

Like some ^{the} fool, I forgot to send you this letter when it was written. Jonathan, June 30th.

June 21, 1984 Birthday of Henry Tanner and Rockwell Kent
Highlands, North Carolina 28741

JARGON SOCIETY, AT IT AGAIN, AND STILL CRAZY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS...

What North Carolina, and the Nation, needs is a good five-cent cigar--one manufactured out of ground-up rootabaga, the only known substance guaranteed to be good for you. Until that time, I am plotting something else good for North Carolina: a MUSEUM OF VISIONARY ART. Where? Maybe just north of Old Salem in one of those handsome brick railroad buildings near the intersection of Brookstown and Old Salem roads. Cost? Let's not get into that yet. All of this is still visionary.

The immediate point is, Roger Manley (photographer and folklorist now stationed at Durham Technical Institute) and I have just discovered the cosmic centerpiece for such a museum: a nearly complete telling of the stories of the Bible by 87-year-old Mrs. Annie Hooper, of Buxton, NC on the Outer Banks. Mrs. Hooper's accomplishment is quite incredible. It is a devotional work consisting of thousands of figures made out of driftwood, English putty, and paint, created over some 35 years since an angelic messenger told Annie to get on with it. The work is unique, inspired, and inspiriting to others. When Christ preaches to the birds, Annie provides a comforting 278 birds to complete the tableau. Who can count the number of Gadarene swine she has made? Innumerable figures cram her modest house in Buxton: the Children of Israel, taking part in the Exodus, fill the sun porch; the Golden Calf is somewhere up in the attic; Daniel in the Lion's Den is jumbled this way and that in a corner of the barn... If assembled in one piece, with imagination, sound and light (perhaps like a Civil War diorama), Annie Hooper's Bible Stories would draw good Christians to Winston-Salem like spiritual flies. As a folk-art achievement it has no equal except at the very highest level: Simon Rodia's Towers at Watts, S.P. Dinsmoor's Garden of Eden in Lucas, Kansas, and the Facteur Cheval's 'Ideal Dream-Palace' at Hauterives in the province of Drome in southeastern France.

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Annie Hooper is 87 years of age. She is not anxious to remain on this fitful earth for long, she wants to join her late husband of 67 years, John, in Christian Heaven. Before she goes, we would be committing a criminal act by not cataloguing her work: photographing each tableau, labelling the individual pieces, recording on professional quality tape Annie's story of each episode. With this done, there is breathing space to allow for the creation of a non-profit, first-class MUSEUM OF VISIONARY ART. Mr. Manley and I will not be pandering to the exquisite greed and urbane wrong-headedness of big-city dealers and collectors. We would like to see some of the best native art remain in the South, where it is being made... Mr. Seymour Rosen, Director of SPACES (Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments) in Los Angeles, joins Roger Manley and me in emphasizing the urgency of proper documentation in Buxton. The next issue of SPACES' newsletter will highlight sites in North Carolina and the entire country will see us with new eyes.

Roger Manley and I talked the other day with Dan Patterson, Professor of English at UNC (Chapel Hill) and Director of the Curriculum in Folklore. He is as amazed by the Annie Hooper work as we are. And he agrees that a trained graduate student in folklore needs to get to Buxton as quickly as possible. He luckily has a candidate available in August to do the work: Catherine Peck, Route 5, Box 335, Burnsville, North Carolina 28714.

We need a small foundation grant or a gift from a private individual to cover Mrs. Peck's cost. The salary is negligible, living costs by the seaside in August must be covered. We are talking about 30 days' time. Let's calculate:

Modest accommodation on the Outer Banks in August @ \$35.00 a day. Total: \$1050.00

The 1000 miles from Burnsville to Buxton and back by car @ 18¢ per mile: 180.00

NC State per diem allowance for food @ \$13.50. Total: 405.00

30 rolls of film @ \$5.00 each: 150.00
Photoflood lights, 4 @ \$3.00 each) 12.00

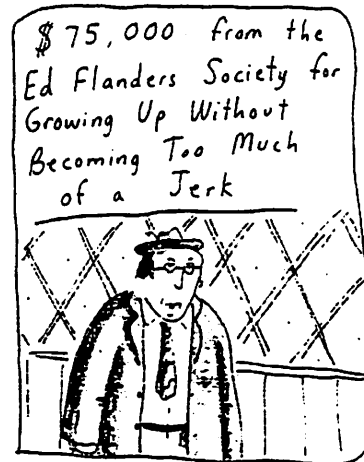
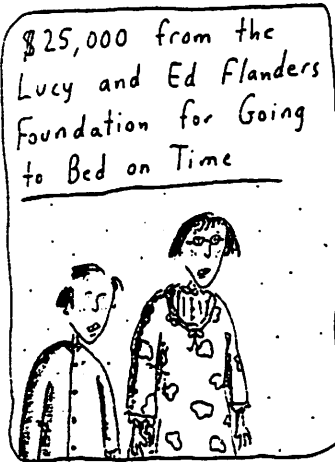
Tapes, labels, Nagra tape-recorder, et al., provided gratis by UNC Curriculum on Folklore

Salary? Even at \$5.00 an hour, a month is 800.00

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Add these figures up and you get at least \$2500.00. Perhaps Mrs. Peck can skimp on salary because she will be dealing with wonderful material for a thesis or book. So, we are asking for \$2000.00 minimum, with a bit more if possible. We are not being so demanding as the following:

GRANTS & RECIPIENTS



R. Chest

It would be a disaster to have something as wonderful as Annie Hooper's marvellous work disappear without view. So, first we get a clear picture of it. Then we beg the art-struck Medici chieftains of Forsyth County for a new museum to complement MESDA, SECCA, the Sawtooth, Reynolda House, et al. North Carolina is full of 'ordinary' people who often turn out to be not ordinary at all. They will come to this museum, if that is news that the city fathers of Winston-Salem want to hear.

Another time I will tell you about a second major treasure that needs housing: "THE ELVIS-VAN," a hagiographic 1962 Corvair truck, painted black and covered in air-brushed scenes from the life of Elvis, courtesy of 4000 hours' labor by Mr. Churchill Winston Hill of Elizabethton, Tennessee. Press the buttons on the outside of the van and interior juke boxes play you "Jailhouse Rock" or "Blue Suede Shoes," and lots of lights flash on and off.

A check (tax-deductible to a non-profit public corporation), please, to THE JARGON SOCIETY, c/o F. Whitney Jones, President, 1000 West Fifth Street, Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27101. Telephone: (919) 722-2371.

Jonathan Williams