

### AFA Invites you to Gathering in Camden and Gee's Bend, November 15

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 15,  
WILL BE A GOOD DAY FOR  
AFA MEMBERS AND ALABAMA  
COMMUNITY SCHOLARS.

It will include a fine southern buffet at the GainesRidge Dinner Club in Camden, a ride across the Tombigbee River on the Gee's Bend Ferry, a stroll through the community made famous by quilts, and a visit with some of those nationally known and loved quilters.

For graduates of the Alabama Community Scholars Institute, the day will begin at 9 a.m. at Black Belt Treasures, an acclaimed gift shop and art gallery that features the works of artists and craftsmen of the Black Belt region. AFA members who aren't Community Scholars yet will want to drop by Black Belt Treasures before going to lunch at GainesRidge.

GainsRidge, built in the late 1820s, is one of the oldest structures still standing in the area. It was once the only two-story building between Black's Bluff and Allenton, two early settlements almost 50 miles apart. In 1898 it passed into the family of its present owner, Betty Gaines Kennedy, who opened it to the public as a dinner club in 1985.

We will assemble at GainsRidge, 933 Highway 10 East, at noon for a hearty lunch

followed by a talk by Dr. Amalia Amaki on the quilts of Gee's Bend as objects of visual study. Dr. Amaki is an artist, art historian, curator, and scholar of American art and culture who teaches at the University of Alabama. She is known for her mixed-media quilts that celebrate the lives of African-American women blues singers and button-encrusted cyanotypes as well as her numerous public commissions and scholarly activities.

At two o'clock we'll board the ferry in Camden for a 45-minute ride to Gee's Bend (also named Boykin). This small town found itself isolated after the original ferry was shut down by local authorities in 1962 when large numbers of residents began taking the ferry to the county seat of Camden in order register to vote. The lack of ferry service forced the residents of the community to drive more than an hour in order to conduct business in Camden until a new ferry was put into service in 2006.

In Gee's Bend we will see recently installed murals of the quilts pictured on U.S. postage stamps in 2006 and will visit with some of quilters who became famous when an exhibition of their art work opened at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston in 2002. The quilts then went to the Whitney Museum in New York City where their art was described as "some of the most miraculous works of art America has produced."



Tyree McCloud of Gee's Bend has created murals of the USPS Gee's Bend quilt stamps. Photo courtesy of Black Belt Treasures

A second exhibition, "Gee's Bend: The Architecture of the Quilt," has traveled to seven additional museums closing with the Philadelphia Museum of Art at the end of this year.

We will be through in Gee's Bend around 4 p.m. and most will depart by car via Highway 5 rather than return to Camden on the 5:30 ferry. Linda Vice, who has planned this day for us, will give us information about other special Black Belt places to visit on our way home. Linda is a graduate of 2004 the Alabama Community Scholars Institute, a founder of Black Belt Treasures, and has been nominated to serve on the AFA Board. She was honored by the Alabama Department of Tourism in 2007 for her work in developing Black Belt tourism.

Gee's Bend has long been a Mecca for folklorists and we are excited about our November 15 visit. We are inviting only members and friends of the AFA to this gathering in order to keep it intimate. We hope you'll reserve your space soon by e-mailing Jackie Ely soon. Please see the last page for details.



## AFA's Excellent Board of Directors

By Joyce Cauthen, Executive Director

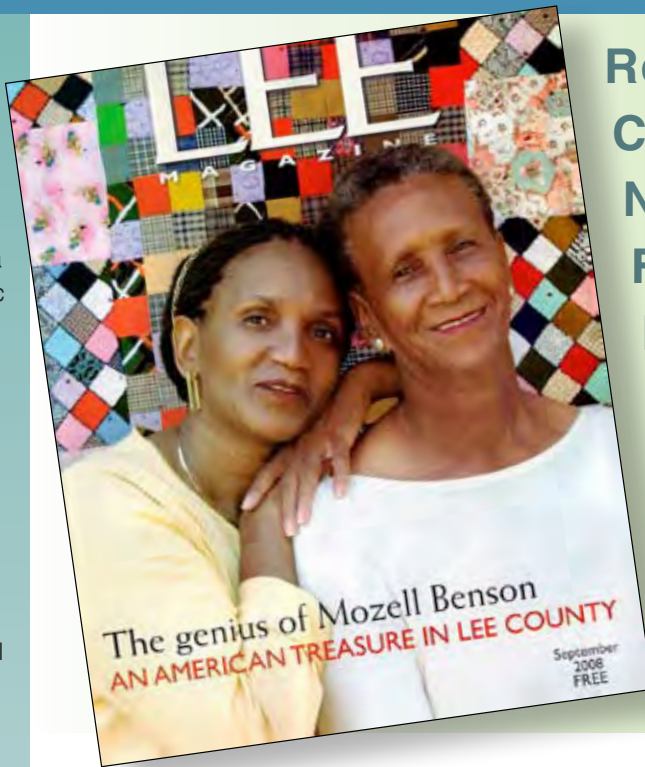
It has been a pleasure to be guided this year by the AFA Board of Directors. To a person they are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and give sage advice which they back up with action. Because of work commitments that make it difficult for them to attend our mid-week meetings, two board members, Wanda Johnson and Kevin Nutt, will be leaving the board this year. We appreciate their service and will miss them.

Pending your approval of the slate offered by our nominating committee at the November 15 gathering in Camden, Jim Hall (Tuscaloosa), Russell Gulley (Ft. Payne), Bill Jarnigan (Florence), Duncan Blair (Birmingham) and Betsy Panhorst (Auburn) will return to the Board. They will be joined by new members Linda Vice (Thomasville), Brant Beene (Birmingham), Deborah Casey (Eufaula), Sylvia Stephens (Opelika) and Jessica Lacher-Feldman (Tuscaloosa). It looks like The AFA will remain in good hands in 2009.

### AFA Thanks Its Supporters:

*The following people have joined or renewed since the Spring '08 edition of our newsletter. Please check your label to see if it is time for you to do the same. Your support means so much to us.*

*Birmingham:* Dianne Baer, Joan Broerman, Otto Carter, Beth Stewart; *Montgomery:* Jim Carnes & Erin Kellen, Clyde Eller, Anton Haardt (Sustaining member); Joseph Trimble, Frank Wright; *Tuscaloosa:* Joy Baklanoff, Catherine Davies; *Jackson, MS:* Thomas Kersen, Larry Morrisey; Charlotte Barber, Deatsville; Kay Brotherton, Huntsville, (Patron); Russell Gulley, Fort Payne; Alice Harp-Hopkins, New Orleans; Janet Henderson, Somerville; Peter Hill, Davis, California; Bill Hogan, Millbrook; Caiith Kushner, Jackson Heights, New York; Dee Ledbetter, Crossville; Thomas Morley, Fairhope; Mecca and Adam Lowe, Waverly; Annette Otts, Beaverton; Patsy Peoples, Florida; Charles & Cenda Price, Austin, Texas, (patron); Margaret Stephens, Auburn; Sandra Swindall, Montevallo; Margaret Newman, Anniston.



## Recognition Continues for National Heritage Fellow Mozell Benson

Mozell Benson of Waverly was featured in an excellent 8-page article entitled "The Genius of Mozell Benson: An American Treasure in Lee County" in the September issue of Lee Magazine. It is accompanied by numerous color photos. Pictured on the cover with Mrs. Benson is her daughter Sylvia Stephens who is carrying the family's quilting tradition. Sylvia was an Alabama Community Scholar this summer, where she learned how to document her mother's work. You may view the article at [www.lee-magazine.com/covers/fabric-life](http://www.lee-magazine.com/covers/fabric-life).

## Former President of AFA Passes



Al Thomas at AFA's Gathering in Selma at Temple Mishkan Israel in 2003.

Alan R. Thomas, who served three terms as President of the Alabama Folklife Association, as well as holding other offices over the years, died on June 4, 2008 after suffering from leukemia and related health problems for several years. He was 78.

Al was the most enthusiastic and evangelistic of AFA members and was always recruiting people to join. Despite chronic health problems, he greatly enjoyed working in the AFA booth that we set up at various festivals and presiding over the annual gath-

erings held in small cities across the state. As expressed in his obituary, he had a life-long passion for all types of music, with a special affinity for old-time music and Sacred Harp. His wife Gypsy, who has also been a strong supporter of the AFA, requested that in lieu of flowers, donations be made to their church or to the AFA. We appreciate the memorial donations we received in his name and greatly miss Al Thomas, under whose leadership the AFA grew in size and mission.



**Tributaries at Last: Volume 10-11 of the AFA Journal is at the printer and will be in the mail to members soon. It will be worth the wait.**

*The Alabama Folklife Association is a non-profit statewide organization whose purpose is to promote knowledge and 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.*

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- \$15 Student       \$35 Individual       \$500 Corporate  
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*To join, send this form, with check payable to the AFA, to Jackie Ely, Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, 410 North Hull Street, Montgomery, AL 36104. Your contribution is tax-deductible.*

# Look for Alabama between the U.S. Capitol and the Washington Monument in 2010

The Alabama State Council on the Arts and the Alabama Folklife Association are preparing to bring Alabama to Washington, D.C. in the summer of 2010. We are working closely with the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage to produce the Smithsonian Folklife Festival which will take place on the National Mall, June 24-28 and July 1-5, 2010. Please put it on your calendar and plan to join us there.

Initiated in 1967, the Festival has become a national and international model of a research-based presentation of contemporary living cultural traditions. Over the years, it has brought more than 23,000 musicians, artists, performers, craftspeople, workers, cooks, storytellers, and others to the National Mall to demonstrate the skills, knowledge, and aesthetics that embody the creative vitality of community-based traditions.

The Festival is usually divided into programs featuring a nation, a state and an occupation (architecture, politics, law, etc.) In 2010 the featured country will be Mexico, the state will be Alabama and the theme is yet to be announced. To date the Festival has featured exemplary tradition bearers from more than 90 nations, every region of the United States, scores of ethnic communities, more than 100 American Indian groups, and some 70 different occupations.

The Festival generally includes daily and evening programs of music, song, dance, celebratory performance, crafts and cooking demonstrations, storytelling, illustrations of workers' culture, and narrative sessions for discussing cultural issues.



The 2008 Smithsonian Folklife Festival featured the nation of Bhutan on the National Mall. Photo by Deborah Boykin

According to Diana Parker, director of the festival, it "is an exercise in cultural democracy, in which cultural practitioners speak for themselves, with each other, and to the public. The Festival encourages visitors to participate—to learn, sing, dance, eat traditional foods, and converse with people presented in the Festival program."

Here in Alabama we have been discussing traditions that can be presented well in a festival setting and are now beginning to do the fieldwork which will help us plan specific programs and exhibits and write the text panels that will guide visitors through the Alabama area. Topics being worked on are Mobile Mardi Gras, "the Muscle Shoals sound," sacred music traditions such as Sacred Harp singing, various foodways across the state, and quilters, potters, basketmakers, instrument makers and others who have been part of the State Arts Council's Apprenticeship program. We are also exploring a "talking" stage that features the way Alabamians of different regions and professions speak, as

well as an area that presents some of the state's sports traditions.

We plan on restaging part of the festival the following October on the grounds of the Department of Archives and History in Montgomery. The number of people we present at the festival and the number and elaborateness of the stages depend, of course, on how much money we are able to raise. Stay tuned for a progress report in the next AFA newsletter.



One of the small stages featuring music from the State of Texas at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival 2008. Photo by Deborah Boykin

# Quilter Bettye Kimbrell is Honored by the National Endowment for the Arts

*"THIS, THE HIGHEST FORM OF FEDERAL RECOGNITION OF STEWARDS OF OUR CULTURAL LEGACY, REFLECTS OUR AGENCY'S COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE AND TO PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THE DEPTH AND BREADTH OF OUR NATION'S ARTISTIC HERITAGE. UNLIKE MOST OF OUR OTHER FUNDING PROGRAMS, THIS AWARD IS NOT RECEIVED THROUGH APPLICATION, BUT RATHER AS THE RESULT OF NOMINATIONS BY COMMUNITY MEMBERS, ARTISTIC PEERS, OR CULTURAL SPECIALISTS."*

— DANA GIOIA, CHAIRMAN OF THE NEA

Bettye Kimbrell of Mt. Olive (Jefferson County), Alabama, was selected to be one of eleven National Heritage fellows in 2008. Of that award Dana Gioia, Chairman of the NEA, writes, "This, the highest form of federal recognition of stewards of our cultural legacy, reflects our agency's commitment to excellence and to public awareness of the depth and breadth of our nation's artistic heritage. Unlike most of our other funding programs, this award is not received through application, but rather as the result of nominations by community members, artistic peers, or cultural specialists."

Bettye Kimbrell is a world-class quilter, known for the hand stitching that highlights and enriches every element of each quilt she makes. Anne Kimzey of the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture writes, "Her expert skill reveals itself most powerfully in the intricate needlework and ornate, detailed quilting that has become her trademark. People are amazed by her subtle but complex designs and of millions of tiny stitches that

cover her 'whole cloth' or 'white on white' quilts." In addition, Kimbrell is a devoted teacher and quilt "missionary." In 1979, she organized a quilt show to raise money for the Mt. Olive Community Center, a frame schoolhouse used for social functions and as a nutrition site for senior citizens. Out of this effort came the formation of the North Jefferson Quilters' Guild that has met twice weekly for the past 25 years. Kimbrell has encouraged hundreds of people of all ages to learn to quilt and taught them how to do so at the Guild and at places like the Jefferson State Community College, John C. Campbell Folk School, the Kentuck Festival of the Arts, and the Museum of Appalachia, to name a few.

For this combination of artistry, skill and service, Bettye was named a National Heritage Fellow for which she received a generous monetary award and was honored at three elegant events in the nation's capital in September—an awards ceremony held on Capitol Hill attended by friends, family and Congressman Spencer Bachus; a banquet in the Great Hall of the Library of

Congress, and a public concert, this year attended by approximately 1700 people at the Music Center at the Strathmore. At the concert, Kimbrell was poised and humorous with MC Nick Spitzer. Her quilts, shown in fine detail on large screens at each side of the stage, received much praise from the audience.

A SELECTION OF KIMBRELL'S QUILTS ARE ON DISPLAY IN THE ALABAMA ARTISTS GALLERY OF THE STATE ARTS COUNCIL (201 MONROE STREET, MONTGOMERY) UNTIL OCTOBER 31. THIS EXHIBIT ALSO INCLUDES A QUILT BY NORA EZELL AND ONE BY MOZELL BENSON, NATIONAL HERITAGE FELLOWS IN 1992 AND 2001.



Bettye Kimbrell at Heritage Fellowship award ceremony with Dana Gioia, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, and Congressman Spencer Bachus, Alabama's 6th District representative.

# A Tremendous Success: Alabama Community Scholars Institute 2008

Twenty-five intelligent and energetic Community Scholars gathered on the campus of the University of South Alabama in Mobile in June to learn the skills involved in documenting their own community's traditions. For practice they documented Mobile traditions involving Mardi Gras, guided by Kern Jackson, Ph. D., a professor at USA and an authority on carnival in Mobile. Thus they visited museums and listened to brass bands when not learning how to operate digital recorders, make documentary photos and videos, do interviews and log them in detail, etc.

This year's Institute, made possible in part by the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts, was eight days instead of the usual ten, but the staff and scholars were determined to fit in as much as possible, resulting in both exhaustion and exhilaration.

The 2008 Community Scholars were Ashley Tillery (Montgomery), Tonja Young (Daphne), Megan Loper (Washington, D.C.), Patsy Peoples (Florala), Barry Little (Fairhope), Donna Turner (Moody), Connie James (Butler), Amy Beach (Mobile), Annette Otts (Beaverton), Elizabeth Donovan (Allston, MA), Israel Lewis, III (Mobile), Holly Fowler (Atmore), Emily Blejwas (Mobile), Stephanie Jackson (Mobile), Whitney Green (Selma), Amanda Blum (Montgomery), Sylvia Stephens (Opelika), Barbara White (Auburn), Cristina White (Auburn), Joseph Trimble (Montgomery), Maggie Legg (Fort Deposit), Tyler Kittles (Bayou La Batre), Jacquelyn Denson (Andalusia), Patrice Dees (Brewton), Steve Dark (Gulf Shores).

Ashley Tillery (see below) gave the following assessment of the Institute: "During ACSI Community Scholars from all over the state convened in Mobile

to study the city's Mardi Gras traditions. In Mobile Mardi Gras is a year round affair which depends on the lives, talents and outputs of everyday people to endure. In most cases the average person will never know who these people are and yet without their commitment Mobile's Mardi Gras would cease to be. As part of our ACSI training we interviewed some of these individuals applying techniques and fundamentals learned in class.



Holly Fowler photographs Clifford Alexander, the "Dancing Machine" at ACSI 2008. Photo by Stephanie Jackson

In my case I interviewed a general participant by the name of Dora Finley. Dora has been celebrating Mardi Gras in Mobile for 50 years. She has faithfully maintained some old customs, created a few new ones and noted how others have changed over time. On the surface this would seem to suggest she's but a small, insignificant part of Mobile's Mardi Gras. After all, she doesn't appear on some float year after year or play in a big shiny brass band and yet the truth of the matter is Dora, like countless others, is Mobile Mardi Gras. As it is, Mobile's Mardi Gras does not exist unto itself. You can't call it on the phone or invite it over for dinner. It's a concept born out of the city's public imagination and for over 200 years Mobilians have believed in their conception, enacted its narrative and ultimately passed it on to another generation. Like so many traditions,

the singular expressions of Mardi Gras, such as parades and balls, are but the briefest glimpse into something much larger. Ironically, in order to understand what that something larger is you have to explore the minutest of details as represented by people like Dora, people who will die relatively nameless and endure in relative anonymity. As I learned at ACSI, you have to look to these because they are the vessels through which the tradition lives and the keepers of its memory."



## New Position at AFA Made Possible by Grants

The AFA has received grants from the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the "Support the Arts" car tag committee which will pay for fieldwork done for the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Ashley Tillery of Montgomery, a graduate of the Alabama Community Scholars Institute 2008, was selected for this position. In addition to being a fieldworker she has the responsibilities of strengthening the Alabama Community Scholar network and developing the AFA's presence by taking our information/sales booth to folk events throughout the state.

She will work with Joyce Cauthen and

a committee of linguists to develop presentations at the Smithsonian festival about Alabama "oratory"-- the way Alabamians talk about their lives and professions. She is currently working on the Mobile Mardi Gras section for the AlabamaMosaic website. AlabamaMosaic is a repository of digital materials on Alabama's history, culture, places, and people. Its purpose is to make unique historical treasures from Alabama's archives, libraries, museums, and other repositories electronically accessible to Alabama residents and to students, researchers, and the general public in other states and countries.

The Mardi Gras section will have photos, brief bios, and excerpts from the interviews done by the 2008 class of Community Scholars for use at the Smithsonian festival.

She also is developing a section of the AFA web site that will allow all three classes of community scholars to post information about projects they are doing and generally keep in touch with each other.

Ashley graduated from the University of West Florida in 2007 with a B.A in Interdisciplinary Humanities. Her areas of focus were art history, religious studies, and anthropology.



# GATHERING IN CAMDEN

## AND GEE'S BEND,

## NOVEMBER 15, 2008



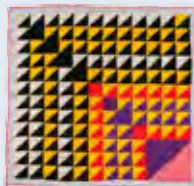
### Registration

To reserve space at the Gainesridge Dinner Club, e-mail or call Jackie Ely: Jackie.Ely@arts.alabama.gov or 334-242-4076, ext. 234.

### Schedule

**9 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.:** Community Scholars meet at Black Belt Treasures in Camden. Others may visit the gift shop/gallery at their convenience. 209 Claiborne Street, [www.blackbelttreasures.com](http://www.blackbelttreasures.com)

**Noon:** Community Scholars, AFA members and guests meet at Gaines-Ridge Dinner Club, 933 Highway 10 East, for buffet lunch and a talk by Dr. Amalia Amaki, "The Quilts of Gee's Bend as Objects of Visual Study." (Cost of lunch: \$15)



**2:00:** Ferry leaves for Gee's Bend. (Fare: \$3 for car and 1 rider; walk-ons and additional riders \$1 each)

**2:45** Visit Gee's Bend and her famous quilts

**4:00:** End of program. More touring and socializing encouraged.

### Lodging

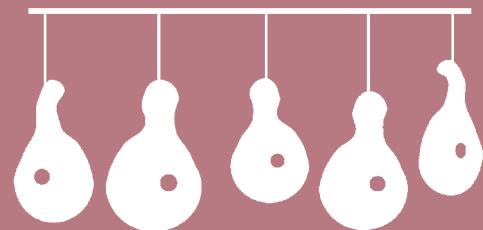
Days Inn of Camden, 39 Camden Bypass, (334) 682-4555  
\$49.99 per night (10% off to AFA members)

Southern Inn, 40 Camden Bypass, (334) 682-4148  
\$47.50 plus tax



# you are invited...

## Alabama Folklife



## ASSOCIATION

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

[www.alabamafolklife.org](http://www.alabamafolklife.org)

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*The AFA is supported in part by the Alabama State Council on the Arts and by proceeds from the sale of "Support the Arts" car tags.*



*You may view the newsletter with color photos, and send it to others, by going to [www.alabamafolklife.org/resources](http://www.alabamafolklife.org/resources).*