

Editor's Statement – Folklorica 2011

The definition of what constitutes folklore is changing in North America, Europe, and the countries of the former Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. Americans include almost anything in the category of folklore. Scholars in the former Soviet Union have a much narrower definition of folklore, although their ideas of what constitutes appropriate subject matter for study are expanding as well. One of the missions of *Folklorica* has been to expose each side to the work of the other and to facilitate dialogue. This issue continues in that tradition.

Jan Pohunek's article on the Czech phenomenon called "tramping" is an example of an article from Eastern Europe which examines a subject area not typically included in the realm of folklore. Tramping is a combination of hiking and camping and, true to most definitions of folklore, it was an activity that arose "from the bottom up." This was not a government sponsored or promoted activity. Quite the contrary, it was a way to go outside official life and to engage in something that was more free and spontaneous. Pohunek's is essentially a historical piece that traces how tramping evolved.

The next two articles, Iryna Charniakevych's piece about weddings in Belarus and Svitlana Kukharenko's study of Ukrainian beliefs and custom associated with death and funerals, are more classic studies. Charniakevych looks at the geographic distribution of certain wedding practices and also provides detailed descriptions of what happens in Belarusian Palesse. Kukharenko gives descriptions of beliefs and practices associated with the normal course of life and those performed for people who die unexpectedly and before their time. These are deaths that are not anticipated and often seen as "bad" in some sense. Charniakevych and Kukharenko provide data that is virtually unavailable in English. It has always been this editor's policy to include articles that provide difficult-to-find information and these two items fall in that category.

The last two articles, Linda Ivanits's examination of attitudes toward folklore among Russian intellectuals and Svitlana Kry's study of the possible influence of folklore on literary works, are in the tradition of the examination of folklore in other intellectual spheres. Folklore, like all disciplines, does not exist in isolation. Folklore was seen as important to

nation building and folklore was often used as a source of literary material. Ivanits and Krys look at these aspects of our discipline. Interestingly, Krys argues that what may seem to be the influence of folklore on literature is actually the influence of one literary work upon another. More typical studies have tried to identify folklore elements in literary works. Krys takes a different perspective.

This issue of *Folklorica* also has its usual book reviews and a report about our sister journal, *Zhivaia Starina*. What is unusual about this issue is the set of lead-in essays and the two reports at the end. Since this is the last issue of *Folklorica* which I will edit, I felt that a set of historical pieces would be appropriate. With that in mind, I asked James Bailey and Faith Wigzell to write reminiscences about their work with the Slavic and East European Folklore Association in general and with the journal in particular. I selected Bailey because the Slavic and East European Folklore Association came into being on his initiative. Wigzell was the person who was the long-time editor prior to my service in that position. She is also the person who made the journal into what it is today. Many short-term editors, me included, preceded Wigzell, but it was she who raised the level of the journal up to international standards. She made it the fully peer-reviewed and highly respected publication that it is today. The introductory set of essays concludes with a piece by me. I look back on my work with the association and with *Folklorica*.

Following the articles and included in the “reports” section are two more unique pieces. One is an autoethnography by James Bailey. Bailey looks back on his many visits to Moscow. He was one of the first Americans to spend a long period of time in that city doing academic work and he went back on many occasions. In his report, Bailey describes those moments that were particularly startling and revealing. It was these special moments that helped him see the true nature of the USSR and they help us better understand the Soviet Union also. Since we are marking the twentieth anniversary of the end of the Soviet Union, Bailey’s piece is most appropriate as a reminder of what the Soviet Union was like and what it meant to be an American working on Soviet soil.

I have also indulged myself by including an account of my recent work in Ukrainian villages in the north-eastern corner of Kazakhstan. My motivation for doing so is to expand our definition of our organization,

what it does, and what it covers. As the definition of folklore changes, so too should the definition of the scope of this organization. Not long ago, folklorists working in Central Asia made an attempt to organize. My report about Kazakhstan is an effort to address these folklorists and to tell them that we have much in common. Rather than starting a separate organization, they would do well to join us. As we have learned from our colleagues in the Slavic and East European world, so we can learn from our colleagues working in Central Asia and they can learn from us. I recently attended the meeting of the Association for the Study of Nationalities held in Moscow. Russian colleagues showed keen awareness of the importance of the various indigenous peoples living within the Russian Federation and in contiguous nation states. I hope that my piece about Kazakhstan helps make folklorists aware of these people and of the importance of including Central Asia within our scope.

As always, I would like to conclude with my sincere thanks to all who have helped me put this issue together. Special thanks to Hanna Chuchvaha who has been my editorial assistant and kept better track of all of our submissions than I could possibly have done on my own. Thanks to our book review editor Jason Merrill. And thanks to our very capable copy editor, Katherine Bily. As for Peter Holloway, our steadfast master of the layout, no words could possibly convey the gratitude that I feel. He has been our technical person much, much longer than I have been editor. He was our webmaster prior to Jon Perkins. He has worked with the printer and mailed out issue after issue. He recruited members to the organization. Anything that needed doing, he did. Thank you, Peter.

And best wishes to our incoming editor, Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby. May your term as editor be as rewarding as mine.