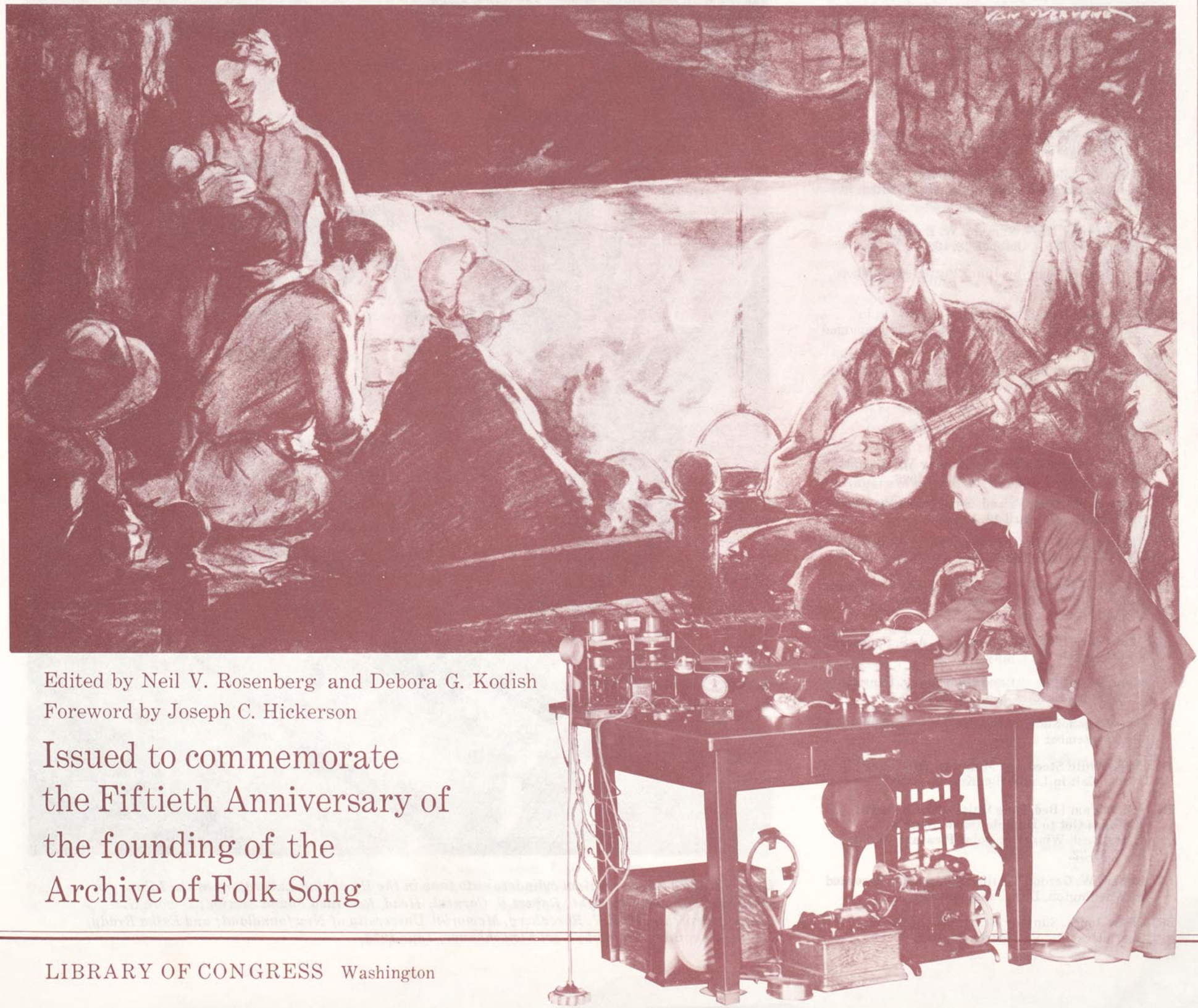
# "Folk-Songs of America"

## THE ROBERT WINSLOW GORDON COLLECTION, 1922-1932



Edited by Neil V. Rosenberg and Debora G. Kodish
Foreword by Joseph C. Hickerson

Issued to commemorate the Fiftieth Anniversary of the founding of the Archive of Folk Song

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS Washington

## SIDE A

A1 **Haul the Wood Pile Down.** Singer Unknown. Bay Area, California, early 1920s.

**Roll the Old Chariot Along.** Singer Unknown. Bay Area, California, early 1920s.

A2 **Old Ninety Seven.** Sung by Fred Lewey in Concord, N.C., October 15, 1925.

A3 **The Old Gray Mare, Hesitation Blues,** and **Not A-Gonna Lay My Religion Down.** Sung by Bascom Lamar Lunsford in Asheville, N.C., October 19, 1925.

A4 **Brother Jonah.** Sung by James G. Stikeleather in Ashville, N.C., November 11, 1925.

**Georgie.** Sung by Nancy Weaver Stikeleather in Asheville, N.C., November 11, 1925.

A5 **Isaac Meddler, Mississippi Sawyer,** and **Sally Goodin.** Played on fiddle by John W. Dillon in Asheville, N.C., October 22, 1925.

A6 **Old Granny Hare.** Sung by W. E. Bird in Cullowhee, N.C., October 28, 1925.

A7 **Single Girl.** Sung by Julius Sutton in Dillsboro, N.C., October 28, 1925.

A8 **Prisoner's Song.** Sung by Ernest Helton in Biltmore, N.C., November 20, 1925, accompanied on banjo.

A9 **Let's Go to Bury.** Sung by Rev. A. B. Holly in Brickton, N.C., December 14, 1925.

## SIDE B

B1 **Deep Down in My Heart.** Sung by W. M. (Billy) Givens in Darien, Ga., March 19, 1926.

**Jesus is My Only Friend.** Sung by Bessie Shaw in Oakhill, Ga., April 10, 1926.

**Glory to God, My Son's Come Home.** Sung by J. D. Purdy near Darien, Ga., ca. 1926.

B2 **Ol' Man Satan/Drive Ol' Satan Away** and **Finger Ring.** Sung by Mary C. Mann in Darien, Ga., April 12, 1926.

B3 **Blow Boys Blow (1).** Sung by J. A. S. Spencer in Darien, Ga. [?], May 11, 1926.

**Blow Boys Blow (2)** and **Haul Away.** Sung by A. Wilkins, Eastern U.S., ca. 1930-32.

B4 **The Wagon.** Sung by Ben Harney in Philadelphia, Pa., September 9, 1925.

B5 **Milk White Steed** and **Mulberry Hill.** Sung by Nellie Galt in Louisville, Ky., ca. 1928 [?].

B6 **Yes Ma'am [Bed Time Quiz]** and **All God's Children Got to Humble Down.** Sung by Betty Bush Winger in Point Pleasant, W.Va., ca. 1931-32.

B7 **Robert W. Gordon Testing Equipment.** Recorded in Washington, D.C., January 1932.

B8 **Casey Jones.** Sung by Francis H. Abbot in Charlottesville, Va., March 24, 1932.

*Duplicating Gordon's original cylinders onto tape in the Recording Laboratory of the Library of Congress. From left to right: Robert B. Carneal, Head, Recorded Sound Section; Debora G. Kodish; Professor Neil V. Rosenberg, Memorial University of Newfoundland; and Erika Brady, L C staff engineer. Photo by Carl Fleischhauer, June 1978.*

# Foreword

July 1, 1978, marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Archive of Folk Song in the Library of Congress. We are celebrating the semicentennial year with a symposium and an exhibit on the archive's history, a special concert by folk musicians, an article for the Library's *Quarterly Journal*, and a commemorative long-playing recording. Throughout these events will be woven the name and accomplishments of the archive's first director (1928-32), Robert Winslow Gordon.

The recognition we give Gordon for his role in the archive's beginnings not only serves as a leitmotif for our fiftieth-year celebrations but also publicizes an American folklorist whose work has been largely unknown. The reasons for Gordon's lack of acclaim are several. First, he pioneered folksong documentation at a time when the subject was appreciated by but a handful of specialists and aficionados. Second, his publications were few and largely ephemeral; he refused to compromise accuracy and scholarship for mass publication and exposure. Finally, federal support for folklore documentation and preservation was tenuous in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It took ten years, the Depression, and the New Deal to assure federally funded activities in folklore.

Robert W. Gordon's collection of over nine hundred cylinder and disc recordings, ten thousand songs in manuscript, and numerous ephemeral and popular publications related to folksong lay in storage in the Library's Music Division stacks for more than three decades. The accomplishments of later directors of the archive overshadowed the dormant treasures of the archive's first director. During the 1940s and 1950s, few scholars were aware of the Gordon collection, and virtually no one worked with it. More assiduous researchers such as Benjamin A. Botkin, Austin E. Fife, and D. K. Wilgus perused it. Others, including Herbert Halpert and Kenneth S. Goldstein were cognizant of the collection and realized the need to bring it to light.

I grew aware of the great riches of the Gordon collection soon after I began working at the archive in 1963. During the next ten years, I was able to direct a number of researchers to the collection for interesting song texts, often predating any other report on the songs in question. Occasionally, scholars were provided with tape copies of particular cylinders for their comparative and historical studies. Thus Gordon's pioneering efforts influenced the subsequent scholarship of Archie Green, Norm Cohen, Judith McCulloh, and a few others.

As time passed, other "champions" of R. W. Gordon stepped forward. Archie Green spoke of his accomplishments on many occasions, perhaps never more eloquently than in November 1968 at the annual meeting of the American Folklore Society in Bloomington, Indiana. Interest also accrued at the University of Oregon, where Gordon's personal papers had been bequeathed through the auspices of Prof. Arthur Brodeur, Gordon's colleague and friend of many years. University of Oregon folklorist J. Barre Toelken directed students to this collection once it was housed in the university library's special collections as part of the Randall V. Mills Memorial Archive of Northwest Folklore (q. v. Grimm).

In 1973 my own efforts to make the Gordon collection more accessible were joined by those of Debora G. Kodish, a Lehigh University undergraduate who discovered its variety and extent while on a ballad research project. Subsequently, as an intern in the Archive of Folk Song, Kodish explored the many boxes of typescripts, correspondence, and index cards. During this period and later while working on her master's degree in the Folklore Department of the Memorial University of Newfoundland under the direction of Prof. Herbert Halpert and Prof. Neil V. Rosenberg, she made a number of lists and indexes and helped to prepare the manuscripts for preservation on microfilm. She interviewed Robert Gordon's daughter, Mrs. Roberta P. G. Nye, and her family in Shallotte, North Carolina, and also a number of other people throughout the country who had known Gordon. These researches, which were supported by grants from Memorial University, culminated in an exemplary thesis.

In 1976 the archive was able to place the Gordon cylinders on the Recording Laboratory's schedule for preservation duplication (the Gordon discs had been copied onto tape several years before). In preparation for this, two archive interns, Rebecca Martin and Susan J. Grodsky, prepared a provisional shelflist based on Gordon's own card index. The cylinders were copied by Mark Schellhammer under the supervision of Chief Engineer Robert B. Carneal.

Debora Kodish's study of Gordon at the Memorial University of Newfoundland spurred Herbert Halpert to order a set of the Gordon tapes for the university's folklore archive. Once the tapes and shelflist arrived in St. John's, folklore archivist Neil V. Rosenberg assigned to a graduate student, Robert McCarl, the task of listening to and further annotating the tapes. Rosenberg and the new Folklore Department director, Kenneth S. Goldstein, asked McCarl to give particular attention to items appropriate for issuance on an LP disc. Goldstein's and Rosenberg's keen interest in a publication of selected Gordon recordings dovetailed with interest at the Library of Congress in a suitable commemoration of the archive's anniversary. Initial selection for the LP was energetically carried out by Goldstein and Rosenberg in Newfoundland and by Kodish at the Library. Rosenberg and Kodish were on hand for a final tape duplication supervised by Carneal and assisted by Assistant Chief Engineer John E. Howell and Erika Brady, staff engineer.

The interest and efforts of many people led to the conception and completion of this recording. Extreme thanks are tendered to everyone who collaborated in this project. In addition, we thank the singers and musicians who recorded for R. W. Gordon and their next-of-kin who, when located, gave us permission to include selections on this LP. For general encouragement and specific guidance, we are much indebted to Kenneth S. Goldstein, Archie Green, Herbert Halpert, Alan Jabbour, Bert Nye, Roberta Gordon Nye and family, and J. Barre Toelken. Grateful acknowledgment is also tendered to Loyal Jones and to the James Stikeleather, Jr., family for photographs and to Sharon Cochrane, Donna Jean Fusonie, Frank J. Gillis, John Hasse, Gerald E. Parsons, Jr., and Cindy Turpin for their assistance with annotations, transcriptions, and bibliography.

To the memory of Robert Winslow Gordon we dedicate this recording.

JOSEPH C. HICKERSON
Head, Archive of Folk Song

*A prophetic photograph. Robert W. Gordon's interest in technology emerged early. Here he appears to play cards against himself in a double exposure; Gordon also tripped the shutter. Bangor, Maine, ca. 1900. Photo courtesy Mr. and Mrs. Bert Nye.*

# Introduction

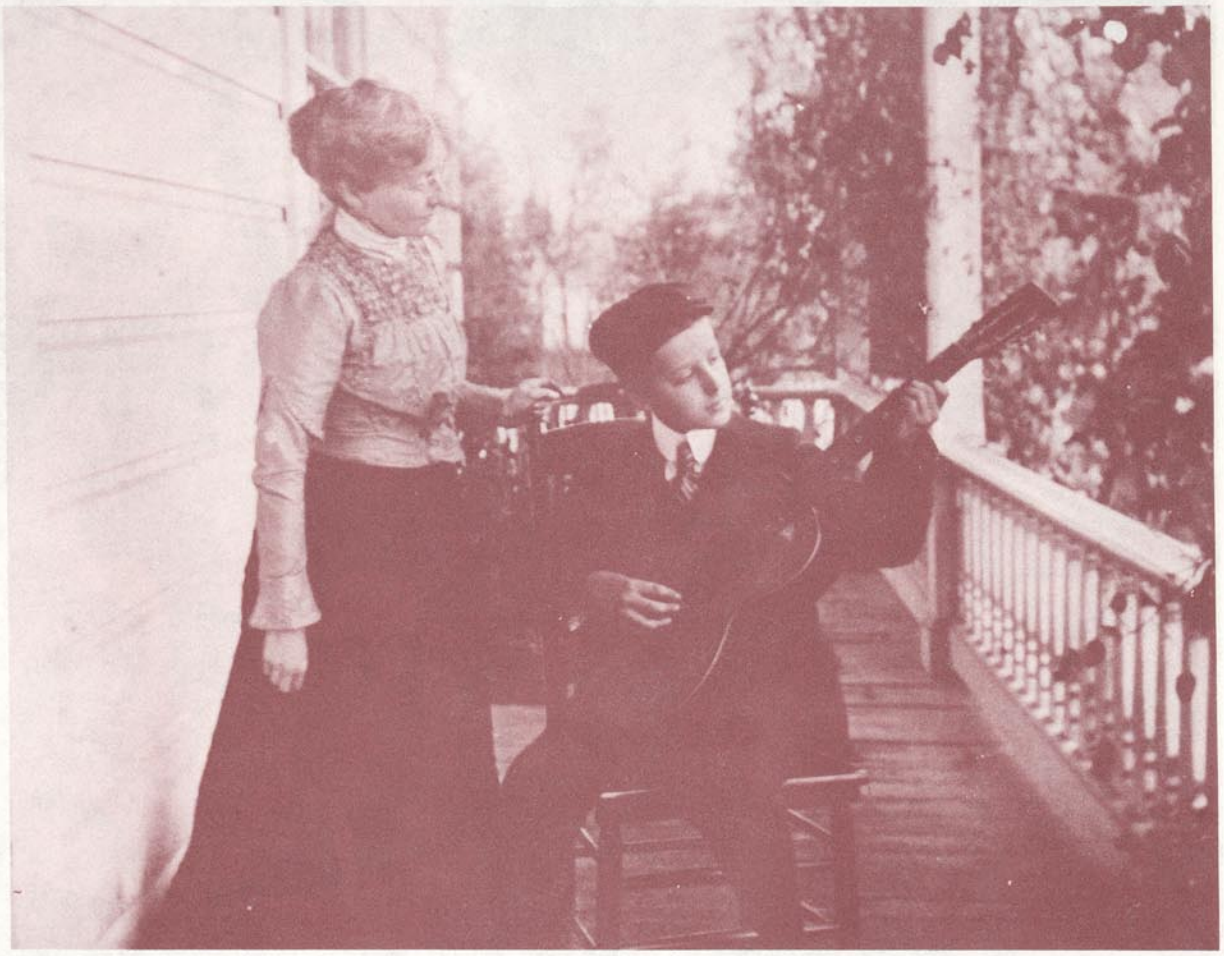
BY DEBORA G. KODISH

The recordings on this album represent one man's ambitious attempt to document the extent and variety of American folksong. Like many other folklorists in the first decades of this century, Robert Winslow Gordon studied English Literature at Harvard under George Lyman Kittredge. Unlike other folklorists, however, Gordon abandoned a career in academia, because he believed the duties of the profession hampered him in his determination to learn everything there was to know about folksong in America. He became, instead, a free-lance writer supporting himself with articles on folksong in popular magazines.

Gordon carried his heavy cylinder recorder (and later, his disc machine) to the San Francisco waterfront, the Appalachian mountains, and the Georgia coast in order to record the diverse singing traditions of this country. He recorded nearly a thousand cylinders, collected nearly ten thousand more song texts from the readers of his popular articles, and gathered many thousand additional song versions from old camp-meeting and revival songbooks, broadsides, folios, and hillbilly recordings—ephemeral material of which few of his colleagues were aware. Gordon never believed that his collecting was finished and never wrote the definitive volumes of collectanea and theory that he planned. Nevertheless, in his theoretical orientation, his scientific outlook, his sensitivity to popular culture, his dedication to technical accuracy, and his interest in phonographic and photographic documentation, Gordon was a pioneer among the folklorists of the 1920s and 1930s.

The field recordings Gordon made reflect his broad research interests and his unusual eclecticism. To him, the recordings were exciting aesthetically, theoretically, and technically. To us, listening fifty years later, they are perhaps even more exciting, for time has added another dimension, and we appreciate them for what they tell us about the epoch in which they were recorded and about the man who recorded them.

Robert Winslow Gordon was born in Bangor, Maine, on September 2, 1888. As a youth he was fascinated with technology and tinkered with radios, airplanes, and cameras. Later, at Exeter and then at Harvard, he continued his technical experiments. Although Gordon received a privileged education, he worked hard both in and out of the classroom. He waited table, sold subscriptions, and took numerous other odd jobs to pay for tuition, books, and inevitably, radio and camera parts.



*Gordon and his music teacher. Although he received professional instruction on the guitar, Robert W. Gordon did not consider himself a musician. In his correspondence, he remarks on his inability to carry a tune—an opinion his rendering of "Charlie Snyder" (B7) does not substantiate. Bangor, Maine, ca. 1900. Photo courtesy Mr. and Mrs. Bert Nye.*

Gordon began his study of English literature at Harvard in 1906 and remained in Harvard's English Department in varying capacities until 1916. During this time he crossed paths with many of the scholars who were to play significant roles in the development of American folklore studies over the next few decades. Although he knew these men, Gordon was highly independent. Even as a student he was known for the curiosity and perspicacity, the thoroughness and perfectionism that were both to bless and to plague his career. In 1912, while he was teaching litera-

*A family outing. While a student at Phillips Exeter Academy (1902-06), Gordon (extreme left) lived in the home of his aunt in Exeter, New Hampshire. This is apparently a photograph from those times. Note that the back row, where Gordon stands, seems to view picture taking with some ceremony. The front row, with its maidens decked in running pine, coffee pot sporting a hat, and barely suppressed youth, sets a lighter tone. Photo courtesy Mr. and Mrs. Bert Nye.*

ture and composition courses under his mentors George Lyman Kittredge and Barrett Wendall, he met and married Roberta Peter Paul of Darien, Georgia. Their only child, a daughter named Roberta, was born in 1914 while the couple was living in Cambridge.

Although he had not completed his Ph.D. dissertation, Gordon accepted the position of assistant professor of English at the University of California at Berkeley and, with his family, moved west in 1917. His interests in folksong, material culture, custom, folk belief, and technology all blossomed in the West.

Although he taught graduate courses in folklore, supervised theses, and read theoretical papers to learned societies, Gordon differed greatly from his academic colleagues. Nowhere was this more evident than in the matter of collecting folksong. While others typically took down ballad texts from graduate students, Gordon

*A family man. Robert W. Gordon seated with daughter Roberta (Mrs. Bert Nye) on his lap. Standing, from left to right, Gordon's mother-in-law, Mrs. Paul; wife, Roberta; mother, Harriet; and family friend Josephine Brodeur. Taken near Berkeley, California, ca. 1922. Photo courtesy Mr. and Mrs. Bert Nye.*

*The "Adventure Campfire." This group of friends from the Berkeley area took its name from the magazine* Adventure. *They gathered to listen to the songs Gordon had recorded and to perform folksongs for public functions and on local radio. In this picture, Gordon is on the far left, cigarette in hand, Arthur Brodeur, his lifetime friend, is in the center of the back row, and Frank Kester, the Oakland newspaperman who helped launch Gordon's field recording project, is in front of Brodeur holding the group's mascot. Ca. 1924. Photo courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Bert Nye.*

spent much of his time collecting songs on the Oakland and San Francisco waterfronts, where he won the cooperation of stevedores, sailors, captains, hoboes, and convicts. The first two selections on this record were probably recorded on one of Gordon's waterfront forays between 1923 and 1924.

During his years in California, 1917-24, Gordon gathered more than one thousand shanties and sea songs, at least three hundred of which he recorded on cylinders, making his the largest collection of maritime songs then in existence. Gordon was not interested in the sheer number of texts; instead he hoped to learn from this large body of data something of the role that Afro-American traditions and popular minstrel show materials played in the development of the sea shanty. He was successful in his fieldwork, but most of his colleagues in Berkeley's English Department failed to recognize it. Few of them knew what he was doing on the waterfront, and many expressed the wish that he would spend his time in more orthodox academic pursuits. Gordon, however, was not inclined to explain his research or his methods.

At approximately the same time he began his fieldwork in the Bay Area, Gordon launched a collateral program of long-range research. In 1923, he began to edit the column "Old Songs That Men Have Sung," in the pulp magazine *Adventure*. By printing songs that his readers requested and advertising for additional texts and

## Old Songs That Men Have Sung

**Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.**

**Although this department is conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.**

**Conducted by R. W. GORDON, care of *Adventure*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City.**

THIS evening I've just finished playing over a number of the phonograph records I've made in the last three weeks. Altogether there are a hundred and forty, and they cover every type of folk-music—old ballads of long ago, modern work-songs, dance and play songs, spirituals, "banjer" and fiddle tunes—all played or sung, as they should properly be, by people who love them and in many cases have helped to make them. All I can bring to you are the words; I wish it were possible to bring the singers as well.

What has struck me most has been the cordiality with which I have everywhere been received and the eagerness of all I have met to help in the collection. Perhaps most helpful has been Bascom Lamar Lunsford of Asheville, for years a lover and collector of the old songs. He has not only sung for me himself, but has brought in singers and gone into the country with me in search of others.

I'm glad to announce that Mr. Lunsford has consented to associate himself with this department and to become officially our district collector for Western North Carolina.

HERE is one of the old ballads obtained through his assistance. It was sung by Miss Ada Moss, a student at Cullowhee State Normal, as it has come down traditionally in her family.

It would be hard to tell the story more simply or effectively. The song itself comes down to us probably from about the time of Sir Walter Raleigh and neither tune or words have lost their appeal, though both have been modified somewhat as they have passed on from singer to singer.

**The Merrie Golden Tree**

(*Sung by Miss Ada Moss*)

There was a little ship all on that sea
And the name that they gave it was the Merrie Golden Tree,
As she sails on the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
As the sails on the lonesome sea.

There was another little ship all on that sea,
And the name that they gave it was the Merrie Turkolee,
As she sails on the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
As she sails on the lonesome sea.

There was a little boy all on that ship,
And he said, "Captain, captain, what will you give me
If I'll sink that old ship in the middle of the sea,
As she sails on the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
As she sails on the lonesome sea?"

"I'll give you money, and I'll pay your fee,
And besides, my oldest daughter I will marry unto you,
If you'll sink her in the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
If you'll sink her in the lonesome sea."

He bowed his little head and off swam he,
He swam and he swam till he came to the Merrie Merrie Turkolee,
As she sails in the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
As she sails in the lonesome sea.

He had a little tool all fitted for use,
And he bored nine holes in her old hull at once,
As she sails in the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
As she sails in the lonesome sea.

He bowed his little head and back swam he,
He swam and he swam till he came to the Merrie Golden Tree
As she sails in the lowland, lonesome, lonesome
As she sails in the lonesome sea.

He said, "Captain, captain, take me on board
Or you won't be as good as you told me you would,
If I'd sink her in the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
If I'd sink her in the lonesome sea."

"I won't give you money, nor I won't pay your fee,
Nor my oldest daughter I'll not marry unto you
And you sunk her in the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
And you sunk her in the lonesome sea."

"If it wasn't for the love that I have for your men,
I would do unto you as I did unto them—
I would sink you in the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
I would sink you in the lonesome sea."

He bowed his little head and down went he;
He bid farewell to the Merrie Golden Tree
As she sails in the lowland, lonesome, lonesome,
As she sails in the lonesome sea.

NOW I'm going to ask Mr. Lunsford to take down his "banjer" and pick while he sings a modern dance tune. There are endless verses, but not much story.

**Cindy, Cindy**

(*Text of B. L. Lunsford*)

O where'd you get your liquor
O where'd you get your dram?
I got it from a nigger
Way down in Rockingham.
*O get along home, Cindy, Cindy,*
*Get along home, Cindy, Cindy,*
*Get along home, Cindy, Cindy,*
*I'll marry you sometime.*

I went to see my blue eyed girl,
She met me at the door;
Her shoes and stockings in her hand,
Her feet all over the floor.
Cho:





Apple like a cherry,
Cherry like a rose;
How I love my pretty little girl
God in Heaven knows!
Cho:

Cindy's got religion,
She had it once before;
When she hears my old banjo
She's the first one on the floor.
Cho:

Once I had a "banjer"
And every string was twine;
The only tune that I could pick
Was "I wish That Girl Was Mine."
Cho:

I wish I had a needle and thread
As fine as I could sew,
And a thimble from Baltimore
To make that needle go.
Cho:

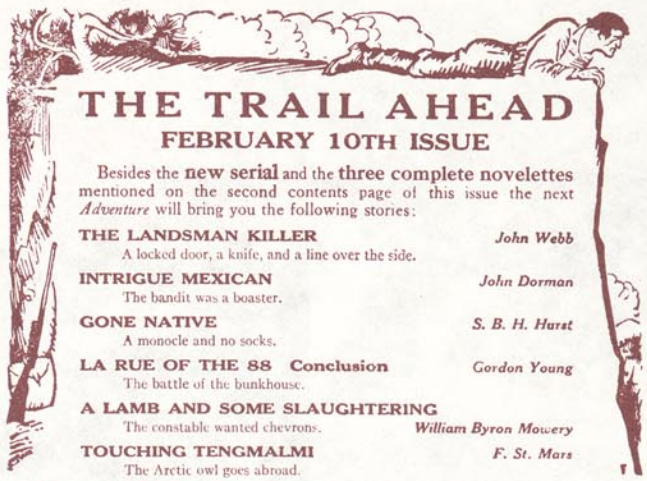
She told me that she loved me,
She called me "sugar plum."
She throwed her arms around me
Like a grape vine round a gum.
Cho:

Finger ring, finger ring
Shines like glittering gold;
How I love my pretty little girl
O God in Heaven knows!
*O get along home, Cindy, Cindy,*
*Get along home, Cindy, Cindy,*
*Get along home, Cindy, Cindy,*
*I'll marry you sometime.*

Another that I'd like to print if there were room is "I Wish I Were a Mole in the Ground," but you can hear Mr. Lunsford himself sing that if you will get hold of an Okeh phonograph record 40155.

DON'T forget that I still want all the old songs of every variety that you can send in, and all the hints you can give that will put me on the track of singers. There are still a number of photographs of scenes on the trip printed on postcards and waiting for those of you who help out in either of the ways mentioned above.

ADDRESS all letters to R. W. GORDON, care of *Adventure*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.




STILL FARTHER AHEAD

THE THREE ISSUES following the next will contain *long* stories by Arthur O. Friel, Thomson Burtis, W. C. Tuttle, L. Patrick Greene, Fairfax Downey, W. Townend, T. S. Stribling and Leonard H. Nason; and short stories by Charles Victor Fischer, William Westrup, John Joseph, T. T. Flynn, Robert Carse, L. Paul, James Parker Long, Don Waters, Alan LeMay, George E. Holt, Clements Ripley and others; stories of white men up the Amazon, traders in Africa, aviators in the oil-fields, cowboys on the Western range, doughboys on the Western front, hardcase skippers and hucko mates on the high seas, desert riders in Morocco, daring men in dangerous places up and down the earth.

verses, Gordon used the column to build up an immense and eclectic collection of folksong as well as a broad network of correspondents and informants from all over the United States and overseas. His reputation as "the *Adventure* man" made his name familiar to many sailors, convicts, and hoboes in the Bay Area before they met him with phonograph in hand. His connection with *Adventure* was to prove more useful in the field than in the faculty meeting, however. The "Old Songs" column—which was later praised by folklorist Archer Taylor as the greatest contribution to the study of American folksong of its time—was another source of dissatisfaction to Gordon's Berkeley colleagues, who would have preferred his endeavors to find expression in a more conventional way. Gordon, committed to "a popular-scholarly approach," continued all his life to publish authoritative, interesting articles where they would be read by wide audiences.

Gordon's California collecting came to an end when English Department politics threatened the job of a lifelong friend and colleague. In defending his friend, Gordon embarrassed the head of the department. He was sent on sabbatical for the year 1924-25 and was informed that he would not be rehired. Gordon left Berkeley and returned to Harvard, planning to finish his doctorate. But he decided instead to undertake a year-long trip (1925-26) with the object of making the definitive recorded collection of American folksong. Gordon arranged to support his first year in the

*The* Adventure *column. Robert W. Gordon's feature "Old Songs That Men Have Sung," as it appeared in* Adventure, *January 30, 1926. The invitation at the end to send in "all the old songs of every variety" was part of Gordon's "great plan" to collect every American folksong. Reproduced from the collections of the Archive of Folk Song.*

field through a contract for a series of articles for the *New York Times Magazine* (the series title provides the title of this album), a $1,200 Sheldon traveling fellowship from Harvard, discounts and donations on equipment from the Edison, Ford, and Eastman companies, and loans from friends. The variety of his sources of support notwithstanding, his resources amounted to little, and his trip trembled constantly on the brink of financial disaster. Nevertheless, with the discovery of plentiful material and willing informants, he soon abandoned his original itinerary and stretched one year of fieldwork into four. Gordon felt that he was discovering material that shed light on the problems of folksong origin and development. He collected many versions of particular songs and explored their historical, social, and cultural backgrounds. By reconstructing the histories of specific songs, Gordon expected to gain insights into the evolution of folk literature in general. The two versions of "Blow Boys Blow" presented on side B reflect this theoretical concern.

Gordon regularly traveled many miles out of his way to track down a bit of information that might aid him in understanding a specific song history. On his way to Asheville, North Carolina, where he intended to set up his first field station, he made a detour in order to interview and record two men who claimed to be the authors of "The Wreck of Old 97." In 1924, this song (sung by Vernon Dalhart) had become the first hillbilly

Adventure *in archaeology. The Campfire group (see above) conducted several archaeological expeditions in Marin County, California. Here Gordon poses with a freshly unearthed specimen. Ca. 1923. Photo courtesy J. Barre Toelkin, University of Oregon.*

*Folksongs in the* Times. *This illustration for Gordon's article "The Folk Songs of America: Banjo Tunes" appeared in the* New York Times Magazine *of January 1, 1928, over the caption, "He Begins With One of the More Characteristic Banjo Songs, Slower in Rhythm and More Lyrical Than Those of the Fiddler." Copyright © 1928, New York Times Co. Reprinted by permission.*

*The issue of April 24, 1927, carried Gordon's article regarding black folk culture of the Georgia sea coast, "The Folk Songs of America: Negro Shouts." The caption reads "Every Singer Moves in Time." The* Times *published 15 installments of "The Folk Songs of America" between January 2, 1927, and January 22, 1928. There is reason to believe that in this illustration, unlike the preceding one, the* Times *staff artist Van Werveke was guided by a photograph supplied by Gordon. Copyright © 1927, New York Times Co. Reprinted by permission.*

record to sell a million copies. Fred Lewey was one of the pair who claimed authorship, and his historic rendition is included here. It later figured in litigation surrounding the copyright ownership of the song — a court case that helped establish Gordon's reputation as an expert witness and to demonstrate the application of folklore scholarship to practical affairs.

Gordon arrived in Asheville in October and set up his tent in the hills outside of town. There he typed his transcriptions, wrote his "Old Songs" columns for *Adventure*, and descended to town only for mail and supplies. One of the first persons he met in the Asheville area was a young, banjo playing lawyer, Bascom Lamar Lunsford. Lunsford played and sang into Gordon's cylinder machine and took him around the mountains introducing him to other musicians and singers. Nancy Weaver Stikeleather and James Stikeleather, John W. Dillon, Ernest Helton, W. E. Bird, Julius Sutton, and the Reverend H. G. Holly were among Gordon's other North Carolina informants. The fiddle tunes, ballads, and religious songs that they perform on this record represent some of Gordon's chief research interests and favorite "finds."

By Christmas 1925, Gordon had been living away from his family for more than a year. The separation was difficult, emotionally and financially, and he decided to move to a field station on the coast of southern Georgia — to Darien, the childhood home of Mrs. Gordon. The reunited family occupied a two-room house, and Gordon resumed work, eagerly setting out to record the Afro-American traditions of the Georgia coast. The rowing songs and the boat songs which he discovered are represented on this record by the performances of Mary C. Mann and J. A. S. Spencer. Mary Mann, a deaconess at a local black church, had organized a school in Darien in which she taught young black women the domestic skills they needed to find employment. Mary Mann had a large repertoire herself, and she encouraged her students and members of her church to contribute their songs to Gordon as well.

Gordon felt that he occupied a special position in the Darien black community. He had earned the trust and friendship of several local blacks, among them W. M. Givens, whose niece was sometimes employed by the Gordons. One day she came running terrified into their home. Her uncle had been bitten by a poisonous snake.

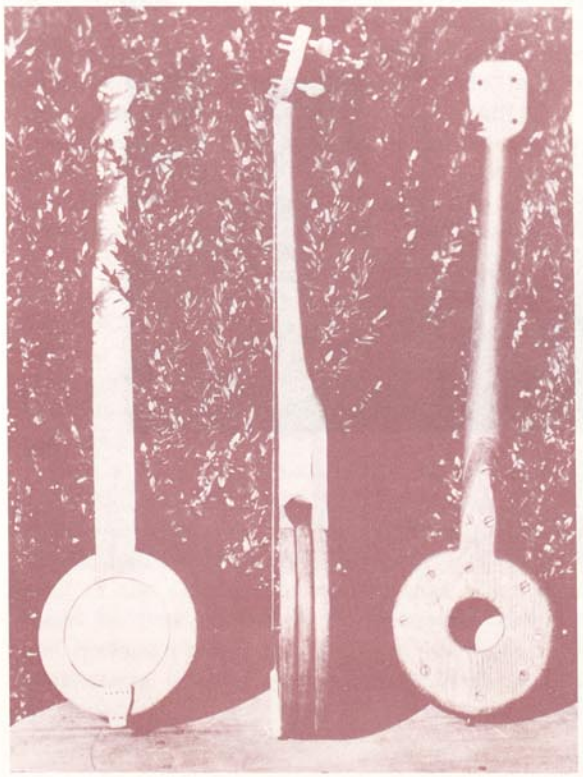
Gordon rushed back with her, put a tourniquet on the man's leg, cut the bite, and sucked out the venom. Billy Givens was soon walking again, and Gordon had earned a friend for life — a friend who also happened to be a fine singer. He can be heard singing "Deep Down in My Heart" on side B. All of Gordon's Georgia informants lived within a day's drive of Darien, for Gordon did not have enough cash to buy gasoline most of the time and was obliged to return to the station where he had credit. Nor did he always take the car on his field trips; he knew the countryside for fifteen miles around Darien from his long walks.

Money remained a problem, and although Gordon saw no end to his collecting, he was looking for a steadier source of income than freelance writing could provide. He wanted the chance to collect, examine, and theorize about American folksong without financial worry. Gordon had done extensive research at the Library of Congress, and in the fall of 1926 he brought his dream to Carl Engel, chief of the Music Division at the Library. Engel was interested in Gordon's work and considered him America's foremost authority on folksong. When Gordon asked for institutional support, Engel responded enthusiastically. Gordon's dream fit neatly into Engel's own hopes of establishing a graduate institute for the study of musicology at the Library of Congress, which would include a national center for the collection and study of folk music. As no government funds were available, private donors were solicited and subscriptions raised. In July 1928, Herbert Putnam, the Librarian of Congress, appointed Gordon "specialist and consultant in the field of Folk Song and Literature." Gordon later proposed a title that he thought would appeal more to the imagination of the general public: director of the Archive of American Folk Song.

During the first year of the archive's existence, Gordon remained in Darien collecting the shouts, rowing songs, rags, reels, and turning songs that were of primary importance in the study of American folksong and of special significance in learning how folksongs start and spread. The December 1928 meeting of the Modern Language Association in Louisville, Kentucky, lured him away from home by providing opportunities to work in a new region, to publicize his national folksong archive, and to ask for the cooperation of all interested scholars. It may have been on this trip to Louisville that Gordon met Nellie Galt and Ben Harney, both of whom may be heard on side B of this record.

Although Engel, Putnam, and Gordon shared a belief in the importance of a center devoted to the collection and study of American traditional

*Mountain informants. Bascom Lamar Lunsford, shown here with his accompanist, Gertrude Johnson, was a great help to Gordon's fieldwork in North Carolina. Lunsford was an active tradition bearer, an amateur collector, a performer, and the organizer of the Mountain Dance and Song Festival, the first such event in the United States. Photo courtesy of Loyal Jones.*



*Mystery photograph. Although his correspondence makes reference to the documentation of folk culture with the camera as well as the recording machine, only two of Gordon's field photographs have ever been found, this one and the one below of Mary C. Mann. Gordon probably took this picture, identified on the back as "homemade banjos in Western North Carolina," in 1924 or 1925. It reveals an interest in material culture that was all too rare in folklore scholarship of the 1920s. Photo from the Harris and Ewing albums in the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress.*

*Nancy Weaver Stikeleather, shown here with her two children, was another folk music enthusiast who contributed to Gordon's research. She and her husband James (both may be heard on this LP) collected and sang songs from the Asheville locality for Gordon and other scholars. Photo courtesy of James Stikeleather, Jr.*

*New employee. Robert Winslow Gordon in a portrait taken in 1928, when he joined the staff of the Library of Congress as the first Head of the Archive of American Folk Song. Photo courtesy Mr. and Mrs. Bert Nye.*

music, they did not agree upon the methods by which such a center should develop. Gordon wanted the freedom of a research scientist — financial backing and complete support while he went about his independent investigations. Putnam and Engel, however, felt compelled to write repeatedly to Darien, requesting information as to his whereabouts and activities. Perceiving that his great distance from the Library was a barrier to harmonious relations, Gordon concluded his Georgia fieldwork and, in September 1929, moved with his family to Washington.

Once his archive was installed in the southwest corner of the Library's attic, Gordon devoted a great deal of time to experimentation with recording apparatus. He conducted his own tests with cylinder and wire recorders and stayed in close consultation with commercial firms. Borrowing a new model of Amplion disc recorder in 1932, he traveled to West Virginia, Kentucky, and Virginia to try it in the field. His recordings of Betty Bush Winger and F. H. Abbot on side B stem from this field experiment with disc recording.

Gordon's difficulties with the Library were only momentarily relieved by his move to Washington. The depression put an end to the donations which

had sustained his position, and in 1933 the last of these funds ran out. This, coupled with the Library's disappointment in his performance, cost Gordon his job. It was a blow from which he never recovered.

He spent his final year at the Library indexing the texts he had amassed during his tenure as editor of the "Old Songs" column, the transcriptions of the material he had recorded in his fieldwork, and the collections of other folklorists which he had acquired for the archive.

Gordon's active career as a folklorist ended in 1933, although some of his most important publications appeared after that. He worked in the Washington, D.C., area, primarily as a technical editor and as a professor of English, until his death on March 29, 1961.

It is now fifty years since Gordon was appointed first director of the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress, and therefore a fitting moment to reexamine and appreciate his achievements, and to publish some of his collectanea. Many of the original cylinders considered for this commemorative disc are in poor condition, badly worn from overuse by Gordon himself. It is probable that he transcribed song texts from his original field recordings. He also played them over for informants and colleagues. Thus the very items in which Gordon was most interested are now the items in poorest condition. His collection is so large, however, that there is no lack of significant material of good recorded quality.

We have also been guided in our choices by Gordon himself. We have tried to put together the sort of album that he might have assembled. Our selections are items about which Gordon wrote and which seemed to him to be keys to the comprehension of American folksong, i.e., items which document the interplay between black and white traditions and reflect the influence of popular, commercial culture (minstrel and tent shows, camp meetings, and phonograph records) upon folk traditions.

In his writings, Gordon tried to recreate the contexts in which he had recorded these songs. He constantly lamented that the printed page could not do justice to the beauty of the music or the skill of the singer. He wished that his readers could be transported to the mountain cabin or the lowland church to share with him there the excitement of live performance. With a little imagination, we can now, fifty years later, feel some of that excitement.

*Tidewater informants. Mary C. Mann sang many unusual songs for Gordon while he was conducting field research in Darien, Georgia, between 1926 and 1928. A deaconess in the Episcopal Church, she ran a school that prepared young black girls for work in domestic service. In this picture, Mary Mann stands with a number of her pupils who are apparently weaving traditional, coiled grass baskets of the Sea Islands. Photo courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Bert Nye.*