2026 Missouri Folklore Society Conference Presentation Handlist

Friday Lunch Keynote

Autumn Cuddy



Image credit: Autumn Cuddy

"Sound Investment: Documenting the history of Columbia's music scene with CoMo Music Project"

Archivist Autumn Cuddy discusses the organization and launch of CoMo Music Project, an initiative focused on collecting and preserving the rich history of Columbia, Missouri's, local music scene across the 20th and early 21st centuries. CoMo Music Project is currently entering its third year.

Friday Dinner Keynote



Kitty Ledbetter
"Rare Books and Other Things: What Shall We Do with Our Collections?"

The most worrisome part of collecting artifacts is deciding what to do with them when it's time for letting go. I began building a catalog of nineteenth-century periodicals and books for primary research when I entered graduate school in 1988. However, in today's academic world, rare book libraries are no longer purchasing such things. Good rare book dealers looking to expand their supply are hard to find. I have many women's periodicals featuring hand-colored fashion plates, and I am certain that I could sell these on eBay, but to what end? The plates would be cut out and framed for sale in antique markets for $300 a piece, or an AI company would digitize them and destroy the originals. After all: you have the image, why do you need the paper? I will show photographs of a few of these artifacts from my collections at this year's Missouri Folklore Society meeting and discuss possible solutions.

Kitty Ledbetter is Professor Emerita from Texas State University. She taught and published books and articles on British Victorian literature for 20 years. Before moving into that career, Kitty was a country music disc jockey at radio stations across the country. Kitty is co-author with Scott Foster Siman of a book titled "Broadcasting the Ozarks: Si Siman and Country Music at the Crossroads."
Image credit: Kitty Ledbetter

Friday Afternoon Plenary Panel



Bo Brown, Rachael West & Katy Henson
"From Folkways to Foodways: Missouri's Living Foraging Traditions."

Foraging in Missouri is more than simply identifying what's edible, it is part of a living tradition shaped by generations of observation, necessity, storytelling, land stewardship, and food culture. From familiar Ozarks favorites like morels, pawpaws, persimmons, and elderberries to plants whose uses are less widely remembered today, Missouri's landscape holds a rich history of people gathering food and medicine from the wild.

This panel brings together three Missouri foragers with different areas of expertise to explore wild plants through the lenses of folklore and historical use, ecology and cultivation, and modern culinary practice. Panelists will share how traditional knowledge continues to influence the way Missourians interact with wild foods today, from foraging to landscaping while discussing responsible harvesting, and the renewed interest in bringing native and wild foods back to our gardens, kitchens, and communities.

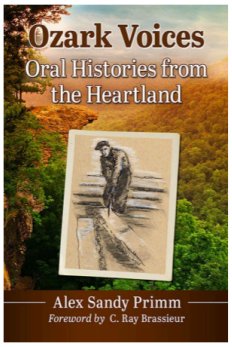
Through conversation, personal experience, and audience Q&A, the panel will explore not only what Missourians forage, but why these plants have mattered and how those traditions continue to grow and change!

Bo Brown is a published author and awardee of the Living Tradition Fellowship by the Missouri Folk Arts Program. Katy Henson operates the business "Wildscapes,", and Rachael West operates "Eating the Ozarks."

Saturday Lunch Keynote

Alex Primm
"Oral history for everyone: How to interview people for an historic record."





This presentation on how to do oral history will be based on Alex's book *Ozark Voices* and award-winning video, *Treehouse*. Planning plenty of time for discussion.
Image credit: Alex Primm

Saturday Morning Field Trips

Ozarks Model Railroad Association
Visit the Ozarks Model Railroad Association to learn about model railroads and their organization. See their recreation of part of the historic Frisco Line from Monett, MO to Ft. Smith, AR.

Ethnic Food Exploration: Taste, Discover, Share!
Join us for a hands-on exploration of a local ethnic grocery store! Wander the aisles, look beyond the familiar, and find something you've never tried before. Each explorer is encouraged to choose and purchase one item for $10 or less (but no purchase is required)—after we'll gather together to share our discoveries, samples, stories, and reactions.



Come curious, adventurous, and ready to have some fun. You may discover a new favorite food, learn something unexpected, or simply expand your experience one bite at a time!

Special Guest & Workshop presented by Missouri Humanities

Justin Hamm
“No Such Place as Nowhere”



Current Missouri Poet Laureate and recent Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellow Justin Hamm, with equal parts humor and wonder, performs poems soaked in Missouri creekwater and dried in her prairie winds. He draws on the people and landscapes of his Midwestern home to illustrate the region is not, as the saying goes, “flyover country,” but rather a place of compelling culture, conflict, drama, and beauty. Justin performs with an accessibility and warmth that is perfect for both seasoned poetry fans and those who have yet to make up their mind about the genre.

Current Missouri Poet Laureate Justin Hamm is author of five collections of poetry and winner of a 2026 Laureate Fellowship from The Academy of American Poets.

Image Courtesy: Justin Hamm

Missouri Humanities Presents a Veterans Writing Workshop:
“The Humble Apartment of the Chest”
With facilitators Justin Hamm and Father Kenneth L. Chumbley

This two-hour generative poetry workshop will explore the ways in which poetry can express intense emotion. The chest is a metaphorical place where we keep our memories, joy, pain, fear, loved ones, and history. We will move through guided writing sessions to help bring form to what we keep in our chest and, hopefully, turn it into poetry. The workshop will include dedicated time for composition and an optional sharing session at the end. No experience with poetry is necessary, and participants will be encouraged to write about any subject they choose.

For veterans, their families, and their loved ones of all experience levels.

Presenters



Taylor N. Libbert
"Missouri Ozark Literature Analysis"

This presentation aims to identify trends in publications that may imply prototypical Ozark experiences as evidenced in genres (which could stand in for market trends & consumer demands). Along with a map of the Missouri Ozarks and visualizations of its literary canon, it breaks down the types of genres present in books that take place within the geographic boundaries of the Missouri Ozarks – the southernmost region of the Midwest. This gives way to an understanding of what's at the epicenter of the Ozark literary schema. As an up-and-coming researcher on Missouri's literary heritage, I have a database of 800+ books – of which I have read ~75 across all regions of Missouri and have found 200+ that take place within the Ozarks between 1900-2019.
Image credit: Taylor N. Libbert

Joey Borovicka
"Every Day is Bargain Day! Springfield's History Through Newspaper Ads"

What can newspaper ads tell us about a city's history? Join presenter Joey Borovicka for a nostalgic and enlightening look at the Springfield of yesteryear as seen through the lens of its newspaper advertisements. You'll also learn about a valuable library resource along the way!
Image credit: Springfield Daily News, June 30, 1934





Chris Drew
"Printing Persons and Place: Folk History in Press and Ephemera"

Newspapers and paper ephemera from post-civil war to the information age offer a unique perspective on local history reflecting common lived experiences not always captured in other sources. We'll look at the depiction and remembrance of Good Children's Lane and feminist culture in Springfield, and campus activism at Mizzou.
Image credit: Springfield News Leader, Free Press Underground, Over the Rainbow

Rick Gibson

“Using Audio Drama to tell stories - the Making of ‘The Life and Times of Curtis Lee’”

Introducing how to create an audio drama for podcast or streaming.

Image credit: Rick Gibson





Jenny Smith

"Country Doctoring, Housecalls and Home Births”

My father, born in 1915 received his Osteopathic degree in Kirksville in 1941 and set up practice in Crocker, MO, Pulaski County. He made house calls, delivered 2500 babies in Pulaski Co. over his 45 years in practice. He got paid sometimes in bushels of corn and livestock, etc!

Image credit: Jenny Smith

Anastasia Robinson

“Show Me Strangeness Project”

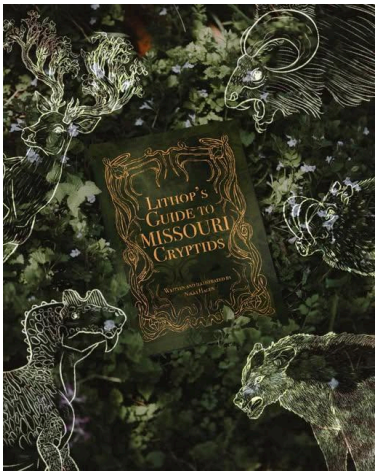


This project is a personal effort to collect and archive Missouri folklore, history, family stories, and personal experiences of “strangeness”. Anything unexplained, otherworldly, supernatural, or just outside of the norms of mainstream societal beliefs. Ghosts, UFOs, superstition, haunted places, fairies or gnomes, folk magic/medicine, psychic abilities, prophetic dreams, etc.

Stories may be personal experiences, passed down from family members, or part of regional or cultural folklore. Stories and submissions will be archived on the website showmestrangeness.com, and a companion podcast will feature interviews and presentations of collected materials. See a presentation of the project, and its hope to collect some of Missouri’s past and present strangeness and preserve it for the seekers and story-lovers of the future.

Image credit: Anastasia Robinson

Nikki Hagen
“Missouri Cryptids: A Creature Design Project”



Lithop's Guide to Missouri Cryptids, is many things: a creature design project, a nod to my own folklore, and an acknowledgement of the stories of the Missouri people through history. After receiving a generous scholarship from a nonprofit, Dreamzilla, I sought to rewrite a book I created during a class in 2022. In an effort to reconcile with my complicated feelings about Missouri, I chose to research stories about strange Missouri monsters.
Image credit: Nikki Hagen

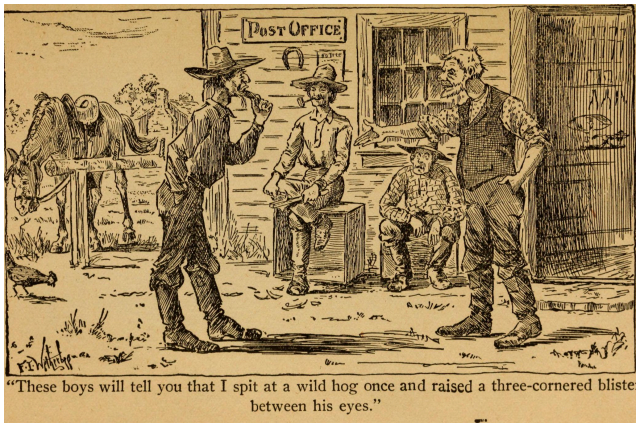


Jo Van Arkel
“Flash Fiction and Folklore: Writing New Stories with Traditional Tales”

I will trace the literary tradition of writers drawing from folktales to write new works. Then I will read micro and flash fiction from my own collection Ozark Stories and Wonder Tales, with influences from Vance Randolph and other Ozark folklorists.
Image credit: Public Domain

Steve Wiegenstein
“Using Folklore in Historical Fiction ”

Steve Wiegenstein's acclaimed historical novel series (Slant of Light, This Old World, The Language of Trees, Land of Joys, and Bring Daybreak) follows the life of an Ozarks village from the 1850s to the 1920s. The action of the novels often draws on elements of Ozarks folklore. In this presentation, Steve will talk about the perils and advantages of using folklore in fictional situations, with examples drawn from the work of several different writers. *Image credit: “Opie Read in the Ozarks” (public domain)*





Stephanie Saunders
“From Folklore to Fiction: Buttons as Motif and Material Culture in Covered Buttons”

My first novel, Covered Buttons (Mercer University Press, 2026), is a coming-of-age novel set in the Ozarks during the 1930s. While the story is informed by the birth control movement of the era, buttons serve as a central motif throughout the novel. Drawing on folklore recorded by Vance Randolph and other Ozarks collectors, this session explores the superstitions, customs, and meanings associated with buttons in the early twentieth-century Ozarks. I will discuss how these traditions shaped the novel's themes and imagery and will read several brief passages inspired by this folklore.
Image credit: Stephanie Saunders

Chris Otto
"From Panther to Cryptid: The Evolution of the Ozark Howler”

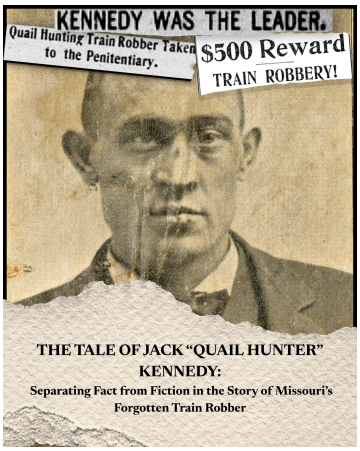


This presentation examines the Ozark Howler, a mysterious creature said to inhabit the remote forests and hills of the Ozarks, as an example of how contemporary legends develop, circulate, and become associated with regional identity. Often described as a large, dark, catlike or bear-like animal with horns or glowing eyes and an unsettling cry variously compared to a wolf’s howl, an elk’s call, or a human scream, the Howler occupies an uncertain space between traditional folklore, cryptid culture, and modern popular storytelling. Rather than attempting to determine whether the creature “really exists,” the presentation will trace accounts and descriptions of the Ozark Howler, examine possible connections to older Ozark supernatural and animal traditions, and consider the role of oral storytelling, newspapers, tourism, the internet, and cryptozoology in shaping the legend. Particular attention will be given to the problem of authenticity: how supposedly old traditions can be reconstructed, embellished, or even invented as they circulate. Ultimately, the Ozark Howler provides a useful case study in how folklore continues to evolve and how stories about mysterious creatures express ideas about wilderness, fear, place, and Ozark identity.



Charles & Gary Nodler
“Hornet Spooklight”

Learn about the mysterious light on the rural border between SW MO & NE OK.
Image Credit: BBC / Ed Craig Collection at Dobson Museum and Home Archive



Cameron Lee

“The Tale of Jack "The Quail Hunter" Kennedy: Separating Fact from Fiction in the Story of Missouri's Forgotten Train Robber”

A glimpse into my research into Jack "Quail Hunter" Kennedy, prolific 19th century train robber and my 4th great grand uncle. Jack’s criminal career ushered in the end of the Wild West and saw the rise of the Pendergast era of Kansas City as outlaws were traded for organized crime. Working the railroad as an engineer, running with the remnants of the James-Younger gang, and even trying his hand at the silver screen never seemed to satisfy the Quail Hunter. Through countless newspapers, police and detective autobiographies, legal documents, and family history I’ve learned as much as possible about the man an entire generation tried to erase from our family tree. Join me as I cut through over 100 years of mythologizing to find the truth behind the man who tried to revive the legacy of Jesse James in the dying days of the Wild West.

Image credit: Cameron Lee

Kaitlyn McConnell

"The Value of Celebrating Folk Culture"

There's value in celebrating regional culture in the moment it's happening. In this talk, Ozarks Alive's Kaitlyn McConnell will share thoughts on why understanding and recognizing the value of in-progress work impacts the region through the lens of the Rock Picking Awards. The new Ozarks Alive initiative recognizes individuals and organizations annually across the Ozarks for figurative "rock picking" of Ozarks cultural work.

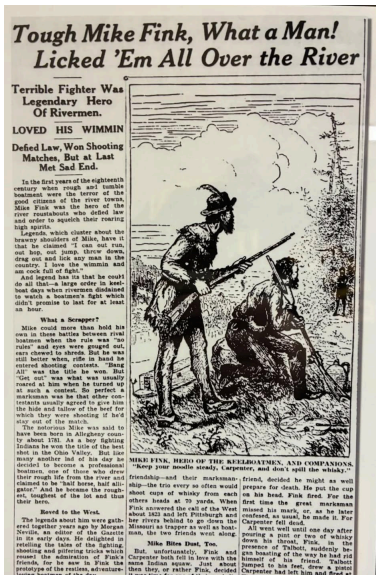
Image credit: Kaitlyn McConnell

Amelia LaMair

“Building Community and Culture at Flotsam Farm”



Flotsam Farm, named for the swirling debris that piles up together when the river rises, is a place where culture is continually building and changing. Located in the rural Ozarks, we host weekly and annual events centered on music, art, social and environmental justice, food production, and mutual aid. Learn about the challenges and successes of a place where punk rockers, hillbillies, homeschoolers, hippies, preppers, professors, environmentalists, cityfolk and countryfolk, newcomers and old timers, elders and youngsters can mingle, share a meal, learn something together, and have fun. *Image credit: Amelia Lamair*



Tough Mike Fink, What a Man! Licked 'Em All Over the River

Terrible Fighter Was Legendary Hero Of Rivermen.

LOVED HIS WIMMIN

Defied Law, Won Shooting Matches, But at Last Met Sad End.

MIKE FINK, HERO OF THE KEELBOATMEN, AND COMPANIONS.

Robert Boyd
"Alphonso Wetmore, Joseph M. Field, and Mike Fink: How History Became Legend"

The first mention in print of the semi- mythical keelboatman Mike Fink is in the first play produced west of the Mississippi, Alphonso Wetmore's "The Pedlar." The character is more fully developed in sketches by James M. Field published in the "Reveille," St. Louis's first literary journal. Together these sources are a good illustration of the process by which the myths of frontier culture blended with the development of literary journalism to produce the Southwest Humor out of which writers such as Mark Twain and Ambrose Bierce drew their inspiration.
Image Credit: Public Domain

Linda & Gary Kuntz
"Storytelling in Missouri"

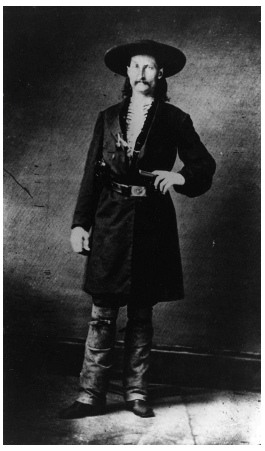
The presenters will talk about their experience storytelling at state parks, historic sites and Missouri Liars Contest.



Linda & Gary Kuntz, Nancee Walker-Micham and Sue Godsey
"Storytelling Performance: Folktales and Missouri Liars Contest"

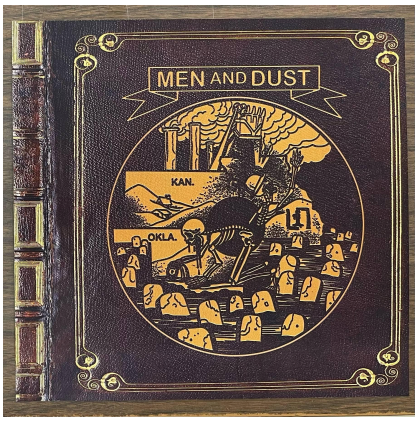
Storytelling performance with 4 storytellers (Gary Kuntz, Linda Kuntz, Nancee Walker-Micham and Sue Godsey) focusing on Missouri folktales and tall tales.
Images Courtesy: Linda Kuntz

Bob Allen
"The First Gunfight"



Brief details will be presented of the first one-on-one, face-to-face, quick draw gunfight in the Old West and its effect on how we view gunplay in the Old West

Dan Johnston, Arik Gilbert, & Dustin Simpson
"Men and Dust: Local History in Music - a conversation with the band The Itch"



Stalwarts of the Ozarks music scene, The itch (Dan Johnston, Arik Gilbert, and Dustin Simpson) speak with moderator MFS president and Ozarks Public Radio host and reporter Chris Drew, on their concept album *Men and Dust*, and SWMO history. The itch put out an album in 2025, Men and Dust, steeped in local history and conceived in response to and conversation with the historic documentation of SW Missouri mining culture. They performed the album as a multimedia experience in conjunction with documentary footage, and released a vinyl record with accompanying book expanding on the ideas of the music and performance.
Image Credit: The itch



Liberty Murphy
"Famine, Feathers, and Folklore"

This presentation uses a folkloric perspective to analyze how the 1847 donation made by the Choctaw Nation to the people of Ireland during The Potato Famine serves as a site of cultural memory creation. Based on personal experience in Ireland, documented history, and public memory, I show the ultimate impact of the donation is derived not from the initial donation, but how this gift is shared, reinterpreted, and understood across time. Although the original donation was not a very large one, its value has greatly increased and transformed into a shared folklore. Folklore connects a culture to itself but is not limited by geography, therefore, it can connect two cultures through creating a shared culture. The Choctaw gift connects two nations, both impacted by displacement and colonization. This presentation will demonstrate how the gift functions as a source of transnational folklore.
Image Credit: Liberty Murphy

Kevin Cupka Head
"Swimmin With The Fishes: Missouri's Sunken Past"



Since the completion of Powersite Dam in 1913, over 200,000 acres of Missouri riverside has never learned to swim. This presentation will provide a visual and narrative tour through the abandoned towns, sites, and cultural landscapes submerged beneath our lakes and reservoirs.
Image Credit: Public Domain



Rachel Gholson
“A Survey of Vietnamese Culture in the Ozarks”

The Vietnamese community of the Ozarks grew significantly in the 1970s when immigrants were housed in Arkansas. Ties to local communities were strengthened over decades through work in local food industries in towns like Springfield, Missouri and through nearly fifty years of annual celebrations like Marian Days in Carthage, Missouri.
Image Credit: Springfield-Greene County Library

Harvey Day-Arnett
“Sittin' Up With the Dead: Traditional Ozarks Death Practices”



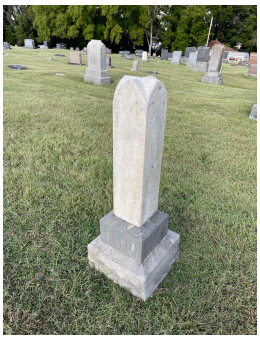
Before the modern funeral industry became the standard, caring for the dead was a communal experience. Family and friends came together to "sit up" with the dying and the dead, prepare the body for burial, and conduct a funeral in the home. This presentation will look at the superstitions, rituals, and traditions that informed these practices in the Ozarks, from the care of the dying through the remembrance of the dead. We'll also explore what might be gained from returning some of these practices to families and communities.
Image Credit: State Historical Society of Missouri



Neal Delmonico
“The Folklore of the Elemental Gods of India and of Native Americans”

Presentation on the folklore surrounding two ancient “elemental gods” from India and some Native American ritual beliefs about the sacredness of fire. We’ll focus first on India’s god of fire, Agni, and the less well known, but perhaps more ancient, god Apām Napāt, “Child of the Waters,” also a god of fire [and water], who is sometimes mistakenly identified with the god Agni. On the Native American side I will examine and compare Native American views and practices that embody their beliefs in the sacred nature of fire, such as the seven (or possibly eight) council fires, also known as The Seven Fire Prophecy, practiced by the Native Americans beginning with the Anishinaabe (meaning the “people from whence lowered,” ”the good humans,” “beings made out of nothing,” or “spontaneous beings.”) people who lived in the Great Lakes region of Canada and the United States, and gradually merged parts of their language and stories with those of other peoples.
Image Courtesy: Public Domain

Whit Gillenwaters
"Grave Matters: Symbols, Stories, and Cemetery Preservation"



Historic cemeteries are filled with symbols, stories, and clues to the past. An exploration of cemetery symbolism and history with practical information on the tools, techniques, and best practices for safely cleaning gravestones.
Image Courtesy: Reddit / Fair Use



Sharp Woolston, Daniel Smiley, Raymond Mathis, Garret Jackson (*We Always Lie to Strangers* Podcast)
"Ozarks Cultural Identity - Arkansas Vs Missouri, A Discussion"

A discussion on the differing opinions and ideas on what makes the Ozarks and Ozarkers unique, which is oddly split for such a small region.
Image Courtesy: WALtoS

Dave Malone (Malone Media)
"Film Screening: Tennyson's Maud (2026)"



A screening of Tennyson's Maud, a 15-minute narrative short that relocates Alfred, Lord Tennyson's 1855 poem to the 1920s–30s Ozarks. The film centers on a prosperous Black family, drawing attention to the lesser-known history of Black landownership and enterprise in certain communities during this period. Despite its historical setting, the film's central conflict is one of social class, romantic love, and the obsessive passions that can accompany it.
Image Credit: Dave Malone

Thomas A. Peters
"McClurg Music Mondays"



Music jam sessions are part of the enduring folk culture of the Missouri Ozarks and elsewhere. A weekly music jam has been held in tiny McClurg in northeast Taney County, near the Glade Top Trail, since 1983 – 43 years. Tom Peters, the current "mayor" of McClurg (pop. 1), will talk about the McClurg jam, the music, the food, the dancing, and the fellowship and traditions it fosters and supports. Ongoing efforts to document and share this extraordinary music jam will be covered.

Image Courtesy: Tom Peters



Joanna Dee Das
"Folk or Commercial? Branson Variety Entertainment"

Folk culture has long been posited as the opposite of commercial entertainment. This paper asks what we might gain by troubling this distinction. It takes the Baldknobbers Hillbilly Jamboree, one of Branson, Missouri's longest-running shows, as its case study, focusing on their first decade (1959-1969). While the Baldknobbers marketed themselves as purveyors of authentic Ozark folk traditions, their repertoire in the 1960s included numbers from a range of genres and styles—including several commercial country hits and songs from movie soundtracks. I argue that this fact does not invalidate their claim to uphold an Ozark tradition, but the tradition is not one of Anglo-Saxon/Scotch-Irish folk purity. Instead, it is the longstanding Ozark tradition of variety entertainment. The value of the Baldknobbers Hillbilly Jamboree lies in the show's cultural borrowing, mixing, and reworking, which demonstrated Ozarker—and American—traits of adaptability, creativity, and vibrancy.

Jillian A. Hodge
"Preserving History: the Freedom Suit of Milly Sawyers"



Delve into the story of Milly Sawyers, an enslaved woman of color suing for her freedom in Springfield in 1834. Just 4 handwritten documents almost lost to history gives us a peek into the racial struggles of that moment in Springfield past. Session participants will then assume roles in a short recreation of the freedom suit brought by Milly Sawyers in the Greene County Circuit Court, and discuss the aftermath of that court decision. We will then wrap up with a discussion of how we as a community choose to remember and memorialize history.
Image Courtesy: Jill Hodge



Julie Henigan
"Ozark Ballads"

Musician, folklorist, poet, and noted folksong scholar Julie Henigan will perform traditional ballads from the Ozarks, providing historical context from the Old and New Worlds, as well as background information about each song. She will discuss how scholars have defined ballads and present examples of three different categories of ballads, including so-called "Child ballads"; printed or "broadside ballads"; and "Native American" ballads (ballads composed in the New World). She will play recordings of several traditional singers from the Ozarks (e.g., Almeda Riddle and Ollie Gilbert), as well as performing several ballads herself.



Matt Dauphin
"Real Talk from a Fake Mayor"

By day, Matt Dauphin is the Gallery Manager at the World Chess Hall of Fame and Galleries in St. Louis, MO, as well as Vice President of the Carondelet Historical Society. By night, he is Carondelet Guy, a musician and storyteller, and the longtime host of Chill Dawg Cove, a music venue run from his backyard in Carondelet for the past 15 years. (Carondelet being an area independently founded in 1767, later becoming a part of St. Louis, MO)

Chill Dawg Cove has become an inextricable part of the neighborhood's lore. An ode to Carondelet , it's filled with records, posters, treasures, antiques, even bits of the neighborhood itself. It's here that musicians and artists commune with neighbors and friends.

As Carondelet Guy, Matt weaves together the stories and characters of the neighborhood, from the tumbleweeds that roll down Minnesota Avenue, to real talk with his neighbor Mr. Henry, to mystifying nights at The Crystal Wizard, he preserves the texture of everyday life beside the mighty Mississippi. His deep affection and love for the place and its people has earned him the unofficial title of "the Mayor of Carondelet"

Jeffery Goss
"Long-range Weather Lore and Seasonal Proverbs"



Analysis of folk weather prediction sayings, phonology correlations, and winter "omens" that have been handed down in Missouri. Which ones have been validated over time, which ones possibly misunderstood, and which ones originated far from here – and thus cannot be expected to hold true? Also, other sayings derived from farming, and what they mean, and traditions related to weather, the moon, etc.
Image Courtesy: Old Farmers Almanac



The Creek Rocks - Cindy Woolf and Mark Bilyeu
"Exploring Ozarks Field Recordings with The Creek Rocks"

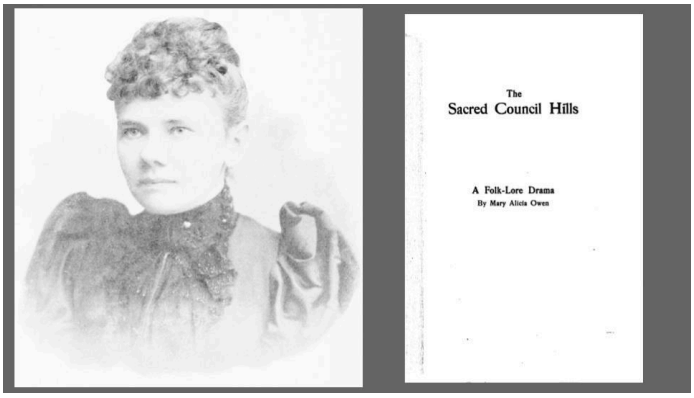
We would talk about the different archives of Ozarks Folksongs, about our recent Fellowship as Artists in Resonance at the American Folklife Center and our research there at the Library of Congress, play samples of the field recordings we've used as our sources for recordings and performances, and do some live performances of our versions of these songs.
Image Credit: The Creek Rocks



Emma Neighbor
“Ozarks Square Dancing: Keeping Community Alive”

Demonstration of traditional Ozarks square dance figures and accompanying calls, with traditional Old Time fiddle music that was developed alongside the dances more than 100 years ago.
Image credit: Emma Neighbor & Guerilla Creative Photography

Betsy Delmonico
“Mary Alicia Owen's THE SACRED COUNCIL HILLS: A FOLK-LORE DRAMA”



This paper will look at one example of a “folk-lore drama,” THE SACRED COUNCIL HILLS, composed in 1909 by MFS president Mary Alicia Owen, in terms of the “assembling” and “comparing” which shape its significance.

Though intended for performance by students at a high school in St. Joseph’s (and first published in the UK), SACRED COUNCIL HILLS was designed to foreground the customs, beliefs, practices, habits, songs, etc. of the people who had been pushed out of the Blacksnake Hills by the Platte Purchase Treaty of 1936.

Owen was perhaps this country’s greatest (white) expert on those displaced people, having spent much of her life visiting their reservation, recording their stories, crafts, rituals, beliefs. The play which she constructed demonstrates a keen understanding of both her target audience—white families who wanted somehow to recognize those their ancestors had displaced —and Sauk and Mesquakie people, whose “old, every-day stuff” deserved to be carefully “assembled and compared.” This is not to say that Owen had no culturally constructed prejudices, just to say that she worked very hard to establish the great value of Native American culture. A handful of examples (a song, a ritual, a craft, a belief) will illustrate this point.
Image Credit: Public Domain

Curtis Copeland
“Preserving the Ozarks, One Story at a Time: Authors, Storytellers, and Cultural Heritage”

The rich cultural heritage of the Ozarks has long been preserved through storytelling, folklore, and the written word. Today, regional authors continue this tradition, blending historical research, personal experiences, and literary creativity to produce works that both educate and entertain. Through more than 145 episodes of the Ozarkian Folk Chronicles podcast, hosts Curtis Copeland and Hayden Head have interviewed numerous authors whose books explore the diverse history, traditions, people, and peculiarities of the Ozarks. This presentation highlights selected authors and their literary contributions, examining the fascinating subjects they explore and the cultural heritage their works help preserve. Together, these writers demonstrate the enduring importance of storytelling in documenting, celebrating, and sustaining the distinctive identity of the Ozarks.

Curtis Copeland
“The Burial of Rose O’Neill: Faith, Folklore, and an Unconventional Ozarks Farewell”

When renowned artist and Kewpie creator Rose O’Neill died in 1944, her burial at Bonniebrook in Taney County, Missouri, defied the deeply rooted Christian funeral traditions of the Ozarks. Without sermon, prayer, or formal religious ceremony, her farewell left a lasting impression on those in attendance. Folklorist Vance Randolph, a close friend of O’Neill, described the unusual burial, while contemporary newspaper accounts offered a contrasting perspective.

This presentation explores the circumstances surrounding O’Neill’s funeral, her unconventional spiritual beliefs, and the traditional religious customs of her Ozarks neighbors. Through historical accounts and regional folklore, her burial reveals the intersection of faith, individualism, and community tradition, illustrating how one remarkable woman's final farewell challenged cultural expectations while inspiring profound respect.