

**The Great Festival
Site Search**

**Thursday Contraband
Moving Again!**

NEFFA
NEW ENGLAND FOLK FESTIVAL ASSOCIATION
NEWS

Summer 2006 – Vol. XXXII #2

**Remembering
Margaret MacArthur**

**Minutes? But of
Course!**

TALES FROM THE WILD:

Searching for a New Festival Site



THE air was heavy with mist and the sun long gone when we set out from base camp. Misty halos surrounded the sputtering lanterns as our tired, ragged party assembled their packs and readied the animals. Giles, a plucky young Scot, was a wonder of youthful high spirits, as he whistled a sprightly tune. The rest of us, deadened by fatigue, weighed down by leaky, mud-soaked boots and endless disappointment, trudged into formation, and waited for the signal when we would embark upon the exploration of another potential NEFFA Festival site.

Was it a Wednesday? Thursday? Out here, all the days run together. I can still remember the way it all started. It was another place, another time. Ah! We were fresh-faced back then!

Our motley band is united by a common interest. We are the people who help plan for the annual New England Folk Festival. For years we have been living off the fat of the land

at a place called Natick High School. When we first moved in, back in the '60's - was it that long ago? - we were greeted with open arms by the locals. In fact, they helped pay our way.



Times have changed, and so has the High School. Budget cutbacks during lean times have forced the Natick Recreation Department to withdraw their financial support. After 9/11, our satellite parking lot needed to change from the relatively close-in US Army Soldiers System Center (Natick Labs), to the more distant TJX Headquarters, needing more buses to service. Kitchen equipment, water fountains, clocks, windows, lights, sinks and toilets are falling into disrepair.

Perhaps the largest change to the High School has been the withdrawal of the Lower Hall from our use. When we moved into Natick, we did not use the Lower Hall. As our attendance grew along with diversity of interests of our attendees, we found the Lower Hall to be a great resource. Several years after that, we gained the Overflow Room. It was kind of disorienting for a while for the dancers and the callers/bands to be separated from view, but we coped, and appreciated the additional floor space that helped alleviate the legendary Lower Hall 'conditions'.

In 2003 and 2004, we had a harbinger of things to come. The Lower Hall was filled with exercise equipment and christened as the town Wellness Center. The town and NEFFA agreed that NEFFA could clear out the Lower Hall if NEFFA would pay for repairs and readjustment of the equipment.

In 2005, the town had received a grant for new equipment and refused to let us move it. We

attempted to cope with just the overflow room by creative programming, but it was a disappointment for many Festival attendees.

In planning for 2006, we were greeted by another hurdle: a large interlocking rubber floor was installed in the Wellness Center. Our offer to move equipment *and* remove and replace the rubber floor was turned down.

So this year, we bit the \$12,000 bullet, and erected The Fabulous Dance Tent, which was a real hit even considering the lousy weather. This expense is not one that we can continue to maintain.

All in all, we thought that this is a good time to get serious about searching for a new place for the Festival. We hired Persis Thorndike to do the research and leg work, and she came up with a several good candidates for site visits.

And now back to our story...



There was a distant rumble of thunder as we stood outside the long stairway leading up to the main entrance of the Building. Boggs has tied the animals to a rusted iron fence where they remained, straining at their reins. Were they sensing something?

Progress was difficult during our ascent, as the steps were slippery, and, more disturbingly, had treacherous crumbled edges. After what seemed like minutes, we reached the top of the stairs, and instinctively checking the location of our memo pads and cameras, we entered.

My assignment was to check the lobby for adequate space, lighting, and traffic flow. Easy enough you might think, but then the



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The NEFFA News, a publication of the New England Folk Festival Association, Inc., is published four times a year to communicate with its membership and other interested persons. **Please send all editorial submissions** to Dan Pearl, 15 Buffalo Run, Southborough, MA 01772, or to neffa@neffa.org. Opinions of individuals are not necessarily the opinion of the NEFFA Executive Board.

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<u>Issue</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
Spring	Feb. 1
Summer	May 15
Fall	Aug. 15
Winter	Nov. 1

next sentence arrived. Suddenly, the lobby was plunged into darkness! Instantly, there was pandemonium! People were running into each other! People were screaming! My body was racked with unbelievable pain as I ran headlong into a column! Then the lights came back on. Standing by the light switch was tall, gaunt, hollow-cheeked man. His dead eyes focussed nowhere in particular. The hair on the backs of our necks stood on end as he said in a thin, eerie voice, "Greetings. I am your guide. Welcome to...the Building." A brilliant flash of lightning and crack of thunder completed the nightmarish picture.

Our party recomposed itself, and then continued its trek into the veritable bowels of the building. "What horrors will await us?" we were all thinking. "Where's the toilet," I was thinking.



Actually, when we do our site visits, we do check the toilets. Our main goal is to identify the types of spaces that might match those that we have at Natick. We look at all the gym-type spaces, the Auditorium, the cafeteria, classrooms, specialty rooms, the library, courtyard, other exterior spaces, etc.

We look for good traffic flow, logical layout, parking, width of hallways, handicapped access, air circulation, potential for coat racks, etc. Sometimes, we do not see a 1 to 1 facility match with Natick High School, which is OK. We may have to compromise, adjust, or re-imagine what the Festival can be.



Our party, good men and women all, staggered out of the Building, our job done for the day. We all decided to dedicate our mission to the memory of plucky young Giles. His easy-going smile will live forever in our memories, as will his screams of horror when he inadvertently entered the Forbidden Wing.



Our search is going well, and we hope to make an announcement this summer about where the Festival will be. If you want to get immediate notification of our decision, send an email to

NEFFA-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

The New England Folk Festival Association, Inc. is a non-profit educational and cultural organization, incorporated under the general laws of Massachusetts to preserve folk traditions in New England and elsewhere; to encourage the development of a living folk culture; and to encourage high standards of quality and performance in the folk arts.

Membership entitles one to voting privileges, publications, and to reduced admission to selected NEFFA-sponsored activities. It is open to interested persons who support our objectives.

Annual Dues are \$20/individual, \$38/family (up to 2 people over 18). Contributions beyond these basic amounts are welcome and tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law. Send check, payable to NEFFA, to the office. Occasionally, NEFFA shares its mailing list for a one-time use by like-minded folk organizations. If you do not want your name and address shared in this way, tell us with your membership. **Please direct all inquiries** to the NEFFA office: PMB 282, 1770 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02140 or (781) 662-6710, or via email: neffa@neffa.org

Interested persons may get on NEFFA's mailing list for one year at no charge. Send request with full name and address to the office.

IN PASSING

We are sad to hear that Margaret MacArthur died in May 2006. This appreciation was published in the The Barre Montpelier Times Argus and is reprinted with permission.

Margaret MacArthur, "Folk Songs of Vermont." I remember seeing that listing among the hundreds in the Folkways Records' catalog in the early 1960s — along with recordings by Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, music from indigenous communities around the world and even the sounds of frogs.

As a rabid young Philadelphia folkie, I had just come under the spell of the southern Appalachian and Deep South roots of the folk revival and was not particularly interested in music from north of the Mason-Dixon Line. But the name stuck.

It wasn't long after I moved to Vermont some years ago that I discovered the richness of the state's music traditions and why Margaret MacArthur was not only the first folk singer to issue an album of Vermont songs, but why she was Vermont's first lady of folk music as well.

First, there were the songs. I say first, because to Margaret it was always the song, not the singer, that mattered most. She saw herself as a vehicle for the musical stories she told with grace and directness. She never drew attention to herself; she always made sure her audience understood the significance of the song. Never pedantic, Margaret seamlessly combined the roles of performer and educator. "I don't regard what I do as entertaining, except as the stories themselves are entertaining," she once told me.

Margaret is best known for her performances of rural songs from a time before mass transportation and mass communication transformed Vermont life and culture, a time when songs and stories were transferred through contact with friends and family.

Margaret wrote songs as well. There, too, she followed a traditional approach — writing about rural life, events and people — not about herself. She even viewed the melodies she composed for locally written poems as part of the "folk process." "New tunes," she said, "are just fragments of old tunes put together."

Margaret's love of old songs began during her peripatetic childhood. Born in Chicago, she grew up in rural Missouri where she developed a lifelong love of country ways and traditional folk songs. She was especially attracted to long story-songs, or ballads, which she researched as a student at the University of Chicago. In 1948, she moved to Vermont and soon settled with her husband, John, in Marlboro, in an old farmhouse where she began raising a family and living the kind of rural life she had begun singing about.

That lifestyle, in turn, brought home the reality of the songs.

"Our time spent fixing up the house," she wrote in the notes to her 1982 album, "An Almanac of New England Farm Song," "gave us insight not only into building techniques of the early

Thanks, Margaret

By MARK GREENBERG

1800s but into the ways of life of our predecessors."

When a neighbor gave her an unusual, broken harp-zither, John repaired it, and Margaret began using it, along with the Appalachian dulcimer, to accompany her songs and pick old-time tunes. Today, this instrument is known as a "MacArthur harp."

Living without electricity for the first six years in Marlboro, the MacArthurs did what many old-time families had done at night: They sang by the light of kerosene lamps. "Something about those dim lights in the winter really inspired me to learn a lot of long songs," she once remarked.

But Margaret did not confine her passion for old ways and music to the home. She began seeking songs from her neighbors as well as from the Middlebury College collection begun by Vermont's pioneer folk song collector, Helen Hartness Flanders, who encouraged Margaret's singing and collecting.

As a teacher at the two-room Marlboro schoolhouse, Margaret began introducing the children to songs that she was learning, often from their parents and grandparents. Later, she developed thematic programs for schools. She also began writing songs with kids based on oral history interviews the students had conducted in their families and communities. (A collection of those songs, "The Vermont Heritage Songbook," and companion CD are available from the Vermont Folklife Center.)

Margaret's public performances were often thematic as well. And they were always informative. She was "rigorous about the antecedents and legacy of a song," according to Alex Aldrich, executive director of the Vermont Arts Council. "She had such an influence, not only on people, but on the way traditional music is carried from generation to generation."

For this, as well as for her talents as a musician, Margaret, who toured nationally and internationally, received major recognition in and beyond Vermont. In 1985 the University of Massachusetts named her a New England Living Art Treasure. In 2002 the Vermont Arts Council presented her with its Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Arts. In 2005 she was invited to sing at the Library of Congress and the Kennedy Center.

Margaret accepted those honors with characteristic modesty.

"She was so unassuming," said Jane Beck, executive director of the Vermont Folklife Center. "She never really accepted the impact she had on Vermont. She was so down-to-earth."

That brings me back to Margaret herself. Far more than a singer, collector and preserver of songs, Margaret was a mother, wife, friend, baker of bread, and tender of gardens, a person absolutely dedicated to nurturing and living in harmony with both the natural and human environments. Warm, genuine and inclusive, Margaret dedicated her life to preserving old songs and ways not simply because they are old and quaint, but because they help remind us of where we've come from, who we are and the fundamental value of transmitting culture directly

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FOUND at the NEFFA Festival

These items were found at the 2006 NEFFA Festival. If you think an item might be yours, contact Dan Pearl at 508-229-2854 or Daniel_Pearl@yahoo.com . Items not claimed by August 1st may be donated to charity or recycled.

Clothing

Bag of clothes including red L
Izod shirt with pens in pocket
Many pairs of shoes
Clayton CA T-Shirt
Combination short skirt and
tights, Black
Floral Pennsylvania T-shirt
Several caps and hats
Floral print tan blouse
Dark W's petite vest with lame
trim
Dark paisley vest
AMC Naturalist fleece vest
Tool cosmic design black
hooded sweatshirt
Teal cotton sweater
M's blue plaid shirt
White dress shirt
Purple plastic jacket
Grey Pinewoods sweatshirt
Tan pants with white piping

Accessories

Gold leather gloves
Olive green kerchief

Musical Accessories

Ingles fiddle stand
Susato whistle case

Toys

Chick-in-egg toy

Jewelry

Beaded bracelet
2" red metal ring
Silver fillagree necklace &
chain
Earring with purple bean-like
dangle
Silver earrings with long
dangles

Miscellaneous

Umbrellas
Head Radio with "Emily TRA-
K" written on it
Screwdriver double-headed
Eyeglasses
Sunglasses
Small beaded bag
Silver ring with several
rhinestones
Keys with Speedpass fob
Hole punch
Small pocket knife
Bag of cheesecloth squares
Flying geese canvas tote
Red Felt
Lacrosse ball

(Continued from page 4)

from person to person.

And now she's gone. Margaret became ill about a month ago with Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, a rare, incurable brain disorder and died at home on May 23. She was 78. It's a terrible loss for us all.

The last time I saw Margaret was at last summer's Champlain Valley Folk Festival. I was running a workshop featuring some of the old Pony Boys, central Vermont's preeminent radio cowboy band from the 1930s to the '50s, and Margaret showed up. She had appeared with some of these folks in "The Unbroken Broken Circle," my own video documentary about Vermont traditional and country music and came to the workshop to support them, even though their music was influenced by popular, post-electronic culture and, some would say, stretched the boundaries of "folk."

But to Margaret it all came from the same roots and was all part of Vermont's musical heritage. Spontaneously, I asked if she'd start things off by singing "Fifty Years Ago," a 19th century song that speaks of such then-modern improvements as horse teams replacing oxen. She did, her voice true and clear with just a touch of grit: "How wondrous are the changes since 50 years ago"

Just over 50 years ago Margaret MacArthur moved to Vermont. She knew of the wondrousness of this place and helped to make it more so.

Thanks, Margaret.

Mark Greenberg is a musician, writer and producer. He currently teaches courses in American vernacular music at UVM.

Summary of the Minutes of the NEFFA Executive Board

March 12, 2006

President's Report (Maureen Carey)

Introduction of Caroline Bays, new ticket co-chair who will work during the Festival. Ron Bernier is the pre-Festival person.

Nominating Committee Report (Shelagh Ellman-Pearl)

There were no responses to the Call for Nominations. We do have a full slate. We have two new Director candidates, **Bob Golder** and **Beth Parkes**. **Robert Johnson** agrees to be Vice President. Next year, Maureen cannot be re-elected, so we are looking for suggestions.

Beth Parkes will also become Membership Chair. Kristin Gustafson and Hal Wagner will continue to take care of the Membership booth at the Festival.

T Shirts: Bob Golder is designing them. The shirt will have some kind of color gradient. Lisa decides how many.

Festival Committee Reports

☐ Access (Shelagh Ellman-Pearl)

Katy Burns will do ASL as needed. Another situation: the Natick train station is not HP accessible, the West Natick station is. So I'm checking on transportation, either a taxi service or The Ride: what arrangements can we make for someone taking the commuter rail.

Dan: One needs to be a registered subscriber for The Ride, and subscribe a month ahead. It's also unreliable. **Shelagh:** Mike Bergman has a lift van.

Dan: I am worried about liability. **Peter:** There must be a cab service in the area with a wheelchair van.

☐ Evaluations (Shelagh Ellman-Pearl)

The evaluation form draft was distributed.

☐ Food (Maureen Carey)

Great Meadows is not coming. Cookies, coffee and pastries will be taken over by the Boston Gay and Lesbian Dancers. We have a Natick company, Dave and Jerry's, that will make soup and slush. They'll do 3 soups and 2 slushes. We have a guy from Oxford, MA who will do chili etc. People want French Fries but they can't do it without propane. **Linda:** I don't have the Natick group on my list. I need any changes now. **Maureen:** We won't have Polish this year because of health issues. We'll accommodate her if she can come back.

☐ Inside Facilities (Harold Henry)

We're going to have a 40 x 80 tent right outside the Lower Hall, about 2 feet away from the wall. There will be a canopy in between. We won't have a zipper

door because of emergency exit issues. I want to get a 10 x 20 canopy as an anteroom; maybe another canopy outside. There will be lights on the inside. The poles inside will be strong enough to support speakers. They'll start set-up Wednesday. **Peter:** Is there a truss across the middle? I might want to hang speakers there. Can I get a drawing? **Harold:** The price will be 11- or \$12,000 dollars. **Dan:** We need to put the tent on the map. **Linda:** Also, we'll need a fair number of signs, "No bags" etc. Michael and Diane need to know. I think we'll need signs at the entryway and inside. **Steve:** Will we have a safety people there? **Dan:** We have someone who visits the Lower Hall – that will be part of their loop. **Peter:** Do we need another person? **Shelagh:** I'll e-mail Alan about that. **Harold:** We can run power, there's no public access. Only one outside door will have tent access – you can run power through the other door. **Dan:** Have you spoken to the Fire Dept.? I don't want the Lower Hall exit to feed into the tent. If the Fire Dept. is OK with it, then I will be, but they have to know the exact plan.

☐ Printed Materials and Program (Linda Leslie)

The preliminary grid was distributed. There are already a few changes. I've been doing this since 1999 and we've had an extraordinary number of cancellations. The number one reason is people being offered a paying gig. I let folks know that we were disappointed. I haven't gotten to the point of saying please don't apply... I want to see if this was just a fluky year. Then we had a Greek guy who was coming and he forgot to notice that it was Greek Orthodox Easter.

☐ Sound (Peter Olszowka)

Peter: I've been talking to Eric Kilburn about sound in the tent and we'll only have speakers at one end of the tent. **Linda:** Can we have sound at the "less dense" end people-wise? **Peter:** I think people will set up where the music is coming from. **Linda:** Then I suggest you put speakers at the end away from the doors. **Dan:** What about putting equipment along the long end? **Peter:** We would have multiple shorter sets. The speakers will take up about 3 feet of space. There's less of an effect if there's the 80 feet. **Linda:** There are other things than contra. But I think we're better off having longer sets. Short sets aren't as good for medleys. Dancers will naturally go for the length. **Mark:** Sets at the Scout House are 65 feet. You could use up 10 feet and let the speakers be taller. **Peter:** The Main Hall is about 70 feet from the front of the stage to the bleachers. **Rayna:** What

about outside noise considerations? **Peter:** If the tent is empty at 10:00 we can turn the sound off. **Linda:** We purposefully put contra dance in the Main Hall after 7 PM Saturday night. The loudest thing Friday night will be swing dance from 10-11. **Harold:** The tent is about 50% bigger than the Lower Hall we have. The 40 x 80 ends up getting us the equivalent of what we lost. **Dan:** The VFW is about 65 x 65. The Main Hall seems longer than the VFW. We're spending money – might as well make it as long as practical. **Peter:** I'd tend to go with the 40 x80 - we use up 6 or 9 feet for the speakers. **Dan:** I want dancers to say 'Wow, look at the size of the tent'.

Peter: Every year we borrow a lot of sound equipment – we don't rent, but we pay for any damage. The Entertainer is a 20 year old piece of equipment. In the 80's it was the only piece of equipment in that size, so everybody has one: the Scots, FAC, CDS, Cal has two or three, Mike Bergman has one. I want to keep these going as long as possible. The advantage is that volunteers always get to use the same sound board. Eventually, we'll have the challenge of coming up with 5 identical sound boards – 4 rooms plus a spare. **Dan:** We don't need fancy boards for the smaller rooms. We can buy 5 new ones. **Peter:** There's a board that might fit the bill, but a lot of people think that a board that's only used once a year might not be very reliable. But they might not be worse than the Entertainers are lately.

Volunteers (Bethany Seeger)

I haven't received any changes as far as scheduling volunteers. I have the feedback from last year as far as no-shows etc. If you have any changes, let me know as soon as possible. There are some fliers on the table – can anyone take them to dances? **Linda:** How are we doing with numbers? **Bethany:** It's too early to tell – the mailing just went out. I've been getting 2 or 3 per day. I got a flurry on line – maybe 60 or 70 for general volunteering. Sound is a little slower. The deadline is March 20. Last year, about 140 signed up ahead of time, about 50-100 at the festival. **Peter:** Our exchange rate is the most generous of any festival (4 hours for the Festival).



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