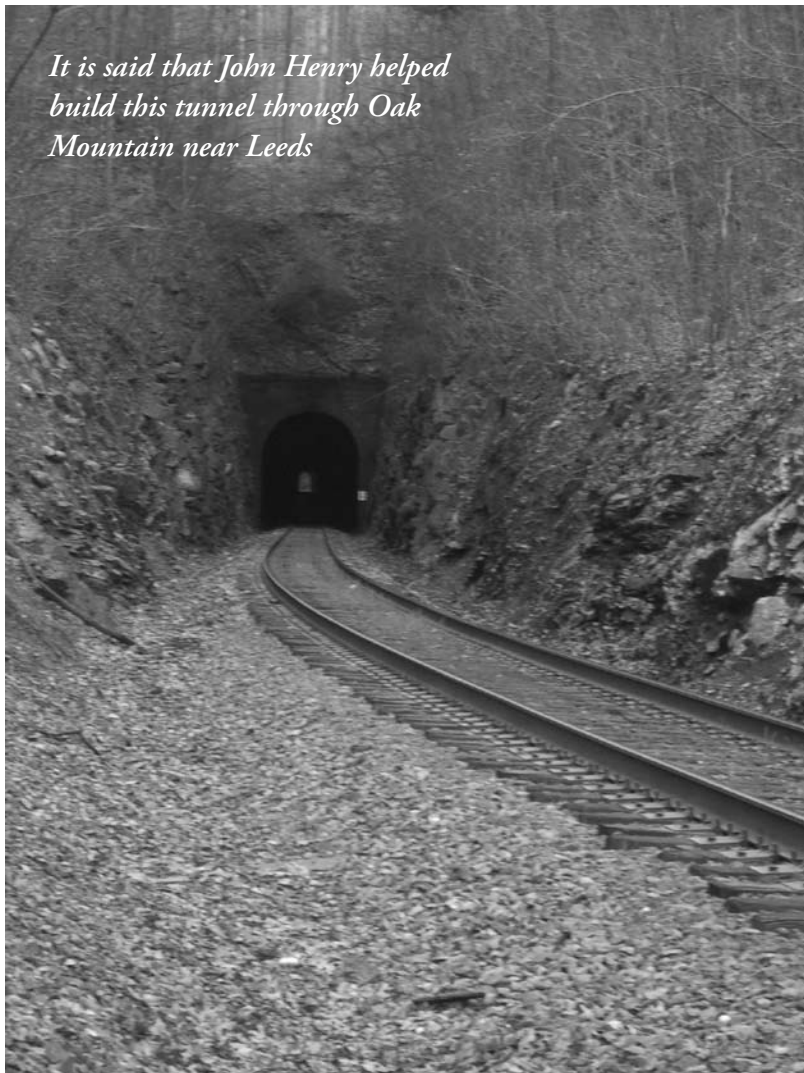


*It is said that John Henry helped
build this tunnel through Oak
Mountain near Leeds*



SUMMER 2007

AFA Celebrates John Henry Legend September 15 in Leeds

Everyone knows that John Henry, the legendary steel-driving man, died with a hammer in his hand. Some people believe the story is a myth; others believe that John Henry was an actual person who died after winning a competition with a steam drill. Among the latter are people who know just where he died. It has been said that sites in five states claim that distinction. Leeds, Alabama, with the nearby community of Dunnavant, is one of them. The City of Leeds has proclaimed the third Saturday in September to be a day honoring John Henry, and the Alabama Folklife Association will hold its annual gathering in conjunction with this celebration.

On September 15, AFA, the Leeds Historical Society and the Leeds Arts Council will present "John Henry in Leeds: Celebrating a Local Legend."

This day-long program will feature talks by scholars as well as a panel of area residents who have grown up hearing the John Henry legend. A grant from the Alabama Humanities

Foundation is making the program possible.

The AFA's interest in the John Henry legend began when John Garst, a chemistry professor at the University of Georgia, submitted a thoroughly researched and fascinating article to our journal, *Tributaries* (Vol. 5, 2002). Garst asserted that John Henry Dabney, a former slave from Crystal Springs, Mississippi, worked on the C&W railroad tunnels through Oak and Coosa mountains and died there, possibly on September 20, 1887, or another date in 1887-88. As a featured speaker at the upcoming event, Garst will explain the evidence which led to this conclusion. Scott R. Nelson, a history professor at the College of William and Mary and author of *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, the Untold Story of an American Legend*, will also speak. His appearance is made possible by New College of the University of Alabama.

Long before Garst began his research that led him to Leeds, there were people in the area who had heard stories of John Henry working on the tunnels. Community Scholars Evan Haarbauer and Susan Thomas and AFA Director, Joyce Cauten have interviewed citizens who have John Henry stories to tell. Susan Thomas has been asked to assemble a panel of these informants for the program.

"John Henry in Leeds" is still in the planning stages but a brochure with full details about the program will be sent to AFA members early in August. Information will also be available at www.alabamafolklife.org.

Save the date and spread the word!

AFA Appreciates Support from NEA, ASCA, and You

We were extremely pleased to receive notice of a \$25,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts recently. This grant provides operating support for the organization for two years, mainly for the executive director's salary and travel expenses.

The grants process for the NEA is very competitive and it speaks well of our organization that we received one.

The AFA also is grateful for annual operating support granted by the Alabama State Council on the Arts. With frugal management by our board and executive director, funding from these two agencies covers most of our administrative costs; thus we are able to devote the contributions of our members and corporate sponsors to projects that document and present Alabama folk culture.

Recent projects such as John Bealle's song-history research for the Bullfrog website and Susan Thomas's fieldwork in the Leeds area in preparation for "John Henry in Leeds" were funded by member dues and sponsor contributions.

ACSI Alert!

The Alabama Community Scholars Institute will take place in Mobile at the Brookley Center (formerly Brookley Field) on June 20–29, 2008. There we will train 25 people to do folklore fieldwork in their own communities. Tuition, room and board will be free for those selected.

If you are interested in attending or know other people ages 18 and up who want to research aspects of Alabama folk culture, please let us know so that we can send more information about it. To do so, please email joycecauthen@bellsouth.net or call 205-822-0505.

ACTC Activities Report

The Alabama Center for Traditional Culture is a division of the Alabama State Council on the Arts which gives great support to the AFA. Below is a report from its director, Joey Brackner:

- The Center staff has been assisting editors for the *New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* and the online *Encyclopedia of Alabama* in writing entries and suggesting various writers for other entries. The *Encyclopedia of Alabama* is scheduled to launch in February or March of 2008 with more than 600 entries.
- We have two summer interns. Betty Ann Lloyd, a Huntsville native, from Western Kentucky University, will work with us from June 4 to August 10. Kateryna Pashkovska, will be here June 10–July 11. She is a student from the Ukraine, at Utah State University on a Fulbright grant. They will observe our grants process, produce a radio show, do fieldwork, help host our July singing, digitize older fieldwork, and help prepare a NEA heritage award nomination. They will also attend Camp Fasola, a week-long Sacred Harp singing school near Anniston in July.
- You may have recently received our NEA-funded report called *Alabama Al Dia: A Report on Hispanic Cultures in Alabama*. The report serves as an overview of Hispanic traditions for Alabama arts organizations that want to include this portion of their community in their programs. Please let us know if you need more copies of the report.
- Anne Kimzey is currently working on an exhibit and booklet celebrating the 22 years of ASCA's Folk Arts Apprenticeship program. We are working with a \$20,000 NEA grant and some ASCA money. The Alabama Folklife Association is helping with this project. The exhibit, which will present selected artists and their work, will open November 16 at ASCA and will tour to other locations during the spring of 2008. The book will have a section that lists every grantee in the history of the program. Mark Gooch is doing photography for the project and Steve Grauberger will produce a CD sampler of recordings by traditional musicians who have participated in the program.
- Jackie Ely continues to be the Center's liaison with the Alabama Folklife Association, our statewide partner in researching and presenting Alabama traditional arts.



Bullfrog Lives! New Website Expands Folksong Education

Producing *Bullfrog Jumped: Children's Folksongs from the Byron Arnold Collection* was just the first in a series of activities the AFA is doing to make the songs available to children, families, and teachers today.

We have recently built "Bullfrog World" at www.alabamafolklife.org. When a visitor clicks the Bullfrog Jumped button at the site they are offered a rich array of material about the songs and the collection. One section, researched, written, and designed by John Bealle, is a biography of Byron Arnold which, among other things, documents the trips he made crisscrossing the state in the summers of 1945–47 to preserve as many old folk songs as he could.

Bealle also searched for information about each song and created our "song history" section. There one can learn that "The Old Gray Goose" may have been derived from an air composed for a 1752 opera by the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and that "It Ain't Going to

Rain No More" is not a folk song, but one composed and recorded by Wendall Hall in 1923. There are hundreds of fascinating facts in this section.

Central to the website is the learning guide developed by Paddy Bowman and Marsha Weiner. This extensive section is designed to help teachers incorporate the songs on *Bullfrog Jumped* into their classes, pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. It suggests imaginative activities that relate the songs to their social studies, math, physical education, art, and language classes. Teachers who do not have the CD can download specific songs from the site to use with these lessons.

One of the best things about having a website is the ability it gives the AFA to add more information as we find it. Recently Emily Mims of the Atmore Chamber of Commerce sent us a photo of one of the singers on the CD. Taken in 1932, it shows Mrs. Jane Peavy at the back of the classroom where her students are learning about spinning and weav-

ing. We added this to a section called "Bullfrog News," which we intend to update often.

Graphic designer Pilar Taylor made the site attractive and functional. Two consultants, music teacher Linda McAllister of Huntsville and storyteller Wanda Johnson of Mobile, gave suggestions for improvement from the educator's viewpoint. A generous \$5,000 grant from the Alabama State Council on the Arts made the project possible. We hope you'll drop by the site and tell teachers and parents about it.

A program which takes songs and stories into five elementary schools across the state in the fall of 2007 is the next activity growing out of *Bullfrog Jumped*. There will more in the next newsletter about that.

Below: Classroom of Mrs. Jane Peavy, Rachel Patterson Elementary School, Atmore, 1931–32



Archive of Alabama Folk Culture Acquires Folk Festival Recordings

In 1989 the Alabama Folklife Association produced the first Alabama Folklife Festival in Birmingham's Linn Park in conjunction with the first City Stages. It gathered in one place musicians, craftspeople and cooks from across the state to celebrate long-held traditions. Many people attending City Stages to hear pop music by the latest groups were surprised to find in a corner of the park performers with deep roots in old-time fiddling, country blues and African-American *a capella* gospel music. Many festival-goers were taken with the purity of the music and the enthusiasm and humbleness of the performers, and



Robert Thomas and Albert Macon and were popular at the festivals until Macon died in 1993. (Photo by Axel Kustner, 1991)

the stage became their favorite at the huge festival.

In 1991, the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, which provided important staffing for the festival, requested that

it be moved to Montgomery. When that happened, City Stages continued the folklife stage in Birmingham under the name of the "Alabama Sampler" which it supported through 2002. Thus, during the four years that the Alabama Folklife Festival was held at Old Alabama Town there were two folk festivals each year.

Whenever and wherever the festival took place, the AFA made sure the musical performances were recorded.

This resulted in more than 200 audio tapes of treasured performers like bluesman Albert Macon, old-time fiddler Ralph Whited, and John Alexander's Sterling Jubilee Gospel Singers of Bessemer, all now deceased. These recordings, plus informational brochures from all the festivals, were stored at the home of AFA Executive Director Joyce Cauthen until June 27 when archivist Trey Bunn of the Archive of Alabama Culture (AAFC) acquired them and ASCA intern Kateryna Pashkovska organized the printed materials. At the Archives they will be transferred to digital media where they can be made accessible to the public while the highly-perishable originals will be preserved in appropriate conditions.

The AAFC was created by the AFA, the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture and the Alabama Department of Archives and History in 2006 to collect and preserve documents and artifacts concerning Alabama folk culture. These organizations hope that individuals with recordings of shape-note and gospel singings, fiddler's conventions, oral history interviews and other aspects of our culture will consider donating them for safekeeping and public accessibility.

Calendar

September 22: Boom Days, Fort Payne

October 6: Tennessee Valley Old-Time Fiddlers Convention, Athens

October 20: Kentuck Festival of the Arts, Northport

Wanda Robertson and Bill Allen staffing the AFA booth at last year's TVOTFC.



You Can Help AFA Meet the Public

You are a member of an elite group of people who know and care about the Alabama Folklife Association and its efforts to document Alabama's folk culture. When the AFA sets its booth up at various events across the state we always meet people who are thrilled to learn about us. Some join the AFA on the spot.

In the calendar above are the places we will be in upcoming months. We hope you'll stop and visit. And we especially hope you'll volunteer to help staff the booth. It's a fun way to get to know other members and we always need your help. If you can volunteer, please email joycecauthen@bellsouth.net or call 205-822-0505.

AFA Appreciates Its Members

We are honored to have your support. Below is a list of all who have joined or renewed since September 2006. We have switched to a new database system and may have a few bugs in the list at this time, which we will correct with your help. If you should be on this list but are not, please let Jackie Ely know by e-mailing her at Jackie.Ely@arts.alabama.gov or calling 334-242-4076, x. 234.

BIRMINGHAM: Al and Gypsy Thomas; Annette Reynolds; Bethanne Hill; Brenda Moore; Carolyn Fritz; Chamsie Phillips, *Patron*; Charlie Hunter; Daniel Wolk; Dianne Baer; Duncan Blair, *Patron*; Gregory Jeane; Janet Bronstein; Jeff & Sherry Loper; Jim Brown; Joan Broerman; June Mays; Ken & P. J. Martin; Marie Cain; Marjorie White, *Patron*; Otto Carter; Paul & Edwina Vahle; Paulette Haywood; Philip Foster; Rachel Turner; Robert Stewart; Russell Chambliss; Sara Bright; Stan Mackin, Jr.; Tatum Preston; Tom & Katherine Diggs

FORT PAYNE: Robert & Susan Hume; Russell Gulley

MONTGOMERY: Debbie Pendleton; Frances Frizzell; James Loeb, *Patron*; Karon Bailey; Micki Beth Stiller, *Patron*; Walter McGriff; Wayne Sabel

NORTHPORT: James Crawford II; Chuck Gerdau; Robert Halli, Jr.; Debbie Bond (for AL Blues Project); Larry Pierson; Ann Bourne

TUSCALOOSA: Ana Self Schuber; Charles Day; Deborah Branyon; Dwight Cammeron; Jim Hall; Michael Mattox; Stacy Morgan, *Patron*; Michael Picone; Steven Yates; Thomas Sawallis

OTHER: A.R. & Tiffany Grenier, Gordo; Adam Boyd, Brooklyn, N.Y.; Aimee Schmidt, Decatur, Ga.; Alan Brown, Meridian, Miss.; Arnold Zwicky, Palo Alto, Calif., *Patron*; Art & Ellen Litman, Culver City, Calif.; Betty Barrett, Lafayette; Bettye Kimbrell, Mount Olive; Bill Aaron, Wetumpka; Billy Nutt, Gulf Shores; Caith Kushner, Jackson Heights, NY; Carole Miller, Leeds; Charles & Cenda Price, Austin, Texas; Charlie Smith, New Haven, Conn.; Chris Beverly, Thomasville; David Bagwell, Point Clear; Deborah Casey, Eufaula; Dee Ledbetter, Crossville; Eila Maddox, Pinson; Fannie Smith, Prattville; Gerald T. McNeill, Hammond, La.;

AFA Board of Directors Recruits Corporate Sponsors

In November 2006 AFA members elected a fine board of directors consisting of Lori Sawyer, president; Jim Hall, vice president; Duncan Blair, treasurer; Russell Gulley, secretary; and Fannie Smith, member-at-large. In our February meeting they instituted a new category of support, the corporate sponsor, at the level of \$500. Duncan Blair's law firm, Burr and Forman, agreed to support the AFA as did the City of Fort Payne, where Russell Gulley works as director of the Big Wills Arts Council. New College of the University of Alabama, directed by Jim Hall, has become a corporate sponsor by virtue of the resources it provides the AFA in the form of lecturers, recording services, student interns and meeting facilities. The board also recognized NewSouth Books as a corporate sponsor because it donates newsletter and brochure design and printing throughout the year.

Here's to our corporate sponsors. We hope to make them proud of our work.



Janet Henderson, Somerville; Jim Holland, Athens; Judy Martin, Marion; Kay Brotherton, Huntsville; Lesley Williams, Durham, N.C.; Lo Gordon, Brevard, N.C.; Loretta Burns, Tuskegee; Lori Sawyer, Walnut Hill, Fla.; Louise Woodall, Bessemer; Margaret Newman, Anniston; Marilyn Burchett, Old Hickory, Tenn.; Mark Brown, Columbus,

Ohio; Reggie Watts, Jasper; Regina Ferguson, Tanner; Richard Holland, Livingston; Roy Mott, Grove Hill; Sandra Nixon, Decatur; Sandra Swindall, Montevallo; Sara & Lowell Hamilton, Leesburg; Shawn Williams, St. Petersburg, Fla.; Susan Thomas, Mobile; Wayne Flynt, Auburn; William Hogan, Millbrook; William Melton, Evergreen, *Patron*.

THE ALABAMA FOLKLIFE ASSOCIATION is a non-profit statewide organization whose purpose is to promote the appreciation of Alabama folklife through activities including festivals, conferences, fieldwork, videos, audio recordings and publications. Your membership supports these activities. In return you receive our journal *Tributaries*. To join, send the adjacent form, with check payable to the AFA, to Jackie Ely, Membership Coordinator, Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, 410 North Hull Street, Montgomery, AL 36104.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

My check is enclosed for:

\$15 Student \$35 Individual

\$100 Patron \$200 Sustaining \$500 Corporate

Send c/o Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, 410 North Hull Street, Montgomery, AL 36104 • www.alabamafolklife.org

Boom Days Celebration in Fort Payne, Sept. 14–22

Last year the City of Fort Payne put on its first “Boom Days Heritage Celebration,” and it was lovely. The festival in the City Park, right downtown near the old opera house and railroad depot museum, was a folk festival in the spirit of the festivals sponsored by the AFA in 1989 and the early 1990s.

Taking place this year on Saturday, September 22, from 9 a.m. until dusk, it features arts exhibits, demonstrations, and traditional music. The Gees Bend Quilters will return along with potter Jerry Brown, Sloss Furnace ironworks artists, furniture makers, folk artist Micheal Finster, Tommy Moorehead’s Mighty Fine Art Assault Team, and a park full of other fine artists and craftsmen. On stage will be the Melody Men, Flying Jenny, James and Rachel Bryan, Willie King, Bobbie Owen and family, Dean Mitchell and others. The AFA booth will be there, too.

The celebration actually begins on September 14 and also features rock

and roll, blues, singer-songwriters, a golf tournament, and much more. Those interested in shape-note music will want to join the Paps Baxter Memorial Singing on September 15 from 10 A.M. to 8 P.M. at the Fort Payne Opera House. J. R. “Paps” Baxter (1887–1960) was a DeKalb County native who became a leading teacher, song-writer, and publisher of

the paperback gospel song books that are so well known in the South. This style of Southern gospel singing grew out of the older fa-so-la or Sacred Harp singing and has remained a strong form of community singing in Alabama since the early 1900s.

For more information on Boom Days, call Russell Gulley, 256-845-0203



The Gee’s Bend Quilters will help Fort Payne celebrate the City’s “Boom Days” on Sept. 15.



c/o Alabama Center
for Traditional Culture
410 North Hull Street
Montgomery, AL 36104

www.alabamafolklife.org

THE AFA NEWSLETTER is edited by Joyce Cauthen, with design and production by Randall Williams. It is published when there is enough news to make it worthwhile. Please mail announcements of events, publications or other items of interest to AFA members to Joyce Cauthen, 2169 Shadybrook Lane, Birmingham, AL 35226, or email joycecauthen@bellsouth.net, or call (205) 822-0505. The AFA is supported in part by the Alabama State Council on the Arts.