

Seymour - I don't think to :

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Catherine:

At the writing of this introduction to the Annie Hooper project, we still don't definitely know whether the funds to do it will come through. However, since I am about to leave for Arizona, I thought I should go ahead and prepare some instructions for you, in the likely event that we will get money. I don't have time to do a rewrite on these instructions, so please bear with me--I will give them to you more or less as they pop into my head, and you may have to arrange them to suit yourself and the work there is to do when you get to Buxton. First off, let me introduce you to Annie herself:

Mrs. Hooper is 87 years old, and for much of her life she has lived at Buxton (Cape Hatteras) in the Outer Banks. Her husband, John, died a little over two years ago. They were married for something like 65 years, and you will not be in her presence for long before she will mention him. It was a very intense and loving relationship for the entire time. He was a fisherman during his early adult years, and she would try to write a poem for him every day while he was out fishing. Later, he built the Lighthouse View Motel, and settled-in to a life of managing it. The motel is managed today by their only son, Edgar, who is a practical, straightforward, and unsentimental fellow. About thirty-five years ago (by her reckoning; less by Edgar's) some traumatic event--perhaps the death of another child or something along those lines--triggered a period of mental illness in Mrs. Hooper. This was manifested in her having spells of amnesia, blackouts, hearing voices, etc. She was sent to the Dorothea Dix Mental Hospital in Raleigh, where as near as I can make out from her description, she was administered electro-shock therapy. She has a rather humorous tale of holding a light bulb in her hand and seeing it glow. After she left the mental hospital and returned to the Outer Banks, she began her work. At times she has told me about hearing voices and angels when she approached electrical outlets in the house and this led to her work--you will need to probe her about this as gently but as completely as you can.

Let me pause for a moment, and interject that so far, I may have given you the impression that she is a gloomy, dark, and scary person to be around. Far from it, she is delightful, quite funny, and full of joy--except when she broods about the loss of her husband. Sometimes, something will remind her strongly of him--a smell, a sound, the way someone crosses their legs, and she will go off on a depressing tangent. Asking her a question on another subject, or getting back to the point of the conversation will restore her good spirits almost immediately. As you will see from the enclosed slides and from meeting her, the thing she has done has no equal in any spontaneous art that I know of. There are several thousand figures. However, let me hasten to say that many of them fall into rather large groups that can be handled (I hope) fairly rapidly.

The work has been created as a didactic tool--to teach people about the joyful aspects of the Christian story. There are few examples of the darker aspects of the Bible. I have not seen any representations of Satan, for instance, although he may be hidden away in a closet.

It is my hope that a permanent exhibit of her work will be possible some day. I have a fairly specific way I would like to show it, and I am hoping that the work you do this summer will make it possible. ~~Which~~ The best way to describe my idea is to describe the general impression of the exhibit space. Her work (as I fantasize) will be together in a large, simple room in an unpretentious building--ideally a recycled building like the way Brightleaf Square in Durham was recycled from an old warehouse. The room would be about the size of the old main exhibit space at the Ackland--where Terry Zug's pottery show was. Within the room, her work would be arranged in

accessible, exciting, appropriate, and non-distracting ways. For instance, the Sermon on the Mount scene could be mounted on a gray, stepped pyramid perhaps six feet high and fifteen feet broad. The figure of Christ at the top could be illuminated a bit more brightly than the other figures of listeners surrounding it. Or a pit in the floor could house the scene of Daniel and the Lion's Den. Again, the pit would itself be neutral, but the setting would permit the figures to be viewed from the proper angle. Other scenes, like the Children of Israel following the Pillar of Fire, or Jacob's Dream, could be mounted in equally appropriate ways. In addition to these scenes, which would be arranged in a logically and aesthetically meaningful way, there are many figures that illustrate a Scriptural "point" or a lesson from Mrs. Hooper's synthesis of the Bible. These latter would be spaced throughout the room singly or in groups at appropriate places.

A few times a day, the exhibit would be shown in a manner that most closely approximates Mrs. Hooper's presentation of the work in her house. That is, when she takes you through the work, she "animates it" by moving pieces around and picking up portions of it to make them interact with each other. Lazarus is unwound from his shroud; the stone is rolled away from the entrance to the tomb of Jesus (during which she says, "This symbol means that we must move the stone away that covers and hardens our hearts."), Moses's staff transforms into a snake and back again, and the shepherds fall prostrate before the vision of the angels. I don't think in the exhibit itself it would be possible to actually animate the work, but I believe that something of the power of her presentation and performance could be captured--by lighting and hearing her voice. So at the exhibit, instead of Mrs. Hooper leading you into the crowded den and gesturing toward the Children of Israel, instead during this occasional "performance" of the exhibit the figures that make up the Children of Israel scene would be more brightly illuminated while her voice on tape describes the meaning of this scene. This is one of the main places where you would come in, because one of the things most needed is good tapes of her talking about the work. But let me get back to that in a minute. The tapes would be edited and silent light cues would be established to change the lighting to illuminate in turn each aspect of the scenes she talks about. Done poorly, this could seem cheap and hokey, but done well, I think it could be one of the most moving presentations by individualist-isolationist-non-careerist-naive (dare I use the term "Folk" the way a lot of people do?) artists ever seen.

Here is the basic problem: Annie Hooper is prepared to go ahead and die and thereby rejoin her husband. When she dies, Edgar will be faced with the task of doing something with the work. It cannot remain where it is because another member of the family will be moving in to Mrs. Hooper's house. At present, the work is crammed in every spare place in the house, in a shed out back, and in the attic. Mrs. Hooper has never been able to see it all displayed in one place at one time, and may never get the chance to get it shown "properly" (as she says). Because of the crowding, at the moment, only she can tell us where one scene leaves off and another begins, and certainly only she can say what the point of each scene is, and how they tie together in her message. Many of the scenes have additional figures and pieces stashed in the attic or in other parts of the house.

Your mission, therefore, is to make it possible for the work to be exhibited later on, and in some kind of understandable way. In order to do this, several things have to be accomplished:

1. For each story, as much as possible, all the figures should be arranged together in some neutral place or neutral background, and positioned according to her ideas about the arrangement.
2. The scene should be photographed from several angles, and any major or important figures should be photographed afterwards

separately. Some system of keeping the rolls of film identified would have to be used, like photographing a sheet of paper before photographing each scene on major figure, on which you have written in magic marker the identifying information, such as:

STORY # 16
 "Jacobs Ladder"
Gabriel (B)

In this example, all the angels, and Jacob himself would be identified with a number painted or written by you on the bottom of each, and major figures would in addition be given a letter--Jacob would be 16 A, Gabriel 16 B. etc. This is only an idea--you might have a better system in mind when you begin working. But something is needed so that later on the stuff could be packed and unpacked and re-separated into the appropriate scenes again.

3. Part three of your job with each scene, therefore, would be numbering and "registering" the pieces.
4. Finally, you would tape Mrs. Hooper talking about the scene. Often there are little placards she has made so that when she is tired she can let people tour themselves through the house while she rests. If she is in a hurry, she will simply read these placards to you, prefacing each with (often inappropriately) "This is the story of . . ." This is not what is needed on tape, because the exhibit later on would be boringly presented if she says "This is the story, this is the story," over and over. This will be the trickiest part of your job, and perhaps some strategies for getting around it are to collect a number of the placards from a particular room (remember where they need to go back) and have her read them, and then talk about them. Get her to expand on the meanings behind each work. For one thing, this is your chance to talk with someone whom I feel has a real key to the meanings of the scriptures, and you could let your own interests guide you into finding out more. It can be very beautiful. Mrs. Hooper is a poet in addition to being an artist and much of her phrasing is wonderful, and should be recorded for its own sake as well as the sake of the future viewers of her work. Pretend you are trying to get her to narrate a film (indeed, there may be funding for a film later on), so try to ask questions that get her flowing about herself, her life, and her work.
5. Finally, you would return each scene to where it came from, and indicate this location in the house in your notes. I will enclose a form from an organization called S.P.A.C.E.S. which may be of some help.

After your work is completed, or as much as possible is completed in the length of time you have, Mrs. Hooper would continue showing the work to visitors and doing with it whatever she wants. I will try to use the work you do--the photographs and slides of the individual scenes as well as photographs of the scenes in situ (take as many as you can)--to try to raise funds to have the work permanently preserved and displayed. The work you do in giving this some structure would make the exhibit itself possible, as well.

Let me give you some additional information. S.P.A.C.E.S. is headed by Seymour Rosen in California. Seymour will be very helpful to you and would try to answer any problems that might come up. He has met Mrs. Hooper and will be involved in the

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future activity with it. His address and phone number are at the top of the enclosed form. I'll also enclose a copy of his newsletter. I will send him a copy of this letter, so he will know what I have told you, as well.

Dan Patterson has agreed to furnish a Nagra tape recorder and tapes to make the recordings. Be sure you are checked-out on it, and that you are getting good clean recordings, because once Mrs. Hooper passes, the opportunity will be lost. Check it daily while you are in the field. Seymour Rosen can provide us with Kodak pre-paid processing mailers for the film at 1/3 off the regular amount. It would be a good idea to call him before you head out to visit Mrs. Hooper and see what additional advice he has.

Do you have a 35mm camera? The ideal thing would be if you could borrow another one from a friend and put black and white film in one of them and color film in the other. Depending on where you will do the shooting, you'd have to buy daylight or color slide film (don't get color print film). We will try to budget this somehow, or reimburse you for the costs to you.

I see your average workday as something like the following: You wake up (preferably after spending a night at a reduced-rate at the Lighthouse View Motel); have breakfast, and call Mrs. Hooper around 9:30 a.m. (She sleeps late.) Head over to her house about 10, and spend a few hours with the figures, arranging and photographing them before it gets too hot. In the early afternoon, get out the tape recorder and get her to talk about the scene(s) you just photographed. Assume that someone seeing the scene might not know the story, so get her to not only talk about what the scene means, but what it is (you might either have to feign ignorance at times or explain to her that you'll need to tell other people who are ignorant about it). Let her ramble, at least as much as the tape allows, without getting too far off the subject. Try to find out more about her life and the special way she sees the world. Then, say at about 2:30, you could head back to the motel, put the cameras and films in a safe place (probably safer to leave them at her house, once you establish a working relationship with her) and a cool place,, and head to the beach. In the evening, you could figure out what to do the following day. A lot of this is going to be playing it by ear, seeing how you fit in with her daily schedule, and seeing whether she gets tired or is ready to proceed. At first, I imagine she will want to lead you around and be with you, but as she gains confidence in you, she can probably rest while you do the photographing. There is much work upstairs as well as out back.

As far as setting up a photographic work space, you will need to see what can be done when you get there. There is a garage or carport in which it might be possible to move enough pieces (provided they were protected from the rain by opaque plastic sheets--so tourists won't see the work and try to make off with it) to clear a space in the shed. Or perhaps the dining room (which would mean tripod and tungsten film) could be used. You'll figure something out, I'm sure. Perhaps Edgar can lend a hand, if you can charm him into action (he's about 60).

I won't pretend that this will be an easy job. However, I think it would turn out to be one of the most interesting and potentially valuable and important things a trained folklorist could ever do. This is on a par with saving the Watts Towers in Los Angeles. And I think you are the appropriate person to do it.

The money is being raised by the Jargon Society, of which Jonathan Williams is the director. Jonathan is also someone who has visited Mrs. Hooper with me and may have some good advice. The Jargon Society is managed by Thorns Craven (Treasurer; 216 West Fourth Street, Winston-Salem) and Whitney Jones (President; 1000 W. Fifth Street, Winston-Salem, 27101; phone 919-722-2371). Jonathan's number, which you should call before July 20, is 704-526-3213.

I wish I could go with you to Buxton and get you set up. It is possible that Seymour Rosen would do this if you would like, and if S.P.A.C.E.S. can afford it. Certainly you should get in touch with both of them before you head out there (both being Jonathan Williams and Seymour Rosen). I will be on the road and mostly unreachable until July 15. Then, from the 16th to August 15th, you could write or call and leave a message for me at this address:

Roger Manley
c/o Tony Kuiper, Pharmacist
Kayenta I.H.S. Clinic
Box 368
Kayenta, AZ 86033

I will be living about 30 miles away out in the desert, but I'll check with Tony on a more or less weekly basis. His number is 602-697-8517. In an emergency, you could also try me at 697-3236, which is the Chilchinbeto Indian Clinic (they could send out a four-wheel drive to find me).

Annie Hooper's address is:

Mrs. Annie Hooper
Box 39
Buxton, N.C. 27920

her phone 919-995-5625

or call her son Edgar Hooper (listed) or the Lighthouse View Hotel (listed).

I will try to call and talk with you after we have something more definite about the money, and after you have had a chance to read this over. Meanwhile, I hope your summer is going well. I certainly hope this works out so your second half of the summer can be even more exciting!

Forgive me for sending you the xerox, and keeping the original--too much white-out to make it easy to read in the original!

as always,



Roger Manley