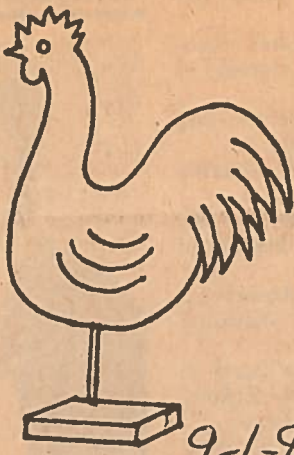


# Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin • County Historian



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## FOLK ARTS

What is folk art? Neil Big, a professional folklorist, who is currently working in Orleans County for the Orleans County Council on the Arts, has given these three definitions:

1. Arts of living and doing in everyday life.
2. Any artistic expression in small groups.
3. The conditions which express one's personal and community identity.

Perhaps we can safely assume that folk art is an attitude of artistic expression incorporated into daily and community life. Often folk artists feel they are the guardians of traditions which have been passed down from one generation to another. The folk artist respects his heritage but also innovates. He sees his role as a bridge between past tradition and novelty. Folk artists often have a repertoire of designs and techniques.

What then are specific folk arts? Surely they can be many different things. Here is a partial list of examples: quilting, woodcarving, story telling, weaving, painting, stone cutting, farm crafts, hunting lore, cooking, crocheting, needle work, rug hooking, etc.

Why is folk art important to Orleans County? Folk art is important because it often shows the hidden talents and hidden dimensions of peoples' lives. Often these people do not think of themselves as artists or of what they produce as something special. To make something important of this, to celebrate folk arts, is a way of honoring the extraordinary aspects of ordinary people who live among us. It's a way of realizing how rich our community life and culture actually is.

Presently, through the Orleans County Council on the Arts, a study is being made within the county on folk art traditions. Known as the Folk and Ethnic Arts Program, it is being conducted by Neil Big with funds made possible through the Folk Arts Division of New York State Council on the Arts. It is only a beginning effort which it is hoped will become more long term. It is hoped that this project will build community pride, identity, enthusiasm and a sense of tradition, along with helping people discover themselves and others.

Mr. Big is presently seeking to put together a list of local folk artists in Orleans County. The culmination of the present grant will be seen at the Old Timers Fair on Sunday, September 20 from 1 - 5 at the Cobblestone Museum Complex in Childs. Here there will be numerous local folk artists displaying and demonstrating their particular art form.

Local folk artists interested in the Old Timers Fair or the Folk and Ethnic Arts program are encouraged to contact Neil Big through the Orleans County Council on the Arts at 589-9013. He will be available for projects and meeting with people from various traditions and is looking for people who can participate. Mr. Big is also currently working on a similar project at Arts for Greater Rochester. He considers it a privilege to be working in Orleans and expects to give his best to the taxpayers.

New York State has been a leader in the advancement of folk art studies by legislating a million and a half dollars to folk arts while the Federal government currently allows only three million annually for the entire country for the study of folk arts.