The Virginia Foundation and the Virginia Folklife Program are sponsoring the Piedmont Guitarists Tour, with ten performances statewide between October 1992 and May 1993.

VFH announces 15 new program grants totalling $103,070.

Recent Foundation grants have supported two important new exhibits on Virginia's Folklife Traditions.

Filmmaker and VFH project director Priscilla Coudaux writes movingly about the immigrant experience.

VFH acknowledges the support of recent patrons and contributors.
The Piedmont Guitar Tradition
VFH Sponsors Piedmont Guitarists Tour

Through the Piedmont Guitarists Tour, the Virginia Folklife Program of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities is providing audiences throughout the state with an opportunity to hear first-hand the leading representatives of a major American folk music tradition. The Tour is sponsored jointly by VFH and the Virginia Commission for the Arts, with funding provided by the Folk Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts and the Ruth Mott Fund. A Tour schedule appears below. For further information, contact Garry Barrow, Tour Director.

The Musicians

John Cephas—who will be performing with harmonica virtuoso Phil Wiggins, his long-time partner—is the world's foremost performer of Piedmont blues. A winner of the NEA's prestigious National Heritage Fellowship award in 1989, Cephas' mastery of the instrument is well matched by his clear and soulful voice. Wiggins' adept and energetic harmonica perfectly complements Cephas' singing and playing, making their renditions of classic and original blues an unparalleled musical experience.

John Jackson, another National Heritage Fellow (1986), is a master of finger-style guitar picking, and more of a songster than a bluesman. His repertory of rags and reels, blues ballads, early country blues, and country and gospel music reflects the diverse kinds of music that was made by his family and friends in rural Rappahannock County, where he was born in 1924.

Daniel Womack, born in Pittsylvania County on Christmas Eve, 1904, now makes his home in Roanoke, and—having renounced the blues—dedicates his musical talents to the spirituals and early styles of gospel music he grew up with in the twenties and thirties. Not only does he recall and play a variety of rare tunes from his childhood, Daniel is also a master storyteller, and one of a very few traditional mouthbow players.

Turner and Lynn Foddrell's brand of blues and "pre-blues" music represents a regional variation on the Piedmont style from the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains, bearing the imprint of fiddle-tunes and dance music Turner heard his father and other relatives playing at country dances in and around Patrick County fifty years ago. Turner performs with his son Lynn, who carries on the family tradition while blending the older styles with some musical reflections of his own generation.

Schedule of Performances

Saturday, October 17, 1992
Fork Union, Virginia
Fluvanna County Department of Community Programs
Central Elementary School, 7:00

Sunday, October 18, 1992
Dillwyn, Virginia
Buckingham County Arts Council
Dillwyn Elementary School, 3:30

Sunday, December 13, 1992
Richmond, Virginia
Central Virginia’s Public Broadcasting Studios of WCVE/WHJ, 3:00

Tuesday, February 23, 1993
Dublin, Virginia
New River Community College
Richardson Auditorium, 7:00

Friday, February 26, 1993
Roanoke Virginia
Harrison Museum of African American Culture
Henry Street Music Center, 7:00

Sunday, February 28, 1993
Winchester, Virginia
Kurtz Cultural Center
Kurtz Building, 3:00

Thursday, April 15, 1993
Whitesburg, Kentucky
Appalshop
Appalshop Theatre, 7:30

Saturday, April 17, 1993
Washington, Virginia
Rappahannock Association for Arts and Community
The Theatre at Washington, 7:30

Saturday, May 8, 1993
Covington, Virginia
Allegheny Highlands Arts Council
Covington High School, 8:00

Sunday, May 9, 1993
Independence, Virginia
Grayson County Folk Music Society
1908 Courthouse, 7:30
Foundation Awards New Grants Totalling $103,070

At its November 1992 meeting, the Virginia Foundation awarded 15 grants to support the following humanities programs in Virginia:

**Booker T. Washington National Monument, Hardy** — $3,000.
Funds to support research and script development for an original play on the competing social philosophies of Booker Washington and W.E.B. DuBois.

**Center for the Liberal Arts, Charlottesville** — $6,500.
A two-week summer seminar for teachers, recruited from throughout the state, on the role of masks and folktales as vehicles of cultural influence, with a focus on their use in contemporary theatre.

**Shenandoah Shakespeare Express and James Madison University, Harrisonburg** — $14,000.
A two-week summer seminar for teachers on new ways of teaching Shakespeare through "performance studies" in addition to the reading and exegesis of texts.

**Ki Theatre, Washington, Va.** — $5,000.
A series of four performance-discussion programs on the relationship between an artist’s native culture and his or her creative work, featuring artists and scholars from four widely differing cultures.

**The Senior Center, Charlottesville,** $1,500.
A series of five weekly lecture-discussion programs on immigration and ethnic diversity in the U.S.

**Yorktown Victory Center, Yorktown** — $5,000.
A five-part lecture-discussion series, focusing on the untold stories of the American Revolution — its impact on the lives of women, African and Native Americans, and "ordinary" people who shaped and were shaped by its events.

**The Chrysler Museum, Inc., Norfolk** — $8,000.
A panel discussion, 21 outreach programs, and a series of on-site interpretive tours designed to explore the roles of women, Jewish Americans, and African Americans in 18th century Norfolk.

**Northern Virginia Regional Humanities Council, Falls Church** — $4,200.
A panel discussion program on cultural diversity in Northern Virginia, featuring a diverse group of panelists, mostly first and second generation immigrants, emphasizing personal narratives of immigration and cultural encounter.

**Piedmont Humanities Council, Drake’s Branch** — $9,370.
A total of 28 book discussion programs, four in each of the seven public libraries in the PHC’s service region, focusing on the works of Virginia mystery writers.

**Piedmont Virginia Community College, Charlottesville** — $5,000.
Funds to support two related conferences on American women and World War II, part of a larger series to commemorate the War’s 50th anniversary.

**Monacan Indian Tribal Association, Monroe** — $5,000.
Funds to develop site, collection, and interpretive plans for a Monacan Indian Tribal Museum.

**Museum of American Frontier Culture, Staunton** — $2,150.
A four-part lecture-discussion series on the theme, "Exploring Virginia’s English Heritage."

**Appalshop, Inc., Whitesburg, Ky.** — $6,150.
A one-day symposium, extensive interviews, and radio programming on the presentation of Appalachian history through two well-known dramas, *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* and *Red Fox, Second Hanging.*

**Greater Reedville Association, Inc., Reedville** — $23,000.
Funds to support production and circulation of a travelling exhibit on the occupational traditions of the watermen and women of Virginia’s Northern Neck.

**School of Nursing, University of Virginia, Charlottesville** — $5,200.
Funds to plan a travelling exhibit on the history of public health services in Virginia, emphasizing the role of nurses in the development and maintenance of the state’s public health system.
VFH Supports Two New Exhibits on Virginia’s Folklife Traditions

Recent VFH program grants have supported two important new exhibits on aspects of Virginia’s varied and complex folklife tradition. One of these, on Blue Ridge Folk Music Instruments and Their Makers, opened during the Summer of 1992 and is on display through February at the Blue Ridge Institute of Ferrum College. The other, an exhibit on the occupational traditions of the watermen and women of Virginia’s Northern Neck, is scheduled to open in May of 1993 at the Reedville Fisherman’s Museum in Reedville. Each of these exhibits offers its viewers insights into a distinctive and highly developed cultural tradition in which life, livelihood, artistic expression and the bonds of human community are inseparable. Further information on these exhibits can be obtained from the sponsoring institutions (see below).

Blue Ridge Folk Music Instruments and Their Makers

The rich tradition of musical instrument making in Virginia’s southern Blue Ridge is illustrated and explored in this impressive exhibit of more than 60 banjos, fiddles, dulcimers, guitars, mandolins, and autoharps – all made by local resident craftsmen from the early 1800s to the present. This tradition has thrived in an equally rich and expressive musical environment, in the region that includes Floyd, Franklin, Roanoke, Patrick, Bedford, Grayson, Botetourt, and Carroll Counties, each of which is represented by instruments in the exhibit. Likewise, the works of 46 craftspeople (many still living) are represented, with special attention given to the influence of three of the area’s best-known instrument-making families: the Meltons, the Creeds, and the Hashes.

Each instrument reflects the tastes and talents added by its maker to a traditional Blue Ridge form, Thus, many of the instruments are personalized and embellished with elaborate inlays of wood veneer, mother of pearl, and metal: one group of fiddles features carved peg heads in the shapes of animals. The exhibit also includes a number of unusual designs – a heart-shaped banjo, a “double dulcimer,” and a copper fiddle.

The staff of the Blue Ridge Institute conducted extensive field research in preparation for the exhibit, and a handsomely illustrated catalogue containing scores of photographs and interpretative essays by three nationally-recognized scholars of traditional instrument making is scheduled for publication in February 1993. Essayists include Professor L. Allen Smith of Simmons College, Professor Robert B. Winans of Gettysburg College, and Dr. Alan Jabbour, Director of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress.

Subsequent to its display at Ferrum, which will end on February 28, 1993, the exhibit will travel to the William King Arts Center in Abingdon (July - October 1993); to the Hand Workshop in Richmond (January - March 1994); and to the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum in Williamsburg (April - September 1994). All dates are tentative. For further information about the exhibit and its travel schedule, contact Roddy Moore, Director, Blue Ridge Institute of Ferrum College, Ferrum, Virginia 24088 (Phone: 703-365-4416).

Reedville Watermen’s Exhibit

In March of 1991, the VFH awarded a grant to the Greater Reedville Association to support research, documentation, and planning for a travelling exhibit on the occupational
traditions of the watermen and women of Virginia's Northern Neck. This work involved 29 taped interviews with 34 watermen and women, totalling approximately 45 hours; extensive photographic documentation, including more than 4,000 new original photographs in black and white and color; consultation with scholars, selection of photographs, and writing and editing of the exhibit text.

Results included a stunning visual record of the watermen’s lives and traditions; impressive oral histories that are eloquent, funny, informative, and often profound; and gracefully written interpretive copy for the exhibit, including scores of quotations from the oral histories: in short, the raw material for a solidly researched, visually engaging, provocative, and accessible exhibition. In November, VFH awarded a second grant, of $23,000 for exhibit production.

The exhibit, scheduled for completion in May of 1993, will focus on the Region’s four major fishing traditions — pound net fishing, crabbing, menhaden fishing, and oystering — and on the related expressive and material traditions of net mending, boat building, and chantey singing. Two copies will be produced, — one for initial circulation to five sites in the Northern Neck and permanent display at the Reedville Fisherman’s Museum in Reedville; the other for circulation throughout the state by the Foundation’s Media Resource Service. The exhibit, together with the oral history tapes and photographs not included in the 14-panel display, will thus become a permanent resource for scholars and public audiences, in the Northern Neck region and beyond, a moving and provocative record of a way of life that is now under extreme stress and may soon disappear.

For further information on this exhibit, contact Jan Shriver, Project Director, Reedville Waterman’s Project, P.O. Box 127, Reedville, Va. 22539 (Phone 804-453-4188).

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**Foundation Issues New Guidelines for Grant Applications**

The Virginia Foundation has recently issued revised guidelines for grant program applications, reflecting new VFH administrative requirements as well as broader definitions of the Grant Program and its goals that we have been developing for some time.

The new guidelines are effective October 1, 1992 and should be used after that date by all applicants for Discretionary, Media Center, and Regular-Cycle Program grants.

New Supplements covering Film and Video and Summer Seminar grants are also available. (Note: These guidelines do not apply to fellowships). Organizations who are considering an application should write the VFH to obtain copies of the new guidelines. Those eligible to apply for VFH program grant support include public and private non-profit organizations and educational institutions in Virginia and, to a limited extent, out-of-state organizations whose projects have a direct relationship to Virginia and a significant Virginia audience.

As always, staff is available to assist prospective applicants in any way possible. Please contact us if you have questions or would like to discuss a new project idea.

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*A selection of carved fiddle beads from the Blue Ridge Instruments and Their Makers exhibit at Ferrum College’s Blue Ridge Institute.*

Photo courtesy of Blue Ridge Institute.
Holding On While Letting Go
Thoughts on the Immigrant Experience in Virginia
by Priscilla Coudoux

One of my most visceral memories, because it involves food, is of a courtly North Vietnamese colonel and his wife who would invite us, even the children, to tea. Mme Nam always made special French style butter pirouette cookies for these occasions, and sent us home with a large tin of them. To this day, the sight or smell of a pirouette reminds me of her.

A couple of years ago, my mother asked me to critique a vignette she had written about Col. Nam and his wife. Her story told how my parents were once, long in advance, invited to dine with the Nams. Upon arriving at their home, they were ushered into a small courtyard and seated at a round table. There were no other guests. My mother noticed an unusual fragrance but thought little of it since Saigon was filled with exotic odors. After a wonderful Vietnamese meal, special because they usually served French food, Col. Nam brought a large, beautiful plant over to the table. Candles were lit, cognac and jasmine tea served. As they sat in a comfortable silence, the lily flower slowly unfolded, filling the room with its perfume. After some moments, Col. Nam rose, bowed over my mother's hand and said good-night. A week later, his bullet-filled body was found in the Saigon River.

Rather recently, I met an older Vietnamese gentleman at a conference in Charlottesville. He spoke, very movingly, of what it means to lose one's homeland, to spend ten years in reeducation and come here at the age of sixty and start all over. After his presentation, we began to talk, about his family, my having lived in Saigon, my marriage to a Vietnamese. I told him my mother's story of Col. Nam, omitting the ending. When I finished, he stood silently for a time, probably not longer than thirty seconds but long enough for me to wonder if I had been wrong to impose my memory on his solitude. Finally, he bowed, as the Vietnamese do, and said "I can not believe, and I am very happy, that you have understood my culture so well".

Being an immigrant, and more particularly a refugee, is a constant search for empathy and understanding in a milieu which all too often refuses the least gesture in that direction. I use the word refugee deliberately, to evoke an experience which, for all its similarity, is far different from that of an immigrant. "Refugee", a banal word perhaps, hackneyed from overuse in a world where images of refugees are a constant on the evening news. "Refugee" to flee, to escape, to seek refuge, is in Lao "khun Ope pa Noke

"The refugee experience is one of marginality, of constantly tacking back and forth between two worlds. It is rooted in loss..."
people who flee great danger. The involuntary nature of the refugee experience is in many ways its essence, prompting dreams of a return home, inhibiting acculturation, provoking mental distress. To be a refugee is to grieve, sometimes quietly, sometimes violently. In the process of planning an emigration, the emigre is allowed a period of mourning, mourning which for most becomes constructive striving for a better future. The refugee, most often facing war, starvation, persecution, has no time for such psychic adaptation; the refugee's grief surfaces later, often well after the initial resettlement process. And, I believe, the refugee's grief resurfaces throughout his or her life.

The refugee experience is one of marginality and liminality, of constantly tacking back and forth between two worlds. It is rooted in loss, replete with memories of violence. But, the refugee experience is also one of community, of coming together in a shared past to build the future. It is about this coming together, about the reaffirmation of self through the performance of unwritten texts, which I would like to speak for the remainder of my time.

Southeast Asian cultures, particularly Lao, are largely oral — rich in legends, folk tales and poetry, most of which remained unwritten until the French colonization. Unlike Vietnam, Laos had no tradition of fiction, biography or autobiography. When I attempted to find Lao literature for this program, I could only find translations of folk tales, one of which I will read to you later. What I would like to do now is perpetuate this oral tradition by telling you a Lao saga.

I feel somewhat awkward telling you this story; after all, you might say, I am American, dress notwithstanding, and this is a Lao tale. But, I first came into contact with the Lao over twenty five years ago when we were posted to Vientiane and the relationship has been sustained since that time. My memories of those teenage years are very much my own, not my family's of my first kiss with a Lao boyfriend, of first slumber parties with Lao classmates, of introducing Lao friends to the pleasures of sticy rice and peanut butter, of picnics in the rice fields, of watching a Lao friend die in the Vientiane hospital, of my first funeral — a Buddhist cremation. Leaving Laos at the age of fourteen was a rupture which I never overcame: I studied Asian history in high school, Buddhist art and architecture in college and after a brief hiatus doing urban conservation in Montreal, went off to find Lao friends in France. I worked with a Lao cultural association in Paris and have been involved both personally and professionally with the Washington Lao since 1982.

The Laotian refugees with whom I work, and whose lives I chronicle on film and paper, are for the most part past the first stages of acculturation. Many have lived here for ten or fifteen years; a good number have become American citizens. They are, excepting the elderly, well able to function in American society — to speak enough English, to work, to drive a car, to buy a home or start a business. Their children are educated in mainstream schools and survive on hamburgers or pizza. For the most part, however, they continue to speak Lao at home, to socialize with other Lao, to intermarry and to worship at their temple in Catlett, a small town in Fauquier County some ten miles from Manassas. If you were to ask Lao about themselves, their culture, the likely response would be, why don't you come out to Wat Lao, our temple, and see.

The story of this Buddhist community and temple, while specific to the Washington Lao, has much in common with the stories of immigrant and refugee groups throughout our history. It is reflected in many of the books which we are discussing.
today. And, in its final and most recent chapter, it suggests the tragic dilemma faced by many hyphenated Americans today—by Lao, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Afghan, Ethiopian and Salvadorans, to name but a few, who now have the option of returning home.

Wat Lao Buddhavong, Wat means temple in Lao, was begun in 1977, two years after the first wave of Lao arrived in this country. It was initially housed in a private home, then in a small, dilapidated residential building in Springfield. The latter was purchased with no knowledge of zoning regulations; the neighbors complained constantly about noise and parking problems. One would deliberately mow his lawn during prayers. In 1985, seeking a larger space where they would not disturb others, the community purchased a fifty-eight acre property in Catlett. The zoning Board hearings on their plans, widely publicized in the local press, were armonious to say the least. The Lao were essentially accused of coming to proselytize and fundraise, to steal our kids and our money. Not long after they moved in, the monks’ residence, a bungalow built close to Route 28, was firebombed in the middle of the night. A picnic organized by the Lao, to which all neighbors were officially invited, was boycotted. To this day, the owners of a nearby cornerstore refer to the Lao as Hare Krishnas.

The community of Wat Lao has paid off a $300,000 mortgage and raised twice that amount towards construction of a worshipping hall. The building is not finished so major celebrations are held outdoors. One does not attend functions at Wat Lao for the creature comforts: it is always too hot or too cold, dusty or muddy, lacking proper kitchen or bathroom facilities. Out of town visitors sleep in vans, tents or sardine style in the monks’ residence. Traffic still gets tied up on Route 28, and there are still complaints made by the neighbors.

But, life and worship, the sharing of laughter and of sorrow as one of my Lao friends puts it, go on. A recent celebration, held over the Fourth of July, attracted an estimated 4500-5000 people (an estimate, I should say, made by the Deputy Sheriffs on duty that day). After the morning worship and food offering to the monks, the congregants share a communal meal and spend the afternoon visiting with friends and relatives, playing sports, listening to Lao folk music, placing flowers on family graves, bargaining for vegetables from Florida, traditional skirts from Northeast Thailand, cassettes by popular Lao and Thai singers.

On an average weekend, and during the week, small family groups gather at Wat Lao to make special offerings, consult the monks and receive their blessing. Teenagers are taught classical dance, Lao etiquette and cuisine; the elderly chew betel, joke and rest. Much flirting goes on under the watchful eyes of older sisters, aunts and mothers. During the three month rains retreat, Buddhist Lent, as many as fifty young men and boys take the robes, a temporary status symbolizing respect for one’s parents and the deceased. They spend one or two weeks at the temple, learning to obey the precepts, recite the prayers, meditate and withstand the rigors of celibacy and a restricted diet.

Wat Lao Buddhavong is unique among North American Lao temples in having as its Abbot a renowned traditional healer. Achan Bounmi, a herbalist and folk psychotherapist, is venerated by the Lao as a devout monk with great spiritual power. He is serene yet charismatic, living apart from yet emeshed in the daily lives of his people. Much is made of his willingness to brave the elements by sleeping outdoors, of his intuition developed through meditation, of his ability to cure those whom American physicians have sentenced to death, of his ability to predict winning lottery numbers. Achan Bounmi receives a constant stream of visitors, phone calls and letters; his medicines are mailed all over the world. He is, without a doubt, the nexus of this Lao community.

Like the religious institutions and community centers of other immigrant and refugee groups, Wat Lao is a place of healing, both individual and communal. It is the only place where Lao can simply be themselves: to seek not only the solace of ritual but also the necessary companionship of ethnic peers with whom they share a common language, etiquette, cuisine, humor and, a common experience of exile. Over the years, the temple has fostered a sense of Lao ethnic identity and pride vital to successful acculturation. With one foot in the past, the Washington Lao are indeed better able to build the future. As Achan Bounmi once told me, “We live in the present because of the past. We make the future from the present.”
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Six years ago, in November 1986, the Foundation awarded a grant to the Indochinese Community Center and the Lao Buddhist Society, Inc. to support research and planning for a film on the Lao refugee community in Northern Virginia. Working with an impressive group of scholarly and technical consultants, project director Priscilla Coudoux and her husband Sylvain, an internationally-respected cinematographer, developed an extensive Treatment for the hour-long film; hired Emmy Award winner Connie Reinhart as consulting producer; and concentrated the documentary’s focus on the role of Buddhism in Lao refugee acculturation. VFH awarded a second grant, to support the film’s production, in March of 1991.

The film, entitled “I Take Refuge,” is now nearly complete and scheduled for release in the Summer of 1993. Targeted at a broad audience, it documents the Temple as a place of physical, spiritual, and social refuge; the ceremonies, ritual celebrations, and healing practices that help to sustain the transplanted Lao culture; and the new immigrants’ need for community among themselves and with their new American neighbors.

The filmmakers, by virtue of their close association with the Lao community over many years, have enjoyed complete access to the sometimes sensitive events they set out to film. (Sylvain Coudoux is a Vietnamese who was raised in Laos; Priscilla Coudoux spent much of her childhood living in Indochina; and both participate regularly in services and festivals at the Temple.) This six-year project offers an excellent illustration of the role VFH has played, in this and other projects, as a catalyst encouraging intra-community documentation as well as thoughtful explorations of the immigrant experience and of cultural encounters in Virginia. During the next few years we expect to broaden even further our work in these areas, through the new Virginia Center for Media and Culture and its companion project, the Cultural Conservation Initiative. For further information on the Media Center and/or the Cultural Conservation Initiative, contact Andrew Wyndham or Garry Barrow at VFH.