Appendix C. Utah Folk Arts Collection and Chase Home Museum and Archive

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C. Utah Folk Arts Collection and Chase Home Museum and Archive

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The Folk Arts Program of the Utah Arts Council has an extensive collection of folk art, much of it on display in the Chase Home Museum of Utah Folk Arts in Salt Lake City’s Liberty Park. The Chase Home also houses an extensive archive of recordings and photographs and a library of folklore books and other materials.

STATE FOLK ARTS COLLECTION

On March 9, 1899, led by representative Alice Merrill Horne, the three-year-old Utah State Legislature passed Bill 86 creating the first state arts agency in the country. Not only did this bill establish the Utah Art Institute with the stated purpose “to advance the arts in all their phases,” but it also mandated support for visual artists through an annual competition and exhibition from which paintings were to be purchased for a Fine Art Collection. Over the years, the Utah Art Institute became the Utah State Institute of Fine Arts, and the competitions and purchases continued, expanding the Alice Art Collection, as it was called in honor of its founder.

With the celebration of the country’s Bicentennial in 1976, federal arts funding became available that allowed the Utah State Institute of Fine Arts to grow into a multifaceted agency, the Utah Arts Council. Among the first discipline-based programs to develop was the Folk Arts Program, the third state-based folk arts program established in the country. A 1937 legislative mandate, State Senate Bill 52, “to take all necessary and useful means to stimulate a more abundant production of an indigenous [i.e., folk] art, literature and music in this state” provided the legal rationale. One of the first major projects undertaken by Hal Cannon, the first Folk Arts Coordinator, was an exhibit of historic and contemporary works of art exploring the use of the beehive symbol by both fine and folk artists. The Grand Beehive Exhibition provided an opportunity to add objects to the Alice Art Collection, and for the first time, art was purchased that reflected the aesthetics of community-based artists as well as of those with academic training. A new branch of the collection was established, the State Folk
Arts Collection, and among the first pieces of folk art accessioned were a saddle, a tied quilt, a Shoshone beaded buckskin bag, a Navajo sand painting, a Tongan tapa cloth, and a neon sign of a beehive.

Since that time, a few pieces of folk art have been purchased each year and the Folk Arts Collection has grown to about 300 pieces. Many of the folk art objects were acquired during the process of documenting the traditional arts and artists of specific cultural communities. As a result, multiple examples of Tongan quilts, baskets and needlework by Laotian refugees from Southeast Asia, Native American basketry and beadwork, and Navajo story baskets were purchased during community-based fieldwork. Many were curated into exhibits for display at the Chase Home Museum of Utah Folk Arts or for exhibits through the Arts Council's Traveling Exhibition Program. Many individual objects, not associated with a particular project or exhibit, were also added to the collection as artists from a variety of traditional communities were identified and their work documented. Additional art forms include whistling and woodcarving; handmade rugs; needlework; furniture; leather, rawhide, and hitched horsehair cowboy gear; metalwork and stonework; Asian paper arts; Hispanic sculptural traditions ranging from piñatas and retablos to Day of the Dead sculptures; and traditional pottery from Eastern Europe. Aside from the contemporary nature of the collection, it is unique in that all of the objects were purchased from living artists whose lives and work were documented by the Folk Arts Program staff through tape-recorded interviews and photography. About half of the collection is on display at the Chase Home Museum of Utah Folk Arts, 10% is on loan or traveling, and 40% is being conserved or is in storage.

State Folklife Archives

The first items accessioned into the Folk Arts Program archives were actually generated before the program became a reality. Prior to creation of the Folk Arts Coordinator position, Hal Cannon, working with fellow folklorist Thomas Carter, produced a two-album project called The New Beehive Songster. The first LP album was a reissue of field recordings from the archives at the University of Utah made mostly during the 1940s by Utah folklorist Lester Hubbard. The second album featured recordings made by Cannon and Carter from folk performers around the state, including some recordings of the same folk artists, or their descendants, featured on the first album. In July 1976, the month that Cannon began work with the Arts Council, he accompanied one of those artists, ballad singer Kenneth Ward Atwood, to the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife in Washington, D. C. A few photographs of Atwood in Washington, D.C. and Cannon’s and Carter’s field recordings for the New Beehive Songster, Volume II, were the first items in what would become an archive with thousands of recordings and photographs documenting Utah folk culture.

The Utah State Folklife Archives contained in 2004 more than 1,400 sound recordings and over 12,000 photographic images, with new materials constantly
being added. Included are documentary materials from one-time projects or events like the Grand Heritage Days Folklife Festival held in Moab in 1981, the 1995 survey of Hispanic culture and traditions called *Hecho en Utah (Made in Utah)*, and the *Social Dance in the Mormon West* project completed in 2000. The archive also contains documentation of ongoing projects like the Folk Arts Apprenticeship Project (a program providing grants for one-on-one teaching between master and apprentice artists from the same cultural community) and of “Living Traditions: A Celebration of Salt Lake’s Folk & Ethnic Arts” (an annual festival coproduced with the Salt Lake City Arts Council). There are also collections organized by genre documenting Utah folk art and traditions such as performance, craft, material culture, occupational folklore, and celebrations.

As technology changes, the number of informational formats grows. The audio archive contains everything from reel-to-reel recordings and LP records to cassettes, DAT (digital audio tape) recordings, and CDs, while the photo archive includes color slides, black-and-white negatives, prints, and CDs with digital photo images. Labeling, accessioning, and storing each item so that it is both physically safe and easy to retrieve has been a challenge. In the early 1990s, the Folk Arts staff undertook a major initiative to address these issues by organizing the collection into categories and establishing an archival database for retrieval. Ten years later, they began the process of converting the audio materials into digital format, creating CDs for easy access, storing the original recordings for safekeeping, and saving the recordings on computer hard drives, ready for the next technological breakthrough. Photographic materials are also being digitized as needed, working towards the goal of ultimately making all ethnographic materials accessible electronically.

In addition to the fieldwork-generated recordings and photographs, the Utah State Folklife Archives also contain a specialized library of approximately 1,000 books and 700 journals dealing with the folk arts, traditions, and cultures of Utah and the American West. Field notes, transcriptions of recordings, artist files, and topical files are constantly being generated, organized, and updated.

All materials—audio, photographic, and printed—are housed at the Chase Home Museum of Utah Folk Arts where they are used on a daily basis by the Folk Arts staff. They provide the information and resources needed to provide a cultural context for artists in performance and to produce booklets, recordings, lectures, and other educational resources. The archives are also an important resource for folklorists, historians, and others interested in researching Utah topics. Efforts at processing newly generated materials and making all archived materials easily accessible have continued as the archives have grown.

**Chase Home Museum of Utah Folk Arts**

In the mid-1980s, the Visual Arts Program of the Utah Arts Council became tenants of the Isaac Chase Home, a nineteenth-century farmhouse situated in the middle of Salt Lake City’s Liberty Park. The home, built in 1853 for miller
Isaac Chase and his family, had served over the years as a residence for park superintendents and caretakers and as a relic hall for a chapter of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers. With funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and labor provided by Salt Lake City, the then-empty building was renovated and turned into an art gallery, opening with a show featuring contemporary crafts and followed by a number of juried and invitational exhibits of Utah fine art. After mounting a folk arts exhibit during the 1985 season, the Folk Arts Program moved into the space in the fall of 1986 and the Chase Home Museum of Utah Folk Arts was established.

The Chase Home proved an ideal location for exhibiting traditional art. A domestic space with many windows, little wall space, and rooms sized for people, it has the proper configuration and scale for showing three-dimensional objects made for use in home and community settings. Using a vernacular central-hall floor plan, it was constructed of hand-made adobe bricks fashioned from local clay. Like the art displayed inside, the home was made from locally
available materials by artisans working with traditional skills in aesthetic parameters handed down through generations.

From 1987 through 1995, exhibits at the Chase Home focused on specific artistic traditions and cultural communities or on projects and programs administered by the Folk Arts staff. Topics included folk art made from recycled materials, folk art perpetuated within families, traditional Native American art made by resident tribal groups, Hispanic folk arts, Navajo basketry, and cowboy crafts, as well as art made by participants in folk arts apprenticeships and by recipients of Utah Governor’s Awards. In 1996, this series of topical exhibits culminated in an exhibit of folk art for Utah’s Centennial Celebration with selected art objects from earlier exhibits supplemented with folk art purchased from individuals representing groups not previously featured. The result was an exhibit that portrayed the breadth of Utah’s folk artistry in four galleries—Native American, rural lifestyle, occupational, and ethnic—the basic configuration that has been used to convey the variety of traditional art being produced by cultural communities around the state.

The Chase Home concert series, Mondays in the Park, was established in August 1987. These free evening concerts are devoted to performances by community-based artists and typically feature such performers as ethnic dance troupes, musical ensembles, family bands, and cowboy poets, all from communities within the state of Utah. Concerts are held in front of the Chase Home with the building’s copious porte-cochere providing cover for the stage while the audience is seated on the lawn. In 2001 the series doubled in size to eight Monday evening concerts during July and August. Each season an audience of over 3,000 is able to experience and learn about the traditions of their Utah neighbors through performances that involve over 200 paid folk and ethnic artists. The informal, accessible park setting attracts a loyal audience of families, seniors, and local community members who can spend a pleasant summer evening enjoying informative introductions and artistic performances that demonstrate the richness and diversity of Utah’s traditional arts.

In the year 2000, the Chase Home underwent a badly needed renovation funded by the Utah Arts Council via an appropriation from the Utah State Legislature and by the building’s owner, the Salt Lake City Corporation, with a contribution from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This $850,000 project included retrofitting for earthquakes; repair and stabilization of the adobe walls; a new roof; repair or replacement of all exterior wood; new heating and cooling systems, plumbing, and electrical work; new landscaping; and a refurbishing of the interior. In addition to renovating the building, this partnership resulted in the signing of a no-cost renewable lease, ensuring that the State Folk Arts Collection would have a home until at least 2020.

The Chase Home Museum of Utah Folk Arts is the only state museum of its kind in the country devoted entirely to the display of a state-owned collection of contemporary folk art curated and interpreted from a folkloric point of view. Because of its location in the middle of Utah’s largest urban park, its free exhibits
and concerts are available to many community members who are not necessarily museum- or concert-goers, yet who happen upon the Chase Home Museum and discover their own artistic traditions on display. In the nineteenth century, the Chase Home was considered an out-of-town attraction—a place where Mormon leader Brigham Young and his friends came to enjoy an organ recital during afternoon tea or to spend the evening dancing to fiddle music. Since 1987, more than 200,000 visitors have rediscovered this pioneer tradition as the Chase Home Museum has become “the place” where traditional art and artists from Utah’s ethnic, native, occupational, and rural communities share their crafts, music, and dance with their own communities, their Utah neighbors, and tourists from around the world.