



# Field Notes

News from Traditional Arts Indiana

Volume 4, No. 1 April 2002

## TAI Pilots New Master-Apprentice Program

Apprenticing with a master is a time-honored way of passing on traditional arts. As a way to complement the natural process by which traditions are handed down, TAI is pilot-testing a Master-Apprentice program. Unlike many other states, Indiana has never had such an opportunity for traditional artists. TAI looks forward to building a strong program in the Hoosier state in the coming years. To launch TAI's program, we invited three Indiana artists and their apprentices to consult with us.

Bluegrass musician Angie Caldwell of Seymour is currently working with two talented young people from Bartholomew County, apprentices Brendan Thompson (fiddle) and Jourdan Thompson (mandolin). Angie will help Brendan and Jourdan hone their ensemble playing skills and develop a broader repertoire of traditional tunes.

Under the careful tutelage of tamburitza maker Milan Opacich of Schererville (Lake County), apprentice John Miksich, also of Schererville, is building his very first tamburitza cello.



John Miksich in Milan's shop working wood for a tamburitza cello. — Photo courtesy of Milan Opacich

*"I don't want to take this to the grave." — Jim Cooper on his desire to pass on his skill and knowledge as a hoop-netmaker*



Angie guides Jourdan's fingers during a lesson. Brandon is seated playing his fiddle. — Photo by Jeremy Hogan

Hoop-netmaker Jim Cooper of Evansville comes from a long line of Wabash River fishermen. Dan Cain, Jim's apprentice from New Harmony is working on his second net.

Later this year, master-apprentice teams will be able to apply for grant funds to cover the cost of supplies, teaching time, and travel. A panel selects participants based on artistic quality, traditionality and feasibility of study plan. Awards range from \$500 to \$2,500 for projects that last from six to twelve months. Support from the National Endowment for the Arts makes this funding possible. Please contact our office for more information.



Jim Cooper helps his apprentice Dan Cain with the mathematical calculations used to make a hoop-net. — Photo by Rich Remsberg

## Credit for Getting Things Done

TAI's work with IU students stimulates spirited discussions ranging from distinctions between folklore and ethnomusicology to ethics, the politics of public presentation, and the advantages of grounding professional careers in folklore perspectives. In F497, the undergraduate folklore majors seminar, John McDowell and Inta Carpenter integrated hands-on experience with discussions of theory and methods. Two undergraduates are preparing a web-based slide show for TAI. An undergraduate folklore student earned 6 credits working through TAI to plan and produce a *Cinco de Mayo* celebration with a local arts agency. Students from other departments are also involved with TAI: telecom majors produced a video on saddle-making and graduate students in a non-profit management class chose TAI for their case study.

## On the Road . . .

### Spring 2002 IHS/TAI Lyceum

#### *From Burgoo to the Bottomlands: People and Place in Southwestern Indiana*

The spring 2002 Lyceum is an open invitation to experience cultural history through local foodways. With the help of resident advisors, we've identified a number of popular dishes in the southwestern corner of Indiana for lyceum participants to learn about and to taste: fiddlers, BBQ, burgoo, and brain sandwiches. Lyceum attendees also will have an



opportunity to try their hand at making a fiddler hoop-net or Japanese *origami*, hear about the secrets of smoked BBQ, and learn about life on a river bottom.

Neon sign at the Hilltop Inn tavern advertising burgoo.  
— Photo by Erin Roth



Butchering crew, many whom are residents of Union Township, pose for a photograph during a break in hog butchering at David Hauschild's farm. David (back row, left) is known for his delicious liver sausage. Photo by Erin Roth

In Master Classes scheduled for Saturday April 27, participants will learn about southern Indiana culture through hands-on experience and more intimate interaction with local experts. Class members may choose to learn the traditional art of making a catfish hoop-net and wooden shuttles from master netmaker Jim Cooper, study Wabash River ecology with fisheries biologist Tom Stefanavage, learn how to make flitters and kuchen from Florence Wannemuehler, or watch Jeff Wildeman and members of the Cookin' Dutchmen demonstrate sausage making.

A guided bus tour on Saturday, May 11 will highlight regional and ethnic cooking in southwestern Indiana. In addition to exploring sites in Vanderburgh County, the tour offers an opportunity to learn from local residents, observe traditional art demonstrations, and sample regional foods. Stops include Union Township, the rich fertile land of the Ohio River bottoms, an African American neighborhood to sample BBQ and learn about local African American history, West side businesses, a historic German Catholic church, and a century-old all-men's singing club, and lunch at the Hilltop Inn. Immediately following the tour,

Traditional Arts Indiana (TAI) is dedicated to expanding public awareness of Indiana's traditional practices and nurturing a sense of pride among Indiana's traditional artists. As a partnership of the Indiana Arts Commission (IAC) and the Indiana University (IU) Department of Folklore & Ethnomusicology, TAI works locally with individuals and organizations to promote and facilitate

cultural documentation and public programming. The National Endowment for the Arts, the IAC, IU and private donations support the work of TAI. For more information, contact Erin Roth, Manager, (812) 855-0418, tradarts@indiana.edu, www.indiana.edu/~tradarts.

#### The TAI Team

Ilze Akerbergs, Technical Assistant  
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Inta Carpenter, Director  
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Gayle Holtman (IAC) Liaison  
Erin Roth, Manager

*Fieldworkers 2002:* Ilze Akerbergs,  
Beth Campbell, Inta Carpenter, Erin Roth

participants will enjoy a traditional German meal and live polka music by the Rhein Valley Brass.

Local sponsors are the Arts Council of Southwestern Indiana, Historic Southern Indiana, and the Vanderburgh County Historical Society. For more information, visit Indiana Historical Society's website at [www.indianahistory.org](http://www.indianahistory.org).



Playing clabber at Dogtown Tavern in Union Township.  
— Photo by Erin Roth

## From the Field . . .

[Excerpt from Erin Roth's fieldnotes from her fieldwork in southwestern Indiana at the Dogtown Tavern in Union Township, a river bottom just south of Evansville. Dogtown Tavern is one of the stops on the Lyceum bus tour.]

A rainy, gray day. . . . I had made plans the day before to meet Rosie Mesker (a quilter from St. Agnes Catholic Church) for lunch. She was there along with Sharon Winiger (another quilter from St. Agnes) and their husbands. . . . They welcomed me to the table, handed me a menu and I decided quickly to order the catfish platter – fiddler platter. . . . It was delicious. Batter-fried, but lightly. The fish was tender and perfect.

Before we finished, the clabber players began to filter in. They were a rowdy bunch. Greeted the people at my table with hearty handshakes and hands to shoulders. The four I ate with left and I was left with seven men who had come to play clabber.

They play weekly, but usually at one person's house, in the garage in the summer. And about twice a month at Dogtown, where on this day one person immediately ordered a round of beers for everyone, and they continued to take turns ordering. . . . Someone shook talcum powder in the middle of the

table to keep the old cards from sticking. And they began to play. Lots of joking, but concentration too. They played for quarters. A bad game would leave you with \$3 or \$4 less by the end of the night. So it wasn't big money. But they took it somewhat seriously anyway.

Clabber is played similarly to euchre. . . . They seemed to all have an intuitive sense about the cards – knew immediately what the other was thinking or why they'd laid what they laid. There was some table talk, which was allowed. And some chiding when one would make a mistake.

They've been playing together for about 25 years. Gerald Chipps said he's been playing for 60 years. One man said he learned as a six year old. Their love for the game was obvious. And what a great way to spend time together – now that they're retired they play during the day and not late into the night like they used to. They joked quite a bit with the cook, Joyce and with me – seemed to more as the beer flowed more freely. Some lit up cigars on that first round and worked on them throughout the afternoon.

## Creating, Changing, Renewing

### *Portraits of Indiana's Traditional Artists:*

#### *Jim Cooper – Catfish Hoop-Netmaker*

Jim Cooper grew up along the river. He fished with his father and uncle on the Wabash. Jim's father made nets but he learned most of what he knows from some of the best netmakers in southwestern Indiana. Catfish hoop-netmaking is a dying art. Many now use manufactured nets. Some sport fishing advocates say the nets are depleting the fish too quickly. Jim believes that if you treat the river well, the river will treat you well.

Jim's nets are beautifully crafted. He pays careful attention not only to the functionality of his nets, but also to their



Jim knits the throat of a hoop-net from inside the net.  
— Photo by Rich Remsburg

aesthetic qualities. He turns his knots inward, shapes his own needles out of various woods, and has developed a complicated system of knot combinations to help him identify each of his nets should they be stolen from the water.

His knowledge reaches beyond the nets he makes. Jim raised his family in part by catching fiddlers. He knows every dip and crevice on the Wabash River bed. Jim proudly points out that he's used the same, undamaged prop on his john boat



Jim demonstrates tying knots. *Photo by Rich Remsberg*

## The Bulletin Board

*Lyceum* – From Burgoo to the Bottomlands: People and Place in Southwestern Indiana  
([www.indianahistory.org/webbrochure.pdf](http://www.indianahistory.org/webbrochure.pdf) for more information)

- April 27 — Master classes
- May 11 — Tour

*TAI at the Indiana State Fair* — August 15

- Main Street Stage — noon to 6 p.m.

Musical performances by TAI artists

- Home & Family Arts Building — 3pm

Indiana State Fair Masters Ceremony

since the late 1980s. To be a successful fisherman, he says, “You have to know how to read the current and the feed lines.”

Jim has been living with cancer for several years and has begun to urgently pass on his knowledge. He will be leading a master class in fiddler hoop-netmaking at the Lyceum in Evansville on April 27 (see article on Lyceum, above). He is also part of TAI's master-apprentice program, teaching an apprentice the art of netmaking.