Public Folklore in Utah

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Utah’s traditional culture was perhaps first gathered and displayed for public edification either in a Mormon Church-owned museum that was located on Temple Square in Salt Lake City or in “relic halls” operated by the Daughters of Utah Pioneers (DUP). Early in the twentieth century, the DUP, founded in 1905, started gathering diaries and artifacts from members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) who crossed the plains to Utah before the coming of the railroad in 1869. There are eighty-eight DUP relic halls in Utah, all run by volunteers. The materials on display are generally identified but not interpreted.

During the Works Progress Administration period in the 1930s, some Utah traditional arts such as pioneer needlework were documented by artists and photographers. Then, in the 1960s, a smattering of recordings featuring Utah folklore appeared. Hector Lee’s narration of J. Golden Kimball and Brother Petersen stories may be the first effort at interpreting folklore for the public—the record jacket had some minimal notes on how the stories came about. About the same time, Rosalie Sorrels recorded three albums featuring folksongs of Utah and Idaho. In both these cases, the collector became the performer and the original materials were left in the archives, the tradition bearers from whom the materials were collected left unrecognized.

The first release of original, field-gathered folk materials occurred in 1975, when two young traditional music aficionados, Thomas Carter and Hal Cannon, decided to produce a record album featuring songs recorded in the field by early folklorists. As an undergraduate at the University of Utah, Cannon had spent hours listening to the field recordings of Lester Hubbard and Austin and Alta Fife. Carter and Cannon wanted to produce a record that would feature the old recordings along with new versions of them by their band, the Deseret String Band. They wrote to Alan Jabbour, director of the newly minted Folk Arts Program at the National Endowment for the Arts, inquiring about the possibility of a grant. Jabbour told them that the Endowment would be interested only in the release of the old recordings, not the new interpretations. Cannon recalled in a 2003 interview, “We had no idea. . . . I’d never even heard the word ‘revivalist’ . . . . That was quite a blow at the time, because to me the interesting thing was
that I’d skipped class and gone up and just listened to all the Hubbard material and I loved it, and that it was going to live again.”

Carter and Cannon contacted University of Utah folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand, and he helped them put together a successful NEA grant application. With additional money from the University of Utah Bicentennial Committee, the three produced _The New Beelive Songster, Volume One_, with field recordings mostly from the 1940s. The title for the record was adapted from a pamphlet of Utah songs from the 1860s.

For volume two of the project, “New Recordings of Utah Folk Music,” Cannon traveled throughout Utah between July 1975 and July 1976, seeking out the same people (or their descendants) that Hubbard and the Fifes had recorded, as well as searching for new people to record. As with the first album, the songs were annotated in an accompanying booklet with an introduction to establish contexts. By the time he completed the fieldwork for this album, Cannon had become convinced of the value and need for supporting authentic traditions and their practitioners.

At about the same time, William A. “Bert” Wilson (see chapter 10), an English and folklore professor at Brigham Young University, began traveling throughout Utah giving lectures on folklore subjects, tailoring each lecture to the region he was visiting: “Coal Mining and Ethnic Minority Folklore” in Price, “Folklore and Local History” in Cedar City, “Green Beans and Golden Gators: The Folklore of Mormon Missionaries” in Provo, and “Forest Folklore: A History Resource” at a Forest Service workshop in Logan. In an interview (7 May 2003), he said that he considered himself “the missionary for folklore in Utah” during this time. He did not consider this kind of work public folklore, which for him had negative connotations because his attitude had been shaped by his association with Indiana University professor Richard Dorson and others who were wary of any use of folklore outside the academy. Wilson rather saw this work as an extension of his academic calling. However, his feelings about public folklore underwent a major change, beginning with his experience presenting the Meldrum family of quilters at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 1976. There he observed how festival patrons interacted with the Meldrums and saw that there was a public good being served by making people aware of their own traditions.

While these early projects and events brought folklore to the general public, a state-sponsored folk arts program had its Utah beginnings at the Utah State Division of Fine Arts (later to be known as the Utah Arts Council) in 1976. Utah has the oldest arts agency in the country—it was founded in 1899 with an all-volunteer board and staff and a state allocation. By the mid-1970s, the agency had been professionalized, and at a time when many other states were just starting to create their own arts agencies, Utah, with a reliable budget of state funds, was poised to take advantage of NEA dollars to create new programs and positions. During this period, the Folk Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts was actively encouraging states to hire folk arts coordinators. The NEA’s first folk arts program director, Alan Jabbour, and Bess Lomax Hawes, who succeeded
him and expanded the program, actively nurtured new state folk arts programs. Over the years, Hawes became a friend and mentor to many young folk arts coordinators around the country.

Ruth Draper, director of the Division of Fine Arts, wrote a grant to the NEA for such a position, using state funds plus money from the Utah American Revolutionary Bicentennial Commission to match the federal funds requested. She found language in the agency’s original enabling legislation that referred to stimulation “of an indigenous art, literature and music in this state,” language which she saw as compatible with folk arts. She had in mind hiring Hal Cannon, whom she had known since he was a young boy and who had heard of her plans and expressed an interest in the position. Cannon had a master’s degree in film from the Rhode Island School of Design and a bachelor’s in journalism from the University of Utah. His lack of background in academic folklore concerned some people, but Draper became convinced that Cannon could do the job. He had taken some of Brunvand’s folklore courses at the University of Utah as an undergraduate, and his friend Carter, who had gone to Indiana University to earn a Ph.D. in folklore, had a background that helped Cannon understand the basics of folklore theory, fieldwork, and scholarship. Cannon also accompanied traditional singer Kenneth Ward Atwood to the 1976 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, where he was able to rub shoulders with folklorists from around the country. Nevertheless, he knew there were skeptical eyes on him, and he felt pressure to produce good work in the first year of the program.

When Cannon was hired as the state folk arts coordinator, his was one of the first such positions in the country. Henry Glassie had worked as a state folklorist in Pennsylvania in 1966, though his was not a folk arts coordinator position as such jobs were later defined. As other arts agencies took up the challenge to establish folk arts programs, George Carey was hired in Maryland (1974) and Linda White in Tennessee (1975). As soon as he was officially employed in 1976, Cannon created a low-cost brochure that included a definition of folk arts, a list of the Utah Folk Arts Project’s goals, a short bibliography, and the names of the Folk Arts Advisory Panel: Gail Barnette Della Piana (a member of the Fine Arts Board), Jan Brunvand, Ruth Draper, USU folklorist Austin Fife, Rowan Stutz (coordinator of arts in education for the State Office of Education), and Bert Wilson.

The presence of three academic folklorists on that committee was not a mistake. From the beginning, academic folklorists worked with and advised public sector folklorists in Utah. Cannon had first met Barre Toelken, Jan Brunvand, and Polly Stewart (a native of Utah who later had a teaching career in Maryland) through folk music networks. He consulted with Brunvand and Wilson when thinking about how to start the state folk arts program. This cooperative relationship between public and academic folklorists that began in the 1970s has continued to the present, and the folk arts advisory panel established then has continued to include academics. Part of this cooperation may be due to the fact that there were and are a disproportionately large number of academic folklorists in the state; even in the mid-1970s, Brigham Young University, the University
of Utah, and Utah State University all had trained folklorists on their faculties. But, as Cannon said, “... it could have been a real revival sort of a deal. If I [had] ... said, ‘Oh, let’s just have a bunch of folkies,’ ... it could have turned out very differently.”

In the first year of the Utah Folk Arts Project, a building year, survey work was carried out, technical assistance was provided to several festivals, a statewide teacher-training workshop was held, and classroom workshops were given. Cannon also traveled around the state speaking about the program.

In the second year, Cannon created the Southern Utah Folklife Festival at Zion National Park in partnership with the National Park Service. The festival ran for many years, later under the sponsorship of Dixie College. At first, it was a project of the Utah State Division of Fine Arts, with Cannon and several hired hands making it work. It featured, in the words of Cannon’s report to the NEA, “interesting, indigenous expressions, peculiar to the desert region, such as water-witching, desert plant use, sandstone cutting, unique pioneer music traditions, and Southern Paiute lifeways.” The festival was funded by an NEA grant of $5,000 along with smaller contributions from the Division of Fine Arts, the National Park Service, the National Park Service Foundation, and the National Council for the Traditional Arts. A recording of the festival’s music was made by the National Public Radio program, Folk Festival USA, and the University of Utah’s public television station shot video footage there as well. Cannon enticed the radio program to cover the festival by telling the producers that they never featured western festivals or authentic folk musicians. “I sort of shamed them into coming down to record our program. ... And then they went back and ... edited out all the real great stuff,” retaining only the folk-revival singers—Toelken, Cannon, and the Deseret String Band—rather than the featured tradition-bearers.

By the end of the first eighteen months of the Utah Folk Arts Project, it became clear to Cannon that he had many more ideas than he could pursue, so he hired Carol Edison, a family friend who was completing a master’s degree in English, to go to southern Utah to manage the second Southern Utah Folklife Festival. There she worked with Bob Dalton of Dixie College and put on a successful festival in spite of never having done such work before.

In the meantime, Cannon began thinking about doing an exhibition of Utah folk art. The Library of Congress sponsored three meetings for public folklorists during these years, and there Cannon met and befriended Jim Griffith (Arizona), Mike Korn (Montana), Suzi Jones (first Oregon, then Alaska), Steve Siporin (Oregon and Idaho), Jane Beck (Vermont), and Steve Ohrn (Iowa), among others. The coordinators shared ideas and discussed work-related challenges, talking on the phone frequently. In particular, Cannon kept in touch on an almost daily basis with Jones, who had recently completed a similar folk arts exhibition in Oregon.

The exhibit was conceived as a survey project with a catalog to be published by BYU Press, and it was timed to coincide with the American Folklore Society
meetings scheduled for Salt Lake City in the fall of 1978. Cannon hired field-workers: Thomas Carter, back from Indiana, worked on vernacular architecture; Ann Nelson researched Native American arts; Richard Oman gathered Mormon folk art; and Nancy Richards documented early Mormon furniture. Susan Oman oversaw the gathering of folk art for the exhibit, most of it borrowed from collectors and museums.

Once again working beyond their experience, Cannon and a group of helpers mounted an impressive exhibit, complete with a continuously running film of performances, in the Empire Room of the historic Hotel Utah downtown. The elegant room itself posed challenges for such a project because nothing could be hung on the walls; even the lighting had to be completely self-contained within the structure of the exhibit panels. Utahns who viewed the
exhibit were generally enthusiastic, but unfortunately, not many people saw it. It was the year that many folklorists boycotted the AFS meeting to register their displeasure with the Mormon Church’s opposition to the federal Equal Rights Amendment, and even locals did not turn out in large numbers, perhaps because of inadequate publicity. Later, however, the show traveled to other locations in the state, including Brigham Young University and the College of Southern Utah, where it was well-received. The attractive catalog, edited by Cannon, has remained a landmark publication on Utah folk art.

During the same period, a strong sense of community developed among state folk arts coordinators throughout the country as they created programs and approaches that would define public folklore for many years. In addition to gathering at the Library of Congress and at American Folklore Society meetings, they were from time to time invited to observe the NEA Folk Arts Panel as it reviewed grant applications. This experience gave them an intensive look at what was going on around the country and taught those who had less formal training the standards of the field as NEA had defined them. This association eventually led coordinators from the western states to come together at a regional meeting and, later, to develop a regional project focused on cowboy poetry. Both were the result of the westerners’ feeling that the eastern establishment did not fully understand them or their constituencies.

Following the Utah Folk Art exhibit, the program produced a flurry of other projects. Cannon obtained additional funding to hire Edison full-time as assistant folk arts coordinator starting in November 1978. In its third year, in addition to the exhibition and the Southern Utah Folklife Festival, the program sponsored folk artists in the schools and a gravestone exhibition, gave funding to the Fife Folklore Conference (see chapter 24), provided technical assistance to a Scandinavian festival, and embarked on a survey of the music of Carbon and Grand counties. Folk artists from Carbon County were featured at the Utah Arts Festival that year, and that work led to a larger project on Carbon County ethnic music a couple of years later.

In 1979, Cannon decided to do another exhibition. In his work with the Utah Folk Art show, he had been impressed with the number of beehives he found in various places. Deriving from a Book of Mormon reference to honeybees, the beehive is a pervasive Mormon symbol connoting hard work and a willingness to sting outsiders who might try to bother the Saints in their isolated Great Basin home. Cannon approached Allen Dodworth, the director of the new Salt Lake Art Center, about collaborating on an exhibit that would focus on beehives in Utah culture. Cannon proposed an exhibit that would include not only traditional arts but also fine artists’ interpretations of beehives, commissioned works from folk artists, popular arts such as business signs, and a “correspondence art” component featuring postcards sent in by over one hundred artists from around the world. The idea of commissioning folk artists to produce items using designs they would not ordinarily use, along with taking a folk/popular symbol and inviting fine artists to interpret it, evidently made the NEA Folk Arts Panel
uncomfortable. They did not fund Cannon’s grant request. However, the idea was attractive to Mervyn’s Department Stores, which signed on as a sponsor.

The exhibit, which was on display at the Salt Lake Art Center from 12 September through 19 October 1980, was, in comparison to the Utah Folk Art exhibit, very popular. It was visually impressive and it resonated with local interest in history, heritage, and religious symbolism. It also gave needed visibility to the Folk Arts Program and built bridges between the folk arts and fine arts communities. After it closed, it traveled to the Renwick Gallery at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D. C., where it was on display for more than seven months in 1981.

At about the same time, other public folklore projects were being developed around the state. Bert Wilson, who had moved to Utah State University to develop a folklore program there, received NEA grants in 1979 and 1980 to identify, document, and present folk artists of northern Utah, southern Idaho, and western Wyoming at the Fife Conference and the Festival of the American West. The festival was an annual summer event of USU’s Student Services and Development divisions, and folklorists and historians have had major doubts about it throughout its existence, primarily over the festival’s accuracy in representing history and culture. Wilson thought to use NEA funds to bring in authentic folk artists for the festival, hoping to demonstrate to the organizers the difference between real tradition bearers and revivalists/reenactors. He also hoped that the interpretive signage used in the folk arts area would be an example for the festival organizers on how to make a public event both entertaining and educational. During the years of the NEA grants, Wilson’s ideas were implemented, but they were largely abandoned afterward despite a short-lived committee of folklorists and historians that advised the festival in the 1990s. That group eventually resigned to protest the fact that their advice went unheeded.

In 1981, the growing community of western state folklorists decided to meet together to discuss issues of mutual concern. They received an NEA grant to pay their travel expenses, despite Bess Lomax Hawes’s opposition. Hawes was throughout her career a supportive mentor for folk arts coordinators and a tireless advocate for the inclusion of traditional arts in federally funded programs; her influence can still be seen in the hundreds of community-based programs, from festivals to exhibits to publications, that came out of state folk arts programs. As state programs had developed, however, art forms that had not previously been documented by folklorists began to emerge, and the question of excellence in the arts had become harder to determine. Hawes’s doubts about the utility of the regional gathering may have come out of the feeling that the development of regional associations might mean the loss of the NEA’s control over definitions of artistic quality and community, with a possible result being the Folk Arts Program’s vulnerability to criticism at the Endowment.

The first regional gathering of public sector folklorists was held June 22–26, 1981, in conjunction with the Fife Folklore Conference at Utah State University. The participating coordinators sent letters of support to the Endowment after
Throughout the 1980s, public-sector folklorists from around the western United States met annually in conjunction with the Fife Folklore Conference at Utah State University. Working sessions were held in the Fife Folklore Archives.

the meeting, expressing their hope that the gathering could receive more funding in the future, which it did, for a meeting held June 14–18, 1982. An important feature of having the meetings at the same time and place as the Fife Folklore Conference was the interchange between the public and the academic folklorists. The public folklorists gave one or two presentations to the Fife Conference audience, they often attended lectures by their academic colleagues—who came from various institutions from all around the country—and they were part of all the social gatherings of the Conference. This interaction further strengthened the friendship between Utah’s public and academic folklorists.

The most important and far-reaching idea to come out of the western state folklorists’ meetings was the very idea of a regional public folklorists’ gathering. Since the first western meeting in 1981, several other such conferences have been created around the country. These gatherings have played an important role in policy, training, and program development in regional, state, and local folk arts programs. Early agendas of the western meetings show some of the same general areas of concern that continue to be discussed today: funding, organizational issues, fieldwork, and advocacy. Other topics have arisen as times have changed: the organization and preservation of archives, the situation of the next generation of public folklorists, cultural equity, intellectual property, and many other subjects. In addition, the western meeting has always included professional development workshops in areas such as writing, photography, audio production, and field recording.
The Utah Arts Council’s Folk Arts Program and Utah State University continued to host the western meetings until 1993, when I went to work for the Western States Arts Federation (WESTAF) as the regional folk arts coordinator. At that point, I took on the management of the meetings and, after polling the group about a change in location, that year held them in Santa Fe, where WESTAF was located. This shift allowed the folklorists to attend sessions of the concurrent conference of the Western Alliance of Arts Administrators (WAAA) in Albuquerque. The change of location for the meetings was refreshing, both for the Utah folklorists, who had spent a tremendous amount of time over the years making arrangements, organizing field trips, and otherwise planning the meetings, and for the folklorists who attended, who had the opportunity to learn something about cultural groups and activities in another part of the West. From that time on, the group voted to move the meeting around the region.

The second important idea to emerge from the early years of these western meetings was the concept of interstate cooperation on a regional folk arts project. The topic was discussed at the first and second Fife gatherings, and also at a September 1982 meeting in Santa Fe organized by WESTAF. Previously, at a Library of Congress meeting of state folk arts coordinators, Arizona’s Jim Griffith had broached the idea to other westerners that cowboy poetry, a tradition that could be found in most western states, might be an appropriate topic for a cooperative project. About 1983, prompted by discussions at the western regional meetings, Hal Cannon and Steve Siporin wrote an NEA grant application on behalf of the Sun Valley (Idaho) Center for the Arts and Humanities for fieldwork and planning for a cowboy poetry conference. Again, there were concerns at NEA about the project, according to Cannon, because of a sense that folk poetry might somehow lower the artistic standards of the NEA program, which had struggled hard and often to prove to skeptics that folk art could be of the highest artistic quality in its sphere, just as fine art could. Bert Wilson, serving on the NEA Folk Arts Panel, went to bat for western traditions, making the case for folk poetry—and cowboy poetry in particular—as a vibrant, community-based art form that ran the artistic gamut from hackneyed to ingenious and elevating. He was the driving force behind the funding that was awarded for the cowboy poetry fieldwork and planning, and later for implementation.

Cannon and Gary Stanton conducted much of the fieldwork for the Cowboy Poetry Gathering, but a major factor in the success of the event was the state folk arts coordinators’ participation, both as fieldworkers and as staff for the first Gathering, which took place in January 1985. Some of the NEA grant money was distributed to the states to help defray fieldwork costs. The Gathering has continued as an annual event, now designated the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering, thanks to an Act of Congress; it celebrated its twentieth year with a retrospective exhibit in 2004.

From 1982 to 1985, Carol Edison’s position as assistant folk arts coordinator had been funded by grants from the NEA, with her work centering primarily on documenting Native American, refugee, and rural communities and the
production of education materials; in 1985, the state assumed responsibility for her salary. In 1983, a third position—initially part-time and funded by grant monies—was created at the Folk Arts Program, and subsequently Craig R. Miller, David Stanley, Anne F. Hatch, and George H. Schoemaker worked there. Edison became coordinator after Cannon decided in 1985 to create the Western Folklife Center in Elko, Nevada, to administer the annual Cowboy Poetry Gathering; subsequently he served as executive director of the Center and later opened a Salt Lake City office to create media products, including radio programs and video productions, with the help of producer Taki Telenidis. The Western Folklife Center was, in fact, an outgrowth of the Utah Folklife Center, created as a nonprofit by Cannon in the late ’70s as a means to raise money to support the programming of the Folk Arts Program.

Throughout the early years of the state folk arts program, no grants were awarded to cultural organizations in the state; instead, the program focused on fieldwork and special projects that presented Utah’s traditional cultures to the public. In 1982, the arts council created the Governor’s Folk Art Award, which was strictly honorific—no funds went with it. Later, two more awards were added to the program: the Cultural Heritage Award for people who weren’t traditional artists but who helped maintain cultural identity, and the Service to Folk Art Award for people who, although not artists, assisted folk artists and their communities.

It was also in the mid-1980s that Bert Wilson was appointed to the Utah Arts Council board, with the specific idea that he would represent folk arts.
Thomas Carter and Margaret K. Brady had written letters to then-Governor Scott Matheson asking that a folklorist position be established on the board. The board had several slots designated for artists, one of which was “craftsman.” In 1992, the legislature redefined that slot for a “folklore or folk arts working artist.” That position has since been filled by an academic folklorist, including, in addition to Wilson, Barre Toelken and Brady.

It is remarkable that, beginning in 1983, Utah had a folk arts staff of three when most other state folk arts programs, especially in the West, had only one staff person. The presence of a folklorist on the UAC board was indicative of deep support for this kind of work and was certainly a factor in educating the board about the importance of folk arts. In a joint interview, Edison pointed out that each new staff addition was done with grant funds, so the small programming budget was never tapped for personnel. She said, “. . . we made the argument that people made the difference. . . . we could do a lot with elbow grease if we just had staff.” Stanley added that another argument probably helped convince the board to support additional staffing: “[W]e were the only game in the state. That is, there were lots of museums that had visual arts collections, there were lots of creative writing programs in literature, but in terms of folklore . . . there was no exhibition space, nobody was producing concerts. . . . we weren’t duplicating what other entities could or should be doing and we were not competing for either public charitable contributions or government money or foundation money or grant money.” Edison also pointed out that as the National Endowment for the Arts began to place emphasis on serving “underserved” communities, the folk arts program was able to fulfill that need for the Utah Arts Council, so it was a good time to ask the board for more support.

The Cowboy Poetry Gathering was not the only folklife project focusing on cowboys and ranchers. In 1985, the Library of Congress, the Utah State Historic Preservation Office, the Utah Arts Council, the Western Folklife Center, the National Park Service, and Utah State University teamed up to do an intensive fieldwork project in Grouse Creek in far northwestern Utah. It was devised as a collaboration of folklorists, architectural historians, and historians to document both the tangible and intangible aspects of a community in order to understand it better, demonstrate the potential of cooperative research efforts, and possibly impact policies affecting historic preservation and cultural conservation. For three intensive weeks, researchers including Cannon, Edison, and Carter, who was the project manager, lived and worked in Grouse Creek. The work was grueling but the outcome was important. While such a large cooperative project is financially daunting to produce, the book that resulted from the work, edited by Carter and Carl Fleischhauer, showed the potential benefits of interagency and cross-disciplinary collaboration, especially in land management planning. Another cowboy project was Carol Edison’s Cowboy Poetry from Utah: An Anthology (1985), based on fieldwork conducted for the Cowboy Poetry Gathering.

In the late 1980s, the Folk Arts Program increasingly turned its attention to ethnic groups and their traditions, moving away from its early focus on
documenting the traditions of what the staff thought to be the last generation of old-time Mormon folk artists. Projects had been completed in the early 1980s on Laotian refugee arts, Polynesian quilting and music, and ethnic music. The appointment of Craig R. Miller, who had long been involved in ethnic folk dance and who was a founder of a popular Eastern European festival called Utahslav, helped to turn the program’s direction. In addition, the staff had been in contact with other folk arts coordinators from around the country and had observed the variety of projects being accomplished with ethnic communities. Looking back, Edison commented that the program’s efforts to revitalize old-time Mormon arts “were not perceived well nationally. I stayed away from it. We moved into more focus on ethnic communities and minority communities in the state and I don’t think we ever really looked back.” She commented further that perhaps the Folk Arts Program should have paid more attention to Mormon culture “because we certainly have encouraged revitalization and revivalism in other communities, in ethnic communities and Native communities. We pat people on the back, we encourage them, we try and enable them to do that. Yet when it comes to our own cultural group, we haven’t done any of those things in a very big way.”

Beginning in 1987, Miller hosted a weekly program, “Utah Traditions,” on community radio station KRCL. It began as a thirteen-part introduction to folk music in Utah funded by the Utah Humanities Council, intended, in the words of the program report, to explore “the process of how folk music is passed from one generation to the next, the context of family and community in maintaining traditions, and how folk music functions to reinforce cultural identity. Five additional programs explored religious music of Utah’s Black residents, and three more programs explored the heritage and traditions of Utah’s Greek community. Later programs explored ethnic traditions, community celebrations and the roots of contemporary folk expression in Utah.”

In 1985, the Folk Arts Program was housed in an old water-pumping station in Salt Lake City’s Reservoir Park, and the city had just announced plans to demolish the building. At the same time, Ruth Draper resigned from the UAC and became a regional representative of the NEA, and a new executive director, Carol Nixon, came to the arts council. At around the same time, the UAC Visual Arts Program, which had remodeled the historic Isaac Chase/Brigham Young home in Liberty Park to serve as exhibition space, announced that it would vacate the building. When the visual arts coordinator offered the building to the folk arts staff, they jumped at the opportunity to create a folk art museum.

The Folk Arts Program moved into the Chase Home in Fall 1986 and immediately the staff began to think more in terms of annual programs than the special projects that had previously occupied the program. Stanley pointed out, “... all of a sudden we had a facility to manage, walls to cover ... concerts to arrange, and so the emphasis on special projects declined by a lot. And we started emphasizing annual recurring ones much more.”

One of the annual projects developed by the staff was the Living Traditions Festival, conceived primarily by Edison in partnership with the Salt Lake City
Arts Council. The first festival was in May 1986, and it soon became an annual event on the weekend preceding Memorial Day weekend. Living Traditions focuses on the traditional arts of ethnic, occupational, and other communities within the Salt Lake Valley. It has done much to change local perceptions that Utah lacks ethnic diversity. Another benefit of the festival has been the building of trusting relationships between the Folk Arts Program and the ethnic communities in the Salt Lake Valley. Edison pointed out that because the festival provided opportunities for ethnic groups to share their traditions and make a little money, it became easier for the folklorists to approach those groups and to follow up with in-depth fieldwork in succeeding years.

Partnerships such as Living Traditions helped build support for the UAC Folk Arts Program and allowed the staff to develop networks with other organizations. Stanley worked with the Salt Lake Mayor’s office on a downtown revitalization project focused on healthy neighborhoods, and he also helped document and present crafts traditions for Celebrate the City Festivals in 1985 and 1988, which marked the restoration of the ornate City & County Building, built in 1892. Stanley documented the work of stone cutters, slate roofers, gold-leaf artists, decorative plasterers, and other traditional craftspeople during the restoration and produced a photographic exhibition of their work.

Another fruitful partnership for the UAC Folk Arts Program was with the Folklore Society of Utah (see chapter 23). The society, which had been founded in 1958, had had its ups and downs over the years. Thomas Carter became president of the Society in the 1980s and initiated the production of a folklore newsletter. Around 1984, Stanley took over the editing of the newsletter and continued to do so after he joined the UAC staff. The Folk Arts Program used the newsletter to publicize its events, and Stanley also developed the newsletter as a place where people could publish short articles on various aspects of Utah folklore. The two organizations shared printing and mailing costs, and the Folklore Society managed the sales of recordings and publications pertinent to Utah folklore.

When Stanley was hired by the Folk Arts Program, one of his responsibilities was to work with schools. He conducted several teacher workshops aimed at encouraging teachers to incorporate more folk arts and folk artists into the classroom. However, such training was having only limited effect in the classroom, so in the late 1980s, the Folk Arts Program partnered with the UAC’s Arts in Education program to arrange for folklorist residencies in the schools. The program hired independent folklorists like me (I did a month-long elementary-school residency in Vernal in September 1989) and graduate students like Karen Krieger from the folklore program at Utah State University to fill these residencies.

In 1989, in addition to his work on the program’s annual projects, Stanley undertook a project on storytelling in which he made field recordings in context, recordings of groups of people whose members knew each other well and liked to tell stories. The groups included river guides, quilters, railroaders, and teenagers at a slumber party. The result of his work was a thirteen-part radio series, Listening In: Utah Storytelling, that was also released on cassette with an
accomplishing booklets. The series proved to be valuable in the classroom and was used by teachers of folklore in secondary and higher education.

Also in 1989 and again in concert with national trends, the Utah Arts Council received NEA funds to start a folk arts apprenticeship program. The federal funds were used to hire Craig R. Miller as apprenticeship program manager, and state money was used for the grants awarded to master artists to instruct apprentices. The Utah folklorists based their program on a model developed by Barbara Rahm in California as well as bits and pieces of other similar programs around the country. In the early years of the apprenticeship program, twelve to eighteen grants were awarded each year. By the late 1990s, that number had fallen lower, averaging around eight awards per year, probably because the folklorists were occupied with more annual programs, the renovation of the Chase Home, and bringing the archives up to standard. The staff learned quickly that applications in any given year tended to come from communities where fieldwork was being done.

The decade of the 1990s was one of growth in annual programs like Living Traditions and the Mondays in the Park concert series, in which folk artists performed in front of the Chase Home on summer evenings. Mondays were chosen for these concerts because in Mormon culture, Monday nights are reserved for family activities, and the folk arts staff figured that a free outdoor concert would attract families. The conjecture was correct, the concerts became increasingly popular, and the schedule was eventually expanded from one month of Monday concerts to two.

The 1990s were also a period of museum development. The Chase Home proved to be a hospitable environment for folk arts. The need to fill its galleries drove much of the fieldwork that was done after the program moved there. Edison was the power behind the development of the museum and its exhibits, with a new one every year until the building’s 2000 renovation. Exhibits included “Save It For A Rainy Day” (1990), focusing on adaptive reuse and recycling of materials into art; “Hecho en Utah” (1992), a major project that included not only an exhibition of the arts of Spanish-speaking residents but also a lecture series, twelve concerts, three cassettes of music, and a book; “Shared Legacies” (1993), exhibiting the work of artists who participated in the first five years of the apprenticeship program; “Underneath the Western Skies” (1995) focusing on cowboy crafts; and “Willow Stories: Contemporary Navajo Baskets from the Simpson Collection” (1994), which represented only a small part of a major fieldwork effort dealing with Navajo basketry in the Douglas Mesa area of Monument Valley, where the art of Navajo basketry was preserved while it disappeared from other parts of the Navajo Nation. Thanks to Edison’s nomination, basket weaver Mary Holiday Black received a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1995, the first Navajo and the first Utahn to be so honored.

In 2000, after years of work by Edison to generate interest and raise funds, the Chase Home was renovated. The building is owned by the city of Salt Lake but houses a state-sponsored program, and much negotiating was necessary before
renovation and financing plans were agreed upon. The building was sagging in several places, and the original adobe brick walls were deteriorating in spots as well. It also did not meet federal accessibility standards, and it was cold in the winter and insufferably hot in the summer. The restored building is ideal for the display of folk arts and stands as a monument to Edison's persistence and vision. Its setting in Liberty Park, a central gathering place, makes it easy for members of ethnic groups living nearby to visit the museum when they are in the park. It has four galleries that currently display 135 objects from the 267-piece state folk art collection, dating from the mid-1970s to the present.

In 1990, the Utah Legislature created an arts endowment in the state with an allocation of $2.3 million, which served as matching funds for $750,000 that came from NEA. Largely through David Stanley’s efforts, the earnings from $150,000 of this NEA money were eventually earmarked to fund a new grant category, Ethnic Arts Grants, to be administered by the Folk Arts Program. These grants are “designed for Utah’s ethnic communities to revitalize, strengthen and present their traditional or national art forms” (http://arts.utah.gov/folkarts/ethnicgrants.html). The Ethnic Arts Grants (both individual artists and organizations are eligible) fund not only traditional folk arts, but also popular and classical arts of ethnic communities, and they thus fill a gap that has often been problematic for folk arts programs.

As in other state folk arts programs, the Utah staff have found their time increasingly taken up with administrative duties and annual programs with less time available for fieldwork and special projects. However, through their nurturing over the years and the dissemination of grant funds to artists and communities, the infrastructure of folk arts has been strengthened. Organizations like ethnic dance groups, community centers, and local festivals are generally doing well and passing on their traditions thanks to the efforts of the folklorists at the Utah Arts Council, who now spend much of their time managing grant programs, providing technical assistance, and overseeing an important new effort to organize, stabilize, and make accessible the archival materials that the program has collected since 1976. A sound engineer has been hired to digitize the collections, and the Utah Folk Arts Program has become a national model for the indexing and storage of state folk arts collections, including photographs, recordings, and objects of art. The program is now participating with several other western state programs in a consortium dedicated to making such collections more accessible via the Internet and other resources. George H. Schoemaker, who joined the staff in 2000, takes the lead in much of this work, contributing both his academic background in folklore and his knowledge of computer technology.

Over the years the staff has produced a number of recordings and publications featuring Utah folk art traditions. Of particular note is Miller's work documenting old-time social dance traditions among rural Mormons. His research led to An Old-Time Utah Dance Party, cassette and CD versions of field recordings; a booklet covering the history of the tradition; and a spiral-bound booklet containing piano versions of the recordings along with dance steps. This
project illustrates how the Folk Arts Program can help perpetuate Utah’s traditional arts by preserving information so that it will be available to traditional communities for their future needs.

In addition to the Folk Arts Program, other institutions are contributing fieldwork and public programming. In 2001, the Bear River Association of Governments (BRAG) based in Logan, Utah State University’s Mountain West Center for Regional Studies and its folklore program, and other entities, working in partnership with the Office of State History, began developing the Bear River Heritage Area. This heritage area, encompassing three counties in northern Utah and four in southeastern Idaho, is focused on economic development, tourism, and heritage preservation. In the earliest meetings dealing with the heritage area, BRAG Economic Development Director Cindy Hall invited USU folklorist Randy Williams to participate. Williams recommended that fieldwork be done to identify the cultural resources of the region, and she helped the heritage area raise funds from State History and the Utah Community Cultural Heritage Coordinating Committee, an interagency entity. Using these funds, three Utah State University folklore students were hired to work under the direction of independent folklorist Andrea Graham of Pocatello, Idaho. With some help from Williams and me, they spent the summer of 2001 interviewing, recording, and photographing tradition-bearers in the three Utah counties. In 2003, NEA funding was received to pay for similar work to be done in the Idaho counties, again with Graham leading the fieldworkers. The result of this work has been the production of a guidebook and website focusing on the cultural resources of the area. The Bear River Heritage Area Council, a group of business, tourism, government, and education leaders, continues to develop programs to promote those resources. The fieldwork documents (slides, tapes, notes) are housed in the Fife Folklore Archives at Utah State University.

Williams, whose advocacy of fieldwork for the heritage area was so effective, has been a quiet presence in Utah public sector folklore. A 1993 master’s graduate of the USU folklore program, she was initially hired as archival assistant to Barbara Lloyd, then the Fife Folklore Archives director. Williams immediately became involved in public-sector projects. Building on her experience writing folklore curriculum for fourth-graders, she was hired by the Children’s Museum of Utah to write curriculum to accompany a ranching exhibition. In 1994, her job title and responsibilities at USU were changed to program folklorist, doing public-sector work through the USU folklore program. She worked with elementary educators and supervised graduate students in school residencies, arranged for folk artists to appear at the Fife Folklore Conference, and worked for a time with the Festival of the American West. In 2001, her job was changed again, and she became full-time archivist and curator of the Fife Folklore Archives. However, she still does public projects when she can, and in 2003 she organized an oral history training workshop under the federal Veterans History Project.

Other USU master’s graduates have also contributed to the public folklore scene in Utah. Anne F. Hatch, a 1991 graduate, went to work for the Utah Arts
Council in 1992 after Stanley left. She oversaw the apprenticeship program as one of her duties and hosted “Artspeak,” a public affairs radio program on KRCL in Salt Lake. Karen Krieger graduated from USU about the same time as Hatch and later went to work as heritage coordinator for the Utah Division of Parks and Recreation. She serves on the State Native American Coordinating Board and helped create the Ute Tribe Olympic Exhibit in Midway, Utah, during the 2002 Winter Olympics. Sally Haueter, Michael Ward, Robin Parent, Lisa Duskin-Goede, Elizabeth Harvey, and Darcy Minter have all worked as student interns doing fieldwork for the Bear River Heritage Area and for USU’s Mountain West Center for Regional Studies in 2001 and 2003. Haueter went on to be hired as manager of the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering, and fellow graduate Michael Christensen was hired as the staff folklorist at the Utah Cultural Celebration Center in West Valley City.

Hal Cannon has continued to be a major force in Utah public sector folklore. When the Western Folklife Center had a Utah office between 1986 and 1991, it sponsored a few projects in Utah, most notably Voices W.E.S.T., a festival of folk choral music. The event was Cannon’s idea and featured group singing from a variety of cultures. I worked on the project while employed by WFC during those years, and when I left the Center in 1991, Meg Glaser took over coordination of Voices W.E.S.T. Cannon and the Western Folklife Center also sponsored a concert of cowboy poetry and music during the 2002 Winter Olympics. Despite the number of folklorists working on public programs in Utah, Cannon is still the most visible and is to many people the “face” of Utah folklore programs.

The generally cordial relationship between public and academic folklorists in Utah has benefited both sectors. Public sector programs have been informed by the understandings of academics, and academic programs like the Fife Folklore Conference have benefited from the participation of public folklorists. Graduate students have had opportunities to work in the field through internships with public folklore projects.

Without the consistent support and funding of the National Endowment for the Arts, most of the public programming in the state would never have happened. Nevertheless, there remains within the state and the region a persistent perception that those who serve on panels and staffs of the federal agencies do not understand the culture and folklore of the West. This perception led to the creation of the Cowboy Poetry Gathering as a demonstration of western folk arts, and to the development of the regional public folklorists’ retreat as a place where western folklorists could discuss topics of mutual interest. Both projects became models for other regions.

Public programming of folk arts in Utah continues to be an important presence in the state, creating festivals, concerts, exhibits, and crafts demonstrations, carrying out research, and publishing books, articles, and recordings. The center of this activity has been the Utah Arts Council and its Folk Arts Program, which annually produces a major festival, a concert series, a museum exhibit, an apprenticeship program, and many public events in addition to managing one
of the few state folk arts museums in the country, preserving an archival record of communities and their arts throughout the state, and making fieldwork available to the public through publications, audio and video recordings, radio programs, and other media products. Since its founding in 1976, it has brought to public awareness the quality of the state's folk arts, the diversity of its people and art forms, and the link between its heritage and its contemporary residents.