

FOLK PATTERNS

RESEARCH RESOURCE BOOK

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

NEWAYGO COUNTY

6907 W. 48th St.

Fremont, MI 49412

Phone: 616/924-0500

This booklet is designed to help the *Folkpatterns* participant find some of the answers to the questions raised in the *Concepts* booklet. Presented here are some general guidelines, some research do's and don'ts, and some ideas to explore with your project leader.

Once you have chosen an item or topic to investigate, you will want to know how to study it. Whether you have chosen a new or old item, you will find that there are a wide range of resources for information. The following areas are only a few of the many that can be explored and you will undoubtedly find your own special resources.

Human Resources:

A. Family Interview

Your own family may be the easiest place to start. Start with someone with whom you feel very comfortable. Prepare some questions, but be prepared to let the interviewee bring up things you might not have thought of. Show interest in what the person is telling you—be a good listener as well as a good questioner. If possible, keep your selected object close by where you can see it. Objects often help stimulate memories. Be sensitive to the needs of family members. Don't schedule interview sessions at inconvenient times. Older people tire easily—don't interview them any longer than they are able. Do ask them about items or events related to your chosen item or topic. They might have old magazines, photographs or diaries. Ask them to show them to you. Do ask them if they know anyone else you could talk to. By all means, let them know what you are working on and what will happen to the information they give you.

B. Community People

Once you have tried out your interviewing skills on a family member, then you are ready to begin contacting other people for information. Depending on your selected topic you might find that any of the following contacts might be helpful: local businessmen, local politicians, ministers, priests, rabbis, newspaper editors, retired schoolteachers, residents of senior citizen homes, museum curators, ethnic leaders, a neighbor, a builder, a lawyer, an architect, a local historian, an artist or craftsman. Where do you find these people? Look into senior citizen homes, fraternal organizations, community centers, ethnic centers, churches. Ask around for names of people who might be able to tell you something about your topic. If you locate one person to interview, ask them if they could recommend someone else. Chances are they will have a friend or relative that will also have information, perhaps they will even contact the person for you.

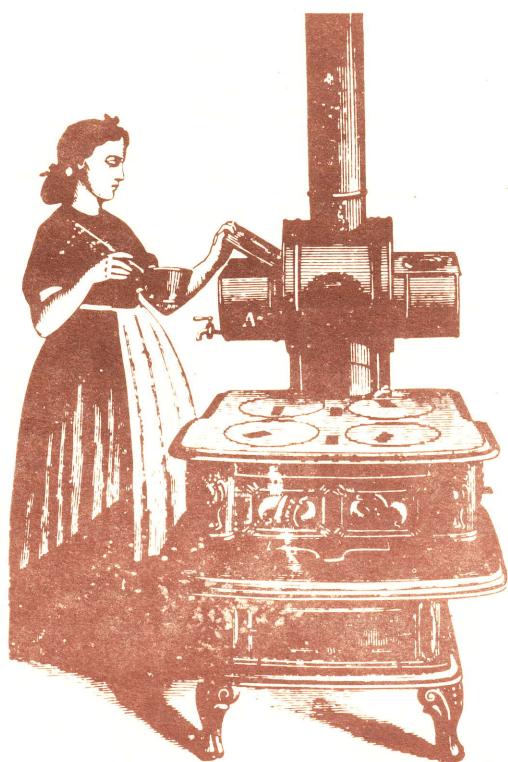
Always be sure to inform your contact about your project and obtain their permission if you will be tape-recording or photographing.



**Michigan 4-H – Youth Programs
Cooperative Extension Service
and The Folk Arts Division
The Museum Michigan State University**

Non-Human Resources: Libraries

Libraries are a great resource for finding both information and clues to additional information. Here you will be able to find books on state and local history. You might find that if your community has passed its fiftieth, seventy-fifth or hundredth birthday, a local historian may have written a local history on that occasion. Main library branches may contain complete collections of state historical journals, town records, and business directories. Many libraries have collections of old area surveys and maps. Special resources might also include census listings and business records. Other non-book materials may be located in library vertical files or boxes. These may include handwritten diaries, loose family papers, photographs, autograph albums or newspaper clippings.



For the item or event on which you have focused, it might be interesting to read a newspaper dated from the same period. Perhaps the event will be covered or the item advertised. Libraries may have copies of the local paper going back to when the paper was first printed. It may even have copies of community weeklies which have long since gone out of business.

Libraries have catalog systems to help you locate your resources. Card catalogs usually have a subject-heading list, and you will probably have to use your imagination when using this list. For instance, if you want to find out about a rocking chair you might have to look under the following headings: chairs, chair making, furniture making, furniture industry, wood products, etc. Or if you want information on a wood-burning stove, you might look under these headings: stoves, wood-burning stoves, energy sources, heating apparatus, etc. You must keep in mind that your subject may be hidden under another listing.

Librarians are there, not only to take care of the collections, but also to help you. When you need help, ask them, for they can probably refer you to resources you might overlook. Librarians are a special source of information in themselves, especially if they have worked in one location or library for many years. In fact, in some towns, the librarian is also a local historian. So, it might be helpful to share with them what you are doing. They might be able to steer you toward other community resources.

It will probably take several trips to the library before you find the information you are seeking. But part of the fun of searching for information there is that along the way you will discover many surprising bits of information.

Other Non-Human Resources

Though libraries will be one of the most helpful sources of leads for your investigation—you might need to check into one or more of the following:

- (1) local newspaper office—for back copies of papers, clipping files, contacts, reporters and editors
- (2) museum—for similar objects, museum library resources, contacts with curators and local historians
- (3) business—for records, old catalogs, advertising and contacts with businessmen
- (4) archives—for specialized holdings (such as photographs, folklore, etc.)
- (5) schools—for records, yearbooks, school newspapers, libraries, contacts with present and retired teachers
- (6) government offices—town records, birth and death records, and contacts with officials
- (7) churches—for records, photos, histories and contacts with older church members
- (8) historical society—for old papers, records, photographs and contacts with local historians
- (9) Chamber of Commerce—for names of old businesses and contacts with businessmen
- (10) community college—for library resources and contacts with people interested in historical research

Recording Information:

A. Tape-recording

Tape recording interviews is the usual means of recording information. A small cassette machine with a built-in omnidirectional microphone will give the best results. It is easy to use and so inconspicuous that its presence will soon be forgotten. If you or your family don't own a recorder, sometimes local libraries or school systems will lend their equipment. By asking around you might find some other agency which would be willing to loan equipment when you need it. A ninety-minute cassette (forty-five minutes per side) is a good choice since it is economical, unlikely to tangle, and long enough to record substantial segments of an interview without interruption.

Before you begin an interview, make sure you run a test. The microphone should be placed so that all voices can be picked up. Read carefully any instructions that come with the particular tape recorder that you are using. As far as possible, all extraneous noise should be eliminated. That includes closing windows and turning off radios. Older people's voices may be softer so you might have to place the recorder nearer them. The recorder should also be placed where it will not be disturbed during the interview and where you will have easy access to it when it becomes necessary to change tapes.

B. Cameras

Although it isn't necessary, a camera is a useful piece of equipment which can provide a visual record of the object, events and interviews. It can also be used to copy any documentary records that the informant might offer, such as photographs or scrapbooks. Perhaps you could team up with someone who is interested in photography. Either they could take pictures for you or could teach you how to take your own.

Notebooks

If you do not have tape recorders or cameras available, you can still record information by keeping a journal or notebook. Writing during an interview can have its disadvantages—it is tedious, difficult, time consuming, and hard to maintain accuracy. However, if you are recording information in a notebook, the following will be helpful: (1) always date your entry of information; (2) double check your written information with your interviewee (read back some of your notes if necessary); and (3) keep all of your information together in one or two books.



Keeping Your Records

All tapes should be labelled with names, dates and locations. Ideally, all tapes should be transcribed and indexed. Though this is a time-consuming process, you will be able to refer more easily to information on the tapes. Cassette tapes could be kept in a shoe box—remember to keep them sorted in a dry, cool place.

Photographs should also be labelled with names, dates and locations. If possible, the type of film and the camera setting should also be recorded. Negatives can either be kept in plastic negative files or glassene sleeves.

Most importantly—remember to keep your information together. It may be that a local library or museum would be interested in your project. You might even consider donating your findings to them when you are all through.

Obtaining Permission:

Taping and Photographing

Whenever you are obtaining information from another person, it is important that you obtain permission to use the material in various ways. This can be done by using the following sample form:

Don't make promises you can't or don't intend to keep. If you say you will erase part of a tape, do so, even if it means losing some important information. Respect confidences and privacy. Let your informants see anything that will be published before it is too late to alter a manuscript.

FOLKPATTERNS RESEARCH RELEASE

I hereby authorize _____ (representing the Folk Arts Division of The Museum) to record on film, tape or otherwise, my name, likeness and performance and to use and to authorize others to use such recordings or film for educational television and radio broadcasting over stations throughout the world, for audiovisual purposes and for general educational purposes in perpetuity. You may also use my name, likeness and biography for publicizing and promoting such broadcasts and other such uses. I also warrant and represent that all material furnished and used by me is my own original material or material for which I have full authority to use for such purposes. I reserve the right to withdraw from this project at any time, and I understand that I will have the opportunity to edit the interview before future use.

Signed:

Witnessed:

Signed:

Witnessed:

Signed:

Signed:

Date:

Signed:

Signed:

For Collecting Objects/Manuscripts or Photographs

If you are offered any materials, such as diaries or photographs, perhaps they would best be kept in public trust which simply means donating them to a state or local library or museum. If you are offered historical materials, the best thing to do would be to notify either your 4-H leader or the Folk Arts Division at The Museum, MSU.



This booklet was prepared by Marsha MacDowell, Curator of Folk Arts at The Museum, Michigan State University. Assistance was provided by the following individuals: Don Jost, Michigan 4-H Foundation; Sue Kirkland, 4-H Program Assistant; Lenore Cooper, 4-H Volunteer Leader; Michelle O'Malley, Lynn Cochrane, Tanya Woodards and LaNai Reynolds, 4-H Youth; Dick Hill, 4-H Program Leader; Larry Landrum and Russ Nye, Department of English; Sherryl Faltum, Graduate Assistant; and Bill Lovis and Kurt Dewhurst of The Museum staff.

Advice on the project was also given by Elliott Wigginton of *Foxfire*, Matt Joseph of Wisconsin 4-H — Youth Programs, Janet Langlois and John Gutowski of Wayne State University, Jim Callow of the University of Detroit and Bob Teske of Western Kentucky University.

Sponsored by The Folk Arts Division of The Museum, Michigan State University; Michigan 4-H Foundation; and Michigan 4-H — Youth Programs, this project has been made possible with a Planning Award from the NEH Youth Projects Program of The National Endowment for the Humanities, a Federal agency established by Congress to promote research, education and public activity in the Humanities.

Photo credits: Michigan State University Library—Frank M. Benton, Herkerand Berg Collections; Michigan History Division—Childs, Dravenstatt, Hall Collections; Sears Catalogs of 1895 and 1905; The Museum Folk Arts Archives, Michigan State University.

Michigan 4-H — Youth educational programs and all other Cooperative Extension Service programs are available to all without regard to race, color or national origin. • Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Gordon E. Guyer, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824.