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Alfred Shoemaker and the Discovery of American Folklife

With the rise of folklife in the twentieth century as a term for the social basis of tradition, America took on the look of a nation of composite groups. Folklife averred America’s pluralism, its ethnic-regional diversity, and Pennsylvania became its model. Folklife was a rarely used term in America before Pennsylvania’s Alfred Shoemaker raised it most forcefully as an alternative to folklore after World War II. By 1972, Richard Dorson observed that folklife “has vied with and even threatened to dominate folklore” (Dorson 1972d, 2). By the time America’s bicentennial celebration rolled around in 1976, the United States had an American Folklife Center in the Library of Congress, an Office of Folklife Programs in the Smithsonian Institution, and a department of Folklore and Folklife at the University of Pennsylvania. Several American journals had folklife in their masthead, of which Pennsylvania Folklife was the oldest and largest.

Amid glorified monuments to great unifying figures of American history, folklife bursts on the Mall in the nation’s capital every summer as a showcase of American pluralism (Adams 1990; Kurin 1990). Sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution, the Festival of American Folklife sounds keywords of diversity in its presentations. As the secretary of the Smithsonian offered in the introduction to a festival publication, “In the United States today there is increasing awareness and debate about questions of culture. The terms ‘multicultural’ and ‘diversity,’ ‘equity,’ ‘conservation,’ ‘survival,’ and ‘pluralism’ are becoming part of public discourse as national and local institutions evaluate their missions, audiences and constituencies” (Adams 1990, 5). Folklife, even more than folklore, provided a way to get at the vitality, the totality, of separate ethnic communities. Explaining folklife in “contemporary multicultural society” to festival-goers, Richard Kurin wrote, “Expressive, grass-roots culture, or folklife, is lived by all of us as members
of ethnic, religious, tribal, familial, or occupational groups. It is the way we represent our values in stories, songs, rituals, crafts and cooking. Whether the legacy of past generations or a recent innovation, folklife is traditionalized by its practitioners; it becomes a marker of community or group identity. Folklife is a way that people say, "This is who and how we are" (Kurin 1990, 8).

While the rhetoric of folklife used in the festival encouraged "community or group identity" as the basis of plural America, the presentation at the festival favored groups "in need of empowerment," as one former staff member observed (Sommers 1996, 230). The director of the office sponsoring the festival phrased it in a less politically charged way: "The Festival gives voice to people and cultures not otherwise likely to be heard in a national setting" (Kurin 1989, 15). The history of the festival shows a procession from the safety of regional groups to communities claiming disenfranchisement or even victimization. Beginning with Regional America in 1967, the festival added a Native American Program (1968), Working Americans and Old Ways in a New World (1973), African Diaspora (1974), Community (1978), Folklore and Aging (1984), and Cultural Conservation (1985). A festival presenter reflected that at the festival, "'Folk' in fact means working class, marginalized, and grassroots; the traditions of the elite and powerful seldom are celebrated at FAF" (Sommers 1996, 230). She brought up the controversy over the American Trial Lawyers Program in 1986 as an example of this bias in the construction of folklife on the Mall. The folklorists did not question claims for the verbal artistry of trial lawyers as authentic tradition, but they disputed whether the festival "was an appropriate vehicle for the presentation of such a moneyed and powerful group, even with the intent of 'demystifying the powerful'" (Sommers 1996, 230). She pointed out, moreover, that during the Michigan Program the following year, "it was not the traditions of the engineers or designers we sought, although clearly theirs is valid occupational lore, but rather the lore of the worker on the assembly line, of the Union, of the ethnic workers who sought jobs in the industry" (Sommers 1996, 230; see also Cantwell 1991).

The rhetorical turn toward folklife before the Festival of American Folklife began affirmed recognition of unempowered groups as part of a view of a socially representative cultural democracy in the United States. Folklife study established the persistence of ethnic-religious communities bound by tradition that can be overlooked in a kind of cultural competition for public notice. The notice is important because of the presumption that mass culture overtakes folk cultures and fosters a consensus on the necessity for technological progress. Folklife study reminded Americans of the possibility of continuing tradition, and the benefits of self-esteem and belonging it brought. The special groups covered by folklife—the Amish and Cajuns, for example—were imperative for providing models of community in America. Folklife studies thus worked to chart ethnic-regional cultures that created a national map of difference.
Folklife showed difference in its very origin. Its roots lay not in the familiar English coining of a "good Saxon compound" of folklore, but in the foreign German term *Volksleben* and the Swedish *folkliv* (Yoder 1963; Erixon 1967; Fenton 1973; Bronner 1996c). The use of folklife argued for the interrelation of tradition in its cultural totality with reference to patterns created by oral, social, and especially material expressions (see Fenton 1967). The totality was rarely national, though. In its use of folk, it translated to a subcultural, and often marginalized, existence within a mainstream society. "Lore" implied unusual, surviving expressions that drew attention to themselves. "Life" appeared more functional; it invoked everyday, public activity as continuing tradition. It underscored the social bonds, the group identity, that lay at the foundation of a local culture. Its orientation was social-historical, to find precedent for a separate society, and ethnographic, to observe traditional practices and their living functions. Its inspiration was in German and Scandinavian scholarship, and its manifestation was in the plural ethnic-regional communities of Pennsylvania. It flew in the face of comparative literary methods of the prevalent historic-geographic school that seemed preoccupied with folktale texts. It went beyond an American anthropology of the exotic primitive in American Indians to an ethnography of familiar groups, often engaged by participants in the culture. It sought to bring issues of ethnic-regional identity and community to the fore as a new nationalism swept America.

The story of how Alfred Shoemaker made folklife prominent has its fair share of intrigue. It is a saga of a crusader up against formidable odds and a series of events that brought him rapid fame and a sudden fall. Alfred Shoemaker was used to going against the tide. A pacifist in time of war, a Pennsylvania-German speaker in an English-speaking world, a homosexual in a heterosexual society, Shoemaker exemplified difference and innovation. He established the first department of folklore or folklife in the United States, the country's first folklife society, and its first folklife publication. He created precedents for public folklife festivals, folklife archives, and cultural programming in popular media. Indeed, he brought meaning to the use of folklife as a rhetorical strategy for legitimizing cultural diversity and empowerment of marginalized groups. He put into circulation a new lexicon of tradition, including folk culture, material culture, and cultural source area. His model for the nation was in the state of Pennsylvania, in which he observed a commonwealth of distinctive communities often put in precarious political roles. The Pennsylvania-German group to which he belonged had withstood state efforts to undermine the culture by suppressing the subcultural language and education.

In the story of Alfred Shoemaker is found the struggle to find reconciliation in the American discourse of culture between ethnic and national orientations to folklore. As a flamboyant public figure and academic scholar, Shoemaker simultaneously appealed to a Pennsylvania-German audience and an international scholarly "folk culture" fraternity. Removed from the ivory tower and anthropological assumptions about being an outsider to gain objectivity, Shoemaker saw benefits
from his role as an insider to Pennsylvania-German culture to study its traditions. While his name may not be attached to present-day attempts to reconcile ethnic, national, and international folklife, his work significantly set the pattern for later attempts to intellectualize the public realm. In this discussion, I first examine reasons for the rise of folklife studies in the fertile soil of Pennsylvania and the development of the Pennsylvania-German tradition as a model for an unmeltable community in a multicultural society. I move then to Shoemaker's campaign to expand Pennsylvania-German historiography into a national scholarship encompassing all of America's groups.

Instead of isolating oral tradition into literary types as many folklore studies had done, Shoemaker's folklife studies gave special notice to observable crafts and arts as signs of functional traditions that contribute to the life of a community. Arts and crafts were integral to the function of a community, and they resulted in products including houses and town plans that remained visibly fixed on the landscape with ethnic imprints long after their makers had passed away. Folklife seen in a community's material products thus emphasized a total environment emphasizing the persistence of tradition. Folklife countered folklore's tendency to marginalize stories as surviving products of bygone ages. Folklife had a connotation of a living tradition, seen visibly in its arts and crafts used for the necessities of community life.

The legacy of rural art and craft studies in Pennsylvania reaching well back into the nineteenth century helped to convey an image of Pennsylvania as a place where hand-wrought tradition is momentous. It is an image filled with bank barns, fraktur, painted furniture, paper cutting, decorated stoves, baskets, quilts, and pottery. It is an image combining the hardy practicality associated with Pennsylvania settlers and the beauty they carved into their lives. This image undergirds much of today's folklife scholarship in general—emphasis on handwork, rural life, and domestic goods—and reflects several patterns that call particularly on the Pennsylvania experience.

That experience was a plural one. As opposed to the master narrative of ethnic homogeneity in early southern and New England settlement, Pennsylvania's saga featured an assortment of religious-cultural settlements from groups outside the English mold. Seeking refuge in Pennsylvania, groups such as Mennonites, Brethren, and Quakers formed distinctive ethnic and religious communities, often isolated from one another, that helped preserve Old World customs and language. In Pennsylvania, the character of communitarian group life in America became defined. Historian Michael Zuckerman emphasized the priority of Pennsylvania as America's first plural society. He explained: "The very diversity of the area demands the requisite attention to variation. Tribalism may have emerged among the Quakers of New Garden, but a far different familialism appeared close by among the Friends of the Welsh Tract. Sects may have solidified in revolutionary Philadelphia, but privatism prevailed in the revolutionary countryside a few miles
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up the Schuylkill” (1982, 23–24). Unlike New England, where studies of communities leaped to national generalization, in Pennsylvania study by geographic and cultural necessity was essentially local, primarily ethnic and religious. Since activities in the central Pennsylvania heartland often appeared outside of nation-making events in New England or the South, students of the region found value in locating the ordinariness of rural everyday life as a sign of communal importance.

The contrast of Pennsylvania to the nation is less a matter of landscape than ethnicity, amply demonstrated by the coverage of German heritage among Pennsylvania’s many groups. Even in this nod to the dominance of German folklife in Pennsylvania’s history, there is a plural, fragmented story. Historians often divide between “plain” sects, such as the Amish and Dunkards, and “church people” of Lutheran and Reformed faiths. Residents additionally distinguish between Old German, or the “Dutch” of colonial Pennsylvania, and New German brought over in the wave of late-nineteenth-century immigration. Pennsylvania’s multiple identities, its communitarian sense of plural ethnicities, are bound in its varied history and settlement.

THE ETHNIC CONNECTION

Pennsylvania began its settlement late, when compared to the other colonies on the Eastern Seaboard. The commonwealth also differed from its neighbors in the kind of settlers who came. Consistently, Pennsylvania attracted disenfranchised religious and ethnic groups from Europe. English Quakers during the late seventeenth century were joined by Dutch and Welsh brethren. Almost immediately the principle of a plural society emerged with this mixing of European ethnic-religious identities in a “holy experiment” of religious freedom. Attracted by promises of ethnic tolerance and a landscape reminiscent of their homeland, persecuted religious sects from German-speaking countries came next to give a contrasting image to the English roots of most Eastern Seaboard settlements. Mennonites, Amish, and Dunkers from Switzerland and the German Rhineland spread well inland into Pennsylvania and they established close-knit farming communities. The mountainous inland landscape influenced the separation of communities according to valleys. Still today, one hears reference to the subregional separation of the Oley Valley, Lehigh Valley, Hegins Valley, Mahatango Valley, and on it goes.

In many valleys bounded by imposing mountains in the Appalachian chain, an isolation and hardy self-sufficiency arose. In many Pennsylvania valley communities German language, art, and custom of the Old Country persisted well into the twentieth century. To be sure, the Germans, who mostly spoke a Plattdeutsch dialect, had contact with English speakers, and gave rise to an American German dialect they identified as the basis of a cultural group, called Pennsylvannisch Deitsch, or Pennsylvania Dutch. Within the range of settlement, subdialects formed, often arranged by valleys such as the Shenandoah, Lehigh, and Susquehanna (see
Buffington 1949). Many of the pioneers of Pennsylvania ethnic and folklife studies used linguistic training to tie the social boundaries of dialect to an ethnic culture (see Buffington et al. 1980). Alfred Shoemaker's dissertation, for instance, connected language use to cultural boundaries of an Amish community in Illinois (1940). The Pennsylvania linguistic scholars went beyond analysis of the dialectal nature of a community's language to make a case for the cultural integrity of ethnic characteristics of art, architecture, and belief associated with a language group.

Near the inland Pennsylvania-German settlements were many lowland Scots who had lived in northern Ireland, including many Presbyterians who had come during the eighteenth century to southeastern Pennsylvania for religious and economic opportunities. The result of this early settlement was an association of Pennsylvania's inland landscape with strong ethnic areas—particularly German and Scots-Irish communities. The distinctiveness of the arts and customs of these peoples, when compared to the predominant English background of the other colonies, helped create an image of ethnic islands within the new American nation. The family farm economy and supposedly stubborn hold onto Old World ways created an associated image of these areas as "folk" or "traditional" societies in contrast to the progressive nation.

An industrial connection to Pennsylvania ethnicity also became strong in a state that was host to the iron, coal, steel, lumber, and oil booms of the nineteenth century. When waves of southern and eastern European immigrants came to work in Pennsylvania industries during the late nineteenth century, they found encouragement from German and Scots-Irish precedents for maintenance of ethnic customs. Nonetheless, the life preserved by the colonial Germans was not matched by later immigrants who tended to maintain aspects of their culture such as food, domestic arts, dance, and music in a more ethnically mixed environment. By then spreading out across the state from Philadelphia to Scranton, Johnstown, and Pittsburgh, the new waves of Italian, Ukrainian, Serbian, Croatian, Polish, and Hungarian immigrants—to name a few of the nationalities—settled into a more urban experience than their German predecessors. Yet in Pennsylvania they were known for forming ethnic neighborhoods and establishing a vast assortment of ethnic clubs and churches that led to early urban anthropological and folkloristic interest (see Miner 1994; Gibbons 1882, 268–303; Culin 1887; Korson [1938] 1964).


Other indications of this ethnic bias can be seen in nineteenth-century studies and societies. The Pennsylvania-German Society was formed in 1891 and featured
many folklife topics in its publications, and other periodicals such as Pennsylvania-German, Penn Germania, and German American Annals began at the turn of the century. Thirty years earlier, Atlantic Monthly featured Phebe Earle Gibbons’s essays on Pennsylvania traditions. Her organization revolved around ethnic topics: under “Pennsylvania Dutch,” she covered Quiltings, Festivals, and Manners and Customs, and she discussed similar traditions for Swiss Exiles, Dunkers, Moravians, and Schwenkfelders. She collected her essays under the title of Pennsylvania Dutch, and Other Essays and consumer demand encouraged three revised editions between 1872 and 1882. Another widely known statement of Pennsylvania’s diversity before the turn of the century was Sydney George Fisher’s The Making of Pennsylvania (1896). Fisher characterized the state and its folkways by its “mixture of languages, nationalities, and religions,” and the way “these divisions led a more or less distinct life of their own in colonial times” (Fisher 1896, iii; emphasis added). Pennsylvania was no melting pot, according to writers in this part of America, and the studies of immigrant crafts verified this fact by showing the “extremely varied” character of Pennsylvania, as Fisher called it.

The divisions of religion that Fisher noticed led to the realization that some groups did not participate in America’s polity. They desired a total way of life “separate from the world” and could accomplish that within Pennsylvania. The image of ethnicity and folklife in Pennsylvania often joined nonconformist sectarian life. Among the first popular descriptions of the Pennsylvania Germans, Phebe Gibbons’s classic work viewed religion as the basis of groups that did not seek intercourse with other communities. While she could accept the idea of groups maintaining their Old World ties, the separation of the communities and lack of interest in negotiating politically surprised her. She repeatedly used the loaded term “sect” to underscore the difference, and communal separation, of the Pennsylvania groups. Although the groups she described did not use the term sect, it gave to her readers the impression of a small devoted community breaking away from the mainstream and living totally, maybe fanatically, within their faith.

Gibbons gave special attention to Amish and Mennonites and related their lives to the pursuit of plainness. She saw its manifestation in everything they did and the traditions they kept, including dress, transportation, and architecture. She also recognized the religious worlds within a world often retrievable only with reference to an insider’s view. Here is the anecdote she gave to demonstrate this: “It is said that a person once asked an Amish man the difference between themselves and another Mennist sect. ‘Vy, dey vears puttons, and ve vearsh hooks oont eyes;’ and this is, in fact, a prime difference” (Gibbons 1882, 15). Don Yoder later used this connection of dress and sect to draw attention to “sectarian costume” research in the United States (1969). When he revised it for the textbook Folklore and Folklife (1972), edited by Richard Dorson, the material, a survey of dress used by sectarian groups mostly in Pennsylvania, became “folk costume.”
Other early surveys of Pennsylvania featured religious sectarianism as a feature of Pennsylvania ethnicity. Oscar Kuhns in 1901 devoted a chapter of his *The German and Swiss Settlements of Colonial Pennsylvania* (1901) to Pennsylvania religions and offered the impression that Pennsylvania's Germans lived essentially in sectarian and church communities. Jesse Rosenberger's *The Pennsylvania Germans* (1923) gave a more even-handed account, but nonetheless spread the message that most of the Pennsylvania Germans “were possessed of strong religious convictions which dominated their lives, while the general character of all may be said to have been religious” (69). He devoted a separate chapter to the Mennonites as providing “a somewhat interesting additional distinctiveness in their religious history and characteristics” (Rosenberger 1923, 86). In a supplement to the popular volume in 1929, Rosenberger further conveyed an image of sectarian proliferation: “the number of sects first represented has since been considerably increased by schisms and by the formation of new sects, for the creation of which the Pennsylvania Germans have at all times shown somewhat of a propensity” (Rosenberger 1929, 27). If Pennsylvania became known in regional literature for its German stamp and general plurality of nationality groups, it also became specially associated with a growing number of ethnic sectarian communities tied to the land. This image defied the expectation of diminishing ethnic separation on the American landscape with the advent of industrialization.

**The Celebration of Decorative and Preindustrial Arts**

The paradox of Pennsylvania’s reputation for the heights of American industrialization and rural life owes to the lateness of settlement to the region relative to migration to the South and New England. The latecomers looking for land moved into Pennsylvania highlands because of the impression that other, more desirable lands had been taken. The highland settlement allowed for the isolation of homogeneous agricultural communities. With the spread of the population inland, demands for transportation and consumption increased. The lateness of settlement also encouraged the rapid introduction of industrialism that began sweeping Europe in the eighteenth century into the port of Philadelphia. Fisher believed that Pennsylvania’s reputation for tolerance also contributed to the acceptance of innovation in the region (Fisher 1896). The same immigrants that brought masterful craft skills to the United States found themselves highly sought after by the growing numbers of manufacturers in Philadelphia and its outskirts. By the 1790s, more than one-third of all exports of the United States came from Philadelphia. In 1795, Oliver Evans introduced his automated gristmill in the Philadelphia area; to the amazement of the public, the mill received raw material and delivered a finished product on a large scale with little human intervention. Similar transformations were occurring in the printing, cloth, leather, and iron industries. The American factory system took shape in these technological advancements.
Artisans and small farm operations, a mainstay of the Philadelphia economy for more than a century, felt squeezed out by more mills and iron furnaces. By 1800 at least 167 furnaces and forges had been established in Philadelphia. By the early nineteenth century Philadelphia led the nation in manufacturing and population. Pennsylvania's populations, especially its German settlers, were known for their hardy practicality bred by the challenge of agricultural life often under rough conditions. Out of this tradition, Pennsylvanians offered the nation the Conestoga Wagon and the Pennsylvania Rifle, known for their durability, efficiency, and economy. The German bank barns, fixtures on the Pennsylvania landscape, had an Old World look, but were admired for their efficiency. Larger than English barns, the bank barns used the hillsides for extra support and created extended space on the second level with an overhanging forebay. The forebay additionally served to protect livestock and equipment underneath (Glass 1986; Ensminger 1992). As practical as they were, the Pennsylvania Germans also conspicuously displayed signs of decoration and belief, and defied expectations that the poor folk lacked a developed, indeed boisterous, sense of art. Builders formed ventilation holes in the second level in geometric and natural shapes; elaborate weather vanes graced the tops of the barns; "hex" signs colorfully marked the front of the barn. The elaborate, colorful decoration featured motifs of ethnically distinctive tulips, birds, swirls, and hearts which added symbolic meanings of good fortune to the equipment of agriculture and farm living. They also seemed to certify the ethnic masterwork of practicality by covering in distinctive designs that drew attention to the value of the utilitarian object. To be sure, decoration often indicated a maker's cultural insignia and background, but it also marked the object as one made to last and to be cared for. This approach to the built environment carried over into the household, where rugs, quilts, towels, coverlets, documents, stoves, and furniture carried decorative flourishes. Even after the landscape appeared more industrial, the domestic interior perpetuated traditional arts, and the hearth and bed became dominant symbols of traditional ethnic life in Pennsylvania.

Awareness of a "folklife" in Pennsylvania emerged in recognition of the force of industrial change in the region, and in celebration of the domestic domains of rural stability. One can look to some of the nation's first folklife collections to see these influences on the attention to preindustrial and decorative arts. John Fanning Watson created a stir in the early nineteenth century, for example, by publishing his *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania in the Olden Time* (1830), in which he romantically recorded accounts of proud artisans. He claimed that during his lifetime great changes had occurred in the lives of the artisans. "In less than twenty years," wrote Watson, "our exports have grown from twenty to eighty millions.... Our inventions and improvements in the arts, which began but yesterday, make us, even now, 'a wonder unto many'" (Watson 1857, 2). Thus he sought to document the handskills of the aged before their proud traditions associated with the bonds of community and spirit passed. He recorded the reminiscences of
wheelwrights, blacksmiths, and furniture makers. Many of these preindustrial arts did not disappear, as Watson feared, but the belief that their extinction was imminent, coupled with the assumption that Pennsylvania's conservative rural German settlers preserved the old ways, guided the hunt for traditional arts for many years to come. Indeed, the use of the term “folk art” and the decorative arts it described during the late nineteenth century were particularly associated with Pennsylvania researchers before the term became generally popular in American studies during the 1930s (Robacker 1959; de Jonge 1972; see also Bronner 1984a).

A pivotal figure in the late nineteenth-century boom of interest in preindustrial and decorative arts was Henry Mercer of Doylestown, Pennsylvania. Repeating some of Watson's rhetoric, Mercer claimed that “mechanical improvements in human handicraft at the beginning of the nineteenth century have suddenly transformed the American farmer from a pioneer relying for equipment upon his own skill and industry to a husbandman abundantly supplied with labor-saving devices.” For Mercer, the value of preserving the old crafts was that “they gave us a fresh grasp upon the vitality of the American beginning” (Mercer [1897] 1987, 281). Himself an industrialist, Mercer nonetheless appreciated the integrity of handwork and its closeness to nature. In 1897, he installed a splashy exhibition of Pennsylvania folk crafts and arts entitled Tools of the Nation Maker, and followed with essays on fraktur, log houses, and decorated stove plates. Inspired by the establishment of Skansen, an outdoor folk museum in Sweden, Mercer then began building his dream of a folklife museum to house the collection and re-create the setting of preindustrial life, now known as the Mercer Museum. His collection was not alone, as indicated by the publication of F. J. F. Schantz's The Domestic Life and Characteristics of the Pennsylvania-German Pioneer (1900) and, later, the famed collection of the Landis brothers which led to the establishment of the Pennsylvania Farm Museum near Lancaster, Pennsylvania (Landis 1939, 1945; Cary 1989).

In answer to the historical tendency to neglect ethnic communities altogether or their culture to local history, Mercer had this argument: “in the largest sense the store of Eastern Pennsylvania and of its Bucks county is that of the whole Nation” (Mercer 1987, 282). He pointed out that Pennsylvania stood for the beginning of the country because it acted as middleman between the Old World and New. As a busy, mixed thoroughfare to the West, he opined, Pennsylvania laid claim to the cultural hearth of the largest part of the country. Tradition is especially prevalent here, he thought, because the “American pioneer” here more than elsewhere, “thrown for a time upon his own resources, turns back to conditions more primitive than those left behind in the Old World” (Mercer 1987, 282). He viewed this factor, together with the geographic and ethnic isolation of the region, contributing to the persistence of a folk culture on American soil. He gave special emphasis to the communal formations of the Germans in Pennsylvania: “the collection has been made in an old settled region, half Germanized one hundred years ago, and including to the northward a district where fixed conditions, having escaped the encroachments of
railways, die slowly. Here in Bucks county, rather than in Dutch New York, Puritan New England, or the more decidedly English or French regions of the South, we might expect to trace readily the leaven of various trans-Atlantic ingredients of nationality which by degrees should be detected amongst a group of objects fashioned by English, Irish, Welsh, Dutch or German hands" (Mercer 1987, 282).

The Community Emphasis

In Pennsylvania, the idea of community is a material, not abstract, concept. When Pennsylvanians talk about community, they are talking about their towns and ethnic settlements (Zelinsky 1977; Hopple 1971-1972). Just travel the old pike in Central Pennsylvania from Harrisburg to Carlisle, a distance under twenty miles, and you can go through a dozen towns. There is no thought here of incorporating into a larger unit, as cities in the Midwest have done. And residents maintain fierce loyalties to their small towns, manifested in Old Home Days, local historical societies, and town festivals. Another indication is that residents still identify where they live by the small town name rather than the larger urban center around which it may revolve. Investigating the historical roots of this town identity, geographer Wilbur Zelinsky determined that the process of town founding advanced more vigorously in eighteenth-century southeastern and central Pennsylvania than over any other extended tract in British North America.

The Pennsylvania town has several distinctive characteristics. One peculiarity, when compared to other American regions, is the tightness of the settlements. Residences are built close together and close to the street, and as Zelinsky found, this tendency "appears in those attenuated one- or two-street villages that straggle far into the countryside" (1977, 127). Unlike town plans elsewhere, Pennsylvania towns often mix dwellings, shops, and offices in a single area and relegate churches, cemeteries, and schools to peripheral locations. Other common features in the Pennsylvania town are the diamond or square, often where a public market once stood, and a network of attractive alleys running through the town. Similar to many settlements in Germany, the compactness of the towns provides a contrast to sprawling outlying areas of farmland or woods that are kept fairly pristine. The effect is to attain an "urbane intimacy and lively visual variety" in town while maintaining a pastoral landscape on its outskirts. This pattern reflects the varied settlement characteristic of the plural sectarian society that originally came into Pennsylvania and fosters the bonds of traditions working in tightly knit communities. Part of the reason that folklife is associated with these communities is the location of crafts and services in each town. The compact town commonly featured blacksmiths, wheelwrights, tinsmiths, and other craftworkers along the main street in addition to the farmers who brought crafts to sell at market. The profusion of towns throughout the landscape encouraged the establishment of many craft services and apprentice traditions through Pennsylvania. Documentation of crafts in
Pennsylvania was often a way to recall town life and the quality of goods found within one's town. It also spoke to the speculation that along with industrial change, urbanization threatened Pennsylvania's customary folklife revolving around the almost-communal towns. Traditional arts particularly showed local variation, and projected an "intimacy and lively visual variety" reminiscent of the towns.

Hence, local study of folklife and history has been strong in Pennsylvania. Watson's *Annals*, reprinted in many editions to the end of the nineteenth century, was an influence on the efforts to record folk traditions as part of town histories in Pennsylvania. The guide for study published in 1893 by the Philadelphia chapter of the American Folklore Society made the emphasis of community explicit. It urged the study of "usages of a community which are peculiar to itself, and which, taken together, constitute its individuality when compared with other communities." Henry Mercer's fame as a precursor of American folklife studies was indeed based on the study of his beloved Doylestown and surrounding towns in Bucks County for the Bucks County Historical Society. In this light, with the community holding the key to tradition and creative expression, one might better understand his particularly Pennsylvanian boast in 1897 that when considering folk crafts, "we need not look so far ahead to imagine the time when if we do anything like our duty, the student of these things, whoever he may be, will not go to Washington, Boston, New York, Chicago, or anywhere else in the country to study American history from this fresh point of view, but will be compelled to come to Doylestown" (Mercer 1987, 289).

The communities of Pennsylvania relate well to one another partly because of ethnic connections and the paths of transportation that tied the state into a region. Unlike the pattern in other states, migration from the eastern port of entry, namely Philadelphia, tended to stay within state lines. A reason, then, for the attention to arts particularly framed by Pennsylvania is that the state demarcates cultural as well as political lines. The Pennsylvania-German influence dips down below the Mason-Dixon line into north-central Maryland and northwestern Virginia, and north-central Pennsylvania bears a New England stamp, but generally the state uniquely represents a cultural region tucked between the older regions of New England and the South (Glassie 1968; Zelinsky 1973; Gastil 1975).

Affecting the construction of folklife in America as the description of a total way of life was the presence of distinctive religious communities described as sects and experimental societies. They were characterized as isolable subcultures with linked features of language, dress, occupation, custom, foodways, architecture, and craft. In addition to the "plain" sects such as the Amish, Dunkers, and River Brethren were enclosed societies such as Ephrata in eastern Pennsylvania and Harmony in western Pennsylvania. These settlements became American models for the "folk society" of the "little community" described by Robert Redfield in Mexico as a rural subculture within the modern state. Redfield offered its characteristics as "distinctiveness, smallness, homogeneity, and all-providing self-sufficiency" (Redfield 1950, 4; see also Loomis and Beegle 1951). John Hostetler
used this view of an "intimate, face-to-face" community tied to the land to organize his often-reprinted *Amish Society* (1963). Alfred Shoemaker isolated the Amish and Mennonites as folk communities among the Pennsylvania Germans, and placed them within the settlement landscape of the region: "The Amish and 'Team' Mennonite farms cluster around Garden Spot villages with such arresting names as Bird-in-Hand, Intercourse, and Blue Ball. The Amish, who own some of the richest farmland in America, and the less prosperous 'Team' Mennonites, who for the most part inhabit the hill land, believe to a man that God has but one plan for them: to till His acres and be non-conformers in the world which *man* has created" (Shoemaker 1959c; see also Smith 1961). The "little community" of the Amish, the subject of Shoemaker's dissertation work, seemed appropriate to application of European folklife methods used for peasant communities.

**The Emergence of Folklife**

The close integration of language, art, and custom in the ethnic and sectarian enclaves of Pennsylvania suggested to many nineteenth-century chroniclers an approach that examined traditional arts within the life of Pennsylvania's distinctive communities and regions. They saw the arts as part of the daily round of life and an expression of the cultural inheritance maintained in the New World experience. Contributing to the appropriateness of this approach to Pennsylvania was the influence of German ethnological methods which were widely read in German intellectual circles in Pennsylvania academies (Yoder 1963). Early in the nineteenth century, Christian Heinrich Niemann of Kiel in his journal *Schleswig-Holsteinische Volkskunde* published a forty page questionnaire to show his method of assembling a systematic description of a community or region (Jacobeit 1991, 70–71). Wolfgang Jacobeit reflected that it was "one of the first attempts at interdisciplinary cooperation for a comprehensive investigation of an area and its people," and it was appropriate to German-speaking areas known for their distinct regionalism in language, arts, and architecture. Later questionnaires expanded the concern to a connection of a people made separate by their work as well as by their land. The essential components of an alternative to the Grimms' linguistic study of oral tradition as a type of literature had formed in this approach. It would emphasize the observable behavior in daily life of a group or community, integration of its customs and crafts, and social function of its traditions. It fundamentally understood traditions as ways of life that contribute to formation of separate identities, and it asked how those traditions are maintained and adapted by the group. Its political importance was that it supported the integrity of small communities against larger forces—national, industrial, and cultural—that would engulf them.

The appeal of folklife as a rhetoric of social difference became noticeable in the literary work of Pennsylvania resident Ludwig August Wollenweber (1807–1888), who published *Gemälde aus dem Pennsylvanischen Volksleben* (Pictures of
Pennsylvania Folklife) in Philadelphia and Leipzig in 1869. Wollenweber was a political refugee from the Rhenish Palatinate during the 1830s and settled in Philadelphia, and later further inland in central Pennsylvania. He founded and edited the *Philadelphische Demokrat* in 1839 and became an advocate for Pennsylvania-German welfare. In his opening line of *Gemälde* he emphasized “das Land und die Leut,” the connection of people to a place and the separate identity and tradition they, that is Pennsylvania Germans, gain from it. He arranged beliefs by the season in which they were appropriate, and thus showed that they functioned within a round of daily life related to agricultural communities in the inland Pennsylvania-German region. In vignettes such as *Farmleben* or “farmlife” he submitted that the Pennsylvania Germans had established a separate tradition within the United States, but not without struggle (see Robacker 1943, 1034). Some of this tribulation is especially evident in his saga of *Die Berg Maria* (Mountain Mary, 1880), in which he wrote the opinion that the Pennsylvania Dutch fought in the Revolutionary War to throw off British tyranny so as to live their ethnic life freely.

There is a direct line from Wollenweber to later folklife scholars, for John Joseph Stoudt translated and introduced the Mountain Mary legend in 1974 as “the classical study of Pennsylvania Dutch life during the Revolutionary period” (Wollenweber 1974, 15). Phebe Gibbons included an English translation of Wollenweber’s stories in her third edition of “Pennsylvania Dutch,” and Other Essays in 1882. They provided reinforcement for her view of the distinctiveness of the Pennsylvania-German settlement. She emphasized the objectivity of the “life” she observed in her first paragraph: “I shall try to give from my own observation and familiar acquaintance, some account of the life of a people who are little known outside of the rural neighborhoods of their own State, who have much that is peculiar in their language, customs, and belief …” (Gibbons 1882, 11).

The theme of local separateness seen in folklife comes through an early, if not the first, American use of the term folklife. William Wells published “Folk-Life in German By-Ways” in the popular magazine *Scribner’s Monthly* in 1873. Examining the very region of Hesse that the Brothers Grimm had made their case for a united voice of a national folk, Wells found more variation, and more persistence, among communities than the brothers.

The German peasants form the most conservative communities in the world. Within a stone’s throw of all the habits and customs of modern civilization, they will persistently maintain their speech, their costume, and their notions, both at work and at play. These differ also greatly in different regions, so that one can stand on a mountain summit, and look into valleys right and left, whose inhabitants wear different garbs, speak different dialects, and who, quite likely, may be of opposite faiths. These peculiarities are so marked that one well versed in folk-lore can divine among a score of men of different origin, the valley or the mountain range to which each one belongs. (Wells 1873, 590)
Wells advocated the localized study of folklife as opposed to the international study of folklore. "The study of German folk-life is therefore well-nigh exhaustless," he wrote, "and one who would do justice to it must choose some particular region, that its manners and customs may be considered apart" (Wells 1873, 590).

One German immigrant from Hesse who came to Pennsylvania and took up the study of folklife sounded a conciliation between ethnic community and national culture. Karl Knortz (1841-1918) was an educator and writer who believed that a national culture was inevitable in the United States but sought to involve plural, and especially German, influences on its formation (Assion 1988; Schamschula 1996). He appropriately published the first, even if slim, study of national folklife as Zur amerikanischen Volkskunde (On American Folklife, 1905). While making sweeping comments on American national character such as "Americans like to talk and they patiently listen to others, even when they talk about the most ridiculous things" and "The American wants to earn money in every situation," he also pointed out the persistence of sectarian German communities in Pennsylvania and Iowa (Knortz [1905] 1988, 42). He also paid attention to other ethnic "quarters" for Italians, Irish, and blacks that formed a distinctive community folklife. He contributed a methodological guide to folklife study as Was ist Volkskunde und wie studiert man dieselbe? (What is Folklife and How Does One Study That? 1900) in which he included questionnaires and suggested problems of interethnic relationships and acculturation as particular to the American scene (see also Knortz 1882; Schamschula 1996). Folklore was part of a larger study of Volksleben, or folklife, he urged, toward the understanding of social Volkscharakter, by which he meant the formation of collective identities (Knortz 1906, 3-5). If Knortz was not read widely in English, he had a measurable influence in German education circles that had a marked impact on American universities during the Gilded Age.

The University of Pennsylvania's German department became especially important in the connection of Pennsylvania-German language to folklife. Marion Dexter Learned (1857-1917), the chair of the department from 1895 to 1917, issued calls for systematic collection of folk cultural materials, and he mentored two mainstays of Pennsylvania-German folklife research—Preston Barba and Edwin Fogel. Fogel completed his dissertation on beliefs and superstitions of the Pennsylvania Germans under Learned, and offered it as a "serious attempt at putting into permanent form a phase of folk-life which will soon disappear into the background and thus be irretrievably lost" (Fogel 1915, iii). He credited Learned, "an inspiring leader," with allowing the study of folklife as a "chapter in the larger field of German American relations" and for encouraging an insider to study his own background. Learned became nationally known in scholarly circles for his views in his capacity as president of the Modern Language Association in 1909 and editor of German-American Annals from 1897 until 1917. As editor of a series of books called "Americana Germanica," Learned published Fogel's work alongside studies of the Harmony Society, Germans in Texas, and German Creoles in Louisiana.
Of special significance in spreading academic awareness of Pennsylvania’s ethnic communities, Learned planned and published the first American ethnographic survey in the United States dealing with European rather than American Indian cultures (Learned 1907, 1911). Called the American Ethnographical Survey, it surveyed the Conestoga Valley, mostly in Lancaster County, for a range of folk cultural material, including language, architecture, and craft. It was notable, too, for its attention to localized group identity and its manifestation in thriving cultural forms (Learned 1903). The “culture census,” as Learned sometimes referred to his survey, connected folklife with the method of ethnography, and according to Don Yoder, earned Learned the reputation of “one of the pioneers of the folklife studies movement in the United States” (Yoder 1971, 73; see also Old Penn 1911).

I could discuss other figures such as William Julius Mann, John Baer Stoudt, E. L. Grumbine, and Walter James Hoffman, all who contributed to a consciousness of Pennsylvania folk around the turn of the nineteenth century (Robacker 1943, 144–69; Mann 1880; Stoudt 1915; Grumbine 1905; Hoffman 1888). The upshot is that inspired by German ethnological methods and a political concern for the integrity of German communal life in America, Pennsylvania-German writers and students of language and culture developed a special approach toward folklife in Pennsylvania. Most of the writers had a connection to the Pennsylvania-German Society formed in 1891 with the intention of interpreting the group’s folklife together with its history and literature. The folklife approach in Pennsylvania differed from the British-inspired approach prevalent in the American Folklore Society, formed in 1888. The folklore approach considered oral traditions separately from material traditions, and compared cross-culturally, rather than in the context of a single community or culture, to compile an evolution of the tradition’s development.

The distinctiveness of the Pennsylvania, and especially Pennsylvania-German, scholar’s approach helps explain the relative independence of Pennsylvania folklife studies from the main movements of American folklore study until the late twentieth century. Study of tradition in Pennsylvania stressed crafts and customs as part of folk tradition, and related them to social and oral parts of a community or regional culture. A sign of this emphasis to American folklorists came in 1888 with the first volume of the American Folklore Society’s *Journal of American Folklore*. In it, Walter James Hoffman published “Folklore of the Pennsylvania Germans,” in which he described flax raising, barn design, marriage custom, foodways, and quilting parties all related to the cultural history of Pennsylvanians around his native Reading. Work on German communities in America suffered with the rise of anti-German feeling in the United States during World Wars I and II. The *Journal of American Folklore* contained twenty articles on German Americans before World War I, and did not publish another one until 1931. The Pennsylvania-German Folklore Society formed in 1936 and published several volumes on folk crafts and arts, but it received scant attention from the American
Folklore Society, probably because the academics of the American society perceived it to be of regional or parochial rather than national interest. Indeed, the self-concerned tone of the introduction to the Pennsylvania-German Folklore Society may have sounded exclusive and hardly objective: “the sphere of this Society is, of course, ethnological seeking to record permanently the folk-mind of our own people. History, as such, is therefore to be subordinated, the main emphasis falling upon the cultural aspects of Pennsylvania German life” (emphasis added; Yoder 1971, 81-82).

Up until World War II, leading lights of Pennsylvania-German cultural studies such as Preston Barba, Thomas Brendle, John Joseph Stoudt, and Edwin Fogel barely received notice in folkloristic circles, although they published extensively on folk art, belief, and speech. To be sure, they were self-conscious about their scholarly contribution, but their main publishing outlets were within Pennsylvania-German societies, and few of them held major academic positions (Yoder 1971; see also Beam 1995). When tourist interest moved John Joseph Stoudt's cultural history of Pennsylvania Germans into wide circulation, he editorialized in his preface: “Pennsylvania Germans have been orphans in American studies.... The main barrier to better understanding has been language. Pennsylvania Dutch culture has been viewed as ‘strange’ and ‘foreign’ by authorities in American studies. The field has no academic home, for it belongs neither to German nor to history departments. Some rubricate it with folklore” (Stoudt 1973, 9). Aware of the academic trends mentioned by Stoudt and still loyal to Pennsylvania-German folklife, the young and brash Alfred Shoemaker took it upon himself to change the intellectual landscape of tradition in America.

THE CREATION OF THE FIRST DEPARTMENT OF FOLKLORE

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is usually credited with the establishment of the first academic “curriculum” of folklore in 1939. Led by Ralph Steele Boggs, the curriculum contained nine courses taught by six professors from five different departments, making it possible for a folklore major toward the M.A. or a minor toward the Ph.D. (Boggs 1940, 95–96). In 1948 Stith Thompson established an interdepartmental program at Indiana University at Bloomington, which awarded its first Ph.D. to Warren Roberts in 1953. It was not until 1963 that Richard Dorson inaugurated the folklore department at Indiana. By using the term “department” Dorson argued that folklore joined the higher ranks of other disciplines. Folklore then took its rightful place as a distinctive study, not just an amalgamation of many studies. Pragmatically, it served as a budgeted power base to promote folklore studies at the undergraduate as well as graduate levels, spread course requirements on cultural studies, and fund graduate students.

Dorson’s original appointment at Indiana University in 1957 was to chair what was then called “the committee on folklore.” According to Dorson, when he came
... some half-dozen graduate students were seeking higher degrees in folklore. The courses they took originated almost entirely with established departments. That is, the course on the English and Scottish popular ballad belonged to the English department and would be cross-listed under Folklore. In effect, the folklore program simply drew upon the existing faculty and curricular resources of the university. I myself was budgeted full-time in the history department, and all the members of the folklore committee were budgeted in their respective departments of anthropology, English, Spanish, and so on. By such means the university cautiously launched new programs with a minimum of outlay. The programs might grow into departments, remain indefinitely in a limbo status, or wither away. They had to prove their vitality. (Dorson 1976c, 113-14)

"Vitality" at North Carolina and Indiana had an academic definition taking in numbers of students, faculty, and courses. Public outreach (in the way of festivals, museums, or centers) was not part of this strategy. Courses at North Carolina and Indiana stressed literary forms of folklore (ballad, epic, narrative) and their offerings crossed ethnic and national lines. When they covered the American scene, they emphasized the British inheritance. According to Boggs's survey, most folklore courses appeared in English departments, and the most common subject was English and American ballad (1940, 97).

The approach at Franklin and Marshall, set in the heart of the "Pennsylvania Dutch" country, was different. Its emphasis on the integrated traditions of diverse ethnic-regional groups that formed local cultures within America had a relation to the ethnic-regional roots of the college. A small liberal arts college with ties to the German Reformed Church and Pennsylvania-German scholarship, it had for decades promoted teaching and research in local culture. One notable figure at the college was the Reverend Joseph Henry Dubbs (1838-1910, F&M class of 1856), Audenried professor of history and archaeology, who served as president of the Pennsylvania-German Society and wrote on folklore of the Pennsylvania Germans ("Dr." 1910; Yoder 1949, 5). When Dubbs died, none other than the college president, also a past president of the Pennsylvania-German Society, wrote a tear-jerking appreciation in The Pennsylvania-German. Franklin and Marshall's president spotlighted Dubbs's concern for local traditions which complemented the college's mission: "His knowledge of the founding of Pennsylvania, the early settlements of the German and the Scotch Irish, the planting of the first churches, and the development of the different religious denominations in this state was accurate, minute, and thorough, and there are few who will vie with him in this respect, and few, alas! who are qualified to receive his mantle" (Stahr 1910, 421).

H. M. J. Klein later filled Dubbs's chair and wrote on the folk customs of the Amish (1946). Dubbs's granddaughter, Elizabeth Clarke Kieffer, was on staff as reference librarian during the 1940s and 1950s and worked closely with the Pennsylvania-German collection. Edwin M. Hartman, headmaster of the Franklin and Marshall Academy connected to the college, chaired the organizing meeting of
the Pennsylvania-German Folklore Society in 1936 (see Ziegler 1943, 182–83). The strong connection to the Pennsylvania-German culture made sense. Most of the students came from the region and many spoke Pennsylvania German as well as appreciating its folkways. When Theodore Distler (of German, if not Pennsylvania-German ancestry) came from Lafayette College to become president of Franklin and Marshall in 1941, he continued the legacy by supporting a strong German department, and in 1944, appointing J. William Frey its chair.

Frey, a Pennsylvania German, received his Ph.D. at the University of Illinois, where he completed a dissertation on the Pennsylvania-German dialect in eastern York County of Pennsylvania. He had studied comparative philology in Germany, and besides mastering dialects of German, he developed capabilities in at least fifteen other languages (see Beam 1981, xiii). Codirector of the Pennsylvania-German Folklore Society, Frey had a special love for folklore and folk song, and frequently entertained publicly using his native Pennsylvania-German folk song repertoire. When he returned to the United States he relied on his folklore collecting experience among the Pennsylvania Germans for dialect columns in York County newspapers, commercial recordings, and radio shows. Beginning in 1943, he edited and published Der Pennsylvaanisch Deitsch Eileschpiggel, taking its name from a folklore trickster figure in Pennsylvania-German lore. Begun at Lehigh University and later continued at Franklin and Marshall, the periodical was a miscellany of Pennsylvania-German folklore, fiction, poetry, history, bibliography, news, and commentary. Frey also contributed to scholarship with a chapter of Pennsylvania Songs and Legends on Amish folk music (1949) and a book-length grammar of Pennsylvania German (1942).

Frey and Distler, with the help of library director Herbert B. Anstaett, had an unusual opportunity to develop Pennsylvania-German folklore scholarship at Franklin and Marshall when Harvey Bassler donated a massive collection, forty-five tons in all, of rare books, pamphlets, fraktur, and prints, much of it obtained from indefatigable Pennsylvania-German collector Charles Unger of Pottsville, Pennsylvania (Yoder 1983, 11; Faill 1987, 5). On October 21, 1946, Distler wrote to the Reverend William Rupp of the Pennsylvania-German Society assuring him that the college would house the collection on the third floor of the Fackenthal Library, named after a former president of the Pennsylvania-German Society and a trustee of the college. Thinking of appropriate scholars to work with the collection, Distler in 1948 tapped Alfred Shoemaker. Frey had known Shoemaker at Illinois and Distler had previously hired him for the German department at Lafayette College. Another figure working with the collection, Don Yoder, joined the religion department as instructor in 1949. A Franklin and Marshall alumnus (class of 1942), Yoder had received his Ph.D. in 1947 from the University of Chicago. Both Shoemaker and Yoder had been involved with the Pennsylvania-German Folklore Society. The acquisition of the collection and faculty interest in folklore set the stage for the creation of the department of American folklore.
Other developments in Pennsylvania during the late 1940s supported academic and public interest in folklore. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission began a folklore division in 1948 and named Henry Shoemaker the nation’s first state folklorist. Philadelphia was home to the American Folklore Society, and in 1944, the city hosted the society’s annual meeting. In addition to claiming the Pennsylvania-German Folklore Society, the state also boasted a Pennsylvania Folklore Society, headed by Henry Shoemaker, and even a Harrisburg Folklore Society (H. Shoemaker 1943, 180–81). Folk festivals abounded in Pennsylvania. Bucknell University’s George Korson produced successful festivals through the 1930s, Philadelphia provided the backdrop for the National Folk Festival for a number of years, and the Harrisburg Folklore Society hosted an annual summer festival (see Gillespie 1980; H. Shoemaker 1943, 181). Henry Landis meanwhile promoted the folk museum movement, based on European folklife models, with his open-air collection of Pennsylvania-German buildings, tools, and crafts near Lancaster (later to become the Pennsylvania Farm Museum and Landis Valley Museum).

Pennsylvania-German scholarship blossomed during the 1940s. Influential dissertations and studies on language and lore appeared by Albert Buffington, Alfred Shoemaker, J. William Frey, and Lester W. J. Seifert (Beam 1981, xvi; Weiser 1991, 22–23). Scholarly interest in Pennsylvania-German language and lore was connected to a longstanding academic tie between German studies and folklore. German language studies, with its legacy of folk narrative and linguistic research stretching back to the Brothers Grimm and others, used folklore extensively. In the United States, Archer Taylor and Wayland Hand, two leaders of the American folklore movement, for example, were Germanicists. Boggs’s survey revealed that after English, folklore courses in the United States were most likely to be offered in anthropology and German studies.

Pennsylvania-German scholars often argued that the dialect had not received its due. They recognized that many German departments with elite views frowned upon the mongrel, even doggerel sounding Pennsylvania German. In response, many Pennsylvania-German scholars came to the academic study of folklore and culture, because they pointed out that the dialect’s meaning and richness comes out in its cultural context, its use in folk expression such as proverbs and tales, and its adaptation to a new land with terms for buildings and implements. Folklore in the Dutch country, they pronounced, represented a great, often overlooked, artistic outpouring from a distinct regional culture (see Shoemaker 1954; Yoder 1990). This culture spread south, north, and west, and contributed to American culture generally (see Glassie 1968). American studies combining history and literature, however, usually emphasized the elite works that unified the country (see McDowell 1948a), although Richard Dorson loudly called for the integration of folklore studies within American civilization courses (Dorson 1950b, 346; see also Dorson 1971a, 78–93).
American studies developing among Pennsylvania scholars tended to accent the ethnic, regional, and religious mosaic of America (see Bronner 1989b; Yoder 1990). More than combining the literary and historical, Pennsylvania-German scholars working in American studies stressed cultural inheritance, especially within research on communities and groups, and the symbolic expressions of culture in material, social, and oral traditions. Colleges in Pennsylvania were among the pioneers of the American studies movement gaining speed during the 1940s. Indeed, years before, Penn State's Frederick Lewis Pattee, who counted folklore among his interests, became the first professor of American literature. Would it not make sense, then, to recognize American folklore with a professor bearing that title in the heart of a folk culture?

Enter Alfred L. Shoemaker. Franklin and Marshall hired Alfred L. Shoemaker as assistant professor of American folklore in 1948. He also became head of the new "Department of American Folklore," which is first listed in the college catalogue for 1949–1950. Shoemaker’s approach was to stress an ethnological approach to "folk culture." Shoemaker was well aware, indeed proud, that he was breaking new ground on the American scene. As he explained,

In America most everybody interprets folklore to mean folktales, folksongs, rhymes, riddles—and little else.... However, those of us, like myself who have received our training in the folklore archives in Sweden and Ireland—the finest—do not share this narrow view. As far as we are concerned, folklore is the study of the material and intellectual culture of tradition-bound elements in our present-day societies. In addition to popular literature and popular beliefs and practices, folklore for us includes a study of our folk customs, games and pastimes, folk medicine, 'alda weverglawva' [Pennsylvania German term for folk beliefs], folk art, crafts, cookery, farms and farming and traditions—both mythological and historical. (Shoemaker 1949a, 1)

Shoemaker’s approach and background coming into the discipline of folklore provides a contrast to other young leaders such as Dorson, Herbert Halpert, and Wayland Hand who emerged during this period. While they all founded academic homes for folkloristic study, Shoemaker charted his path toward the ethnographic study of folklife. More so than the other doyens of the field, Shoemaker put into practice an agenda for public presentations of folk culture. And perhaps because of that, and the appearance he gave of being on a crusade for his people, Shoemaker became more of an ethnic culture-hero.

Shoemaker was born in 1913 in Saegersville, Lehigh County, part of the Pennsylvania Dutch Country not far from Allentown. He grew up speaking Pennsylvania German and in high school joined a dramatic club that presented plays in Dutch and English using Pennsylvania folklife themes. He attended Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania (the common choice for Lutheran boys in the Dutch Country), where he came under the influence of folklore professors and Pennsylvania-German specialists Preston Barba and Harry Reichard. According to
a story circulating about Shoemaker's college days, an adviser casually suggested that Shoemaker educate himself beyond his coursework by reading. Shoemaker surprised the adviser later by reporting that he had read every book in the Muhlenberg College Library, and he wanted to know where he should go from there! Shoemaker was aware of the stigma that sometimes attached to a "Dutch accent," and he worked on his oration by reading aloud. He emerged from college with a flair for speech. As a later associate recalled, "his expression was magnificent, his manner impressive." Dropping plans to become a Lutheran minister, he dedicated himself to the study of language and folk culture and championed the significance of Pennsylvania-German tradition.

After receiving his A.B. in 1934, Shoemaker studied in Europe, spending time at Munich, Heidelberg, Uppsala, and Lund, where he was exposed to folk-cultural research along ethnological lines. He returned to the United States to do graduate work at Cornell University and ended up majoring in German at the University of Illinois, known for its cultural as well as linguistic studies. The "Seminar in Deutsche Volkskunde" taught by Charles Williams was available in the German department, and folklore was a common subject of interest among Illinois graduate students (Boggs 1940, 101). Shoemaker received his Ph.D. from Illinois in 1940, completing a dissertation on the language and folklore of the Amish in Arthur, Illinois. Shoemaker's attention to social and cultural context of language distinguished the work. Applying his command of German dialects, Shoemaker served his country during World War II working for U.S. Army Intelligence in Europe. It was a traumatic experience, he later told friends, to see the wholesale destruction of precious cultures and intense violent hatred of peoples for one another, and it turned him toward pacifism (forced to carry a weapon, he carried it unloaded).

Shoemaker poignantly referred to his wartime experience in an unusual place—a monograph on traditional rhymes and jingles of the Pennsylvania Dutch—intended for the general public.

It was an evening during the war. My Counter Intelligence Corps team—three lawyers, a fellow college professor and myself—were stationed in Hayingen, a small industrial town in Lorraine. A mile or two away, across on the other side of the Moselle, the Germans lay entrenched. It was the long lull—those weary months of waiting—before the final offensive that carried our troops across the Rhine and brought an end to hostilities in Europe.

From Hayingen, where we lay, and from the country 30 or 50 miles to the east, there had come, over 200 years before, the forebears of the Pennsylvania Dutch. They had left, weary of war and strife, to find peace and happiness in Penn's woods. And I, two centuries later, realized for the first time how strong must have been their longing to leave those parts for a better world—for the hills of the Lehigh, the Schuylkill and the Susquehanna.

There was artillery fire overhead. I longed feverishly for a book—a book which would translate me into another world, one free of hatred and slaughter. And it was
then, that moment, that I came, quite by chance, upon a 38-page booklet, “77 Nursery Rhymes for Our Little Ones.” It was in German, of course. I turned the pages nervously. There were the identical rhymes I had learned as a child from my own Pennsylvania Dutch grandmother. Deep emotions welled up within me.... (Shoemaker 1951, 3)

Shoemaker related himself in war to the experience that propelled a social movement to Pennsylvania, a Pax Americana in his mind. He used folklore (some may even say lost himself in it) to express the continuity of culture and something of the essence of his group’s experience. Although the rhymes inspired questions for him of origin and diffusion, the “most important” he wrote, was “to what degree are these traditional rhymes a reflection of man’s inner self?” (Shoemaker 1951, 16). This questioning of folklore’s relation to self and society owed, he sometimes said, to his strange position in the army as an American with a subcultural identity of Pennsylvania-German background fighting Germans. In this regard, Shoemaker recounted on occasion his profound, yet disturbing, experience as a prisoner of war. While imprisoned he had friendly relations with a German commander who had been an ethnologist before the war. Their discussions of culture and folklife, the similarities and differences of their traditions, seemed to him to lift them away from the war. Shoemaker reported going into a deep depression when the commander was killed.

Shoemaker spent summers after the war studying at the Irish Folklore Commission in Dublin and the Folklore Institute in Basel, Switzerland. These institutions offered him models for the systematic coverage of folk cultures, models he would later apply in Pennsylvania. A wealth of formal education and folk experience behind him, an insatiable thirst for books and field projects, an energy and charisma that suggested innovative leadership, Shoemaker attracted admirers among scholars and ordinary folk alike. Loud and boisterous, even crude outside the university, studious in the library, he was a man to be noticed as an outlandish personality. Some of this reputation came from his often bombastic speaking style, and his unashamed demonstrations of his Pennsylvania-German folksiness, which rubbed against stereotypes of the university scholar at the time. Stories of his prodigious efforts at reading, working, and organizing added to his legendary standing. His friends remember him variously as “a man of the people” and “a scholar’s scholar.”

To drive home the point of Shoemaker’s duality as ordinary folk and academic folklorist, the story is told about the ivory-tower scholar who came to check out the remarkable Alfred Shoemaker. Climbing the stairs to the solitary third floor of the library, he was directed to an isolated desk impressively piled high with books and papers so that the occupant looked literally buried in his work. The visitor glowed with the idea of approaching a monastic scholar of the highest order. The visitor suffered a shock, however, when he spied Shoemaker, sporting a goatee on a folksy face, beaming behind the piles. As the visiting scholar told a colleague later,
"I expected a scholar, and I found a billy goat." "That's all right," Shoemaker supposedly remarked on hearing of the comment, "at least he'll remember me." Beyond this suggestion of complexity to Shoemaker's personality, other traits found expression in adjectives used by former associates to describe Shoemaker: dynamic ("he was going to make things happen, you could tell"), tireless ("doing, he was always doing"), modest ("that was his Pennsylvania Dutch side coming in"), trusting ("too much so"), zealous, brilliant, visionary, idealistic, altruistic, outspoken, impatient, sensitive, and devoted.

Before coming to Franklin and Marshall, Shoemaker taught German at Lafayette and Muhlenberg colleges, and in 1947 became curator of the Berks County Historical Society in Reading. The *Journal of American Folklore* carried the news of his curatorial position with the commentary: "Dr. Shoemaker, a folklorist as well as an historical scholar, like Dr. Louis C. Jones of the New York [State] Historical Association, is keenly interested in the role which historical societies may play in the recovery and study of traditional culture" ("Historical" 1947, 425). In addition to his other duties, Shoemaker hosted a radio show in the Pennsylvania German dialect where he related folk narratives and wrote a column on regional culture for the Lancaster daily.

Shoemaker's first courses at Franklin and Marshall, according to a newspaper clipping in the college archives, were on the folklore of Southeast Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Dutch folklore (September 29, 1948). Appealing to the public, Shoemaker taught the courses during the evening. Other courses taught by Shoemaker—Introduction to Folklore, General American and European Folklore—along with a mention of the department were announced in the *Journal of American Folklore* ("Folklore" 1949, 66).

The Franklin and Marshall catalogue gave the department its own listing under the heading "Folklore," with the following description:

The aim of the Department of American Folklore is to give the student an understanding and an appreciation of the material and intellectual culture of tradition-bound elements within our American society. The courses in folklore will treat the following subject matter: popular oral literature, popular beliefs and customs, folk art and crafts, folk medicine, sports and pastimes, settlement and dwelling, folk speech, mythological and historical traditions, livelihood and household support, communication and trade, and the festivals of the year.

The courses covered folklore research in Europe and America, required fieldwork, and featured material and social traditions in a regional, ethnic, and community context. An unusual offering within the list for a folklore curriculum was a course on folk art.

11. Introduction to Folklore. A survey of the beginnings in folklore research in Europe and America; the operation of folklore institutes and archives; theories and methods; the historical, geographical, sociological and psychological aspects of the subject.
12. General American and European Folklore. A survey course, comparative in nature, covering particularly the lore of groups in our American society, such as cowboys and lumberjacks. The American folksong will be studied in particular.

13. Folklore of Southeastern Pennsylvania. Particular emphasis on the folklore of the Pennsylvania Dutch. A course in folklore methods and techniques. A term report, based on field work, will be required of each student.

14. Pennsylvania Dutch Folklore. This course stresses popular oral literature (folktales, proverbs, riddles) and collecting techniques. A fair knowledge of the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect is a prerequisite.

15. Pennsylvania Dutch Folk Art. A study of fractur, primitives, barn signs, decorated household furnishings and ornamental objects.

16. Pennsylvania Folk Literature in Standard German. A study of popular ballads, folksongs, proverbs and riddles and of popular literature as disseminated by Pennsylvania-printed German broadsides, pamphlets, almanacs, books and newspapers. Prerequisite, a year's study of German.

With these courses, all under the heading of folklore, Shoemaker could boast the first department of folklore in the United States, and more undergraduate courses with the folklore prefix than any other institution. He could even claim listing as many courses under folklore as those offered in the largest graduate curricula at Indiana, North Carolina, and UCLA (see Boggs 1940; Dorson 1950b).

With his department Shoemaker hoped to signal the academic respectability of folklore in the United States. He had witnessed the success of folk culture studies in European academe and thought that folklore studies as a discipline could be similarly established in the United States. Although he recognized that Stith Thompson was moving toward the creation of an academic program, he considered his approach too limited to hold student interest or carry scholarly weight. He also resisted Thompson's literary assumption that historical reconstruction could derive from an aggregate of library texts or the anthropological premise that objectivity could be achieved from observation of a culture radically different from the observer. He sought an academic platform from which to launch studies that could be relevant to the communities from which they came. His case for the department at Franklin and Marshall was to argue the benefits for involvement of students in an understanding and promotion of their own tradition. He considered a public role for folklife as a way to involve groups in their own study and spread the ideas of folklife into a public philosophy. That philosophy involved the importance of local and ethnic heritage to a realization of a cultural identity and an American self.

He joined Dorson in railing against Benjamin Botkin's use, or misuse, of folklore in the public arena, because he felt that Botkin served to confuse the public about what folklore is by jumbling together examples from non-folk sources with hardly any cultural context or interpretation. Shoemaker disagreed with Dorson, however, about whether Botkin's pandering signaled that academic scholarship
Alfred Shoemaker as he appeared in *The Pennsylvania Dutchman* publicizing the 1951 Pennsylvania Dutch Folk Festival. (Pennsylvania Folklife Society, Ursinus College)
Following Tradition

and popular public presentation could not mix. Before the days of state and federal funding for folk arts programming, Shoemaker put into action an agenda for using scholarly premises in public folklife presentations. His programming included festivals, radio shows, bus tours, outdoor museums, and popular pamphlets. To put these plans for a public presence into action, Shoemaker conceived of a center, the Pennsylvania Dutch Folklore Center, responsible for public activities associated with the department, raising money privately, and as was his tendency, he had grand designs.

Joining Shoemaker, the charismatic driving force behind the Pennsylvania Dutch Folklore Center, were able associates in J. William Frey and Don Yoder. Together, they had an applied scholarly purpose in promoting and preserving the folk culture of the Pennsylvania Dutch (or "German") culture in central Pennsylvania. They sought to foster Pennsylvania Dutch identity and community, threatened by post-World War II mass culture and lingering anti-German sentiment. Their choice of the vernacular term "Pennsylvania Dutch" over the more "bookish" (as Yoder called it) "Pennsylvania German" was a sign of the center's populist spirit and perhaps an indication of the separation of this culture from the fatherland and the experience of other immigrant groups. "Truly," Shoemaker underscored in a letter dated May 30, 1949, seeking support from Henry Francis du Pont, "this is the first time and place which the Pennsylvania Dutch have had to express themselves and preserve their cultural values." With the marvelous resources of the Unger-Bassler collection as a base, the center had an ambitious program of publishing a weekly newspaper covering folk culture in the region, collecting questionnaires and maintaining a folk archives, constructing an outdoor folk museum, sponsoring "folk tours" of European source areas of Pennsylvania culture, and producing a popular folk festival—the Pennsylvania Dutch Folk Festival (later the Kutztown Folk Festival)—which became America's largest regional folk festival (see Yoder 1983). "The publication of our paper," Shoemaker boisterously declared, "is only ONE phase of our important work. We want to imitate the Irish and Swedish folklore commissions by collecting and cataloguing literally millions of items pertaining to every bit of our traditional cultural life in southeastern Pennsylvania! We shall leave no stones unturned! We want thousands of photographs, thousands of wire and disc recordings, files and files of folktales, rhymes, recipes, games, pow-wow cures, etc., etc., and the ultimate building of the Pennsylvania Dutch Library right here on this campus! To this we have dedicated our lives and energies. We three editors are all in the thirties" (see also Shoemaker 1957).

No stone unturned indeed: Shoemaker's demanding routine was to start at his office and library early in the morning, spend afternoons and early evenings recording interviews and documenting folklife and material culture around the region (he made use of wire recorders and cameras), and into the night return to his office where he did not turn in until two or three in the morning. In this way he
earned the reputation of scouring both the library and the field with an unusual systematic thoroughness (hence the story about his preparing and organizing "millions" of cards on local folk customs and reading every book in the Muhlenberg College Library!).

The grand scope of the center's efforts, academic and applied, and Shoemaker's leadership are evident in the center's weekly publication, the Pennsylvania Dutchman. The first issue carrying the subtitle "The Weekly Devoted to Pennsylvania Dutch Culture" (later it became "Devoted to the Folk Culture of the Pennsylvania Dutch") appeared on May 5, 1949. It carried news of the folklore department at Franklin and Marshall on the front page, and under the heading "The Folklore Center and You," Shoemaker explained the paper's exalted mission: "We, the Pennsylvania Dutch, were taught for generations to despise and disrespect our traditional culture. The task that we of THE PENNSYLVANIA DUTCHMAN have set ourselves is to teach NOT hate, NOT disrespect, but UNDERSTANDING, APPRECIATION, and, most important of all, a LOVE FOR OUR HERITAGE" (Shoemaker 1949b, 3). The weekly newspaper began with a remarkable circulation of 12,500, and continued successfully as a quarterly magazine. Besides editing the folklore section of the Dutchman, Shoemaker contributed almost two hundred essays to the publication between 1949 and 1961. Focusing
Tourist guide produced in 1955 by Alfred Shoemaker and Don Yoder, featuring the Amish as the centerpiece to the folk cultural attraction of central Pennsylvania. The guide carried the imprint of the Pennsylvania Dutch Folklore Center, Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster.
particularly on folk custom, material culture, and language, Shoemaker's essays (and festivals) often implied that folk culture so close to the life of the Pennsylvania Dutch and other groups, once an embarrassment in front of elitist eyes, should be a source of social pride and honor, artistry and inspiration.

Although devoted to Pennsylvania-German ethnicity, Shoemaker by 1950 had a vision that the center's publications and activities could expand into a national institute, an American folklife center, that would extend the folk cultural approach to other communities and regions. The Pennsylvania Dutch Folk Festival, for example, became the Kutztown Folk Festival under Shoemaker's leadership, and he included field-researched displays of Welsh, Ukrainian, Irish, and Slavic communities in Pennsylvania. The festival featured many tents for educational presentations to accompany performances of folk culture. Applying a pluralistic model of America, Shoemaker wanted the expanded festival under the guidance of the scholarly center to invite the participation of the folk communities themselves as well as a place for outsiders to understand and enjoy the communities' authentic expressions. The timing of the festival around American Independence Day had a symbolic value for Pennsylvania Germans able to celebrate their ethnic culture as part of an American celebration.

"The Center," Don Yoder remembered, "was based on European models and its purposes included the collecting, archiving and disseminating of scholarly information on every aspect of the Pennsylvania German culture. In 1956, under the influence of the European Volkskunde and folklife (regional ethnology) movements, we changed the title of our organization to the Pennsylvania Folklife Society and the name of the periodical published by our society from the Pennsylvania Dutchman to Pennsylvania Folklife. In this way we felt that we might do justice to all of Pennsylvania's ethnic groups" (Yoder 1982, 18). The archives and journal eventually moved to Ursinus College in Collegeville, Pennsylvania, and Yoder, longtime editor of Pennsylvania Folklife, left for the University of Pennsylvania in 1956. After a few years, in 1963, Yoder taught for the freshly formed Department of Folklore and Folklife.

The use of terms such as folk culture and folklife to designate an ethnological approach to the study of cultural traditions in America thus had its beginnings at Franklin and Marshall. Don Yoder reflected that "the term 'folklife,' now used widely in American scholarship (at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress and Department of Folklore and Folklife ... at the University of Pennsylvania), was first used in the scholarly context at F&M .... 'Folklife' got around the built-in limitations of the British 'folklore' by including material culture and other aspects of the totality of the culture, as well as the verbal 'lore' with which folklorists have traditionally busied themselves." Remarking on the contributions of Shoemaker's classes in folklife, Yoder recalled that "students did field work, reporting on interviews with 'powwow doctors' (native folk healers) and other typically Pennsylvania Dutch phenomena" (Yoder 1983, 8). Vincent Tortora,
First issue of *Pennsylvania Folklife*, winter 1957–1958. Alfred Shoemaker was listed as managing editor. The issue, produced as a slick popular magazine, included an article by Alfred Shoemaker on New Year’s “fantasticals.” The cover story on traditional architecture was unusual for an American folklore publication at the time.
Advertisements for books by Alfred Shoemaker published by the Pennsylvania Folklife Society in the “Special 1960 Festival Issue” of Pennsylvania Folklife.
a student in Shoemaker's classes, added that Shoemaker's interests went beyond Dutch folklife to the cultures of other ethnic, religious, and regional groups in America. Shoemaker made a special effort, Tortora emphasized, to have the class material in his American folklore class reflect the varied backgrounds of students and the cultural diversity of the United States. Students saw their work for the class being put to use by the center. In Tortora's time, the eight to ten students in the class wrote for the *Pennsylvania Dutchman*, collected for the archives, and organized presentations for the festival.

The folk culture center, later reorganized as the Pennsylvania Folklife Society, offered another first when it replaced the *Pennsylvania Dutchman* with *Pennsylvania Folklife* in 1957 and thereby announced an expanded scope to a variety of folk cultures. The launching of *Pennsylvania Folklife* inaugurated folklife into the title of an American periodical. Until it ceased publication in 1997, *Pennsylvania Folklife* boasted the largest circulation for any American folklore journal, more than even the *Journal of American Folklore*. Yoder recognized that "the periodical was unique in America, for its purpose was to publish materials on one ethnic/regional culture and stimulate research from its readers" (Yoder 1990, 4). In addition, it set articles on folk beliefs, songs, and narratives alongside those for folk art and material culture. It published items in dialect and encouraged contributions from community members. Its contributors, from in and outside academe, the Pennsylvania-German editors insisted, wrote in an engaging narrative style.

Shoemaker’s notoriety for his academic and public efforts earned him an invitation to the Midcentury International Folklore Conference at Indiana University in 1950. It was hosted by Stith Thompson, probably the preeminent folklorist in America at the time, who advocated an international study of folklore based on literary, rather than ethnological, principles. It gave Shoemaker an opportunity for international exposure for his campaign for application of folklife methods in the United States, although it appeared that he was a lonely voice. He drew support from Swedish scholar Sigurd Erixon who beseeched the audience to undertake "a comparative cultural research on a regional basis" in Europe and America that would expand the concept of folk tradition. He cited the urgency of the task: "In this period of great change there are still certain islands [of folklife], which we may call relic islands, and many traces of dying cultures within our reach. Our modern folk-life researchers must utilize the extraordinary possibilities which are thus placed at their disposal" (Thompson 1953, 252–53). Thompson understood the need to describe tradition broadly, but thought that folklife was an anthropological rather than folkloristic problem. For Shoemaker and Erixon, the issue was a way to study culture in terms of the groups in which humans live and work, and folklife presented a way to combine ethnology and folklore toward a view of social tradition in modern societies.

Shoemaker grappled Alan Lomax in a debate about the parochialism that folklife could produce. Shoemaker advocated establishment of archives such as the one
at his center for each different ethnic-regional group, so that a total way of life within a socially based culture could be described. “Well, then we can’t understand world folklore,” Lomax interjected. He thought that comparisons needed to be made across genres within a “supernational archive” rather than for individual groups. Lomax added, “The material has to be brought together in order to make any sense of it, and I don’t see why the Pennsylvania Dutch should have a priority on staying in its own backyard” (Thompson 1953, 98–99). Shoemaker fired back that every group had its own distinctive history and cultural character, and therefore the Dutch or another group needed to have its traditions understood in relation to one another. Comparison across genres, he thought, leveled out the differences among cultures, and fallaciously suggested equivalent functions.

Shoemaker rattled his fellow folklorists at the important midcentury conference in another dispute over the use of festivals. While Thompson and others were skeptical of the “bogus” folklore at festivals, others thought it was important to make folklore available to the public. In contrast to the idea of folk music or storytelling festivals emphasizing the aesthetic appeal of the texts and forms of folklore, Shoemaker hailed the distinctiveness of his festival as a folklife project to present the integration of a subculture. “I have felt all along here that the problems which I face are very much different from those of a good many of the folklorists present,” Shoemaker told his colleagues. He explained a difference with reference to the social and material basis of the folklife festival:

We had an enormous exhibition station and we put the arts and crafts of the community on display, both those of the past and those of the present. We had about four hundred feet of one of the buildings devoted to folk art exclusively. The thing that I was most interested in doing was presenting the culinary culture. What is more traditional in life than the cuisine? So I got four church groups in Cookstown to become interested. Each one of the four church groups made four or five distinctive dishes and so we actually had sixteen different traditional dishes of the Dutch country presented as part of the folk festival. Of course that was what the people were particularly interested in. As far as folk are concerned, I have never seen why we should limit ourselves exclusively to the oral tradition. To my mind that is only a very small segment of folklore and in the life of the people may not get as much attention as folk art, games, gambling, and so forth. That, by the way, has not been brought out here and it is an important aspect of culture. What are the traditional gambling games in a certain area? We put them on the stage, got people in the area to show how the gambling was carried on in the various taverns. In other words we tried to put the folk culture on parade. That is my definition of a folk festival. (Thompson 1953, 245–46)

Sensing resistance to folklife approaches from other conference participants, Shoemaker took his Swedish folklife allies Sigurd Erixon and Åke Campbell back to Pennsylvania to tour his center and appreciate its folklife projects (Thompson 1996, 267–68).
Dissatisfied with the reception to folklife at the midcentury conference, upon his return to Pennsylvania, Shoemaker cheekily organized his own conferences focusing on the folk cultural theme. On March 31, 1951, Shoemaker’s center hosted the first “Pennsylvania Folk Life Conference” at Franklin and Marshall College. A significant statement that emerged from the conference was Don Yoder’s address which appeared under the headline “Let’s Take Our Blinders Off!” on the front page of the Pennsylvania Dutchman on May 1, 1951. In it, Yoder applied lessons of religious history to an American folklife effort. He worried that church histories could give the impression that continuities did not exist among a Protestant movement or a national setting. Underscoring the keyword of “discovery” to indicate a hidden social reality, Yoder asserted that “we have discovered that we have common American interests which cut across the artificial boundaries of denominationalism.” He urged readers to beware of the danger of a kind of blind denominationalism in devotion to Pennsylvania-German folklife study, and called for a broad view of American “diversity.” He argued that obstacles of “racialism” and “cultural separatism” needed to be overcome, so as to build an “objective study of Pennsylvania’s folk culture” that would contribute to an understanding of the “cultural interplay” in the creation of an American “hybrid culture.” Yoder implored followers of Pennsylvania-German culture to “focus our intellectual spotlights upon cultural interaction rather than stressing one group alone to the point of nationalistic stultification” (Yoder 1951, 6). Yoder set an agenda that would account for “all the present divergent cultures which still exist among us” and the cultural interaction of various groups in America that give rise to hybrid national traditions. He thus lay the groundwork for the transition of the Pennsylvania-German interests in Pennsylvania Dutchman to broader intercultural goals of Pennsylvania Folklife, and later, of American Folklife.

The center followed the folklife conference with sponsorship of annual summer seminars on Pennsylvania folk culture, beginning in 1952. “Academic folklorists have often been accused—and rightly so,” a boastful blurb for the seminars announced, with a possible swipe at Stith Thompson’s summer folklore institutes at Indiana University, “of talking and writing with great gusto about folklore but never actually rubbing elbows with the folk! Here, then, for the first time in the history of folk-culture studies in America is the opportunity to take advantage of the researches and contributions of the scholars and experts whilst at the same time becoming acquainted first-hand with the Pennsylvania Dutch folk in a concentrated but unexpurgated form” (“Pennsylvania” 1953). Laying claim to central Pennsylvania as “the richest and most diversified folk culture in America by far,” the seminars offered that “serious students may at last study this folk culture on an academic plane.”

The first set of folklife seminars featured a staff of twenty-six authorities, including professors (John Hostetler from Penn State in addition to Frey and Shoemaker), curators (Donald Shelley of the Henry Ford Museum and George O.
Bird of the Berks County Historical Society), community collectors (Thomas Brendle, Luther Schaeffer, Henry Kauffman, Earl Robacker, and William Troxell), and writers (Ann Hark, Arthur Graeff, and Frances Lichten, among others). "The student will be studying, observing and absorbing his subject in the heart of the very milieu upon which he is concentrating," the seminars stressed, and "registrants will have immediate avenues on all sides for exploring and testing the theories and conclusions of the classroom—in other words, they will learn by doing" ("Pennsylvania" 1952). The subjects ranged from definitions of "folk-culture" to folk song, tale, medicine, belief, art, and architecture. Bringing to light the applied purposes of the center, the seminars concluded with two panels, one on "how to put traditional folk-cultural materials to use" and another on "what has been the contribution of the folk-culture of the Pennsylvania Dutch Country to American life?"

The Department of American Folklore at Franklin and Marshall remained on the books through the academic year 1951–1952. Shoemaker's name then disappeared from the faculty listing after 1952–1953. A number of factors did the department in. Shoemaker's efforts increasingly turned to the operation of the Pennsylvania Dutch Folklore Center. Of the three codirectors, Shoemaker was the most active, and had the grandest vision of its future. Vincent Tortora recalled that Shoemaker "didn't work well within a structure or pattern like teaching courses as a member of the faculty. He wanted to be free to pursue all his other activities of archiving, publishing, promoting, and interviewing and answer only to himself."

Florence Baver, who worked for Shoemaker at Kutztown and later founded the Pennsylvania Dutch Folk Culture Society, added that Shoemaker's first love was the people from whom he collected. He took to field research better than anyone she ever saw. He insisted on returning his work to "his people" by radio programs in the native dialect, newspaper columns, and festivals. He bragged of treating tradition bearers as intelligent people who appreciate hearing interpretations of their own culture, and he boasted of reaching more people with scholarship than uppity ivory-tower folklorists. He also separated himself from many festival promoters who tended to emphasize entertainment of artists instead of presentations of community life as Shoemaker wanted to spread. Scholars were expected to teach at that time, but Shoemaker left college teaching to devote himself to his center which allowed him to reach directly to the public and maintain his research and presentational activities. He nonetheless remained the teacher in his public seminars and many lectures across the region, and conceived of his center's purpose broadly as cultural documentation and education serving people at all levels.

Given the restrictions of the college structure, it was unlikely that the department at Franklin and Marshall could expand beyond Shoemaker's faculty listing, and the center, besides having the greatest potential for growth, also allowed Shoemaker the greatest freedom to pursue multiple projects and roles. The summer festival brought great publicity and substantial income to the center, and issuing the
newspaper and related publications became a major publishing venture. Meanwhile the archives ambitiously covered material, community, and social traditions beyond the oral genres usually indexed singularly in other American archives. Shoemaker cooperated with the growing tourist industry in the area, writing and editing many brochures and guides to the local culture (1953, 1954, 1955, 1956, 1959c). In addition, Shoemaker produced several scholarly monographs on folk custom and material culture in Pennsylvania (1959a, 1959b, 1960).

Franklin and Marshall’s president had reason to be enthusiastic about the college’s Pennsylvania-German connection when Harvey Bassler proposed funding a major library addition to house the folklore center. Bassler commissioned architectural plans for the project, but tragically in 1950 he died in an auto accident, ironically on the way to the center, before he could complete the funding arrangements (Yoder 1983, 11). Bassler’s donations aside, Distler had been an avid supporter of Shoemaker’s efforts, but the climate changed for the Pennsylvania-German connection at Franklin and Marshall when Distler retired in 1955. The new president sought to make Franklin and Marshall an elite national institution, and moved to reduce its faculty and student ties to the local culture. The speculative business ventures of the Pennsylvania Dutch Folklore Center led by the always independent and frequently cantankerous Alfred Shoemaker no longer sat well with the college president. The new president instituted sweeping changes in the curriculum, downplayed the German Reformed Church affiliation, and worked toward bringing students and faculty from outside of Pennsylvania into the college.

With the college’s mission changed, the Unger-Bassler collection and center archives were transferred to Ursinus College, which maintained an interest in Pennsylvania-German studies and the nearby Kutztown Folk Festival. Only a folk tale course in Franklin and Marshall’s anthropology department gives any hint of the folkloristic legacy in the curriculum at Franklin and Marshall today. During the late 1980s, however, an exhibit at the college of Pennsylvania-German fraktur art recognized Shoemaker’s contribution and Shoemaker supporters established a library fund in his honor (Faill 1987). Before Shoemaker cut his ties to the college, he influenced a number of students and associates at Franklin and Marshall who remained active in culture studies. Among them were Vincent Tortora (who taught communications and languages at Hofstra and Adelphi colleges and produced several films on religious folk communities), Joel Hartman (professor of rural sociology at the University of Missouri), Florence Baver (director and curator of the Pennsylvania Dutch Folk Culture Society and Museum), and C. Richard Beam (director of the Center for Pennsylvania-German studies at Millersville University). Shoemaker’s mark shows also every time the terms “folk cultural approach,” “Continental plan” (for the layout of the Pennsylvania-German house), and “cultural source areas” (especially in searches for antecedents and “New World forms”) are used in American scholarship (see Weaver 1986; Parsons 1980–1981).
Alfred Shoemaker held colossal goals of promoting folklife to the public, and issued lofty promises of a better, more tolerant, more peaceful world as a result of folk cultural research. He operated at a kinetic pace, and had a capacity for brewing trouble by living on the edge. With all his grandiose plans, and his emotional state fragile, his friends worried that he set himself up for a crash. Renowned for his creative ideas, he was not highly regarded for his business acumen, although he scored a number of financial successes. He depended on associates to translate his groundbreaking, sometimes high-flown, ideas into practical terms. It is a credit to his foresight and understanding of folk culture's appeal that he had as many successes as he did. Often impatient, trusting to a fault, not one for tolerating formalities, Shoemaker's downfall might have been expected, but perhaps not so drastic or mysterious.

Exit Alfred Shoemaker. After enjoying tremendous success and renown for his folklife research and public promotions, Alfred Shoemaker felt the fabric of his life suddenly untangle in 1963. Wanting to capitalize on the success of the summer festival in Kutztown, Shoemaker proposed yet another gargantuan project, a fall harvest festival held on grounds the center had purchased east of Lancaster. Despite warnings from associates about overextending the resources of the Pennsylvania Folklife Society and the energies of the staff, Shoemaker brazenly charged ahead. He grandly envisioned a site comparable to the finest European museum and archives, operating year-round with historic buildings (a decorated brick-end bank barn was reconstructed on the site), research facilities, and festivals. He borrowed heavily for the project, and amassed great debts betting that his success streak would continue. When the time came for the "Pennsylvania Dutch Frolic" in the fall of 1963, heavy rains washed out the festival, and all that remained was a long line of creditors. Shoemaker faced ruin for himself and his beloved center.

The Pennsylvania Folklife Society recovered, Shoemaker did not. He came out of it an emotional wreck and was committed to the State Hospital in Allentown. In 1964, he appeared homeless and destitute in New York City, and yet reportedly had the mental wherewithal for culling folklore. He frequently showed up tattered and bruised at Vincent Tortora's door talking excitedly about folktales he heard among Hispanic immigrants to the city and folk customs of street people among whom he dwelled. Stubbornly independent, Shoemaker often turned down offers of shelter and money. Rarely seeking aid for himself, he came to friends he knew to help others he considered less fortunate. By 1967, Shoemaker stopped coming around. He disappeared, and is presumed dead.

Although Shoemaker's academic career, and his department at Franklin and Marshall, did not last long, both set important precedents for ethnological approaches to folklife, fieldwork, folk art and material culture, regional and ethnic folk culture, occupational folklife, and public folklife. The Cooperstown Graduate Program in American Folk Culture hatched by Louis C. Jones (with whom Shoemaker's name was linked in the *Journal of American Folklore*) sponsored jointly
by the New York State Historical Association and the State University of New York at Oneonta from 1964 to 1979 bore a striking resemblance to the plan laid out by Shoemaker's department. Shoemaker's vision at Franklin and Marshall is hardly known in folklore historiography, although much of what he called for in the way of a folk cultural approach and public folklore is now being taken up in major academic programs and departments, as well as in public programs such as the American Folklife Center. The influence of the Franklin and Marshall department was especially evident in Don Yoder's contribution to the Department of Folklife and Folklife at the University of Pennsylvania and the publication in 1976 of *American Folklife* (Yoder 1983). Further, many purposes of a public center devoted to Pennsylvania ethnic studies and connected with an academic department live on at the Center for Pennsylvania Culture Studies at Penn State Harrisburg, Center for Pennsylvania-German Studies at Millersville University, and the Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center at Kutztown University. These institutions (and others applying folk culture studies) benefitted from Shoemaker's pathbreaking example, and maybe learned from his mistakes.

**After Shoemaker: The Public Face of Folklife**

Folklife as a term and concept was imported from Pennsylvania during the 1960s and flowered as a national term for a social vision of cultural diversity during the 1970s, anticipating the "multicultural" debate of the 1980s. In retrospect, countercultural movements of the 1960s may have helped create sympathy for the communal spirit of ethnic-regional folklife among young students. Civil rights struggles in the South, war on poverty in Appalachia, and ethnic politics in urban cities were also responsible for interest in folklife because they stimulated the search for models of community persistence rather than assimilation and modernization. Don Yoder's oft-cited essay "The Folklife Studies Movement" in *Pennsylvania Folklife* harped on this persistence in a national agenda for the "rediscovery of the total range of the folk-culture (folklife)" (Yoder 1963, 44). As a counter to modern society, folklife "is the opposite of the mass-produced, mechanized, popular culture of the 20th Century," Yoder wrote (43). He iterated the importance of tradition as oppositional to the dominance of modern mass culture by emphasizing folk culture as traditional culture, "bound by tradition and transmitted by tradition, and ... basically (although not exclusively) rural and pre-industrial" (Yoder 1963, 43). He called for extending the folklife model of Pennsylvania-German concern, first to a statewide survey of Pennsylvania communities, and second to other regional folk cultures in the United States. He cheekily urged adoption of a folklife discipline for America as part of an international movement including Germany, Scandinavia, and Great Britain to view subcultures as integrated wholes.

Yoder's essay became a manifesto to expand folklife approaches to groups often neglected in American history or to present a culturally diverse view of American
civilization. Austin Fife in Utah picked up the concept to emphasize the integrity of Mormons in the West as a functioning cultural tradition. With a broader purpose, he produced an exhibition at Utah State University entitled *Folklife and Folk Arts in the United States* in 1968 “to suggest a wide scope in geographic origin, chronological development, and distinctive ethnic groups” (Fife 1969, 9). Henry Glassie, who had come from the Cooperstown program to study under Don Yoder at Pennsylvania, produced *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture in the Eastern United States* (1968), which argued for the persistence of American regional-ethnic folk cultures from the colonial period to contemporary times. It contravened outlooks in American studies of a homogenizing nation with an emergent national character.

In addition to the formation of the Cooperstown program in New York State which featured required courses on “Folklife Research,” Warren Roberts at Indiana University and Norbert Riedl at the University of Tennessee introduced folklife and material culture courses to cover community studies in their respective states (Roberts 1988, 2–8). Riedl appealed to American folklorists in the *Journal of American Folklore* (1966) to follow the lead of Don Yoder’s manifesto for folklife. He suggested use of questionnaires and cultural mapping to create a comprehensive ethnographic survey and atlas of folk culture. To the opposition created between folklore and folklife, he suggested that rather than change the American Folklore Society into a folk culture or folklife society, he was calling for marshaling American folklorists to a new mission contributing to “any future material-oriented folk culture research in this country” (Riedl 1966, 562). The implication was that the materiality of tradition revealed a rootedness in place and a visibility of cultural difference that could be systematically studied and persuasively argued.

Folklife became further expanded during celebrations of America’s bicentennial. While many events were supposed to invoke unity and independence relating to the founding of the new nation in 1776, the timing of the bicentennial after a period of social upheaval marked by movements for group rights for blacks, Hispanics, other minorities, and women urged a reflection on American social relations. The 1976 Festival of American Folklife for the bicentennial on the nation’s symbolic center, on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., confronted the issue and made American folklife a synonym for a cultural accounting of America’s diverse groups. As if to punctuate the significance of folklife at the time, the festival, begun modestly the decade before as an Independence weekend celebration, in 1976 lasted throughout the summer. The secretary of the Smithsonian Institution blared themes of diversity and localism for the festival: “What we have hoped—and have seen come to pass in many places—is that our Festival would illustrate the many roads to the better understanding of our varied cultures, that our visitors would return home to create their own celebrations out of their own cultural resources in their own local museums and schools” (emphasis added; Ripley 1976, 3).
American uneasiness about celebrating a violent revolution led the celebration to focus on lasting American principles such as freedom, tolerance, and pursuit of happiness that supported a present-day social balance (see Kammen 1978; Lomax 1976). It would be a festival “to cherish our differences,” festival director Ralph Rinzler announced, and visitors witnessed sections devoted to Native Americans, European groups, African Americans, regional cultures, family and children’s traditions, and working-class traditions (Rinzler 1976, 7). If festival-goers came to the festival to forget their troubles, Margaret Mead reminded them in the program: “We have seen a President resign. The tragedy of the Vietnam war continues to haunt us. We are in the midst of an economic recession. To give ourselves over to celebration and enjoyment, even on our 200th birthday, say the critics, is callous and heartless” (Mead 1976). By installing a festival of folklife that emphasizes the diversity of America’s communities and the complexity of social traditions in everyday life, Mead suggested that “we shall be able to take heart in facing problems that are unsolved and otherwise may seem insoluble” (Mead 1976, 6). Difference of race, region, and ethnicity on the Mall, in other words, appeared to be a strength of American life, a sign of progress, rather than a condition to be lamented.

Although scaled down after the bicentennial, the Festival of American Folklife continued to have national visibility. In 1994, it was named the “Top Event in the U.S.” by the American Bus Association as a result of a survey of regional tourist bureaus. That put it on a par with previous winners including the Olympics and the World Expo (Kurin 1996a). By 1995 the festival had featured tradition bearers from fifty-three nations, every region of the United States, scores of ethnic groups, more than a hundred American Indian groups, and some sixty occupational groups (Kurin 1996a, 253). Several ethnographies treated the festival itself as an invented tradition to be studied, and criticized (Cantwell 1991; Bauman, Swain, and Carpenter 1992; Price and Price 1995). Even though the Kutztown Folk Festival attracted more people, the American Folklife Festival attracted more scholarly attention because of its representation of traditions on the Mall, the nation’s symbolic center. Although critics were frequently concerned about the exoticization of tradition bearers on festival stages, festival producers insisted on their sensitivity to community concerns. Director of the Office of Folklife Programs Richard Kurin defended the grass-roots intervention of the festival: “Research for the event and documentation of it have resulted in complex community-level collaborations, training, and a documentary archival collection held at the Smithsonian and disbursed back to various local institutions” (Kurin 1996a, 253).

Festival producers realized the implications of folklife’s position on the Mall as a strategy of presenting, and creating, community. Politically, their translation of the folk on the Mall as neglected or disenfranchised groups in the polity such as Native Americans, African Americans, elderly Americans, and working-class Americans encouraged what they thought of as a more inclusive, decentralized cultural democracy. Kurin expounded:
The festival has had strong impacts on policies, scholarship, and on folks "back home." Many U.S. states and several nations have remounted festival programs and used them to generate laws, institutions, educational programs, documentary films, recordings, museum and traveling exhibits, monographs, and other cultural activities. In many documented cases, the festival has energized local and regional tradition bearers and their communities, and thus helped conserve and create cultural resources. It has provided models for the Black Family Reunion, the Los Angeles Festival, and other major civic cultural presentations, including America's Reunion on the Mall for the Clinton Inaugural. (Kurin 1996a, 253)

In festival and scholarship, folklife more than the concept of folklore became associated with efforts to maintain cultural diversity of marginalized groups through the conservation of community traditions. On the first working day of the bicentennial year of 1976, the American Folklife Preservation Act (Public Law 94-201) became law and resulted in the creation of the American Folklife Center in the Library of Congress to "preserve and present American folklife." The wording of the act emphasized keywords of "diversity" and "difference." I quote the declaration of findings and purpose of the act:

The Congress hereby finds and declares—
(1) that the diversity inherent in American folklife has contributed greatly to the cultural richness of the Nation and has fostered a sense of individuality and identity among the American people;
(2) that the history of the United States effectively demonstrates that building a strong nation does not require the sacrifice of cultural differences;
(3) that American folklife has a fundamental influence on the desires, beliefs, values, and character of the American people;
(4) that it is appropriate and necessary for the Federal Government to support research and scholarship in American folklife in order to contribute to an understanding of the complex problems of the basic desires, beliefs, and values of the American people in both rural and urban areas;
(5) that the encouragement and support of American folklife, while primarily a matter for private and local initiative, is also an appropriate matter of concern to the Federal Government; and
(6) that it is in the interest of the general welfare of the Nation to preserve, support, revitalize, and disseminate American folklife traditions and arts.

In keeping with this "welfare" mission, the center coordinated fieldwork teams in Paradise Valley, Nevada; Lowell, Massachusetts; and South Georgia. It produced book-length catalogs on the American cowboy and Italian American folklife, published guides to national folklife resources, and sponsored conferences on belief and folk art (Jabbour 1996a, 1996b). The center incorporated the Archive of Folk Song in the Library of Congress and changed its name to the Archive of Folk Culture. It produced a splashy color booklet announcing American folklife as "a commonwealth of cultures" (Hufford 1991). It equated folklife to "community life
and values,” and related it to the reality of plural groups in America and the perception of change in the twentieth century. “We no longer view cultural difference as a problem to be solved,” the booklet proclaimed. Instead, it made the case for difference as “a rich resource for all Americans, who constantly shape and transform their many cultures” (Hufford 1991).

The American Folklife Center has had legislative challenges since it was founded. The issue was not whether folklife was a valuable thing to preserve in America, but whether in a mad dash to balance the federal budget agencies charged with cultural research and programming should be publicly funded. The center was threatened with a loss of funding from a fiscally conservative House of Representatives in 1995, but the Senate restored it after a letter-writing campaign and support for the center’s work in the popular press. To appeal to legislators, the center underscored its national scope in its budget battles by publicizing ways that its activity reached every state of the country. In 1996, Representative William Thomas (Republican-California) introduced a bill to repeal the American Folklife Preservation Act, thus removing an independent board of trustees and need for reauthorization, and incorporate the functions of the American Folklife Center within the Library of Congress. Thomas claimed that his proposal insured the survival of folklife collections, since it promoted folklife as a standing special collection of the library. At the same time that the Librarian of Congress James Billington offered that folklife would gain stature as part of the cultural references for American society, he also gave notice that the center’s budget and activities would be curtailed. Alan Jabbour, the center’s director, supported the move to remove the center as a vulnerable budget item open to legislative sniping. Things got really complicated when the House Appropriations Committee passed an amendment to transfer the center to the Smithsonian Institution, and the board of trustees of the center, going against the advice of Jabbour, led a public campaign for reauthorization. The upper house ended up saving the day. Senator Mark Hatfield, chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, praised the center’s work for preserving the folklife of America’s groups as being in the national interest. The Senate passed a bill with a measure for reauthorization of the center in the Library of Congress for 1997–1998, and the House went along. The president signed the bill, maintaining the center’s folklife purpose, at least for a while.

A year after the center was established, the Office of Folklife Programs became an independent office of the Smithsonian Institution. Its director Richard Kurin explained that it “promotes the understanding and continuity of contemporary grass-roots cultures in the United States and abroad” (Kurin 1996b). A federal report entitled Cultural Conservation: The Protection of Cultural Heritage in the United States (1983) coordinated by Ormond Loomis argued for the growth of federal programs at the Smithsonian and the Library of Congress to protect “cultural heritage” in addition to historic properties covered by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. By calling this heritage cultural, rather than national or
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historical, the report assumed it would entail diverse ethnic, racial, and occupational groups. It offered that "productivity, freedom, and unity come from our cultural diversity" (Loomis 1983, iii). Citing the appeal of Alex Haley's *Roots* and Foxfire programs, the report maintained that, in fact, Americans needed, indeed demanded, a local or ethnic cultural identity, but found that mass cultural and national forces threatened to destroy traditions essential to perpetuating separate cultural identities. "Folklife," the report concluded, is especially useful in addressing the problem. Its shorthand definition of the term was "community life and values." Its longhand version taken from the American Folklife Preservation Act stressed the lack of a shared national culture: "the term 'American folklife' means the traditional expressive culture shared within the various groups in the United States: familial, ethnic, occupational, religious, regional."

This definition and its implication for a lack of national tradition or exclusiveness bothered several prominent folklorists, such as Richard Dorson. He advocated a model of national consensus of shared historic traditions in the mixture of American groups. He criticized folklife scholars for inadequate relation of folklore to the broad American historical experience. He especially assailed Don Yoder's *American Folklife* for not conveying a distinctive American cultural experience, and scattering traditions "found" in places as diverse as Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean. In making an argument for a common national culture, Dorson feared that folklife gave the impression that none existed. He was especially irked that in separating a single group for cultural consideration, folklife approaches commonly overlooked ethnic interrelations and national connections (Dorson 1978c).

Yoder testily answered later that his model was "in a very real sense Pennsylvania's cultural pluralism, brought about by William Penn's invitation to English and Welsh Quakers, Scotch-Irishmen, Rhinelanders, Swiss, and anyone else who wanted to come, made Penn's Woods the basic prototype, the colonial model, for the pluralistic America that we have today" (Yoder 1990, 6). He reasserted that folklife studies are tied to the American experience as an experience of group life. Folklife study seen broadly beyond Pennsylvania, he wrote, views traditions pluralistically "in the context of that larger unifying society and culture of which all subgroups and traditions are functioning parts" (Yoder 1976b, 13). Yoder echoed Shoemaker's battle cry that American folklife in the twentieth century had to be "discovered," because it represented a social reality that went against an American myth of melting pot assumptions, or myths, propagated to give a false impression of assimilation and nationalism that was somehow natural and progressive.

Yet Yoder conceded that a temptation existed in folklife studies to provide ethnographies of particular groups and de-emphasize or criticize the role of the "unifying society and culture." If cultural comparison or historical contextualization are lacking, the result could easily be a fragmented picture of cultures within America, as I observed in a collection of ten folklife books published in 1989 covering groups such as Louisiana Cajuns, Lake Champlain fishermen, and Amana
Following Tradition

Society members (Bronner 1990a). Built into the folklife effort was the assumption that data could become archived, comparative, even quantifiable. Europeans had a head start, pioneer American folklife scholars figured, but with the rapidly growing vigor of American folklife studies, they imagined that traditional cultures on the American continent could be charted and analyzed. Attempts to coordinate folklife research in the form of a cultural atlas for the United States have not been successful, and efforts to organize team research in communities have been all too infrequent. Invoking folklife could become a way to preserve the integrity of one’s “people” as a community. It also is a way to present those people positively to the public as a living tradition. “The people at the center of folklife studies,” Henry Glassie observed, “maintain their integrity and draw our admiration by holding to traditions that enable them simultaneously to express themselves and to meet their social responsibilities” (Glassie 1990, ix).

As folklife became nationalized from Shoemaker’s rural regional-ethnic Pennsylvania-German model, new trends were apparent toward merging folklore and folklife into a conception of human agency in tradition. Urban and industrial crafts, modern children’s arts, suburban yard arrangements, and memory arts of the aged were all presented as folklife during the 1990s. In some cases, the justification for calling such studies folklife was a matter of method or scope. It appeared that if a study employed ethnography—the systematic observation of communicated, symbolic behavior in cultural scenes—or if it included customary and material traditions, it could constitute folklife. Laurie Sommers reported that in the 1990s, folklorists in “public sector practice” used folklore and folklife interchangeably, and in academe at the same time Robert St. George beheld a “specious” distinction between the two terms (Sommers 1996; St. George 1995). Yet many folklife advocates justifiably worried that the significance of integrated communities like the Amish that received special attention for their social differentiation and totality of tradition would not be fully appreciated if folklife became subsumed under, or melded with, folklore (see Vlach 1985a; Bronner 1996c). To do away with some of the confusion, Jan Brunvand in his widely used textbook on American folklore proposed that “a safe generalization is that American folklorists have accepted the European concept of folklife as constituting their subject matter, and that they are borrowing from ethnography and ethnology for new field methods and theories” (Brunvand 1986b, 330). While conceptually defining folklife broadly as “the full traditional lore, behavior, and material culture of any folk group, with emphasis on the customary and material categories,” Brunvand under the heading of “Folklife and Folklore,” nevertheless called on “current usage” to form his narrower operational characterization of folklife “to mean only customary and material folk traditions, even though there is good reason to substitute the word immediately and permanently for the much-abused term ‘folklore’” (Brunvand 1986b, 401).

To be sure, the bookshelf of American works with folklife in the title still paled in comparison to those using folklore. The UnCover database for the first six
months of 1996, for example, listed 175 works with folklife as their keyword as opposed to 1,632 for folklore. The majority of folklife works covered a state, region, locality, or ethnic group. A few discussed occupational groups and urban neighborhoods. One could read into the titles that studying a group’s folklife meant that it was threatened with disintegration or victimization. Showing the rationality of communal tradition, putting a human face on culture, argued for its integrity. Some studies, given the American penchant for individualism, suggested a person’s choice of “folklife” for a symbolic kind of observable behavior made conspicuous in society. John Vlach cautioned that this favor for biographical studies, “cannot stop there with the universe inside the mind of a maker of objects; folklife studies are by the definition of the discipline also concerned with the maker’s social universe” (Vlach 1985a, 70).

Folklife came to the fore in public and scholarly discourse primarily as a rhetorical reference to communal connection and group identity. The range of groups covered during the 1980s and 1990s went well beyond Shoemaker’s concern for ethnic-regional cultures that were bounded by ancestry and rooted in place. It grew to include folklife for groups designated by gender, sexual preference, and disability, to name a few commonly used categories. Folklife as a way of following tradition appeared more common and everyday, and as a cultural formation of groups more extensively national. The political significance of widening designation of folklife groups is that as legitimized ways of life expressed through shared traditions, they vie for cultural protection as well as social equity with established ethnic groups. Hence Ward Goodenough in American Folklife referred to folklife as a way to record change of social attitudes to subcultures, and to promote maintenance of a diversity of groups within a “national community” (Goodenough 1976, 25). The rise of the folklife movement observed by Goodenough showed that in public discourse, determining the groups properly constituting American culture was open to debate—and intellectual construction. The heightened twentieth-century appeal of “life” in the discourse of culture was that as a subject, it offered a totality of experience to consider, and as an object, it represented the right of individuals to lead lives that did not conform to mass culture. In an era when the idea of community became increasingly elusive, folklife argued for communal persistence.

In the public discourse of American culture, the folklife approach that Alfred Shoemaker set in motion followed, and declared, groupness as the essence of tradition. That the rhetoric of “discovery” became attached to folklife is significant because it established two Americas. The reference to the common phrase for Columbus “discovering” America led to the nineteenth-century view of a new unified nation emerging from European and primarily homogeneous New England inheritance. The other comes from the twentieth-century “discovery” or “rediscovery” of American folklife. Its model lay in Pennsylvania’s commonwealth of cultures. The suggestion of discovering America anew showed in a project to redraw
the nation into communities of difference. In recognizing, even elevating, whole communities following tradition, the folklife movement involved evaluation, and judgment, of ways that Americans socialize. As a rhetorical quest, the twentieth-century discovery of American folklife forced reflection on the uncertainty of how they related to tradition, and to one another.