



INHERIT IOWA

IOWA FOLKLIFE: OUR PEOPLE, COMMUNITIES, AND TRADITIONS

AN ACTIVITY GUIDE FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

Produced by the Smithsonian Institution with the Iowa Sesquicentennial Commission, in cooperation with the Iowa Arts Council, Iowa Public Television, and State Historical Society of Iowa. Primary funding from Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc.



WHAT

Senior citizens can help document and preserve the cultural heritage of Iowa for future generations. One way to do this is to participate in some of the activities described in this guide. Seniors can conduct research in their communities, they can establish and maintain an archive of interviews, photographs, and recordings, they can produce desktop publications, mount an exhibition about local traditions at a library or community center, or even help teachers in local schools to teach their students to better understand and appreciate Iowa's heritage.

WHO

Any senior citizen can use the information in this activity guide. Most activities will be more successful if done with a group of people at a senior citizen center or in cooperation with a school or community service organization.

WHERE

This guide is for use in any of Iowa's communities, large or small.

WHEN

The activities covered by this guide can be carried out year round. Anyone can start anytime.

WHY

Iowans participate in a rich cultural heritage. Much of this is not written down. It is part of an oral tradition—the tales families tell, stories about how it used to be, knowledge about a community, a farm, or an important event. This part of culture and history—Iowa's folklife—gives shape and character to people's lives. Future generations may learn from the wisdom and knowledge of their elders. But if it is not documented, it is harder to do so. The activities in this guide promote the documentation and preservation of that wisdom and knowledge.

HOW

This booklet contains the basics you will need to get started. Look inside to see what you can do, and how easy it is.



Researching and Documenting Community Traditions



PHOTO BY ERIN ROTH

just your relatives? Establish the scope of the research. Will it be general, where you document all the traditions of a particular community, or is it more focused on one or another type of tradition?

For ideas, view the videotape *Iowa Folks and Folklife*.

TRADITIONS

There are thousands of local cultural traditions to research. The following list gives only a sample. A project might include any of the following types of traditions, or some combination:

- **Verbal Art:** tall tales, legends, humorous stories, oral biography, superstitions, riddles, jokes, proverbs and sayings, rhymes, family oral history and stories, work stories, school stories, dialect, sermons, cheers, toasts, cowboy poetry.
- **Song:** ballads, work songs, ethnic songs, game songs, sports songs, school songs, lullabies, religious songs.
- **Dance:** social dances, religious dances, ethnic dances.
- **Games and Play:** tag games, guessing games, children's games.

WHAT TO RESEARCH

Decide on what constitutes the "community" for the purposes of your research. Is it everyone in your town, or is the "community" people who worked at a particular factory? Is the "community" farmers, members of your ethnic group, or

- **Vernacular Architecture:** houses, outbuildings, floor plans, construction techniques and materials, tools, fences, wall murals, mailboxes, bridges, yard art, garden decoration.
- **Foodways:** recipes, food preparation techniques, cooking technology, gardening, canning and curing, religious and celebratory uses of food.
- **Occupations:** boatbuilding, blacksmithing, mining, tool making, machine making, furniture making.
- **Folk Art:** quilting, weaving, embroidery, egg decoration, paper work, leather and bead work, rosemaking, jewelry making.
- **Home Medicine:** home remedies, healing rituals.
- **Celebrations and Rites of Passage:** rituals of birth, baptism, initiations, marriage, death; seasonal and calendrical events, public holiday traditions, festivals, and fairs.

TRADITION BEARERS

Because so much of Iowa's cultural heritage resides in the memories and lives of people, to do good research you must identify tradition bearers—people who by their knowledge and skill, good memory or particular role are especially well qualified to provide information. Your family, friends, and neighbors can often point you to a person "who knows about that." And you need to follow those leads until you find such people. Within a community, certain people have a reputation for being good quilters, or keepers of certain knowledge and oral history. Librarians, local folklorists, and historians can help lead you to them.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

You should collect some basic biographical information about the tradition bearers you meet and interview. But the focus of the research is on the tradition itself:

- What is the tradition?
- Where did it come from?
- Who performs/does it?
- Where, when and why?
- How does it vary?
- How has it changed over the years?
- How important is it, for whom?

INTERVIEWING

PREPARATION: Make an appointment with the tradition bearer. Make clear your purposes. Take a notebook, pen or pencils, camera, or tape recorder if appropriate. Think of questions ahead of time—write some down. Try interviewing a friend as practice.

For ideas, view the videotape *Profiles*.

BEGINNING: Restate who you are and the project's purpose. Obtain informed consent for the interview—ask for permission to conduct the interview; explain where the tape or notes will go. You might develop a simple form for the project that asks the person to sign a statement saying, "I give my permission for any tapes, notes, and photographs made to go into an archive for educational, non-commercial use."

QUESTIONING: Interviews will typically include:

- **Biographical questions:** How did you learn, when, from whom, why do you do this?
- **Process questions:** Describe how to do what you do—from start to finish.
- **Context questions:** Where do you do this, for whom? Do you work with others, when? Where do you get your supplies/instruments/ingredients?
- **Aesthetic/skill questions:** What are the key characteristics of the tradition—e.g., a pattern, materials, instrument/tool used? What makes someone good or respected in the tradition?
- **Vocabulary questions:** What are the names of particular instruments/tools/techniques?
- **History questions:** Has the tradition changed, what are its challenges and opportunities?

Sometimes asking about biography is a good start; other times it will be regarded as an affront to privacy. You must use your judgement. The simplest approach is to begin with a general question, like "tell me about X" where X may be a quilt or a boat or a song or anything created by the tradition.

In order to answer the research questions, interviews are typically open ended, meaning there is no set series of specific questions. Good interviews elicit much information; bad interviews do not. Here are some rules of thumb for conducting a good, effective interview.

1. Speak directly to the person in a respectful, conversational tone.
2. Be gentle but inquisitive, interested but not overbearing.

3. Ask follow-up questions based on what you hear and learn.
4. Respond to the questions and queries of the tradition bearer. You might end up reversing roles.
5. Use items in the interview setting to jog the memory of the tradition bearer. You might notice photographs or other items that you can ask about.
6. If you are not tape-recording the interview, make sure you keep notes. Don't attempt to write everything—do write short phrases to help you later remember what was said. If there is something you need to write verbatim—like a proverb—do it.
7. During the interview, ask about photographs, family bibles, examples of crafts, home recordings, letters, floor plans, and other items that help illustrate what was said.

TAPE RECORDINGS

Tape-recording interviews is best because it leaves a good record of what was said, sung, or discussed. For cassette tape recording use 60-minute tapes. Leave some blank space at the start of each to later enter information. Set the microphone close to the tradition bearer. Number your tapes immediately after recording. You can formally label them later.

PHOTO DOCUMENTATION

Use the best camera and flash you can. Black-and-white 400 ASA film is standard for research purposes, but you may want other (faster or slower) film given the tradition documented and the needed uses—e.g., color slides. Take the following types of photographs: **portrait** (of tradition bearer), **context or set shot** (shows person working, performing, doing tradition), **detail shot** (minute features of an object or technique), **illustration** (arranged display of object). Take more pictures than you think you will need; keep rough notes on the order of photo subjects, and number each roll as it comes out of the camera. You will formally label photo work later.

OTHER DOCUMENTATION

Video documentation may be appropriate for the tradition. Researchers shoot video for documentation, not for a finished film—leaving that art to a specialist. When shooting, leave room at the beginning for your own introduction (time, date, place, subject). Shoot a

bit closer in than you think you should, especially when recording music. Avoid excessive camera movement—a tripod is helpful. Do not overuse the zoom feature; do not overdo panning. Number tapes as completed.

You may also make direct descriptive observations and write them in your notes. You might draw a simple map or diagram a craftsman's work bench or plot dance steps. These also become part of your notes.

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Local libraries and county and state archives often have information on local traditions. They might include published books and maps, but also diaries, government reports, official documents, land records, etc. Consult your local librarian.

Establishing an Archival Collection

LOGGING MATERIALS

All materials collected in an interview should be labeled with the name of the researcher, date, place, and subject. All notes should be placed in a single folder. Create a photo log by having a contact sheet developed for each roll of film. Label the back of each sheet in soft pencil or indelible marker (make sure it doesn't bleed through). On a separate paper, indicate the number of the photo (as it appears on the contact sheet) and, next to it, information about the photo. Create a tape log for recordings. Label the tape. Set the counter to 000, replay the interview, and, on a paper indicate the counter number and the different subjects—e.g., 015 Great Flood story, 137 Farm work description. Do the same if you have video footage.

STORING MATERIALS

The logs, with any supporting materials, like maps, drawings, notes from library or archival research, should go into the file with the interview notes. An overview and inventory of the material should form the first page of the file. Use hanging folders in wood, metal, or plastic cabinets to store files. Tapes can be stored in drawers or on shelves. Oversized maps and charts should be stored flat.

PRESERVING MATERIALS

Use acid-neutral paper and folders where possible. Avoid rubber bands, staples, glue, paste, clips, tape, and other adhesives—they will damage materials over the years. Use archival-quality, ph-neutral slide and negative protectors made of paper or polyester. Do not store photos or negatives in glassine sleeves provided by photo developers. Tapes should be stored in dry conditions, away from electronic or magnetic equipment, 18" from fluorescent lights and telephones.

ORGANIZING THE ARCHIVE

Develop a numbering system by project, by field researcher, by tradition bearer, and by tradition, so that each folder and all other materials can be cross-located and reassembled. You can develop a handwritten or typed catalog, listing for each project the different field researchers with the different people interviewed about the indicated traditions. Or you could develop a simple computerized data base. You will have to keep track of two things—the code number that labels all the material that goes together, and the location of the material, which physically may be in different places (cabinets or shelves of your archive).

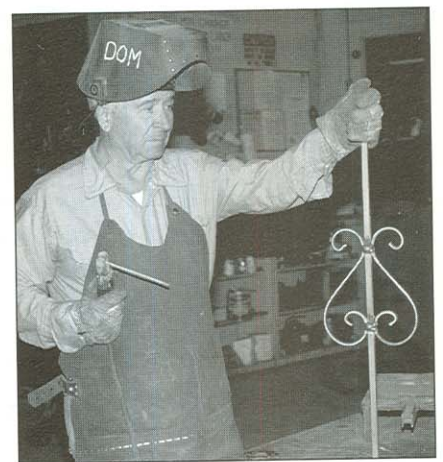


PHOTO BY RACHELLE H. SALTZMAN

Producing Publications

RESEARCH-DERIVED PRODUCTS

The documentation in the archive can serve as a source of information for years to come. You may want to turn the raw research into a particular product, like a booklet, a cookbook, a music or spoken word recording, or an exhibition. Following are some examples of what you can do and how.

A BOOKLET

Your booklet might be about farm tales, high school cheers, a local ethnic festival, or any of the traditions and communities you have researched. First, write a short prospectus on the booklet—one page describing the topic you will cover, how the booklet will be organized. Also write a preliminary table of contents. Pass these around to get comments, and change your plans accordingly. Next, gather the materials in the archive. Listen to tapes, look at photos, read interview notes and other holdings. Take notes, systematically making sure to reference the code numbers of the archival material, so that someone eventually reading your booklet can find the original source tape or photograph. Assemble all your materials and begin to draft a manuscript. Most books or booklets on cultural heritage contain a good deal of description—because this tends to be very rich. To communicate this, your book will contain many direct quotes, lyrics to songs, photos, and drawings.

For example, a community cookbook based on your archive should be much, much more than just a compilation of recipes. Your cookbook would have all sorts of information and stories surrounding the particular dishes.

Your booklet might try more complicated analysis of the material—for example, comparing patterns of different quilts made in the community—but usually you will have to do more specialized reading or work with university professors in order to do so.

A local publisher, like the newspaper, for example, might consider printing your booklet. If this is a possibility, you must discuss with the publisher the format for photographs (usually 8 x 10 B&W glossy) and other materials with the manuscript. If you are self-publishing on a computer, the quality of the booklet will depend on your printer and whether or not you will scan photos and line drawings, maps, and diagrams electronically or photocopy them onto a master copy. Eventually you will produce a master or camera-ready copy to take to a printer. You must budget for the number of pages, the quality of paper, special cover, any color work, the binding, and the number of copies printed. Work with your printer on estimating these costs.

For ideas about publication see the *Festival of Iowa Folklife* program book.

A RECORDING

You may have some very nice, well-recorded stories, songs, and performances collected in your archive. A book about them, even giving lyrics, doesn't quite evoke their character. You might consider making a documentary recording. First, do the same as you would for a booklet, developing a prospectus and a table of contents. Next, listen to the archival recordings and copy those you want to include—you can use a dual-cassette recorder. Write liner notes for each selection (use the booklet accompanying the *Iowa State Fare* CD recording in this packet as an example). Make your final rough tape of songs in the proposed order—these will now be copies of copies. If you are satisfied with the order, you can now master the finished cassette recording. Go back to the original source tapes, since they are of the best, first-generation quality. Copy each item in order onto your master cassette. (An alternative is to get a university or radio station or firm in your town to digitally master these recordings from cassette to DAT tape for reproduction.) If you go low-tech, you can make cassette copies one at a time. It is better to find a company that can make multiple copies from your master tape.

The liner notes can either be desktop-published as a long J-card, folding into the cassette holder, or done at a printer.

Producing an Exhibition

CURATION

Your research may be broad and rich enough to merit a museum-like exhibition. Consider museum exhibitions and displays you have attended in Iowa and through your travels elsewhere. You might want to produce an exhibition of objects that can range from photographs to tools, quilts to wood carving. You will either have to have an individual serve as a curator, or form a curatorial committee to develop the exhibition. As with a book and recording, the curator's first step is to write up a prospectus based upon the material in the archive and information developed from the field interviews. Your table of contents in this case will be the sections of the proposed exhibition. If the exhibition is about a particular community, you might want to arrange it either in terms of chronological periods, or by themes, or by type of tradition. In addition to the prospectus and contents you should early on develop a list of potential objects for the exhibition. If there are no objects, there can be no exhibition. You will not have the objects (save photographs) in your archive, but you will know where to get them, and presumably what kinds of things tradition bearers have at home and might be willing to lend.

PRODUCTION

In addition to the curator or curatorial committee, you will need a full exhibition team. These roles can be taken by individuals or subcommittees. It is important to maintain communication throughout the exhibition development process—and there is more than enough for everyone to do. The committees and tasks are:

- **Curatorial**—Develops exhibition themes and content, selects objects, writes labels, signs, publications, executes loan agreements, cares for objects, trains docents, oversees educational efforts.
- **Design and Technical**—Investigates and evaluates the various venues for mounting the exhibition; plans for technical needs of gallery space (lighting,

sound, electricity, exhibit installations); works with curatorial team to design exhibition and graphics/catalogues, brochures.

- **Fundraising and Finance**—Works with others to develop budgetary needs, secures gifts, grants, in-kind donations; oversees finances.
- **Public Relations**—Develops publicity materials and strategy to advertise exhibition. Organizes opening ceremony and other special events.

OBJECTS

You will need to develop a form letter that specifies the loan of an object to you and the conditions under which it will be kept and returned. Do not borrow valuable items from members of the community if you cannot provide adequate security or insurance!

DESIGN

At the community level, an exhibition well done with meaningful objects backed by good research will have more impact than a fancy exhibition. Don't try to overdo the exhibition with commercial display cases and fixtures that may take attention away from the community objects. Keep the design simple.

SIGNS, LABELS, AND CATALOG

Signs will range from entry and sectional signs announcing the names and themes of the exhibition and its components to sub-section signs giving information about a tradition or era, to labels for each item which should include their provenance—what is it, who made/used it, for what, when, and where. Include the donor's name. Use the exhibition sign as the basis for a desktop-published exhibition catalog (you should add photocopied pictures of objects).

OPERATING THE GALLERY

Have tradition bearers and other members of the community serve as docents or guides to the exhibition. Curators will have to train them. Have school groups come to your exhibition. If well done, you will find your exhibition becoming a source of local pride. The exhibition will also stimulate more interest in your archive and in local research.

Senior Citizens in the Classroom

SENIOR CITIZEN/STUDENT EXCHANGE

Accompanying the *Inherit Iowa* activity guide is the *Learning Guide for Teachers, Students, and Senior Citizens*. It contains lesson plans on various Iowa traditions, handouts, documentary material, how-to information, and further references. It has been sent to every public middle/junior high school and high school in the state of Iowa. The lesson plans are organized in terms of subject matter—language arts, social studies, music, and art. Most lesson plans have a section called **Student/Senior Citizen Exchange**. The purpose of this is to bring senior citizens and students together to share information in the examination of Iowa's cultural traditions and folklife. The title and number of each lesson plan is listed below for your convenience. If you know something about the topic, you might contact the school in your area and to offer to help out. Also included in the school plans are activities similar to those in this guide—conducting research and establishing an archive, desktop-publishing a community study, developing a documentary recording, planning an exhibition and a cultural festival. This provides opportunities for senior citizen centers to collaborate with local schools on these projects.



PHOTO BY RICHARD STRAUSS

Learning Guide Lessons

1. SOCIAL STUDIES

- Lesson 1.1: Iowa's Communities and Folklife
- Lesson 1.2: Meskwaki Indian Traditions
- Lesson 1.3: Documenting Local Traditions:
Interviewing
- Lesson 1.4: Oral History of Immigration
- Lesson 1.5: Occupational Folklife/Work Traditions
- Lesson 1.6: Celebrating History: Frontier Heritage
- Lesson 1.7: Celebrating Community:
Scandinavian-American Music Making
- Lesson 1.8: Foodways As Family Heritage

2. LANGUAGE ARTS

- Lesson 2.1: Family Stories
- Lesson 2.2: Collecting Stories
- Lesson 2.3: School Stories
- Lesson 2.4: Work Stories
- Lesson 2.5: The Blues As A Story Poem
- Lesson 2.6: Singing Stories of Mexican Americans

3. MUSIC

- Lesson 3.1: Playing Old-Time Tunes
- Lesson 3.2: Recording Music
- Lesson 3.3: Family Music Making
- Lesson 3.4: Czech- and German-American Polka
Band Music
- Lesson 3.5: Gospel and Spirituals: Sacred Music

4. ART

- Lesson 4.1: Quilting Communities
- Lesson 4.2: Photographic and Video Documentation
- Lesson 4.3: Hmong Textiles: Stories in Cloth

5. SPECIAL: MULTI-DISCIPLINARY, CULMINATING ACTIVITIES

- Activity 5.1: Develop a Community Research Archive
- Activity 5.2: Publish a Community Study
- Activity 5.3: Create Your Own Musical Recording
- Activity 5.4: Create Your Own Museum Exhibition
- Activity 5.5: Produce Your Own Cultural Festival

Resources

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Along with this *Inherit Iowa* activity guide is a packet of materials that can support your efforts.

Iowa Folks and Folklife is a 56-minute documentary produced and broadcast by Iowa Public Television. It examines the Iowa traditions presented on the National Mall of the United States as part of the Smithsonian Institution 1996 Festival of American Folklife. The tape also covers some of these traditions back home in Iowa, and at the 1996 Festival of Iowa Folklife. It provides a useful overview of what you might cover in selecting traditions and communities to research.

The second video, *Profiles*, consists of a series of four essay segments on aspects of Iowa's cultural traditions, including footage from the festivals in Washington and in Des Moines and from RAGBRAI, Decorah's Nordic Fest, the Sidney Rodeo, and on location in Dubuque, Villisca, Plainfield, and Waterloo. It gives a good picture of how to document traditions, with sample interviews and video documentation of work culture, celebrations, and particular tradition bearers.

The Iowa Folklife Resource Directory lists possible tradition bearers and scholars who can participate in or advise on projects in your area.

Iowa State Fare: Music from the Heartland is a compact disc (CD) recording featuring nine Iowa groups performing a variety of music, including gospel, blues, Meskwaki song, country, Latino *corridos*, quartet singing, polka, string music, and Scandinavian music, as well as liner notes.



PHOTO BY RICK VARGAS

The Festival of Iowa Folklife program book has readings on the nature of community in Iowa, and various traditions from foodways to crafts, local stories, farm humor, ethnic heritage, and music.

The Learning Guide for Teachers, Students, and Senior Citizens contains lesson plans on various Iowa traditions, handouts, documentary material, and how-to information, and further references.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

For more information about the *Iowa Folklife Resource Directory* and possible tradition bearers and scholars who can participate in or advise on projects, contact: Rachele H. Saltzman, Iowa Arts Council, 600 East Locust, Capitol Complex, Des Moines, IA 50319-0290, telephone 515-242-6195, fax 515-242-6498, or e-mail rsaltzm@max.state.ia.us.

For information about this activity guide contact: Educational Specialist, Center for Folklife Programs & Cultural Studies, Smithsonian Institution, MRC 914, Washington, DC 20560, or telephone 202-287-3424, fax 202-287-3699, or e-mail cfp.cfpcs@ic.si.edu.

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