
Reviewed by Lydia Pish.

The appearance of a good book in any field must always be a cause for rejoicing among scholars in that field, but I feel that the publication of a first-rate work on calendar customs calls for something more extreme—perhaps dancing in the streets! Surely there is no more neglected area of our discipline; while excellent studies of narratives, songs and ballads using new approaches and techniques are published with fair regularity, the folklorist interested in custom is faced with one dreary collection after another of unrelated customs listed with no regard to function. With the brilliant exception of Herbert Halpert’s Christmas jamming in Newfoundland and a few scattered articles, one might really say that the study of customs has remained pretty much bogged down in the 19th century. Le Terra in Piazza is a model study of a custom, superbly carried out by what must surely be the ideal field team: one native who is thoroughly familiar with the language, the people and the territory, and one objective outsider.

The palio of Siena is familiar to many tourists and to anyone who has done much reading about Italy. Superficially it is a race which is held twice each summer among ten horses which represent ten of the seventeen contrade or wards of Siena. The race is preceded by a four-hour parade in elaborate historical dress. In fact, the palio is an extremely complex ritual in which the entire city participates, not only on the day of the race, but throughout the year.

In the first chapter the authors give a brief history of the palio and of related mimic battles and ritual games in Siena. The second chapter is concerned with the contrade into which the city is divided. The peculiar relationship of the Sienese citizen to his contrada is the basis of the palio and the authors give a careful and detailed account not only of the structure of the contrade, but also of the symbols, blasons populaires and rituals by which the individual is identified with his contrada. The traditional rivalries between pairs of contrade (which vitally affect the race, since the enemy of the winner is considered to have lost) are also discussed.

After establishing the background the authors give a complete description of the events leading up to the race, the race itself, and the part it plays in the daily lives of the Sienese. The most impressive feature of this book is the way in which the authors have been able to handle a truly staggering amount of detail, ranging from the choosing of the horses to the banquet served by the winners, without once losing sight of the whole picture. This is especially impressive in view of the fact that a large number of the details of the race, especially the partiti (secret agreements between one contrada and another or between a contrada and a jockey) are not made public. Also, the palio is not
an isolated event, but is a focal point for the activities of the Sienese throughout the year. Therefore, the authors had to deal not only with the race, but also with such diverse phenomena as children's games, proverbial speech, and gambling devices. The chapter on the palio in song gives some idea of the amount of material which had to be covered; each song associated with the palio exists in at least 17 variants! The written descriptions are enhanced by 62 beautifully reproduced color plates.

The excellent technique involved for gathering the material for this book and the skill with which it is presented are indisputable. The only part of the work which may expect to draw fire from some folklorists is the chapter in which the authors give their interpretation of the meaning of the palio, which involves both structural and psychoanalytical analyses. I find their explanations both reasonable and convincing—as they point out, it is hard to avoid reading sexual symbolism into a horserace in which jockeys carry whips made of the stretched, dried penises of calves. I would strongly recommend this book to all folklorists as a model study of a custom; those who have problems with psychoanalytical interpretations can always skip the last chapter.

It is almost impossible to praise La Terra in Piazza highly enough. Not only have the authors included a good bibliography, superb illustrations and a helpful glossary, they have also done a fine job of writing. In addition to purchasing this book for your own collection I suggest that you buy a copy for any friend who may be travelling to Italy this summer.

_Song Branch Settlers: Folk Songs and Tales of a Kentucky Mountain Family._

Reviewed by Sylvia Ann Grider

Leonard Roberts has carved a lasting niche for himself as a collector of "regional," i.e. Kentucky, folklore. This, his most recent book (No. 61 of the A.F.S. Memoir Series) is the realization of his dream to bring together in a single volume the personal histories and reminiscences of the members of the Couch family along with their complete songs and narrative repertoire, as collected by him over a five-year period from 1951 to 1955.

As Roberts explains in the introduction, prohibitive publication costs forced the original publication of his Couch family material in two separate media, "The ballads, local legends, and experiences should constitute a letterpress volume—and this became Up Catchin' and Down Greasy. The mass of songs and tales should be the other, and this became a microcard volume, Tales and Songs of the Couch Family, both brought out in 1959." (p. xx) The existence of the later document is