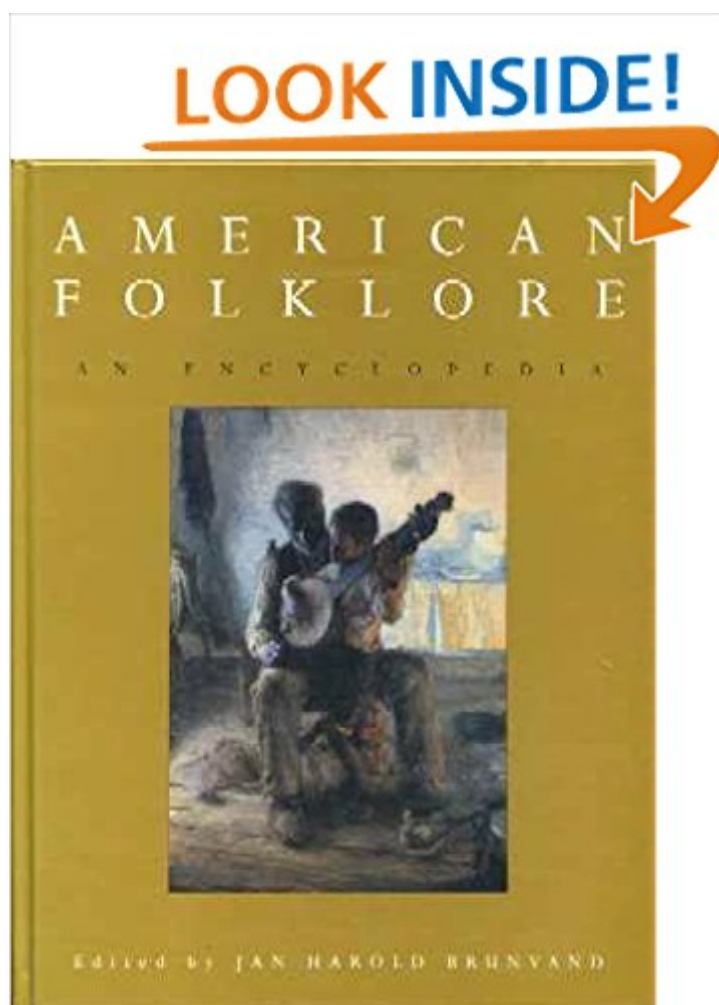


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# American Folklore: An Encyclopedia (Garland Reference Library Of The Humanities)



## Synopsis

Contains over 500 articles Ranging over foodways and folksongs, quiltmaking and computer lore, Pecos Bill, Butch Cassidy, and Elvis sightings, more than 500 articles spotlight folk literature, music, and crafts; sports and holidays; tall tales and legendary figures; genres and forms; scholarly approaches and theories; regions and ethnic groups; performers and collectors; writers and scholars; religious beliefs and practices. The alphabetically arranged entries vary from concise definitions to detailed surveys, each accompanied by a brief, up-to-date bibliography. Special features \*More than 2000 contributors \*Over 500 articles spotlight folk literature, music, crafts, and more \*Alphabetically arranged \*Entries accompanied by up-to-date bibliographies \*Edited by America's best-known folklore authority

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Within limits carefully delineated in the preface (e.g., "American" is to be understood as North American but not, except for select articles, as Native American), editor and folklorist Brunvand, best known for his collections of urban legends (The Baby Train, LJ 2/1/93), has produced an excellent and understandable reference on American folklore. Brunvand asserts that his is the first attempt at an encyclopedia of American folklore from a serious academic slant, and from this reviewer's searches, he may be correct. Each article is signed, and the contributors' credentials are clearly stated at the beginning of the volume. All but a few entries are followed by cross references and a bibliography. Articles cover holidays, festivals, and rituals from Ground Hog Day to Passover;

geographic areas; ethnic groups; types of folklore (from Jack tales to jazz); theories of folklore; folklore scholars; folklore characters from Jesse James to the Tooth Fairy; folk crafts, music, and dance; and the folklore of historical events as diverse as Juneteenth (the celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation) and the Gulf War. Highly recommended for all high school, public, and academic libraries. Katherine K. Koenig, Ellis Sch., Pittsburgh Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc.

In the preface to this work, the editor, the compiler of several collections of urban legends, differentiates between "folklore in America" and "American folklore." American folklore is defined as stories, tales, mythology, and lore based on experiences unique to American history and the North American continent. This encyclopedia does not address such topics as European or African folklore, except in passing; instead it concentrates on phenomena that have become part of American culture. Topics range from rodeo and the Great Lakes to Elvis, "Xeroxlore," and UFOs. The overall tone of the book is scholarly. The editor suggests specific articles for readers interested in a scholarly survey: American Folklore Scholarship and Material Culture to provide background; treatments of Marxist or feminist approaches to the study of folklore; and Regional Folklore as an introduction to specific entries such as Appalachia, Rocky Mountains, Basque Americans, Dutch Americans, and so on. The articles, arranged in alphabetical order and varying in length from one paragraph to several pages, come from more than 200 contributors. Most of them are professors of American studies, English, anthropology, or folklore. Additional topics include people (fictional characters such as Paul Bunyan, folk singers, anthropologists), institutions (LC's American Folklife Center), holidays, styles of folklore (proverbs, tongue twisters), games, arts and crafts, musical forms, historical eras (New Deal, Atomic Age), the paranormal, and folklore unique to special groups or situations: truckers, disasters, hunting, academic life. Information is current; several entries refer to tales circulating over the Internet. While maintaining an academic approach, some of the articles are also humorous. Children's author Rosemary Wells contributed to the article on the tooth fairy. The article begins with a description of ancient folk methods of disposing of baby teeth and goes on to document the rising popularity of the tooth fairy as evidenced through trends in children's literature: six stories appeared in the 1960s, 11 in the 1970s, 29 in the 1980s, and 18 in the first two years of the 1990s. In his article on cow tipping, Ed Zotti wonders why the scientific community has yet to launch a major investigation into the physical feasibility of this activity, despite the abundance of supposed participants. Computer Folklore contains several amusing examples. References to scholarly literature are listed at the end of each article. Limited see also references

direct readers to related entries, and a general index is provided. Black-and-white photographs accompanying the text include pictures of folk ceremonies, examples of crafts, and traditional occupations, such as dowsing. This work is more inclusive than popular works that organize information according to historical period, such as *American Folklore and Legend* (Reader's Digest, 1978) or Richard M. Dorson's *America in Legend* (Random, 1973). Coverage is more comprehensive than in *Folklore on the American Land* by Duncan Emrich (Little, Brown, 1972), which classifies folklore by literary style (tall tales, proverbs, etc.). This fascinating new work really has no competition on the reference shelf and will be useful in high-school, public, and academic libraries.

Excellent reference from one of the dogs of the Folklore world. Folklore is beginning to take the stage and it's import is being recognized. Brunvand offers a well educated perspective.

Anyone who's ever been involved in the production of a specialized encyclopedia knows the possible pitfalls and realizes it's nearly impossible to avoid all of them. This volume suffers from relying on a few contributors who have not developed a strong grounding in the areas they cover. These are uncritically written and occasionally misleading. Certain other entries are inflated with trendy jargon that makes them unreadable and uninformative. Other articles, however, by careful scholars of long experience, are of very high quality. They are accessible to college freshmen (or so one hopes) while providing a concise overview for the serious researcher. The book is abundantly illustrated with photos, though some of them--like the full-page pictures of Elvis, Davy Crockett, and a fig-leaf wearing strongman--obviously have been selected primarily for their sales appeal. Others--like the full-page photo of an Anglo-American lady who sang a version of "Barbara Allen" and the full-page Currier & Ives of "The Angel of Prayer"--contribute very little. While it's impossible to include everything and everybody, there are some striking omissions here. "John Avery Lomax" gets his due, but there's no article on Alan (though he does appear several times in the index). "Jazz" and "Blues" are entered, but "ragtime" is hardly mentioned. On the opposite side of the ledger, "Con artist" is treated, though the topic's special connection with "folklore" is not very obvious. There's no general article on "folk hero," but the big, familiar topics, like "Tall tales," "Folksong," "Ballad," "Legend," "Cowboys," "Folklore and American Literature," and so on, are covered at length, and biographies of numerous folklorists and collectors are included. An important innovation is the inclusion of long articles on minority-group folklore in the United States. Beside "African Americans" and "Mexican Americans," and other long-influential groups, there are articles

on "Korean Americans" and "Basque Americans," and such non-ethnic minorities as "Gay Men" and "Lesbians." Overall, despite its inevitable lapses, this encyclopedia sets a new high standard for American folklore reference books. One hopes the next edition is even better.

Publishers are developing a growing number of encyclopedias on folklore these days. This volume is one of the best ones currently in print. It covers a wider variety of topics and groups of people. The insightful articles develop a strong base for understanding folklore, and researchers can use this book as a reference source for finding more publications on a range of topics. The book balances its reading level so that it is accessible to general readers, but its content is grounded in solid scholarship. It's also a fine source for finding quick references to various topics of interest in the study of folk belief, legends, traditional music, folk dance, customs, and other folklore genres.

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