

Missouri Folk Arts Program

Lisa L. Higgins
Missouri Folk Arts Program Director

One of the highlights of the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program (TAAP) 30th anniversary year was a partnership with Missouri State Parks and Historic Sites. Missouri Folk Arts Program staff and volunteers presented TAAP alumni to audiences at historic sites in Kansas City, St. Louis, and Jefferson City. On May 30, 2015, along the Upper Current River, MFAP presented twelve traditional artists in the park. One week later, we traveled down to southwest Missouri, toured the Roaring River State Park trout hatchery, and presented fourteen artists under a canopy of trees. These last two events provided occasions to introduce three members of our Community Scholars Network to several TAAP master artists. Pete Bradshaw, Deloris Wood Gray, and Mary Peura stepped in to document these special events with photographs and interviews.

Current River State Park: Master quilter **Barbara Culpepper** of Van Buren, Mo., grew up in a family where making quilts was a necessity. If Mom made your clothes, every left over scrap was saved to make quilt blocks, even worn clothing and feed sacks. In rural Missouri, everyone raised chickens, and colorful, printed feed sacks were a great resource for quilting fabrics. Mrs. Culpepper has a beautiful “Airplane” quilt in her collection, made in the 1930s from a *Kansas City Star* newspaper pattern from feed sack material.

When she and her husband Ray married in 1957, Barbara Culpepper continued the family tradition of piecing quilts, but she passed her completed quilt tops on to family members to quilt, or she made a “tied” quilt, rather than hand-quilting herself. As her family had before her, she continued to piece from patterns published in the *Kansas City Star*. Barbara never did take to hand-quilting, though, so her husband gave it a try. He found it to be a good pastime, and so began their quilting partnership. He quilted Barbara’s beautiful pieced tops, which provided necessary bed covers for their family. More recently, as Ray found his dexterity waned, he discovered long-arm quilting machines—and bought one. The Culpeppers continue to turn out beautiful quilts.

Cecil Murray is a johnboat builder and a paddle maker from Doniphan, Mo. He begins with a plank of wood from a sassafras tree, approximately two inches thick. He draws the basic shape on the plank, cuts it with a band saw, and then the real work of hand carving and chiseling begins. Murray was taught the craft by his Uncle “Punk” Murray, who,



Barbara Culpepper

Cecil revealed, did not approve of using band saws. Still, Cecil is certain his now-deceased uncle would be proud of the paddles. In fact, he wished Uncle Punk was around to see the blue ribbon Cecil won at the Ripley County Fair. Uncle Punk taught Cecil an important adaptation he made to the paddles, adding metal strips at the bottom to navigate rocky river bottoms and to push off boulders and logs on shore without destroying the wood.

Besides making paddles, pretty enough to hang on the wall as art, Cecil is more widely recognized for his johnboats, a tradition passed down from his grandfather, father, and uncles, and a tradition Cecil learned as a very young boy. Johnboats are unique water vessels and stretch twenty-six feet long, so long that Cecil has a ninety-six foot shed where he builds them.

—**Mary Peura, Painter and Arts Volunteer**
Ste. Genevieve, Missouri



Cecil Murray

Current River State Park: **Marideth Sisco**, who lives just north of West Plains, Mo., is a wordsmith, whether sharing stories and songs from stage, on the radio, or in print. At Current River State Park, she entertained the audience with personal experience stories about her “rise to fame” as a musician and actor in the independent film *Winter’s Bone*, for which she provided the opening and closing soundtrack songs. She regaled the audience with an insider’s view to the film set and a brush with cancer that almost cancelled her acting debut. Sisco shared stories of The Blackberry Winter Band that she formed after the film, which traveled across the U.S. and into Canada in what they dubbed the “Amazing Geriatric Hillbilly Tour.”

Sisco also shared her insights into Ozark culture and the regional motto to “use it up; wear it out; make it do; or do without.” From that motto, Sisco has written a song, and she has made another career with a public radio program; several



Marideth Sisco

CDs and books; and an independent record label. Sisco is presently editing a series of gardening columns that she wrote as a newspaper reporter fifteen years ago for an illustrated book project. Another CD is in the works, as she revisits music that she studied and performed as a music scholarship student in the 1960s at Missouri Valley College and then Southwest Missouri State.

Strains of Van Colbert’s banjo tunes, Marideth Sisco’s stories, and Cliff Bryan’s fiddling drifted from the park’s portable stage up to **Ray Joe Hastings’** portable forge. The master blacksmith repeatedly heated iron at his fire as he demonstrated the processes for making gigs while bystanders looked on, turning from forge to anvil and back again several times. Occasionally, he was assisted by friend and Doniphan neighbor Cecil Murray. A young visitor eagerly volunteered to hand-crank the forge’s fan as Hasting waited for the heat of the fire to increase.

Hastings took periodic breaks from the forge, sitting near an exhibition of gigs—finished and in process—that he assembles as a teaching tool. At this vantage point, Hastings alternately autographed copies of his self-published book *Bow & River Gigs: Used in the Clear Streams of the Ozarks* or swapped “shop talk” with friends and fans. Hastings recalled his training in the apprenticeship program in 1995 with the late Paul Martin of Bunker. Hastings drove to Martin’s workshop weekly for six months of lessons, inspired by the elder’s craftsmanship and his own collection of gigs from various regional makers. Hastings pointed to the variations in style and function in the gigs in his impressive display. When asked why he needed to make or



Ray Joe Hastings

collect another gig, Hastings replied with a laugh: “I just need one more!”

—**Deloris Gray Wood, Local Historian and Author**
Salem, Missouri

Roaring River State Park: **Robert “Bob” Patrick**, formerly of Bethel, Mo., got his start in blacksmithing at the age of six when he was trying to make a ‘Tarzan knife’ for his brother and continued the craft more as a hobby. “We started hammering out stuff cold; then when I was about nine I started heating metal,” he recalls, “I read a lot and learned how to do it from National Geographic more than anything else” [at that time]. I saw the African and Asian blacksmiths working from a hole in the ground. I said to myself, ‘I can do that!’ I was a little kid and there was nothing that could stop me because I was too ignorant to realize I couldn’t do it.”



Robert “Bob” Patrick

For Patrick, like most of his peers, blacksmithing is a traditional trade and art form that represents an essential aspect of human history. “It is one of the essential trades for human beings,” explains Patrick, “Tool making is what sets human beings and a few other animals apart.”

Since 1978, **Joseph “Joe” Patrickus II**, who lives at Macks Creek, has been carefully handcrafting custom western boots using tools and techniques dating back to the late 1800s. “I’m fifth generation in the trade, and my son Joey will be the sixth,” he says. “We’re trying to keep it in the family.” The boots that Patrickus and his son create are “a little fancier and a little more upscale than traditional cowboy boots,” said Patrickus, “We’ve got all kinds of artwork on our boots. We do a very basic plain boot to one that is very ornate with gemstones, gold and silver. “I use exotic leathers like Caribbean butterfly fish, African frog skin, and I could go on.”

Patrickus feels strongly that the craft of boot making should be preserved. He recalls, “We’ve had apprentices through the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program. My son, who [works] with me now, started his apprenticeship years ago. The western boot is truly an American tradition, and it’s something we enjoy doing. It’s an American craft that can be passed down from generation to generation like a family recipe.” ■

—**Pete Bradshaw, Ozark Light Writer, Freelance Photojournalist**
Sarcoxie, Missouri



Joseph “Joe” Patrickus