Folklife and Fieldwork

A Layman's Introduction to Field Techniques

First Edition Prepared 1979 by Peter Bartis
Revised 2002

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COVER PHOTO:
During a July 1994 American Folklife Center field school project in San Luis, Colorado, participants Laura Hunt (left) and Beverly Morris (right) interview rancher Corpus Gallegos on the vega, *a cattle grazing area held in common by the community. Photo by Miguel Gandert*

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Preface to the Third Edition

When the first edition of Folklife and Fieldwork was published in 1979 there were only a handful of professional state folklorists. Today nearly every state has a program for documenting and presenting its own folk cultural heritage. Folklife fieldwork has gone beyond its early missions of preservation and scholarship to serve new uses, such as providing information to economists, environmentalists, and community planners. New technologies for preserving and presenting traditional cultural expression have been developed. A new generation of professionally trained folklorists have emerged from university programs, and many now work in state and local organizations to sponsor concerts, Web site presentations, exhibits, and other cultural heritage programs.

But regardless of the number of folklorists available for professional projects or the sophistication of the technology, there is still a need for the participation of all citizens in the process of documenting our diverse traditional culture.

The American Folklife Center

The United States Congress created the American Folklife Center in 1976 with the passage of Public Law 94-201, the American Folklife Preservation Act. That enabling legislation instructs the Center to undertake a wide variety of programs that document, preserve, and present American folklife. To carry out this congressional mandate, the American Folklife Center (AFC) conducts and coordinates field documentation projects; develops educational publications and programs, including online presentations; sponsors conferences, lectures, and concerts; and provides specialized technical, administrative, and consulting services to community organizations, scholars, educators, and other federal and state agencies. On October 21, 1998, the U.S. Congress permanently authorized the American Folklife Center within the Library of Congress, with the passage of Public Law 105-275.

The AFC includes the Archive of Folk Culture, the nation's largest collection of documentary materials relating to historical and contemporary traditional life in the Unites States and throughout the world. Established at the Library of Congress in 1928, the Folk Archive includes field recordings of folksongs and spoken word performances, as well as fieldnotes and photography illustrating a diverse range of Anglo-American, European American, African American, and Native American cultures, including ethnic, regional, and occupational groups.

The AFC has a small and versatile staff of professionals, and operates under the supervision of the Librarian of Congress and the general direction of a Board of Trustees (appointed by Congress, the Librarian of Congress, and the president of the United States). Among the ex officio trustees of the board are the chairmen of the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and the presidents of the American Folklore Society and the Society for Ethnomusicology.

To learn more about the AFC's services and programs, including an extensive list of online publications and collections, visit our Web site.

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Ambrose Thibodeaux, Merlin Fontenot, and Nathan Abshire play the three principal instruments of Acadian music: the triangle, the fiddle, and the accordion. First annual Acadian Music Festival, Lafayette, Louisiana, 1974. Photo by Turner Browne. American Folklife Center Collection

Introduction: What Is Folklife?

When Congress created the American Folklife Center in 1976, it had to define *folklife* in order to write the law. Here is what the law says:

> *American folklife is the traditional, expressive, shared culture of various groups in the United States: familial, ethnic, occupational, religious, and regional. Expressive culture includes a wide range of creative and symbolic forms, such as custom, belief, technical skill, language, drama, ritual, architecture, music, play, dance, drama, ritual, pageantry, and handicraft. Generally these expressions are learned orally, by imitation, or in performance, and are maintained or perpetuated without formal instruction or institutional direction.*

Different terms have been used in the past to refer to traditional culture. Early British studies used terms such as *bygones, popular antiquities,* and *curiosities*. By the time the Englishman William J. Thoms coined the term *folk-lore*, in 1846, there was widespread popular and scholarly interest in the subject throughout Europe.

In this country interest in folklore began in the mid-nineteenth century with study of the American Indians, whose distinctive culture seemed to be vanishing. By the time the American Folklore Society was founded in 1888, other topics were gaining in popularity, such as, Anglo- American folksong and African-American culture. The society's first president, Francis James Child, was a well-known ballad scholar; and collecting folksongs of all kinds was the goal of the Archive of American Folk-Song when it was established at the Library of Congress in 1928.

Over the years, the Archive has grown to include a wide variety of folk materials that document all aspects of traditional life, and in 1981 the name was changed to the Archive of Folk Culture to reflect more accurately its broadening scope.

Initially, then, the desire to collect folklore and folksong derived largely from the fear that these aspects of cultural expression were disappearing—a valid motive that continues to impel collectors. But folklorists no longer believe that folklore and folklife are cultural remnants from the past or that they exist only in isolated pockets of the country. Folklife is universal to human culture and dynamic. Particular traditions come to an end or are modified; particular events, objects, and forms of expression change and evolve, but the process continues by which traditional culture is created. All of us participate in folklife activities and expressions, and folklife is alive in all our many and diverse American communities.

Marilyn Bañuelos (right) photographs Connie Romero as she interviews rancher Corpus Gallegos on the vega, *a publicly owned piece of grazing land in San Luis, Colorado, during a July 1994 field documentation training school jointly sponsored by the American Folklife Center, Colorado College, and the Center for Regional Studies of the University of New Mexico. Photo by James Hardin*

Henrietta Yurchenco (right), one of the many extraordinary collectors whose fieldwork documentation is included in the Archive of Folk Culture at the Library of Congress. She is shown here in the 1970s with a member of the Methodist Church that served as a focus of her research among the African American Gullah-speakers of John's Island, South Carolina. American Folklife Center photo by David Lewiston

What to Collect

We are accustomed to thinking of scholarly work as taking place in a library, and the library is often the first stop as either the amateur or the professional folklorist begins his or her investigation. In the library, as well as on the Internet, in museums, archives, private collections, and other repositories, you will find information on what other researchers have discovered about your topic of interest. There you will also find guides such as maps, local histories, and directories for conducting your own research. You may also find leads for people to interview. The scholarly reports and publications from other researchers will help you avoid repeating research that has already been done and provide a context within which it is possible to ask new and informed questions.

Fieldwork, on the other hand, is scholarly work that requires firsthand observation—recording or documenting what you see and hear in a particular setting, whether that be a rural farming community or a city neighborhood, a local fish market or a grandmother's living room. It means gathering together for analysis the raw material that may one day find its way into a library or museum, to be used by future scholars or by the original researcher to produce an essay, book, exhibit, or an online presentation.

The beginning of any research project, whether in the library or in the field, is a statement of purpose that can be expressed in a few sentences. It is important to develop that statement carefully since it may serve as a way to introduce yourself to both community members and research and reference librarians assisting you in preliminary, pre-fieldwork preparation. Each time you visit a research facility or conduct an interview, be prepared to explain the purpose of your project. In addition, you will want to explain why you are doing it; if applicable, what your school or institutional affiliation is; and how the information you collect will be used.

It is helpful to think of a field project in three parts. The three are interdependent and equally important, and each part will be addressed in this pamphlet:

(1) Background research and preparation
(2) The fieldwork itself
(3) Organizing and preparing the material for archival preservation

There are many possible subjects for a folklife project, such as one group's ethnic heritage, a children's game, or local farming or maritime traditions. When the project is under way, you will discover that subtopics emerge. The games of a particular schoolyard, for example, may include counting-out rhymes, songs, a strategy for play, and material artifacts.

To indicate the breadth of possibilities for folklife research, a partial list of the many kinds of traditional activities appears below. All of the items are regarded by folklorists as expressions of traditional culture. Any one of them might be the focus of a folklife project, or a project may include several of them in combination.

> To view examples of professional documentation projects in the American Folklife Center's Archive of Folk Culture visit our site online at www.loc.gov/folklife/ndl.html "Collections Available Online."

ORAL AND MUSICAL TRADITIONS

❖ Spoken Word: tall tales, legends, humorous stories, personal experience stories, proverbs, riddles, toasts and testimonies, mnemonic devices (rhymes), nursery and game rhymes, speech play, ritual insults, jokes, family histories, dialect and idiomatic speech, sermons
❖ Song: ballads, children's songs, work songs, blues, sea shanties, ethnic songs, play-party and game songs
❖ Music: fiddle tunes, drumming, yodeling, whistling
❖ Dance: clogging, square dance, round dance, buck dance, ethnic dance
❖ Game, Play, and Strategy: tag games, guessing games, seeking games, competitive games (dueling, daring, racing), game strategy (rules and techniques), acting, pretending

MATERIAL CULTURE

❖ Artifacts: houses, outbuildings, barns, boats, floor plans, roofing materials, masonry, wall and fence constructions, tools and implements
❖ The Cultural Landscape: wall and fence placement, farm planning, farming techniques, rural and urban use of land and space, physical and economic boundaries of regions and neighborhoods
❖ Crafts and Trades: boat building, blacksmithing, coal mining, tool making, papercutting, pottery, sailmaking, rope making, weaving, straw work, animal trapping
❖ Folk Art: graphic arts, furniture decoration, embroidery, beadwork, wood carving, jewelry making, yard and garden decoration

FAMILY LIFE

❖ Traditions and Customs
❖ Religious observations
❖ Rites of passage: births, birthdays, baptisms, marriages, funerals

FOODWAYS

- ❖ Food preparation and recipes
- ❖ Canning and curing processes
- ❖ Traditional meal preparation
- ❖ Religious or symbolic uses for food
- ❖ Gardening

BELIEFS

- ❖ Folk Medicine
- ❖ Religious practices
- ❖ Luck and magic

FESTIVALS, DRAMA, RITUAL

- ❖ Seasonal and calendrical events
- ❖ Saints and nameday celebrations
- ❖ Feast days
- ❖ Market days
- ❖ Community festivals and pagent

The wedding of Cambodians Sopheap Muth and Pen Hing at the home of Pen Hing's mother, Mrs. Chounn Chen, in Lowell, Massachusetts, September 1987. New ethnic immigrants bring a wealth of traditions to the United States. Some of these traditions are maintained, some are lost, and some take new forms in their new settings. From the American Folklife Center's Lowell Folklife Project. Photo by John Lueders-Booth

Shawn Orr interviews long-time Mission Valley resident Waldo Phillips as part of his school's Montana Heritage Project in St. Ignatius, Montana, 1997. Sponsored by the American Folklife Center, the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, and a consortium of Montana organizations and institutions, the Montana Heritage Project encourages young people to discover and document the people and traditions of their own local communities. Photo by Michael Umphrey

Conducting Fieldwork

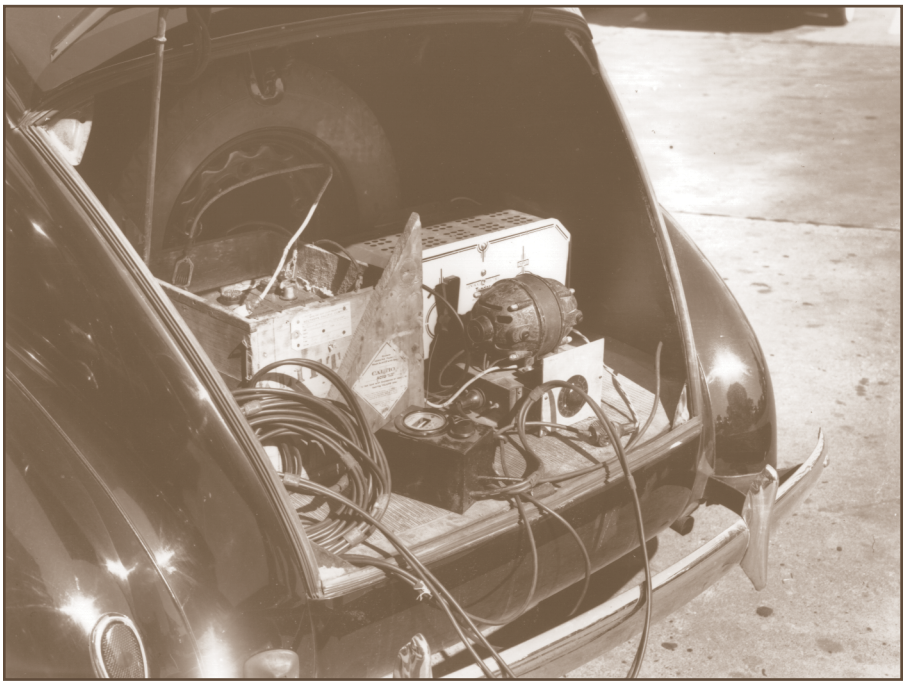
Folklore can be collected from almost anyone, but certain people, by virtue of their good memories, long lives, performance skills, or particular roles within a community, are often especially well qualified to provide information. Folklorists sometimes refer to these people as "tradition bearers." A researcher's own family members may include tradition bearers, or can also provide leads to such persons in the larger community. And the very way community members are identified by others in the community may indicate the kind of information you can expect to get from them: traditional craftspeople, shopkeepers, storytellers, musicians, or those who know and use proverbs, to name just a few examples.

If you have decided on the subject of your investigation and prepared yourself with preliminary research, you are ready to identify people who can provide the information you seek. If you are working in your own community, start with family and friends. If they are unable to lead you to a "tradition bearer," try a visit to:

local churches;
community and corner stores;
civic and cultural clubs;
small parks and other outdoor areas in which people gather;
public events like ethnic and community festivals, country music concerts, volunteer fire department fund-raisers, barbecues, and church homecomings.

Professional folklorists may use such places as starting points when they are working in communities other than their own. They will sometimes use flyers and posters, and may even receive helpful local newspaper, TV, and radio coverage if their projects are particularly interesting and important locally. Determination and legwork will almost always have positive results.

Most states now have folklorists or folk arts professionals who can give you additional advice about your project. Helpful assistance may also be available to you and your project if you are located near a university that has a folklore studies program, or a folklorist on staff. For information on state and local programs, as well as on colleges and universities that offer degrees in folklore, see Folklife Sourcebook, an online resource at www.loc.gov/folklife/source/. There you will find chapters on "Folklife Programming in Public Agencies and Organizations" and "Higher Education Programs."



Sound-recording equipment John and Alan Lomax transported in the trunk of their car during their fieldwork expeditions. "I remember well the first electrically driven machine that I operated in 1933," John A. Lomax writes. "The amplifier weighed more than one hundred pounds; the turntable case weighed another one hundred; two Edison batteries weighed seventy-five pounds each. The microphone, cable, the tools, etc., accounted for sufficient weight to make the total five hundred pounds. . . . In order to carry them in the car I tore out the back seat . . ." "Field Experiences with Recording Machines," Southern Folklore Quarterly, *vol. 1, no. 2 (June 1937), The University of Florida in Cooperation with the Southeastern Folklore Society, p. 58. American Folklife Center photo*

How to do Fieldwork

PREPARATION AND BASIC SUPPLIES

A simple checklist for fieldworkers might include the following items. The list will vary according to the project:

1. Notebooks, pens, and pencils
2. Camera, film, or digital medium, and accessories as needed, such as an assortment of lenses, a flash, lighting equipment, and a tripod
3. Audio or video recorder (battery-operated ones are useful); microphones; plenty of fresh tape, discs, or sound cards; batteries; and an extension cord
4. Tape measure for recording the dimensions of material objects
5. Appropriate dress, which is both comfortable and/or right for the occasion. Some fieldworkers need a stout pair of shoes and casual clothes, for example; others, collecting at events such as a family dinner or a church service, will need more formal clothes.
6. Release forms—sometimes also called "consent" or "permission" forms (see sample forms section)
7. Maps

SOUND RECORDING

When John Lomax recorded American folksongs for the Library of Congress in the 1930s, he traveled through the southern states with a heavy and cumbersome disc recording machine in the trunk of his automobile. Today, however, there are lightweight digital and analog recorders on the market, of various prices and qualities. Recording technologies are changing and merging so rapidly that even professionals debate over the "best" equipment to use. Much of the debate focuses on the durability of the recording, once made, since long-term preservation is of utmost importance. For that reason, archivists usually advise collectors to avoid DAT tape because of concerns about deterioration.

The use of sound recorders has made the collection of folklore a different task than it was in the days when pencil and paper were the primary means of collecting; and the ability to record the performer's voice has preserved a human presence for future generations to hear and study. Recording is important because it collects the information just as it was spoken, sung, or played. But the audio recording does not make the fieldworker's job effortless. There is much to learn about the equipment before going into the field, much to do while you are there, and much to do when you return. The recorded material must be numbered and logged, and the social and cultural context in which it was made must be

described as part of your fieldnotes. Because video cameras are able to capture and document a broader context, their use by fieldworkers has increased (see the section on video cameras).

Here are some hints on using a sound recorder—many also apply to the use of a video camera:

1. If you have the opportunity to make advance arrangements for the interview, mention that you would like to record it. Be sure to tell the informant what the recording will be used for (to be placed in an archive for research purposes, to be used in the preparation of a publication or an exhibit, a term paper, etc.), and make sure that he or she understands and approves. Professional folklorists always ask that a consent form be signed. Collectors should anticipate that future commercial recordings, exhibits, and publications both in print and online may result from their work. Sometimes members of the informant's family will have proprietary feelings about the person and traditions in which you are interested, so you will want to consult with them as well. It may be helpful from the start to offer a copy of the recording or photograph, or to agree to play back the interview for approval and commentary.

2. Speak directly to the person and respond to statements in an encouraging way. Try not to be preoccupied with the recording machine; practice with it before the interview to ensure that you feel comfortable using it.

3. Do not be afraid to have your own questions, comments, and responses on the recording. They place such documentation in context and account for the reason and logic behind the responses. Leave the recorder on to make an uninterrupted recording of the session. But avoid using such expressions as "I see" or "uh-huh," which are likely to be distracting to someone using the recording later on.

4. If you are using tape, sixty-minute and ninety-minute cassettes are recommended. Longer ones are subject to stretching and tearing. Cassettes that are fastened with screws in the corners are usually of high-quality construction, and you can easily take them apart if the tape snaps or jams. If using a CD or minidisc machine, buy high-quality discs. Do not try to economize in the purchase of your recording medium.

5. Set the microphone as close to the performer as possible or use a lavaliere-type "clip-on" microphone. Beware of ambient noise, such as the hum of a refrigerator or traffic noise from the street outside a window.

6. Number your recordings as you take them off the machine so as not to confuse them. Later you can write other necessary information on the cassette or disc: title of the project, the name of the performer or speaker, name of the interviewer, date and location of the recording, and the kind of material or key subjects recorded (for example, "songs," "stories," or "weaving techniques").

At the American Folklife Center, folklorist Peter Bartis instructs Celina Campas, a teacher from California, in the use of a cassette-tape recording machine. It is important for the beginning fieldworker to become thoroughly familiar with the operation of documentary equipment. Photo August 2002 by James Hardin

During a workshop on sound-recording techniques at an American Folklife Center field school conducted in partnership with Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio, in June 2000, Selena Lim, Gloria Parsisson, and Bob Thometz take turns setting up and operating the equipment. Photo by David A. Taylor

7. Do not trust the label alone. Professional archivists recommend that you record on each cassette or disc an announcement of date, location, and persons present, spoken directly onto the recording at the start of the recording session and at the start of each tape in succession.

8. Listen to the interview and write a "log" or topic-by-topic summary for each recording, using as a guide the example in the back of this pamphlet. Make sure the label on the recording matches the heading on the recording log (recording number, date, and names of people or events).

9. Store recordings in a dry, temperature-stable atmosphere away from electronic or magnetic equipment. Be sure they are at least eighteen inches from fluorescent lights, telephones, and electric motors. Remove recordings from your automobile as soon as possible and avoid the common practices of resting recordings on recording equipment, television set, and VCR or DVD players (see section on archival considerations).

STILL PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION

Fieldworkers should attempt to use the highest-quality camera, flash, and lighting equipment available to them. For images comparable to good traditional film cameras, digital cameras with at least 3.2 mega-pixels should be used. Extraordinary technical advances in both film and digital cameras allow even the most amateur among us to take good pictures. But good photographs alone do not satisfy the need for comprehensive data. They must be accompanied by notes that provide information concerning location, date, subject matter, and additional observations. Prepare a photo log for each roll of film or disc you use (see sample forms). Write along the back edge with a soft pencil and mark prints with numbers that correlate with a photo log sheet. Slides may be identified with roll and frame numbers to match them with the photo logs. Digital images should be printed in smaller formats (similar to film's contact sheets).

Before the interview or photographic session, check to be sure batteries, flash, and extra film or discs are on hand. Usually by the end of an interview, even the shyest persons will agree to having their pictures taken. A complimentary photograph will be appreciated by the informant and can open the way for further contact and the development of greater rapport. Remember that the photograph is a tool to help you collect and understand traditional culture. The documentary information depicted in the photograph is of primary importance; the photograph's aesthetic appeal is secondary. Of course, a combination of art and information is most desirable, especially since photographs may later be used for educational displays.

Take enough pictures to properly document the person, event, process, or performance you are studying, whether the various steps in the con-

Ken Light photographs four generations of an Italian American extended family in Pueblo, Colorado, while several family members hold cherished photographs of relatives. From the American Folklife Center's 1990 Italian-Americans in the West Project. Photo by David Taylor

struction of a chair or the way a musician holds his or her instrument. Some photographs should include the normal surroundings of the person, object, or performance. They should show, for example, the household of the person interviewed, the use of space, decorations, and characteristic details such as an icon corner or workshop.

In the past, professionals photographed with both color slide film and black-and-white negative film, to have a wider range of options for using the photographs. Color slides were once very desirable for illustrated talks, such as those in the classroom, while black-and-white prints are cheaper to reproduce and therefore may be more desirable for publications. Once again, however, technologies have brought new modes of presentation that are mostly digital and computer-oriented. In some cases, you may want to use the entire range of possibilities to capture the still image. If you have a good camera and want to avoid the high cost of the best digital camera, remember that relatively inexpensive scanners can provide digitized images should they be needed. The general rule is the slower the film speed, the higher the quality of slide or negative. Most photographers, however, find ASA 400 black-and-white film suitable for general purpose work. For the initial processing, professionals frequently order contact sheets. Contact sheets provide an economical method for determining which negative frames should be printed and are useful reference tools that may be easily filed. Digital cameras produce a similar product.

Peter Bartis inspects one of the American Folklife Center's digital video cameras, in preparation for an interview, to ensure that it is functioning properly. Photo August 2002 by James Hardin

Peter Bartis clips a lavalier microphone to the blouse of Taru Spiegel, while Veterans History Project staffer Timothy Roberts readies a digital camera for an interview. Using a separate microphone, rather than the camera's built-in microphone, provides superior sound. Photo August 2002 by James Hardin

VIDEO DOCUMENTATION

The popularity of affordable high-quality video recording equipment will encourage many to consider its application to fieldwork. This is particularly so since digital video cameras often may be used for still photography. Digital video cameras with sophisticated features and simplified operating procedures are leading to a new era of field documentation and provide opportunities for studying, preserving, and teaching.

As with still photography, the first concern of video camera users in the field should be the development of straightforward documentary footage. Leave the art of filmmaking to the specialist. Consider the following:

1. Avoid excessive movement of the camera. A common mistake is the overuse of zooming and panning.
2. As with sound recordings, announce the date, location, event, and people present (as well as interviewer's name) directly on to the recording.
3. Prepare a video log for each event recorded (see sample audio and video log). Label cassette boxes and cassettes.
4. If music or narration is of primary interest, consider using high-quality sound recording machines and microphones in addition to a video camera.
5. Since management of video equipment usually requires more than one person (unlike the use of a sound recording machine, once microphones have been set), video recording may require team fieldwork or a technical assistant—particularly if the subject of your interview is in motion.

Mr. and Mrs. Josh Easter of Surry County, North Carolina, with the assistance of Wally Macnow (left), peel apples for drying, as Terry Eiler (behind the camera) and Bob Fulcher videotape the process. From the American Folklife Center's 1978 Blue Ridge Parkway Folklife Project. Photo by Lyntha Scott Eiler

At the American Folklife Center's June 2000 field school in Bloomington, Indiana, held in partnership with Indiana University's Folklife Institute and the Evergreen Institute, team members Chris Tobar-Dupres (right) and Ronald J. Stephens interview Claude Rice about Bloomington's courthouse square. Photo by David A. Taylor

THE RELEASE FORM

Try to anticipate the future uses of the materials you collect. Fieldworkers should always ask the person interviewed for permission to share both the information and the audio and visual documentation created during their visit. Permission should be given in writing, using a prepared document called a "release form" (sometimes called a "consent form"). This is particularly important if the documentary materials being created will be housed in a public archive or used in a public venue such as online presentations, exhibits, print publications, documentary films, or television.

The interviewee/performer/informant signs a written release form to indicate his or her awareness of the goals of the project and willingness to allow remarks or photographs to be used in public educational programs or for other purposes. Release forms may be very specific (such as requesting permission to use a person's image in a video produced by a high school classroom), or they may be very broad, so that the documentation may be used in ways it is impossible to anticipate at the time of the interview. The broadest release form is often best and more likely to be favored by institutional and public archives. An example of a release form used by the American Folklife Center is included in this booklet.

Fieldworkers, including the photographer, the person who operated the video camera, and the person who operated the sound recorder, may all be asked to sign release forms if the results of their fieldwork are deposited in a public archive or library. Why? To give the institution the right to publish or exhibit the material and to allow use by others.

Even though a release form has been signed, fieldworkers should notify persons whose pictures, words, songs, or artifacts are being used for public display (especially when that use includes Internet presentations). A signed release form, of the kind used by most field projects, does not mean that an informant relinquishes his or her rights to the material. It is a good idea to allow space on the form for special provisions of use or permissions negotiated by the informant and the collector.

Generally speaking, a release form is not needed in cases where people are publically participating in public events—a photograph of a large group of people watching a parade or dancing at a festival, for example. But use caution when photographing or recording professional performers participating in staged events, since many professional performers do not allow such documentation without their consent.

At the American Folklife Center, folklorists Stephanie Hall and Catherine Kerst examine the Library of Congress's American Memory Web site, which includes numerous presentations based on documentation from Folklife Center field collections. Photo 1995 by James Hardin

In connection with its study of cowboy life, called the Paradise Valley (Nevada) Folklife Project, the American Folklife Center produced a book and exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution, in 1980, both with the title Buckaroos in Paradise. *American Folklife Center photo*

What to do with the Results

So, you spent some time in the field. You took notes and you have a list of names, a pile of tapes and disks, and a sizable quantity of videos, slides, photographs, and negatives. In addition, you managed to pick up, for example, a few maps, posters of events you documented in the community, a program booklet or two, a votive candle, a piece of homemade needlepoint that was offered as a gift by an appreciative informant, assorted expense receipts, a number of letters, and drafts of your preliminary field study plan. You are also, perhaps, five pounds heavier, because everyone wanted to feed you. You can lose the weight, but the collection should be safeguarded and carefully preserved.

The information and material you have collected satisfies or further stimulates your curiosity about your family, the immediate community, or the particular subject of your investigation. But it may also be of interest to others. Community centers, local and regional museums, and state and local historical societies often maintain folklife collections, and some academic institutions house archives of folklife materials. Organizing and labeling the diverse parts of your collection will make it more useful to you and to others. The staffs of these institutions and organizations may be willing to talk with you about how to handle your material and will be able to say whether or not your work is suitable for deposit at their institutions.

If you plan to place your collection within an institution, always contact that institution ahead of time to make sure that they are willing and able to take your collection and properly care for it. Ask for specific instructions on how they wish you to document and prepare your collection for donation.

For a list of folklife institutions, archives and programs, see Folklife Sourcebook, online at www.loc.gov/folklife/.

PRESERVING YOUR COLLECTION AND DEVELOPING AN ARCHIVE

The need to adhere to archival standards in organizing and preserving folklife materials has become increasingly recognized by professional and nonprofessional collectors nationally. Although a detailed presentation of specific archival techniques is far too extensive to present here, a few fundamentals will assure a good start. The care, processing, and proper storage of materials must be an integral part of the planning, budgeting, and carrying out of any field documentation project. Such treatment ensures the preservation and accessibility of the valuable collection you created.

To protect your collections, here are a number of suggestions:

1. Use acid-neutral (archival quality) paper, files, and envelopes. Acid-neutral storage sleeves and boxes are expensive, but for long-term storage they are worth the cost.

2. Use archival quality, PH-neutral slide and negative protectors made of either paper or polyester.

3. Do not store negatives and photos in the glassine sleeves provided by photographic developing companies.

4. Use soft pencils or indelible pens for labeling photos, slides, and recordings.

5. Avoid paper clips, rubber bands, glues, and other metals and adhesives, which may result in damage and rust or leave sticky substances on your materials. Avoid stick-on labels, which leave a residue and may fall off over time.

6. Protect materials from magnetic fields, heat, sun and bright lights, humidity, and insects and rodents.

7. If you are using a tape medium, fast-forward a few revolutions before recording and stop recording before the tape runs out.

8. Store materials away from overhead water pipes and areas where there is a risk of fire or flood. Do not store materials near refrigerators, television sets, and other electric equipment.

9. Remember, electrical equipment produces heat, and the popular tendency to rest a recording on a nearby speaker should be avoided since powerful magnets in speakers will damage magnetic recording tape.

Plan your labeling and numbering system in advance, and organize materials as you go to avoid unwieldy backlogs or even loss or subsequent mislabeling of materials. Consider establishing some of your file folders in advance to facilitate the handling of your paperwork. Sample file headings might include: Planning, Collected Publications and Ephemera, Letters, Budget, Equipment, Tape Logs, Photo Logs, Field Notes, Consent Forms, Maps, and Publicity. Administrative files should be preserved, since they include information on origins, goals, and overall planning and carrying-out of the project.

If you plan to donate the collection to an archival institution or use it for your own long-term research, it is a good idea to store your paper and printed materials in acid-free folders, which you label and number consecutively. A list or inventory of all components of the collection, along with a brief description of the project—prepared while the goals and activities of the project are fresh in your memory—will prove helpful as years pass and will be indispensable to the archivist or librarian who might catalog the materials.

Proper management of project materials involves time, attention, and patience. Careful labeling and logging and the systematic assignment of

Anna Holland, from Waterford, Virginia, uses a lap hoop in working on a quilt. The American Folklife Center conducted a workshop on quilting techniques at the Library of Congress in 1989. Photo by Reid Baker

Tribal member Maxine White works with American Folklife Center staffer Laurel McIntyre at the 1999 harvest festival pow-wow, Macy, Nebraska. White reviewed documentation made by the Center at the 1983 Omaha pow-wow, and helped to identify people who were photographed at that time. Photo by Alan Jabbour

numbers for cross-referencing purposes, however mundane the tasks may be, will pay off by rendering your materials accessible and useful.

Professional archivists and folklorists with specialized experience and interest in archival techniques should be consulted whenever necessary. For larger projects, consulting fees should be considered in fiscal planning and grant requests. Software packages designed to store and retrieve vast amounts of data are now available. They render the tasks of typing, indexing, cross-referencing, and gaining access to research data much easier.

In the American Folklife Center's collection processing area, Veterans History Project processing technicians Sandra Savage, Judy Ng, and Rachael Mears examine materials submitted by World War II veteran Clifton Davis, from Paris, Ohio. Each item will be logged, numbered, and carefully housed in acid-free folders and containers. Photo August 2002 by James Hardin

Archivist Stephanie Hall carefully places color slides from the American Folklife Center's collections in preservation housing for storage in the Archive of Folk Culture. Photo 1995 by James Hardin

At the American Folklife Center's June 2000 field school in Bloomington, Indiana, held in partnership with Indiana University's Folklife Institute and the Evergreen Institute, team members Delia Alexander (left) and Tamara Hemmerlein examine slides they took during their field research that have just come in from the photo lab. Photo by David A. Taylor

Folklife specialist Mary Hufford interviews bluegrass musician Everett Lilly during a 1996 Fourth of July celebration on Kayford Mountain, West Virginia, for the American Folklife Center's Coal River Folklife Project. Photo by Terry Eiler

The Professional Folklorist and Public Programs

Agencies, institutions, and public educational programs that need cultural documentation hire trained professionals. Since the formation of the American Folklore Society in 1888, folklorists have represented the scholarly discipline which studies traditional culture whether regional, occupational, or ethnic in nature. Folklorists also recognize and use specialists in associated disciplines of study such as ethnomusicology, oral history, sociology, anthropology, historic preservation, and museum studies, among others, and have long coordinated projects that involve the general public. The end result of many public projects that folklorists have directed have included public exhibitions, festivals, reports and recommendations related to urban planning, development of archives to encourage community scholarship, preparation of school curricula, teacher training programs, and reports on criteria necessary in the long-range development of community educational and recreational programs.

Frequently folklorists are hired in an administrative capacity to design, implement, and manage "folk artists in the schools" programs, oral history projects, museum programs, and broad scale documentation projects. If you are interested in securing the services of a folklorist, you may call the American Folklife Center for referral information regarding your state folklife program as well as other federal and regional institutions which will assist you. The Center also maintains information regarding educational programs in folklore and the locations of folklorists teaching in universities and colleges in all states and regions of the United States and throughout the world.

Additional Reading

Allen, Barbara, and William L. Montell. *From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981.

Baum, Willa K. *Oral History for the Local Historical Society*. 3rd ed., rev. Walnut Creek, Calif.; AltaMira Press, 1995

Davis, Cullom, Kathryn Black, and Kay McLean. *Oral History: From Tape to Type*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1977.

Hall, Stephanie A. *Ethnographic Collections in the Archive of Folk Culture: A Contributor's Guide*. Washington, DC: Publications of the American Folklife Center, no. 20, 1995.
(Available online at www.loc.gov/folklife/cg.html)

Ives, Edward. *The Tape Recorded Interview*. 2nd ed. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1995.

Ives, Edward, and Jackson, Bruce. *The World Observed: Reflections on the Fieldwork Process*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996.

Jackson, Bruce. *Fieldwork*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987.

Ritchie, Donald A. *Doing Oral History*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995.

Taylor, David A. *Documenting Maritime Folklife: An Introductory Guide*. Washington, DC: Publications of the American Folklife Center, no. 17, 1992.
(Available online at www.loc.gov/folklife/maritime)

Internet Resources

American Folklife Center, Library of Congress
http://www.loc.gov/folklife/

Library of Congress Preservation
"Caring for Your Collections"
http://lcweb.loc.gov/preserv/

St. Andrew's Episcopal School. "Doing Oral History"
http://www.doingoralhistory.org

Indiana University, Oral History Research Center
http://www.indiana.edu/~ohrc/index.html

Montana Heritage Project
http://www.edheritage.org

Oral History Association home page at Dickinson College
http://www.dickinson.edu/oha/

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Southern Oral History Program
http://www.unc.edu/depts/sohp

Utah State University, Oral History Program
http://www.usu.edu/~oralhist/oh.html

Fieldwork Data Sheet

Number _____

Corresponding to: Tape No. _____ Photo No. _____
Video No. _____ Other _____

Collector: _____

Circumstances of interview: _____

_____

_____

_____

Name of informant: _____

Address: _____

_____

_____zip_____

Others present at interview (names and addresses): _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Place and date of birth: _____

_____

Family information: _____

_____

Size of family (names and ages): _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Ethnic heritage (mother's and father's): _____

_____

_____

_____

Generation of informant: _____
(Date of informant's, parents', or grandparents' immigration.)

_____

Circumstances of immigration: (reasons)_____

_____

_____

Activities in Old World: _____

_____

_____

Migrational experience and travel (U.S.A. and elsewhere): _____

_____

_____

Education, apprenticeship, and training experience: _____

_____

Occupational experience: _____

_____

Church or religious affiliation: _____
Membership in organizations (civic, social, etc.) _____

_____

_____

Special interests, skills, and hobbies: _____

_____

_____

Important events during life (civic and personal): _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Folklore and traditional materials in informant's repertoire (use additional page). Brief description of genre or type of performance:

_____

_____

_____

Informant's commentary on performance: _____

_____

_____

_____

When does he or she perform? _____

_____

_____

_____

Time and circumstance: _____

How, when, where, and from whom did he or she learn particular presentation? _____

_____

_____

_____

Additional observations by fieldworker: (Character of informant, contact with mass media and modern world, personal opinions and reactions that resulted from or influenced the interview)

_____

_____

_____

_____

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_____

_____

Audio and Video Recording Log

Collector: _____ Tape No. _____

Recording title (information or event): _____

Corresponding Data Sheet No. _____ Photo Log No. _____

Fieldnotes (dates or other retrieval no.): _____

_____

Format: _____ (cassette, disk, sound card, digital video, etc.)

Length: _____

Machine model used: _____

Interview date: _____ Time: _____

Place of interview(s): _____

_____

Setting and circumstance: _____

_____

_____

Subjects covered: _____

_____

_____

_____

Additional notes: _____

_____

_____

_____

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_____

_____

_____

TOPIC SUMMARY

Time or meter | Topic / informant

Still Photography Log

Format: _____

Collector: _____ Contact Sheet No. _____

Corresponding Data Sheet No. _____ Tape Log No. _____

Fieldnotes (dates or other retrieval no.): _____

_____

Camera model used: _____

Interview/visit date: _____ Time: _____

Setting and circumstance: _____

_____

_____

TOPIC ANALYSIS

Image numbers Subject

_____

_____

_____

_____

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_____

Release Form

I, _____, am a participant in the _____ project, (hereinafter "project"). I understand that the purpose of the project is to collect audio- and video-tapes and selected related documentary materials (such as photographs and manuscripts) that may be deposited in the permanent collections of _____. The deposited documentary materials may be used for scholarly, educational, and other purposes. I understand that the _____ plans to retain the product of my participation as part of its permanent collection and that the materials may be used for exhibition, publication, presentation on the World Wide Web and successor technologies, and for promotion of the institution and its activities in any medium.

I hereby grant to _____ ownership of the physical property delivered to the institution and the right to use the property that is the product of my participation (for example, my interview, performance, photographs, and written materials) as stated above. By giving permission, I understand that I do not give up any copyright or performance rights that I may hold.

I also grant to _____ my absolute and irrevocable consent for any photograph(s) provided by me or taken of me in the course of my participation in the project to be used, published, and copied by _____ and its assignees in any medium.

I agree that _____ may use my name, video or photographic image or likeness, statements, performance, and voice reproduction, or other sound effects without further approval on my part.

ACCEPTED AND AGREED

Signature _____ Date _____

Printed name _____

Address _____

_____ Zip _____— _____

Telephone ( ) _____–_____

Fax ( ) _____–_____

Email _____

Notes

Notes