# Creativity thrives at Folklore Village

**By Kenyon Bennett**

Terri Van Orman has been the Folklore Village executive director since 2014. She recently provided a broad overview of the folk school and its purpose. Although the pandemic hurt its program during 2020, attendance numbers at Folklore Village have rebounded. "We have been working really hard since the pandemic just to get our numbers back up to pre-pandemic levels," she said. That has happened. "We've surpassed those numbers, particularly for our folk school classes and our barn dances," she added. The recent Christmas Festival drew larger numbers of people "than we've had in a very, very long time."

Folklore Village is located almost seven miles east of Dodgeville on 3210 County Road BB. Ridgeway is located three miles northeast of the site. Jane Farwell, a folk dance leader and the daughter of Ridgeway farmers, founded Folklore Village in 1966, Van Orman said. Farwell celebrated traditional folklife and dancing, folk arts, Old World skills, ethnic heritage, and community during her life, 1916-1993. Well-educated, she applauded lifelong learning. Although Farwell is now gone, Folklore Village, representative of her ideas, continues.

Today, Folklore Village's classes and programs teach dancing, singing, playing or building musical instruments, crafting, blacksmithing skills, piecing mosaics, a variety of folk arts, and many creative projects, Van Orman said. Celebrating cultural heritage and hosting seasonal festivals are important at the site.

"We want to continue to grow, of course, and just to let people know we're here. It's amazing how many people in Dodgeville and Ridgeway do not even know that we exist, much less those in Madison. A few people who realize we're here say, 'Oh, yeah, I went there when I was in second grade.' People have to find it. They have to see it. We offer so many interesting and fun things that appeal to a lot of different types of people and at a lot of different price points, from free to somewhat expensive, but we'd like to have something for everybody. We cap our prices for our barn dances so that families can come and bring a bunch of kids," Van Orman said.

**Folk Education Association of America**

Folk schools in the U.S. began in the early 20th century but were influenced by 19th-century Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872) of Denmark. He is credited with his country's transition to democracy. Emphasizing that schools should promote a strong sense of dignity among rural people and farmers, the largest population in Denmark then, Grundtvig strongly believed in education and that human identity should be at education's core. He felt that an individual's cultural identity and sense of community were meant to cultivate pride and feelings of belonging. Grundtvig, himself, never founded a folk school or taught.

Van Orman is a Folk Education Association of America board member. Members are located throughout the U.S. and meet during Zoom meetings. The association supports folk schools. Instructors are often grassroots people who teach Old World skills and folk arts while advancing a strong sense of community among learners. The FEAA selectively words its purpose somewhat differently. "The FEAA and its projects support and facilitate community-based, learner-led education as a strategic tool for community organizing," the FEAA Board of Directors said.

Van Orman discussed a current FEAA project. "One of the main projects has been the Folk School Alliance. That's been a consortium of folk school leaders who meet via Zoom once a month. We talk about everything from what's a fair amount of money to pay and instruct a folk school instructor to questions about what happens behind the scenes. For example, 'What about insurance? What kind of insurance do you need to have?' These conversations that we host are for either currently operating folk schools and their leadership and/or people who would like to start a folk school, of which there are more and more every day," she said.

**Jane Farwell**

Iowa County, Wisconsin, and its people fostered Farwell's love for rural folklife, ethnic music and dance, community, and different cultures. She was born Jan. 18, 1916, to Roy and Frances (née Cape) Farwell, dairy farmers who also raised sheep. According to the Wisconsin State Journal, Madison, Feb. 10, 1932, when recognized by the Wisconsin Sheep Breeders and Wool Growers at the annual Get-Together lamb dinner at the Loraine Hotel in Madison, Roy received an award certificate for "producing 143 pounds of lamb per ewe in 120 days." Farwell was age 16 then.

Doty School, today containing condominiums, was built in 1906 at the intersection of W. Wilson and S. Broom streets in Madison. The school was named after James Duane Doty, a politician who lobbied for Madison to become Wisconsin's capital in 1836 and who later became Wisconsin's territorial governor from 1841-1844. Doty School generated interest when educators opted to allow deaf students to attend some of its classes in the 1920s.

One of the lucky students attending Doty School was Farwell's younger sister Philippa, nicknamed "Phippy." The girls' aunt Jane Cape, an educator, insisted that Philippa attend Doty School. Farwell would be in charge of her younger sister in Madison but attend regular schools. The sisters' parents consented to the plan, allowing both their daughters to attend Madison schools during the week and return home to the Ridgeway farm each weekend, Van Orman said. The Farwell sisters were believed to have stayed with a Madison relative during the week, Van Orman said.

Deaf students at Doty School were taught to speak and read lips, the State Journal said Oct. 4, 1929. The method was more progressive than past models.

Details gleaned from The Capital Times, Madison, Feb. 25, 1938, indicated Farwell was an active young woman. Farwell had been an honor graduate from Madison Central High School in 1933. For two summers she taught tap dancing in Dodgeville and assisted with the leadership school of folk festivals at Tower Hill State Park near Spring Green, Wisconsin. She created her own major in rural recreation at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, where her aunt Jane Cape taught, Van Orman added. During Farwell's senior year at Antioch College in 1938, she was an active member of the Community Youth Council that promoted recreational activities for adults and children there. She had also assisted at Memorial Hospital in Chicago, Friendly Inn Settlement in Cleveland, and Hartley House Settlement at Hell's Kitchen in New York City, the Times said. Hell's Kitchen was a rough district known for its subpar tenements housing poor Irish immigrants.

Different newspaper sources indicated Farwell's activities after college graduation June 25, 1938. During the 1940s she was an assistant recreation specialist for Oglebay Institute, Wheeling, West Virginia. She specialized in teaching folk dancing. She also became a state recreation specialist in the 1940s for the West Virginia Agricultural Extension while remaining on the Oglebay Institute's staff. By 1946 Farwell traveled to different U.S. locations to conduct workshops and dance camps for the National Recreation Association. By 1948 she had formed the Rural Recreation Service and still traveled. On Dec. 1, 1948, the Times cited Farwell as helping to organize the first Folklore Village Christmas Festival in Wisconsin at the public high school in Mount Horeb, Wisconsin. The Rural Recreation Service, headquartered in Dodgeville and directed by Farwell, sponsored the festival Dec. 28 to Jan. 1 that year. The Times also cited Farwell as having traveled throughout the U.S. and directing folk camps and festivals for seven years prior to that.

Farwell married Jurgen Hinrichs, a young farmer from Germany, Jan. 3, 1955, the Times reported five days later. The couple exchanged vows at Farwell's parents' home near Ridgeway. "A Christmas tree decorated with lighted candles in the German tradition" served as the backdrop while "a revolving German chime box played during the ceremony," the Times said. Hinrichs had toured and studied American farming in the U.S. four years prior, the newspaper said. Hinrichs also had completed an internship on the Farwells' family farm, Van Orman added.

During the next 11 years, the couple lived near Ostrfriesland, Germany. Farwell traveled to different countries to teach folk dancing while Hinrichs farmed. Farwell, along with other folk dance specialists, toured Japan for 40 days in 1956, the State Journal reported March 25 that year. Farwell was cited as saying the tour was "sponsored by a Japanese newspaper chain, the International Recreation Association, the Japanese Ministry of Education, and the U.S. State Department." The event was one of the highlights of Farwell's life.

In 1966 Farwell returned to the U.S. She bought the old Wakefield School near the family farm close to Ridgeway and the school's acre of land that had once belonged to her grandfather during the late 19th century. Farwell planned to use the school for teaching folk dancing. The school initially was recognized as Folklore Village, but more buildings were eventually added to what became the main complex down the road on property where the Farwell farmhouse still stands. Recollections vary somewhat about the schoolhouse, but reports about it and Folklore Village's activities surfaced in newspapers in 1968 and ensuing years.

**Holding a broom, Jane Farwell instructs curious children during a class.** *Courtesy of Folklore Village.*

On Dec. 24, 1968, the State Journal reported briefly on the Folklore Village Christmas Festival. Farwell was conducting the 21st annual festival, which she had originally founded in 1948 and organized annually at Mount Horeb for seven years before moving to Germany. The tradition had continued in her absence at Mount Horeb. The year 1968 marked the first time the festival would be held at the Farwells' farm, the State Journal said. Farwell "is restoring a one-room country school and plans to remodel the dairy barn as a dance center," the newspaper said.

More was reported on the Wakefield School. "That tiny schoolhouse is a story in itself. It adjoins the Farwell family farm where Jane Farwell grew up. Her grandfather sold the building and the land it is on to the county for $15," the Times reported Dec. 14, 1978. A separate source stated the schoolhouse and land were donated to the county. Farwell "bought the schoolhouse back from the county for $1,000. For 10 years, it has been Folklore Village," the Times said.

The Times indicated Dec. 23, 1970, that Farwell, as creator and director, "had been conducting a fascinating year-round folklore project called Folklore Village Farm" at the Wakefield School for two years.

With Folklore Village underway and expanding, its complex eventually grew from containing Wakefield School and Plum Grove Church, having the barn-like Farwell Hall constructed in 1988, offering overnight rustic bunkhouses onsite for weekend retreats, starting the Tall Grass Prairie Restoration Project, initiating preservation for the 1848 Aslak Olsen Lie log house, offering a blacksmiths' shed, and more.

Van Orman referred to the Lie log house currently scheduled for completion by June 21 for a ribbon cutting then. "We've been working the last 10 years to rebuild the house. That's the 1848 Norwegian combo log cabin, which then metamorphoses with a second story. A post and beam construction will be on the second story," she said.

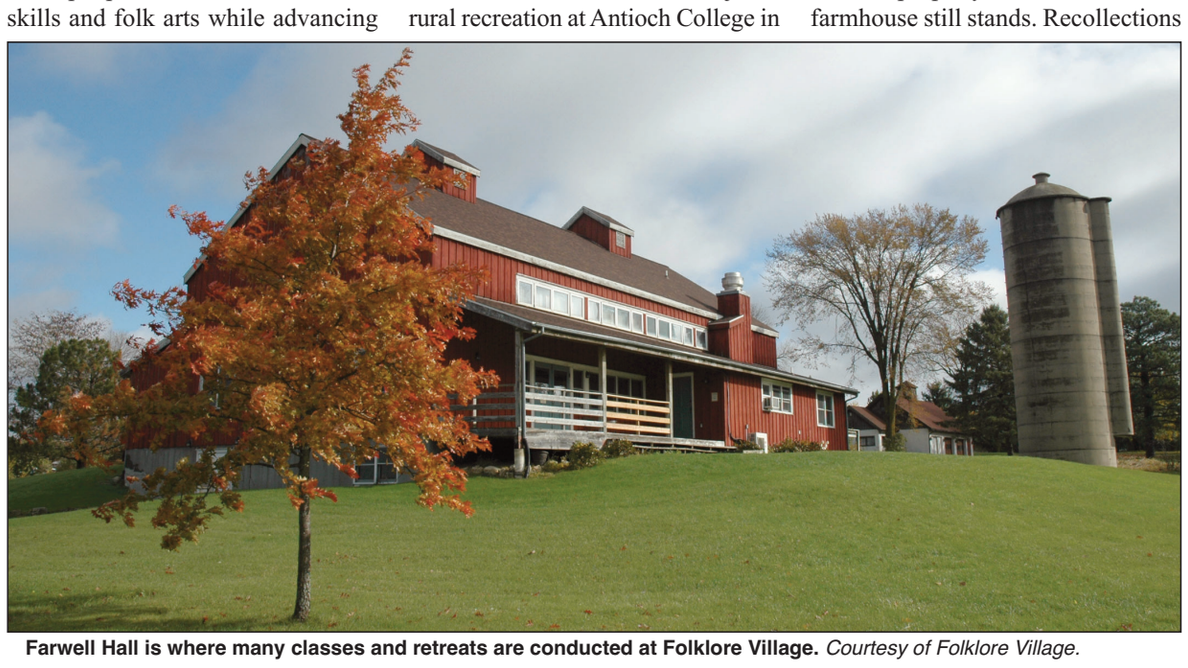
Lie, an immigrant from Norway, originally built the house near Klevenville in Dane County, Wisconsin, in 1848-49. He was master craftsman specializing in carpentry and cabinets. He also utilized blacksmith skills he had acquired.

All folks can experience the sense of fun and ongoing magic at Folklore Village. Register for classes or special activities through the Calendar of Events link at https://folklorevillage.org/.

**Children learn maypole decorating.** *Courtesy of Folklore Village.*

**Maypole dancing is popular among children.** *Courtesy of Folklore Village.*

**Christmas festivals are celebrated annually.** *Courtesy of Folklore Village.*



**Farwell Hall is where many classes and retreats are conducted at Folklore Village.** *Courtesy of Folklore Village.*

**Blacksmith enthusiasts develop new skills.** *Courtesy of Folklore Village.*