

The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress presents
the Benjamin Botkin Folklife Lecture Series

FREE NOONTIME EVENT

AN ACQUISITIONS AND PRESENTATION PROJECT

BRIDLES, BITS AND BEADS: FOLK AND FIELDWORK FROM THE HIGH, WIDE AND HANDSOME STATE OF MONTANA



FEATURING ALEXANDRA SWANEY,
DIRECTOR OF FOLKLIFE PROGRAMS
AT THE MONTANA ARTS COUNCIL

photo by Alex Swaney

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Thursday
July 21, 2005

12:00 NOON to 1:00 PM

LM 139

1st Floor, James Madison Building

Library of Congress

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Washington, DC

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The fast horses and Indians you see on this flyer conjure up a stereotypical landscape of the Old West. It's an image from the Real Bird family's re-enactment of Custer's Last Stand. There still are cowboys and Indians in Montana-those are some of the peoples who live there and many still do practice their traditional arts. But as everyone who lives there knows, Montana is changing rapidly and becoming more of a playground for people of means, and less of a bread and beef basket to the country. In addition, there are traditional folk in Montana that defy many of the usual characterizations we have in mind.

Bridles, Bits and Beads was the first traveling folk arts exhibit curated and toured throughout Montana by Alexandra Swaney in her first two years as folklife director at the Montana Arts Council. Dr. Swaney will present a slide show with commentary covering this exhibit along with an overview of the Montana Folklife Program of the last ten years, accompanied by audio selections. You will meet such artists as:

Bill Allison, saddle maker from Roundup, Montana, who feels really good about making something that suits the working cowboy, and about being able to stay where he wants to be.

Nina Russell, jazz pianist born in Washington D.C. who worked in the Chicago clubs in the thirties, spent the forties in Los Angeles, and came to Montana because her father had been a buffalo soldier at Wounded Knee and later in Montana. The last third of her life she became an institution in Kalispell, Montana, playing every week at a local nightclub into her late eighties.

Bill Ohrmann, visionary painter, who at age eighty began painting colorful scenes of the collapse of the earth and its ecosystems, based on his personal experiences as a rancher in the Flint Creek Valley of western Montana.

Iris Allrunner, star quilter and porcupine quiller from the Fort Peck Reservation who founded the battered women's shelter on the Fort Peck Reservation and believes that traditional arts are essential to the continuing social and spiritual well-being her people. Her quilts are also framed and hanging in the tribal casino.

John "the Yank" Harrington, accordionist, who came

from Ireland to Butte, Montana, but who vowed never to work in the mines. He became a Butte institution, and for many years collected and recorded many of the musicians who lived or came through Butte. His collection is now being accessioned by the American Folk life Center.

Alma Hogan Snell, Crow ethnobotanist and relative of Chief Plenty Coups, and granddaughter of tribal elder Pretty Shield, who knows the old ways of cooking and curing with the plants growing right around her house.

Pat Kennedy, Chippewa Cree elder and well-known composer of powwow social songs who was also a spiritual leader and received an award from the Institute for Noetic Sciences for his attempt to bridge the spiritual gap between white and Indian worlds.

Not forgetting that Montana really is a huge state with regions that have their own identity, you will hear about lelse, lutefisk, and the poetry and songs of D.W. Groethe from its Norwegian immigrant culture. You will also experience slides and audio from fieldwork surveys from the last ten years carried out by folklorists Blanton Owen and Jens Lund in north central and eastern Montana.

Alexandra Swaney received her Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Colorado in 1975, based on fieldwork in Mexico, where she interviewed elders in the city of Saltillo, Coahuila to discover cultural attitudes toward aging, and found that their stories were far more interesting than her dissertation topic. She has been Director of Folklife Programs at the Montana Arts Council for the last nine years.

The American Folklife Center was created by Congress in 1976 and placed at the Library of Congress to "preserve and present American Folklife" through programs of research, documentation, archival presentation, reference service, live performance, exhibition, public programs, and training. The Folklife Center includes the Archive of Folk Culture, which was established in 1928 and is now one of the largest collections of ethnographic material from the United States and around the world. Check out our web site www.loc.gov/folklife

