

Curriculum Vitae of Michael E. Bell

Education

- Ph.D., Folklore (Anthropology minor), Indiana University, Bloomington, 1980. Dissertation topic: African American voodoo practices.
- M.A., Folklore and Mythology, University of California at Los Angeles, 1972.
- B.A., Anthropology/Archaeology, University of Arizona, Tucson, 1966. M.A. level course work completed in Archaeology, 1968.

Recent Public Programs/Projects

2005-09 Folklorist & Writer, *Languages of the Land: A Dialogue with Salter Grove*

I recorded and edited people's stories about the small city park south of Pawtuxet Village. The sound recordings were part of an artistic installation created by Holly Ewald that explores the history and culture of Salter Grove from pre-contact times to the present. The installation was shown at the Warwick Museum of Art, John Jay College, and AS220 Project Space. A book based on this installation, entitled *Languages of the Land: A Dialogue with the Downs*, will be published in December of 2009. A Voices and Visions of Village Life project, sponsored by the Warwick Museum of Arts and funded by the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts and the Rhode Island Foundation. Three associated discussion panels were funded by the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities.

2007-08 Principal Scholar, *Soldiers' Stories at Life's End*

I conducted six workshops to train Hospice volunteers to interview former military personnel under Hospice care and served as sound recordist for the interviews that became the basis for a film. Sponsored by Home & Hospice Care of Rhode Island and funded by the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities.

2006-08 Principal Scholar & Writer, *Orchards in the Ocean State*

The materials gathered during the *Vanishing Orchards* project were incorporated into a traveling exhibition that consists color and black-and-white photographs, interpretive text panels and artifacts. The exhibit was installed at the Cranston Public Library, the University of Rhode Island, the Museum of Work and Culture, Gallery Z on Federal Hill, Providence, the Bristol Art Museum, and the Museum of Natural History at Roger Williams Park. Sponsored by the Cranston Public Library and funded by the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities.

1980-2006 Consulting Folklorist, Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission

My responsibilities were to develop and implement programs--and collect, maintain and make accessible to the public, materials--that express and interpret Rhode Island folklife and oral history. Funded by a Legislative Grant to the Folklife Program from the State of Rhode Island; subgranted to Heritage Harbor Museum.

2004-05 Principal Scholar, *Vanishing Orchards*

Still photographer, Alex Caserta, film maker, Rocco Michaluk, and I documented and interpreted the occupational folklife and oral history of Rhode Island's apple growing culture through direct interviews, still photography (color slides and black-and-white), and videotape. Occupational folklife, in this case, includes the year-round, everyday activities of those involved in the cultivation of apples as well as the groups they interact with while conducting their business. A culminating event for the project, hosted by the Rhode Island Historical Society, consisted of a brief slide show, a ten-minute video, and a panel discussion led by Heather Faubert of the Agricultural Extension of the University of Rhode Island and four of the apple growers. Sponsored by the Rhode Island Historical Society and funded by the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities.

2004-05 Principal Scholar, *Pawtuxet Village: One Space, Many Places*

A collaboration of scholars, artists, and educators guided children and adults in using and creating maps to explore selected sites in Pawtuxet Village. Beginning with the participants' connections to sites that exist today, the team led participants back in time via historical walking tours, site visits and oral histories. Participants created an artistically conceived history atlas of the village featuring three visual story maps--Present Day, 1750-1950, 1600-1750--that interpret the European-American, African-American and Native-American communities during those three time periods. Presented by Voices and Visions of Village Life, recipient of the 2005 Rhode Island Preservation Education Award and the Waterfront Center 2006 Clearwater Citizens Award. Sponsored by the Cranston Public Library and funded by the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities and the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts.

2005 Folklore Scholar, *Fish Tales*

A film-development project to create a one-hour documentary film on recreational striped bass fishing, focusing on the local legends and living master fishermen of Newport and South County; sponsored by the Hera Gallery and funded by the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities.

2004 Principal Scholar, *An Inventory of Historical Resources in Pawtuxet Village*

Responsible for identifying, collecting, cataloguing and publicizing the history of one of New England's oldest villages. The materials gathered for this project will be housed in a special collection at the William Hall Library, Cranston.

2003-04 Principal Scholar, *Pawtuxet Village Freedom Project*

My responsibilities included the following: identify research topics that speak to the various conceptions of freedom as a folk idea evident in the history of Pawtuxet Village, Rhode Island, from the early seventeenth century to the present; coordinate participating scholars in bringing research materials into the public discourse through Saturday library programs for children and their parents; link the scholarship to the work of participating artists and community historians; deliver the keynote public lecture entitled, "Freedom as a Folk Idea in Pawtuxet Village." Sponsored by the Cranston Public Library and funded by the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, Verizon, and the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts.

2000-04 Co-Director, Folklorist & Writer, *From Bullrakes to Clambakes*

We compiled a permanent and accessible record of the occupational folklife of the Narragansett Bay shellfishery through direct observation of pertinent activities in their natural contexts and interviews with key informants. The research team assembled a documentary record through still photography, videography, audio recording and field notes that was used to produce a travelling exhibit, book and videotape. The exhibit was shown at seven sites in Rhode Island and at the Northwest Folklife Festival in Seattle, Washington. Sponsored by Heritage Harbor Museum and funded by the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities.

Recent Publications

- 2009, *Languages of the Land: A Dialogue with The Downs*, with Holly Ewald (privately published by the authors), 57 pp.
- 2006, "Vampires and Death in New England, 1784 to 1892," *Becoming Dead: The Entangled Agencies of the Dearly Departed*, edited by Bilinda S. Straight, Special Issue of *Anthropology & Humanism* 31:2, pp. 124-140.
- 2006, "Belief," entry in *Encyclopedia of American Folklife*, edited by Simon D. Bronner (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe).
- 2005, "Black Cat Bone," entry in *Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Folklore*, 3 vols., edited by Anand Prahlad (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press).
- 2005, "Vampires," entry in *Encyclopedia of New England*, edited by Burt Feintuch and David H. Watters (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- 2003, "Books, Bones and Beliefs: Rethinking Resources for Historical Interpretation," *New England Archivists Newsletter* 30:4, pp. 4-7.
- 2002, *From Bullrakes to Clambakes: The Occupational Folklife of the Narragansett Bay Shellfishery* (Providence, RI: Heritage Harbor Museum), 14 pp.
- 2001, *Food for the Dead: On the Trail of New England's Vampires* (New York: Carroll & Graf), 337 pp. A BookSense 76 Pick and winner of the Lord Ruthven Assembly Award for Best Nonfiction Book on Vampires (paperback edition 2002).

Lecturing and Teaching

I have delivered hundreds of papers, lectures, and workshops before professional, academic and general audiences on a variety of topics, from folklore theory and methodology to African-American belief systems. I also have served as adjunct professor in Departments of Folklore, English, American Studies, and Anthropology at colleges and universities.

Professional Activities and Service

2003-present Co-Founder and Co-Director, Voices and Visions of Village Life, recipient of the 2005 Rhode Island Preservation Education Award and the Waterfront Center 2006 Clearwater Citizens Award.

1986-present Cranston Historic District Commission: Chair, 1994-2004; Vice Chair, 1993.

1982-present Rhode Island State Council on the Arts: Panelist for Grants, Apprenticeship, and Fellowship Programs.

2004-09 Board of Directors, Cranston Historical Society.

1984-2000 National Endowment for the Humanities: Panelist for Museums and Historical Organizations and Youth Projects; Outside Evaluator for Library Programs and Preservation and Access.