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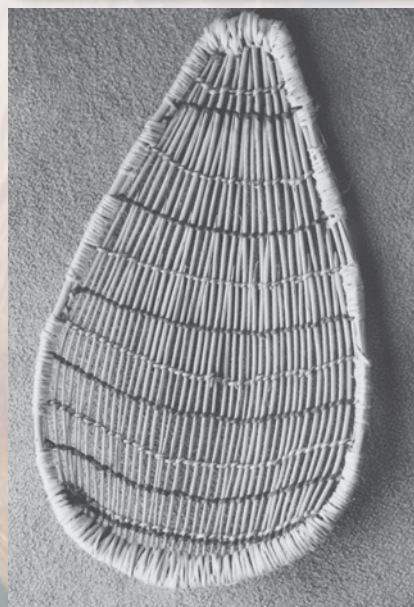
Nevada's Living Folk Arts



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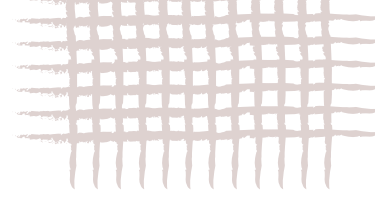
Nevada's Living Folk Arts

By Andrea Graham



THE NEVADA FOLK ARTS APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM 1988-1998

NEVADA ARTS COUNCIL



Dedicated to the Memory of

Steve Kane (apprentice Paiute-Shoshone singer)

Manuel "Popeye" McCloud (master Paiute singer)

Blanton Owen (founder of the Nevada Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program)

This catalog accompanies an exhibit of the same name at the Nevada State Museum,
on display from May 20, 1999–April 30, 2000.

COVER PHOTOS (*clockwise from upper right*): Angie McGarva and her daughter Canika; Abayomi Goodall and the Children of the Diaspora African Musical Ensemble; Diane Ohata-Sims; Jesse Windriver and Adam Fortunate Eagle; Larry and John Schutte (Fortunate Eagle photo by Blanton Owen, all others by Andrea Graham)

TITLE PAGE PHOTOS (*clockwise from upper right*):
Ukrainian Pysanky by Zoria Zetaruk; leather stamping by Spider Teller (background photo); willow winnowing tray by Virginia Sanchez; willow water jug by Emma Bobb (Teller photo by Blanton Owen; all others by Andrea Graham)

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Nevada Arts Council, a division of the Department of Cultural Affairs
716 North Carson Street, Suite A | Carson City, Nevada 89701
(775) 687-6680 | fax (775) 687-6688 | nac.nevadaculture.org



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

(top to bottom) Randy Stowell braiding a leather bosal, Agnes Foster cleaning willow for a basket, Eddie Brooks hand-stitching leather, Luba Eads "writing" with wax on Ukrainian Pysanky egg

Handed Down: Nevada's Living Folk Arts

Art is everywhere. It belongs to everyone who has something to say and expresses it creatively in words, music, or the movement of the body, on paper, in wood or leather or fabric, through celebrations and gatherings, and in such everyday activities as cooking, using proverbs, or singing a lullaby. The main difference between folk art and fine or popular art is that its sense of beauty and appropriateness are rooted in a community, and its techniques and functions have been passed down through face-to-face interaction over many generations.

Folk arts are part of a community's heritage. They have been shared within that group, whether it is ethnic, tribal, religious, familial, occupational, or regional, and they express important values, beliefs, and esthetics of that group. But folk arts forms aren't perpetuated automatically or unthinkingly, and it takes work, time and understanding to keep them alive and vital. That dedication comes from individuals who actively choose to learn, perfect, develop and pass on an art form as part of their culture.

The master artists and their apprentices in this catalog are just such people. The masters are among the very best at what they do, having dedicated their finest efforts and often years of time to learning and improving an art form that speaks for them and their community. They are not always very old—several here are in their thirties and forties, and in several cases the master was younger than the apprentice—because it is the quality of the time they put into their art as much as the quantity, and the understanding and dedication they bring to it, that makes them masters. Another characteristic they have in common is their willingness to share what they have learned with those who show a real interest in carrying on the tradition. The apprentices represent the future of those traditions. They have already taken the time to learn on their own because they realize their identity is tied to their heritage and they want to take an active part in perpetuating its art forms. They all talk about passing on what they learn—to their children, neighbors, and fellow workers—as a responsibility that comes with choosing to carry on a tradition. As their master taught them, so will they teach the next generation.

The tradition of teaching and learning through apprenticeship is a long one. Many trades were, and still are, passed through fairly formal apprenticeships, where the learner works for the master in return for being taught the skills of the trade or occupation. But in traditional cultures almost all learning takes place through direct interaction, observation and hands-on experience rather than through more organized schooling. Then, too, there are whole areas of human endeavor that have never been written down or codified, and whole encyclopedias of knowledge that are carried only in people's heads and hands.

Since 1988 the Nevada Arts Council has sponsored the Nevada Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program, funding 53 apprenticeships during the first ten years of the program with the help of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. Nevada's Folk Arts Apprenticeships, although a formal government-sponsored program, are designed to support teaching in the informal apprenticeship mode. They are set up so a master artist works with one or two apprentices, not a whole group or class, to provide the

in-depth sharing of his or her deep understanding and consummate skill in an art form. And they stress the passing on of traditions within the group that has created and maintained them.

The money in the program pays the master artist for his or her time spent teaching, and also helps with such expenses as purchasing tools or materials, covering travel costs to get materials or for the participants to get together, and even paying for babysitting to allow the artists uninterrupted time to work. The participants in an apprenticeship work at their own pace and on their own schedule, whatever works best for their situation and the art form being passed on. For example, Native American basketry traditions require that willows be gathered at certain times of the year, in late fall and early spring when the branches have no leaves. Many craft traditions, such as rawhide braiding, are carried out mainly in the winter months, when outdoor work is not so demanding. And often the telling of certain stories or singing of particular songs is restricted to specific times of year, or associated with rituals and ceremonies.

Many of the art forms that have been supported through apprenticeships—dances, songs, crafts, foods, stories—are in danger of being lost when the few people who know them pass on. Their knowledge is carried only in their heads and hearts and hands, it has never been written down or video-taped. Younger people are not learning like they used to, they can't spend time with their elders when they are pulled away by the demands and complications of modern life. But traditional arts have survived this long because they have a purpose, because they express who we are and where we come from, and they help us face the future with a sense of stability and connection.

The Nevada Arts Council's Folk Arts Apprenticeships can't save endangered traditions—only the people who know and care about them can. All we provide is encouragement and perhaps some incentive in the form of modest financial support. As we can see in the people who have participated in the program over its first ten years, there is a tremendous range of traditional culture in Nevada, and many dedicated artists and students willing to give of themselves to keep it alive. Some of these traditions have been in Nevada for hundreds or thousands of years (Paiute songs or buckaroo saddle making, for instance) and some are as new here as the state's newest immigrants (Thai dancing and Polish paper cuts), but if it is being done in Nevada today, we consider it a Nevada art. From the most domestic—making biscuits from acorns the Washoe way and weaving willow baskets to carry babies—to the most theatrical—swirling Mexican dances and pounding African drum rhythms—they all deserve our attention and our applause. We are humbled by these individuals' artistry and their dedication to the cultures, and honored to have helped, in a small way, to keep those arts alive. Their loss would impoverish us all; their continuity keeps us healthy.

Andrea Graham

FOLK ARTS PROGRAM COORDINATOR
NEVADA ARTS COUNCIL

Square Dance Calling:

Phil Aranguena and Tom Moody

Phil Aranguena was born in Elko in 1925. He began square dance calling on his own shortly after his caller friend Gene Ludlow left the area, but soon started taking classes with such well-known callers as Cal Golden. Phil and his wife Betty have been members of Elko's Sagebrush Spinners since the club's beginning in 1977.

"I didn't have a burning desire to be a caller. I just enjoy dancing and I enjoy the fun and friendship in square dancing. And I just wanted to keep it going here. Really, what happened, my sister-in-law, as a present to me, gave me some dancing classes. It was ballroom dancing, but then (the teacher) also taught us square dancing. And that's what got me into dancing. The wife and I met at square dancing, actually. I was in a square dance class and my regular partner couldn't make it one square dance and the instructor asked Betty if she would be my partner. That's how we got acquainted. The very first night there while we were dancing, the one thing we both remember, she said to me, 'Phil, don't get grabby.' So that's how we got started.

Tom Moody, 47, was born in Thatcher, Arizona. He was an air traffic controller in the Air Force and continues to work for the Federal Aviation Administration. It was while he was based in Fairbanks that he began his love affair with western style, club square dancing. Tom also met his wife Babs at a square dance.

"The first time I square danced was at church dances at Thatcher. And the first time I ever square danced like they do nowadays was in New Mexico when I was in high school. The first time I became aware that square dancing was for older folks was when I was in the Air Force. But I actually learned to square dance in Fairbanks, Alaska. In Alaska they have several square dance clubs and all the callers belong to an association. I even went to the caller's association in Fairbanks and asked them if I could learn. And they just didn't seem interested in teaching me. And then last summer when I mentioned it to Phil, he seemed like he was so anxious to teach somebody. And so Phil and I have really—we just got into it really hard and fast."

Tom Moody takes his turn at the mike.



Phil Aranguena calls a square dance figure at the regular Saturday night get-together of the Sagebrush Spinners in Elko.

Shoshone Cradleboards:

Agnes Foster and Harriet Allen

Agnes Foster was born in 1913 in Cloverdale Canyon, about thirty miles east of Ione, Nevada. She continues her Shoshone family's tradition of making and using twined willow baskets. She now lives at Stillwater, near Fallon.

"My mother did quite a bit of willow work. She did real nice baskets, you know, the round baskets. And then I used to help her; that's how I learned how. And she used to show me how to split the willows and how to scrape them, and all that. You want willows that come right straight up from the ground. You get the reddish-brown ones. Those that are dying aren't any good; they're gray. It's hard. Like I told the girls last year, even if your work doesn't look very good, don't give up. Because the next time it'll be a little better."

Harriet Allen was born in 1949 near Schurz, Nevada, and works as the education coordinator on the Shoshone-Paiute Reservation at Stillwater, where she has spent most of her life.

"My grandmother used to make cradleboards, and we'd watch her. But I never tried to learn; it looked hard. I've always wanted to learn, though, I always have. And then there were some other people who wanted to learn also, so I said 'why not'? And I knew Agnes worked with willows, so I asked her and she said yes. And she was willing to work with us. Patient? Oh, she's the most patient woman I've event met!"

Harriet Allen working with willows for a cradleboard.



Agnes Foster begins to split a willow shoot into thirds; the resulting "thread" will be used for weaving baskets together.

Rawhide Braiding:

Randy Stowell and George Nix

Randy Stowell was born in 1949 and raised on the family's ranch in Rowland, northern Elko County, Nevada. He grew up in the buckaroo tradition of cowboying and remains active in the cattle business in Elko and White Pine counties. Randy has earned a reputation as one of the country's best braiders of beautiful and functional rawhide horse gear.

"My father gave me the desire to rawhide; when he was young he braided quite a bit. Built ropes and reins and hackamores and stuff. There's two parts to rawhiding. The one part is learning how to braid; tying the buttons. And the other part is learning how to work your rawhide, having it in the right condition. That's real important in making smooth work, having your rawhide in the right condition. You can't just pick a piece of rawhide up and braid it. You have to wet it, dampen it, and then let it mellow and get in the right texture. If it's too wet then when you braid it and it dries, it leaves gaps in the rawhide. And if it's too dry and you try to braid it, then it doesn't braid tight."

George Nix was raised in Oakley, Idaho and earned a degree in range management from the University of Idaho. He worked ten years for the United States Forest Service in Austin, Nevada, and currently does reclamation work for an open pit gold mine in Elko County.

"As far as braiding's concerned, I've been interested in it for a long time. I used to...when I was in high school we used to ride for a lot of area ranchers working cows for them. And we had our own horses and needed gear, and we didn't have any money to buy gear, so we'd braid our own out of usually parachute cord or leather. I never had worked with rawhide and that was primarily the reason I wanted to take this up."

*Randy Stowell
scrapes the hair off
a cow hide while
George Nix looks on.*



*George Nix asks
Randy Stowell a
question about
rawhide braiding.*



Paiute Language and Stories:

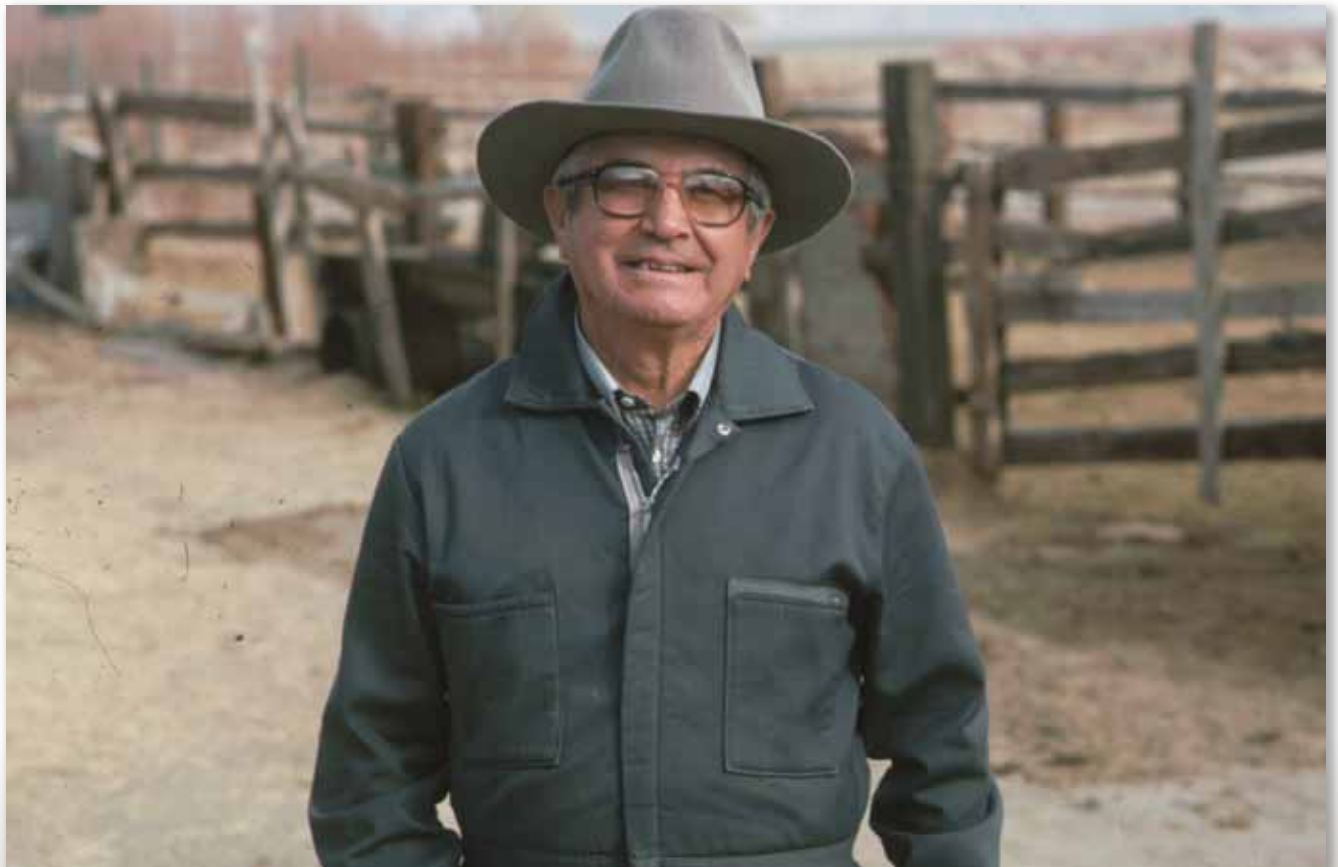
Thomas Williams and Joni Johnson

Thomas Williams, born in 1917, was raised in Stillwater and has lived in Schurz since the 1930s. He worked as a buckaroo on many of central Nevada's "mountain ranches" in the 30s, was awarded three purple hearts and the bronze star during World War II, and bought his place in Schurz after the war.

"Just the old people, you know. They mostly use it. And a lot of them, they don't want to talk it, some of them. And in them earlier days, they don't want the Indians to talk it when they went to school. At Stewart [Indian School] they didn't want them to talk Paiute among themselves. Kind of punish them for it. They were army teachers they told me, what they were. And they were pretty mean to the kids. The older guys told me about it back then. Kind of rough, they said, them days."

Joni Johnson was born in Schurz, Nevada on the Walker River Paiute Reservation in 1964. She graduated from the College of Idaho and currently works in California. Joni has a long interest in learning her family's particular dialect and has studied with her grandfather Thomas Williams and other family members and friends.

"I want to learn the language of my grandfather so it doesn't become extinct. There's more people interested in it now, so I don't think it will die out. My grandfather is a good teacher because Paiute was his first language and he still...I think he's still young enough to teach it; to understand what I'm asking. Ultimately I want to learn so I can teach someone else. And also, right now, to be able to talk with the old people before they die. They speak it better than English."



Thomas Williams takes a break from morning chores at his ranch in Schurz.

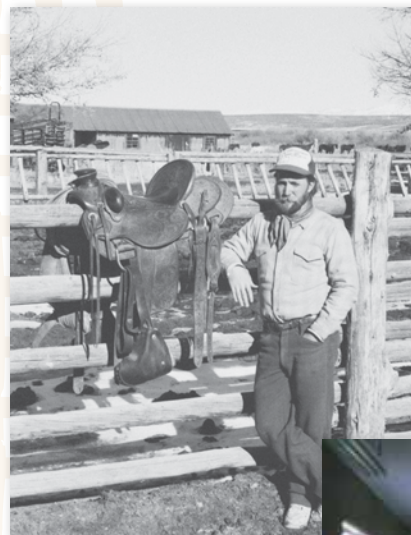
Saddlemaking:

Eddie Brooks and Alan McDonald

Saddle maker Eddie Brooks is a transplanted Texan whose roots have grown deep into the buckaroo country around Elko. He started working with leather as a boy growing up around Ft. Worth, making belts, wallets and other small items, and eventually apprenticed in the saddle making trade that supports him today. He was running a Texas saddle shop in 1964 when Paul Bear from Capriola's in Elko hired him away. He worked in Nevada for two years, then returned to Texas for another nine years, but came back to Elko for good in 1975.

"I never could get this country out of my system, I loved it up here," he says. He was struck by the differences in the way cattle were worked, too, and consequently the different saddle styles in each region of the country. He says the move to Nevada "was really good for me, made a lot better saddle maker out of me...When I come up here, well, they really, they sit in them all day long. Back then, this country, there wasn't a fence in the country hardly, you could ride plumb to Idaho and never hit a fence from Elko. They've fenced it up a lot now, and that's just twenty something years ago. So they went everywhere horseback, you know, and there wasn't a stock trailer in the country in them days. They had a few bob-tail trucks and if they had to go 100 miles they'd haul their horses, but if they had to go 30 miles they rode. So they really demanded a good saddle...It really helped me. I wouldn't take nothing for it, cause it made such a difference." Eddie ran the shop at Capriola's until 1982, and then started his own custom saddle business.

Eddie's apprentice Alan McDonald was raised in a ranching family in southern Idaho. His father was also a saddle maker, and Alan inherited his tools and his love for cowboying. "I figured, well, cowboying is basically my main interest in life, it still is pretty much, so I just loaded up my saddle...well, I didn't have a saddle, I needed a saddle. So I decided, well, I'll build me one. So I did, I kind of got one put together, come to Nevada, and started cowboying on it, been riding it for about five years. It was pretty crude, but I got my riggings in straight and it fit a horse pretty good, but it didn't always fit me too good so I was always taking it apart and cutting on it somewhere and putting it back together...I've always held the interest, wanted to learn.



Alan McDonald uses the saddle he made while working as a buckaroo on the IL Ranch in northern Elko County.



Eddie Brooks and Alan McDonald in Eddie's Spring Creek saddle shop.

"I'd go into saddle shops and try to watch guys work. A lot of guys will quit working when you go in, you know, so you just kind of got to walk around and try to pick things up, but I'd never had any formal instruction until last winter."

Fortunately for Alan, Eddie was willing to let him watch and learn, and Alan built a complete saddle during his apprenticeship. He still works as a buckaroo—"For me, the more hours you spend in a saddle, that's experience towards building them," he says—and would like to keep riding as long as he can, but he will also be developing his saddle making and silver working skills, too, as a lifelong trade. Eddie and Alan agree that the most important part of saddle making is to fit the horse, and then to fit the rider. But as Alan says, "Then, you know, in the end you want a product that looks balanced, that the lines are together on it. That's where the pride in your craftsmanship comes in."

Paiute-Shoshone Songs:

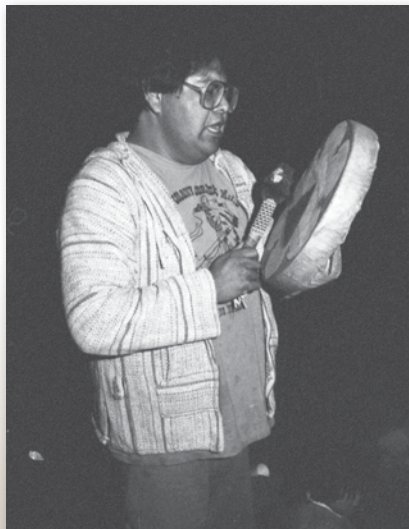
Art Cavanaugh and Steve Kane

With the decline of Native American languages, the growing influence of pan-Indian pow-wow drumming and dancing, and the pressures of modern American life, traditional Shoshone and Paiute singing is becoming an endangered art. The old songs were sung in groups to accompany round dances, although in recent years small hand drums were added to provide volume since fewer singers knew the songs.

Art Cavanaugh of Winnemucca is one of perhaps half a dozen traditional round dance singers in Nevada, and with his powerful voice and extensive repertoire certainly one of the best. His father was a singer, and traditional music and stories were an important form of entertainment when Art was growing up. He says, "So I listened, I put it in my head, I guess, and it stayed there. That's where I learned, all these things from stories, how to conduct yourself, your life, all these are told through stories, through the coyote stories that tell you not to do this, not to do that. That's how you grow up, knowing the difference between right and wrong is what they teach you. You have the ability to determine your own life, which way you want to go—go bad or be good."

When Steve Kane of Reno heard that Art would be in the area for awhile, he jumped at the chance to spend time with him learning songs and techniques. Steve's mother's family was from Pyramid Lake and as a child he listened to an uncle who was a well-known hand-drum singer. "He had the kind of voice that would put goose bumps on your back," he says. Steve put his Indian heritage aside for awhile while he was in college, but he has now returned to it and renewed his interest in the culture and particularly the songs.

Steve Kane



Many of the songs are about nature—streams, forests, birds, stars—although more modern ones have also been written on such subjects as the American flag, and Art and his wife Barbara are translating some hymns into Paiute and Shoshone. Traditional dances start late in the evening, and often go until sunrise without the same song being repeated. Steve describes such a dance: "That's really a unique experience, it's like being high on something, you know, when you sing all night. The way Art sings his songs, the way they used to do it a long time ago, is they'd dance all night in a circle. It's a fast type of step too, you can imagine doing it all night, it's like you get into a trance. You reach a point where you get so tired, you know, you think that you can't go on, but your adrenaline's going, you just kind of keep pushing on, and you can go on all night."

It is sometimes a hard balancing act for Native American people to maintain their traditional beliefs and values while still be a part of contemporary life, and the efforts of people like Art and Steve are crucial in that task. "Indian people are tough," Steve says. "I think the thing that's kept us different is the songs, the culture, the language...if we ever lose that, we're just like anybody else, we've lost our uniqueness."



Art Cavanaugh

Horsehair Hitching:

Doug Krause and Toni Schutte

Horsehair hitching is an intricate, beautiful and time-consuming cowboy craft that was almost lost but is making a comeback. In the early part of the century a great deal of hitched gear was produced by prisoners, who had plenty of time to make headstalls, reins, belts and the like from strands of horsehair hitched one stitch at a time, but because it was associated with prisons few other people wanted to be known as hitchers and the art was rare. Doug Krause of Cheyenne, Wyoming, is one of the new breed of young craftspeople who have relearned the art and taken it to new heights. Doug was raised in Colorado and spent some time rodeoing, then got training as a saddle maker. Along the way he got interested in braiding bull ropes for rodeo cowboys, and from there took up rawhide braiding. When he saw old hitched horsehair pieces in museums, he was immediately fascinated, but because he didn't know anyone doing hitching, he had to teach himself the techniques by taking apart old work.

Doug is constantly looking for new designs and ideas, as well as improving his technical skill, but it is the trip as much as the destination that fascinates him. "Hopefully I'll get better, that's always a goal," he says. "But one of the things I get asked a lot is, 'Well, how long does it take you to get good?' I don't know what good is because it's not...the process isn't the ending point, it's the journey that's the important thing. I mean, as long as you're getting better then the art form is a journey. It's not, 'I want to get this good' and then when you get there, well then, what do you do? You enjoy the journey, you don't enjoy just the end result."



*Doug Krause and
Toni Schutte on
Toni's front porch.*



Toni Schutte watches as Doug Krause shows her some of the finer points of hitching.

Toni Schutte, who lives in Tuscarora, got interested in hitching about five years ago when she wanted something to do with the leftover tail hair that came from the sacks of mane hair her husband Larry used to make ropes. She practiced with yarn, learned a little from a book, and got enough help from another hitcher in Elko to get started making key chains and buttons for braided reins. She saw Doug's work at the Cowboy Poetry Gathering and cornered him for advice that turned out to be so helpful they set up an apprenticeship. Toni really appreciated Doug's willingness to share his knowledge, and is actively using what she learned to create her own new designs.

Hitching is done with bundles of from six to ten tail hairs twisted together. The strand is hitched around a core string that is wound around a dowel, so the finished product is in the shape of a tube after it is slipped off the dowel. The basic design element is a diamond, and everything else is a variation of that. Doug likes to dye his horsehair in bright colors, although much of the older work is done in natural shades of black, brown, gray and white.

"I think there's different levels of the hitching ability," Doug says, "but kind of the way I look at it is anybody that's taken the time to hitch, it doesn't matter how crude it is, you know, that's kind of exceptional, just...there's not many hitchers around, so any work is sure better than nothing. That's pretty commendable, I think."

Saddlemaking:

Spider Teller and Ira Walker

Northern Nevada has a large contingent of Indian buckaroos, and at least one Indian saddle maker. Spider Teller has a saddle shop in Owyhee, on the Duck Valley Shoshone-Paiute Reservation, and crafts custom gear for working cowboys in the area. Now in his mid-40's, Spider was raised in Owyhee and has worked on ranches around Tonopah and in Idaho. He studied saddle making in 1971 and has been at it ever since. Spider is fascinated by concepts of design in stamping leather for saddles, and draws all his designs freehand on the damp leather. "You know just about where everything's going to go, you already got it in your mind, you know, where your flowers are going to go, how your stems are going to go," he says. He begins by drawing in the main elements—the large flowers and stems—with a swivel knife, then filling in with buds, scrolls and leaves and adding details with other stamping tools. Spider is critical of saddle designs that "just go out to nowhere" and works hard to tie all elements of his designs together.

Ira Walker was raised in Owyhee and has been "hanging around" Spider's shop since it opened, picking up quite a bit of leatherworking skill. He has made one saddle, and says a lot of his knowledge is coming back as he works closely with Spider. He was raised in the ranching life, and currently makes his living as a roper on the rodeo circuit. Spider says Ira is "pretty much along" in saddle making, and after helping him with one saddle will make one on his own. Naturally, Spider spent a lot of time teaching him to use a swivel knife and perfecting his stamping and designing. According to Spider, "Like on your stamping tools, lot of guys think it's easy. You've got to hold it tight in your hand, otherwise it'll get to jumping on you. If you don't hit it hard, you're not going to get a dark...you're not going to get that color to it." He dampens

the leather and wraps it in plastic for a few days to get it really wet for the initial designing, but then lets it get almost dry before stamping the details in order to get a good dark color.

There are a lot of details to look for in a saddle—quality of the leather, construction details, fit and comfort—but Spider admits that he is always trying to improve his work. "There's always a mistake on a saddle, always, you always make a mistake on a saddle, it just can't be perfect," he says. But as long as there are cowboys, saddle makers will keep trying to get it right.



*Spider Teller
with one of his
saddles.*



*Spider Teller and Ira Walker
working in Spider's shop
in Owyhee.*

Washoe Round Baskets:

Florine Conway and Tamara Crawford

The Washoe Tribe is known for its intricately designed and exquisitely made round willow baskets, but the art is rare today and only a few skilled basket makers remain. One of them is Florine Conway, who was born in Dresslerville and raised in a basket making family. However, she didn't make baskets herself until a few years ago, when she realized the art was all but gone, and she had to do most of the learning on her own, studying old baskets and recalling what she could



Florine Conway splits a willow into three parts for use as threads to sew a basket.

Tammy Crawford was born in Dresslerville also, but was raised in the Bay Area and was unaware of much of her Washoe heritage until she moved back to Nevada. Having children of her own, experiencing the rituals of birth, and using cradleboards made by her aunts prompted her to find out more about her culture. She began learning to make willow cradleboards, and seeing Florine's work sparked her interest in round baskets as well. "I'm sorry it's taken me this long, this late in my life to realize, and I'm certainly glad there's somebody around to still teach me, and to take a chance that I will learn from her," Tammy says. "I'm prepared to do

it, because I just feel that it's a part of me that I need to know. And because I feel I can do something, even learn and then maybe teach it to somebody later, it really hasn't died, although my work may not be as good, I will still have the knowledge to carry it on."

The first step in making a basket is to find good willows, something that is getting harder and harder to do because of restricted private land and the use of agricultural chemicals that weaken



Tammy Crawford working on her first round basket.

and poison the plants. Willows used for the foundation of a cradleboard just have the bark scraped off, but willows to be split for the 'threads' used to sew baskets together go through a series of preparatory steps. They must be split into three pieces lengthways while still green and the inner core removed. The threads are then coiled to dry, and when ready to use the bark is peeled off. Threads are run through a series of successively smaller holes punched in a jar lid or old pocket watch cover, to make them fine and uniform.

Large willows, also split in three parts and scraped to an even diameter, are coiled for a foundation and sewed together a row at a time with the threads. The basket is shaped as it goes, and designs can be added in black bracken fern root or the red bark of the redbud tree. Despite the time, effort and patience involved, a handful of Washoe women are maintaining and relearning the art of willow basketry and actively promoting their cultural heritage. Tammy is one of the youngest, but hopefully not the last.

Horsehair Mecartys:

Larry Schutte and John Schutte

Families are central to the perpetuation of traditional skills, and many an art form has been passed from parent or grandparent to child for generations. With the rapid change and unprecedented mobility of modern life, however, such continuity is increasingly rare, so it is always encouraging to see a family that is sharing a heritage in concrete ways.

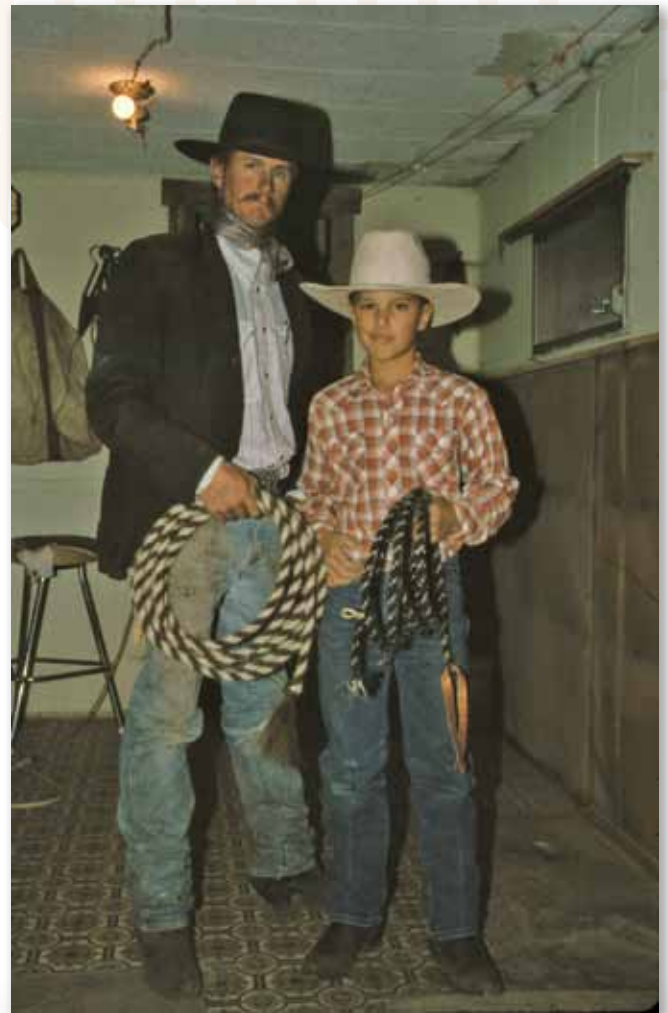
Larry Schutte is a buckaroo now working near Tuscarora, although he has worked all over northern Nevada and in Idaho. About a dozen years ago he got interested in twisted horsehair ropes called mecartys, from the Spanish *mecate*, and got Bill Kane, another cowboy on the Spanish Ranch, to show him how they were made. Larry says Bill “showed me his knowledge but made me search and dig and exasperate myself for eleven years, trying to be absolute in the craft. But it’s like the violin, it takes all the time you give it and needs more. Sometimes I’m outwitted, but making ropes of horsehair is my therapy.” Today Larry’s ropes are acknowledged as some of the finest in the West, the most ‘alive,’ and he is constantly experimenting with new color combinations and gradations.

Larry’s twelve-year-old son John has grown up in the ranching life and rides and ropes alongside his father. He has also taken an interest in making mecartys and had already assisted with hundreds of ropes before becoming involved in a formal apprenticeship. As Larry says, “He has excellent capabilities in all things, and shows a weakness for using good-feeling hair ropes.”

As with so many traditional arts that make use of available natural materials, mecarty making involves a long process of acquiring and preparing the basic fiber. Larry gets sacks of horse mane hair (which is softer and easier on the hands than tail hair) anywhere he can, often trading a finished rope for it. After the hair is washed it must be ‘picked,’ or pulled apart into separate fibers that lie in all directions. Usually this is a time-consuming hand process, but Larry has devised a machine with a rotating drum and teeth that pick and separate the hairs. A newspaper-sized sheet of picked hair is then rolled into a bun, from which the hair is fed to make the strands. A small electric motor turns a hook that twists the hair, and the rope maker feeds hair from the bun, backing up as the strand lengthens. Four separate strings are twisted, each more than double the length of the finished rope, and then they are twisted

together in the opposite direction in pairs. The resulting two long strands are doubled to make four, which are twisted again to make the finished rope. By using different colored hair in one or more strands, or parts of different strands, an amazing variety of stripes and gradations can be achieved.

John has already had one of his ropes exhibited at the Cowboy Poetry Gathering, and shows every sign of continuing to carry on the family tradition, both as a mecarty maker and as a buckaroo.



Larry and John Schutte with their mecartys.

Rawhide Braiding:

Randy Stowell and Jean Pierre Pedrini

Randy Stowell was raised on a ranch in Rowland, in far northern Elko County, and has been a buckaroo all his life. His appreciation for rawhide braiding came from his father, but most of what he knows he taught himself through trial and error, taking apart old gear, looking at books, and talking with other braiders. Randy is one of the best rawhide braiders in the country, and his bosals, reins, headstalls and riatas are highly sought after, although he has to squeeze time to work on his craft into a busy life running a ranch.

Jean Pierre “Pedro” Pedrini seems at first to be an unlikely candidate to be a maker of Western saddles, but his work is firmly in the buckaroo tradition and he was thrilled to be able to work with Randy to improve his skill in rawhide braiding. Pedro is French, but since he was a kid he has been fascinated with American cowboys and at the first opportunity he came to this country to learn about cowboys and saddle making. One of his stops on that first trip was Capriola’s in Elko, where he worked under Eddie Brooks for a few months before returning to France. Of Eddie and the other saddle makers at Capriola’s he says, “I owe those guys the trade, you know. Because they did this without realizing they were doing it, they just took me as a guy, just as a friend, and they helped me.” He came back to stay in 1978, and has developed into a good custom saddle maker; today he has his own shop in Gridley, California, but he would like to come back to the high desert country soon.

Pedro already knew a little bit about braiding, but wanted to learn more, both to maintain the tradition and to help in his job, where he gets numerous requests to repair old braid work. He learned to make bits for the same reason—to round out his knowledge of horse gear, although he still considers himself primarily a sad-



Randy Stowell (right) teaching Pedro Pedrini how to braid a noseband for a bosal.



Pedro Pedrini practices braiding.

dle maker. Pedro learned quickly working with Randy, delighted to learn the little tricks that come with experience and to figure out techniques and knots that had puzzled him. Like Randy, Pedro doesn’t believe in keeping his knowledge to himself; he wants to put something back into the art and share it widely. He says, “When you do a good thing, it will last, it’s there. Lots of people will see it, and it will keep on going...If you want to be good, that’s up to you.”

Paiute Buckskin Smoking:

Norma Williams and Stacy Gibbs

Norma Williams grew up with willow cradleboards and baskets, buckskin moccasins and dresses, and decorative beadwork. A Paiute Indian, she was born at Stillwater, attended the Stewart Indian School, and moved to Schurz when she married. Of the traditional crafts of her people she says, "It was part of our everyday life, you did it because you needed it. I just kept it up all this time."

Norma is the only person in Schurz she knows of who still tans and smokes deer hides the traditional way, and her granddaughter Stacy Gibbs recalls helping stretch hides as a child. Stacy learned the skills of scraping and tanning buckskin, but before the apprenticeship had never smoked them to give them the traditional golden color Paiute hides are known for.

The long process of preparing hides starts when a Paiute hunter skins the animal by pulling the hide off rather than cutting it. Cutting can make holes or leave chunks of meat on the hide; "That'll ruin your hide right there, if they don't know how to skin them good," Stacy explains. The hide is then soaked in water for up to a week to loosen the hair, and the hair and thin layer of skin are scraped off with a drawknife, again taking great care not to cut holes. The traditional tanning process involves rubbing the hide with cooked brains to soften it; after that the hide is stretched constantly until it is dry, a tiring and time-consuming process that leaves it soft and white. "If you get it done and you see yellow streaks or it's real hard in certain spots, that's when she [Norma] gets it and dunks it back in the water, and that's when you cry," Stacy laughs. "But you have to do it over," Norma reminds her.

Other tribes use unsmoked white hides, but the Paiutes are known for their golden smoked buckskin. Two hides are sewn together along their edges with the scraped surface inside, and the bottom left open. A strip of canvas is sewn around the bottom and the hides are hung up over a can of smoking cedar chips. Any holes where smoke leaks out are patched or covered with tape and the canvas is tied tightly around the can to keep the smoke in. After 20 or 30 minutes the hides are checked and if the color is right they are pulled apart and aired out.

Buckskin is used to make moccasins, gloves, vests, cradleboard covers and other small items, but Stacy used the hides she smoked to make a dance dress for her four-year-old daughter Alyssa. Two hides were

Norma Williams shows some buckskin gloves and clothing she's made.



Norma Williams watches as Stacy Gibbs checks a freshly smoked hide for color.

enough for the small dress, but an adult dress can take up to seven hides. Alyssa dances with the Screaming Eagle Dancers of Schurz, directed by Stacy's mother, so the dress will get plenty of use. When she outgrows it her little sister will get it, and Alyssa will get the larger dress her mother used when she was a girl. Not only will the dresses themselves be passed on, but so too will the knowledge of how to make them and the meaning surrounding them.

Shoshone Baskets:

Emma Bobb, Jeanette Losh and Brenda Hooper

The Yomba Shoshone Reservation is a tiny settlement of about 100 people in the isolated Reese River Valley of central Nevada, 50 miles (10 paved, 40 dirt) south of Austin. Emma Bobb, at 82, is one of only three remaining basket makers in a community where basketry was a basic survival skill for centuries. Emma started learning the art of willow basketry from her mother and grandmother when she was about 8 years old, and makes the full range of traditional basket types, from cradleboards and pine nut winnowing trays to coiled round baskets and pitch-coated water jugs. She also tans buckskin, does beadwork, and makes rugs and quilts. And as a fluent speaker of the Western Shoshone language, she is an important link in the continuation of her culture.

Sisters Jeanette Losh and Brenda Hooper, both in their 30s and raising their own children, know how fragile their native traditions are, and are determined to learn as much as they can from the tribal elders. “We just took it for granted because she [their great-grandmother] was always doing it,” Jeanette explains, but now elements of the culture like basket making are in danger of being lost if individuals don’t take the time to learn them. They worked with Emma to learn all they could about basketry, starting with gathering the willows and preparing them for use; the Reese River Valley

is blessed with plenty of water and very little settlement, so willows are still plentiful and healthy. Brenda had learned the basics in a school class as a youngster, but Jeanette had never made a basket, so they started from scratch, and both women made small doll-size cradleboards during their apprenticeship. Jeanette especially was glad of the chance for hands-on experience in an art form she grew up with but never had a chance to try. And both said the opportunity to spend time with Emma had enriched them in other aspects of Shoshone culture as well.

In talking about her community’s traditions, Brenda says, “It’s like we came to a cliff and dropped everything off, it’s all gone.” Not quite all gone, with people like Emma still able and willing to teach what they know, and Jeanette and Brenda eager to learn.



Brenda Hooper, Emma Bobb and Jeanette Losh.



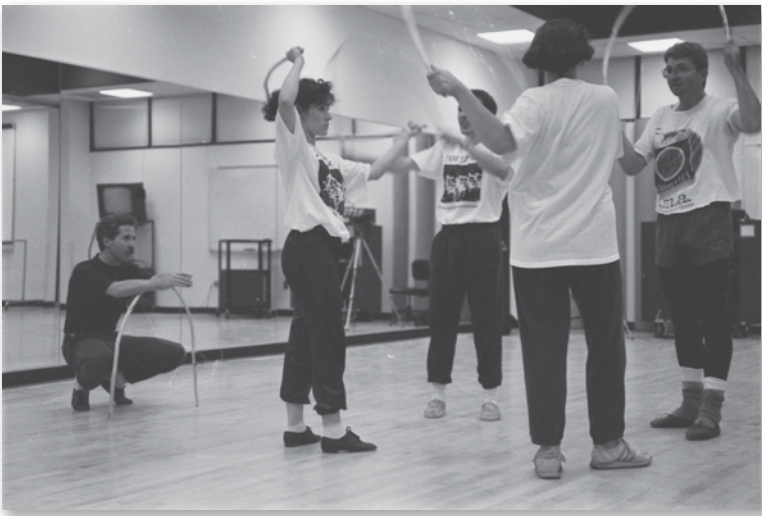
Emma Bobb gathering willows.

Basque Dance:

Jesus Larrea and Lisa Corcostegui

Basque culture is imbedded deep in the history of the American West, and maintains strong living connections to its European homeland that have kept it alive and vital here. A very personal connection was made when the apprenticeship program allowed Basque dance master Jesus Larrea to spend a month in Reno with Lisa Corcostegui, director of the University of Nevada's Zenbat Gara Basque Dancers.

Jesus started dancing as a teenager with a group from his school in San Sebastian, and by age 18 he was good enough to join one of the area's semi-professional dance troupes, Argia. Argia's director has done extensive field research on traditional village dances and celebrations, and has even helped revive dances that were almost lost after the Spanish Civil War. Jesus is now an instructor with Argia, and has performed with the group all over the Basque Country, as well as in Italy, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, France, Cuba and the United States. He and Lisa first met when they were both performing at an international Basque festival in the summer of 1990.



Lisa was raised in Ontario, Oregon, near the Idaho border and her parents' home town of Nampa. Her Basque mother and grandmother instilled an early love of Basque culture, and Lisa started dancing when she was just four or five years old. "I always wanted to go to the Basque country, and I always wanted to do anything Basque," she says. "Every time I had to do a report, you know, and you could write on whatever you wanted, always Basque this, Basque that, Basque whatever. I was just in love with the culture, I always was, ever since I

was little. My grandma used to tell us stories, too, about where she lived when she was young and the things she used to do over there, and it just seemed, you know, magical almost." Lisa's dream came true when she was able to visit the country for a summer, and then return for 2 ½ years as part of UNR's Basque Studies Program.

Lisa, her Basque husband Enrique, and a few friends put together a dance for a University ethnic celebration in 1989, and from that was born the Zenbat Gara Dancers. The company now numbers 20, and has performed all over the West. Working intensively with Jesus allowed Lisa to learn many more dances, both solo and group, from every region of the Basque country. The benefits of personal instruction were invaluable; she says, "Some things you can learn off a video, more or less, and other things, just forget it. And this is one of those things you have to have somebody who knows what they're doing to teach you how to do it." Jesus also worked with Zenbat Gara while he was in Reno, as well as with the children's dance group of the Reno Basque Club; his wife even came with him and helped the group make some authentic new costumes to go with the new dances. It is exchanges like these that keep Nevada's Basque community very much alive and connected to its roots.

Jesus teaching Lisa and other members of the Zenbat Gara Dancers.



Lisa Corcostegui and Jesus Larrea.

Washoe Baskets:

JoAnn Martinez and Cynthia Foster

The tradition of Washoe willow basketry has seen a marked resurgence in recent years, thanks in large part to the efforts of JoAnn Smokey Martinez and her sister Theresa Smokey Jackson. The two women are tireless practitioners of and advocates for the Washoe way of life, and have been extremely generous in sharing their knowledge of the language, stories, beliefs, plants, foods and crafts they grew up with.

In this apprenticeship, JoAnn Martinez worked with her niece Cynthia Foster to teach the art of willow basketry. Both live in Dresslerville, the Washoe Colony near Gardnerville, and come from a long line of accomplished craftswomen. JoAnn learned to work with willows from her mother and grandmother, although she never tried making baskets on her own until she was in middle age and realized if she wanted baskets she'd have to make them herself. "It was strange there, when I started working with the willow, I knew exactly what to do, and everything just came so easily for me," she says. "I think you have that feeling there for it, and like I say, I have a good feeling with working with willows, I just really enjoy it."

Apprentice Cynthia Foster got the same feeling, even as she struggled to learn to split willows into three parts to make threads for sewing. She raised her own children in cradleboards, but lately she had been searching for a renewed connection to her culture, and called on her family heritage to help. As she explained, "I think I just see what's happening...I want some type of a source... and I just really felt a need, I didn't want this to die, I didn't want it to just disappear... so I reached back and I thought I'm going to do this, I feel artistic, I can do this, I have talent, I do, I have a desire and I have the patience."



*Cynthia Foster
learning to split
willows.*

Patience is a definite prerequisite for the task, which is actually a long series of tasks. JoAnn began by showing Cynthia how to find good willows, not an easy job in the Carson Valley with its booming development and increasing use of pesticides in farming. Once gathered, willows to be used for the back of a cradleboard need to be cleaned and scraped, while willows for threads are split and the inner pith taken out; and all of this needs to be done while they are still fresh. Only when all the materials are ready can the weaving start—the long, flat back of the cradleboard, and the curved hood made from tiny willows, and decorated with yarn in different patterns for boys and girls. Cynthia completed a cradleboard during her apprenticeship, and shows every intention of continuing to develop here art with the help of her aunts.



*JoAnn Martinez using a winnowing tray to roast pine nuts
with hot coals.*

Shoshone Beadwork:

Angie McGarva and Tamea Knight

Beadwork is a relatively recent art form among Native Americans—since the introductions of glass beads by Europeans—but they have made it their own, incorporating traditional patterns, meanings and uses, and elevating it to extraordinary levels of skill and beauty. Anyone who has ever stopped at a roadside smoke shop in Nevada has seen beaded earrings, belt buckles, saltshakers and other modern adaptations of bead working skills made for tourists; fewer know of the traditional uses of beadwork for dance costumes, cradleboards, medicine pouches and the like.



Tamea Knight and Angie McGarva working at Angie's house.

Angie McGarva, a Western Shoshone from Lee in Elko County, is a master bead worker who has been learning the craft since she was a little girl watching her mother. Now in her mid-30's, she specializes in what she calls "flat work," beads sewn on a stiffened cloth backing to make items for traditional costumes such as medallions, wrist cuffs, hair ties and leggings, as well as picture frames, barrettes, and checkbook covers. Angie developed her own technique of stringing beads on one thread, laying it on the surface to be beaded, and using a second needle and thread to sew it down with a stitch every few beads; she says she taught herself by taking apart other pieces, reading books and experimenting. Angie likes to do designs in what she calls "fire colors"—yellow, orange, red—against any color background, but especially black, and she rarely plans out a design beforehand. "You figure out the design as you go, that's what I do, I don't know how other people do it," she explains. "Because it's your design you're putting into your work, it's your creation, so do it the way you feel."

Tamea Knight is also a Western Shoshone from Elko, but she spent much of her childhood in other places. When she returned home, got married and had children, she rekindled an interest in her heritage and began learning about buckskin and beadwork, mostly working on a loom. She jumped at the chance to learn Angie's technique, and the two spent every Saturday afternoon at Angie's house during the apprenticeship. They also used some of their grant to take a trip to the Ft. Hall Shoshone-Bannock Reservation near Pocatello, Idaho—a major bead-working center—to buy beads, needles, thread, buckskin and other supplies. Tamea says it took her three weeks to make her first barrette (while Angie finished two in the first afternoon) but the results were worth it, and it got easier each time.



Angie McGarva and her daughter Canika wearing an outfit Angie made.

Pow Wow Drumming:

Dean Barlese and Heidi Barlese

The tradition of pow wow drumming, singing and dancing originated with the Native American tribes of the Plains, but since the late 1960s it has become a growing influence in Nevada. For hundreds of years native people have traveled widely, and the exchange of ideas and art forms among tribes has a long history. Dean Barlese, a member of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, explains, "There was always, even in the olden days, always exchange between people, I think they liked to travel. My Grandma always talks about when the horses came, that's when it made it easier for people to travel, go visit their relatives. She talked about people going to Ft. Hall [Idaho] and going on out into the Great Plains to hunt buffalo. They never stayed home, they always traveled after that."

Dean's mother is from Warm Springs, Oregon, and his father from Pyramid Lake, so even within his own family there is a history of intermingled traditions. Dean started singing with a pow wow drum group about 1982, and is currently a member of the Red Star Singers of Reno, traveling to pow wows and sun dances all over the west. His younger sister Heidi is a dancer, and a few years later she started sitting in with the drum at pow wows and learning the songs. She used this apprenticeship to learn some new songs, particularly some in the Paiute language, and to work on her singing style.

Large drums are used both at pow wows and at sun dances. Pow wows are mainly social events, although

with a strong awareness of spiritual traditions (no alcohol is allowed, for instance, because of the sacred eagle feathers the dancers wear), while sun dances are powerful religious and spiritual celebrations. At both, though, "The drum is the center, because it's the heart-beat," Dean explains. "It's round like the earth. The old people always told us everything was round, the earth, the moon, even the stars they knew were round. They say the universe is round, it don't never end, it goes on and on. They always teach that man, us human beings, are nothing, we're just a part of the whole circle, we're all a part of mother earth, we're not above it, we're not superior, not set above the animals or anything, we're just a part of it. As long as the drum is going, as long as the singers are there, Indian ways will survive. We've been through a lot in the past...but the spiritual ways still survive. So this is the center, and it sends the voice to the creator and vibrates through Mother Earth, we're still here. The singers form the second circle and their voices with the drumming send their voice, too. The third circle is the dancers that go around the drum, and they're upholding the traditions, keeping their ways going. And the family and spectators around the dancers form the last circle. And the spirit comes back to the drum. At a pow wow you can feel the spirit when it comes in, the spirit will come and you can feel it. Mostly at sun dances you can feel the spirit in the drum, it will make everybody want to dance."

*Dean and Heidi Barlese
singing a Paiute song.*



Chippewa Stone Pipes:

Adam Fortunate Eagle and Adam Tsosie Nordwall

Unlike some contemporary art forms, traditional folk arts are not meant to be hung on walls or placed on pedestals. They are deeply imbedded in a culture and are used in both everyday and sacred contexts. Adam Fortunate Eagle's carved stone pipes are a good example; while Adam would be the first to say they are pieces of art, and some are bought by collectors for display, their primary purpose is ceremonial. Adam is a Chippewa from Minnesota who now lives on the Stillwater Reservation outside of Fallon, and he is passing on his skills and knowledge to his 12-year-old grandson Adam Tsosie Nordwall.

The pipes are made from pipestone quarried in Minnesota. Blanks are roughed out with a hacksaw, then shaped with files, sandpaper and steel wool to a smooth finish. Adam spent a lot of time teaching Tsosie to use saws, files, drills and drawknives safely, explaining, "Most parents say, 'Oh, don't touch that, that's sharp,' you know. Well, heck if they're going to learn it they've got to work with dangerous things. They can't work with dull tools, dull tools are more dangerous than a sharp tool."

Tsosie has been spending time in his grandfather's shop since he was very young, listening to his stories and playing with scraps, so he had little trouble making his first pipe. "You have to have patience," he admits, but in the company of another grandson, Jesse Windriver, and under Adam's cheerful instruction, he is well on his way to becoming a carver. Tsosie and Jesse each finished a pipe, complete with a carved sumac stem and beadwork decorations, and then used them in their manhood ceremonies in May. They went through a sweat lodge ceremony, received instruction in spiritual matters from their grandfather, and spent the night alone on a desert mountain without food or water. Adam explains, "They're going to learn how to use those pipes, how to fill the pipes, how to use them in ceremonial ways because both of them are going to do those things, as they grow older. So it's more than just the simple routine of making an object, this is creating part of their culture, part of their heritage, carrying on your traditions, so it's much more meaningful than the physical thing that you see there, that's what makes this so special. It's more than just teaching the kids the craft, it's teaching them a culture."



Jesse Windriver getting a lesson in pipe carving from his grandfather Adam Fortunate Eagle.



Tsosie Nordwall working on a pipe.

Washoe Baskets:

Theresa Jackson and Sue Coleman

Folk art, like blue eyes or curly hair, tends to run in families. That's because folk traditions of all kinds are based on shared values and esthetics, and survive by being passed from person to person over time. How better to perpetuate a culture than through families?

Washoe elder Theresa Smokey Jackson is one of the best and most respected basket makers in the tribe, and is carrying on a family tradition she learned from her mother, grandmother and older sister. She in turn is now passing on her knowledge to her daughter Sue Coleman, who lives in Carson City. Theresa has been making baskets since she was a child, and is one of the few people who makes round baskets in addition to cradleboards and winnowing trays. She and her sister JoAnn Martinez have been the primary movers behind a revival of interest in Washoe culture. They are members of the last generation to be raised traditionally, with annual summer trips to Lake Tahoe, and fall pine nut gathering camps in the mountains, and they feel it is their duty to pass on what their parents taught them. "We're the elders now, and it's up to us to teach what we know to those that are interested and want to learn," Theresa says.



Sue Coleman

A few years ago Sue asked her mother to teach her about willow basketry, so Theresa started taking her along on gathering trips, showing her how to find good willows for different types of baskets. Theresa and her sister are firm believers in teaching every step in the process; she says, "If somebody already had it for you, then you're not learning it, you're taking somebody else's work. You have to start from scratch." Sue had made several doll-sized cradleboards, and was determined to make a full-size one during her apprenticeship. She succeeded admirably, and said with a big smile, "I love that basket, I'm really proud of it. I told my mom when I finished it I stood it around the house for days, and made everybody look at it!"

Sue raised her own children in cradleboards, and both she and her mother are encouraged to see more and more Washoe people using them again. Theresa can hardly keep up with orders for baby baskets, and just finished one for her first great-grandchild. One of Sue's most treasured possessions is a cradleboard that her grandmother made and she cares for it like the priceless heirloom it is. "A lot of people don't take care of them and don't respect them, and it just irritates me," Sue declares. "They come back broken and I think, how could they do this, it's so precious. I take really good care of my baskets, and I don't understand people who don't respect them. If you take care of them, they'll last forever." With that kind of care, both the baskets and the way of life they represent can last forever.

*Theresa Jackson with
some of her baskets.*



Hawaiian Gourd Crafts:

Aana Mitchell and Diane Ohata-Sims

As people move to Nevada from all over the country and the world, they bring with them the arts and cultures of their homelands and add them to the increasingly diverse society here. The Hawaiian community has already established a presence in Las Vegas, with an active Hawaiian Civic Club, a hula school and an annual Pacific Island festival, so it was exciting to have NAC's first Las Vegas apprenticeship be in Hawaiian gourd crafts.

Master artist Aana Mitchell was born on Oahu and raised in a traditional Hawaiian family. She was chosen from ten children by her father to carry on the chants, dances, crafts and other traditional knowledge, and for 45 years has taken the responsibility that came with that training very seriously. She has taught children and adults in California, where she has lived for 35 years, and has also conducted craft workshops in Las Vegas, where she met Diane Ohata-Sims. Diane teaches language and crafts to the children of the Hawaiian Civic Club, but is always looking to improve her knowledge and skills, and saw the apprenticeship as a chance to spend some more time with Aana.

Together they worked on making several traditional gourd items, including the uli-uli, a rattle used in hula, and a ceremonial mask called kamaka ipu o Ku (the gourd face of Ku). Aana grows the ipu, or gourd, used for the mask at her home in California, but other materials must be brought from Hawaii. Aana began her lesson with a Hawaiian saying, which translates as "When you create anything Hawaiian, do so with much aloha. Transmit that aloha to the

finished product and you will have a perfect creation every time."

There has been a great revival of traditional Hawaiian culture and language in Hawaii in recent years, which Aana has been pleased to be a part of as an elder teacher, or kupuna. "It's not so much teaching them and leaving them, it's carrying it on and living it," she explains. "Don't just say 'I'm Hawaiian and this is my culture,' you must live it, in order to make it true to the people and to yourself." She would like to see that same depth of understanding passed on to young people who live on the mainland as well.

Diane, who was also born in Hawaii, says, "The kids that are born away from the islands are the ones that miss out, and when they go home, they know that they're Hawaiian, but they don't know a lot, they don't know the language...because nobody else speaks." And as she wrote in her application to the program, "My end objective is to learn these ancient crafts in order to share my knowledge with the rest of the Hawaiian community in Las Vegas and pass my acquired knowledge to the younger generation to perpetuate our sacred customs down through future generations."



*Aana Mitchell and
Diane Ohata-Sims
working on a gourd mask.*

*Diane Ohata-Sims
with her finished gourd mask.*

Washoe Baskets:

Amy Barber and Jody Barber Steele

On a sunny summer afternoon, Amy Barber sits on the sofa in a warm corner of her little house near Woodfords, California, and lifts a damp spiral of split willow from a bowl of water. With an awl held between the last two fingers of her right hand she works an opening between the coils of a basket and inserts the new willow under the end of another split willow and wraps it tightly around the coils. Amy works with rags wrapped around the fingers of her right hand so she won't be cut as she pulls the willows taut. A stitch at a time, she shapes round baskets of pale willow with dark bracken fern root designs, as her Washoe ancestors have done for generations.

Amy Barber has lived all of her 85 years in the tiny Washoe community at Woodfords on the Nevada-California border, and she is used to making creative use of the resources around her. She talks matter-of-factly about grinding pine nuts in the hollow of a big rock outside, cooking acorn soup by heating it in a basket with hot rocks, and boulder hopping across the Carson River canyon to find willows. Her mother and grandmother were basket makers, and Amy used to help them gather and prepare willow when she was young. She started making baskets when she was seven or eight, but stopped when she got older and only returned to the craft in her senior years. She now has a houseful of round baskets, which she mostly makes for friends and family members.



Amy Barber working on a round basket.

*Jody Steele
learning to split a
willow.*



Amy's granddaughter Jody Barber Steele knows her grandmother is a cultural treasure, and spends as much time as she can in the little house by the creek at Woodfords. Jody also learned the basics of basketry as a child, from Amy, and now in her mid-30's, with children of her own, she is coming back to the tradition. Amy has showed her where to find good willows, and watches with amusement and sympathetic advice as Jody struggles to learn to split willows into three parts to make the threads for sewing a coiled basket.

"People see the basket already made, they think it's easy, but it's not that easy," Amy explains. "The hard work is where you get the stuff first, the material. If you haven't got the material you can't make it." Jody continues, "Then knowing how to prepare it. I think it's easy by comparison to do the basket, to actually weave it."

Argentinean Guitar:

Oscar Carrescia and Olga Carbia

We think of Argentina as a Hispanic country, but it has a very complex and cosmopolitan history that includes people from Italy, Germany, France and many other countries and cultures. The blending and interaction among these cultures makes for a fascinating artistic environment. Oscar Carrescia was born in Buenos Aires of Italian parents, and discovered an early fascination with and aptitude for music. He recalls hearing a violinist practicing while he and his friends played soccer in the streets of a northern Argentinean town, and when his father asked what he'd like as a gift, a violin was what he wanted.

When the family moved back to Buenos Aires, Oscar entered the music conservatory at age 12, and went on to earn a master's degree in performance on the violin and the guitar. He played with the youth radio orchestra, and then with the National Symphony for about six years, before moving to the United States. In Las Vegas, he played at the Dunes for many years, and has been running a music store and school for the last 17 years, dedicating himself mainly to teaching and directing the Las Vegas Youth Camerata Orchestra.

Olga Carbia is also from an Italian family in Argentina, and also grew up with a love of music, but her focus is different from Oscar's. "Of course I do have a great appreciation for classical music, because, like I told you, my mom was from Italy and she played us the opera and classical at an early age," she explains. "But then when I was born in my country, I developed very nationalistic roots, and then I paid very close attention to the music from the farm workers and the people that are struggling, and this is what I identify with the most. Of course I do appreciate the classic music as a soothing and magnificent experience because I grew up in that, but I identify myself with the music from my land, with the people that struggle to survive, the simple people that with the music they fight, the little simple things of life, the treasure for nature and who they are. And in those very simple songs, the lyrics are very deep, very specific...with that I define myself."

Olga performs South American and Caribbean music with a group in Las Vegas called Amauta, which means "teacher" in the Quechua Indian language. She already knew how to sing many traditional songs, but she wanted to be able to play them on the guitar as well. In her apprenticeship with Oscar, she learned basic chords and playing techniques used in traditional music, and mastered several traditional songs including a samba and the well-known "Malageña." He's a great teacher," Olga says of Oscar. "He tell you 'Bravo! Bravo!' when you come up with one little simple thing, make you feel good."



Oscar Carrescia and Olga Carbia.



Olga Carbia (second from left) performing with Amauta.

Thai Classical Dance:

Pat Kanoknata and Santhana Lopez

Supat Kanoknata had lived in Las Vegas for almost five years, an active member of the Thai community there, before he let people know he was an accomplished traditional dancer. When he first performed in the spring of 1992 people thought he had come in from Los Angeles—they had no idea Las Vegas had a classical dancer of his caliber, and he was immediately besieged with requests to teach. Pat had studied at the performing arts academy in Bangkok for eleven years, but went on to a career in business despite an invitation to become an instructor at the academy. He says he finally performed again in public “to build the Thai name. Nothing about me, nothing personal, because I didn’t ask for money. Just to let the community know about this...where I’m from, what I learn.”

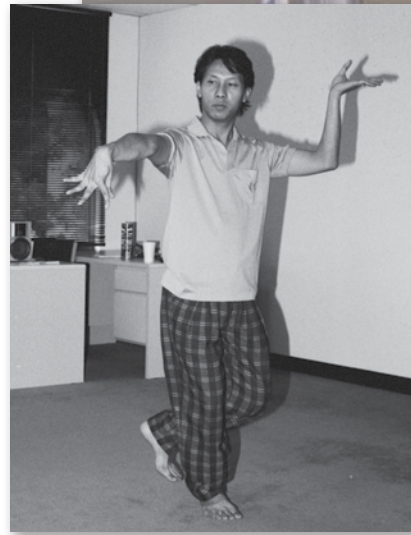
Pat began holding informal classes for members of the Thai community, rehearsing at his office or in his apartment, and performing several times a year at Thai community parties or benefits for the Thai Buddhist Temple in Las Vegas. One of his students was Santhana Lopez, a young woman who started learning Thai dance as a child, and has performed in Guam and in the United States, where she has lived for 14 years. Santhana was already an accomplished dancer, but when she first saw Pat she said, “Who is that guy dancing out there? I want to know him. He’s good.” She had seen other dancers in Las Vegas but reported that, “They not that good, I don’t even want to pay attention, I’m better than them. I want somebody to teach me to be better than me, I don’t want to be better than somebody that teach me, so he’s better than me, I want him to be my teacher.”

Pat admits he is a perfectionist when it comes to teaching classic Thai dance, which is an exact and demanding art form. There are dozens of subtle moves of the hands, feet and body, each with a specific meaning. All Thai dances tell a story, so it is important for the dancers to understand the music and words of a dance first, even when they are sung in the formal palace language. “I want them to be perfect, not just good,” Pat says. “They know that, everyone knows they have to keep doing it ten, twenty times until I say yes, then you can pass. I want quality. That’s it, that’s what counts.” Pat also bought and made many of the elaborate costumes required for Thai dance, and oversaw every aspect of his students’ performances. Unfortunately, he

left Las Vegas in 1995, leaving a huge gap in the Thai cultural community there, but also a lasting legacy of excellence.



*Santhana Lopez (right)
performing at the Las
Vegas Folklife Festival.*



*Thai dance master
Pat Kanoknata.*

Shoshone Baskets:

Evelyn Pete and Edna Mike

Evelyn Pete likes to sit on the floor to clean willows and weave them into baskets, the old way. She and her sisters still speak the Shoshone language when they are together, and she starts her days with a traditional prayer. "But nowadays people don't do them things," she laments. "They say it's old stuff, they said that's old. No, it's not. It still works...but they don't believe it."

Evelyn was born on the old Blackeye Ranch before the establishment of the Duckwater Reservation in eastern Nevada, and she still keeps a house on the reservation, even though she works during the week on the Goshute Reservation in Utah. She was raised with traditional Shoshone practices, foods, stories and crafts, and learned to make baskets from her mother. Cradleboards, winnowing trays, cone baskets and round baskets were all still used in her youth, but in a very short time the skills needed to make them have faded drastically.

Evelyn's sister Edna Mike, only a few years younger, never learned to make baskets, although she saw her mother gathering willows and weaving. Working with Evelyn, Edna has learned where to look for good willows, and how to test them to know if they will work for basket making. Unlike residents of more developed areas, the Duckwater basket makers have easy access to plenty of healthy willows because they live in such a remote area. Usually the sisters go for willows to the old Blackeye Ranch where they were born. Edna also had to learn how to scrape the bark off of the fresh willows, and to perfect the difficult technique of splitting them into three even parts to make threads for weaving baskets. All this before even beginning to make a basket. To add to her difficulties, Edna decided to make a round basket first, one of the more complicated forms of traditional basketry, and managed to finish it during the apprenticeship with her sister.

Evelyn and Edna's older sister Lilly Sanchez is also an accomplished basket maker, so the family heritage has been strengthened even further with Edna's entry into the tradition. And Lilly has also been teaching her daughter the art through another apprenticeship, insuring the continuation of the Blackeye Family tradition to a new generation.



Evelyn Pete splitting willows.



Edna Mike cleaning a willow.

Ukrainian Pysanky:

Zoria Zetaruk, Luba Eads and Natalie Pruc

The Wednesday morning Ukrainian egg class at the Dula Senior Center in Las Vegas is a cheerful place. The students hunch over their work, trading stories and jokes as they carefully draw lines on eggs with melted wax heated in small electric styluses. Instructor Zoria Zetaruk, an energetic 80-year-old woman, is everywhere, sketching the next step of the design on a blackboard, encouraging and praising, passing cups of red and purple dye around, noting the fine points of an intricate design, and joining in the good-natured kidding.

Zoria has been teaching this class for 15 years, ever since she arrived in Las Vegas, but her knowledge of Ukrainian *pysanky* is rooted in her earliest memories. Her parents were Ukrainian immigrants to Alberta, Canada, who insisted on teaching their children the culture of their homeland. She says, "My mother taught us early on how to make these Ukrainian eggs, and she had a double purpose why she did this—to keep the children quiet because she loved to write eggs, and if we weren't writing eggs we'd be rambunctious. Therefore she sat us all around the table and all together we worked on these eggs. And then later on in life when my mother wanted us to do better work than we were doing, she knew another way of doing it. She would say, 'Zoria, will you help me, I can't see.' She *could* see, but this was her way of getting me to help her, and getting into better designs and to knowing the tradition. And we would discuss the egg and what we were drawing and why we were drawing this, and that is how I got into the eggs."

Pysanky, which means "written", are traditionally made for Easter and use Christian and pre-Christian symbols such as stars, crosses, flowers and animals to symbolize the rebirth of spring. Designs are drawn in wax on the egg, which is first dipped in a light dye such as yellow. More designs are drawn and the dyes become successively darker until the egg looks like a dark lump, misshapen with blobs of wax. When it is heated and the melted wax wiped off, however, the completed design appears as if by magic.

Two of Zoria's students, Luba Eads and Natalie Pruc, undertook an apprenticeship with her outside of

the regular class. Luba was born in New York to Ukrainian immigrant parents, and has always had a strong interest in all aspects of the culture, but did not have a chance to learn *pysanky* until she met Zoria. Natalie was actually born in Ukraine, but left with her family when she was 12 and eventually came to Las Vegas. She was already a skilled practitioner of traditional Ukrainian embroidery, and had no trouble picking up the art of *pysanky* as well.

Natalie Pruc, Zoria Zetaruk and Luba Eads.



Luba Eads "writing" a pysanky design in wax.

There is not much of a Ukrainian community in Las Vegas, but these three women, who all speak the language, prepare traditional foods, and carry on the art of *pysanky*, make sure their heritage is not forgotten even in the Nevada desert.

African Drumming:

Mohamed Barrie and Eric Jackson

The African American community in Las Vegas makes up about ten percent of the population, and has a long and sometimes difficult history dating back to the 1940s when migrants from Arkansas and Louisiana began arriving to work in war industries. There is a growing desire for cultural activities within the community as well as a need to share them with the rest of the city, and the establishment of a local city-sponsored art center, several African American cultural organizations and a dance group called Children of the Diaspora African Musical Ensemble (CODAME) in recent years have all enriched the established culture of the community.

An apprenticeship in African drumming which brought Mohamed Barrie from Sierra Leone to work with Eric Jackson provided another boost for African roots in Las Vegas. Mohamed is from Freetown, Sierra Leone, and began learning traditional dancing, drumming and storytelling from his father when he was only five years old. He is currently a member of the Freetown Players, a performing group that has been touring the US for several years.

Mohamed explains that drums are integral to African culture: "The drum, it call you, it tell you everything. So the drum is more important back home, it is kind of the language, talking to people back home." For dancers, the drum tells them when to move. "You don't need to look at the lights or I'm waiting for my red light, or a ten count, no. The drum, as soon as the drum call them, that's their language, it's up to them, they don't need to read or hear somebody say 'Are you ready?' You listen to the drum. That's our own teacher, you know." African dance is a very improvisational art form, and the dancers and drummers must work closely together as they create a performance.

Apprentice Eric Jackson's father is a drummer and he has been studying drumming for years, and specifically African drumming for the last three years or so. The first dance he learned from Mohamed was a harvest dance, which acts out the sowing and harvesting of rice, the principal crop of Sierra Leone. Mohamed insisted on teaching Eric the dance first because, "The lead drummer, he should know everything about the dance. He do everything, that's why he need to know the moves, he need to know everything about the dance, the story, because he controls the dance, nobody else." Mohamed also worked with the dancers of CODAME to teach the Harvest Dance while he was in Las Vegas.

The integration of art into the everyday life of Africans was one of the strongest points Mohamed tried to make. "Let me tell you something about Africa," he says. "If you know how to play the drum you should know how to dance, you should know how to sing, because it's everyday life, you know. Like school, we play drums at school when we're playing, tell stories, so before you grow up you should know how to tell stories, dance, play the drums, all those things."

Eric Jackson and Mohamed Barrie practicing African drumming.



Saddlemaking:

Eddie Brooks and Alan McDonald

This was the second apprenticeship for Alan McDonald, who had worked five years ago with master saddle maker Eddie Brooks of Elko to build a buckaroo saddle that he used in his job as a cowboy. Since that time Alan has quit buckarooing, gotten married, set up in business as a horseshoer, and made several more saddles. While he has made good progress, both he and Eddie felt he could use more help on the very fine points of saddlery that would allow him to really make a living as a saddle maker.

One fall day last year, Eddie and Alan were examining one of Alan's saddles, made about two years before and heavily used by a working buckaroo. The saddle had been rubbing the horse on one side, and they needed to make some adjustments to fix it. Eddie said of the saddle, "Well, there's a lot of quality in it. He really did a nice job of tooling, you can see that. But there's never been anybody that made one that there wasn't a little tiny thing that they don't think's right. Whenever they look at that saddle, nobody else could see it, it's not hurting nothing, but all they can see when they try to look at the saddle is them little places." Alan saw plenty of "little places" on the saddle where he felt he could have done better, and it was those things that he hoped to perfect by working with Eddie for a second apprenticeship.

"I had a guy tell me one time," Alan begins, "he says you can walk into a room and there can be a hundred saddles, and you wouldn't know the first thing about a saddle, but the Eddie Brooks saddle would stand out like a sore thumb. Because it just looks good, but you can't tell anybody why it looks good, it just looks good. And it's all because of the lines and the balance, and the fit, you know, everything comes together nice. So basically that's where I want to get a little better."

During the apprenticeship, Alan made a saddle that he plans to keep as a model for people to see when they order from him. "This saddle's going to be different," he explains. "I'm going to keep it for a saddle to show people, I'm going to put every flower that Eddie's got in his bag on the saddle somewhere so they can see it stamped out. They can look at this saddle and they can see the different styles of design, too." Few saddle makers can afford to keep a saddle around just for show, so the apprenticeship gave Alan a rare opportunity to do just that.

Alan has an excellent understanding of the structure and use of saddles, because he worked as a buckaroo for years, but as Eddie says there is more to saddle making than just functionality. "It's like an artist when they're painting. They can't put a measurement on that, it's just got to be the feeling about it, developing their eye to make things work, you know, turn out the best."



Eddie Brooks and Alan McDonald making adjustments to a saddle.

Shoshone Buckskin Tanning:

Edward McDade and Lyle Sam

The South Fork Te-Moak Indian Reservation at Lee, about 20 miles south of Elko, is one of the prettiest spots in Nevada. In the foothills on the west side of the Ruby Mountains, it has plenty of water and trees, good pastures, and spectacular views of the hills. Edward McDade has lived there for over 40 years, raising hay and cattle, sometimes working for other ranchers, and wondering “how the government goofed up and gave the Indians such a nice piece of ground.”

Edward is one of the few practitioners of the Shoshone art of tanning and smoking buckskin, a skill he learned from his wife Florine’s grandmother and has been doing for about 15 years. He uses the hides to make work gloves that are much in demand among the South Fork ranchers. Because so few people tan their own hides anymore, there is also a big demand for smoked buckskin among women in town who make moccasins, gloves, dresses and other items, and he has no trouble selling any hides he has.



Edward and Lyle work on scraping a deer hide.

As with many traditional arts, the preparation of the materials takes at least as much time as creating the finished product. In the first place, deer hides aren’t always easy to come by, especially ones that have been carefully removed so there are no holes or tears. The hide is soaked in water for three to five days, and then scraped with a drawknife to remove all the hair and the thin layer of skin under it. The tanning process comes next, using a mixture of brains (formerly deer brains, but now more usually cow), soap and lard that is rubbed

into the hide and allowed to dry. The hide is then re-wetted, and must be pulled and worked constantly until it is dry, soft and white, a time-consuming process that demands great patience. Edward says, “You can start in the morning, about ten o’clock, and if it’s nice and warm maybe it’ll take about four or five hours. When it starts getting stiff, you don’t have it. It ain’t going to come out no matter how hard you fight it.” In this case, the tanning must be done again, sometimes several times, before the hide is soft enough to use.

Edward’s apprentice was Lyle Sam, a native of Elko, who started getting interested in the traditions of his heritage in his mid-30s. He scraped and tanned several hides, and helped Edward smoke a finished hide to give it a golden color. For smoking, the hide is folded in half and sewed together, leaving an opening so it can be hung over a smoky fire of cedar. One of the lessons Lyle learned while working with hides was to slow down. “It’s hard to slow down to do it, because I was raised in a hurry-up world, but this isn’t part of that world. You’ve got to make time for this, not hurry up and get it done. It’s not a commercialized product, it’s a traditional project where it takes time to get it done, if you’re going to do it right.”

Edward speaks for all traditional artists when he says, pointing to the center of his chest, “It hits you in here, don’t it? It gets you in your heart, that’s where it comes from. Not just anybody can do it, cause you got to feel it in here.”



Lyle Sam and Edward McDade admire a freshly smoked hide.

Japanese Taiko Drumming:

Doug Muraoka, William Fujii and Norma Honda-Wagoner

The Las Vegas Japanese American Citizens' League has been an active community organization for twenty years, promoting the interests of Japanese Americans, providing scholarships, and serving as a social and cultural catalyst for the community. When Doug Muraoka arrived in Las Vegas from Southern California to attend the university, he didn't know of the organization, but within a few months JACL president George Goto had located him and asked if he would play the drum for dancers at their Obon Festival, a traditional summer celebration. Doug describes it this way: "My first set was terrible, my second set was almost perfect, and so I thought there's no way they're going to ever ask me to do this again. Then George gets on the PA and he introduces me as a drummer, and also says, 'Oh yeah, by the way, Doug will be teaching a class starting in December'. I just said, 'Okay.'"



*Taiko drum master
Doug Muraoka*

Thus began, in early 1993, a remarkable example of a grassroots performing group that has become a dynamic force in the cultural community of southern Nevada. Doug had been playing taiko drums for his Buddhist temple in San Fernando since he was twelve, but had never taught, and was more familiar with the older solo drumming tradition than the newer Japanese American innovation of playing in groups. The Las Vegas group had only one drum to start with, and had to practice on old tires, but under Doug's direction they began creating their own compositions and choreography based on traditional rhythms and styles. "It was all by accident," he laughs. "It's been by the seat of our pants the last year."

Two of the group's members, William Fujii and Norma Honda-Wagoner, showed exceptional talent and interest. Because Doug was eventually planning to leave Las Vegas to continue his education, he saw a need

to train someone to take over his teaching duties, so he chose William and Norma to work with in an apprenticeship. William is the son of Japanese immigrant parents, and has a strong interest in Japanese culture. He is a student at Las Vegas' Academy of International Studies and Performing Arts, and he already has a background in music and is studying the Japanese language. Norma was raised in Los Angeles, but has lived in Las Vegas for 30 years and is a long-time member of JACL. She especially values the range of ages of the drum group's members, from young teenagers to senior citizens.

Doug is very modest about his teaching abilities, and gives enormous credit to the group's members. "I think anybody can hit it, but it takes something else to play it," he explains. "It does take talent to play the drum, it really does, especially to make it look good, to have some style. [Some people are] concentrating, so intent on what they're doing and there's no style in the face, there's no style in the movement, they don't play. And that's what I'm looking for, but that's the hardest part to teach." All of the members of the Kaminari Taiko Drummers can be proud of what they have achieved in just two years, starting from one drum and some old tires. As they pound out their theme song, Kaminari (which means thunder) on drums they have made themselves from old wine barrels, they are sounding the heartbeat of a living tradition.

*The Kaminari Taiko Drummers performing at the
Las Vegas Folklife Festival.*



Shoshone Baskets:

Lilly Sanchez and Virginia Sanchez

Surrounded by bundles of fragrant willow branches, woven cradleboards and winnowing trays, Virginia Sanchez perches on the edge of her mother Lilly's sofa, twining split willow threads around long willows splayed out in a cone shape. Virginia is working on her second project, a small cone basket used for gathering pine nut cones, and Lilly provides encouragement and advice as she adds in willows to widen the shape, or needs to splice in a new thread.

Lilly Sanchez was born on what is now the Duckwater Reservation, southwest of Ely, and was raised speaking the Shoshone language and helping her grandmother gather willows for baskets. Because she moved to Carson City when her children were young, Lilly didn't have a chance to learn basketry herself until about 20 years ago when her kids were grown and her mother could teach her to weave. Now living in Fallon, it is her turn to pass her knowledge on to her own daughter, Virginia, who in turn was inspired by the birth of her daughter in 1994. "It's kind of a responsibility, I think, that we all have," Virginia explains. "Especially when you have children, the responsibility then is to pass it on to them. For me to be able to learn this well and then teach her is real important to me."

Like all basket making apprentices, Virginia says learning to split willows to make threads for sewing is the hardest task. "To get this string here, you've got to split it three ways. And once you have the willow split into thirds, then you take that willow and you take the core out of the center, and it's coring it that's the hardest, because it's all by feel and pressure. And then this is the fun part here, the weaving."

Because the willows are held in the mouth during splitting, the increasing use of pesticides is a major concern for traditional weavers. Lilly tells a story of gathering willows near the prison in Carson City, but when she started splitting them her mouth went numb and she realized they had been sprayed. Virginia works as the director of Native American programs for Citizen Alert, an activist and environmental organization, and sees clearly the interaction between traditional culture and the health of the environment. "It's simple. We're not doing what we're supposed to do, which is basically, Shoshones are taught in our creation story that when we were placed here in this particular land, as a particular people, that it is our responsibility to continue being Shoshone, or Nuwa, and that we're to take care of the world around us. Which is basically saying that everything in the world has a certain spirit to it, and you need to honor that. [We need to] go back to that sort of way of not being real frivolous with the world around us."



*Virginia Sanchez
at work on a cone
basket.*



*Lilly Sanchez
weaving a seed
beater.*

Paiute Cradleboards:

Clara Castillo and Jessica Lake

On a sunny day in late fall, when most of the trees have lost their leaves on the Walker River Paiute Reservation outside of Schurz, basket maker Clara Castillo walks along the bank of an irrigation ditch peering into the willow thickets. She says the willows look good and healthy, not weakened by drought or pesticides, and pulls out a pair of garden shears to start cutting the long straight branches, about as big around as a pencil. These willows will form the back (or box spring, as she says) of a cradleboard for Jessica Lake's next baby.

Jessica has raised her other two children in cradleboards that were bought from other makers, but she has always been interested in learning the art herself and finally found a willing teacher in Clara. Both women are natives of Schurz and Clara has known Jessica since she was a little girl 30 years ago. Clara's mother was a basket maker, but Clara says most of what she knows she's taught herself. She makes round baskets as well as cradleboards, but just for her family. Jessica was surrounded by basket making and other traditions growing up on the reservation, but did not have any immediate family members to teach her.

Back in the willow patch the two women are cutting about 60 willows for the back of the cradleboard. A few weeks earlier they had cut some smaller willows to make the curved hood, and Jessica had been working on scraping the bark off of them. The willows must be cleaned within a few days of cutting because after that the bark gets very hard to remove. When they have enough, they go back to Jessica's house and begin cleaning the willows. After removing the branches and buds, Clara holds a small knife in the palm of her hand and scrapes up and down the willow with a practiced briskness. Thin curls of reddish bark pile on the ground around her feet and soon the branch is smooth and white. Jessica has a lot of work ahead of her to get all the willows this clean.



The most difficult part of preparing the willows is splitting those that will be used to weave the back and hood together. Those willows have the bark left on as they dry for a week or two, and then they are split into three lengthwise strings. Clara takes one of the freshly cut willows, splits the tip into three parts, holds one strand in her mouth and uses her hands to peel the branch apart into three even strands. She makes it look easy, but Jessica knows it takes years of practice. Still, for her it will be worth it, especially when she is able to teach her own children this unique art form of their people.

Jessica Lake returns from cutting willows for a cradleboard.



Clara Castillo pulls the pithy core out of a split willow string, which will then be used to weave willows together into a cradleboard.

Mexican Dance:

Icela Gutierrez, Reyna Esquivel and Gabriela Tshudy

The multipurpose room of a community school in Las Vegas echoes with laughter and rapid-fire instructions in Spanish as Icela Gutierrez tries to get her students to line up for their next dance. She pushes the button of her tape player and the room fills with lively music. Icela runs to take her place among the dancers, calling out instructions even as she performs the steps herself, and that enthusiasm and camaraderie enliven the whole group.

Although only 30, Icela has been performing and teaching the dances of her native Mexico for twenty years, and has recently brought her skills to southern Nevada. She knew no one when she moved here, so she put announcements in the local Spanish-language newspaper and on the radio asking for interested students, and in only a few months has created a close and enthusiastic group of young dancers.

She chose to work with two dancers, Reyna Esquivel and Gabriela Tshudy, in passing on her broad knowledge of Mexican culture and dance. Both apprentices were raised in Mexico and are very proud of their heritage and anxious to share it with their new neighbors in Nevada.

Not much more than a year after the formation of the dance group, called Mexico Vivo, they are being invited to perform at schools and restaurants on a regular basis. At a rehearsal in the new Rafael Rivera Community Center, which opened in early 1996 to serve Las Vegas' Hispanic community, the women's bright full skirts swirl against the black cowboy shirts and sombreros of the men in a dance from Monterrey in northeast Mexico. The dancers whoop and stomp as they execute dramatic moves and interweaving choreography, mirroring Icela's infectious ebullience and accomplished talent.

Each region of Mexico has its own style of costume, music and dance that have been carried down for hundreds of years. One of the most popular and well-known types of performing groups, both in Mexico and in Mexican-American communities, is the folklorico dance troupe, which performs dances of many regions. Just in the last five years in southern Nevada there has been a flowering of such groups, with Mexico Vivo one of the newest. Because sound and movement are something we all have in common, music and dance provide a way for people from different cultures to get to know one another, and as with any art form they highlight both what we share and what makes each of us unique.

As a way to maintain a sense of cultural identity amid the frenzy of change in Las Vegas, folkloric dance plays

an important role in the Mexican American community. As Gabriela wrote in her application to the program, "Folklore is an echo of the past, but at the same time it is also the vigorous voice of the present."



The members of Mexico Vivo, Icela Gutierrez's dance troupe.



Icela Gutierrez

Washoe Acorn Biscuits:

Madelina Henry and Renee Aguilar

Madelina Henry is a master at making acorn biscuits, a unique food of the Washoe people. Madelina, who works as a cook at the Washoe Tribe's Senior Center in Dresslerville, grew up watching and helping her mother and older sister prepare acorns. As she got older, and her sister could no longer undertake the long preparation process, the job fell to her and she has taken it over eagerly.

In this apprenticeship Madelina worked with her younger cousin Renee Aguilar, who is also her assistant at the Senior Center. Renee was raised in San Francisco, but spent the summers in Nevada with her older Washoe relatives, and moved back permanently in 1982. Her long-standing interest in Washoe traditions has reasserted itself, and she considers herself very fortunate to be working with someone as knowledgeable in the old ways as Madelina is.

As with many traditional art forms, the making of acorn biscuits requires a long process of preparation. First of all the acorns must be gathered, and since oaks don't grow in Nevada that means a trip over the Sierra to the foothills in California. The traditional territory of the Washoe people includes the area around Lake Tahoe, so they have access to the acorns, either directly or through trade with the neighboring California tribes. The acorns must then dry for about a year before the shells can be cracked off between two rocks and the meats scraped clean of their reddish inner skin. Madelina says that ideally dried acorns should be white when they are ready for pounding.



Apprentice Renee Aguilar pounds acorns into flour in a traditional grinding rock as master Madelina Henry looks on, willow winnowing tray in hand.

Set in the lawn behind the Dresslerville Senior Center is a large flat stone with a shallow indentation. This “pounding rock” was donated to the center, and serves as a site for the traditional grinding of acorns into flour (although some people nowadays use a blender, Madelina says the resulting biscuits just don't taste the same). As Renee sits on the ground with her legs stretched out on either side of the stone, Madelina pours a handful of acorns mixed with a little of the already-ground flour into the indentation. Renee grasps a large rounded stone and begins dropping it steadily onto the acorns, and in a short time they are pulverized into coarse flour.

The flour is then put into a close-woven willow winnowing tray, and with a practiced shaking motion Madelina makes the coarser grains fall back into the hole, while the fine meal sticks to the tray. This is then brushed into a bowl with a stiff brush made of fern root, and the process begins again with more whole acorns. Once there is a good quantity of acorn flour ready—“I don't make this unless I make a lot of it, because it's not worth my time,” Madelina says—it is placed on a clean cloth over a bed of sand in preparation for leaching with running water. Acorns have a bitter taste which must be removed this way, and Madelina also lays cedar boughs over the flour, which she says adds a good flavor.

After the flour is leached for an hour or so, it is mixed with more water into a sort of soup, which is then dropped by large scoopfuls into cool water, where it gels into rounded biscuits. Neither Madelina nor Renee know of another tribe that makes such biscuits, but to them they taste of home. “I crave my acorns,” says Madelina. “This is soul food.”



Washoe elder Madelina Henry cracks dried acorns with a rock to remove the meat for pounding into flour.

Paiute Songs:

Manuel "Popeye" McCloud and Marlin Thompson

Manuel "Popeye" McCloud was born and raised on the Walker Lake Paiute Reservation, like his parents, grandparents and great-grandparents before him. His family moved between the lake and the town of Schurz, ranching and raising hay and making a living off their connection to the land. "This is my life, this is my roots here," Popeye explains. Despite his attachment to the place of his birth, Popeye (who got his nickname as a child because he wore a sailor hat) spent many years working in highway construction all over Nevada and eastern California, but returned to Schurz for good in 1974.

Popeye sings the old style of traditional Paiute and Shoshone songs, usually unaccompanied but sometimes with a hand drum. He recalls the traditional gatherings of Indian people, called fandangos, that happened several times a year, where many of the songs were learned and passed on. "From Christmas to New Year's, one whole week, that's what they used to have," he explains. "You'd hear singers come from different parts of the area, like Fallon, Reese River, Duckwater, Tonopah, you know, all over. Everybody bring their songs in here. Every individual one, he got his own songs, and they sing, maybe they sing for an hour or so, and they gave up and pretty soon another guy would step in and take over, see, for the circle dance. Some of them songs stuck in me, see, I never did lose them."

Popeye also composes many of his own songs, based on things he observes in the world, both natural and human-made. He says, "It don't just come that easy, you have to work around it, work around and finally it falls in

place. It's hard to get the tune. After you get the tune you can really line it out then...Lot of time, you get in the car, if you open your windows just a little bit, and that air gets you in a certain way...sometimes you get the tune. You let your window open, you try it yourself sometime," Popeye laughs. He has songs about horses and birds, one about a boy on horseback, and even one about a jet plane.

Popeye's apprentice Marlin Thompson, age 41, has a very strong sense of Paiute heritage. He lives in Yerington, and his grandparents were from the Walker Lake and Mono Lake Paiute tribes. Marlin remembers his grandfather singing when he was young, although singers were rare even then, so when he heard Popeye he asked if he would teach him some of his songs. The learning has been difficult because Marlin does not know much of the Paiute language, but he makes a point of having Popeye explain all the words, so he can sing with meaning. "This is it here, all the elders we have left," Marlin says earnestly. "If we don't learn now, it's going to be gone."

Marlin's words ring all too true. Popeye McCloud died at age 79 on May 7, 1996. He was "sung into the next world," as Marlin put it, with a ritual Cry Dance a few days later, and is buried in the Schurz Cemetery. With care and skill, some of his songs will live on. An ancient tradition that can gain inspiration from modern life just as easily as from nature, Paiute singing is clearly a living entity, a voice rooted in the past but alive in the present.



Marlin Thompson and Popeye McCloud stand on the shores of Walker Lake, the subject of many of Popeye's songs.

Thai Classical Dance:

Wanthanee Natechoei, Varoontip Amesbutr and Pannee Connolly

The Thai Cultural Arts Association of Las Vegas was founded several years ago by Supatra Chemprachum and other members of the Thai community to promote and celebrate the culture of their homeland. One of the organization's most visible efforts is a dance group, which performs the classical dance tradition of Thailand. The dancers had been learning from videotapes and from occasional dance teachers passing through Las Vegas, but with the Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program were able to bring in a teacher for three months to work with the group, as well as more intensively with two advanced apprentices.

Wanthanee Natechoei is only 21, but has been studying Thai classical dance at the Fine Arts College in Bangkok for six years and is just finishing her degree in the teaching of Thai performing arts. Her time in Nevada qualified as the required student teaching to complete her degree, and the local students benefited from having an experienced teacher to work with them in person.

The two apprentices, Varoontip Amesbutr and Pannee Connolly, are both natives of Thailand and studied traditional dance in school, as most Thai children do. Varoontip came to the U.S. with her parents ten years ago at the age of 13, and says she was brought up with the Thai culture mixed with American ways. She is currently studying at the University of Nevada Las Vegas, but is being careful to hold on to her heritage as well. Varoontip wrote in her application to the program, "Thai dance is one of the ways I can show my fellow people my appreciation of my race while informing others of the classic art Thai culture has to offer."



Thai dance apprentices Pannee Connolly and Varoontip Amesbutr flank master teacher Wanthanee Natechoei, who came to Las Vegas from Thailand with the support of this apprenticeship.

Pannee Connolly has lived in Las Vegas for the last 21 of her 47 years and is an active member of the Thai dance group. She considers herself an intermediate dancer and hopes to be able to assist with teaching the group after learning some more advanced techniques from the visiting master teacher.

Thai classical dance is an extremely disciplined art form based on a set of hand, arm, and whole body gestures, each of which communicates a specific meaning. The best dancers have to be both extremely flexible and also very controlled to maintain precise hand gestures and body positions, especially during slow pieces. The Thai Cultural Arts Association dance group also performs some less formal and structured village folk dances.

Dance is an integral part of the educational system in Thailand, but young Thai-Americans growing up in the U.S. are not exposed to this ancient art unless they and their parents make a deliberate effort to seek it out. Organizations like the Thai Cultural Arts Association are doing their best to keep the varied and unique cultures of the world alive, in Las Vegas and throughout Nevada.



Varoontip Amesbutr performing at the Las Vegas Folklife Festival.

Filipino Dance:

Amy Rovere, Kim Arche and Yorick Jurani

Amy Rovere appears to be not much older than her students as she tries to pull their attention away from teasing and horseplay and toward learning a new dance from the Philippines. But she is determined and forceful and eventually all eyes turn toward the front of the dance studio. Amy goes over each step, counting out the rhythm then adding music. The students laugh and stumble, but Amy keeps them on track and at the end of the hour most of them make it all



Filipino dance master Amy Rovere rehearses a step with one of her students.

the way through the dance. In a few months these kids in jeans and shorts will be transformed into Filipino villagers in colorful costumes, or elegant ladies-in-waiting, dancing in front of their families and friends, as well as total strangers, proudly representing their heritage.

Finding high school students willing to learn traditional folk dances is a challenge in itself, and keeping them interested and committed to improving their art is a task few would take on. Thus the Filipino community of Las Vegas is fortunate indeed to have Amy Rovere, the energetic and endlessly cheerful director of the Philippine Dance Company of Nevada, who does just that, and more.

Amy, a fresh and youthful 45, was raised in the Philippines and learned traditional folk dances there. She toured with a professional troupe for six years in Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa, and has been living in Las Vegas for over 20 years now. During that time she has performed and taught many individuals and groups; her latest troupe is called the Philippine Dance Company of Nevada. Made up of about 15 of the aforementioned high school students, all of Filipino



Girls of the Philippine Dance Company of Nevada perform a village dance with lit candles balanced on their heads.

heritage, the group practices once a week, and more often before a performance.

For this apprenticeship Amy chose two of her gifted dancers, Kim Arche and Yorick Jurani, to work with more closely on special dances. By the fall of 1995, Kim and Yorick had mastered the Tinikling, the Philippine national dance performed while hopping over and between two bamboo poles which are being clapped together. The group was working toward a spring performance, which took place at the end of March, 1996, in a church social hall. For this performance Kim worked hard to learn a dance from the Muslim heritage of the Philippines, a dance called “Singkil” where she portrays a princess moving smoothly and regally through two pairs of crossed bamboo poles. In her gold dress and veil, holding two gold fans, Kim did look every inch the princess. The group has repeated their successful suite of dances several times at the Las Vegas Folklife Festival.

Both Kim and Yorick were born in this country of Filipino parents, and have been studying with Amy for about five years. Both are very proud of their heritage, enthusiastic about learning the dances as a way of carrying on their culture, and eager to share their traditions with others. Their commitment to their studies—Yorick recently started at the University of Nevada Reno—and the usual teenage social scene leave precious little extra time, but the members of the dance company have put in those extra hours for their culture, and their community is the richer for it.

African Dance:

Malick Sow and Abayomi Goodall

“Dance and drum is everyday life. What we do every day, we express it through dance and drum. If you can walk you can dance, if you can talk you can sing.” That is how Malick Sow describes the place of art in his home country of Senegal, in West Africa. Malick was born in 1950 into a griot family in Dakar. He describes a griot as a “living book,” learning and passing on the history of his people through stories and songs. “Those stories, they come from one generation to another, from father to son, from grandfather to grandson. In Africa...we have a big tree we call baobab where all the elders get together and give the word of wisdom. It is up to the young generation to operate those words of wisdom to the community, that’s how it’s passed down.”

Malick began learning traditional dances and drumming from his uncle at the age of four, and went on to form his own dance troupe and later perform with the National Ballet Company of Senegal. For the last ten years or so, he has made frequent trips to the U.S. to perform and teach, which is how he met Abayomi Goodall, a Las Vegas dance teacher with her own African dance company. Abayomi has been studying with various African dance masters for the last 15 years, absorbing the culture behind the dances as well as the actual movements.

In African culture, drums are used to communicate, sending messages between villages, as well as for dances. The dances also communicate, telling stories with the body. Both Abayomi and Malick emphasize the importance of understanding the cultural context of African music and dance. As Malick says, “It is not about the drumming and dancing, it is about the knowledge. You got to know what you’re drumming, you got to know what you’re dancing, what that means. So that meaning makes you live it, and when you live it your expression is moved, your soul lives with it.” Abayomi continues, “You can’t do African music and dance, you can’t perform it without knowing the culture of the people. It’s part of their everyday life. I tell my students, I don’t care if you never learn a dance movement, I really don’t, if you learn the history, if you become a better person, if you get in touch with your ancestors and your culture... that’s good enough for me.”

Fortunately for the people of Las Vegas, Abayomi has learned the movements and is generous in sharing her knowledge and talent. She has formed a group called the Children of the Diaspora African Musical Ensemble and is passing on what she learns from Malick and other African dance masters to the African American community.



Learning the stories behind African dances is as important as the steps themselves; Abayomi Goodall learns at the feet of master Malick Sow.

Abayomi Goodall and Malick Sow go over the steps to a West African dance.



African dance and drum master Malick Sow comes from Senegal, West Africa.



Rawhide Braiding:

Randy Stowell and Hank Brackenbury

The enclosed back porch of the main house on the Geysler Ranch, a place just barely over the Lincoln County line an hour south of Ely, is hung with braided reins and bosals, broken reatas in for repair, and about a hundred feet of inch-wide rawhide strung up to dry. Rancher Randy Stowell clamps a new razor blade in his custom-designed string cutter, then slides the end of long leather strip against a guide and begins pulling it through, slicing off a strip about an eighth of an inch wide.

He works smoothly and steadily, not in a hurry but not wasting any time or motion either, and the thin strings pile up at his feet. In no time he'll be done with his least favorite part, the cutting, and can begin braiding. "I hate cutting string," he says, "that's the most boring part of braiding to me. You cut and cut and cut, and you can't see that you've done anything. Where braiding, you know, you start braiding and then you can see what you're making and it's more exciting, it keeps your interest better." But as with many traditional art forms, preparation of the materials from scratch is part of the job and can't be skipped or skimped if you want a quality end product.

His apprentice Hank Brackenbury, like Randy a native of Elko County, watches intently. "He makes it look so easy," Hank says appreciatively, knowing full well the years of experience that lie behind Randy's deceptively simple craftsmanship. Raised in the buckaroo tradition of northeastern Nevada, Randy has ranched all his life. Through a combination of learning from his father, looking at books, and taking apart old gear to see how it was put together, he has made himself into one of the region's best braiders of cowboy gear. Working in rawhide and leather, Randy makes reins, quirts (short whips), bosals (used around a horse's nose instead of a bit for training), hobbles, reatas (long rawhide ropes), headstalls and other horse gear favored by Nevada cowboys.



Hank Brackenbury at work on his first piece of braided horse gear, under the patient tutelage of master Randy Stowell.



The patience that makes him such a good craftsman also makes Randy a great teacher. He shows Hank how to pull strips of rawhide through the skiver, which shaves the hide to an even thickness, then sets Hank to do it on his own, tossing in helpful hints at just the right time and letting him learn by doing. After Hank has cut his leather into eighth-inch wide strips and beveled the top corners, which makes for a smoother braid, Randy gathers twelve of the strands around a core cut from an old reata and starts the braiding for a bosal, Hank's first project. Braiding twelve strands takes concentration, and it's slow going at first, but with Randy's watchful eye catching mistakes almost before they happen, Hank makes good progress and is well on his way to a finished bosal.

Hank, too, has been around ranching all his life, and knows the value of well-crafted gear. He has done some leather work in the past, mainly making chaps and doing a little saddle repair, but hadn't done much braiding until he worked with Randy. He now runs a small ranch in Rainbow Canyon south of Caliente and does day work for other ranches. Both Hank and Randy say they wouldn't want any other kind of life, for them or for their children, and they look forward to passing on that love of tradition to the next generation.

Randy Stowell makes braiding twelve strands of leather into a bosal look easy.

Shoshone Songs:

Elizabeth Brady and Lois Whitney

Elizabeth Brady once sang Shoshone songs on a drive all the way from Phoenix to Las Vegas, and didn't repeat once. Her daughter Lois Whitney was amazed—she knew her mother came from a strongly traditional family, and that Elizabeth's parents Jerry and Judy Jackson were renowned singers and storytellers, but she hadn't understood the depth of her mother's knowledge until then. Both Elizabeth and Lois were born in Elko, and both have moved around to various parts of northern Nevada before returning to Elko where they now live just a few houses apart. After Lois came back to her hometown in 1990, she became concerned that young Indian people were losing elements of their traditional culture, so she formed an organization called the Native American Consortium of Northeastern Nevada which actively promotes and supports traditional Indian ways.

In a personal attempt to perpetuate Shoshone ways, Lois began studying with her mother to learn some of the many songs Elizabeth remembered from her father. Elizabeth is fluent in Shoshone, and Lois has a working knowledge of the language, but she found that words were often different in their sung forms, and that many songs used older versions of certain words. Most importantly, Elizabeth taught her that the meaning of a song goes much deeper than the words or the story, and includes history, cultural meanings and associations, and connections to many aspects of traditional Shoshone life. One example is a song about the sagehen, whose mating dance is the model for the Shoshone round dance, and which was both hunted for food and respected as an important member of the natural world of which the Shoshone felt a part. As Elizabeth explains,

"This is where the round dance comes in. The sagehens, in March, that's their mating season and they're out in the mountains. They're in a circle before the sun comes up and they all go like this with their wings. It's a beautiful thing to see. There's more to the sagehen than any other song that we have. They do the dancing, that's the round dance."

As part of their apprenticeship Lois also recorded her mother's songs, transcribed them, and translated them. While she feels this is an important step in preserving the

traditions, she also knows that if they are to be part of a living culture they must be passed on from person to person and kept alive by use. "Indian people insist that we carry these songs in our head, that this is our memory bank," Lois says. "This is where we store everything, our dictionary, and that's what Indian people need to maintain." Also, some of the songs can't be recorded because they are sacred or used for doctoring or are the exclusive property of one family, so the only way they will be preserved is through individuals learning them and passing them on to others.

Both Elizabeth and Lois are devoted to the beauty and strength of their Shoshone ways, and are doing what they can to maintain them; in addition to being a singer, Elizabeth is also a maker of willow and buckskin cradleboards. "The most

important part is that we're maintaining a culture here, whether it's singing or whether it's making something," Lois says. Explaining why she took on an apprenticeship with her mother, she adds, "I thought it was necessary because when she's gone no one is going to be singing it. And then we're all gone, we're all lost."



*Elizabeth Brady and
Lois Whitney.*

Shoshone Baskets:

Darlene Dewey and Melanie Bryan

When Darlene Dewey was born in the mid-1940s at Yomba, in the Reese River Valley of central Nevada, the Shoshone natives of the area still lived in tents. Her family didn't move into a house until she was three years old, and even then they spent most of their time outdoors, raising their own food in a garden, hunting, gathering wild plants, and raising cattle. Darlene's daughter Melanie recalls that there wasn't even electricity or running water at Yomba until she was in high school in the 1980s. It's a remote place, and as a consequence Darlene was raised with many traditional skills, among them willow basketry.

She was the youngest of 13 children and something of a tomboy, preferring to be out helping her father with horses and cows, but her mother did teach her how to gather, clean and weave with willows. "She'd make me sit down and say this is how you clean it," Darlene recalls. "She always told us you start something, you finish it. She said don't put it down, just finish it, and that's the way your life's going to be." Melanie heard the same lessons as a child: "They give you a task, and whether it be basketry or whatever, whoever is teaching you, if it was their specialty, they would make you complete it, so that when you got older you wouldn't be lazy, and plus you would know how to do it."

The impetus for this apprenticeship came from Melanie, who has two small children of her own and wanted to be able to pass her culture on to them. "The thing that bothered me was that I couldn't speak my own language," she explains. "And I wanted my kids to be around it and know these things, know how to do the willows and stuff. I wanted my mom to spend time with us. She's always on the go, you know, you can never just make her sit down and this is the only way, otherwise she would have been gone already. When I was little I saw my grandma do it, but I never had the opportunity to really try it. You need to be able to practice with somebody going, 'no, like this,' or 'you pull.' You have to have someone to show you and to teach you how to feel it. I wanted this for my kids, to see that their grandma and I were taking interest in this. And now they're interested. You know, they'll come over and they'll help me, and now they know how to do it."



Small twined basket made by Melanie.

Melanie Bryan (right) singing songs with a group of Head Start children.



Darlene Dewey splitting willows for a cradleboard.

Paiute Cradleboards:

Ivie Garfield and Sharon Barton

A child living on the Ft. McDermitt Reservation in north central Nevada and raised from her earliest days in a willow cradleboard is already learning what it means to be Paiute. She is protected by the buckskin cover laced tight around her like a pair of sheltering arms; she is surrounded by the elements of nature like willow and hide that connect her to her place on the earth; and she is a part of the human community as she is carried where her parents go and propped up on a sofa or against a tree in the midst of adult activity. Both practically and symbolically, the cradleboard is central to Native American identity in the Great Basin.

In her community of McDermitt, Ivie Garfield is acknowledged as a master maker of cradleboards. She has made them for all her children and grandchildren, as well as for many other people in the area. Her mother and grandmother were also artists in willow, and it was from them that Ivie learned. The first basket a newborn gets is boat shaped, and is used for about a month, traditionally a time when mother and child lived in a small dwelling outside the main house and saw no outsiders. Some women still maintain this practice by staying in a separate room in the house, and Ivie and her apprentice Sharon Barton agree that this is easier on both mother and child since they have few distractions. When the baby and mother return to the main house after a month, the child receives its full-size basket. It is made of small willow sticks woven together with split willow strings and attached to a long oval frame of heavy willow. The board is covered with a buckskin or canvas cover that laces up the front to hold the child in. At the top is a shade of very fine willows woven together and decorated with a pattern in yarn that tells whether the baby is a girl or a boy. The shade keeps light out of the baby's eyes, it can protect the child should the board tip over, and a blanket can be draped over it when the baby sleeps.

Both Ivie and Sharon, who is her niece, were born in McDermitt, which is a ranching community on the Oregon border. Ivie has lived there for all of her 77 years.

During the apprenticeship they worked on identifying and gathering the proper willows, cleaning and splitting them, and weaving. Ivie also tans her own deer hides for the covers, something Sharon hasn't taken on yet. One hide will cover one cradleboard, but Ivie has no set pattern she uses. Rather, she fits the particular hide to the frame, paying attention to the grain of the hide and the way it stretches. Ivie says she can remember every person she has made a cradleboard for; for the important part she plays in introducing children to their Paiute Heritage she is certain to be remembered as well.

Ivie Garfield with some of her cradleboards.



Ivie's cradleboards



Cradleboard frames hanging in a willow in Ivie's yard.

Scottish Bagpiping:

John Massie and Wes Hallam

In the hands of a master like John Massie of Las Vegas, the Scottish highland pipes can make a spirit soar, set feet to marching or dancing, lament the death of a loved one, or celebrate the joy of a marriage. For John, the technical execution of blowing and fingering is an important but partial element in learning the notoriously difficult pipes. The rest comes in understanding the history and meaning of the tunes, and expressing them deeply and individually. John's apprentice Wes Hallam puts it this way: "He can communicate the feelings out. If he wants you to dance on the table he can communicate that feeling, you're dancing on the table. If he wants

The Las Vegas Pipe Band performing at the Las Vegas Folklife Festival.



you to cry, you'll cry, and if he wants you to believe that this is the best tune that you've ever heard he can even communicate that to you."

John retired to Las Vegas recently from Los Angeles, where he was the pipe major for the LA Police Pipe Band. He has spent over 50 years learning and perfecting the pipes, starting at age 12 when he began a six-year apprenticeship in his native Scotland. At age 16 he passed the pipe-major's exam at the College of Piping in Glasgow, and he's been a pipe major every since. John is also a senior piping judge for solo and band competitions, and a tough and thorough teacher. "I believe in teaching to be complete," he explains. "You should never just be able to pick up an instrument or a sheet of music and that's as far as it goes. You should

know something of the history of the music, where it came from, how to look after the pipe." John had vowed to retire from teaching when he came to Nevada, but on his first visit with the struggling Las Vegas Pipe Band he couldn't help making a few suggestions, and after that he couldn't leave. "I could take that wee group out



Wes Hallam and John Massie

in a parade tomorrow and I would not be ashamed of them. "They're working hard," he says in his rolling brogue. They meet once a week,

first playing tunes together on practice chanters so they can all play in unison ("in a competition unit, the pipe major is the law") and then playing on the pipes and practicing their marching.

John believes in training pipers for competition as a way to force them to improve, and he expected Wes to compete in the novice category after they had worked together for a year. They worked

on all the traditional types of pipe tunes, including jigs, reels, strathspeys, hornpipes, waltzes, marches, airs and special tunes for weddings and funerals. When discussing his teaching style, John says, "I expect them to work, and if they do work, they'll win. And I'm not nice when I demand something, believe me. I've calmed down since I retired, but I used to fall into the category of the Cursing Pipe Majors of Scotland. I know what I want off of you and there's nothing in between." His prize-winning students are proof that his style works. "When you see these kids coming back with gold medals and you listen to them play, you think, ah that's the way it should be. That brings it back, it's not too bad, I didn't waste my time," he concludes contentedly.

Washoe Baskets:

Jean McNicoll and Jeanne O'Daye

When she first heard of the Apprenticeship Program and the chance to pass on her basketry skills, Jean McNicoll thought long and hard before committing to take on a student—she didn't want just anyone, she wanted someone she knew she could count on to make the most of the opportunity. But she had started teaching her niece Jeanne O'Daye when the younger woman was a teenager, so she knew her heart was in it even though she hadn't been practicing for awhile. "I decided to go for it because our kids weren't learning anything from anybody," Jean explains, "so I thought, well, I'm not going to be around long so I better start sharing so somebody else can learn. And Jeanne was the only one out of everybody that I could think of. She had the interest and she wanted to learn... it's just worked out great."

The two women did accomplish a great deal, going on gathering trips together, working on weaving, and sharing their knowledge with Head Start children and other school kids through classroom visits. "It's really been a fascinating journey for us because we really got into it, and you know when you have this incentive and the wanting to do it, and then the willows pushing you, come on, come on, we really got into it," Jean laughs. And in spending time together they got to share other aspects of the Washoe culture, like stories and songs, and they learned together how to skin a buck and tan the hide the traditional way.

Both women are tremendously energetic, involved in all kinds of activities, but now any spare moments are used for cleaning willows or weaving. "Even if I'm not thinking, those willows just tell me I'd better get busy," says Jean. But without the impetus of the Apprenticeship Program, "I'd still be just looking at them and walking by." For Jeanne, "basket weaving has been the most difficult task I have ever partaken in," but it has given her the confidence to try other new things as well.

What started as an individual apprenticeship turned into a family affair as Jeanne's husband Tyrone, who is Paiute, began weaving his own round baskets along with her. Their two small children play in the willow threads and come along on gathering trips as well. Jeanne says her husband's grandmother is exceptionally proud that he is learning traditional ways, since he was raised as a "town Indian." "It's a great big deal in their family, she says happily. "It makes him walk taller."



A collection of Jean's baskets

The continuity within the family is no accident: "My family taught me everything," says Jean. "When I think about the beauty of our baskets, it is mind-boggling to wonder who created such beauty in a harsh and challenging environment. I feel so proud to be blessed with the gift to weave baskets."



Jean McNicoll and Jeanne O'Daye at the Sierra Folklife Festival in Reno.

Jean McNicoll gathering willows along the Truckee River near Verdi.



Washoe Wincwing Trays:

Norma Smokey and Colleen Hernandez

Norma Smokey comes from a renowned family of Washoe basket makers, and is doing her part to make sure the tradition lives on in her own family by teaching her daughter Colleen Hernandez how to make winnowing trays. "We were around [baskets] all the time when we were growing up, there were baskets everywhere, they had baskets for everything," Norma recalls. "I wanted to do one of these because, you know, you just don't see them anymore, people don't loan them out." She had been taking her aunts Theresa Jackson and JoAnn Martinez (both master artists in the Apprenticeship Program) out gathering willows and started learning to weave from them. With only a few basic lessons and a lot of enthusiasm, she soon became proficient, returning to her aunts occasionally for guidance on the fine points.

Before the weaving can begin, basket makers must gather their willows. In the rapidly developing Carson Valley, where the Washoe people have lived for generations, it is increasingly difficult to find healthy plants not damaged by pollution or pesticides, or fenced off on private property. Norma has found good willows near Woodfords across the California line, and also in Smith Valley. She looks for long, strong willows to make the threads, so they don't break and don't have to be spliced as often. She says she has a tendency to overdo it when she finds a good source, since healthy willows are so rare, and then all the willows must be worked at once because they have to be cleaned and split while they are fresh. Especially when she was first learning, she was so enthusiastic she would work until "her fingerprints wore off." She encouraged Colleen to take it a little easier and just weave a couple of rows a day.



Colleen Hernandez works on her first winnowing tray as her mother Norma Smokey watches.



Norma Smokey with a large cone basket and winnowing tray.

So far Norma has specialized in winnowing baskets and cradleboards. Her daughter's first project was a winnowing tray, which begins with a frame bent out of a branch from a berry bush. Willow sticks are fanned out from the small end and woven together with twined split willows. Additional sticks are added in as the tray gets wider. As the basket nears completion it must be shaped into a concave bowl, which requires a great deal of strength in the hands. Using the basket takes strength and skill, too. The open-weave winnowing basket will be used to roast pine nuts by tossing them with hot coals. The basket must be kept constantly moving to prevent the coals from burning through it, but to many Washoe people there's no other way to do it; roasting pine nuts in the oven just doesn't have the same taste.

When Colleen's first basket is finished, tradition dictates that it be given away to someone. "It's not like I am happy about it," she says, but her mother assures her it's the proper thing to do. And then she can start on her next project, a baby basket.

Paiute-Shoshone Dress Making:

Francine Tohannie, Harriet Allen and Mary Christy

As with many folk artists, Francine Tohannie learned to make dance dresses by picking up a little information here, a little there, watching closely, asking a lot of questions, trying things herself, and learning from her mistakes. She has a natural artistic bent but grew up in the city of Reno without much awareness of her tribal traditions. It was only when she went away to an Indian boarding school in Utah and met students with rich cultural knowledge from other tribes that she became aware of what she was missing, and began making an effort to teach herself.

When Francine begins work on a dance dress, the pattern she uses is only in her head. She has an understanding of how the dress is put together and how it should fit, so she starts with the wearer's measurements and a rough shape, and refines from there. Her apprentices Harriet Allen and Mary Christy had hoped to make buckskin dresses, but they couldn't afford the price of hides (and it takes three hides to make a dress) so they started with fabric—Harriet felt less nervous working with cloth rather than expensive skins for her first attempt anyway. Her green fabric is cut in a simple T shape, then decorated with fabric appliqués in geometric Paiute or floral Shoshone designs. Then she adds decorations of shells, beads, teeth, bones, feathers and other natural materials.

The dress is only the foundation of a dance outfit, however; the completely dressed pow wow dancer will have a shawl (with hundreds of individually sewn strands of fringe around the edge), moccasins and leggings, a belt, wrist cuffs, a necklace and other jewelry, beaded hair ties and barrettes. For a girl or woman to make her own outfit is a sign of great accomplishment

and pride. All three women work with a youth dance group in Fallon, where they live, and hope to be able to teach the kids how to start making their dance outfits.

Francine has quite a collection of her own dance outfits, including a beaded buckskin dress that weighs about 20 pounds, and a jingle dress, decorated with 365 conical tin “jingles” made from tobacco can lids. Many dresses are decorated more heavily on the back than the front, because the front is covered by the dancer's long braids and jewelry. She has also made dance outfits for her son, who is a grass dancer, and for other people in the area. Pow wow dancing is not indigenous to Nevada, but has been brought in from Plains Indian traditions and has become a new tradition among Nevada's tribes. Pow wows are held all across the state, but Francine and Harriet agree that the best place for traditional Great Basin singing and round dancing is at the annual Pine Nut Festival in Schurz in September.

The future of any tradition lies with a community's children. Harriet is the education coordinator for the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe and sees her learning of dressmaking as just one step in a long process that she will pass on to her youngsters. Her own learning is also something she sees as a process, and the apprenticeship has only whetted her appetite to go to more complex projects, like a beaded cape. “We'll be at this for the next ten years,” Francine laughs.



Harriet Allen (left) working on her dance dress with the help of Francine Tohannie.



Francine Tohannie shows a beaded buckskin dress she made.

Paiute Plants:

Ida Mae Valdez, Lillius Richardson and Marlin Thompson

An outing with Ida Mae Valdez, a Paiute woman in her mid-70s, is no stroll in the park. She takes off up a hill looking for petroglyphs or clambers down a stream bank in search of an elusive water plant, and you'll lose her if you're not careful. She thinks nothing of loading up her pickup with tarps, washtubs, and long pruning shears, not to mention her 68-year old sister Lillius Richardson and several granddaughters, and driving out to the Mason Valley Wildlife Refuge near Yerington for a morning gathering buckberries. And her backyard garden keeps her in corn, tomatoes, squash, and beans all summer and then some. Ida Mae is a woman at home in the outdoors, and rich in knowledge and understanding of the wild world that has been passed to her from generations past.

But that connection to the earth and its inhabitants is being lost; even Ida says she knows only a fraction of what her mother knew when the family was growing up in Smith Valley. They lived on wild rabbits, porcupines and fish, domestic chickens, turkeys and pigs, and the cornucopia of wild plants that was used for food and for medicine. The local bands of Nevada's tribes were named for the foods they were associated with, that's how important their tie to a place was. Ida Mae is sharing her knowledge with her sister Lillius and Marlin Thompson, a young man with a keen interest in all the traditions of his Paiute people. When they all gather at Ida's house outside Yerington to look at the plants Marlin has collected and taste some of the traditional foods, the stories and memories come thick and fast.

Sagebrush was made into a poultice to sooth a burn or boiled as a tea for colds, an experience vividly and not always fondly remembered. Ida's niece Clara remembers her grandmother "always had a pan of that sagebrush and the longer it sat, the bitterer it would get. But you never said no to your elders. She would get a couple of tablespoons and just douse it down you. But it seemed to have cleared up that cough." Almost everyone knew the remedies for common ailments and injuries, and knew where to find the right plants, what part of the plant to use, and what time of year to find them. They also knew to ask permission of any wild thing before taking it for human use, and that they had to leave some for the future.



Marlin Thompson and Lillius Richardson with plant samples they have collected.

Marlin has been trying to collect and identify the local plants, comparing them to a list that was compiled in the 1940s, and finding that many of those species can no longer be found. Often Ida Mae and Lillius know only the Paiute name for something, so he has a hard time connecting a plant with its English or scientific name. But the most important thing is that the knowledge of their use is being passed on to at least one member of the younger generation, even though the older women lament the general lack of interest among young people for their heritage and language. Although she herself regrets not learning basketry from her mother, Ida Mae says, "That's how we were raised, so we know a lot of this stuff here. One day when we're gone, this is all going to be forgotten. Our kids don't know, those two girls out there [her granddaughters] don't know...they'll never know. To them it's just weeds." To Ida Mae and Lillius and Marlin those weeds are the source of life.



Ida Mae Valdez cutting branches off a buckberry bush.

Shoshone Wincrowing Trays:

Leah Brady, Arvilla Johnny and Marian Sam

On a cold December afternoon the living room of Elizabeth Brady's house in Elko is alive with laughter and talk and the smell of fresh willow. Old sheets are draped over laps and furniture to catch the willow shavings, and the conversation turns to last month's adventures of looking for willows in nearby Starr Valley. Master weaver Leah Brady, who is Elizabeth's daughter, is visiting from Fallon for a few weeks to teach her older sister Marian Sam and another younger relative, Arvilla Johnny, how to make wincrowing trays. On her first trip to Elko in November, the three went out looking for their willows, which must be gathered between late fall and early spring when the plants are dormant. Leah says they look on mountainsides, because willows growing too close to water will be weak. It will take about 100 willows for the body of the tray, and even more for the threads to weave with.



Arvilla Johnny and Marian Sam work at cleaning and splitting willows.

Willows for the "spokes" of the tray need to have the bark and inner membrane scraped off while they are still fresh. The willows for threads also need to be cleaned and split into thirds right away, making for a busy time right after gathering. The trio is almost finished with their first batch and is planning on going to Ruby Valley the following day to get more. Willows are getting harder to find as more land is fenced and more willows are cut by the highway department or sprayed with pesticides; because they are held in the mouth while being split, sprayed willows can be very dangerous.



Leah Brady with one of her wincrowing trays.

All three women remember their grandmothers weaving, but they never took the time to learn the art themselves until later in life. Leah recalls, "Grandma Alice used to be out in the front yard all the time making baskets. We never even paid attention or nothing to what she was doing, we just kind of ran around the yard. I can remember her working on baskets all the time, and it never interested us. I don't recall anybody even trying to encourage us to watch, it was more like we were in the way. A lot of this went along with the treatment that they had gotten, like at boarding school. [They were told] you need to go to school, that stuff isn't considered important. And now that people are interested it's hard to find anybody to help and show us things. There are a lot of areas where they don't have anybody left to show." Leah made the effort to watch and talk to older women, including her own mother, to learn willow work on her own.

Leah is also an accomplished bead worker, but she finds a very different sense of accomplishment in working with natural materials. As she explains, "Beads are beautiful just strung on a string, you don't even have to do anything to them to make them look pretty. But here you're taking a stick, and you turn that stick into something which is completely different than doing any type of beadwork, or even buckskin, it doesn't have the same feel because you've created something out of a stick. It's hard for people to understand, it's just like clay, you've taken earth and changed it into something, and you end up with a pot that is nothing close to what you started with. And that's how it is with willow, it's just a feel that you're creating something that wasn't there."

Shoshone Beaded Willow Baskets:

Bernadine DeLorme and Linda Johnson-Comas

Traffic on the freeway hums just beyond Bernie DeLorme's backyard at the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony, and the Reno Hilton looms not far to the east, but sitting in the shade on an August afternoon surrounded by willows and beads, we could be a hundred miles and a hundred years away. Bernie comes from an artistic family (her mother Lilly Sanchez was a master in the apprenticeship program and has received a Nevada Governor's Arts Award) and has been weaving round baskets for over 25 years; her apprentice Linda Comas is already a skilled bead worker and has taken to willow work like a duck to water. The two have known each other from the time Linda was growing up across the street from Bernie and her husband Norman, and participated in a youth craft and dance group the DeLormes organized. Linda learned back then the value of tradition and the importance of doing things with care and quality, and has carried those lessons with her ever since.

Bernie has some of her work out on the card table where they are working. There are simple round willow baskets, a few inches in diameter and decorated with dark designs made from devil's claw, and some extremely tiny ones, covered with beads the size of grains of sand. The most spectacular is about ten inches in diameter and eight inches high, decorated with cobalt blue and orange beads depicting three rows of circling butterflies. It recently won the best of show award at the annual Wa-She-Shu-It-Deh Native American Festival at Lake Tahoe, and deservedly so. Linda also has some of her beadwork with her, like belts, hair ties and beaded bottles, and her artistic eye is also evident. Both women say they are never sure how a piece will turn out when they start. Sometimes a round basket turns out oval, or one row of beaded butterflies metamorphoses into three. Linda likes to start with one color of beads and see what works; Bernie has dreamed of beadwork designs, or used colors she recalls from a sunset.

Just as the world around them is fodder for the imagination, the ordinary objects of life are also available as basket making tools if you know how to look at them. Bernie uses a dart as an awl for making holes between her basket coils so she can push the split willow threads through. She gave

Linda a jar lid punched with various size nail holes—it is used to pull the threads through to make them all the same size. And Bernie wears a heavy work glove on her left hand as she splits the bark off her willows instead of wrapping her fingers in rags as her elders used to do.

It's traditional for a first basket to be given away as a gift, so Linda gave her first one to her 19-year-old daughter for Christmas. As she explains, they were having some difficulties at the time. And Linda used the basket as a lesson. "We were going through a really bad time and she's going to do what she's going to do and mom don't know anything, and she was just driving me up the wall. I gave her my first one, and I told her, you see, I didn't know what I was doing, but I kept going on and going on with it and not really knowing what I was doing, but it still came out looking halfway decent. Being real blind at doing something like that, but to still make it work. And I said I need you to understand that that's something that you could do in your life, no matter how many times you mess up, you can always straighten yourself up, start over, learn something from that."



Linda Johnson-Comas (left) and Bernie DeLorme work on baskets; Linda's beadwork and Bernie's baskets are on the table.



Bernie DeLorme coils and wraps her split willows.

Paiute Buckskin Tanning:

Wesley Dick and Donald Hicks

In an unusual apprenticeship where the master was half the age of the apprentice, Wesley Dick taught Donald “Ike” Hicks the art of traditional Paiute and Shoshone hide tanning. Both men live in Fallon, where Wesley was raised and where Ike has now retired. Ike’s father was Shoshone from central Nevada, and his mother was Paiute from Schurz. He grew up ranching, worked in Carson City for many years, and is now at his mother’s old place keeping a few cows and horses and raising some hay. Wesley has been tanning hides for 15 years, and hasn’t found many young people interested in learning the time-consuming and messy process, but Ike has the time and interest. The two have hunted together in the past, although for this apprenticeship they had to buy deer hides from a friend in Owyhee.

On a warm April day at Ike’s place east of Fallon on the Stillwater reservation, he has deer hides in several stages of preparation. A large metal tank holds some fresh hides soaking in water, where they will stay for four to six days until the hair comes off easily. Ike hangs a wet hide over a smooth horizontal log beam and scrapes the flesh and hair off with a drawknife, a long slightly-curved blade with handles at both ends so it can be pulled toward the user. The next step in the process is to rub brains into the hide, which is the actual tanning process and leaves the skin soft and white.

Ike Hicks scrapes the hair off a deer hide in preparation for tanning.



Traditionally deer brains were used, but nowadays Ike has to get beef brains from the local butcher shop. As he spreads the wet hide on a table and begins working the brains into it, he says, “I should be singing.” There are traditional songs used in the tanning process, acknowledging the gift of the animal for human use, but Ike never learned them from his elders after he went away to boarding school.

After the hide is covered with the brains it is hung up to dray, and then soaked again in water to get the smell out. The brains are rinsed out, and then the real work begins – pulling the hide over the end of a smooth log set in the ground, to dry and soften it. Ike reports that Wesley told him it takes a thousand pulls to get a hide done. This is laborious work, hard on the hands and the back, but it results in an exceptionally soft and white hide that can be used for dresses, cradleboard covers, moccasins, gloves and other traditional elements of Paiute and Shoshone costumes. Hides are often smoked over wood chips to give them a golden color, but are usually left white if they are made into dresses. Ike also uses raw hides, those that are not tanned, to make drums.



Ike Hicks

Polish Wycinanki:

Frances Drwal and Barbara Lierly

With the simplest of materials and tools—paper and scissors—Polish folk artists have for generations been creating intricate and colorful multi-layered paper cuts called *wycinanki*. According to Frances Drwal, a wycinanki artist living near Chicago, the tradition is in danger of being lost in the old country, but a few Polish-Americans are carrying it on in their new homeland. Frances' mother was born in Poland, and Frances was raised, and still lives, in a heavily Polish neighborhood southwest of Chicago. She first saw the colorful paper cuts while studying Polish language and history in Poland, and her first reaction was, "How can anybody do that, all those curlicues, it must take a lot of learning. I found it was surprisingly easy, it just takes time."

Frances did take the time, and brought her new-found skill back to Chicago with her. She began offering Polish language classes through a community education program, and when her students asked for more information on Polish culture, she offered her first class in wycinanki. That got her noticed, and she has gone on to teach with an organization called Urban Gateways in Chicago, offering classes to school children and teachers, adults and senior citizens, for libraries, community centers, museums and festivals. She has also published a book of traditional wycinanki designs from various regions of Poland.

Barbara Lierly also grew up in Illinois, a second-generation Pole, but now lives and teaches high school art in Las Vegas. She met Frances through her mother—both women are members of a Chicago Polish organization—and approached her about an apprenticeship. Barbara's mother is from Poland, but Barbara wasn't raised with much in the way of Polish traditions, other than food and holiday celebra-

tions, and she didn't learn the language. She remembers her parents having some paper cuts in the house, but she had never tried the art herself until she started working with Frances. Barbara went to Chicago in August at the beginning of the apprenticeship and Frances showed her the basics of folding and cutting paper to create designs so she could go home and work on her own. By the time Frances made a trip to Las Vegas the following January, Barbara says she "saw quite a progression" in her work. Barbara has also been teaching her art students the techniques, and invited Frances to her classroom while she was in town.

Most of the patterns are of designs from nature such as animals, birds, and flowers, and they often start with a black background and then build up elements out of different colored paper. Polish farm families used them to decorate their houses, although more recently they have been made for sale to outsiders. Barbara says of the teacher, "The one thing that she really emphasized was anyone can do this process. It does not take any real special person, all it takes is a pair of scissors and some paper and some dedication. You don't have to draw, you don't have to paint, all you have to do is cut."

(above) Polish **Wycinanki** by Barbara Lierly
Barbara Lierly

Frances Drwal working with Barbara Lierly's art students.



Paiute Songs:

Wesley Jim and Marlin Thompson

Wesley Jim was born at Pyramid Lake 76 years ago, and as he walks the lake shore today he can recall the fishing and bird hunting parties of his youth when people would gather from miles around to share the work of providing food for their families. With cooperative labor they could accomplish more than any family could alone, and in the evenings they could share songs and stories around the campfires and return home with news and tales for the nights ahead.

Wesley says he just had an ear for the songs he heard from his grandfather, and they have remained with him to this day. “One thing I’ve grown up with,” he says, “is I noticed my grandfather, when he would go fishing, before he’d ever push his boat in the water, he’d first go to the edge of the water, then he’d kneel down, then he’d pray. He’s thankful for the water that’s there, and he’s saying, ‘I want to go fishing, so don’t be rough. I’m just going out to get what I want.’ Then when he comes back, after he gets whatever he’s going out after, he brings it back and then he prays again, he thanks the water and our super being for all that, what he got. So that’s what I’ve come to know as I was growing up.” Wesley has also picked up more songs over the years as he moved from Pyramid Lake to Carson City to attend the Stewart Indian School, and then to Schurz, where he has lived since 1950.

Wesley’s apprentice is Marlin Thompson, of Yerington, who has a deep interest in learning and preserving his Paiute heritage. He had another apprenticeship a few years earlier with Manuel McCloud, a singer from Schurz, who Wesley acknowledges as a true master, “our teacher.” Marlin did not grow up learning the Paiute language, but is making rapid gains now through the songs and stories. He makes a point of asking questions about everything, what a song means and where it comes from, so he can pass on the history as well as the tale.

There are few places or occasions anymore where the oral traditions of Nevada’s Native people can be heard or learned. Marlin and Wesley agree that the Pine Nut Festival in Schurz in September is where you’re most likely to find the few

remaining singers. Wesley says the festival is reminiscent of the fandangos that used to bring together people from all over the state for days of celebration—the Fourth of July and the time between Christmas and New Year’s were the largest of these. People came to Pyramid Lake from as far away as Duckwater and McDermitt, so there was more interchange between tribes even than today.

Most of the songs Wesley knows are about animals, nature and early people, and even the smallest observation can lead to a song. “Oh, maybe they see a pool of water, a pond,” he reminisces, “and they see these bugs crawling around on the surface, you know they make up songs like that about those...whatever comes to them, that’s how they make it up.” He then proceeds to sing the song about the bugs on the water. Recently Wesley has been working with a group of children to teach them songs and stories, and to take them out into nature where the songs originate. As Marlin says, “The young kids, the ones they teach now, they can pick it up fast, and they can sit there and sing it, and they carry it on wherever they go. Even though they’re only eight, nine years old, they can go somewhere and sing that song and people hear it and say, ‘Wow! She learned that.’ So that’s really good there, I think.”



*Wesley Jim and Marlin Thompson
on the shore of Pyramid Lake.*

Native American Star Quilts:

Edna Mae Johnson and Karen Wahwasuck

A number of elements of Native American culture combine in the tradition of the star quilt. Although quilts were obviously incorporated into Indian culture after contact with Europeans, and the star quilt design in particular seems to have come to the Great Basin from the Plains tribes, the tradition of hand crafts, the love of colors and textures, and the incorporation of quilts into the social structure are all aspects of Nevada's indigenous culture that blend well with this non-indigenous craft.

Edna Mae Johnson of Reno recalls seeing star quilts in Montana over 20 years ago and immediately wanting to learn how they were made. With the help of her sister and a book that provided a blank star design she could color in, she taught herself how to quilt, and has been at it ever since. She can piece a simple star without a pattern now, she's done it so often,

but for more complicated designs like eagles, war bonnets, or teepees she still draws it out ahead of time. The eight-pointed stars are made up of diamond-shaped fabric pieces, with the colors radiating out from the center in rings of graduated light and dark fabric.

Karen Wahwasuck, Edna's apprentice, was an expert bead worker and seamstress, but had had previous difficulty trying to make a star quilt. "I did make one a long time ago, and it came out awful," she laughs. "It came out with five points, and it looked like a Chinese hat in the middle. I couldn't get it to lie down right. Me, I have trouble comprehending reading out of a book, and I couldn't understand it. I need somebody to show me how to do it, because if somebody shows me how to do something instead of telling me, I can do it. So anyway, I showed Edna that one I'd made, and

she told me what I was doing wrong. My diamonds in the first place weren't even all the right sizes, they were all different sizes, and I didn't pay attention to where I sewed. So anyway, I finally got it. Got it now.

The concept of sharing and giving away things is very strong in Native American cultures. The first basket a person makes, for example, is supposed to be given away, and quilts and other hand-crafted items are valued gifts for ceremonies called give-aways. These are held



Edna Mae Johnson and Karen Wahwasuck hold one of Edna's star quilts.

Karen explains. "Edna makes a lot of quilts for give-aways and memorials and stuff like that. She's really helped us, because one of the grandpas died two years ago, and we had a memorial for him and she made a lot of the quilts, and that's when I decided I wanted to try, I wanted to learn how to make a quilt. Because when he passed away, we needed to have something to give away for all the people who helped us. It's better to make it than to buy it, 'cause your time is really important, so when you honor somebody it's better that it's made by you or your family member. It's more important that way. So that was the main reason why I wanted to learn to make quilts."

to honor community members for various reasons. Usually the person or people being honored are the ones doing the giving of gifts; for instance, after someone dies, their family will give gifts to those who have helped them in their time of trouble. "The main reason I wanted

to learn how to make quilts was because of, like Edna does,"

Scottish Bagpiping:

John Massie and Wes Hallam

Scottish pipe major John Massie and his apprentice Wes Hallam, both of Las Vegas, worked together for a second year in the apprenticeship program to help Wes progress to more technically difficult tunes and techniques. Wes entered several competitions in the novice category after his first year of intensive study, and says they were good experiences, if only for the things he learned from his mistakes. John says he practiced too much just before one contest, and his reeds got wet and “died on him.” “You can’t expect to walk in and win your first time,” John says philosophically.

“Eventually when you’re reasonably seasoned the pipe becomes an extension of your own body,” he continues. “You never feel that you’re playing pipes. And that takes a long while to develop, it really does. A lot of practice, somebody telling you what to watch for, it doesn’t come natural. You hear some of these people say, ‘Oh, I’m, self taught,’ and as soon as they say that, oh, I wince, don’t tell me that. Because it’s not an instrument that you can learn yourself properly. It’s got a history, it’s got a lot of pride. It’s a difficult instrument to play and master, no arguments about that.”

This year John has moved Wes to what he calls “heavier-weighted” tunes, with more complex structures and fingering. He lets the student select the tunes he wants to learn. “I play them and then what he does, he selects one, and if I think he’s capable of handling that particular piece then that’s the one he’ll get. If I feel it’s a wee bit too heavy for him, then we’ll give him something in between to build up to that particular level, then we’ll do it. You find, it’s the same with anything, that if you like that particular piece of music, you’ll learn it a lot quicker. If you find yourself a piece of music you don’t like, then you start to fight it, and you never learn it properly, ‘cause you don’t want to play it. The same as anything else.” It’s a simple but effective and long-proven theory of teaching.

*John Massie and Wes Hallam
play on their practice chanter.*

Just learning to breathe properly in playing the pipes is an art in itself. And breathing techniques for the practice chanter, an oboe-like instrument, and the full pipes are completely different because the pipes require control of both the lungs and the arm. According to John, “When you go to the pipe, it’s got to be a controlled breathing, it’s not just you take a great big breath and you blow up the bag. That arm comes down while you’re taking your breath, and to maintain the pressure on the four reeds that are sounding [the chanter and three drones], you’ve got to blow them back up again. That’s what we call erratic blowing, if you’ve taken a big deep breath and you’re blowing it and your arm’s moving up and down, first thing that happens, your drones go out. Instead of getting a steady hum, you get wavering. If you blow too easy, then it stops and goes flat. So the blowing the bag is quite a high percentage of the sound.

Wes surely has years more of learning on the pipes, a fact he rationalizes with an old saying, “seven years to a piper and seven generations to a master.” John laughs, “that’s an apprenticeship and a half!”

John Massie



Filipino Rondalla Music:

Lyn Perry, Gloria Fosgate and Katrina Opena

Lyn Perry organized and directed a rondalla orchestra for seven years in the Philippines, and she missed the music when she moved to Las Vegas in 1985. So in 1994, with three students, she started the Las Vegas Rondalla Orchestra, which has since grown to 12 members, ranging in age from 8 to 60. The rondalla is a Filipino string orchestra which developed after the introduction of the Spanish guitar to the Philippine Islands. Local musicians and artisans developed several other related guitar-like instruments, and Spanish friars provided instruction so that eventually there was a large population of trained amateur players. From this pool evolved the modern-day rondalla group. According to Lyn, the popularity of rondalla music had faded for awhile, but is now being revived in schools, and she learned to play the instruments when she studied for a music teaching degree.

In addition to the guitar, her group uses two uniquely Filipino instruments, the bandurria and octavina. The octavina looks much like a small guitar, with a shorter neck, and the bandurria looks rather like a mandolin, with a pear-shaped body. Unlike the guitar, however, both instruments have 14 strings, grouped in six sets (three sets of three strings, two sets of two, and a single string), and tuned in intervals of fourths. All the instruments are played with a pick. A tremendous range of music is played by rondalla groups, from traditional Filipino tunes to western classics such as Bach to Broadway show tunes and dance music.



Lyn Perry, Gloria Fosgate and Katrina Opena

During this apprenticeship Lyn worked with two members of her group more intensively, to help them advance faster—Gloria Fosgate, whose son was one of the original orchestra members, and Katrina Opena, a twelve-year-old who has been playing since she was nine. Gloria also played music when she was growing up in the Philippines, and as she attended rehearsals with her son she realized that she'd like to start playing again, too, so she took up the bandurria. Katrina plays the octavina, which is tuned one octave lower than the bandurria, but shares the melody with it. As Lyn explains, "There should be two playing, because the rondalla music, the melody goes from the bandurria to the octavina, goes back to the bandurria. It goes from one instrument to another, just like a choir. If it is only the bandurria then it's not a complete music, you will only be hearing one half of it, like that, but if there is the octavina then that completes it."

As far as Lyn knows, hers is the only rondalla group in Nevada, and she struggles with little money and only volunteer time to keep it going. But parents like Gloria who want their American-born children to know music of their heritage, and who miss it themselves, give Lyn the incentive to pursue her talent and her dream.



Lyn Perry (third from left) with the Las Vegas Rondalla Orchestra.

Acknowledgements

The Nevada Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program was established in 1988 by Blanton Owen, the first Folk Arts Program Coordinator of the Nevada Arts Council. He wrote a successful grant to the Folk Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts to support four apprenticeships, planned and publicized the program, and set up the structure for funding, documentation and public education that we still use today. Blanton served the state from 1985 to 1990, then went on to work as a consulting folklorist and fieldworker around the west. He died in a plane crash in 1998, but he left a permanent legacy in this program that allows the artistic legacies of Nevada's traditional communities to live on. This publication is dedicated to Blanton's memory, and to the memory of two artists in the program who also left this place richer than they found it—Manuel "Popeye" McCloud, a Paiute singer and elder from the Walker River Reservation in Schurz, and Steve Kane, a young apprentice Paiute singer from Reno.

The staff of the Nevada Arts Council over the years has been extraordinarily supportive of folk arts apprenticeships, starting with former Executive Director Bill Fox, who oversaw the initiation of the program. Current Director Susan Boskoff has enthusiastically supported its growth, saw to it that funds were found for the program after NEA Folk Arts money disappeared, advocated for the growth of the Folk Arts Program staff, and championed the exhibit and catalog celebrating the apprenticeships' first ten years. Staff members Cheryl Miglioretto and Sharon Prather have been there the whole time to lend a hand when needed, and contract folklorists and fieldworkers Eliza Buck, Russell Frank, Jeanne Johnson, Nicholas Vrooman, and Lesley Williams have connected us with new communities and artists who have become participants in the program.

Thanks are due to a number of folklorists from the Western region who have served a review panels for the Apprenticeship Program for its first ten years; they are Carol Edison, Lore Erf, Dana Everts-Boehm., Debbie Fant, Anne Hatch, Jens Lund, Chris Martin, Bob McCarl, Craig Miller, Warren Miller, Nancy Nusz, Ronna Lee Sharpe, Dave Stanley, Elaine Thatcher, and Nicholas Vrooman. NAC Council members who have chaired those panels are Kathie Bartlett, Thelma Calhoun, Don Clark, Robin Greenspun, Neldon Mathews, Dennis Parks, Roger Thomas, Wayne Tanaka, and Angie Wallin.

The Nevada Folk Arts Apprenticeship program would not be possible without the leadership and financial support of the National Endowment for the Arts. The NEA's Folk Arts Program established apprenticeships in the folk and traditional arts as a model for encouraging and preserving these arts as a living heritage, passed from person to person and hand to hand. Nevada's apprenticeships have always been funded by the state and the NEA, first through their Folk and Traditional Arts Program, and currently through the State Partnership Program. The staff of the NEA's Folk Arts Program (past and present), especially Bess Lomax Hawes, Dan Sheehy and Barry Bergey, have been champions and friends of our work from the beginning, and we thank them.

Most of all, we thank the extraordinary traditional artists of Nevada, whether they have roots here that go back generations or they arrived in the state just a few years ago. The Apprenticeship Program is for them, their ancestors and elders, their children and grandchildren, their friends and communities. And it is for us, their neighbors and fellow Nevadans.

Written by Andrea Graham, except for the 1888-89 apprenticeship text, written by Blanton Owen.

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716 North Carson Street, Suite A
Carson City, NV 89701
775.687.6680
nac.nevadaculture.org