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Lea F. Davis

1975 festival of american folklife

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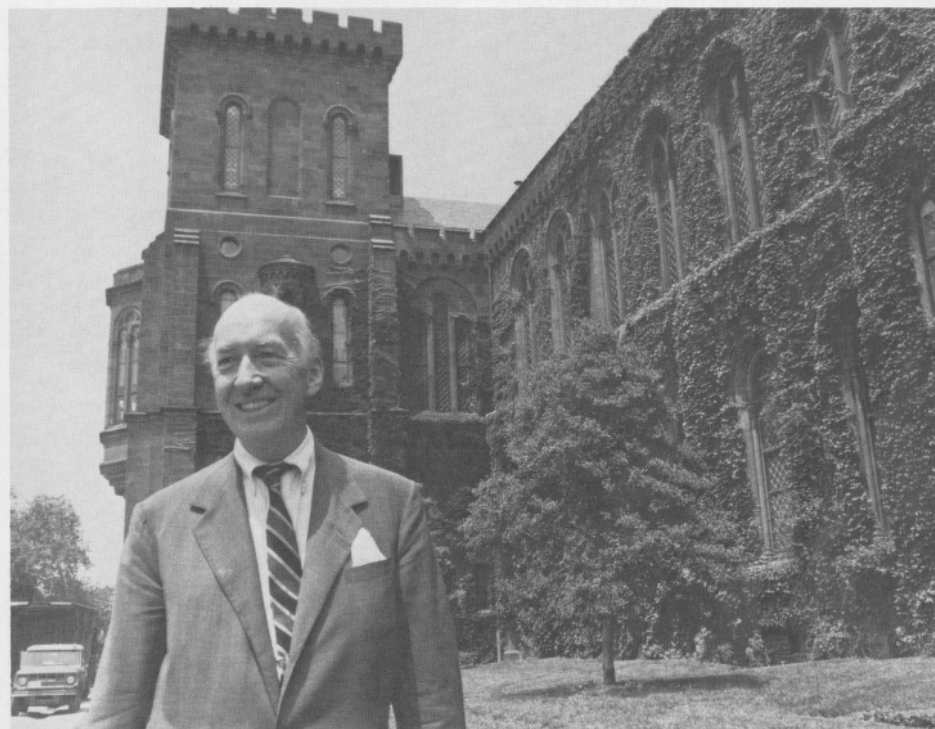


When John Henry was a little boy
Sitting on his father's knee
Said the Big Bend Tunnel on the B.&O.
Is going to be the death of me.

Contents:

Foreword	2
The Festival: Theater of Action <i>by S. Dillon Ripley</i>	3
The Festival: Living History <i>by Gary Everhardt</i>	4
Working Americans	5
Rail Lore <i>by Archie Green</i>	7
Regional Americans	9
The Regions of the U. S. <i>by Mack McCormick</i>	12
Children's Folklore	14
Family Folklore	16
General Information: Programs	17
Highlights:	
June 25	18
June 26	20
June 27	22
June 28	24
June 29	26
Festival Map	28
July 2	30
July 3	32
July 4	34
July 5	36
July 6	38
General Information: Services	40
Old Ways in the New World	41
African Diaspora	46
The World Family of Stringed Instruments <i>by Tom Vennum</i>	48
Old Ways in the New World: On Tour	49
Native Americans	50
What's Your Indian Language I.Q.?	53
Komi Haynes	53
Supporters	54
Staff	55

The Festival: Theater of Action



Eight years ago the Smithsonian started the annual summer Festival of American Folklife involving live performers. They demonstrated to visitors on the Mall that a museum exhibit might consist of tools or instruments temporarily laid aside, but not obsolete. The persistence of crafts, of cultures that involve making, using and playing with such tools or instruments, needed to be underscored, and our theater of action was the museum.

I venture to think that there is a close relationship between what our Festival (June 25-26 and July 2-6) has been seeking to express and some of the newly recognized strivings encompassed in the terms "cultural diversity" or "pluralism." In the Folklife Festival we rejoice in the annual recognition of the persist-

ence of "Old Ways in the New World," as we call it—the perpetuation of national and family folkways, whether they belong to so-called minorities or are transmitted customs from all over the world.

In the same way, we have brought Native Americans to the Mall to demonstrate the resurgent Indian population's concern with enduring crafts and rituals, while our "African Diaspora" celebrates the music, body movement and lifestyles of Blacks on three continents. In a typical large American city such as Philadelphia there are perhaps 30 subcultures, whose practitioners jealously perform Polish folk dances, eat Greek food or preserve tribal music.

There is in mankind today a fear of the loss of identity. We fear that union of megastates and megacorporations