

News From The Vermont Folklife Center

Spring 2000, Vol. 10, No. 1



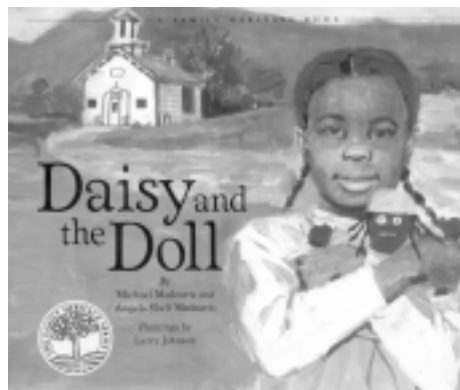
Celebrating the Traditions of Vermont

Family Folklore Celebrated in New Children's Book Series

Stories, like treasured objects, can become priceless family heirlooms. This is the guiding concept of "The Family Heritage Series," a new line of children's books soon to be published by the Vermont Folklife Center.

Based on dramatic tales preserved in the VFC's sound archives, the narratives have been adapted by award-winning contemporary authors and illustrated by distinguished artists. A unique feature of these picture books – geared for ages 6-10 – is the concluding activity page, which offers ideas to young readers for hands-on projects on family history and storytelling.

Two books, to be released in early September, will premiere the series. *The Two Brothers*, by William Jaspersohn, who is also the series' editor, is an immigrant story of the separation and extraordinary reunion of two German brothers who came to Vermont at the turn of the last century. The original story was collected from Ed Eurich, a lifelong resident of the Mad River Valley. *Daisy and the Doll*, by Angela Shelf Medearis and Michael Medearis, demonstrates the pluck and resourcefulness of an African-American



girl in dealing with discrimination in a rural New England town, and is based on Daisy Turner's childhood memory of growing up in Grafton, Vermont. Two additional titles will be published in 2001.

The series grew out of VFC Director Jane C. Beck's interest in expanding the scope of the Center's publishing activities.

"Our mission is to preserve and to present, to make our material available to the wider public. We were meeting this objective nicely for adult audiences, but we had nothing for children," she says. "I wanted the Center to produce books for children that would introduce them to some of the remarkable oral histories in our audio collection, and also serve as a catalyst encouraging them to dig up and to value their own heritage."

So about five years ago Beck and other VFC staff selected a dozen tales that seemed to have potential as literature, and began exploring publishing possibilities. Initially Beck's inclination was to adapt several stories and collect them in one volume, but after talking to educators,

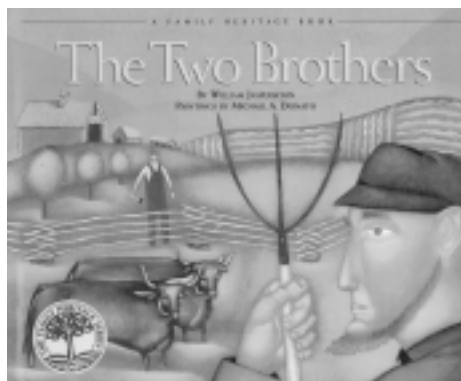
Our First Annual Members' Dinner

Over the years we have become more and more aware of how important VFC's members and friends are to our organization. Their contributions have helped fund research and interviews, produce programming and books, bring educational resources to teachers and school children, and much more.

In an effort to celebrate its association with these loyal supporters, the Center is staging its "First Annual Members and Friends Dinner," slated for May 17 at the Congregational Church in Middlebury. A highlight of the dinner will be the presentation of two special awards for Vermonters who have helped preserve our heritage for the generations of tomorrow. Awards will be presented to:

- An individual who promotes cultural heritage in an exemplary way;
- A master artist who practices and transmits traditional skills.

The evening will open with a reception at 4 p.m., introducing, "Signals and Messages: Celebrating Twenty-Five Years of GRACE" at the Center's Gallery. Keynote speaker at the dinner will be VFC's first board chair, Bill Schubart, founder of Philo Records and CEO of Resolution, Inc.



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Contemporary New England Talkers and Tellers Featured in VFC's Millennium Celebration

Many times we have been asked, "So, what is the VFC doing to observe the Millennium?" Well, nothing seemed more appropriate to us for that purpose than a celebration of the timeless art of folk storytelling. So starting this spring, Vermont residents and visitors will be able to sample a medley of outreach programs and events that highlight today's grassroots yarn-spinners. Major grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund have enabled us to extend our quest for traditional storytellers beyond the borders of Vermont, and thus offer a truly regional showcase of family and occupational narratives.

From May 20 to November 4, the Brattleboro Museum and Art Center will host the premier of "Family Stories, Family Sagas." In this pilot "audio exhibit," visitors will be able to sit in a small, recreated parlor filled with historic and contemporary photographs and immerse themselves in the lives of four generations of the Shippee family of West Dover, Vermont, as recounted in stories, poems and lore. Octogenarian Cora Bardwell is the principal teller, with other family members providing a sampling of their own personal anecdotes. The museum has planned an impressive roster of participatory programs for children and adults.

July 7, 2000, marks the opening of "Gather 'Round: Tales of New England's Workaday World," a major, multi-media installation in the Round Barn at the Shelburne Museum. Through sophisticated audio-visual techniques and theatrical effects, visitors will become witnesses to pivotal episodes in the lives of more than 20 individuals. Members of 11 ethnic groups make up the "cast" of tellers; their



The story of the Shippee family of West Dover, Vermont, is featured in the exhibit "Family Stories, Family Saga" at the Brattleboro Museum and Art Center.

Martha Cooper

broadcast on Vermont Public Radio beginning in late June. Local support from the Vermont Arts Council is helping to underwrite the various components of the "Gather 'Round" project.

recorded stories – on subjects ranging from surviving an accident at sea, to unnerving visits from a family ghost in a Massachusetts farmhouse, to escaping from Laos – provide a kaleidoscope of "Old New England, New New England." The exhibit will be open to the public through October 15, 2000, and will be available for school visits until June 2001.

A companion 13-part radio series, also titled, "Gather 'Round," is planned for

For those who believe that 2001 marks the true millennial year, there's more to come. The "Family Stories, Family Sagas" show will be expanded to include six New England families, and will tour to several communities throughout the region, with the VFC gallery in Middlebury scheduled as the first stop next May. A second radio series highlighting traditional storytelling, titled "New England Touchstones," is also planned for spring, 2001.

Welcome to New Employee Joyce Petersen!

Cornwall resident Joyce Petersen joined the VFC staff in December 1999, as Assistant Operations Manager, a job that combines clerical, promotional and merchandising responsibilities. Stints as a reporter, publicist and manager of a small business, plus several years working as an executive assistant in various administrative offices at Middlebury College, make her well suited to the mix of duties that she faces on a daily basis at the Center.

In the process of learning from scratch the complex details of our internal operation, Joyce

has become an enthusiastic convert to – and an advocate for – the Folklife Center's mission.

"Having recently moved back to Vermont, I particularly appreciate the importance of preserving Vermont's cultural heritage through oral history," says Joyce. "I am very, very excited about new ways to expand statewide participation in and support for the Center's work, particularly through the membership program."



Joyce Petersen



VFC Gallery Showcases the Remarkable Artists of Vermont's GRACE Program

For more than two decades, GRACE, a maverick arts program based in northern Vermont, has been helping elderly people, the mentally and developmentally disabled, and other community residents discover their narrative voice – using paint, crayons and colored pencils. “Signals and Messages: Celebrating Twenty-Five Years of GRACE,” an exhibition highlighting the work of nine of these artists will be on view from April 29 to August 12, 2000, at the VFC Gallery.

One of the common characteristics of the GRACE artists – like all good storytellers – is their ability both to engage the imagination of the audience and to conjure

up their own private realms of memory, experience and emotion. However, no two of these artists are alike. Their diverse narrative styles reflect their originality, from the mysterious hieroglyphs of Curtis Tatro to the cartoonlike pictures of Gayleen Aiken, to the densely detailed maps of Mary Paquette and the bold, high-keyed “tapestries” of Merrill Densmore.



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GRACE (Grass Roots Art and Community Effort) is the outgrowth of art-making workshops initiated by artist Don Sunseri at the St. Johnsbury Convalescent Center in 1975. Since then, the concept of an “open studio” facilitated by artists has taken root under the auspices of GRACE in local gathering places such as community and mental health centers, hospitals and senior meal sites throughout Vermont. While often characterized as “outsider artists” because of their isolation from the mainstream art world, most of the GRACE artists do not work alone and feel a strong kinship to the other workshop participants.

“We are delighted to have the opportunity to work with Don and his staff to produce this landmark exhibition, and to



Two special programs organized by the VFC and GRACE will take place in conjunction with the Middlebury showing of “Signals and Messages.” They are:

June 16, 1 p.m. – 3 p.m.

“Experiencing GRACE,” a round-robin presentation by agency staff, participating GRACE artists and workshop facilitators, at the Masonic Hall. Participation is free, but registration is required due to limited space.

June 21, 9 a.m. – 1 p.m.

“Perspectives on Life Review” – a panel discussion presented by Dr. Armin Grams, retired UVM gerontologist; Gregory Sharrow; and Don Sunseri, artist/founder of GRACE. Admission of \$15 includes lunch. Registration is required due to limited space.

introduce the Middlebury community to this exemplary community-based arts program,” said curator Meg Ostrum.

Funding for this exhibition is made possible through contributions from the Walter Cerf Fund, the Vermont Community Foundation, and Terry and Debbie Allen.

“Signals and Messages” will travel to the Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium in St. Johnsbury at the close of the Middlebury run, and be shown there from September 15 to December 31, 2000. A national tour of the exhibit in 2001 is also being planned.

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VFC Awards Fieldwork Grants for 2000

In a continuing effort to promote field research in folklife and local history, the Vermont Folklife Center recently awarded its 11th round of grants. The following projects are included in this year's funding.

Forrest Holzapfel of Marlboro, after completing an ambitious photographic survey of his town, will revisit the people he photographed and tape their accounts of their experiences in the town and community.

A medical social worker, **Annie Schlesinger of Dorset**, will revisit her elderly clients, many of whom are facing a terminal illness. By soliciting and recording their stories for the Folklife Center, Annie hopes to provide her clients with an opportunity to delve deeper into the process of life review and attain an important measure of peace and resolution.

A grant was also awarded to **Jane Vincent of Vergennes**. Jane is the great-great-granddaughter of Philomene Daniels, the first woman in the world to be licensed as a steamboat pilot and a partial founder of The Daniels' Boat Line. Jane hopes to learn more about the steamboat line that bolstered the economy of the Vergennes area during the period of 1877 to 1916.

Roxbury resident Susan D'Amico intends to document the history of the Verde Antique Marble Quarry in Roxbury. Several former quarrymen who still reside in the town will be interviewed.

Gloria Gil, of Burlington, will conduct a series of audio-taped interviews with people who worked at Bennington Pottery between 1949 and 1972 in order to preserve the memories and experiences of a unique and aging group of Vermonters.

“A Chance to Grow Every Time You Listen”

Field research, conducted through recorded interviews, is an attempt to learn about people and culture, whether past or present. The focus of field-based projects can vary enormously, from the life history of an individual to the history of a community. Among the projects undertaken in 1999 was a history of the organization Women Helping Battered Women, conducted by Julie Steedman of Burlington. WHBW was founded 25 years ago in Burlington, and as part of an observance of the occasion, Julie documented the growth of the organization from its inception as a “radical” movement in 1974 to its status today, when WHBW is recognized as a legitimate part of the community.

Angela Bibens, development coordinator for WHBW, speaking of the Julie's project for the Folklife Center, said, “The impact of this research project on Women Helping Battered Women has been tremendous, as there was so little documentation of our organization because we're such a young movement. Julie's interviewing the founders and significant players in our movement has given us a reference for our young women to view. It also has given men an appreciation of the struggle that women have had to go through.”

Julie Steedman, reviewing the experience of her oral history project said, “It has been an enormous pleasure for me to meet the women who got this organization off the ground. I have learned personally from each of the women who were willing to give so generously of their time.”

Thinking back on her interviews, Julie added, “There is a chance to grow, every time you listen.”

The VFC Archives Are Growing

The past year has been a bountiful one for our archives. In 1999 we received more than 277 audiotapes – 125 of them resulting from fieldwork associated with the New England Storytelling Project. In addition to these audiotapes of interviews, we received several new videos, manuscripts and printed documents for our library.

And now 2000 also looks like it will be a booming year for incoming collections. As of April 1 we had received more than 118 new audiotapes, 216 new video tapes, and several new collections of manuscripts.

Some of our new collections include:

- The Orton Family Foundation Change & Challenge Video Project (160 video cassettes and 90 supporting audiotapes);

- The Farming Project Video Collection (38 video cassettes and supporting documentation);
- New additions to the Daisy Turner Collection by Nea Stephens and the Turner family (photographs and manuscripts).

We are constantly working to expand our research library with books, pamphlets and printed guides to folklife and oral history research. We are currently accepting donations of books about folklore, folklife, oral history, architecture, material culture, Vermont life and communities, folk arts, crafts, holidays, cooking, antiques, hobbies and pastimes. Please call Christina Barr, our archivist, to discuss donating your books to our library. When you are cleaning off your bookshelves think of us!



Children's Book Series

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librarians, booksellers and publishers, it was decided that a series, with each book devoted to one person's story, was a more viable venture. With project development grants from the Fund for Folk Culture and the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation, the Family Heritage Series was born!

"The addition early on of editor Bill Jaspersohn to our team was an enormous boost to the project," reflects Beck. "His experience as both writer and editor was essential in translating our vision into reality."

Advanced comments about the first scheduled releases reinforce our belief that the series will have more than just regional appeal. Renowned children's book author Reeve Lindbergh praised them as "... a real gift to our families and to children of all ages. These true stories are poignant, personal, and beautifully illustrated... a wonderful way to bring the spirit of yesterday alive again, for today, tomorrow and always!"

The Family Heritage Series will be distributed to bookstores in Vermont and nationally by Independent Publishers Group (IPG). It can also be purchased on site or through mail-order from the VFC Heritage Shop.

News from the Heritage Shop

Stop by to see the newly designed "Heritage Baskets." Replicas of crates with paper labels (like the old orange crates!) come in different sizes and shapes and are filled with items from the shop, making gift giving easy. Prices start at \$25.00, and they can be personalized to your own specifications. They make great hostess gifts and birthday presents as well as "goodie packages" for special occasions such as family reunions or corporate events.



Bill Ferris, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, toured the Folklife Center as part of a recent visit to Vermont. Here, Associate Director Meg Ostrum previews with him the new GRACE exhibit.

!Special Offer!

We have a special offer for members of the Vermont Folklife Center visiting the Heritage Shop through the month of August. Advanced orders placed either title in the Family Heritage Series will receive a 20% discount. Books will be ready for pickup September 1, which is the publication date. Other discounts are not included in the special offer. Stop in and we'll give you a preview of the books.

Grant News

We are pleased to announce several significant grant awards received by the Center over the past few months:

- a \$6,300 grant from the Vermont Arts Council for support of the "Gather 'Round" exhibit and radio series;
- a \$20,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts for sponsorship of the 8th Year of the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program;
- a \$50,000 grant from the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation to produce the second two books in the Family Heritage Series.



JOIN THE VERMONT FOLKLIFE CENTER

Celebrating the Voices of Vermont

Help us preserve and present Vermont's traditional culture. Your participation makes a real difference to our program, and you'll enjoy the benefits of membership.

Yes! I want to support the Vermont Folklife Center with my membership. Enclosed is my tax deductible contribution.

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Vermont Folklife Center, Box 442, Middlebury, Vermont 05753



Calendar of Folklife Events in Vermont and the Region

 Denotes a VFC event



April 29 – August 12: “Signals and Messages: Celebrating Twenty-Five Years of GRACE,” VFC Gallery, Masonic Hall, Middlebury, VT. Exhibit of self-taught rural artists from Vermont.



May 17: Members and Friends Dinner. Reception at Masonic Hall, Middlebury, VT 4 p.m. – 6 p.m., with dinner following at the Congregational Church, Middlebury, VT 6 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.



May 20 – November 4: “Family Stories, Family Saga,” Brattleboro Museum and Art Center, Brattleboro, VT (802-257-0124). An audio exhibit of a family's saga.

May 21: Spring Farm Festival, Billings Farm and Museum, Woodstock, VT (802-457-2355). Seventeenth annual community celebration featuring spring farm activities. Special \$1 admission.



June 3 – August 25: Log Cabin Quilt Exhibit, TAUNY Gallery, Canton, NY (315-386-4289).



July 7 – October 15: “Gather 'Round: Tales of New England's Workaday World,” Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, VT (802-985-3348). Multi-media installation showcasing traditional storytellers.



August 24 – November 11: “Painting With Rags,” VFC Gallery, Masonic Hall, Middlebury, VT. Exhibition that surveys the evolution of rug hooking in Vermont since the 1930s.

August 26: Children's Day, Billings Farm and Museum, Woodstock, VT (802-457-2355). Horse-drawn wagon rides and farm activities. Children ages 12 and under accompanied by an adult admitted free.

September 4: Labor and Leisure, Billings Farm and Museum, Woodstock, VT (802-457-2355). Hands-on activities such as sawing wood and corn cutting.



Note: VFC's summer hours begin May 23: **Gallery/shop:** Tuesday-Saturday 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Office hours: Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. **Research Center:** Monday – Friday, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., or by appointment.

For further information, call 802-388-4964, or visit us on our website at www.vermontfolklifecenter.org



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