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By Margaret Moore, Record Staff Photographer

Master Folklorist At Work

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By Margaret Moore, Record Staff Photographer

Folklorist Stanley Hicks Of Vilas Spins His Yarns While Children Hang Spellbound On Every Word At WPCC

Mountain Tales Spellbind Burke

By BRENT CHILDERS
Record Staff Writer

MOHANTON — It took maybe a goat's bristle before listeners knew they were in for about two hours of mountain-grown entertainment when Stanley Hicks of Vilas began his first folktale.

More than 400 people attended Hicks' concert of mountain tales, ghost stories and folk music at Western Piedmont Community College on Monday.

A person didn't need much more than a jigger of stout to realize why Hicks, a nationally known master folk artist, has been named a "National Treasure" by the Smithsonian Institution.

Both children and adult can relate to the simple anecdotes of the Appalachian storyteller's renditions of the Jack Tales, Grandfather Tales and "some of them others."

The young 'uns were sittin' just a boop and a holler away — their attention completely captivated by the imagination of the 73-year-old Hicks as he told tales of walking catfish,

ghosts and wicked witches who turned into cats at midnight.

The children would open their eyes wide as Hicks' lowered his voice to speak of ghostly creatures and then jump with excitement and laughter as Hicks exclaimed, "to getch ya!"

Hicks' natural storytelling and singing talents touch almost every emotion.

Listeners got plumb confuddled as Hicks spoke of midnight's 12 black cats — a brew of witches by day. Jack, the main character in the Jack Tales, severed the left paw of one of the cats. The next day Jack's friend found his wife in bed sick — her left hand had been cut off and 11 of her women friends stood by her bedside.

Listeners laughed at Hicks' humor and cried — as Hicks cried — when he sang about wanting to say, "hey to Mom and Dad just one more time."

Hicks closed the performance by lightin' into some his famous flatfoot dancing to the sound of a homemade fiddle — banjer.

The entire audience was clapping along as Hicks danced a fancy step to the upbeat tune on the dulcimer — played by his nephew Frank Profit, WPCC visiting artist.

The audience stood applauding even louder as Hicks finished the performance.

"I like the crowds more than anything — especially the young 'uns," Hicks said after the concert. "You can have a lot of fun with the young 'uns. Except some of 'em get a little scared."

"I was tellin' 'The Big Toe' one time and all the little kids were sittin' up front. A big ol' lady was sittin' behind the kids and said she wasn't scared of no tale."

"That was the lady I wanted to tell it to."

"When I bent down and whispered next to her and then hollered 'to getch you,' she said, 'damn you.'"

I said, "I didn't think you were scared."

She said, "I wasn't — I thought you were going to grab me."

Both in the Beaver Farm community of Stone Mountain, Hicks farmed and cut timber for a living most his life at Beech Creek.

Author Richard Chase visited the Beech Creek area in the early 1930s and after listening to native H.M. Ward tell the Jack Tales, he decided to publish the stories.

The Wards, like the Hickses, were descendants of Council Harmon, from whom the tales are said to have originated.

Historians from the Smithsonian Institution in the early 1970s began looking for ancestors of Council and found the storytelling talents of the mountain folk something to treasure.

Each year, the Smithsonian conducts folklore festivals in Washington for the folk artists to perform their arts and display their art.

Hicks has been telling the stories for audiences across the country since 1973.

He uses the money he makes from concerts and selling his homemade dulciners to supplement a \$150 a month Social Security check — which helps pay his wife's \$200 a month nursing home bill.

"I'd like to do more concerts — I could use the money — but I'm getting on in age and can't go like I use to," Hicks said.

"I would if I could."

"The people is what I love about it. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for them. They're good people — good American people — and I appreciate it."