

Celebrating New Hampshire's Stories

Lynn Martin and Betty Belanus

Everyone in New Hampshire has a story to tell. When people think of a “storyteller,” they often think of a polished performer with a repertoire of time-honored recitations, legends of the past, or tales of great imagination. In New Hampshire, storytellers are often everyday people with a gift for language and a wealth of human experiences. They come from every walk of life — the logger down the road, the fellow you go snowmobiling with on the weekends, your co-worker at the woolen mill, or someone whose music you dance to at the town hall.

During the research for New Hampshire's presentation at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, fieldworkers interviewed over 450 individuals practicing a variety of traditional musical forms, crafts, and cooking and occupational skills. All of them shared stories that warmed the heart — stories with lessons about the environment, the way the past teaches us about the future, and the importance of community values. The stories reflect the strong sense of individualism in New Hampshire as well as people's desire to work together toward a common goal.

These stories are often full of colorful characters and people who helped shape the personality of a town or region. They paint pictures of daily life at home and at work — memorable moments with family and friends, dangerous encounters, or funny episodes. These stories are part of a larger heritage of language, poetry, and publishing much cherished in New Hampshire. The love of English is echoed



Hugh Fifield from Canterbury poses outside his barn with his draft horse harness.

Photo by Lynn Martin

in the writings of New England-born writers such as Daniel Webster, who crafted *Webster's Dictionary*; Sarah Josepha Hale, who wrote *Mary Had a Little Lamb* and was the editor for the first woman's magazine from 1828 to 1836; New Hampshire's contemporary poet laureate Donald Hall and past laureate Jane Kenyon. Visiting writers have found inspiration in the abundance of natural resources in New Hampshire. Robert Frost wrote a wealth of poems celebrating the state. Thornton Wilder wrote the play *Our Town* based on the picturesque town of Peterborough, which is the home of the MacDowell Colony, a retreat for writers and artists.

The heritage of the spoken word is celebrated in New Hampshire's Festival program, *Celebrating New Hampshire's Stories*, but stories are also told through crafts, recipes, music and dance, and occupational skills. The "Music of New Hampshire" component of the program honors the musical heritage of Yankee, Franco-American, Polish, Scottish, Irish, Jewish, African-American, and Hispanic communities. The "Home, Town, and Community" area focuses on the cultural traditions that define New Hampshire's sense of place. Domestic and religious crafts and the important political heritage of New Hampshire — the community voice of town meeting and the national precedence of the first-in-the-country presidential primary — are explored in this area.

"Ingenuity and Enterprise" examines the inventive nature of industry and small businesses in New Hampshire. The heritage of family-owned and community-based businesses and the way in which fine craftsmen network through guilds are presented. "Seasonal Work and Recreation" explores the cycle of the seasons and the love of the outdoors in New Hampshire, giving rise to the work culture and traditional crafts of recreation. "Farm, Forest, Mountain, and Sea" takes a look at the

occupations that have emerged from the state's diverse natural resources.

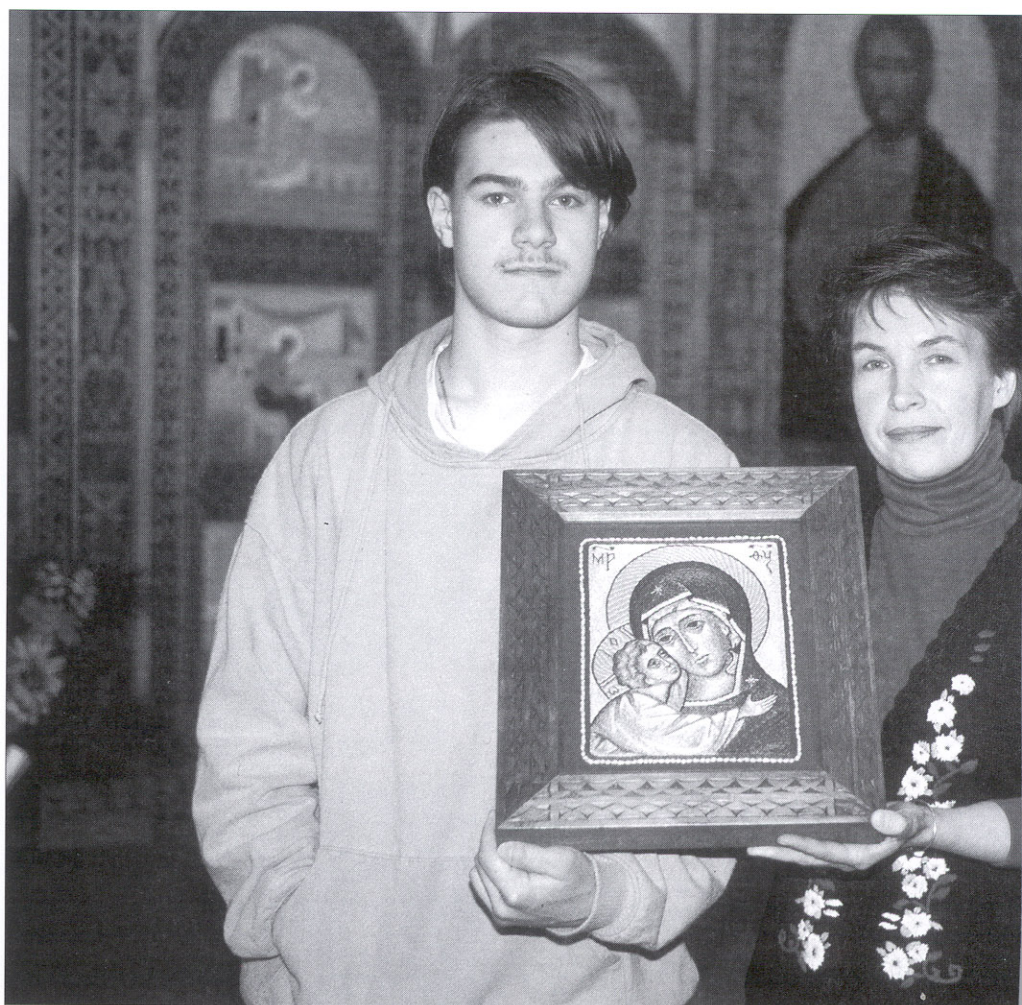
These stories of some of the participants in each of these areas will tell you something about New Hampshire, its spirit, and its people.

HUGH FIFIELD

Hugh Fifield of Canterbury was inter-

the township of Canterbury to his independent logging operation run with draft horses. Today, Hugh keeps busy logging in the woods, collecting maple sap, giving hay rides for local community groups, caring for his animals, and visiting with his large family.

Hugh's stories often feature his dry sense of humor and teasing nature. One



viewed by folklorist Jill Linzee for a project initiated by the Vermont Folklife Center on New England storytelling, which paralleled our fieldwork efforts in New Hampshire. She was taken by his "quintessential Yankee" nature as he regaled her with tales of interesting characters he had met and things he had done in his life.

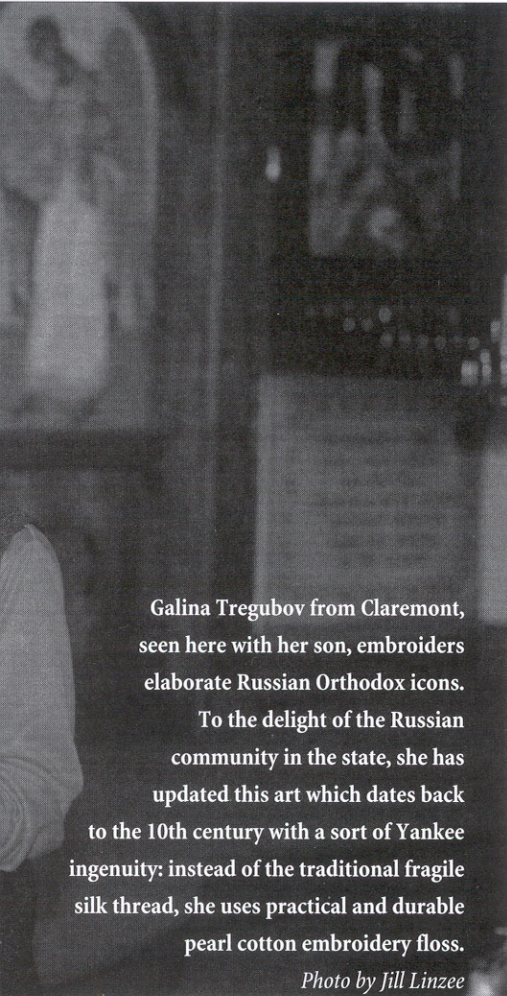
Hugh's rugged hands tell the story of a man who has worked outdoors his entire life — from years on the road crew for

of his favorite jokes pokes gentle fun at his wife Dolores, who was a "city girl" when they married and didn't even know how to light a wood fire for heat and cooking. He related the following incident from Canterbury Town Meeting during his days as town road agent:

You got axes to grind, that's the place to do it. And, usually, we got to arguing over something. The budget ran from January first to January first, a

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year, so in the fall, like November and December, you didn't know whether it was going to snow three feet or not get any snow, so you had to kind of watch, save money in your budget. If it worked out, I might have three or four thousand dollars left in my budget. I had this guy get up, and he couldn't figure out why I had money



Galina Tregubov from Claremont, seen here with her son, embroiders elaborate Russian Orthodox icons.

To the delight of the Russian community in the state, she has updated this art which dates back to the 10th century with a sort of Yankee ingenuity: instead of the traditional fragile silk thread, she uses practical and durable pearl cotton embroidery floss.

Photo by Jill Linzee

left in the budget, and he figured I didn't do my job — his road could've used that three thousand dollars. So, I had to get up and tell him, "We've got to spend what we got, we can't spend what we ain't got." (Pause) But, that was usually a lawyer, that got up and did that.

PAUL DOHERTY

Paul Doherty grew up in southwestern New Hampshire, but his heart always belonged to the northern woods. As a lad, he learned to hunt and fish from several local outdoorsmen, who were also notorious characters. For many years, he served as a state conservation officer in the northern district of the state, and settled in Gorham. His fascination with the newfangled "snow machine" — later known as the snowmobile — led him to head the Bureau of Off-Highway Vehicles.

Throughout his career, he sought out old-timers and colorful individuals, listening to their stories and absorbing their wisdom. Today, at 80, he still enjoys the North Woods in all seasons and still has an ear for a good story. Paul was interviewed twice during our documentation process, once by folklorist Kate Dodge, who researched snowmobiling traditions, and once by folklorist Jessica Payne for the storytelling project. But it is his self-published book, *Smoke from a Thousand Campfires*, that yielded the following humorous tale:

I have always liked the story about the man who hunted long and hard but never saw a deer. He came home one afternoon and saw a freshly dressed out doe hanging in the garage. Rushing in the house, he demanded an explanation from his wife. "Where did that deer come from?" he sputtered. "Well, I'll tell you," she said, "every year you go hunting, you spend lots of money on red outfits, ammunition, guns and a license. Today I went to town shopping and that deer ran out in the road and I hit it. I didn't do any damage to the car, but I killed the deer. The nice Game Warden came along, dressed it out, hauled it home, and hung it for me. I didn't even need a gun or license to serve you liver and onions for supper."

COMMUNITY PROJECTS: NEWPORT AND PORTSMOUTH

During the research phase for the Festival, the curators became aware of community projects that involved the creative and artistic interpretation of oral histories and folklore. A multifaceted project in Newport, a former textile mill town and a center for the precision machine tool industry, turned oral history into poetry with the help of poet Verandah Porche. During the Portsmouth Shipyard Project, initiated by the Portsmouth Music Hall, workers at the shipyard, where submarines are repaired and overhauled, joined the Washington, D.C.-based Liz Lerman Dance Exchange in an interpretation of their occupational folklore and history. Both projects involved schoolchildren, reinforcing the importance of a connection between the generations. These projects will be part of the "Ingenuity and Enterprise" portion of the Festival program.

The stories collected in Newport, in Porche's words, "make the ancient connection between a text woven of voices and textiles in a town where thousands of hands drove the looms." The community spirit and strong work ethic of Newport were also addressed in an exhibition on the machine tool industry organized by Patryc Wiggins. The following story, collected from Clarice "Babe" Frye for the book *Self-Portraits in Newport*, tells of an earlier time on Sunapee Street, one of the main streets through town:

I was three years old when we moved to Sunapee Street. O, I tell you, that was something else again. When my father and mother had to go out and leave us kids, all the neighbors took care of us and made sure we behaved ourselves. We had all ethnic groups, Greeks, Finnish, Polish, and there were two families who didn't know who they were, Americans, I guess. Most of the kids at dusk would come outside

our house and play games, Hide and Seek, and stuff like that, Giant Steps. Most everybody spoke English. If they got mad at us, they could swear at us in their language, and it wouldn't make a difference.

DUDLEY LAUFMAN AND BOB MCQUILLEN

Two of the most active individuals in traditional social dancing in New Hampshire are Dudley Laufman and Bob McQuillen. Both have been playing music in the state for over 50 years. Dudley was born in Newton, Massachusetts, in 1931 and came to New Hampshire in 1947 to work at Mistwold Dairy Farm, Fremont, where he was

shared this one about the first time he met Bob McQuillen:

I went to Norfolk County Agricultural School and went to the New England Folk Festival back in the days when it was held on the fifth floor of the YWCA on Clarendon Street in Boston. Bob McQuillen had come down from Dublin; in fact, in those days he was living in New Boston. He was all dressed in white and he had a great big old Wurlitzer accordion.

Back in those days Bob's hair was blacker than it is now, but it was still streaked with gray, and he was only in his 20s. He was an ex-Marine, he had tattoos on his biceps, and he was

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exposed to New Hampshire traditional dances. Many musicians got their start in Dudley's first group, called The Canterbury Country Dance Orchestra. Along with his partner Jacqueline, Dudley focuses on bringing back many of what he refers to as New England barn dances.

Bob McQuillen was born in Peterborough, New Hampshire. Known for his steady, rhythmic piano playing, he is also a prolific composer of tunes, 1,003 of which appear in a series of self-published tune books called *Bob's Notebooks*. His first New Hampshire-based group was called New England Tradition. Today he plays with Deanna Stiles and Jane Orzechowski in a group called Old New England.

In such a small state, it is inevitable that two such musical giants would have great stories about their times together. At a recent recording session Dudley

a big fellar, and he made a lot of noise. Not only with his accordion, but he whooped and he hollered, and everybody loved him.

When the festival was over, we all trooped down the stairs, and Bob was leading, and he had his accordion, and he was sort of playing and whistling, and we went right out onto the street. Our car was parked up on the right, and evidently Bob's truck was out on the left. And we went out the door, and my mother, my father, my sister, and myself — we all automatically just followed Bob right on down the street — forgetting that our car was up the other side. That was the effect that he had on me as a little kid.

We hope that, like the mesmerizing effect Bob McQuillen's music had on

Dudley Laufman, the stories that the New Hampshire participants have to share at the Festival will captivate visitors with their honesty, wit, and wisdom.

Suggested Reading

Doherty, Paul T. 1992. *Smoke from a Thousand Campfires*. Berlin, N.H.: Smith & Town Printers.

"The Music Hall's Shipyard Project." 1996. Portsmouth, N.H. Program book with historic photos, stories, and interviews.

Porche, Veranda. 1998. *SPIN (Self-Portraits in Newport)*. Published as part of the New England Arts Trust Congress IV, Newport, N.H.

Information about the Vermont Folklife Center's New England Storytelling Project can be obtained by calling the Center at (802) 338-2694.

Betty J. Belanus is an education specialist at the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage and has been working on the Festival since 1986. The New Hampshire program is the third program she has co-curated; she went solo on two others.

Lynn Martin is traditional arts coordinator for the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts in Concord. She formerly held a similar position in Hawai'i for 15 years and has published numerous articles, exhibition catalogs, and audio recordings on traditional culture. Despite the drastic change in weather, she has enjoyed learning about the traditions of her adopted state during this project.