

La Guillonée

Groups from Four Mississippi Valley Communities

The old French New Year's Eve tradition of *La Guillonée* continues to be important to small river communities surrounding St. Louis. In a rare collaboration of traditions, four groups will come together for the 1993 Missouri Heritage Fair on Sunday, April 25. For more information about *La Guillonée*, see "Living French Traditions of the Middle Mississippi Valley," page 25.

Cahokia, Illinois

La Gui-année Singers

Tom Jerome, President

Thanks to the Cahokia Junior Woman's Club, this ancient New Year's Eve custom was revived there in 1963. *La Guillonée* is performed annually at *La Gui-année Ball* by costumed singers who visit from table to table. At this annual event, Mr. Jerome Lopinot, the singers' spokesman, provides a riveting history of the local *La Gui-année* custom. Most of *La Gui-année* singers descend from prominent French families of the Cahokia area. However, one of the singers, Bernard Thebeau, is originally from the Old Mines area of Missouri, and the group's excellent lead singer, Elias Chaisson, is an Acadian from Nova Scotia who came to St. Louis to teach English during the 1950s.

Old Mines, Missouri

La Guillonée de la Vieille Mine

Anna Pashia, Lead Singer and Group Leader

No Middle Mississippi Valley French community has more tenaciously held onto its French heritage than Old Mines, an ancient French lead mining community in Washington County, Missouri. Anna Robart Pashia, the lead singer of *La Guillonée*, is a native French speaker and singer of ancient French ballads she learned from her father, Ben Robart. The Old Mines celebration of

La Guillonée was discontinued for some years earlier this century but was revived under the leadership of singer Steve Thebeau. Although the Old Mines *Guillonée* has not been performed on New Year's Eve for the last several years, a group of French singers of the ancient song can be readily assembled.

Prairie du Rocher, Illinois

La Société de La Guiannee de Prairie du Rocher

Jack Laurent, President

The French people of Prairie du Rocher claim an unbroken line of annual New Year's Eve celebrations beginning with the earliest eighteenth-century settlers. Members of the Prairie du Rocher *Guiannee* performed at the National Folklife Festival held in St. Louis from 1947 to 1949. The present fiddler for the group, Bill Clerc, also fiddled at the St. Louis performances forty-five years ago. Bill's older brother, the late Arthur Percy Clerc, and his father, Charles Clerc, were song leaders of the group for years. Through the efforts of present lead singer Dan Franklin and his brother Jerry, the Prairie du Rocher custom is growing in popularity and number of participants.

Ste. Genevieve, Missouri

La Guignolée Singers

Larry J. "Duke" Bleckler, President

The Ste. Genevieve group has retained the traditional "men-only" characteristic that all Mississippi Valley *Guillonée* groups once had in common. This group now travels by bus to make its annual New Year's Eve round to senior citizens' homes, community centers, and a series of local taverns. Decked in elaborate costumes, the Ste. Genevieve singers chant while rhythmically shuffling in a circular pattern. Their lead fiddler, Leonard "Hoggie" Hogenmiller, of German

descent, was raised on Kaskaskia Island in the Mississippi River where he grew up participating in the local French *Guillonée*.

In 1949, KSGM Radio producer Elmer Donze, of Ste. Genevieve, produced "La Guignolée" on two 78 rpm discs. One disc features the singers from Bloomsdale, Missouri and Prairie du Rocher, Illinois; the other disc features the Ste. Genevieve singers.

[The spelling of *La Guillonée*, used in area communities varies widely.]

The following version of "La Guillonée" was sung by Anna Robart Pashia of Racola, Missouri, and recorded by C. Ray Brassieur on March 5, 1989. Brassieur takes full responsibility for all mistakes in transcription or translation.

"La Guillonée"

(Each line is sung by leader then repeated by group.)

Bonsoir le maître et la maîtresse et tout le monde du logis.
Pour le dernier jour de l'année c'est la Guillonée vous nous devez.

Si vous voulez rien nous donner, dites-nous le.
On vous demande pas grande chose—une échinée.

Une échinée n'est pas grande chose ... [n'a que] de quatre-vingt dix pieds de long.
Si vous voulez rien nous donner, dites-nous le.

On vous demande seulement la fille ainée.
On la ferons faire bonne choses, on la ferons chauffer les pieds.

Quand on fûmes au milieu du bois nous fûmes à l'ombre.
J'ai entendu les coucous chanter et la colombe.

Rossignolet du vert bocage, ambassadeur des amoureux,
Va t'en dire à ma maîtresse qu'elle a toujours le coeur joyeux.

Qu'elle ait toujours le coeur joyeux, pointe de tristesse.
Tous ces fillettes qu'a pas d'amour, comment vivent-elles?

Qui ni dor, le jour, la nuit, mais toujours vieille,
C'est ses amours qui les reveillent, et qui les empêchent de dormir.

(Leader's Solo)

Nous suppliant bien la compagnie de vous pouvez nous excuser.
Si on a fait aucune folrie c'était pour nous désennuyer.
Une autre fois nous prendrons garde si on a le bonheur de nous revenir.

(All)

Bonsoir le maître et la maîtresse, et tout le monde du logis.

English Translation

Good evening, master and mistress and all members of the household,
on the last day of the year you owe us the Guillonée.

If you wish to give us nothing, tell us.
We ask you for nothing much—a (pork) backbone.
A backbone is nothing much ... one but ninety feet long.
If you wish to give us nothing, tell us.

We ask you only for the oldest girl of the house.
We will make a good girl of her, we will warm her feet.

When we were in the middle of the woods, we were in the shade.
We heard the cuckoos sing, and the dove,

Nightingale of the green bower,
ambassador of love go tell my lover that she has a heart of everlasting joy.

That she has a heart of everlasting joy—without sorrow.
All the young girls without love, how do they exist?

They sleep neither day nor night but are always awake.
Their lovers awaken them, they forbid them to sleep.

(Leader's Solo)

We plead to the company (of the house) to excuse us if we acted foolishly.
It was only to have a good time.
We will act better on another occasion, if we have the good fortune to return.

(All)

Good evening, master and mistress and all members of the household.