

# Minutes of the 1988 CFS Meeting

Eighteen current and prospective members of the Children's Folklore Section gathered on Friday, October 28 for a business meeting and breakfast. Section President Bill Ellis called the meeting to order at 7:18 a.m. As those present feasted on a continental breakfast — cost \$6.50 per person (which unfortunately did not even get us orange juice), Bill thanked the Section for its support and assistance during the preceding year. He also reminded those present of the Section-sponsored forum "Ethical Dilemmas in Collecting Children's Folklore" during the ongoing AFS meetings.

Vice-President Priscilla Ord reported there were six submissions for the 1988 W. W. Newell Prize. The winner was Patricia M. Meley (Penn State - Harrisburg) for her study "Paper Power: A Search for Meaning in the Folded Paper Toys of Pre-Adolescents." Patricia's paper was accepted for presentation at this year's AFS meetings and is planned for publication in a future issue of the Section's newsletter. Another paper submitted for the prize, Debbie A. Hanson's "To Thine Own Traditions True: Folklore and Adolescent Romance in Maud Hart Lovelace's Betsy-Tacy Series," was also accepted for presentation at AFS.

After the minutes of the Section's 1987 meeting were approved, Secretary-Treasurer Danielle Roemer reported that, as of August 31, 1988, the Section had a balance of \$1,754 and had earned \$91.00 in interest during the preceding year. The earned interest is thus coming closer to meeting the Section's annual \$100 expenditure for the Newell Prize. Currently, the Section has 63 members: 40 domestic and 23 foreign. Finally, during 1988, a university press requested the cost of renting the Section's mailing list. After consulting with other members of the Section's executive board, Danielle informed the press that the cost of such a rental would be \$20.

Editor Chip Sullivan explained that, with the approval of the executive board, the title of the newsletter has been changed to *The Children's Folklore Review*. The *Review* will appear twice a year, beginning with the current issue (Vol. XI, no. 1 [1988/89]). Plans are underway to expand the publication to accommodate more essays, research reports, and book reviews. Chip would appreciate members' comments and suggestions concerning the appearance and organization of this new format. Linda Morley proposed and members present agreed that each year a letter of appreciation be written to the administration of East Carolina University thanking them for their support of and assistance in the publication of *The Children's Folklore Review*. Members present also requested that Chip and Danielle draft an announcement of the *Review* and send it to relevant publications.

Archivist Simon Bronner noted that Section correspondence housed in the Archives is currently being catalogued. On behalf of *Issues in Children's Folklore* co-editor Jay Mechling who could not be present at the breakfast, Simon also reported that Jay has asked the Smithsonian Press for prompt action on the contract for

publication of *Issues*. Garland Press and the University of Kansas Press have expressed interest in the volume.

On behalf of the Opie Prize Committee (Simon Bronner, Jay Mechling), Simon announced the winner of the 1988 Prize, the first to be awarded by the Section. The winner was Gary Alan Fine (U of Minn) for his study *With the Boys* (U of Chicago Press). The prize carries a \$200 cash award, and Gary will be announced as the winner at the AFS Business Meeting.

Speaking for the committee (Priscilla Ord, Linda Morley, Joe Edgette) looking into the Section's Lifetime Achievement Award, Linda Morley explained that the committee was currently considering the design of the award medal. The committee hopes to order the medals bearing the selected design by the end of the current academic year.

President Bill Ellis opened nominations for the office of Vice-President. Priscilla Ord was nominated and re-elected to that office by acclamation. Bill then opened nominations for Secretary-Treasurer. Danielle Roemer was re-elected to that position.

On behalf of the committee (Priscilla Ord, Jay Mechling) overseeing the Section's annotated bibliography, Priscilla asked members to volunteer to survey specific journals. Linda Morley requested that reminder letters be sent to members concerning the bibliographic project.

Jan Rosenberg informed those present about publications of the International Playground Association, an advocacy organization supporting the wide range of traditional activities occurring on children's playgrounds. Those publications include a newsletter (a copy of which was passed around) and a journal, *Play Rights*. Among other benefits, members received both international (out of Denmark) and American-based issues of the Association's newsletter. For more information, those interested should write: Robin C. Moore (ed), School of Design, North Carolina State Univ., Box 7701, Raleigh, NC 27695-7701. Phone: (919) 737-2204.

In other business, Gary Alan Fine moved that AFS create an abstracts system covering publications in and related to folklore/folklife study, and that this resolution, if passed by the Section, be presented to the wider AFS membership at its 1989 business meeting. Priscilla seconded the motion, which was then unanimously approved.

Linda Morley announced that the Section's calendar project had not received sufficient support from Section members. Discussion followed concerning this and other projects. Linda suggested that the committee investigate the production of a children's folklore broadsheet. The broadsheet could depict children's games and other children's folklore forms spanning the century. The broadsheet could serve as a tribute to the AFS 1989 Centennial and call attention to the Section's ten-year anniversary. Simon moved that the committee be charged with investigating the broadsheet project. Alternatively, Linda proposed that the committee be charged with coordinating materials volunteered by Section members. Linda's proposal was accepted as a friendly amendment, and the motion was seconded and passed unanimously. A \$300 budget ceiling was set. Section members with materials that could be reproduced on a broadsheet are asked to send them to one of the committee's members: Linda Morley, Carole Carpenter, or John Scott.

Bill Ellis raised the topic of a submissions deadline for the Newell Prize. Linda Morley suggested January 1. After discussion, it was moved, seconded, and passed unanimously that the Newell Prize be given for the best student essay written during the preceding year, and that the deadline for submissions be set at February 15. Judith Haut suggested that a notice of this deadline be distributed immediately. Members present also considered the issue of guidelines and standards for the Newell Prize. Priscilla Ord agreed to solicit feedback from Section members on the guidelines. Linda Morley moved that the Section pay registration fees to AFS

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## MINUTES OF THE 1988 CFS MEETING, *continued*

annual meetings for future Newell Prize winners. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Bill Ellis asked for ideas concerning panel and forum topics at the 1989 AFS meetings. Judith Haut agreed to contact participants for a forum relating to ethical issues in analysis and application. Priscilla will look into a panel dealing with the impact of the Opie's work on children's folklore scholarship. Priscilla also suggested that the Section consider inviting Iona Opie to give a presentation during a plenary session. Bill Ellis suggested the topic of historical perspectives on children's folklore study for a Section-sponsored panel at the 1990 meetings.

Discussion then turned to the topic of the Opie Prize. Simon reported that there were at least a dozen submissions for the 1988 prize. They included scholarly books as well as those dealing in pedagogy and in children's literature. In discussion about the form of the award, Gary Alan Fine suggested that the Section present a medal or a plaque instead of a cash prize. Simon proposed the following resolution which was then seconded and passed unanimously:

Resolved (1) that the Section award the Opie Prize for 1989 in the amount of \$200; (2) that the wording of the Prize's announcement be changed to include the following phrases: "for books published between June 1, 1988, and June 1, 1989" and "for a book that contributes significantly to scholarly understanding of the folklore and folklife of children"; (3) that Jay Mechling and Gary Alan Fine constitute the Prize committee for 1989. Linda Morley volunteered to assist the committee as needed. As the hour was drawing late, members present agreed to consider the Prize's future form (1990 and years following) in greater detail at the 1989 Section meeting.

Bill Ellis will chair a nominating committee (Phyllis May-Machunda, Joe Edgette, Danielle Roemer) charged with contacting possible candidates for Section offices to be filled in 1989.

Respectfully submitted,

Danielle M. Roemer  
Secretary-Treasurer

# THE NEWELL PRIZE: 1988

*The 1988 Newell Prize was awarded to Patricia M. Meley, a student of Simon Bronner's, for her paper, "Paper Power: A Search for Meaning in the Folded Paper Toys of Pre-Adolescents."*

Perhaps every generation looks at the next with a mixture of pride and awe, bewilderment and fear. Today many concerned adults, educators, and parents search for ways to better understand the children of the 80's. If we use the examination of children's popular culture as the sole vehicle for constructing a meaningful portrait of modern kids, our worst apprehensions seem to be confirmed. Popular trends in children's fashions are remarkable similar to adult fashions. Adult themes of sex and violence pervade the media; explicit music videos and soap operas are now among children's favorite shows. Even cartoons, shows which are specifically made for children, have deteriorated into hour-long product boosters. Drug use is not uncommon among junior high students, teen suicide has become a national concern, the educational system in America appears to be faltering, and rising divorce rates have shattered the image of the traditional American family. Child Psychologist David Eldind cites these stresses as forcing adulthood prematurely on children, and warns: "The concept of childhood, so vital to the traditional American way of life, is threatened with extinction in the society we have created."<sup>1</sup>

Against this dismal, grim backdrop, I sought to gain a more complete portrait of modern children by exploring their folklife; specifically, by examining their folk toy-making processes. I approached this study with a bias; my impression was that children were simply passive absorbers and relayers of popular culture and I expected my research to validate this view. I agreed with folklorist Mac Barrick who states:

*Today's child has little interest in handmade toys. Early on he is faced with institutionalized play and his toys must be similarly institutionalized. Rarely if at all is he allowed the freedom (he certainly lacks the necessity) to make his own toys as grandfather did; he might hurt himself in the process. It is true that sometimes a handmade toy may develop as temporary solution to an immediate problem, but the toy manufacturers are quick to popularized any such item for profit.<sup>2</sup>*

My field research took place in Columbia, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Originally settled by Quakers who established a ferry there, Columbia was formally founded in 1788. Because of its attractive physical location on the Susquehanna River, the

town grew rapidly, reaching its zenith during the Victorian era. Foundries, rolling mills, lace mills, and other industry flourished and railroad and river activity made the town a hub of transportation, a place where ideas and people flowed freely. Since the turn of the century, Columbia is somewhat of a "blacksheep" in the conservative, rural Lancaster County; largely blue collar, the 12,000 residents are primarily of Scotch-Irish or German Lutheran or Catholic descent.

To a child, Columbia is a unique place to grow up. Though basically urban in flavor, interspersed among the factories and concrete are glimpses of green: fields, streams, wooded areas, and the Susquehanna River are all within reach. There is much freedom available to Columbia's youth; the streets are safe and there is still a strong sense of neighborhood and community. It is the kind of town where neighbors know one another by name, where people sit out on stoops and porches, and where children gather in neighborhood gangs.

I interviewed 52 sixth, seventh, and eighth graders from Holy Trinity School, one of two Catholic schools in Columbia. The school has an enrollment of 200 and enjoys a certain cohesiveness; the kids know each other and their teachers well. It is not unusual for students to be the second or even third generation of a family to attend Holy Trinity, adding to the impression of community. The biggest discipline problems at the school have remained the same for years: chewing gum and talking during class. The children are not the naive remnants of an era gone by, however. They are real, thoroughly modern children who like to ride skateboards and talk on the phone. They watch MTV and Santa Barbara; they collect teddy bears and baseball cards. They worship the radio, and spell atrociously, hassle their parents and . . . they make folk toys.

In a child's hand, any object can be used as a toy: a piece of wadded paper serves as a ball, a stick becomes a laser gun. It is necessary, therefore, to distinguish between folk toys and purely imaginative toys. Mac Barrick offers this definition: "A folk toy is an object made by the folk for use in play."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps a more complete definition would be: any object used, made, or altered by a child for use in play, WHICH IS LEARNED OR SHARED INFORMALLY; this emphasis on the process of learning is essential when discussing children's folk toys. For this reason, I

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