. Gilley Jr., at 85 years old, is an inspiration to younger songwriters and singers. Born in 1913, in Randolph County, Gilley has lived in Fyffe, Alabama

since 1918. From an early age he sang second tenor and alto parts with the Gilley Quartet, a family group consisting of Gilley, two sisters and a brother. He remembers the Gilley Quartet performing on Friday nights to packed high school auditorium audiences in Randolph County. He sang with this quartet for about eight years until his sisters married and moved to North Carolina.

Mr. Gilley and his siblings attended the James T. Vaughan Normal School of Music in Tennessee for eight weeks in 1927 and six weeks in 1928. In 1936 Gilley wrote the music to his first song, "I Will Sing of His Love," with lyrics by William Morgan. The James D. Vaughan Company published that song in the book *Hallelujah Voices*. Gilley has written the words and music to more than 500 gospel songs with over 400 published by various music houses. In the late 1970s he had 21 songs published by nine separate publishers. In the late 1980s he published his own anthology of 102 songs previously published in other books.

Gilley has received certificates of appreciation from governors of Alabama, Arkansas, and Tennessee in recognition of his song writing expertise. He is proud of the fact that, in 1979, his song "What a Morning That Will Be" was broadcast for six months in England. He also received royalties for its use. Currently, he has songs published in "new books" used by the Alabama State Gospel Singing Convention. Among those songs are "Grace Sufficient For Me," "I Shall Go to Heaven," (*Sounds of Home* 1997 James D. Vaughan publisher), "They're Singing Up There" (*God Is Good*, 1998 Leoma Music Company), and "God's Wonderful Love" (*Shoutin' Time*, 1998 Jeffress/Phillips Music).

Mr. Gilley mentioned other song-



Stephen Grauberger

T.L. Gilley of Fyffe shows one of the more than 500 gospel songs he has composed since 1936.

Southern Gospel Music *(From Page 8)*

writers, now deceased, for whom he had great admiration. They include, John Shrader from Ider, Alabama, Eugene Whitt and J. L. Freeman both from Boaz, Alabama.

John Shrader, who was born in DeKalb County in 1893 and died in 1972, is mentioned in the *Gospel Songwriter Biography* (1971, Stamps Baxter). He worked in his spare time as an editor, arranger and writer for the Stamps Baxter Company for many years. He taught more than 30 singing schools, his first in 1921, and published his first song in 1931.

Shrader published more than 500 songs and helped many people to learn to sing as well as write their own songs.

There is still an annual singing in Ider, started by Shrader, which is now a memorial for him on the fourth Sunday in August at the Five Points Missionary Baptist Church. Among his compositions are, "The Lord is My Shepherd," "There is a Home For Me," and "On the Solid Rock."

William Heaps of Clanton, Belton Cobb of Lamar County, and Stanley Smith of Ozark are among contem-

porary Alabama songwriters who support the Alabama State Gospel Singing Convention. William Heaps has published more than 100 songs in various books. Heaps, with the help of others, founded the Alabama State School of Gospel Music as well as a Gospel Music Museum at Snead State Community College near Boaz. A fund was created with the surplus proceeds from the Alabama State Convention to help support students of southern gospel music in the hope of carrying on this important tradition.

New Grants Deadlines

The Alabama State Council on the Arts now has quarterly deadlines for most grants categories including the Folklife Program.

Project grant applications are due September 1, December 1, March 1 and June 1. All Apprenticeship applications are due on September 1.

Guidelines and applications can be downloaded from ASCA's website (www.arts.state.al.us) or can be requested by calling (334) 242-4076.

For more information on the application process for folklife grants contact:

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(334) 242-4076, x-225
FAX (334) 240-3269

Fall Folklife Festival at Landmark Park



Larry Hayes discusses the use of oxen in farming at the 1998 Fall Folklife Festival at Dothan's Landmark Park.

Cane grinding and syrup making will be the focus of Landmark Park's Fall Folklife Festival in Dothan Saturday, November 13. In addition, volunteers will demonstrate traditional farm activities such as basket making, blacksmithing, open hearth and wood stove cooking, quilting, spinning and weaving.

Landmark Park, which serves as Alabama's official museum of agriculture, grows sugar cane on its turn-of-the-century living history farmstead. The cane is harvested from the field, stripped by hand, ground in a mule-

driven mill, cooked in an 80-gallon iron kettle and poured into jars from which visitors can sample.

The Alabama Center for Traditional Culture will interview craftspeople and other festival participants at a Talking Tent stage.

Activities begin at 10 a.m. and also include traditional music, wagon rides, pony rides, concessions and more. Landmark Park is located on Highway 431 North in Dothan. For more information call (334) 794-3452.

Center Hosts Summer Intern

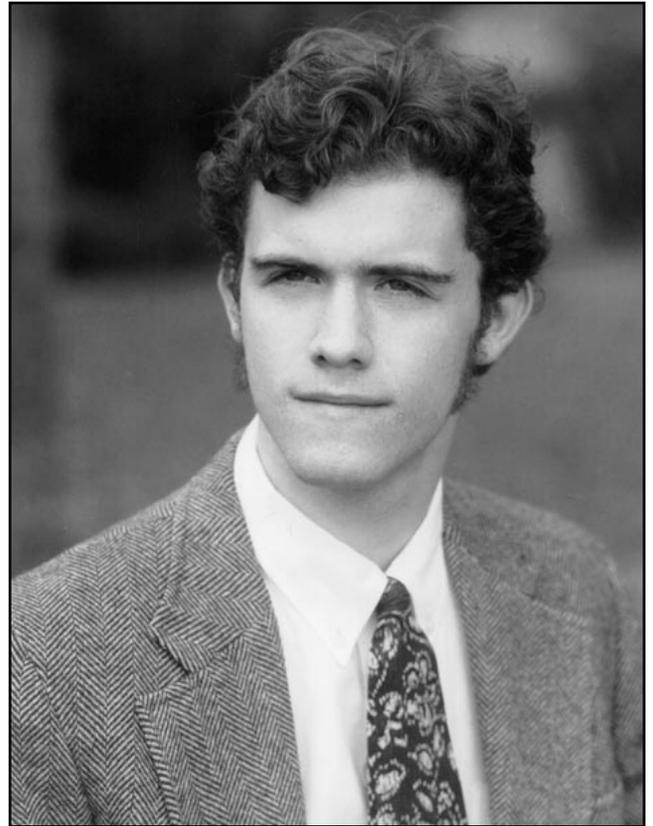
Burgin Mathews is working as an intern for the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture this summer. His duties include assisting Center staff on current projects and archival work. In addition, he is spending a portion of his time researching the legend of the Alabama outlaw Railroad Bill, the topic of his senior thesis. (See article on following page).

A rising senior at Vassar College, he is majoring in American Cultures. "It's really nice because it's interdisciplinary," he said. "I get to use history, English, folklore, religion—a bit of everything." Within his field of study he has selected two disciplines, English and history, with a focus on Southern literature and history. In addition, he has completed a course of independent study in folklore.

Burgin's other interests include traditional music of the South. He plays guitar in his old-time string band, the Swamp Creek Seven. The group plays gigs around campus and

at a coffeehouse in the community and has been featured live on two radio stations in the Hudson Valley region. He discovered that most of his classmates have had very little exposure to Southerners. "They all assume that since I play that kind of music that all Southerners just naturally play it," he said.

Burgin is a Montgomery, Alabama native and a graduate of the Montgomery Academy. He was a 1996 recipient of the Literary Arts Award Scholarship presented by the Alabama Writer's Forum.



Burgin Mathews

Statewide Singings Feature Four Songbooks

Sacred Harp and Christian Harmony singers now have the opportunity to gather twice a year in Montgomery to sing from four shape-note hymnals published in Alabama.

The second annual Capitol Rotunda singing was held February 6, 1999 when 200 singers gathered and sang under the dome of the State Capitol. The singing was organized

by Jim Carnes and was sponsored by the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the State Capitol. It is held annually on the Saturday before the first Sunday in February.

The third Thursday in July is the annual date for the Capital City Singing, which celebrated its 13th year this July 15th. Singers packed the Grange Hall at Old Alabama Town for an all-day singing and, during the noon lunch break, picnicked on the grounds of the museum. The singing was hosted by the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture.

Both events bring singers together from across the state from four of the hymn book traditions in Alabama: the *Christian Harmony*, the *Colored Sacred Harp*, and the Denson and Cooper revisions of the *Sacred Harp*.



Stephen Grauberger

1999 Capitol Rotunda Singing

Escambia County Badman Leaves Legacy of Fact and Fiction

by Burgin Mathews

In October of 1892, deputy sheriff Alan Brewton of Bluff Springs, Florida fired a shot at a turpentine camp worker who refused to register his rifle in accordance with the state's license laws. The worker returned the shot, wounding one of Brewton's men and fleeing into the swamps for escape.

This man's name was Morris Slater, but he was soon known across northern Florida and southern Alabama as Railroad Bill, gaining status as a hero of African-American folklore. Bill was famous for jumping freight trains and stealing goods, throwing cans of food out of boxcars and returning by foot to collect the loot. Then he'd sell the provisions cheaply, or, according to the popular story, simply give them to the poor.

As the stories and ballads detailing his exploits grew, Railroad Bill's life became surrounded by legend, so that the facts and the tales remain blurred today. Because of his ability to elude the law, he was believed by many to possess supernatural powers. Many believed he was a conjurer, trained in the powers of hoodoo, and that he could change himself into an animal, a trick he, reportedly, used to escape. Once Bill supposedly joined the sheriff's pack of hounds in the shape of a dog and "chased himself" all the way to his girl friend's house, where he remained as the posse and dogs continued their search.

Legends arose that Bill could be killed only by a silver bullet, and that he could painlessly catch bullets in his hands. He was said to be so skilled with a gun that he could shoot a hole through a dime, and, according to one ballad's verse, he sportingly "shot all the buttons off the brakeman's coat." Some people believed that simply touching him would bring luck.

To others who tangled with Bill, however, his touch brought death, and he gained the reputation as a murderer as his career continued to unfold. Brewton sheriff Ed McMillan took on the case of capturing Bill, and on July 3 of 1895 he found and cornered the outlaw, only to be shot and killed.

Rewards were offered for Bill's body, dead or alive, and the hunt escalated. Candidates for public office throughout south Alabama promised, in their speeches, to catch the villain. Several black detectives were hired to gain Bill's confidence and capture him, but all failed. One detective by the name of Mark Stinson traveled with Bill for months without ever catching the outlaw with his guard down, until finally his reports to the local officials stopped coming. Stinson was never seen nor heard from again.

Railroad Bill's career ended at last in Tidmore and Ward's general store in Atmore. On March 7, 1896, he walked into the store to buy some food and was shot by Sheriff Leonard McGowan. McGowan's bullet sent the outlaw to the floor, where the body was riddled by further shots to ensure that Bill was dead.

But Railroad Bill's story continued, even in death. His body was put on display in Montgomery, Brewton, and Pensacola, where visitors could pay 25 cents for a look. Souvenir hunters bought pictures of McGowan posed with the famous corpse, and even stripped the body itself of buttons, scraps of clothing, and bullet cartridges. And still the legends continued.

The son of Sheriff McMillan, one popular story claimed, placed bitterweed in the dead man's mouth as a symbol of his hatred and revenge. Another story explained how one of

the men who tended the outlaw's body was scratched and died of blood poisoning. And still others insisted that Railroad Bill did not die at all, but that he still roamed the piney woods and swamps, as a fox or an eagle or a hound, always laughing at the white society which believed him dead. As late as the Depression, stories circulated that the food some families received from federal relief was actually from Railroad Bill. And even today, Railroad Bill's name looms large in the memory of Escambia County, an often-recalled symbol of the local history and lore.

Railroad Bill

Railroad Bill, Railroad Bill,
He never worked and he never will
They lookin' for that bad Railroad Bill.

Railroad Bill was a mighty bad man
Shot the light out the brakeman's hand.
They lookin' for that bad Railroad Bill.

Railroad Bill cut a mighty dash,
Shot MacMillan by a lightnin' flash.
They lookin' for that bad Railroad Bill.

Mrs. MacMillan she whooped and
squawled,
"That's my husband, for I heard him
fall."
They lookin' for that bad Railroad Bill.

Railroad Bill was a mighty sport,
Shot all the buttons off the sheriff's
coat.
They lookin' for that bad Railroad Bill.

Railroad Bill, goin' down the hill,
Lightin' cigars with a five-dollar bill.
Ride on, Railroad Bill.

Railroad Bill say, before he died,
He would build a railroad for the bums
to ride.
Ride on, Railroad Bill.

From *Folksongs of North America*
by Alan Lomax

***From the Field:* Ezell's Fish Camp is a Family Tradition**

by Burgin Mathews

For many of its customers, Ezell's Fish Camp in Lavaca, Alabama (Choctaw County) is much more than a restaurant. It is a cultural institution of sorts, representing a way of life very much connected to the community's river heritage and to family tradition. It is a place to come home to.

It is certainly all of these to Mary Ann Ezell Hall, who now owns the long-time family business. The original building, which is located on the Tombigbee River, served as a trading post around the time of the Civil War. Mrs. Hall's grandfather Charles Agnew Ezell later used the property to meet the packet boats that brought manufactured goods and supplies from Mobile. His son C. A. Ezell, a commercial fisherman,

housed his hunting club in the building during the late 1920s. Mr. Ezell's cook prepared dinner for the club and for private parties until the locale evolved into a full-time, public restaurant in the 1950s. Since then, the business has continued to grow into a chain of catfish restaurants, each owned and operated by Mrs. Hall or one of her two brothers, Charles and Joe Ezell.

Although the old hunting club was eventually disbanded when the site became an established restaurant, Ezell's remains a popular meeting place for hunters. In season, Mrs. Hall remarks, the evenings bring a sea of camouflage and muddy boots. Sometimes even the staff wear camouflage clothing on the job.

Hunters are not the only visitors welcome in Ezell's. The restaurant regularly hosts family and class reunions, high school events, religious revivals, and political dinners, not to mention one wedding party to which the guests wore camouflage and the bride a mosquito net veil. The boat landing near the building's riverside location once made it a popular site for local baptisms, and an occasional baptism still occurs there today.

With plenty of room to seat a large number of people, Ezell's functions as a kind of community center, and its long history provides a sense of the past to its

many customers who grew up coming to the restaurant with their families and now bring their own children.



Anne Kimzey

Mary Ann Ezell Hall

For Mrs. Hall, the building and river conjure up many memories of the past. She remembers Joe Ferguson, who sat for hours at night weaving the nets commercial fishermen like her father would use. In addition to nets, slat boxes traps were often used for fishing. There are still a few commercial fishermen around, Hall said, but most of today's fishing is left to the young or retired, and the tradition of using nets and boxes is no longer as common.

There are also memories of the floods that have occurred over the years, even the biggest of which have hardly slowed down business. Mary Perry, the restaurant's manager, explained that they can see the river rising for days and are prepared when the water reaches the building. "When the river gets ready to come in, we don't try to stop it. We just open the front door and open the back door. And we have some hatches on the back end of the building and we open those so it can come right through," she said. "And the wooden floors buckle up, but the rest of the building stays OK.



Anne Kimzey

Manager, Mary Perry, welcomes customers to Ezell's Fish Camp on the banks of the Tombigbee River in Lavaca (Choctaw County). The family-owned restaurant specializes in catfish.

From the Field: (From Page 12)

And then you come in and clean up and start over and say, 'Hey, we're still here.'"

Such exposure to the river's moods and motions strengthens the business's vital connection to the water. "The river commands a tremendous amount of respect," Mrs. Perry remarked.

Ezell's has undergone a few changes since it first opened, the most notable of which was the shift from serving river catfish to pond-raised catfish, a gradual transition that began about twenty years ago. The fish farms are dependable suppliers and the fish a consistent size, whereas the availability and uniformity of river fish is less reliable, explained Mrs. Hall. Furthermore, farmers can control the flavor of pond fish by what they feed them.

Although the Ezell's restaurants also serve steaks, hamburgers, chicken, and seafood, the specialty



Anne Kimzey

Ezell's Fish Camp still maintains the atmosphere of the old hunting club.

is catfish. As Mrs. Hall notes, catfish has become quite a big business in the South. "Daddy said, 'You know, one of these days they're going to get where they can raise catfish like

chickens,'" she remembered. "And it's here."

Editor's note: This article was based on an interview recorded by Anne Kimzey in November 1996.

Efforts Underway to Create Scenic Byways Program

Alabama is one of only seven states in the nation that does not have a state Scenic Byways Program. For the past year, Alabama Center for Traditional Culture director Henry Willett has been serving on a statewide organizing committee with a goal of having an Alabama Scenic Byways Program in place in the year 2000.

According to Willett, "There are six intrinsic qualities that might make a road corridor eligible for consideration of Scenic Byway designation. My interest has been focused on the cultural and the historic qualities."

"Cultural qualities" refers to the distinctive expression of local community life, said Willett. Where it may be easy to identify widely recognized cultural qualities, such as public art, museums, libraries and universities, others are less obvious.

These may include continuing traditional ways of life (fishing, farming or craft traditions, for example), or other kinds of visual evidence of unique customs, traditions, folkways or rituals of a living community, he explained.

The "historic qualities" refers to landscapes, buildings, structures or other visual evidence of a historically significant past, said Willett.

The other four intrinsic qualities include:

- Scenic
- Natural
- Archaeological
- Recreational

As currently crafted, the plan is to seek an executive order from the Governor creating Alabama's Scenic

Byways Program. The program will be administered by the Alabama Department of Transportation, with designating authority given to a committee comprised of representatives of the Alabama Bureau of Travel and Tourism, The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, the Alabama Department of Transportation, the Alabama Historical Commission and the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

The Scenic Byways organizing effort is being coordinated by the Birmingham-based, non-profit organization Scenic Alabama whose mission is "to protect and enhance the appearance and scenic character of Alabama's communities and roadways."

Tributaries II Published

The second issue of *Tributaries*, the journal of the Alabama Folklife Association, is now available. This issue covers a variety of topics on the folk culture of the state. The articles include:

- *The Log Train : Hank Williams' Last Song* by David Anderson and Patrick Huber;
- *Steve Renfroe, Rube Burrow and Railroad Bill: Alabama's Outlaw/Heroes* by Alan Brown;
- *Even the Houses Die! The Poisoning and Demise of Sweet Valley, Alabama* by Suzanne Marshall;
- *My Great-Grandmother Was A Cherokee Princess: The Unknown Indians of the South* by Fred Fussell;
- *Because We Care: Competence in Performance by African-American Women in Wiregrass Alabama* by Jerrilyn McGregory.

Also, three obituaries celebrate the lives of Sacred Harp singing master Dewey P. Williams, herbalist Tommie

Bass, and retired railroad worker Cornelius Wright. These three men achieved national recognition through their knowledge teaching and presentation of Alabama folk traditions.

Tributaries is a scholarly journal devoted to Alabama folk culture. It serves as a valuable outlet for current folklife research in the state. Editor Joey Brackner is now accepting articles for the next issue of *Tributaries* scheduled for late 2000.

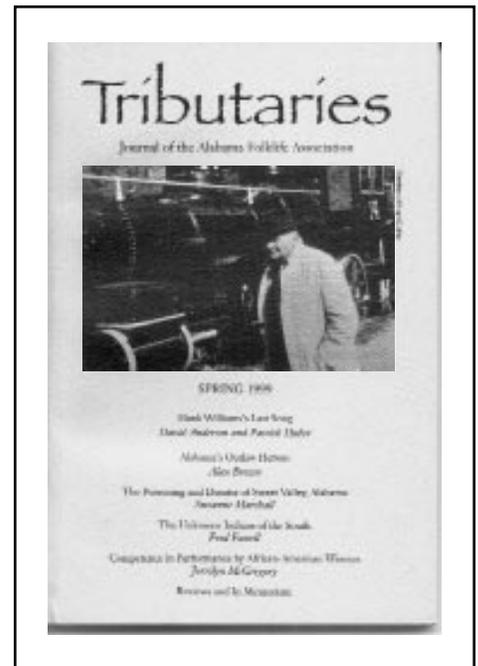
For more information contact:

Joey Brackner
(334) 242-4076, ext. 225 or
joey@arts.state.al.us

Tributaries is available from the Alabama Folklife Association at a cost of \$8.00 per copy.

To order contact:

Jackie Ely
Alabama Center for Traditional Culture
410 N. Hull Street
Montgomery, Alabama 36104
(334) 242-3601
FAX (334) 269-9098



Tributaries Vol. II

Editor's note: Copies of Tributaries, Vol. I are still available. This inaugural issue of the journal of the Alabama Folklife Association contains articles on the great shoal fish trap, Mobile Bay jubilees, quilting, occupational folklore, book reviews and more. See page 15 of this newsletter for ordering information.

AFA Annual Meeting Report

The annual meeting of the Alabama Folklife Association was held on May 22 at the University of Alabama's W.S. Hoole Special Library. Approximately 15 members gathered for an informal get-together and introductions before the business meeting began.

The slate of new officers was proposed and voted in. Officers for 1999-2000 are Erin Kellen, President; Alice Harp, Vice-President; Ginger Jones, Secretary; Joyce Cauthen, Treasurer; Carole King, Kern Jackson, and Bettye Kimbrell, Members-at-Large.

The group voted to allocate \$2,000 to Joyce Cauthen for extra expenses incurred in working on the Benjamin Lloyd's Hymnal project,

which explores the history and legacy of the 1841 hymnal. She reported that the CD and book will sell for \$25 and will be included in library catalogs and *Books In Print*.

The group discussed other potential CD projects, including a compilation of historic recordings from Gee's Bend.

Joey Brackner announced that the State Arts Council has committed to annual funding for the publication of the *Tributaries* journal, of which Joey will remain editor. It was reported that all AFA members recently received copies of the second issue of *Tributaries*.

Brackner is already soliciting articles for the third issue of *Tributaries*. Those interested in submitting

research on Alabama folklife topics for publication in the journal should contact Joey Brackner at the Alabama State Council on the Arts (334) 242-4076, ext.225. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

The Alabama Folklife Association is a non-profit statewide organization whose purpose is to promote the appreciation of Alabama folklife through various activities including festivals, conferences, fieldwork, videos, audio recordings, and publications. To join the Alabama Folklife Association, please, send in the form on the following page along with a check for your annual dues.



Support Folklife with your AFA Dues

The Alabama Folklife Association is a non-profit statewide organization whose purpose is to promote the appreciation of Alabama folklife through various activities including festivals, conferences, fieldwork, videos, audio recordings, and publications.

Yes, I want to support the AFA. My dues are enclosed.

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Alabama Folklife Books and Recordings for Sale



The Alabama Sampler CD celebrates 10 years of traditional music at Birmingham's City Stages festival.

Tributaries, Vol. I: Journal of the Alabama Folklife Association.

Contains essays on the great shoal fish trap, Mobile Bay jubilees, quilting, occupational folklore, book reviews and more. **\$10.00**

Traditional Music from Alabama's Wiregrass. This compact disc feature field recordings of bluegrass, gospel,

blues and Sacred Harp singing from a ten-county region of southeast Alabama. **\$10.00**

White Spirituals from The Sacred Harp: The Alabama Sacred Harp Convention. Alan Lomax recorded these shape-note songs from *The Sacred Harp* in 1959 in Fyffe (DeKalb County). **\$15.00 (CD) \$10.00 (cassette)**

The Alabama Sampler. A compact disc featuring live performances from the traditional music stage at Birmingham's City Stages festival, including blues, bluegrass, Sacred Harp singing, gospel, railroad calls, and more. **\$12.00**

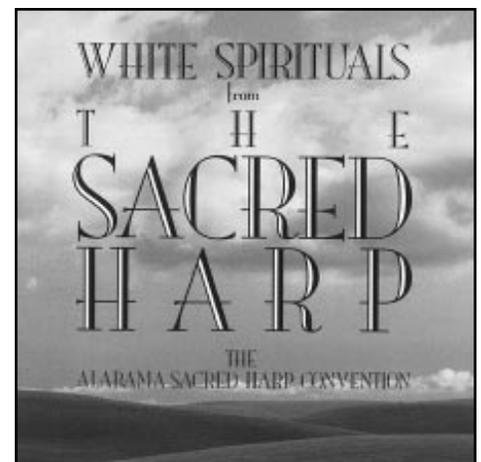
Cornbread Crumbled in Gravy: Historical Alabama Field Recording from the Byron Arnold Collection of Traditional Tunes. Beautifully sung folk songs performed by black and white Alabamians in 1947. Cassette and booklet containing extensive liner notes. **\$12.50**

John Alexander's Sterling Jubilee Singers of Bessemer. This recording

features Jefferson County's oldest African-American *a cappella* gospel group. **\$15.00 (CD) \$10.00 (cassette)**

Add **\$2.50 shipping** on all orders. Make checks payable to: **Alabama Folklife Association.**

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Alabama Folklife

Fall 1999 Issue

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Water Ways Exhibit Available for Booking

An exhibit on Alabama's river heritage titled *Water Ways: The Traditional Culture of Alabama's River Systems* has been touring the state since March of 1998. Displayed primarily in schools and museums, duplicate exhibits traveled to 28 locations (in 20 counties) in the past year and a half.

Eight panels containing 32 photo images plus text explore life on Alabama's rivers. Included are people who make their living from the water through commercial fishing, boat building and river transportation. Also depicted are sport fishing, float trips, boat races and other recreational uses of the waterways, as well as long-standing community rituals such as river baptisms and fleet blessings.

The portable, freestanding exhibit is suitable for display on a six or eight



Anne Kimzey

The Water Ways exhibit has traveled to the Museum of East Alabama in Opelika (shown here) and more than 27 other locations across the state.

foot table. Educational materials are available to accompany the exhibit. There is no charge for booking or shipping the exhibit.

Booking is currently underway for Spring of 2000. A few Fall 1999 slots

are still available. For scheduling information contact: Anne Kimzey, Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, 410 N. Hull Street, Montgomery, Alabama, 36104. (334) 242-3601.