

Delta Sources and Resources

Missouri Folk Arts Program

21 Parker Hall

Columbia, Missouri

by Claire Schmidt (Graduate Research Assistant) and Jackson Medel (Graduate Intern)

The Missouri Folk Arts Program (MFAP), a program of the Missouri Arts Council, a state agency, is administered by the Museum of Art

presenting Missouri's living folk arts and folklife in collaboration with Missouri's diverse citizens.

Directed by Lisa L. Higgins since 1999, the Missouri Folk Arts Program grew out of the Missouri Cultural Heritage Center, founded in 1984. Higgins received her PhD from the University of Missouri and received her first training in public sector folklore as an intern under Dana Everts-Boehm in 1993. Higgins remembers, "Before I even began my internship, I had



Apprentice Nathan Gordon (left) and master Cecil Murray (right) of Doniphan, Missouri worked together in the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program for two years to build the Ozark-style john boat shown here and to craft traditional sassafras paddles.

Photograph by Deborah Bailey, 2010.

and Archaeology at the University of Missouri. MFAP will celebrate its 30th anniversary in 2014. MFAP seeks to build cross-cultural understanding by documenting, conserving, and

an inkling that my career path would change. During the internship, I made the decision to pursue a career in the public sector. Three years later, I landed a position with a regional arts or-

ganization in Atlanta, Georgia, working with Peggy Bulger, one of the leaders in our field. It's no surprise that the Missouri Folk Arts Program internship has been a priority for me since I returned to direct the Folk Arts Program in 1999. The internship not only benefits the students, our program and the state, but we also contribute to the future of the field of folklore."

Deborah Bailey has worked as the Folk Arts Specialist at the Missouri Folk Arts Program since 2000. Bailey coordinates the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program, including application and panel processes, documentation, new artist identification, public programming,

documentation and presentation of the folk arts in Missouri, and she is well-loved by Missouri's traditional artists for her kindness and tireless work. Higgins and Bailey are assisted every year by a graduate research assistant, a graduate intern, and a work-study student, thanks to federal and university funding.

The Missouri Folk Arts Program's longest-running project is the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program (TAAP). The project pairs master folk artists with skilled apprentices to pass artistic traditions on to future generations. This program honors well-known Missouri traditional art forms like old-time fiddle and



Angela Williams interviews master luthier Geoffrey Seitz in his shop in St. Louis, Missouri during a 2011 fieldwork outing for the Community Scholars Program.

Photograph by Deborah Bailey.

and evaluations. She also provides assistance to artists and curates exhibits. Her skills as a fieldworker and documentation specialist have already made a great contribution to the

dance; lesser known regional traditions like Ozark johnboat building; and an array of artistic traditions brought to Missouri by recent immigrants and refugees, such as textile arts like



Missouri Folk Arts Program graduate interns like MA student Tahna Henson (shown here in 2008) gain experience in fieldwork, documenting living cultural heritage. Photograph by Deborah Bailey.

Mandingo tie-dye and ritual dances like the Vietnamese Dragon Dance. Since 1988 MFAP has collaborated with the Department of Natural Resources' State Museum to produce *Tuesdays at the Capitol*, interactive demonstrations by apprenticeship teams on select Tuesdays in April. In further efforts to bring Missouri's living traditions to wider audience, since 1996, MFAP has collaborated with Friends of Historic Boonville, producers of the *Big Muddy Folk Festival*, where MFAP co-coordinates a public presentation (performance, demonstration, or workshop) by apprenticeship teams. These events put the folk arts directly into the public sphere, making them accessible and broadening awareness of their living and persistent nature.

Folk arts-in-education is at the heart of the Missouri Folk Arts Program. In 2009, MFAP

published *Show-Me Traditions: An Educators' Guide to Teaching Folk Arts and Folklife in Missouri Schools*, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Dana Foundation. An electronic version was published on the MFAP website in 2011 and won the Dorothy Howard Folklore and Education Prize from the American Folklore Society. Master storyteller Gladys Coggswell (a veteran of the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program, serving seven times as a master artist, and among a number of artists trained by MFAP to create public programming for school children) recently led a residency at two Columbia, Missouri elementary schools, teaching students storytelling and story-collecting skills. MFAP coordinated the project in partnership with colleagues at the Museum of Art and Archaeology. The College of Arts and Science and the Missouri Arts Council provided funding. MFAP director Lisa Higgins also co-authored a chapter about folk artist residencies in Missouri schools in the recently-published book, *Through the Schoolhouse Door: Folklore, Community, Curriculum* from Utah State University Press (2011).

Just as the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program assists master artists to pass on their skills, MFAP's long history of graduate internships allows master folklorists Lisa Higgins and Deborah Bailey to share their knowledge with new generations of folklorists. Since 1993, MFAP has mentored eleven graduate interns who have gone on to careers in public folklore, public arts, education and academic careers. Graduate interns gain experience in fieldwork, documenting artists and art forms; archival work, storing, maintaining and curating the audio and video recordings, photographs, and work samples of artists; and arts administration, including grant writing, outreach and event planning.

In addition to the graduate internship, in partnership with the University of Missouri English department graduate program in Folklore and Culture Studies, the Missouri Folk Arts

Program also offers a Graduate Research Assistantship. This assistantship program provides for more intensive experience than the internship as well as financial support for the student. Both interns and assistants work in the day-to-day operations of MFAP in addition to conducting site visits with master-apprentice teams and other fieldwork projects.

In recent years, the Missouri Folk Arts Program has launched a new project: the Community Scholars Workshop Series. Since its inception in 2010, MFAP has held a series of six workshops and one convening, introducing community scholars to the nuts and bolts of documentation and presentation of local culture. Workshop leaders coached participants in collection work, including interviewing skills, digital photography and filming; production work, including video and audio editing, and power point presentation basics; and archival work, including record-keeping, storage and transcription. By providing technical assistance and fieldwork training to members of communities around the state, the Missouri Folk Arts Program ensures that the collection, documentation, and presentation of living folk arts is an accessible possibility for interested members of a community who may not have formal training in fieldwork practices. The intention to broaden both interest in the folk arts of Missouri and the practical skills necessary for accurate documentation of folk arts is central to both the Missouri Folk Arts Program as a whole and the Community Scholars Workshop Series in particular.

MFAP intends to continue expanding the Community Scholars Workshop Series by bringing individual workshops to more communities across the state of Missouri and by creating different levels of training for the growing cohort of participants who have attended the introductory level workshops. By expanding the reach of this workshop series to more communities across the state, the Missouri Folk Arts Program can continue the work of conserving, documenting, and expanding awareness of folk



New forms of folk art are nourished by the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program; here, master artist Mahmoud Conteh displays *Gara*, Mandingo tie dye, a cultural and ceremonial art form he brought from Sierra Leone when he immigrated to St. Louis.

Photograph by Deborah Bailey, 2006.

arts in Missouri. Different levels of workshops, starting with beginner and continuing on to intermediate and advanced, will allow MFAP to not just increase awareness of living folk arts in Missouri but expand the participants' skill levels in interviewing, documenting, and presenting their research interests in terms of Missouri's living folk arts.

This summer, MFAP brought Missouri's traditions to the nation's capitol. From June 27th through July 8th of 2012, the Missouri Folk Arts Program participated in the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC. Held on the National Mall, this national festival of living cultural heritage celebrated the passage of the Morrill Act. The Morrill Act, passed in 1862, established land grant universities (including

the University of Missouri). Missouri's exhibit focused on local sustainability in agricultural practices and food preparation methods. Higgins attended the festival as a representative of the Missouri Folk Arts Program in addition to other individuals representing various departments across the University of Missouri campus and the broader Missouri community such as MU's University Affairs, Extension, Mizzou Advantage, MU's Food for the Future initiative, the Rural Sociology department, and the Mississippi River Hills Association, an agri-culinary tourism and marketing organization in southeast Missouri.

Each of these programs and the professional and highly experienced staff of the Missouri Folk Arts Program contribute to documenting, preserving, and spreading awareness of the folk arts in Missouri. The educational benefits are far-reaching and important as folklorists Lisa Higgins and Deb Bailey contribute their experience to work-studies, interns, and graduate assistants but also in community outreach and education, as the staff work toward sustainability for art forms, communities, and the future of the field of folklore. ▲▼▲



Milk Can
Photograph by John Gifford.