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# folklife center news



The Landing of Columbus. Engraving in Johann Theodor de Bry's *Das vierdte Buch von der neuwen Welt*, probably 1594. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress

The year 1992 will mark the five hundredth anniversary of Columbus's voyage across the Atlantic. To commemorate the event the American Folklife Center will sponsor, over the next several years, a program of field projects, exhibits, symposia, and publications. Story on page 2.

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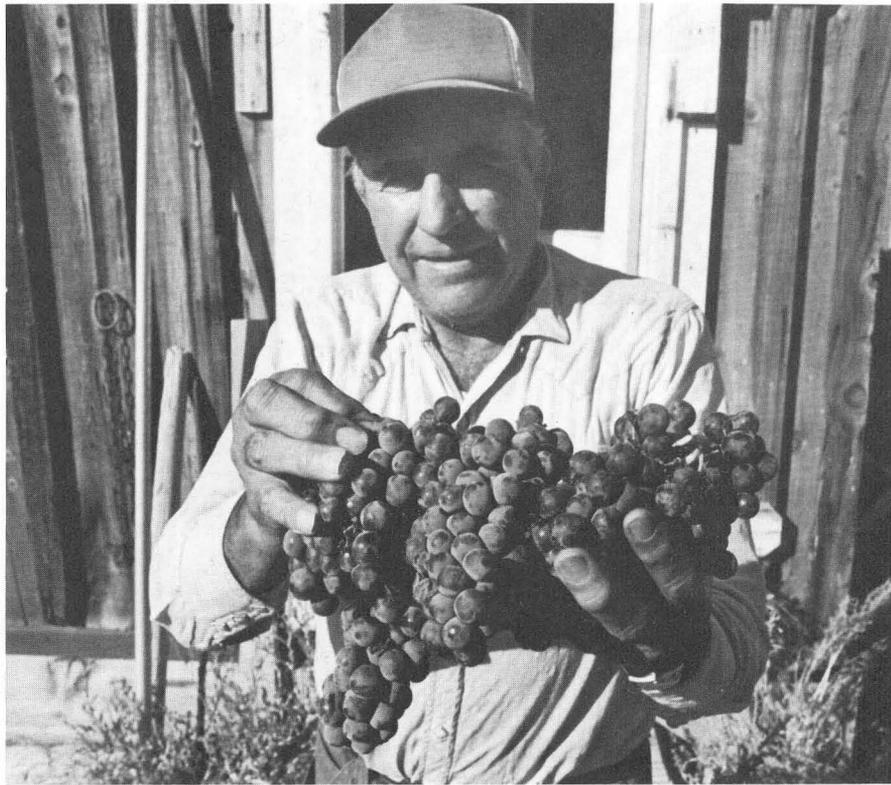
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**CENTER LAUNCHES QUINCENTENARY PROJECTS**



**Nevada cattle rancher Joe Boggio with some California Zinfandel grapes he uses for wine. Boggio is one of a number of Italians who have made the rural West their home. (NV-25-20656-5) Photo by Howard W. Marshall**

By Alan Jabbour and James Hardin

The year 1992 will mark the five hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus's voyage across the Atlantic in search of a passage to India. Columbus has come to be an American icon, however much other rivals are advanced for the title "Discoverer of the New World." But neither the Italian navigator nor his Spanish sponsors could have predicted the enormous consequences of the voyage and of the discovery that two continents unknown to Europe lay between him and his proposed destination.

The Columbian Quincentenary will be celebrated and studied in most of the nations of the New World, as well as in Spain, Italy, and other European countries. In the United States several federal and state agencies and innumerable universities and cultural insti-

tutions have planned programs, and a Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Jubilee Commission, based in Washington, was established in 1984.

The Library of Congress, with large and important collections on Hispanic and Western culture and New World exploration, will sponsor a number of Quincentenary projects. And Congress has asked that the American Folklife Center join in the Library's plans by designing a program that celebrates the American ethnic pluralism that has been one outcome (and on-going consequence) of the remarkable voyage. A folklife perspective on the meaning of the Quincentenary will broaden the historic and bibliographic work of the Library by including a range of people and considerations from the present-day. And folklife exhibits, publications, and symposia will enliven the commemoration.

The Center will develop a series of symposia on the subject of American creativity and cultural pluralism and conduct a major field project to study Italian-Americans in the West. The symposia will take into account the rich variety of ethnic groups that have settled in this country (as well as those already here five hundred years ago), and the field project will focus on the cultural traditions of a single group in several selected western communities (a departure from the Center's usual method of studying the various groups in a single region).

The plan to study Italians in the American West may come as a surprise. Most Americans associate Italian-American life, history, and culture with the urban East. But in the mid-nineteenth century, large numbers of Italian immigrants settled in California and other western states. Many of these immigrants appear to have come from northern Italy—Liguria and the Piedmont—as opposed to the more heavily southern Italian admixture of the later immigration to the cities of the eastern United States. In fact, for many of them the port of embarkation for America may well have been Columbus's natal town of Genoa.

These Italian-Americans brought with them a number of cultural skills and arts—agricultural techniques, wine culture, stone masonry, and much more—which helped shape the cultural milieu of the West. In turn, they were deeply influenced as a group by the other ethnic cultures and the emergent regional culture of the American West; an Italian-American ranch in the twentieth century, for example, is profoundly influenced by the California Hispanic traditions of cattle and horse management.

The project got underway when historian John Alexander Williams was engaged as a consultant to research, plan, and organize the Center's Columbus Quincentenary Program, and particularly the field project on "Italian-Americans in the West." Working with Dr. Williams as the Center's project director is Folklife Specialist David A. Taylor. Advisors for the project include Moyra Bryne-Severino, Washington, D.C.; Dino Cinel, Tulane University; Jens

## FOLKLINE

For timely information on the field of folklore and folklife, including training and professional opportunities and news items of national interest, a taped announcement is available around the clock, except during the hours of 9 A.M. until noon (eastern time) each Monday, when it is updated. Folkline is a joint project of the American Folklife Center and the American Folklore Society. Dial:

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Lund, Washington State Folklife Council; Philip Notarianni, Utah State Historical Society; Blanton Owen, Nevada State Council on the Arts; and Steve Siporin, Utah State University. Two fieldwork excursions are planned

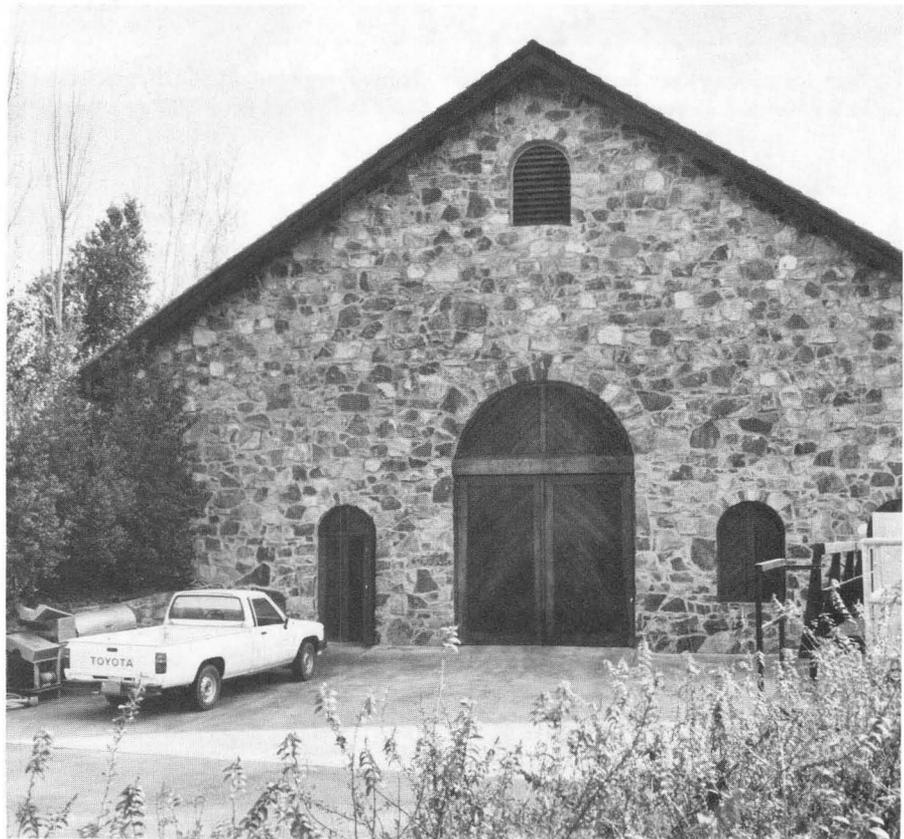
## FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

James Hardin, *Editor*  
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*Folklife Center News* does not publish announcements from other institutions or reviews of books from publishers other than the Library of Congress. Readers who would like to comment on Center activities or newsletter articles may address their remarks to the editor.

for this year, one in July to the fishing community of San Pedro, California, and one to the agricultural community of Gilroy, California. Other western sites will be surveyed later in the year and in 1990. □



**Traditional Italian stonework continues to be a prominent feature of the architecture of California wineries. The stonework for the central building of the Robert Pepi Winery (Oakville, Napa Valley) pictured here was executed in 1981 by stonemason Eugene Domenichelli of Healdsburg. Photo by David A. Taylor, 1989**

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## FROM BACKYARD GARDEN TO AGRIBUSINESS ITALIAN-AMERICAN FOODWAYS IN THE WEST

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Italian immigrant settlers Mr. and Mrs. John Forgnone at their ranch in Paradise Valley, Nevada. (NV 23739) Photo collected for the Center's Paradise Valley Folklife Project in 1978, courtesy of Loui Cerri

By John Alexander Williams

*This is the first in a series of articles written initially by American Folklife Center Consultant John Alexander Williams to provide fieldworkers with historical background and theoretical considerations as they embark on the Center's "Italian-Americans in the West" Columbian Quincentenary field project.*

The foodways of Italian immigrants to the United States (and their descendants) provides an ideal matrix for observing elements both of continuity and of change in the Italian-American communities in the West. There is a long list of specialty crops that Italian-American growers introduced into California agribusiness and a complex of interrelated food growing, distribution, service, and consumption among California Italians, ranging from the stoop laborers and cannery workers who worked in the emerging agribusiness complex to the prominent entrepreneurs who built food-related businesses into large corporations. The transformation of urban and

small-town backyards into Italian fruit and vegetable gardens represents a consistent marker of Italian ethnicity, and special meals and foods define both the idealized and the practical ways in which Italian-American women sustain ethnic identity in contemporary California families. Italian *prominenti* such as Angelo Pellegrini, an immigrant who grew up to become a literature professor and university president in Washington State, waxes poetic in his memoirs about Italian gardens, cooking, and winemaking, while the autobiographies of California winemakers such as Louis M. Martini and Robert Mondavi illustrate some of the ways in which immigrant-based food businesses have led to successful agribusiness careers.

Italian immigrants, like many others from nineteenth-century Europe, were peasants, but unlike many, they expected to go back to the land after making money in America. Thus they clung to traditional food habits for more reasons than the usual peasant conservatism. Traditional Italian

peasant food consisted chiefly of wheat in the form of bread or pasta, accompanied by as much *companatico* (accompaniment of bread) as family resources and the local environment could provide. When they could get or afford it, Italians ate meats, fowl, and vegetables widely known in other parts of Europe, and had taken to American-derived foods such as tomatoes and cornmeal long before they began to migrate to the United States. But the distinctiveness of Italian-American food consumption derived from other ingredients: flat breads (such as *foccacio*); a large and regionally ordered variety of pastas, sausages, and cheeses; an array of vegetables and spices little known outside of the Mediterranean region (such as eggplant, artichoke, broccoli, basil, and oregano); salted fish varieties such as anchovies, sardines, and cod; and, above all, the more exotic (to Anglo-American tastes) elements of the classical Mediterranean triad of wheat, grape, and olive, namely olive oil and wine. The Anglo-American diet was

richer but seemed blander to Italian immigrants, and Italian food had the advantage of being cheaper as well as more appealing to immigrant palates. Their diet may have been exotic by Anglo-American standards, but the numbers of Italian immigrants were sufficient in most American cities to ensure a profitable demand for products that had to be imported, such as olive oil, or that could be manufactured cheaply enough to supplant home manufacture, which was the case with dried pasta.

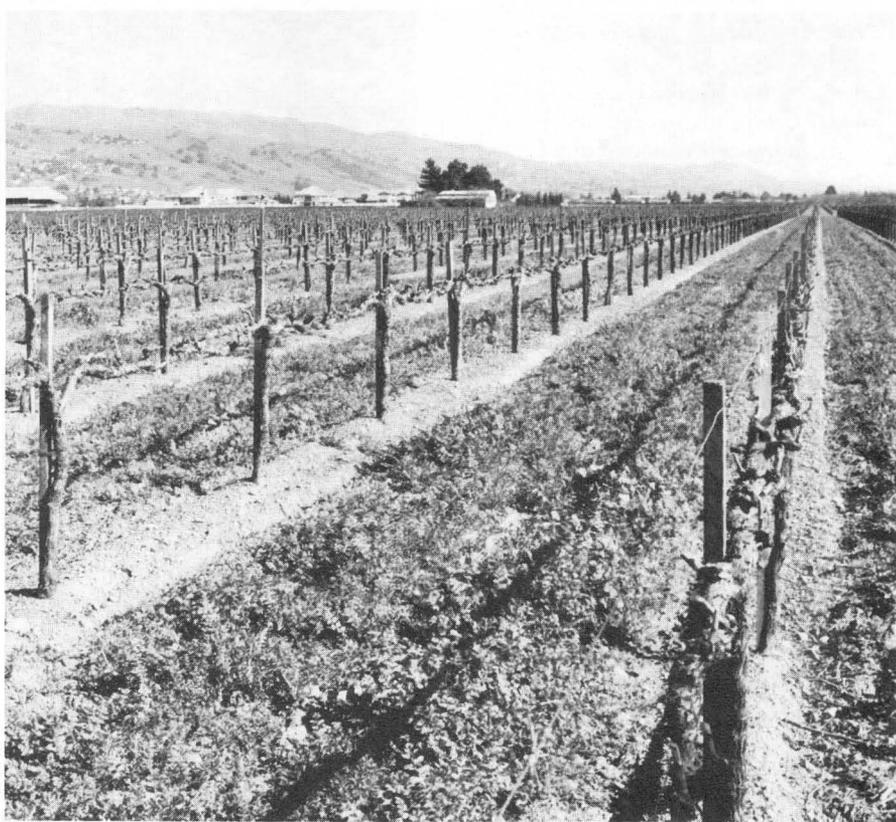
Wherever they could in the United States, Italian immigrants established kitchen gardens to grow the vegetables, fruits, and spices they could not buy in American stores; in settlements of any size, this provided opportunities for truck gardening, often on small bits of land leased cooperatively on the outskirts of cities, or, as in the California valleys north, south, and east of San Francisco Bay, on the less productive fringes of rich agricultural districts where Italians had initially come as seasonal stoop laborers. In smaller cities, such as Denver, Italian truck gardeners peddled their produce themselves door-to-door at the turn of the century. In San Francisco, the volume of business was sufficiently large to justify an Italian produce market, the Colombo Market, organized in 1874 and run cooperatively by commission agents who had sprung up to act as middlemen between urban consumers and the gardeners and farmers who had become established in the districts surrounding the city. In places such as California's Central Valley or the Walla Walla region of southeastern Washington, Italian immigrant growers developed specialty crop niches in emerging agribusiness districts already established by Anglo-American entrepreneurs. In Walla Walla, Italian growers specialized in onions, in the Central Valley in grapes and "coarser vegetables" such as cabbages, broccoli, and cauliflower. In neither area were Italians very active in the wheat and related grain or fruit production that had introduced the large scale market-oriented rural economic order we now know as "agribusiness."

Italian truck gardening, though often initiated by groups of single men

working leased land cooperatively, usually became a family enterprise. But the fact that most Italian immigrants were young men without families, at least in their initial migration to the United States, created other food-related business opportunities. Those men who did have families often established boarding houses; Italian boarding house keepers (nearly always women) thus became restaurateurs of sorts, but independently operated restaurants and saloons soon followed. Food service thus joined production, distribution, and manufacturing as typically Italian-American business enterprises. In San Francisco, the economies of scale were such that entrepreneurs originally confined to the Italian immigrant community, or even to a regional segment of it, eventually built their businesses into major corporations, such as the Italian Swiss Colony in wine production, Del Monte Corporation in food canning,

the DiGiorgio enterprises in fruit and vegetable growing and canning, the Ghirardelli Company in candymaking, the Petri family enterprises in tobacco manufacturing and winemaking, and A. P. Giannini's Bank of America (which originated as the Bank of Italy to handle immigrant remittances but grew toward its modern scale as the financier of Italian-American agribusiness).

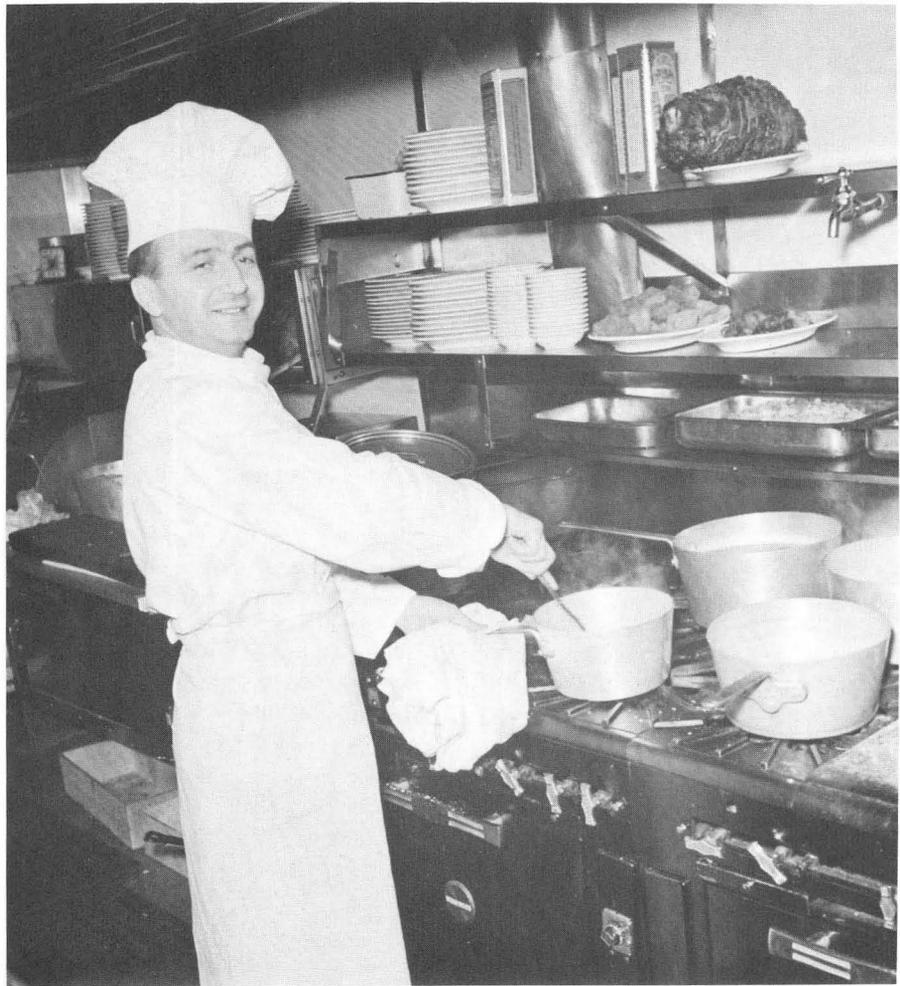
The complicated connection between traditional Italian and modern Italian-American foodways is also evident in the history of California winemaking. Italian immigrants made wine at home everywhere in the United States where they could grow or acquire grapes. Moreover, since Italian wine drinkers were afflicted neither with the drunkenness or with the recurrent bouts of prohibitionism that periodically swept Anglo-American and other Protestant ethnic groups, Italian and Italian-American



**A portion of the vineyard of the Emilio Guglielmo Winery, Morgan Hill, California. Located at the foot of the Santa Cruz Mountain range in upper Santa Clara Valley, the winery was founded in 1925 by Emilio Guglielmo, an immigrant from the Piedmont wine district of Northern Italy. Today the second and third generations of the Guglielmo family in America carry on the business. Photo by David A. Taylor, 1989**

saloonkeepers (along with hotel and restaurant owners) were common in western towns and cities throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. California provided special scope to winemakers, but initially Italians were more important as grape growers and wine consumers than as manufacturers. Before 1918, California wine was predominantly bulk wine and the industry was dominated by distributors rather than producers. Thus while the Italian Swiss Colony had been started as a cooperative venture for poor immigrants by the San Francisco banker Andrea Sbarbaro, it succeeded commercially as a private corporation whose stock was quietly acquired by a non-Italian distributor, the California Wine Association. Most Italian-American farmers and householders continued to make wine, and those who also ran boarding houses, restaurants, or saloons sometimes sold the product commercially as well. In either case, Italian-American wine was coarse, traditional peasant wine, universally known as "Dago Red," the sort of drink with which ancestors had washed down bread and its accompaniment for generations but a far cry from the fine wines for which immigrant offspring like Robert Mondavi would one day be famous.

The coming of Prohibition in 1918 changed all this. Home winemaking remained legal, but commercial winemaking did not. An unexpected result was the creation of a sudden and lucrative boom in the production of wine grapes, especially the cheaper thick-skinned (and thus more easily shipped) grapes in which the typical Italian-American grape producer specialized. The fortunes of such famous Italian-American California winemaking families such as the Martinis, the Mondavis, and the Gallos originated with grape production and sales during Prohibition. When commercial wine production again became legal in 1933, these and other Italian-American families began making and selling wine commercially, while Giannini's Bank of America used its influence over agricultural loans to impose quality-control standards and to prevent the reemergence of a dominant marketing organization. Italian-American winemakers remained



**Chef in a North Beach, California, Italian restaurant, December 8, 1941. (USF34-81839-E) Farm Security Administration photo by John Collier, Library of Congress**

influential in the industry and participated in its transformation from bulk-wine production to bulk and fine wine production after World War II. But while they often promote the image of a traditional family enterprise in their advertising, the actual making of commercial wine by Italian-Americans has little to do with the winemaking traditions of their ancestors. Rather the Mondavis, Gallos, and the like studied formally or informally the French-derived practices already institutionalized in the California industry, supplemented by formal study at the wine chemistry and enology programs established by the University of California campuses at Berkeley and Davis. Noncommercial home winemaking is another matter, however, and so are many of the nonmanufacturing aspects of the commercial industry, such as family management of wineries

and vintage grape production, allied skills such as equipment manufacture and cooperage, and the continued demand for Italian craftsmanship in stonemasonry in the wine districts. Winemaking may thus be characterized as a food-related enterprise with historic social but superficial folkloric connections with Italian tradition. But all these areas are worth investigating as loci of traditional Italian culture in its American setting. □

*John Alexander Williams has taught at Notre Dame, Illinois (Chicago), and West Virginia universities. From 1979 until 1986 he served as assistant director in the NEH Division of Research Programs and from 1986 until 1988 as director of the presidential commission on the Columbus Quincentenary. In August 1989 he will become director of the Center for Appalachian Studies at Appalachian State University.*

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## PLAIN AND FANCY QUILTERS DISPLAY THEIR TALENTS AT SPRING WORKSHOP

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By James Hardin

Plain quilting was born of necessity and nurtured by both white and black cultural traditions, says Geraldine Johnson, the moderator of the Folklife Center's spring workshop. Plain quilts were regarded as "just something that you would need to keep the bed warm," according to one quiltmaker Johnson interviewed, Zenna Todd. They are made quickly, usually by a single individual working alone, from bits and pieces of dark fabrics, and they represent a kind of salvage craftsmanship that reminds us of an earlier America, one that would find the present-day "throw-away society"

strange and a little immoral. Tops are pieced with material found around the house and farm—feedsacks, old clothing, any piece of scrap is fair game. The linings, or batting, are made of the same material, as well as of old quilts and blankets. As many as four or five quilts might be piled on a bed on a cold winter night.

That many plain quilts are beautiful and skillfully made is beside the point in the matter of utility but pertinent to the configuration of feelings and expressions that surrounds quiltmaking: providing for one's family, occupying one's lonely hours, giving expression to one's creativity, and bringing something colorful into the

household. These are the very considerations that interest the folklorist, of course, and that informed the Folklife Center's spring workshop on March 27 and 28, "The Fabric of Life: Quiltmaking Traditions in America."

On the first day, four films were shown: *Anonymous Was a Woman*; *Hearts and Hands: A Social History of Nineteenth-Century Women and Quilts*; *Quilts in Women's Lives*; and *Quilting Women*. On the second day, four panelists spoke on various aspects of quiltmaking and collecting: Geraldine Johnson, a folklorist from Washington, D.C.; Lars Cain, a lecturer and collector who works at the Library of

**Members of the Daughters of Dorcas, Calvary Episcopal Church, Washington, D.C., discuss their work with "The Fabric of Life" workshop audience. From left to right: Viola Canady, whose specialty is stained glass technique; Muriel Drew, working on a lap top quilt frame; and Raymond Dobard, who uses the fishing tackle box shown here for fabric swatches, thread, needles, and scissors. Photo by Reid Baker**



Congress; Katherine Dirks, a museum conservator at the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; and Joyce Ice, a folklorist from Ithaca, New York. Following the formal presentations, the audience was invited to view three quilting demonstrations and talk with the quilters: Anna Holland, a fancy quilter from Waterford, Virginia; Viola Canady, Gertrude Braan, Raymond Dobard, Muriel Drew, and Virginia Quinn, members of the Daughters of Dorcas, Calvary Episcopal Church, Washington, D.C.; and Marie Detweiler, Fern Hostetler, Genevieve King, and Jean-Ann Yoder of the Holly Grove Mennonite Quilters, Westover, Maryland.

Geraldine Johnson spoke from her fieldwork experience in the Appalachian Mountains, including her work with the Folklife Center on the 1978 Blue Ridge Parkway Folklife Project. In asking us to see more than just the beautiful artifact, Johnson stressed the importance of listening to the words of the quilters for the ideas, feelings, and satisfactions that surround the quilting process. The nation's 1976 Bicentennial brought a new interest in Americana, a burst of enthusiasm for American needlework, and a demand for such handiworks as quilts that went far beyond the original need for "something to keep you warm." Johnson speculated that the demand may result in a shift in the purpose of quilting from the needs of the family to the demands of a market, as attention is focused on the quilt as folk art creation. Since certain types of fancy quilts are the ones that sell, those are the ones shop owners and dealers encourage the quilters to make. And the patterns that are recommended over others as more desirable are not always the traditional ones.

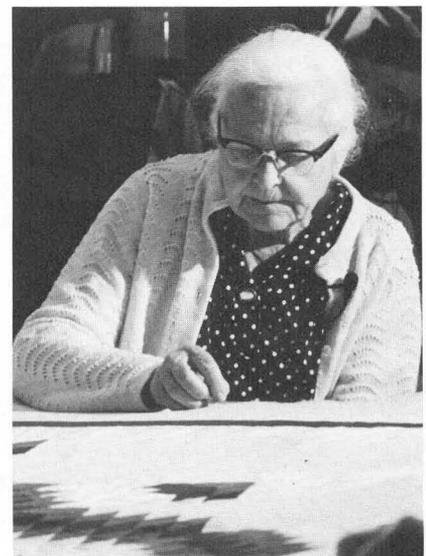
Although some of the traditional considerations in quilting are put aside when the fancy quilt is produced, artistry and skill are in the foreground and bring with them strong feelings of pride and satisfaction. In any event, for contemporary women who are financially well off, able to afford special fabrics for their quilts, and living in houses with central heating, quilting is done largely for the pleasure of



**Above: Holly Grove Mennonite Quilters from Westover, Maryland, working on a "Broken Star" quilt. Clockwise, from bottom: Jean-Ann Yoder; Fern Hostetler, who is speaking to panelist Katherine Dirks of the Smithsonian Institution; and Genevieve King, who is also pictured below. Photo by Reid Baker**

it, to provide an outlet for their talent. And for women who quilt with groups, either social or church-related, there is the additional pleasure of the company of other women. Joyce Ice addressed this aspect of quilting, as it occurs in Delaware County, New York, and her paper is included in this issue of *Folklife Center News*.

However they are regarded, the market for antique and contemporary quilts, and the accompanying rise in prices, are very much with us. For some, the desire to possess something beautiful, unique, and handmade borders on obsession. Lars Cain spoke of his personal experience as a quilt-maker and collector and identified three requisite traits of the latter:





Anna Holland, from Waterford, Virginia, uses a lap hoop in working on a quilt with antique squares. Photo by Reid Baker

1. You must be a lover of objects.
2. You must be a pack rat.
3. You must be a historian.

It is the third trait that best characterizes the "true" collector, according to Cain, the desire to know as much as possible about the acquired object: how it was made, when, who made it, the circumstances that surrounded the making of it, and how it relates to other similar objects. The more one learns about a single object the more it resonates with meaning, putting one in touch with the historical time and place that produced it.

Katherine Dirks, curator at the Smithsonian Institution, spoke about the care of quilts, and mentioned that a number of brochures are available on particular aspects of the subject:

1. How to Clean a Sampler
2. How to Wet-Clean Cotton and Linen Quilts
3. How to Store Antique Textiles in Your Home
4. How to Clean Coverlets
5. How to Mount Textile Objects for Exhibition

Persons who would like to obtain copies of these brochures may write the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Division of Textiles, Room 4131, Washington, D.C. 20560. Allow four weeks for delivery.

The coordinators for the Center's spring workshop were Magdalena Gilinsky and Lisa Turner Oshins. Ms. Oshins is the compiler of a directory of quilt collections and resources located in public institutions. Based on a questionnaire survey conducted by the Center, the book is organized by country, state, and alphabetically by institution. Entries provide detailed information on 747 collections. *Quilt Collections: A Directory for the United States and Canada* is available from the Library of Congress, Sales Shop, Washington, D.C. 20540. The price is \$18.95 for the soft-cover edition; \$24.95 for hardcover. (Add \$2 for orders to \$20; \$3 for orders to \$35; \$4 for orders to \$50; \$6 for orders over \$50.) Checks payable to the American Folklife Center must accompany order. □

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## QUILTING WITH THE GROUP

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By Joyce Ice

*The following article is adapted from a presentation at the Folklife Center's spring workshop "The Fabric of Life." Joyce Ice is the staff folklorist for the Delaware County Historical Association and has been working on an exhibit "Quilted Together: Women, Quilts and Communities." An exhibit catalog with four essays about local traditions is available from the Delaware County Historical Association, RD 2, Box 201C, Delhi, New York 13753. The price is \$9, plus \$2 for postage and handling.*

Situated on the western edge of the Catskills at the northern reaches of the Appalachians, Delaware County, New York, has been home to a number of quilting groups since the nineteenth century. In October 1861, for example, Rosella Frisbee of Delhi recorded in her diary that she had finished taking "subscriptions" for a quilt for Elder Reynold's wife and had invited quilters to work on it. This practice of subscription, or paying to have one's name on a quilt, has continued in the twentieth century. In 1974, the Meridale Presbyterian Ladies Aid Society embroidered names on a quilt top for one dollar each and then drew names to determine the winner. The women's Missionary Society of the North Kortright Presbyterian Church, organized in 1891, made tacked or tied quilts every year to send to missions, to sell at home, or to keep on hand for people whose homes had been destroyed by fire.

In Delaware County, as elsewhere, the 1976 Bicentennial celebration sparked renewed interest in quilting and other traditional arts associated with early American life. Women who shared a common interest in quilts and quilting formed groups or guilds for the purpose of learning more about quilts and foster-

ing an appreciation for quilting as an art form. In contrast to the church-affiliated women's societies of the past, these independent organizations focus exclusively on quilts and quilting, as indicated by the names chosen for the groups: Yesteryear Quilters, Sidney Piecemakers, Catskill Mountain Quilters Guild.

The Delaware County Town and Country Quilters is one example. It formed shortly after the Bicentennial when Madeline Sanford, who learned to quilt at age nine, taught a series of classes at the Delaware County Historical Association. As a group, the women have made quilts to raffle, wall hangings for the county infirmary, and blocks for each other's quilts, besides sponsoring a popular quilt show every other year. Since its formation, it has become increasingly more organized. In 1988, the group instituted annual dues, adopted insignia for quilt pins, and began publishing a newsletter for members. Membership has grown to approximately twenty-five, too large to comfortably meet in homes, so the group now meets twice a month at St. John's Episcopal Church in Delhi.

Quilting for these women is a form of social and artistic expression, something done in addition to housekeeping work rather than as part of it. Young girls today are unlikely to learn quilting as one of the domestic skills they need for adult life. So many women take up quilting for the first time as adults, learning from neighbors, relatives, classes, and groups, and picking up information from magazines, books, and quilt shows.

Delaware County and the entire Catskill region are undergoing rapid development as urban dwellers seek weekend retreats and retirement homes, and quilting groups offer an opportunity for newcomers to become part of community life. Most of the quilt groups now include both women who have lived in the area all their lives and women who have moved there only recently. A shared interest in quilting and a need for

community bring the women together. When Barbara Rosato comes upstate from Long Island each year from April to November, she meets with the Roxbury Quilters. By purchasing tickets for quilt raffles to benefit local organizations such as arts groups, libraries, hospitals, churches, and recreation clubs, weekend visitors and part-time residents are able to participate to some extent in the community. The winner of a raffle describes her quilt as "a real treasure" and feels a connection with the Roxbury Quilters who made it.

In a survey of quilting group members from Delaware, Otsego, and Ulster counties, a majority of women said that belonging to a quilt group was important to them because of the friendship and companionship they shared with other members. One woman wrote that belonging to a quilting group was "a very real part of my life. I belong to two groups and I am heartbroken when I must miss a single meeting. I learn so much each time I attend and cherish the friendships."

For many women, quilting is also a creative response to new or changed circumstances such as retirement and the free time it brings. One woman, unable to return to work after surgery, decided that it was time to do what she really wanted to do and made her first quilt. Ruth Morenus, who belongs to three quilt-related groups, joked that "old age" prompted her to take up quilting as physical therapy. She commented, "If you don't quilt a little every day, your hands get stiff." For some women, quilting is also emotional therapy. Longtime quiltmaker Marjorie Blade explained, "Quilting just calms me right down. If I have any kind of problem, I just go away and do my quilting. Seems like everything evens out when you quilt. I love my quilting."

For women facing personal changes in their lives, quilting is often a source of comfort and satisfaction and a way of coping with loss. After her

husband died, Doris Bennett, a retired teacher, was faced with "trying to fill in time." Quilting with the Franklin Methodist Quilters fills in one day a week for her. For another woman, who cares for her elderly mother, "[Quilting with the group] is my two hours a week away from home." Members find models in the group both in the quilts themselves and in other members who have faced similar life situations and are able to offer understanding and support. In the context of the meetings, they are free to discuss a range of topics that reflect their political, economic, social, and personal concerns.

Being able to see others' work is part of what draws many quilters to groups, where women may share their latest quilting projects, either as finished products or as works-in-progress, exchanging advice about colors, matching or contrasting borders, backings and bindings, arrangement of blocks in a quilt top, selection of quilting designs, and technical

details, such as joining points, lining up pieces, or mitering corners. Marilyn Guy, of the Town and Country Quilters, comments, "If you go to a quilting meeting and there are six people there, you'll get six opinions. You just weigh them all and make your own decision."

Group projects call for shared decision-making and consensus on the part of members. Everyone's opinion is considered though novices usually defer to the more experienced quiltmakers. As Marjorie Slade explains, "One person in the group would never take all the credit for anything. That's the way we feel about it. We all work on things." Overall, the groups emphasize cooperation. Members of a group may go together to shop for fabric to be used on individual and joint projects. Once the blocks are made for a quilt top, members gather around to decide upon the best arrangement. Even if the quiltmakers are using a pattern or picture from a magazine as a guide, they rarely fol-

low it exactly. The women vary colors and patterns to fit their own preferences. They may spend several meetings talking over their options in a group project, rearranging blocks in different combinations before settling on the best one.

There is an element of old-fashioned altruism at work in some quilt groups. The Franklin Methodist Quilters, founded about fifteen years ago, makes quilts to sell and donates the proceeds to their church. They remain separate from other women's associations in the church, so that they can pick the projects they wish to support: roof repair, cleaning and restoration of stained glass windows, or the purchase of new choir robes. Because the group is quiet about its donations, many congregation members are unaware of its support of church projects, and one woman refers to the group as "sidekickers" because of their independent nature.

While some women in the quilt groups make quilts for sale, most do



The Franklin Methodist Quilters stitch a basket quilt for one of their members. *Photo by Drew Harty, courtesy of the Delaware County Historical Association*

not. Instead, they make quilts for family, friends, and for themselves. Survey respondents from the three-county region who sell quilts reported that annual income derived from quilt-making ranged from less than a hundred to as much as three thousand dollars. As one quilter commented, "You should have asked us how much we spend on quiltmaking, not how much we make." Clearly, earnings from quiltmaking are minimal and not the motivating force for these women.

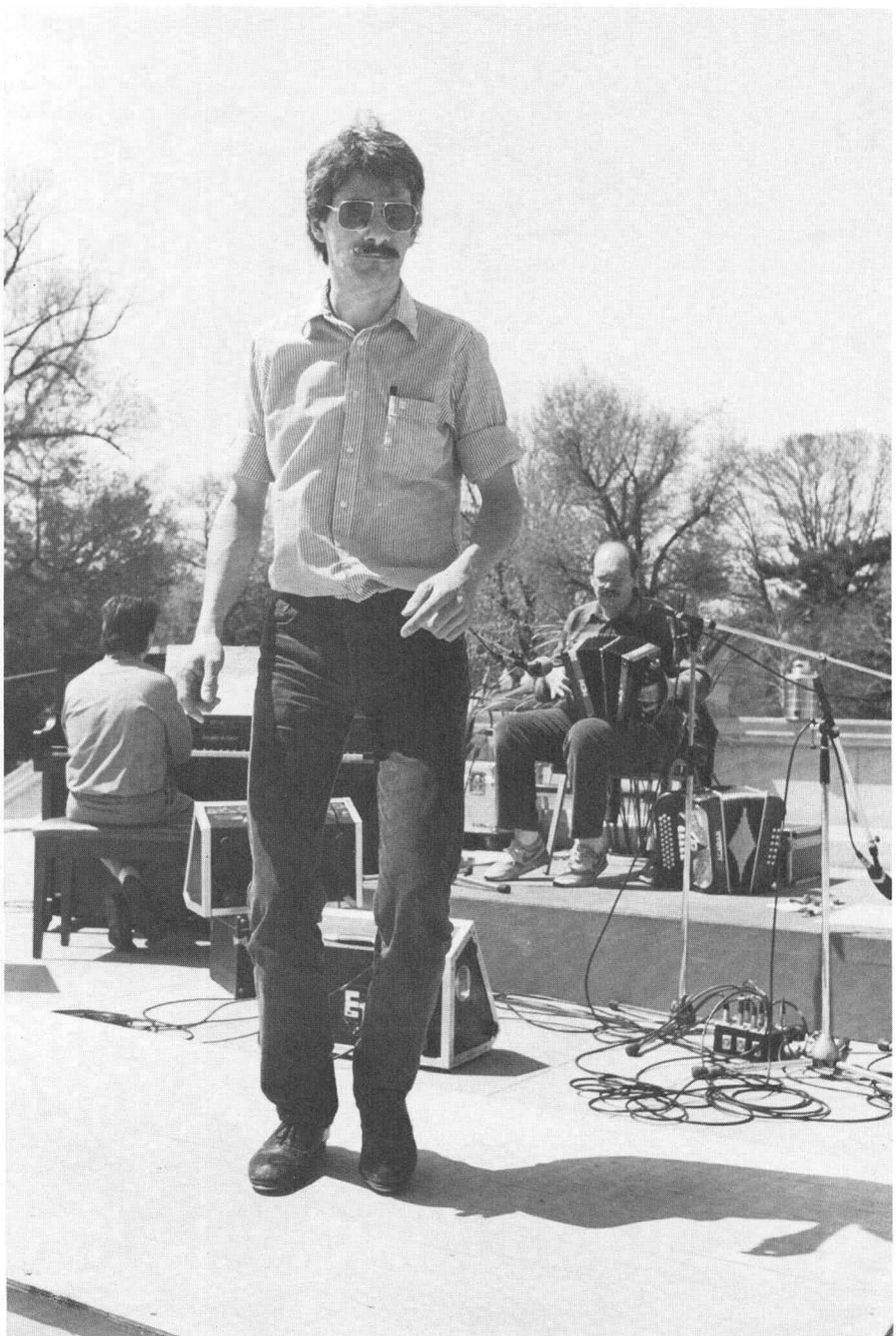
In a time of increased opportunities for women, why do so many turn to an activity long associated with domesticity? The answer may have to do with the ways quiltmaking groups are able to adapt traditional elements while simultaneously incorporating nontraditional ones. Through quiltmaking, women feel connected to women of the past and with other women across the country and even around the world who share a common interest.

But quiltmaking is also a part of a contemporary movement that has drawn attention in popular, academic, artistic, and feminist circles. Quilts have become symbols of women's work and art that both challenge and reaffirm traditional values. When women are questioning old assumptions about their roles and identities, participating in a quilting group offers creative opportunities and new social networks. The groups are one response to a need for a sense of community and intergenerational relationship with other women at a time of social and economic change when families are often scattered. In the quilting groups, women have created flexible structures that enable them to meet a variety of needs. In creating quilts, the women, individually and cooperatively, work to meet artistic and social needs, balancing individual self-expression and social relationships. One quilter summed it up in these words: "Belonging to a group spurs you on to do more and more. You get to see what everyone is doing and it introduces you to areas that you may not think of. Everyone is helpful and encouraging and warm and kind. When you hit a snag and can't create anything—a quilt group is just what you need." □

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## QUEBEC TRADITIONAL MUSIC OPENS 1989 SUMMER CONCERT SERIES

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**Marcel Messervier, Jr. (piano), Norman Legault (step dancer), and Raynald Ouellet (button accordion) perform on the Library's Neptune Plaza, April 20, 1989. Photo by Reid Baker**

On April 20, in the opening program of the Folklife Center's 1989 Neptune Plaza Concert Series, Norman

Legault charmed a Library of Congress audience with his display of *la gigue*, a form of solo step dancing dis-

tinctive to Quebec, Canada. He was accompanied by Raynald Ouellet, who played the button accordion, and Marcel Messervier, Jr., on piano. The three are not an established group but play together on occasion, and the concert was arranged through the auspices of their friend, Canadian folklorist Lisa Orenstein.

Solo step dancing involves a combination of rhythm, dance movements, and traditional dance tunes. As the dancer shifts his weight onto one leg, the other leg is free to gesture, usually with a bent knee, in a front, back, side, or diagonal direction. Patterns of heel and toe tapping and shuffling add percussive accompaniment to the melodic rhythms of the music. These percussive patterns are often emphasized by metal taps on the sole of the dancer's shoes. *La gigue* is not a social dance performed by partners but rather a solo form through which a *giguer* can exhibit his or her skill and artistry.

Neptune Plaza Concerts, presented by the American Folklife Center in cooperation with the National Council for the Traditional Arts, began in 1977. Concerts are held in front of the Library of Congress, on the Neptune Plaza, on the third Thursday of each month between April and October, from 12 noon until 1:30 P.M. Concerts are broadcast live on WAMU, 88 FIVE FM. This year's series also includes:

May 18: Eddie Blazonczyk and the Versatones, Chicago-style polka music from Chicago, Illinois

June 15: Greg Hooven and the Back Step Band, music of the Blue Ridge Mountains

July 20: Hita Brata Roy and Ganga, music from the foothills of the Himalayas

August 17: The Nashville Bluegrass Band, from Nashville, Tennessee

September 21: Ivan Questa Y Sus Vallenatos Autenticos, music from Colombia (in honor of National Hispanic Heritage Week)

October 19: Black gospel from Washington, D.C., the traditional closing concert in the Neptune Plaza series □



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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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I want to comment on Margy McClain's piece about Polish Saturday schools, excerpted in the winter newsletter (*Folklife Center News* 11, no. 1, winter 1989, page 1). It was the following sentence, referring to the history of the Polish people, which brought me up short: "Language and the Roman Catholic religion, rather than nationality, marked the Polish people." To anyone who remembers that three million Polish Jews died in the Holocaust, this sentence hits with quite a thud. It casually reiterates the idea behind the anti-Semitic policies of the interwar Polish government—a Jew is not a Pole. McClain persists in ignoring the Polish Jews when she talks about the D.P. camps after World War II. She says, for example, that Polish D.P.'s settled in the U.S., England, and Canada, where they founded Polish Saturday schools. I believe that there were on the order of two hundred thousand Polish Jews in D.P. camps after the war. Many of them settled here. The majority settled in Israel. The Polish Jews were displaced persons because Polish Christians had made life hazardous for them. One hundred fifty thousand Polish Jews returned from the Soviet Union after the war. Almost all of them went on to D.P. camps in Germany because of anti-Semitic manifestations such as the Kielce massacre, in which forty-one Jews were killed.

These omissions make the article's tone—an upbeat defense of ethnic pride—especially jarring. . . . [The experience of the Polish Jews], after all, illustrates the darker aspects of national enthusiasm.

Sincerely yours,  
Bill Smock  
Berkeley, California

### *Margy McClain replies:*

My article in *Folklife Center News* is an excerpt from a longer essay on Polish Saturday Schools in Chicago,

schools that were part of the American Folklife Center's 1982 Ethnic Heritage and Language Schools Project. The essay clearly focuses on the experience of Polish Christians in Chicago and their efforts through a consortium of Saturday schools to teach Polish language and history to their young people.

In Chicago, Polish Jews and Polish Christians established separate American ethnic communities. Turn-of-the-century Poles came to this country from three separate countries: Russia, Prussia, and Austria. Poland was not a nation-state. These immigrants created community organizations based on shared language, religion, and regional origin. My article looks specifically at the experience of Polish Christians. Relationships that formed among Polish Christian educators in D.P. camps after World War II later evolved into the formal Saturday schools in Chicago and other areas of resettlement.

For more information on the contemporary Jewish community and Polonia in Chicago, readers should consult my recent book, *A Feeling for Life: Cultural Identity, Community and the Arts* (Chicago: An Urban Traditions Publication, 1988), and particularly the chapters titled "Continuity and Renewal in Jewish Chicago" and "Polonia Is like a Bouquet of Flowers."

*Margy McClain is director of Urban Traditions, a Chicago-based organization that promotes and supports ethnic and traditional arts.*

### *Alan Jabbour replies:*

Bill Smock's letter raises an important array of cultural issues. I am sure Margy McClain did not intend to imply that nationhood should be defined as coterminous with ethnicity. Indeed, in the Polish example, she points out that the history of nationhood for Poland has been tenuous, and that most Polish immigrants have

defined themselves "by language, ethnicity, regional origin, and religion." But the conflation of nationhood and national governance with ethnic, religious, regional, or linguistic cultural identity has certainly been one of the great political problems of the modern world.

In America, we have by no means avoided ethnic, regional, religious, and linguistic conflict, and we have treated certain groups in a manner that can only be described as minority status. On the other hand—whether because of the good fortune of our history or because of the wisdom of our founders—we have not equated national identity with any of the other cultural categories. What is more, even our states are culturally pluralistic; that is, they do not correspond to specific ethnic or regional boundaries. Many of our cognoscenti have lamented this pluralistic fabric of American political units, wishing for states that correspond to "rational" regional or ethnic units. But an untidy pluralism begins to look more and more attractive when compared, say, to the current situation in Bulgaria, where ethnic Turks have undergone forced name changes (to "Bulgarian" names) and other cultural indignities, and now are being expelled to neighboring Turkey. Such distressing contemporary events hark back to the beginning of the modern era in Europe—to 1492, in fact, when Columbus's voyage of discovery coincided with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain.

As a contribution to the observance of the Columbian Quincentenary (announced elsewhere in these pages) the Folklife Center plans a series of symposia exploring cultural pluralism and American creativity, during which we expect to pay close attention to the categories of cultural identity and the ways they interrelate in America and the New World. That will give us an opportunity to examine in sober detail the issues Bill Smock raises here.

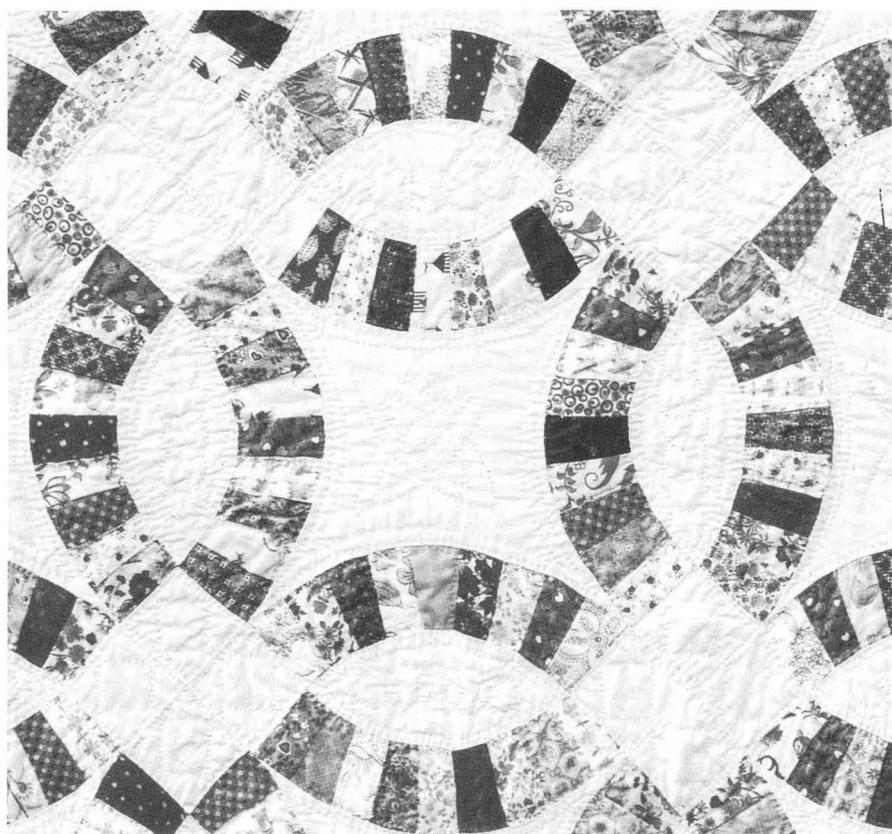
## Center Sponsors Briefing on Folklife Programs

On February 28, 1989, the Folklife Center conducted a briefing to explain national, state, and local folklife programs to new congressional representatives and their staff. Opening remarks were presented by the Honorable Lindy Boggs, congresswoman from Louisiana (right), who spoke of her personal commitment to folklife. Alan Jabbour spoke on the programs of the American Folklife Center, and other federal agencies were represented by Bess Lomax Hawes, Folk Arts Programs, the National Endowment for the Arts; Wilsonia Cherry, Division of General Programs, the National Endowment for the Humanities; and Richard Kurin, Office of Folklife Programs, the Smithsonian Institution.



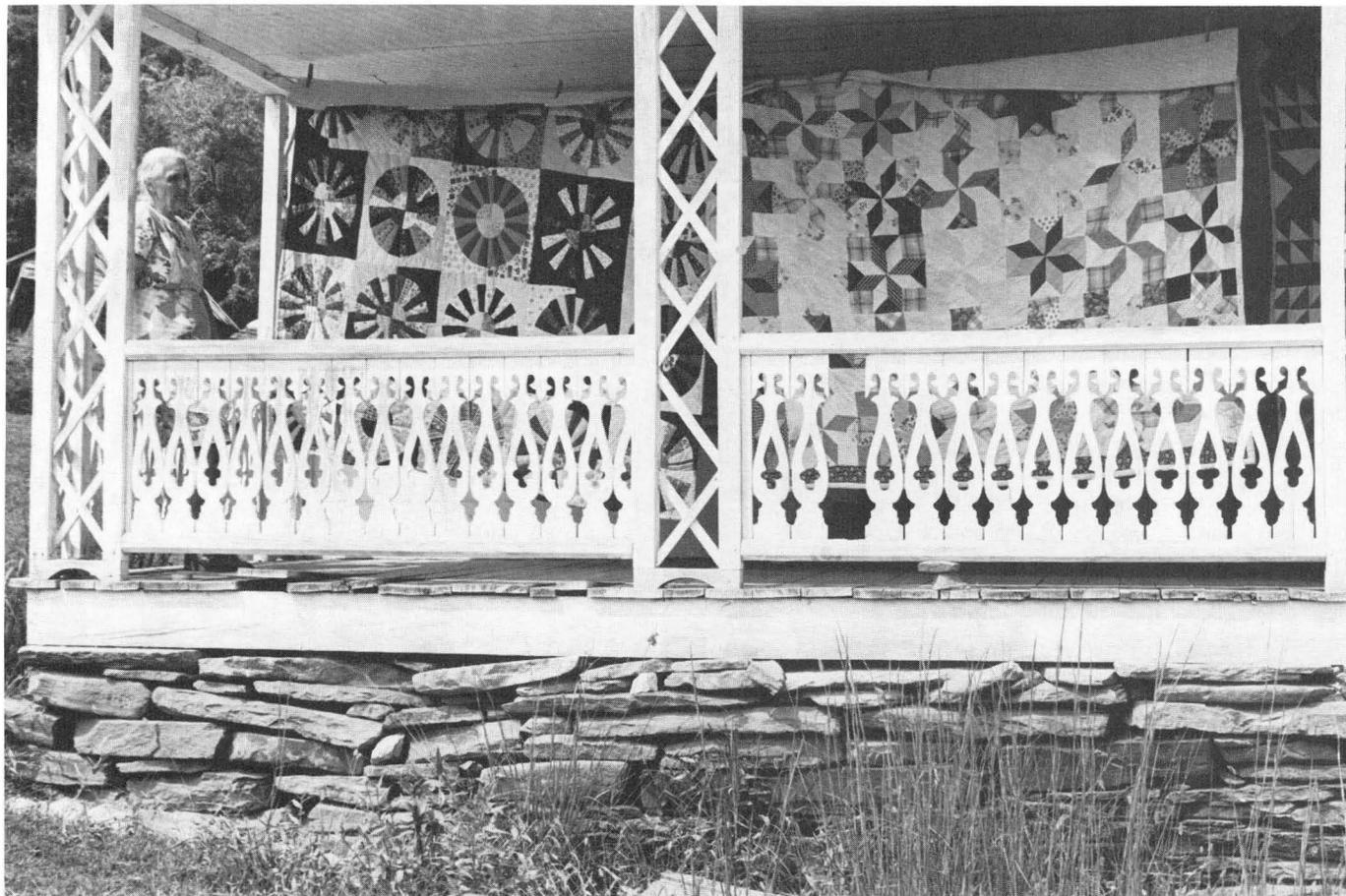
## Note Cards Feature Quilting Motif

Two quilts documented in Folklife Center collections as part of the Blue Ridge Parkway Folklife Project are featured on note cards available from the Library's Sales Shop. There are twenty full-color cards in each box, ten of the Double Wedding Ring Quilt, shown here, and ten of the Flower Basket Quilt. The cards are available from the Library of Congress, Sales Shop, Washington, D.C. 20540. The price for each box is \$11.50, plus \$3.50 for postage and handling. Checks made payable to the American Folklife Center must accompany orders.



### Correction:

In the winter 1989 issue (volume 10, no. 1), photographs of the Nordic customs winter workshop on pages 5-8 and of the Pankake program on page 12 were by Jim Higgins.



Carrie Severt displays her wheel and eight-pointed star quilts on the porch of her Alleghany County, Virginia, farmhouse, 1978. A report on plain and fancy quilting begins on page 7. (2-20257-27A) Photo by Geraldine Johnson for the Blue Ridge Parkway Folklife Project

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