

The Native American community has long considered themselves to be more than just the caretakers of their traditional stories and cultural practices. As the first people of Wisconsin they also feel called to be protectors of the land and waters they inhabit because they consider it to be a sacred gift from the Creator. In a similar way the beautiful land that has been gifted to the Folklore Village community also resonates with special meaning. It rises up from 94 acres of land located in the rolling hills and valleys of Southwest Wisconsin, and is woven into all of the seasons of programming that takes place on that land and has generated so much vibrant communal life over the decades. It comes from a well-cultivated land ethic of restoration and a revival of the idea of the “commons” – which is land set aside for the good of the wider community.

Folklore Village is well known for its dedication to the revival of folk art traditions. But this vision also includes revival for the “commons” land as well, and that is reflected in the decades of care and cultivation that has taken place at Folklore Village through the creation of lovely gardens; the planting of trees; opening up beautiful hiking trails; a careful process of prairie restoration; bringing a historic one room school house, church, and log cabin back to life; and embracing a land ethic that focuses on harmony, beauty and seasonal renewal. Healing the land through a loving restoration of its natural beauty and healing the human community through the life giving properties of folk art traditions go hand in hand. They work in relationship with one another through a shared beatific vision, and this in turn supports all of the programming that unfolds on site through on-going restoration projects and creative festivals.

The project that Jane Farwell birthed through the creation of Folklore Village has been remarkably far sighted because of its participatory and community building vision. It anticipated the deep need that people have for meaningful and relational human life, and she used the medium of her family farm and traditional folk ways (e.g. ethnic music & dance traditions, storytelling, cooking & foodways, games, communal singing, poetry, drama, gardening, crafts, and the creation of feasts & festivals) for building vibrant communities of celebration. Members of the Folklore Village community found wholeness through Jane’s embodied approach to life, whether it was through planting tulips with her in the garden, resurrecting an old building, restoring the prairie life on the back 40, laughing through an improvised skit, or waltzing together across the dance floor. It is a highly relational vision that includes both the people you celebrate with and the beautiful landscape you work on together.

All of these aspects help to open the door for participants to enter into a place of rest and restoration. It helps to bring out the best qualities of cooperation and engagement in the communities that gather for events at Folklore Village. Best of all it is a work of transformation into something that is more like the intimate connection our Native American brothers and sisters have for their ancestral land. Instead of just living as consumers and takers, Folklore Village encourages people to become life givers, tradition bearers, co-creators, restorers, and builders of a healthy family and community friendly way of life. The family land that Jane Farwell bequeathed to the Folklore Village community is a “Sacred Commons” because of all the life that has been birthed on it over the decades. That is why everyone who chooses to engage with it is also called to be a protector and a caretaker of this special land and place.