



HUMANITIES
KANSAS

KANSAS FOLKLIFE:

Celebrating Kansas Traditions

Dynamic presentations that connect Kansans with our state's rich and interesting folklife traditions through engaging storytelling, food, music, and dance demonstrations.



Kansas Folklife: Celebrating Kansas Traditions is part of “By the People: Beyond 250,” a series of community-driven programs created by humanities councils across the nation in collaboration with local partners. The initiative was developed by the Federation of State Humanities Councils and the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. The Kansas Folklife catalog of presenters was created for Kansas by Humanities Kansas.

Together, these programs in Kansas and across the United States of America explore 250 years of the nation’s cultural life and provide opportunities to imagine our future.

How to Use the Humanities Kansas Folklife Catalog

1. Review the catalog and select a speaker and topic.

There is a booking fee of \$100 per presentation. A nonprofit organization can book up to four presentations from this catalog.

All presentations are 60-minutes in length unless otherwise noted.

2. Contact the presenter and confirm time, date, format, presentation needs, and location. **All events must occur before August 31, 2026.**

Discussing the presentation needs is critical. Now’s the time to find out how much space the performer(s) need, the technology required, and more. What’s listed in the catalog may be incomplete.

Consider creating your own one-day mini folklife festival. Invite multiple presenters from HK’s catalog to perform and consider adding a few talented people from your local community too!

3. Apply online at humanitieskansas.org for HK program funding to bring the presenter to your community! You’ll pay the booking fee during the application process and Humanities Kansas will cover the remaining expenses. Payment can be made online by credit or debit card, or by check through the mail.

4. Publicize your event! Humanities Kansas events must be free and open to the public. Download a template for your press release, speaker bio, speaker photo, and more.

5. Tell us how it went! After the event, fill out an event evaluation and cost share form online (required). Send us photos! Your \$100 booking fee will count toward cost share.

Questions?

Contact Kaitlyn Savage, Operations Manager, (785) 357-0359 or kaitlyn@humanitieskansas.org

The opinions expressed by the speakers do not necessarily reflect those of Humanities Kansas.

Let Me Tell You a Story

Annette Billings



Using the rhythms of poetry, Annette spins stories about Kansas and the people who live here. She draws upon the rich traditions of African American storytelling and engages audiences of all ages into a world filled with joy, hope, and humor. Join "Miss Netta Bee" as she uses the power of words to connect people over time and across generations.

Annette is a poet, storyteller, and actress.

anetfulllofhope@gmail.com

785-608-2134

www.anetfulllofhope.net

Topeka

Presentation needs: Microphone



Songs from the Coal Camps: The Accordion Story of the Little Balkans

Phyllis Bitner



The rich history of southeast Kansas's Little Balkans region cannot be told without its soundtrack. For thousands of immigrant families who arrived from Southeastern Europe, music was a comfort and cultural anchor. The accordion and button box—often treasured possessions brought from the Old Country—became the heart of daily life, community gatherings, and family celebrations. Join Phyllis as she explores the traditions, instruments, and spirit of Little Balkans music.

Phyllis Bitner is a local historian and member of the Miners Hall Museum board of trustees.

memrylane@yahoo.com

620-249-9333

Frontenac

Presentation needs: Microphone, table, projection screen



The Heart and Soul of Volga German Life

Jerry Braun



From heartfelt wedding songs to solemn funeral hymns, Volga Germans in Kansas depended on music to be a lifeline to connect generations—some far across the ocean—and mark life's most sacred moments. In this presentation, Jerry shares the rich musical traditions of the Volga German community and highlights how music shaped the culture as people moved to the Kansas plains from Russia. Through a live vocal performance of traditional folk songs, audience members will discover the heart and soul of Volga German music and the artistry behind instruments like the dulcimer, accordion, dolcette, and harmonica.

Jerry is a teacher and has spent his lifetime learning and sharing the Volga German traditions.

jbraun@usd489.com
785-650-4116
Hays
Presentation needs: Microphone, table



Flour Power

Gene Chávez



In this dynamic presentation, Gene shares his family's recipe for making tortillas and tells stories about the history of Mexican residents settling in Kansas to work, raise families, and build community. Gene draws upon his personal heritage and research to bring a simple, but important, cultural food tradition to life.

Gene is a collector of Mexican American heritage in Kansas and consults on diversity issues as president of Chávez and Associates.

gtchavez45@gmail.com
(913) 206-2936
Tonganoxie
Presentation needs: Microphone, table



Lindsborg Folkdanslag

Tamara Dahlsten



Lindsborg, Kansas is known for its strong Swedish heritage and the remarkable ways these traditions are being passed to the next generation. The Lindsborg Folkdanslag is no exception. This group of folk dancers will demonstrate lively variations of the polska, waltz, polka, and engelskas and invite the audience to join. They will perform in handmade folk costumes — some being handed down from early ancestors — and can share those stories too.

Tamara Dahlsten coordinates the Lindsborg Folkdanslag group and is known for her Swedish baking.

tamaradahlsten@gmail.com
785-906-0005
Lindsborg



Let's Dance! Traditional Dance in Kansas

Derrick Doty



Dancing is as American as apple pie, and this demonstration explores traditional dance in Kansas and its importance in social gatherings. Whether these dances were done in fancy parlors, majestic barns, in a makeshift space in a one-room school, or on a patch of grass during community festivals, participants today will have the chance to learn and experience the thrill of Kansas folk dance traditions, including quadrilles, square dances, circles, contras and more!

Derrick is a musician and dance caller.

flinthsillsfiddler@gmail.com
620-487-4579
Manhattan
Presentation needs: Table



Tell Your Own Story

Priscilla Howe



Participants listen, laugh, and linger over memories of their lives. In telling our own stories, we discover our uniqueness, as well as our common ground.

Inspired by the importance of preserving and sharing our history during the 250th anniversary of the signing of America's Declaration of Independence, Priscilla's presentation is a hands-on workshop for Kansans interested in becoming storytellers for their own families, communities, or as preservers of Kansas's wide range of dynamic folk traditions.

Priscilla is a storyteller and facilitator of storytelling workshops.

priscilla@priscillahowe.com

785-331-6181

Lawrence

Presentation needs: Microphone, table



Root, Root, Root for the Home Team!

Anita Mendoza



Join Anita as she explores the Kansas tradition of Mexican American fast pitch softball! In its heyday in the 1970s, teams from across the state—Topeka, Newton, Emporia, Chanute, Wichita, and others—would come together for tournaments. Held in local parks, families gathered to root for their team, share food and memories, and reconnect with friends. Audience members will have a chance to preview a special short film called "Mexican Americans Hit Home Runs in Kansas" before watching a live demonstration of techniques and styles of pitching from local fastpitch softball pitchers. Wiffle balls will be provided for anyone who wants to try out the speed, skill, and rhythm needed for the game.

Anita Mendoza is the founder of the North End Wichita Historical Society.

wichitanorthend@gmail.com

316-409-1447

Wichita

Presentation needs: Microphone, table, projector



Day of the Dead

Valerie Mendoza



Explore the Mexican tradition of Day of the Dead! In this demonstration, Valerie will engage participants with the history behind this centuries-old holiday, describe how it has become a popular celebration across Kansas, and share stories from her grandparents. History, symbolism, humor, and whimsy are part of this rich Kansas cultural tradition, and participants will enjoy learning how to make an ofrenda for the community. Optional: Participants can bring mementos of loved ones to place on the temporary ofrenda.

Valerie is a story keeper and storyteller of Mexican American community in Kansas.

valerie@theotherroad.org

785-845-6385

Topeka

Presentation needs: Microphone, table, projection screen



The Way of Tea: Harmony and Home in Kansas

Ayako Mizumura



Japan is home to many refined cultural arts and traditions, but perhaps none quite as mesmerizing and profound as the Japanese tea ceremony or the Way of Tea. While not a common “folk” practice, it holds a special place for many Japanese people living in the United States, including those who settled in Kansas after World War II. For them, this cultural tradition offers a sense of connection between their cultural heritage and their lives in a new landscape. Join Ayako as she provides a brief historical background of the traditional ceremony, followed by a live demonstration, and an opportunity for guests to taste matcha tea. Ayako will be unavailable to do demonstrations between mid-May and the end of June.

Ayako owns a Japanese bakery and researches Japanese migrant history in Kansas.

mizu@ku.edu

785-979-0070

Lawrence

Presentation needs: Microphone, table, floor space



The Taste of Freedom: A Juneteenth Foodways Journey

Donna Rae Pearson



Join Donna Rae as she shares the story of Juneteenth from Emancipation to its modern celebration. The presentation explores the history of Kansas's African American history of celebrating freedom, which began with "Emancipation Day" celebrations in communities across the state long before Juneteenth became a national holiday. Audience members will explore the holiday's key symbols and discuss its modern expression in large community events and communal meals that echo the spirit of Black family reunions. As Donna Rae shares stories about popular food traditions associated with the holiday, audience members will have the opportunity to enjoy a "celebration red drink."

Donna Rae Pearson is a historian and researcher of African American heritage in Kansas.

Donnarae64@gmail.com

Topeka

Presentation needs: Microphone, 2 tables, podium, projector, projection screen



Mrs. Charles Stephenson (Grace Murray),
Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Food for the Journey: Kansas Stories

Theressa Rice



As African Americans made their way to Kansas, what foods came with them? Theressa's presentation is rooted in stories—stories from her history, her grandparents farm, her family's migration from Oklahoma and Texas, and the food that graced the table for the Sunday Supper once they reached their destination. Some stories might sound familiar—hunting for rabbits, frying up chickens, boiling potatoes dug straight from the ground, and picking berries off the vine to make into a delicious pie. Audience members will connect to these timeless traditions that stretch across generations (and maybe even get a slice of homemade pie to try).

Theressa Rice is a storyteller, baker, and small business owner.

belovedgreetings@yahoo.com

785-580-3233

Topeka

Presentation needs: Microphone, table



African American Musicians in Kansas

Lem Sheppard



From 1860-1920, African American musicians in Kansas performed at civic events, weddings, fairs, barn dances, and private homes. Not defined as traditionally Black music, these musicians played in mandolin quartets, cornet bands, orchestras, and string bands and were an important feature of the musical landscape of Kansas. Join Lem as he demonstrates some of this music on his own guitar and explores how this history mirrors early stories of Kansas.

Lem is an internationally known guitarist and vocalist.

lemshep@yahoo.com
620-875-9131
Pittsburg
Presentation needs: Microphone, table



Native American Ribbonwork Traditions

Jancita Warrington



As a member of the Menominee and Potawatomi tribal nations, Jancita's presentation shares the rich cultural tradition of woodland ribbonwork. As Indigenous people were forced from their homelands near the Great Lakes to Kansas, these traditions made their way to the prairie. Jancita will share the history, symbols, and styles found in this tradition, demonstrate how it's done, have examples of her own incredible work on display, and demonstrate one of the dances that was made for the women of the Anishinabae Nations.

Jancita Warrington is the Executive Director of the Kansas Native American Affairs office.

jancita@hotmail.com
785-917-2798
Topeka
Presentation needs: Microphone, projector, projection screen, speakers, table



Ridin' Trails and Writin' Rhymes: Cowboy Culture of Kansas

Ron Wilson



Kansas was a key crossroads of frontier trails, and it was the state which helped bring the legend of the cowboy to life, from Abilene to Dodge City and from the Chisholm Trail and Gunsmoke fame to the beef industry of today. This presentation shares the rich cowboy history and folklore of Kansas using stories and cowboy poems, presented by poet lariat (NOT laureate) Ron Wilson. Audience members will enjoy Ron's poetry that he says is "all-original, humorous, family-friendly, patriotic, and most of the time, it even rhymes."

Ron is a nationally known cowboy poet and an ambassador for Western heritage.

ron@ronscowboypoetry.com
785-532-8092
Manhattan
Presentation needs: Microphone, table



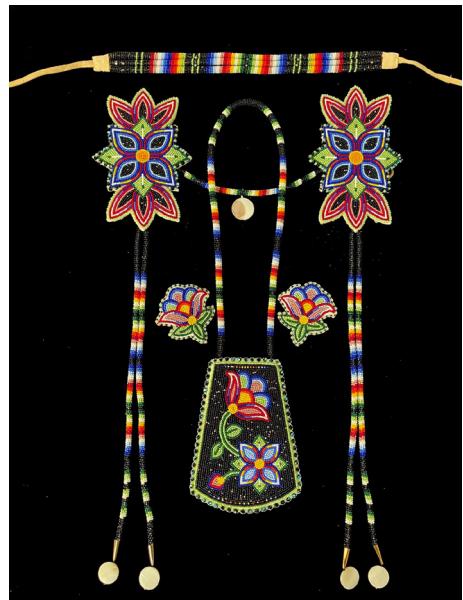
babisyakatek “it is beaded”

Tara Mitchell



This presentation shares the history, cultural significance, and living tradition of beadwork within the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation. Tara will discuss the role of beadwork as both an art form and a means of storytelling, identity, and cultural continuity. The presentation highlights how beadwork knowledge is passed down through generations, emphasizing the importance of family, community, and intergenerational teaching in preserving this tradition. Through live beading demonstrations, audience members will gain insight into traditional techniques, materials, and the time, care, and meaning embedded in each piece. This presentation is designed to foster understanding, appreciation, and respect for Potawatomi culture across communities.

Tara Mitchell is the Deputy Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation and a professional bead artist with over 25 years of beading experience.



Tara Mitchell
TaraMitchell@pbpnation.org
Office: 785-966-3984 | Cell: 785-851-4069
Presentation needs: Microphone, table, projector



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