

This issue features the voices of Wisconsin art teachers. Guest editor, Karen Grow Horan.

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## Inside this Issue:

- 1 Wisconsin Barns-1  
by Karen Horan
- 2 Wisconsin Barns-2  
by Maryann Smasal
- 2 Wisconsin Barns-3  
by Keri Witek
- 4 Wisconsin Barns-4  
by Marcia Thompson
- 5 Wisconsin Barns-5  
by Kathy Baries
- 6 "Barefoot" from *Stories from the Round Barn*
- 7 Barnstorm Wisconsin:  
Barns Alive!
- 7 How to Contact WAB  
Folk Arts Staff
- 8 Summer Sessions for  
Teachers

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# Wisconsin Arts Board Folk Arts Educator

## Wisconsin Barns: Curriculum Applications for the Classroom

by Karen Grow Horan  
Art Department, University of  
Wisconsin Eau Claire

I grew up in the 1940s and 50s in Owen, a small west-central Wisconsin farming community in Clark County. Although I lived in "the city," most of my classmates lived on dairy farms. I spent many happy times on my best friend's farm. Her maternal grandparents, who settled the farm, were first generation Danish immigrants. Her father was a second-generation Slovenian immigrant. Young Amish men from the Medford area helped out on the farm and boarded there as well. Everyone in the household, including three generations of family, lived together in great harmony. ("They *had* to," her mother recently told me.) I believe those formative years made an important imprint on who I am today, including the fact that I love old buildings, and especially barns.

In the 1980s and 1990s, my love of barns was evidenced by my



ARCHED STYLE BARN NEAR WAUPUN

Photo by Fred Kane, in "Wisconsin Barns"  
by Heather Kane 

trips through the countryside taking photographs of barns, and dreaming of living in a reconvered barn someday. Four years ago my dream came true, partially, when I was able to buy some land with a real barn foundation on it in Bayfield County! We built our cabin in the middle of the concrete barn floor; good spirits surround us in our "cabin in a barn."

In the secondary art methods class I teach at UWEC, Maryann Smasal developed an outstanding curriculum unit with barn architecture as a focus. Her enthusiasm, as well as the book *Barns of Wisconsin* by Jerry Apps, inspired me to incorporate a barn unit in my own curriculum

MODIFIED DUTCH GAMBREL BARN AND GABLE ROOF LINE BARN, CTY HWY B, WEST SALEM.

Photo by Fred Kane, in *Wisconsin Barns* by Heather Kane 





STUDENTS SKETCHING A BLOOMER, WI BARN  
Photo by Maryann Smasal

units with future elementary/ middle school classroom teachers and K-12 Art majors. For the unit, students were required to bring a personal barn story to class that was illustrated with symbols and text. Their stories were xeroxed and exchanged with classmates, along with their own additional ideas, and included in an accordion-fold barn book. In addition, the students had journal pages for on-site observations and exclaimed that they would never be able to drive by a barn again without noticing all its unique features.

As a teacher of teachers I especially like the idea that 125 future classroom teachers (in one school year plus a summer session) potentially will have 25 students each in their classrooms someday. Should they choose to do so, those teachers can make an impact upon 3,125 youngsters about the importance of the preservation of historic Wisconsin barns!

## Maryann Smasal

*Art and Computer Graphics Teacher, Owen-Withee School District, Clark County, WI*

My fondest childhood memories contain the sights, sounds, smells and activities around, about and within rural structures including barns, milk houses, out-houses and chicken coops. Barns always fascinated me because the earliest structures were truly architecture without architects, an amazing design accomplishment created by “just plain folks” of the

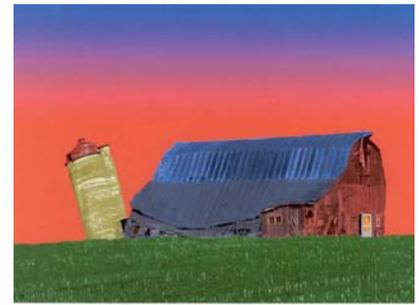
day in response to simple needs such as good storage and animal shelter.

Driving down our rural Wisconsin roads and seeing more and more “farm for sale” signs really brought home the fact that someday barns may become extinct as farms are sold and these magnificent structures are taken down or simply abandoned to nature’s elements. So developing my barn curriculum was an easy decision.

Upon introducing my barn unit to students in Karen Horan’s UWEC Summer Interim class, I felt it was important to cover all aspects of barns, including their European roots, early designs, barn art and family influence. I also included a hands-on component; completing an on-site visit to an old barn so students could see the structure first hand, learn the barn’s history and complete sketches.

In my own classroom, barns went digital! A Spring 2000 field trip prompted a student to showcase a barn known by all area students as “the barn with the leaning silo.” One student created a wonderful computer image of the barn adding gradients and overlays of color while omitting trees and brush in order to focus on the barn and silo. His barn image along with all the class images was entered in the contest and won three group awards including Best of Show!

Photographing the barn and other rural landmarks prompted a lively student discussion and debate about the architectural history of the Owen-Withee area. The best part of this story is that even though the barn burned down and no longer physically exists, it now remains forever documented in my student’s computer image. Barn preservation comes in many forms.



Graphics by Owen-Withee Student Luke Ciszewski 2000  
Instructor: MaryAnn Smasal



ORIGINAL IMAGE BELOW. COMPUTER ENHANCED IMAGE ABOVE, BY LUKE CIZZEWSKI, OWEN-WITHEE STUDENT.

Photo by Maryann Smasal

## Keri Witek

*Recent Graduate of UWEC*

About a year ago, I enrolled in an elementary art methods class at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. It was there that a group project changed the way that I look at the Wisconsin landscape around me. My fellow art methods students and I were assigned to create a printing lesson for upper elementary students. The five of us were strongly encouraged by our teacher, Karen Horan, to incorporate barns into that lesson. After brainstorming, we decided to do a group project with our elementary students that would teach them about Wisconsin barns. Together we designed a huge barn banner whose texture was created by the entire class using stamps. You can see my website: <http://communities.msn.com/teachWlbarns> for pictures of our lesson and the lesson plan.

For this procedure we made small stamps from “design-a-stamp” foam, drawn out on paper first. After transferring the design to foam, we cut out and pasted it to a piece of masonite cut two inches by two inches. When the stamps were finished, the students used markers to color their stamp so it could be printed on the barn preservation banner. Little did we know that this lesson would pull at our hearts and motivate us to want to teach this lesson over and over: to our peers, our students, and our fellow art teachers.

After much research, practice, and organization our first presentation was to our peers. The weekend before we presented this lesson, I took an audio tape player to the farm of a good friend of mine. While there I taped the sounds of the barn. I thought this would be a great attention-getter. As the class began the sound of cows mooing echoed from the speakers. Many people smiled and began asking questions as they entered the room. Their interest became

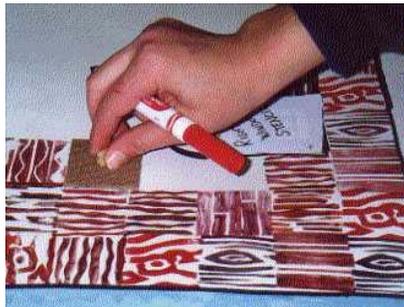


Photo by Keri Witek

apparent; they wanted to know more about barns. Throughout this lesson, smiles continued to form as they began learning about the barns that they drove by everyday.

Once the project was completed, we placed the barn preservation banner in the Eau Claire Wal-Mart store. It was there for a few months, and it was obvious that



Photo by Keri Witek

the community had an interest in barns as well. People from my hometown, one hour away, came up to me and said, “We saw the banner that you helped design. It really made us think about barns.”

We couldn't believe the response we had from this lesson, and felt motivated to teach more people about these beautiful barns. We presented at the Wisconsin Art Education Association Spring Conference in Madison to another group of teachers at the WAEA fall conference in Verona. Each time we presented our research the response was tremendous; not only did our participants enjoy it, they learned a lot, shared stories, and took that information home with them to share with their students.

We made sure that our lesson incorporated the Wisconsin State Standards of art and design. We especially wanted our students to know about the history and unique architecture of their cultural community (Standard D.8.1). We also wanted to make sure that they understood that art in the form of Wisconsin barn architecture reflects the time and place in which it was created

(Standard I.8.5). We encouraged students in this lesson to explore their own ideas about the purposes and meanings of art (Standard J.8.5), and more specifically the purposes and meanings of Wisconsin barns.

Our main objective in this lesson was to introduce the students and community to the purposes and history of Wisconsin barns (Standard J.8.1) and to encourage the community and its members to preserve those barns. After learning about the many different roof types common in Wisconsin, the lesson leads into discussion about why we should save old weathered barns (Standard J.8.10).

Cities are moving in on our rural communities and as a result our barns are being torn down. They are disappearing, and we as Wisconsin citizens and art teachers can do something about it. We can make our students aware of barns' aesthetic value and of barn traditions and history.



CLAY BARN BY WEST SALEM STUDENT  
Photo by Marcia Thompson

## Marcia Thompson

Art Teacher, West Salem Middle School, La Crosse County, WI

In the spring of 2000, I attended the Wisconsin Art Education Association Spring Conference in Madison, Wisconsin. As a courtesy to a friend, I attended a session on barns as architecture presented by Karen Horan and her students. I remember wondering what I could possibly get out of this session as I was not at all interested in the topic being presented. After all, barns are just barns...how could they be interesting, except maybe as a rather trite subject for watercolor painters?

During the session, I felt an increasing sense of excitement... suddenly, I was seeing barns as objects with beautiful form and dignity, objects with a history and meaning for our rural communities far beyond anything I had ever considered before. Karen and her students had achieved their goal; they had exposed me to a topic I had only casually considered before and had inspired a passionate appreciation which has only increased as I have developed a unit of study for the seventh graders at West Salem Middle School.

I bought a digital camera and spent my summer and early fall photographing barns throughout western Wisconsin. In the fall, I applied for a grant from the West

Salem School Board to help develop a quarter-long unit of study for a group of seventh graders enrolled in an elective art class. I also developed a Hyperstudio presentation on barns in La Crosse County using the photos I had taken earlier. The grant, which I was awarded, allowed me to arrange a day-long field trip for my students and to present the Hyperstudio presentation as well as to print 8" x 10" copies of about fifty of my photos for my students to use as reference.

We started the unit by viewing the Hyperstudio presentation and learning about barn styles and construction. Very early in the unit, we visited two working farms to see a 100 year old barn, still in use, a modern milking parlor installed in an old barn, a stanchion milking operation, a state of the art pig barn and a new "curtain" barn for dairy cows. The students were able to go down in the pit at the milking parlor and also visited with the animals at both farms. We were also able to visit Norskadalen, an outdoor museum with several barns and outbuildings built in the mid-1800s by Norwegian settlers in our area.



DRAWING BY WEST SALEM MS STUDENT  
Photo by Marcia Thompson

After this introduction, the students were ready to begin the production phase of this unit. They built clay barns, using the slab method of clay construction. To work out their ideas, they first built their desired barn out of tagboard and then used the

pieces as templates for the clay. The clay barns were difficult and required a lot of problem solving on the part of the students to accomplish their ideas. Most students chose to use acrylic paint to decorate their barns. As students finished working with clay, they began a landscape



BARN DRAWING BY WEST SALEM STUDENT  
Photo by Marcia Thompson

drawing using Elmer's glue and pastels on black construction paper. The students used my barn photos for reference, as the one requirement was that the landscape included a barn.

At the beginning of the unit, the students were given the assignment to interview a relative or friend at least one generation older than himself or herself, asking them to tell of some experiences they had had on a farm or in a barn. The students used these stories to create an accordion-style book, which they wrote and illustrated.

In order to reinforce the idea of using stories and to introduce other aspects of rural life during earlier times, I read daily from a book by Jerry Apps, *Symbols: Viewing a Rural Past*. This book is a series of recollections by the author of various objects from his childhood, such as outhouses, party-line telephones, back porches, etc. The students drew in their sketchbooks while listening to the stories.

The final project of the quarter was a group activity in which the students created a display board



DRAWING BY ALISON LAU,  
DE LONG STUDENT  
Photo by Kathy Baries

promoting barn preservation.  All of the projects were set up as a display in the LMC for our final "Barn Party." We invited parents, faculty and some elementary students to attend and each student shared the stories from their books. One of the students and I also visited the School Board to thank them and to inform them of the results of their grant.

In her final evaluation, one of the students said, "I've learned that barns have changed a lot since they were first made. (We) learned how important barns are to our culture and to help preserve them....I think barns are important to save for the generations to come. I liked going to the barns because it helps to see them firsthand."

## Kathy Baries

*Art and Adaptive Art Teacher, De Long Middle School, Eau Claire*

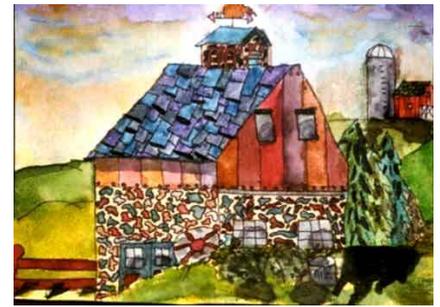
It seems as though we are always looking for appropriate and motivating subject matter to teach art curriculum and also ways to integrate other topics. Thirteen years ago I was teaching art in a rural elementary school. When I looked for themes or topics to teach art concepts I looked at students' interests and backgrounds and also considered how I could develop a lesson to advance learning. I chose barns and farm life to teach drawing, watercolor skills, and color theory

as well as the idea of rural community life which later connected with the core values (honesty, respect, compassion, responsibility, work ethic, and courage) in our school. I also taught this lesson to another class of students within a city elementary school and discovered their lack of awareness of the commitment of farming families.

I have read somewhere that the family barn is a symbol of two ideas. The first is the idea of a family working together with common goals and appreciation for each other and the second is the symbol of hard work. As I teach students I continue to use the topic of barns and farm life since it is a part of our Wisconsin history that must not be forgotten. My students learn much about the type of people who work hard everyday to provide for their families as well as others. The barn designs, which the students made, include the history of past cultures merging together in Wisconsin. Students are exposed to the architectural features that are influenced from barns of Germany, Norway, Finland, and Belgium, as well as other countries.

The theme of barns and farm life provides an avenue for discussing communities and people but also allows all of my students a successful opportunity to create art.

Students who are integrated can draw at least one of the types of barns we discuss. I have tried many successful ways to adapt this lesson for students with varying abilities. Students who have physical limitations in drawing can arrange paper shapes and collage them together to produce a barn image. If white watercolor paper is used, students may paint with adaptive brushes. Students who have perceptual limitations with



DRAWING BY RYAN HANKE,  
DE LONG MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT  
Photo by Kathy Baries

### Barn Story by Ryan Hanke

A long time ago there was an old couple who lived in this barn. There was living quarters above the barn where they lived. They had built the barn on 400 acres in 1920. The couple Mrs. and Mr. Bark loved the barn and would take walks throughout their many acres. People say that they heard the couple happily singing literally all the time.

When Mrs. Bark had passed away it was really hard on him but over time he began to heal. Soon he was happily singing again. The words to his songs told stories of joyful times he had with Mrs. Bark.

At this very moment Mr. Bark is no longer living but if you go to this barn you still can hear him singing, telling stories like the wind whispering in your ear.

perspective may need extra help. Stressing spatial perspective with overlapping, size detail, and color is more concrete than teaching one point or two-point perspective to these students. I do require that all students include two sides to their barn design.

At the present time my students are telling stories about their work. The stories are both visual and written in words. I ask students as they finish their paintings to write at least three

paragraphs on their barn's story. Some write about actual family barns, some write extremely fictional stories, while others write stories that could essentially be true about family use of barns. Artwork is displayed with the students' stories. 

When time allows we view and discuss Jennifer O'Meara's work of barn photos that she alters with a computer program. Ms O'Meara is a young artist working in the medium of digital fine art printmaking by using computers and printing with vegetable-based inks. Students have tried similar ideas by scanning their barn paintings and manipulating their images by changing the sky, adding shadows, adding objects or other drawings, changing the ground, or even the colors.

For a teacher, the possibilities of projects and lesson ideas using barns are endless. Our students are motivated to learn about a building they have seen throughout our state. Students' classroom discussion will open their minds to the stories behind our Wisconsin barns.

## Resources

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 Penner, R. 1996. *A Harvest of Memories*. Greendale, WI: Reiman Publications.

 Sloane, E. 1967. *An Age of Barns*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls.

 University of Wisconsin Extension. *Wisconsin Barn Preservation Program*. <http://www.uwex.edu/lgc/barns/barns.htm>.

 SHSW Division of Historic Preservation. Poster--"Wisconsin Barns: A Legacy Worth Preserving," of the 20-sided Nashold Barn in Fountain Prairie, Columbia County, WI. Contact Donald Aucutt, 608/264-6488. View poster at <http://www.uwex.edu/lgc/barns/poster.htm>.

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 Wisconsin Public Television, *Wisconsin Barns: Stories in Wood and Stone* [www.wpt.org/barns/](http://www.wpt.org/barns/).

**Stories from the Round Barn**  
*Another great resource about a Wisconsin barn*

The Dougan Round Barn in Beloit, WI was built in 1911 and was used until 1969 for the Dougan dairy farm. Milking took



Photo & bulletin board by Kathy Baries

place on the ground floor and hay was stored on the upper level. Now on the national register, it was the featured barn in the Jan 1998 issue of *The Barn Journal*: <http://museum.cl.msu.edu/barn/>

Jacqueline Dougan Jackson has written two delightful books of stories about life on the Dougan farm and around the barn. A sample story follows, reprinted with permission.

### Barefoot

©1997, Jacqueline Dougan Jackson

It is early October 1914. It's suppertime. Grampa sits midway on one side of the dining-room table. Grama is at the end. Ronald and Trever and the hired men are in their places. The hired men have showered, slicked back their hair, and donned clean shirts and trousers. Fried potatoes steam in a dish on the snowy tablecloth. There are pitchers of milk, slices of cold meat, bread and butter, fresh applesauce, creamed carrots. Grampa has said the blessing: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." The food is passed. People begin to eat.

Grampa looks around the table. He says, "I saw a sight today I have never seen before, and I hope I shall never see again." Everyone pauses to pay attention to Daddy Dougan.

"I went over to Tiffany very early this morning, to buy a cow," Grampa says.

Everyone nods. They know where Grampa went, and that he returned with a cow.

"It was still dark when I got there," says Grampa, "and I saw a light in the barn. I went in, and saw a lantern way down at the end of the row of cows. Someone was

milking there, so I walked down to see who. And as I got close, I saw it was a little lad, and he seemed to be milking in an odd sort of manner." Grampa has everyone's complete attention.

"It was chilly this morning," says Grampa. "There was frost."

Everyone nods.

"The little lad was barefoot," Grampa says, "and when I got up to him I saw that he was balancing himself on the milking stool with one foot, and holding the other one over the bucket" - Grampa pushes back his chair and demonstrates - "and milking the stream of warm milk onto that dirty little foot! And when that foot was warm, he put it down on the stall floor and raised his other dirty little foot and milked onto that one!"

The gathering is thunderstruck. Grampa looks at their stunned faces and laughs silently. His eyes disappear.

Then everyone explodes into laughter. When the hubbub dies down, Grama declares, "Wesson, that can't be true!"

Wesson assures her it is.

Ronald shouts into his father's ear trumpet. "Did you say anything to anybody? Did you tell his father or mother?"

Grampa laughs and shakes his head no. "The wife asked me in for a cup of coffee and some coffeecake," Grampa says. He adds, "I drank the coffee black."

From *Stories from the Round Barn*, Triquarterly Books, Northwestern University Press, 1997, ISBN: 0810150727. Look for the forthcoming (2002): *More Stories from the Round Barn* too! <http://www.uis.edu/~jjackson/barnbook.htm>



Dougan Round Barn, Beloit, WI  
Photo from *The Barn Journal* website

## Barnstorm Wisconsin

*The popular national exhibit is coming to Wisconsin in 2003!*

In 2003, six rural sites in Wisconsin will host the exhibit *Barn Again! Celebrating an American Icon*. As described by the Smithsonian Institution, "*Barn Again!* explores the barn as both a cultural and agricultural icon. It examines the building as an architectural structure and as a means of expressing beliefs about what our country was and could be. It...challenges visitors to think about a range of questions. What values do barns represent? What do various types of barns and building techniques say about farming and American society?...What do barns tell us about our past? And our future? "

Along with the exhibit, each site will also host humanities programming about American culture, rural architecture, changing social demographics, agriculture, and life on the family farm. This popular exhibit was designed by the Smithsonian Institution and the National Building Museum. In addition to the six statewide sites, *Barn Again!* may also be at the State Fair and Farm Progress Days. The Wisconsin Humanities Council is coordinating *Barn Again!* in Wisconsin. For info, contact Jessica Becker at the WHC, 608/262-0706.

# Regional Summer Sessions on Folklore for Teachers

## Documenting Local Culture: A Field School on "Disability and Community"

*June 9 - July 1, 2001  
Bloomington, Indiana*

This three-week field school will offer immersion hands-on training in archiving, interviewing, still photography, ethnographic writing, project planning, research ethics, computer applications, and the development of community-building participation programs.

Participants will work closely with local residents to document the history and experience of disability in the community. Their gathered materials will be used to launch a local "Museum of the Person." Contact Inta Carpenter, Indiana University, (812) 855-8049, [carpente@indiana.edu](mailto:carpente@indiana.edu).

## Festival of Iowa Folklife / Cultural Crossroads & the Annual Iowa Folklife and Prairie Voices Institutes

*June 14-17, 2001  
Waterloo, Iowa*

The **Festival of Iowa Folklife** (June 15-17) will feature three days of traditional music, dance, food, crafts, stories, and more from Iowa, MN and WI. Folk artists from Iowa's refugee and immigrant communities will be featured. In 2002, this regional festival will take place at Folklore Village Farm, Dodgeville, WI.

The annual **Iowa Folklife Institute & Prairie Voices Institutes** (June 14-16) will occur during the Festival and serve as a field school for educators. This event will enhance understanding of the Upper Midwest's cultural traditions through interactive,

hands-on activities. For info: <http://www.culturalaffairs.org/iac/folklife/2001festivalandinstitutes.htm>.

## Folklore of Homelands & Diasporas: The Slavic and East European World

*June 25-29, 2001  
Madison, WI*

The UW's Center for Russia, East Europe, and Central Asia offers teachers an exploration of folklore genres of Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and Wisconsin, where immigrants keep these traditions alive. Participants will examine how folklore enriches core curriculum subjects and will attend evening cultural events.

Coordinated by Professor Margaret Beissinger, this five day workshop will address the following themes: life cycle folklore and rituals with special attention to weddings, calendrical cycles, rituals, folktales, and ethnographic and folkloric research tools. Throughout the week, participants will have time to work with one another, lead teachers, folklorists, artists, and professors to transform ideas and materials from both morning and afternoon sessions into lesson plans. On Friday, participants will present their lesson plans for feedback from the group.

Available for graduate credit. For more information contact Erica Tucker, 608/262-3379, [creeca@intl-institute.wisc.edu](mailto:creeca@intl-institute.wisc.edu).

## What Stories Tell Us

*June 25-29, 2001  
Elmhurst, Illinois*

This course introduces teachers and school librarians to folklife concepts, genres, and practices of local people, plus storytelling

techniques to enhance writing in language arts and social studies. Teachers produce a set of materials for classroom use. Contact Cindy Kerchmar, director, 773/286-4636, [ckerchmar@earthlink.net](mailto:ckerchmar@earthlink.net).

## Ethnic Folklore of Wisconsin

*July 17-August 9, 2001  
Madison, WI*

Learn about the ethnic traditions of the American Indians, Ukrainian and Polish Americans, Baltic Americans, and Southeast Asians through a sampling of their music, dance, foodways, holiday celebrations, storytelling and more.

Join Professor Tom DuBois and other experts from 7-9pm, Tuesdays & Thursdays at 975 University Avenue (Grainger Hall), for four weeks of stimulating discussions and performances. All sessions are free and open to the public. Registered students may receive one or three college credits.

To request a brochure, contact: Division of Continuing Studies, 608/262-1156. E-mail: [sdisch@dcs.wisc.edu](mailto:sdisch@dcs.wisc.edu).

## How to Contact WAB Folk Arts Staff

Anne Pryor  
Folk Arts Education Specialist  
608/266-8106  
[anne.pryor@arts.state.wi.us](mailto:anne.pryor@arts.state.wi.us)

Rick March  
Folk & Community Arts Specialist  
608/266-2513  
[rick.march@arts.state.wi.us](mailto:rick.march@arts.state.wi.us)