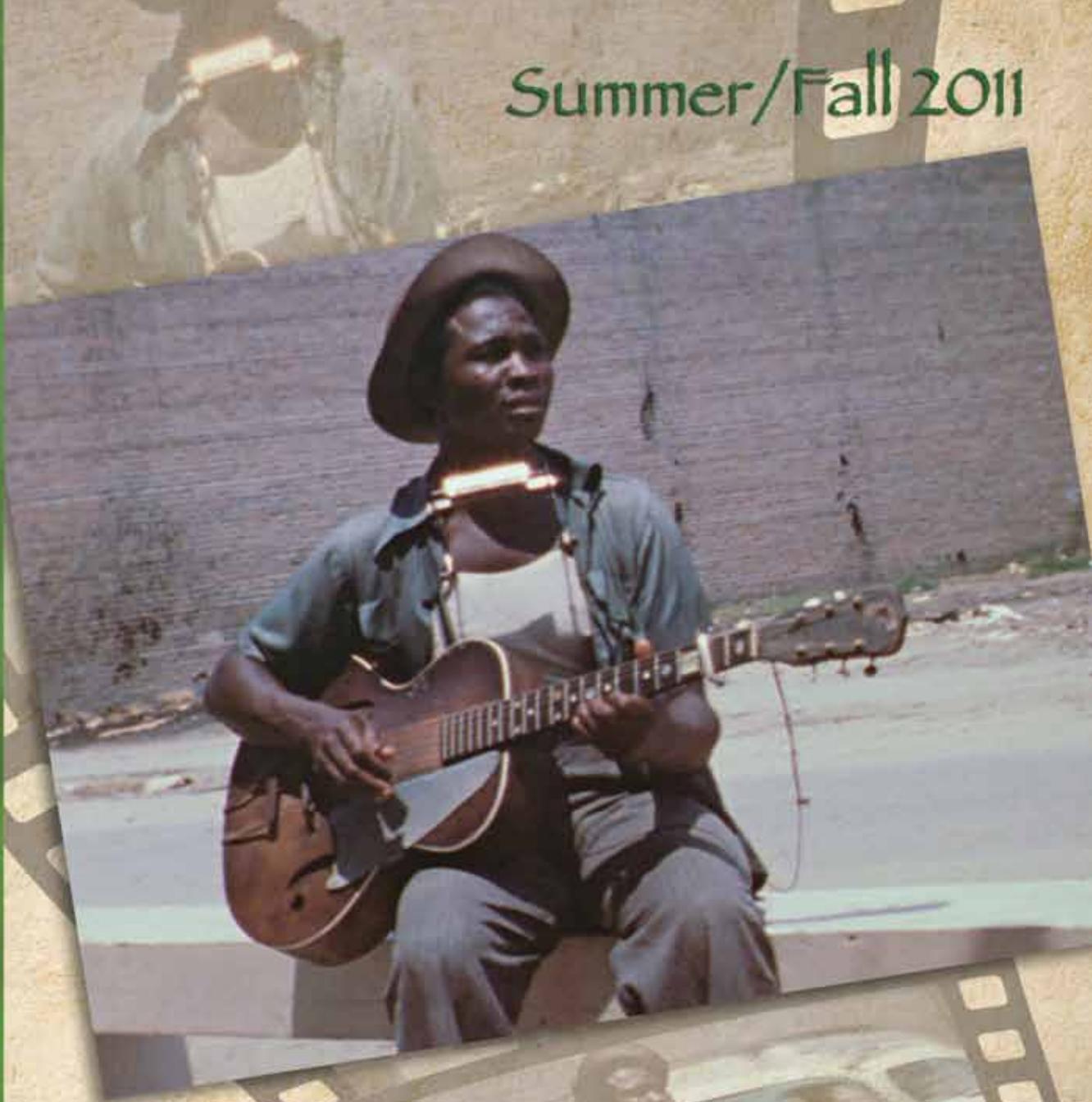


Volume 33
Nos. 3-4

Folklife Center News

Summer/Fall 2011



Honeyboy Edwards Film

Stetson Kennedy

American Folklife Center
The Library of Congress





FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

AMERICAN FOLKLIFE CENTER



“THIS MAN FROM THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS HAD COME LOOKING FOR ME”



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A TWO-WAY STREET: FOLKLORE AND CULTURAL WELL-BEING



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AMERICAN FOLKLIFE CENTER

The American Folklife Center was created in 1976 by the U.S. Congress to “preserve and present American folklife” through programs of research, documentation, archival preservation, reference service, live performance, exhibition, publication, and training. The Center incorporates an archive, which was established in the Music Division of the Library of Congress in 1928 and is now one of the largest collections of ethnographic material from the United States and around the world.

Folklife Center News publishes articles on the programs and activities of the American Folklife Center, as well as other articles on traditional expressive culture. It is available free of charge from the Library of Congress, American Folklife Center, 101 Independence Avenue, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20540–4610.

Folklife Center News does not publish announcements from other institutions or reviews of books from publishers other than the Library of Congress. Readers who would like to comment on Center activities or newsletter articles may address their remarks to the editor.

ONLINE INFORMATION RESOURCES: The American Folklife Center’s website provides full texts of many AFC publications, information about AFC projects, multimedia presentations of selected collections, links to Web resources on ethnography, and announcements of upcoming events. The address for the home page is <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/>. An index of the site’s contents is available at <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/az-index.html>.

The website for the Veterans History Project provides an overview of the project, an online “kit” for participants recording oral histories of veterans, and a brief presentation of some examples of video- and audio-recordings of veterans’ stories. The address is <http://www.loc.gov/vets>.

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FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

Volume 33, Nos. 3–4, Winter/Spring 2011

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Cover: Rare color footage from 1942 depicting David “Honeyboy” Edwards has been discovered in the AFC archive. Read more about Honeyboy’s long association with the Library of Congress starting on page 3.

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“This Man from the Library of Congress Had Come Looking for Me”: David “Honeyboy” Edwards (1915–2011) and the American Folklife Center Archive

By Stephen Winick

Asinger, bottleneck guitar master, and harmonica player, David “Honeyboy” Edwards was a versatile performer and a consummate musician. He was a Blues Hall of Fame member and a National Heritage Fellow, as well as a winner of both an individual Grammy Award and a Grammy for Lifetime Achievement. He was also a friend to the Library of Congress, and had a seventy-year association with the AFC Archive, from 1942, when he was first recorded for the Library, until shortly before his death, when he gave AFC permission to put two of his recordings online.

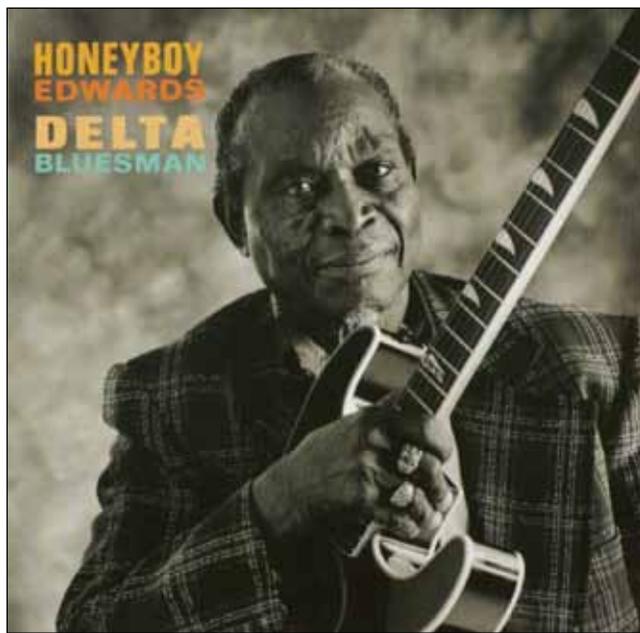
David Edwards was born June 28, 1915, in Shaw, Mississippi, to parents who were sharecroppers and musicians. His mother played the guitar and his father was a fiddler and guitarist for country dances. They bought him his first guitar and taught him to play traditional songs and ballads. They also gave him the nickname “Honey,” which was later

lengthened to “Honeyboy.” Young Honeyboy became aware of the blues in about 1930, when Tommy Johnson, already a well-known performer, came to pick cotton at the farm where the Edwards family lived. He played music in the evenings with other young men in the community, and Edwards took notice. “They’d pick cotton all through the day, and at night they’d sit around and play the guitars,” Edwards recalled in his autobiography, *The World Don’t Owe Me Nothing*. “I’d just sit and look at them. I’d say, ‘I wish I could play.’”

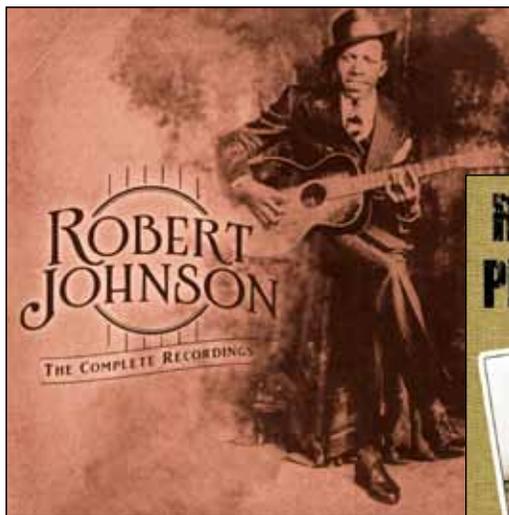
Edwards did learn to play, and began to travel around as an itinerant musician, wandering down to New Orleans in wintertime and back up to the Delta in the spring. In 1937, he met Robert Johnson, a young blues player who was already a well-known recording artist, but who would become

world-famous after his death. The two became fast friends. Although they were both essentially solo musicians, Edwards spent a lot of time with the better-known Johnson, socializing and learning what he could from the older bluesman.

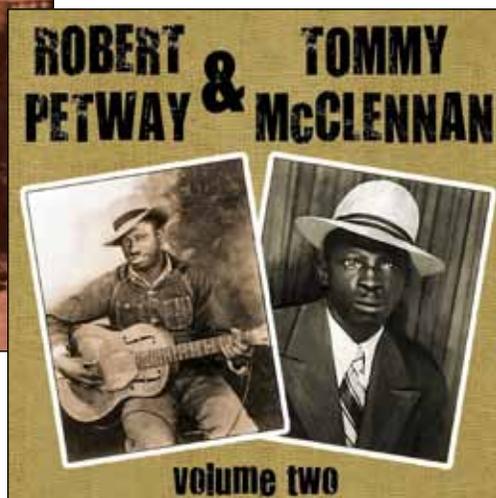
After spending winter in New Orleans as usual that year, Edwards returned to Mississippi in the summer of 1938, to find Robert Johnson involved with a new woman, one whose husband owned a juke joint where Robert played. On Saturday, August 13, Edwards went there to hear Johnson play. Johnson began to feel sick, and was taken home; friends speculated that the jealous husband had poisoned him. Edwards assumed Johnson would be all right, and next visited him on Tuesday, but found his friend worse rather than better. “I talked to him,” Edwards remembered in his book. “But he wasn’t able to talk. There



On Honeyboy Edwards’s 1992 album *Delta Bluesman*, the veteran performer released his earliest recordings, made fifty years previously by Alan Lomax for the Library of Congress. The original discs are in AFC’s collections.



Robert Johnson, Tommy McLennan, and Robert Petway were friends of Honeyboy Edwards and early influences on the young bluesman in the 1930s.



Tommy Johnson (below, far right) was one of the first blues performers Honeyboy recalled hearing. Johnson's playing gave him a lifelong love of music. John Wesley Work III of Fisk University (right) was co-director of the field project during which Honeyboy was first recorded by Alan Lomax.



wasn't nothing I could do for him. People couldn't call the doctor. What black person had any money then?" Robert Johnson died on August 16, 1938, and Edwards was one of his last visitors.

After Johnson's death,

Edwards continued trying to gain recognition and make his way in the world as a traveling musician. He journeyed from the

Mississippi Delta to the "Deep Ellum" section of Dallas, and on to St. Louis. From there he went to Denver, and Boise, and all the way to Portland, Oregon. In Portland, he worked for a brief time as a gandy dancer on a track-lining crew, realigning tracks on the railroad, but soon he won a significant sum in a dice game, which funded further travels: Wyoming, Oklahoma, and down to Helena, Arkansas, where Robert Junior Lockwood and Rice Miller (aka Sonny Boy Williamson II) had a vibrant blues scene going. In this period, he met Tommy McClennan and Robert Petway, from whom he learned several songs. He visited towns little known for the blues, such as Paducah, Kentucky and Cairo, Illinois. And he visited blues capitals, such as New Orleans and Memphis. "But with all that running around," he wrote, "I had to go back to Coahoma before I got found. It was in Coahoma that Alan Lomax come to record me."

In 1942, Alan Lomax was assistant-in-charge of the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress, the archive now housed at AFC. He was engaged in a cultural survey of Coahoma County, Mississippi, with members of the faculty of Fisk Univer-

sity, including John Wesley Work, III.

Lomax's goal was to collect as many recordings of blues and other traditional music as he could. He encountered Edwards twice during his fieldwork, and wrote about those meetings in his book *The Land Where the Blues Began*. Edwards later wrote about those meetings as well, and comparing the two men's separate accounts is fascinating. Both agree that one time they merely spotted one another while Honeyboy was playing; seeing a white man in a juke joint was unusual enough that Edwards remembered Lomax, and Edwards's music was remarkable enough that Lomax made a point of finding him again. The second time, Edwards merely noted, "we talked to each other for a while." Lomax, on the other hand, remembered a conver-



Publicity photo for KFFA in Helena, Arkansas, showing Aleck "Rice" Miller (a.k.a. Sonny Boy Williamson II), Sam Anderson, and Robert Jr. Lockwood. Honeyboy visited with Lockwood and Miller during his travels in the 1930s.

sation in which Lewis Jones, one of his African American colleagues from Fisk, encouraged Edwards to see Lomax as his "white boss," so that they could associate together in full view of the white authorities. It was a suggestion that deeply embarrassed Lomax, but seems to have left little impression on Edwards. When Lomax promised to look him up and record his music, Edwards remembered, "I thought he was just some honky talking out of the side of his mouth."

Lomax was serious, however, and there was a further meeting. On July 20, 1942, Lomax drove to Edwards's aunt's house to pick him up, armed with a disc recorder,

and recorded him for the Archive of Folk Song. "He took me to Clarksdale," Edwards wrote. "He got a room for himself and one for me and then he bought me dinner. He was really nice to me." According to Edwards, Lomax took him to a newly-built Rosenwald schoolhouse, which was quieter than a private home and had electricity for his recording machine. Although they were interrupted by a tornado, they sat it out in the school and finished recording when it had passed. Edwards and Lomax both remember a second brief recording session, at the



Rae Korson, head of the Archive of Folk Song, ca. 1960. About the time this photo was taken, Korson corresponded with Honeyboy Edwards about using one of his recordings on a Library of Congress album.

tourist camp where Lomax and Edwards were staying. According to the Library's records, that occurred two days later, on July 22.

The sessions yielded seventeen songs and several interview

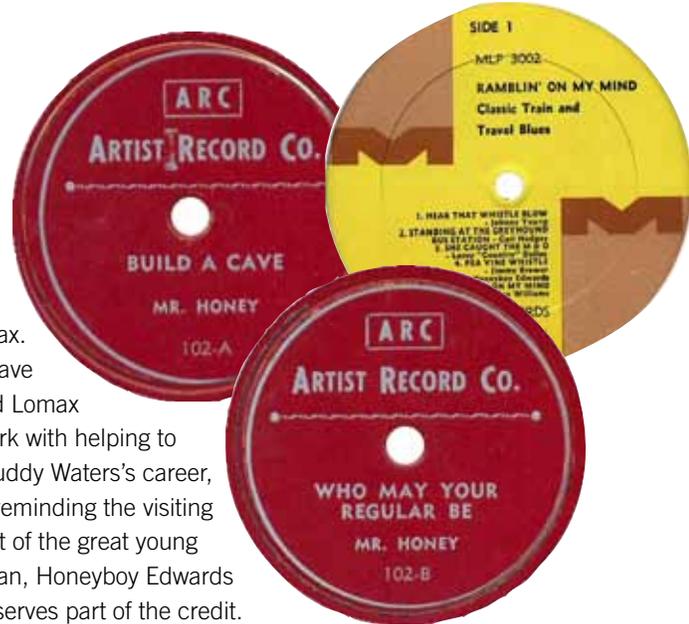
segments. After they were done, Lomax gave Edwards twenty dollars. "The twenty kicked like a hundred dollars in my pocket then," Edwards wrote. "That was my first recording and I felt good. I felt all right with twenty dollars in my pocket, too; I appreciated that. [...] Doing that recording for the Library of Congress felt real good to me. It got me a few little jobs here and there, telling people this man from the Library of Congress had come looking for me." For his part, Lomax remembered Edwards's music and his verbal eloquence, much of which was captured by his disc recordings. Lomax's account of their conversations takes up about twelve pages of his book *The Land Where the Blues Began*. Researchers can hear all the recordings, including the unreleased songs and interview segments, in the Folklife Reading Room. Most of the songs from the session are also commercially available, having been released on *Delta Bluesman*, a 1992 CD on the Earwig label.

When Edwards and Lomax parted in 1942, Honeyboy gave the folklorist tips for several other musicians to look up: guitarist Little Willie, banjo player Black Albert, fiddler Bo Chatmon, and singer-guitarist Andrew Moore. Later, in *The Land Where the Blues Began*, Lomax recounted feeling guilty that he never followed up to record these little-known masters. But Edwards recommended one name above all the others: McKinley Morganfield, then known as "Muddy Water." Lomax took his advice, and hurried off to record the young singer and guitarist, whom he and John Work had already met and briefly recorded the summer before. Like Edwards, Muddy was impressed with his own performance on the discs recorded by Lomax, and decided he could make a name for himself as a musician; he even changed his performing name to "Muddy Waters," apparently based on a spelling error

by Lomax. Many have credited Lomax and Work with helping to start Muddy Waters's career, but by reminding the visiting folklorist of the great young bluesman, Honeyboy Edwards also deserves part of the credit.

When Lomax drove off to Stovall Plantation to record Muddy Waters, he thought Edwards, who had been drafted, was heading straight off to join the army. But Honeyboy convinced the army doctors that an old scar on his head was a sign of a serious brain injury. He failed his physical and escaped the war. (The scar is visible in AFC's footage of Edwards, and was one of the identifying features noted by his family.)

Honeyboy went on playing music in the Delta until the early 1950s, when he followed Muddy Waters and other great blues performers north to Chicago. There, he played regularly in clubs and at the open-air market on Maxwell Street. He



Lewis Jones of Fisk University (left), recording unidentified performers. Jones was with Alan Lomax when the folklorist first met Honeyboy. Photo from the Fort Valley State College Peachite Vol. II, No. 2, Folk Festival Number, March 1944, from AFC's online presentation "Now What a Time."

recorded a few songs as well, for such labels as Arc, Artist and Chess, some of them under the pseudonym "Mr. Honey." But he failed to launch a prolific recording career, and supported himself at times with day jobs in the construction industry.

In 1961, the Library of Congress released the LP record *Negro Blues and Hollers*, a compilation of field recordings from the Archive of Folk Song. In preparing for the release, Rae Korson, the head of the Archive at the time, wrote to Edwards, offering him a nominal fee of thirteen dollars in exchange for permission to use one song from the Lomax recordings on the LP. Korson sent the letter to Edwards's old address in Clarksdale, but it failed to reach him; in accordance with the Archive's policies, this was considered a good faith attempt to reach Edwards for permission, and the recording was issued.

As it turned out, his appearance on *Negro Blues and Hollers* was a welcome career boost for Edwards: it was among the first published evidence of his prowess at country blues and his association with the Archive, which was important information to the growing community of blues aficionados. Later in the 1960s, when these aficionados were rediscovering the first generation of country blues performers, Edwards's genuine roots in the tradition, his appearance on a Library of Congress LP, and his firsthand tales of the by-then-legendary Robert Johnson, made him a hot commodity. By the end of the decade, he was appearing on such projects as *Blues Jam in Chicago* by the British rock band Fleetwood Mac.

Honeyboy was recorded by blues scholar Pete Welding for Testament Records in 1964 and 1967. Although Welding's recordings were not released at the time, his acquaintance with Edwards was to prove important to the musician's relationship with the Library of Congress. In 1970, Welding requested

copies of the Library's recordings of Edwards, and at the same time informed the Library of Congress of the bluesman's whereabouts. (Alan Jabbour, who had replaced Korson as head of the Archive, promptly sent Honeyboy his long-delayed check for thirteen dollars!) In 1976, the Archive once again contacted Edwards, to ask permission to release the song "Army Blues" on the LP record *Folksongs of America Volume 10: Songs of War and History*. Edwards agreed, in exchange for a fifty dollar honorarium.

In the 1970s, Edwards began working with harmonica player

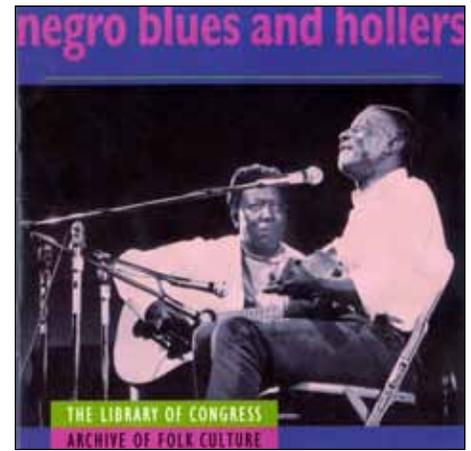
Michael Frank, who founded the management company and record label Earwig Music, initially to manage Edwards's career. Both his performing career and his recording career picked up, partly due to Frank's efforts, and partly due to the burgeoning folk and blues revival, which represented a new, national audience for country blues. He

recorded for a number of labels, including Testament, Blue Horizon, Milestone, Earwig, Folkways, Blue Suit, Trix, and Adelphi.

In the later 1970s, in the midst of this career upswing, Honeyboy Edwards would once again be recorded for the AFC

archive, which was then known as the Archive of Folk Culture. The new recordings were made in concert on the stage of the Coolidge auditorium at a celebration for the Archive's fiftieth anniversary, organized by the Center in collaboration with the National Council for the Traditional Arts. Alan Jabbour, who was the director of the American Folklife Center in 1978, invited Edwards to play at the concert, which also featured singer and guitarist Burl Ives, ballad singer Delta Hicks, banjoist Dee Hicks, and fiddler Benny Thomasson. The then-current head

of the archive, Joe Hickerson, and all three living former heads (Korson, Jabbour, and Lomax), attended the event. During the concert, Edwards acknowledged Lomax, asking him to raise his hand and be seen. "I haven't seen him since '42," Edwards commented. In all, Honeyboy Edwards played nine songs at the 1978 concert, including the traditional "Catfish Blues" (which he learned from his friends Tommy McClennan and Robert Petway, who are often credited with writing it), his own composition "Long Tall Woman Blues," and Robert Johnson's "Sweet Home Chicago."



The CD version of Negro Blues and Hollers, which was first released on LP in 1961. This record was the first indication to the blues revival that David "Honeyboy" Edwards, who had moved to Chicago and urbanized his style, was also a country blues master who had been recorded by Alan Lomax.



In November 1978, Alan Jabbour, Rae Korson, Joe Hickerson, and Alan Lomax, all four heads of the Library of Congress's folk archive who were still alive at the time, gathered for a concert celebrating the archive's fiftieth anniversary. One of the performers was Honeyboy Edwards, who spoke to Alan Lomax from the stage.

PHOTO BY CARL FLEISCHHAUER, AFC

Although he had been recorded frequently since the 1940s, at the time of his Coolidge Auditorium appearance, relatively few of Edwards's recordings had been released. That changed in the 1980s and 1990s, during which time many CDs of Honeyboy material emerged on the Earwig, Genes, Testament, and Evidence labels. The Archive sent copies of Lomax's 1942 recordings to several different record companies that were interested in releasing them; in the end, Earwig issued most of them on the CD *Delta Bluesman* (1992). Edwards also released material recorded in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as brand-new recordings.

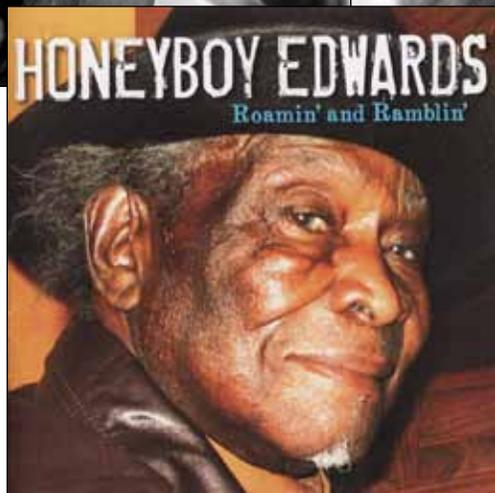
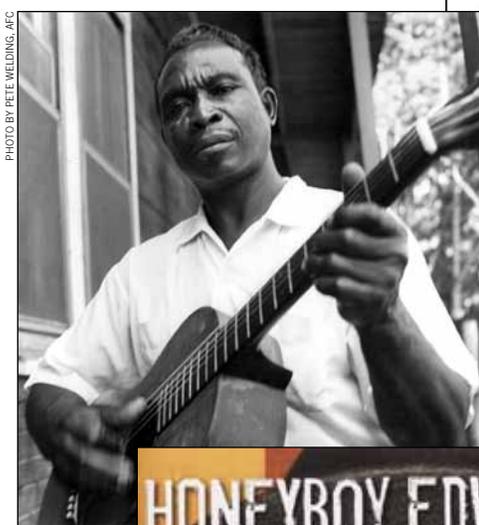
Honeyboy Edwards continued recording into the 2000s. In his later years, through his recordings and his many live performances, he achieved recognition as one of the outstanding blues artists of all time. He won a place in the Blues Hall of Fame (1996), a National Heritage Fellowship Award from the National Endowment for the Arts (2002), an Acoustic Artist of the Year award from the W.C. Handy Blues Awards (2005), an Acoustic Artist of the Year award from The Blues Music Awards (2007), a Grammy Award for Best Traditional Blues Album (2008), and a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award (2010).

In March, 2010, Edwards continued his friendly relationship with AFC and the Library of Congress, by granting AFC the right to use a segment of his 1978 recording in the Illinois installment of the National Sampler Series. Two of Honeyboy's songs can therefore be heard on the AFC website, at <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/sampler/ILaudio.html#tracks7to8>.

The two tracks from Honeyboy's 1978 concert went live on the AFC website on February 28, 2011. Six months later, on August 29, 2011, David "Honeyboy" Edwards passed away from heart failure. He was ninety-six years old. He had spent more than eighty of those years playing the blues, and more than seventy of them as a valued part of the American Folklife Center Archive at the Library of Congress. ○

(right) *Publicity photo of Honeyboy Edwards in his 90s.*

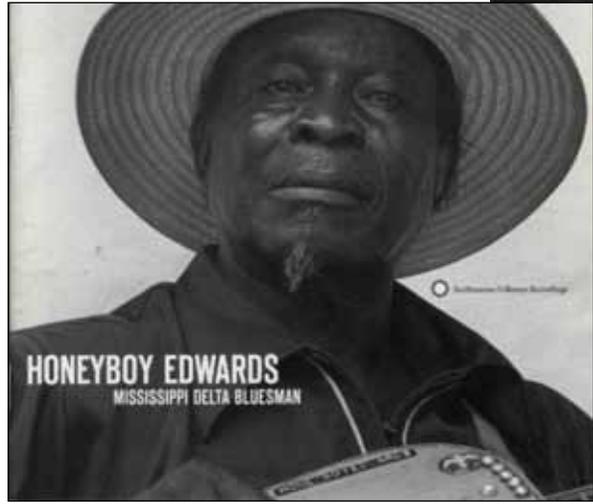
(below) *Honeyboy in the 1960s, photographed by Pete Welding. AFC Pete Welding Collection.*



(left) *Roamin' and Ramblin' (2008) was Honeyboy's last full album before he died.*



(above) *Honeyboy Edwards with his Grammy Award. Photo by Lynn Orman Weiss, courtesy Lynn Orman Weiss and Earwig Records.*



(left) *Honeyboy recorded for many labels in his career, including this album for Smithsonian Folkways.*

“That’s My Daddy!”

American Folklife Center Staff Members Identify Early Color Film of David “Honeyboy” Edwards

By Stephen Winick

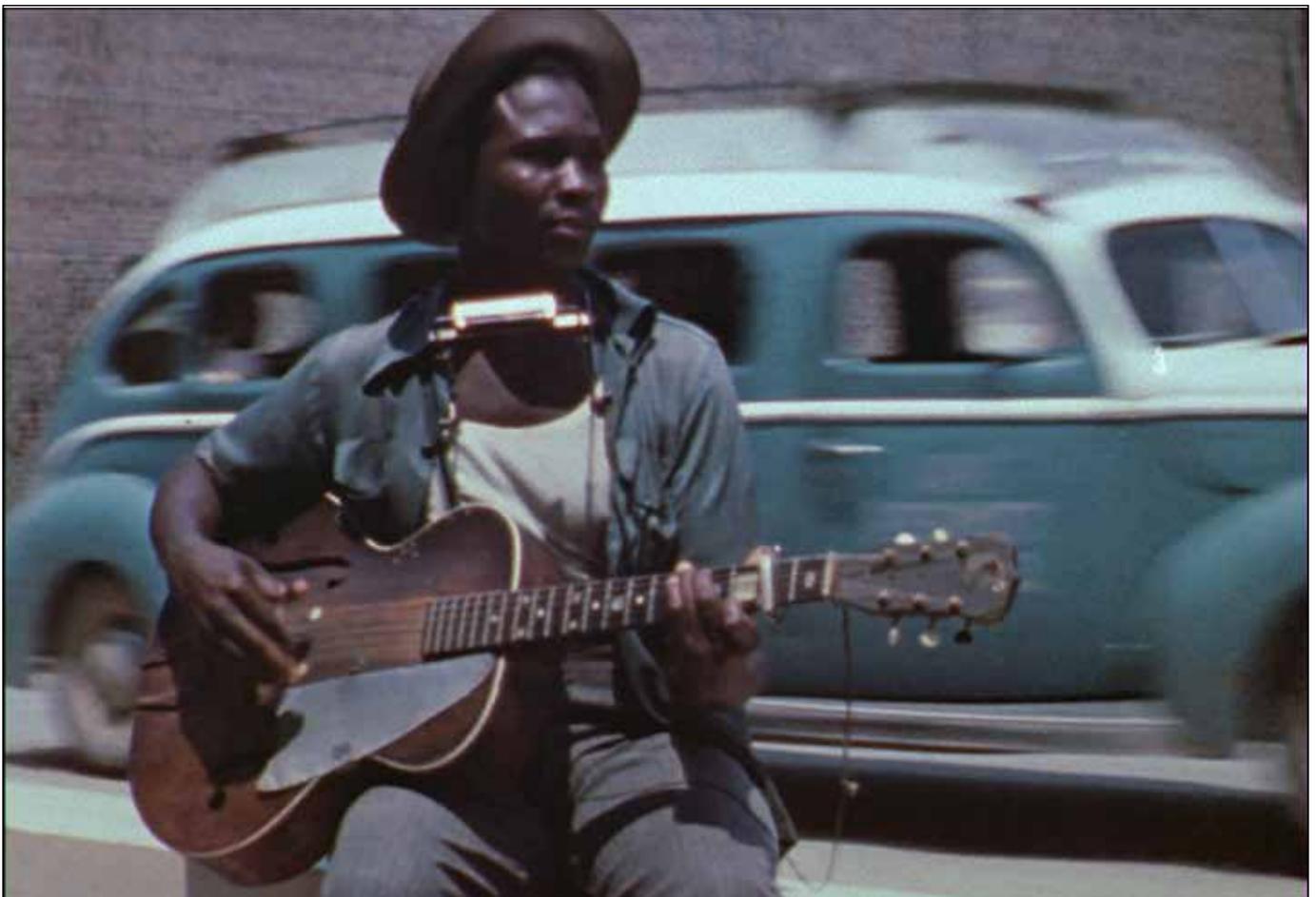
AFC staff members have identified a fifty-second-long segment of silent, color motion-picture footage as film of the Grammy-winning blues artist David “Honeyboy” Edwards, shot by Alan Lomax for the Library of Congress in 1942. Although the meeting between Edwards and Lomax was well documented in published accounts by both men, neither of them mentioned Honeyboy being filmed. We think AFC’s film is the first known image of Honeyboy of any kind; we have not found any other photos earlier than 1967, twenty-five years after the film was shot. According to Honeyboy’s

friend and manager Michael Frank, when Honeyboy was writing his memoir, *The World Don’t Owe Me Nothing*, even the family had no early pictures of the bluesman. This makes the film all the more valuable to researchers of the blues.

On a log sheet typed in the 1940s, most likely by Lomax himself, and entitled “Coahoma County, Mississippi, 1942,” the performer on the film is identified as “Charles Edwards.” This seems to have been a simple mistake, one which led to the film’s remaining obscure for seventy years. The film was known within the Library during that time, but

only from a several-generations-old videotaped copy which had lost its color over the years. AFC’s Archive head, Michael Taft, recalls seeing the footage, not knowing the identity of the performer, and assuming it had been shot in black and white.

The fact that there is no record of Lomax recording anyone named Charles Edwards on that or any other research trip of the era made AFC staff members wonder who the blues player might be. Eventually, reference librarian Todd Harvey and I noticed that the man on the film closely resembles a young Honeyboy



This frame from the Honeyboy Edwards footage shows a young Honeyboy and a rather amazing automobile in 1942.

Edwards, plays the same instruments, has the same last name, and was filmed on the same trip during which Lomax recorded Honeyboy. On further investigation, we found that Lomax left unusually vivid descriptions of Edwards in his book *The Land Where the Blues Began*, and the performer on our film exactly resem-



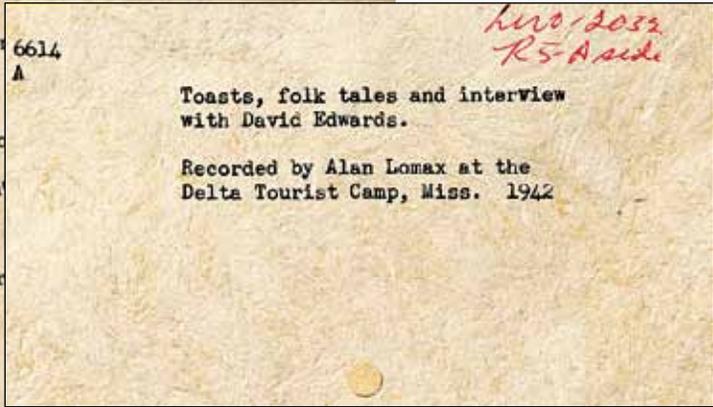
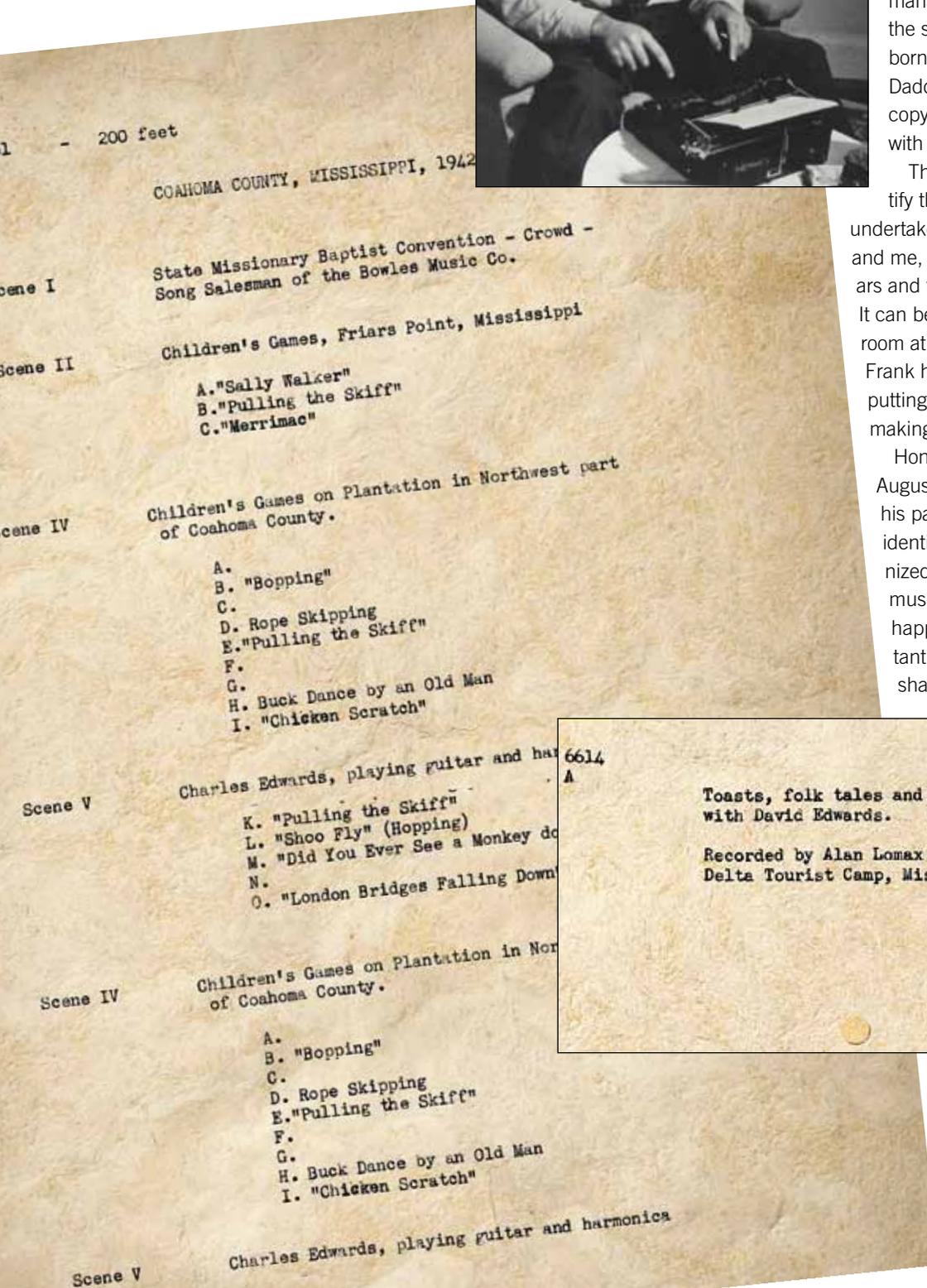
Alan Lomax at his typewriter in 1942, the year he recorded and filmed Honeyboy Edwards. AFC Alan Lomax Collection.

bles those descriptions, from his rakish hat to his thumb pick.

To verify our theory that the unknown performer was Honeyboy Edwards, we sent screen captures to Honeyboy's manager, Michael Frank, who showed the shots to Honeyboy's stepdaughter, born in 1940. Her verdict: "That's my Daddy!" AFC has since sent a DVD copy of the footage to Frank, to share with Honeyboy's children.

The work done to transfer and identify this remarkable footage, primarily undertaken by Todd Harvey, Guha Shankar, and me, will make it available to blues scholars and to Honeyboy Edwards's many fans. It can be viewed in the Folklife reading room at the Library of Congress. Michael Frank has also expressed the intention of putting it online at Honeyboy's website, making it even more widely available.

Honeyboy Edwards passed away on August 29, 2011. We are saddened by his passing, and regretful that our newly-identified film footage was not recognized as Honeyboy until after the great musician's death. Nevertheless, we are happy to have rediscovered this important film, and even more delighted to share it with Edwards's family. ○



(above) AFC catalog card, showing that Lomax recorded more than just the blues from Honeyboy Edwards.

(left) Log sheet, probably typed by Lomax himself, identifying the performer in scene V as "Charles Edwards." This simple error led to the film remaining obscure for years.

Folklorist, Writer, and Activist Stetson Kennedy Dies at 94

With great sadness, the American Folklife Center announces the death of folklorist, writer, and activist Stetson Kennedy. Kennedy was a native of Florida who made many contributions to folklore studies and American life, and created unique and compelling field recordings of multicultural Floridians for the Library of Congress. According to AFC's director, Dr. Peggy Bulger, Kennedy collected folklore not only to preserve it for the future, but to improve the world. "He was a pioneering folklorist, a great writer, and a fearless activist, and he saw it as his primary role to make the world a better place, and to increase cultural equity for all people," Bulger said. "Folks not only in Florida, but across the country and around the world, will miss him a great deal."

Kennedy was born in Jacksonville in 1916, and died in a hospital near that city on August 27, 2011.

Kennedy was best known for risking his life to infiltrate the Ku Klux Klan during the 1950s as an undercover agent for the Georgia Bureau of Investigation. He learned the secret organization's beliefs and codes, and then leaked that information to columnist/broadcaster Drew Pearson who, in turn, exposed the Klan's nefarious work to the American public. Kennedy's book, which was originally published in 1955 as *I Rode with the Ku Klux Klan*, and later republished as *The Klan Unmasked*, tells that story against the backdrop of African

American human rights.

Long before his work on the Klan, Kennedy was an important contributor to the field of folklore and to the collections at the Library of Congress. Kennedy's father was a furniture merchant, and sold basic items on credit for one dollar down and one dollar a week, sending young Stetson door to door each week to collect. In addition to the money, Stetson began collecting both white and African American folklore on his rounds, becoming an accomplished amateur folklorist while still in his teens. He left the University of Florida in 1937 to join the Works Progress Administration's (WPA) Florida Writers' Project, and was soon, at the age of 21, put in charge of folklore,

oral history, and ethnic studies. His team conducted field research of unprecedented depth and breadth, resulting in the documentation of hundreds of traditional stories, songs, items of occupational culture, and other aspects of Florida's diverse cultural heritage.

The most famous of the folklorists

who worked under Kennedy's direction was the celebrated African American novelist and playwright, Zora Neale Hurston. The research done by Kennedy, Hurston and others was carried out from 1937 to 1942, and it produced one-of-a-kind sound recordings of ordinary men and women, plus photographs, researchers' notes and reports, and other



PHOTO COURTESY OF STETSON KENNEDY

documentary materials, which are now preserved at the Library of Congress. The recordings document not only the expected Anglo-American and African-American cultures, but also many other ethnic groups that had a strong presence in Florida in the 1930s and 1940s, including Seminole Indians and Americans of Bahamian, Cuban, Czech, Greek, Italian, Minorcan, Slovak, and Syrian descent. Those recordings, along with an essay by Kennedy, can be found online at the Library of Congress website (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/florida/>).

Kennedy began his writing career as a contributor to the 1939 WPA guide *Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State*. He later wrote *Palmetto Country* (1942), a detailed survey of Florida folklife derived from the data collected by his Florida Writers' Project team and preserved in the AFC's archive. At the time, Alan Lomax of the Library of Congress commented, "I very much doubt that a better book about Florida folklife will ever be written." Kennedy's friend Woody Guthrie added, "[*Palmetto Country*] gives me a better trip and taste and look and feel for Florida than I got in the forty-seven states I've actually been in body and tramped in boot." Other books by Kennedy include *Southern Exposure* (1946), *The Jim Crow Guide*



Kennedy with AFC director Peggy Bulger in 2005.

PHOTO BY STEPHEN WINICK, AFC



PHOTO BY KRIS KRUG, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Billy Bragg performing at South by Southwest in 2008. With Wilco, Bragg recorded Woody Guthrie's song "Stetson Kennedy."

to the U.S.A.: *The Laws, Customs and Etiquette Governing the Conduct of Nonwhites and Other Minorities as Second-Class Citizens* (1973), and *After Appomattox: How the South Won the War* (1995). His most recent book, *Grits & Grunts* (2008), is a collection of memories from Depression-era Key West.

Throughout his life, Kennedy forged friendships with prominent writers, philosophers, and folklorists, including not only Lomax and Guthrie but also Richard Wright, Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Studs Terkel, Langston Hughes, Howard Fast, Alice Walker, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Beginning in the 1950s, Kennedy shared a deep friendship with Guthrie, himself a legendary singer, songwriter and social activist. Guthrie was a frequent visitor to Kennedy's twenty-acre home, "Beluthahatchee," south of Jacksonville, where he wrote the final draft of his autobiography. In 1950, Guthrie wrote a song entitled "Stetson Kennedy," encouraging Floridians to vote for Kennedy for U.S. Senator as a write-in candidate. Although the song is an obscure bit of Guthrie trivia, in 2000 it was recorded by the American alternative rock band Wilco and the English folk-punk singer Billy Bragg, on their second collaborative album of Guthrie's songs, *Mermaid Avenue, Volume II*.

In the past several years, Kennedy has visited the Library of Congress twice to take part in AFC events. On May 24, 2005, he was interviewed by Bulger for the Center's Benjamin Botkin Folklife Lecture series, in a presentation entitled "Building Democracy in America." On March 14, 2008, he was interviewed by AFC's David Taylor on his role at the Florida Writers Project, as part of AFC's symposium "Art, Culture, and Government: The New Deal at 75." Both interviews are available as streaming video webcasts on the Library's website (http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=4099), (http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=4476). ○



PHOTO BY AL AJMULLER, 1943

Woody Guthrie, a longtime friend of Stetson Kennedy's, wrote several songs about him. LC P & P repro. no. LC-USZ62-130859



PHOTO COURTESY OF STETSON KENNEDY

(above) Kennedy with two Capitol Police officers during his day of testimony on the Hill.

(left) Two children wearing Ku Klux Klan robes and hoods stand on either side of Dr. Samuel Green, Ku Klux Klan Grand Dragon, at an initiation ceremony in Atlanta, Georgia, July 24, 1948. Stetson Kennedy was Green's nemesis throughout this era, revealing the Grand Dragon's secret passwords and codes on the radio each week. LC P&P repro. no. LC-USZ62-135357



A Two-Way Street: Folklore and Cultural Well-Being

By Stetson Kennedy

Editor's Note: Toward the end of his life, the folklorist and activist Stetson Kennedy visited the American Folklife Center on two occasions, and spoke about his life and his work. These interviews are available as streaming webcasts on the Library of Congress's website, but we thought it would also be worthwhile to edit them into an article that recounts his work as a folklorist in the 1930s, his later work infiltrating and exposing the Ku Klux Klan, and his associations with such important Americans as Zora Neale Hurston, Woody Guthrie, and Richard Wright. This article is thus presented in Kennedy's own words, culled from two separate interviews, including his appearance in the Benjamin Botkin Folklife Lecture Series.

Speaking in the Benjamin Botkin Folklife Lecture Series is something of a full circle for me. As a teenager I read [Botkin's] seminal monograph, "Bread and Song," and in it he pointed out the integral relationship between life and culture. It went on to advance such philosophical concepts as: "We collectors should not merely collect and take from people, but have an obligation to give back to the people what we had taken." He saw folklore as traveling a two-way street.

And Dr. [Peggy] Bulger [of the American Folklife Center] has certainly been a sterling example of doing exactly that throughout her career...as well as the AFC Archive as a whole, which has been very much involved in seeing to it that the material is not like pheasant under glass somewhere back in the archives,



Stetson Kennedy in the 1930s.

but is republished and disseminated and utilized. I use the expression that the archives should be a seed bed for folk culture, and I certainly hope that trend continues, but I think Dr. Botkin deserves a lot of credit for having promulgated that at the outset.

I was just twenty years old, or younger, when I first crossed trails with Dr. Benjamin Botkin. Botkin was National

Cigar makers (far left) and cigar packers (left) were among the groups whose folklore Stetson Kennedy collected in the 1930s.

Far left photo by Arthur Rothstein, 1938. LC P & P repro. no. LC-USF34-026267-D.

Left photo by Detroit Publishing Company, 1901. LC P & P repro. no. LC-D4-5816.



PHOTO BY ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN



05816 PACKING CIGARS, KEY WEST, FLA.

PHOTO BY DETROIT PUBLISHING COMPANY

COURTESY STETSON KENNEDY



These three photos were taken by Stetson Kennedy during his fieldwork on foodways in the 1930s. They show a group of men making coffee in a large drum, a group of women picking chicken off the bone, and a group of people making pilau by boiling the chicken with rice. LC P & P repro. nos. LC-DIG-ppmsca-08749, LC-DIG-ppmsca-08751, LC-DIG-ppmsca-08750.

Director for Folklore here in Washington for the WPA Federal Writers Project. The whole emphasis in the Roosevelt New Deal back in the mid-thirties was on the American people. In spite of the fact they were all falling over with hunger and joblessness, there was this national focus on people.

And Roosevelt saw fit to bring into Washington...in my opinion, never before or since have so many people of good will, and caring people, been put in cabinet posts and on the judge's bench to administer programs and departments. Never before was such an assemblage in Washington.

I had been at Lee High School; you might know I'd go to Robert E. Lee High School in Jacksonville. And from there I went to the University of Florida. I invented "Independent Studies" by dropping out; [the university] seemed completely unconcerned with what was happening in the Depression. And I went on to Key West. I shipped a trunkload of books to Key West by water; it was cheaper that way. I hitchhiked after it, and that was my higher education.

In my days and years early in Key West, I took it upon myself to start collecting some of the idioms from the Bahamian "Conchs" and the Cuban cigar makers, and of course the Afro- and Anglo-Americans who were there on "the rock," as they called it. And there were some fairly colorful things. I recall one that said, "On

days when the wind is walking right, the water is crystal as gin," and things like that.

I collected what Botkin and others were calling "folk say" back in those days: one-liners in which you sum up an awful lot in a single sentence. And we were very anxious to get as much of that as possible and really distill collective wisdom, a real part of the legacy. And off the cuff, I recall things like, "When you're in Rome, Georgia, you've got to act like it." And it seems to me that sort of thing summed up the Jim Crow system in one line as well as any others I heard.

A former domestic servant, or slave, said, "I've fed white folks with a long spoon." She was ironing when the sounds of the

Yankee guns came over the hill. Old Miss was sitting there rocking and knitting, and Ella, or whatever her name was, was ironing. And she heard the Yankee guns coming, so she put down the iron. And old Miss says, "You're not going to finish the ironing?" And Ella says, "No, ma'am, I'm not going to finish the ironing." And so old Miss says, "What are you going to do?" And Ella says, "I'm going to practice my freedom by sitting down whenever I feel like it." So that's folk say for you.

I made a list [of folk say] and

Benjamin Botkin reads from his book A Treasury of Railroad Folklore in the Library of Congress Recording Laboratory in the early 1950s. LC P & P repro. no. LC-USP6-962-C



sent it on to Dr. Botkin. And he was sufficiently impressed to recommend that I be put in charge of [the WPA's] folklore and oral history and ethnic studies [programs] for the state of Florida at the age of twenty. Zora [Neale] Hurston came on board some eighteen months later. I was wearing these three hats and nominally her boss, but she was her own boss, of course, and worked out of Eatonville, Florida.

It's perhaps of interest that both Zora and I had to take a pauper's oath in order to get those jobs. A pauper's oath, in case you've never taken one, is to solemnly swear that you have no money and no job and no property and no prospect of getting any of those things. So if you can do all that, you've got the job. And I was eminently qualified. No problem. And Zora likewise.

At that point in 1938 when she joined, Zora had already published her first two books. And even so, she needed that job. Royalties, as they called it, consisted of thirty cents per copy a book; Hemingway, Hurston, and later on [me]— that's what we got as our part of each retail

book sale, thirty cents. And the salary involved that we were so anxious to get was \$37.50 every two weeks. And in Zora's case, she only got \$32.50 because someone up here figured out that it was \$5 cheaper to live in Eatonville, Florida than it was Jacksonville, Florida. So Zora only got \$32.50. But even so, she was glad to get that.

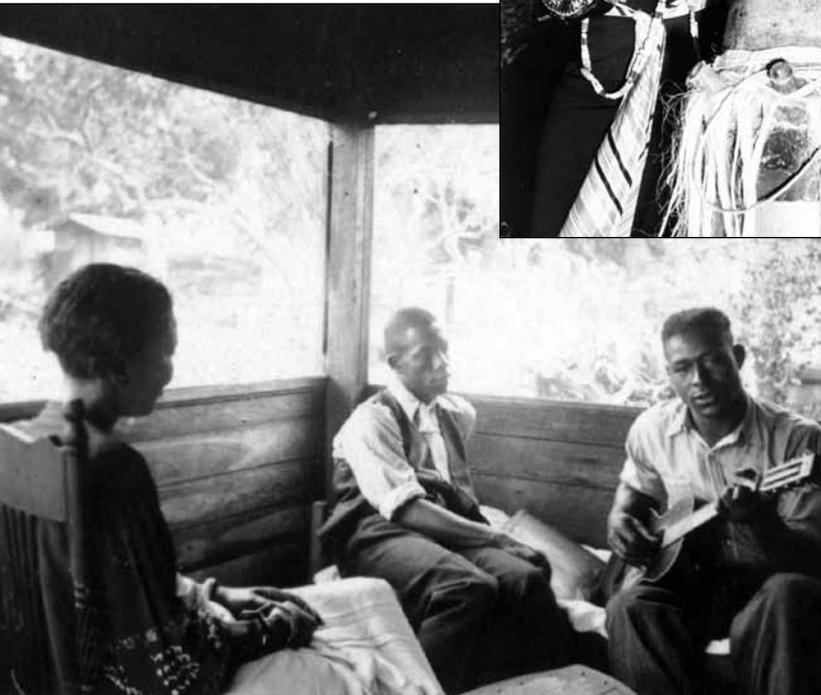
[The state office was] in Jacksonville. We had a staff of two hundred slots statewide, and eight of those two hundred slots were supposed to go to Afro-Floridians. In practice, usually there were not more than six, and they were always the first to be fired whenever Congress put in cuts. They were never allowed in the state office. They had to send a messenger-boy to pick up their checks every two weeks. And they were housed

in a soup kitchen over in the black ghetto, and that's how that worked. Just before Zora signed on, our state director came out into the editorial room, and announced that Zora had signed on. She said that Zora had been feted by New York literary circles, and that she was therefore guilty of putting on certain airs, such as smoking in the presence of white folks, and that we would have to make allowances. That would be the first time that an African American had come into the office, but Zora was coming in. So Zora came, and Zora smoked, and we made allowances.

I recall Zora was stationed in her home in Eatonville and I was in the headquarters in Jacksonville, and our state director popped out of her office one day—she had an editorial staff of some six or eight people—and she looked around and said, "Anybody heard from Zora?" And no one had heard from Zora for some weeks. So the director looked at me and said, "You'd better write her a letter and jog her up." So, I wrote her a letter and jogged her up. And by return mail I received this thick manila envelope postmarked "Eatonville, Florida." And as

time went on I got to calling that the "Mark of Zora": Eatonville.

Word went around the office that a "Mark of Zora" package had arrived, and we tore into it and passed it around, because it was so full of such rich material. We suspected that she'd probably collected it a year or so earlier, and not while on payroll. But we didn't care about things like that, because it was so valuable to us. And as one of the editors of the WPA Florida Guidebook that Oxford Univer-



(top) Zora Neale Hurston in 1937. Soon after this, she signed up to work for the WPA in Florida, and reported to Stetson Kennedy. LC P&P repro. no. LC-USZ62-109672

(above) Zora Neale Hurston during earlier fieldwork, recording Rochelle French and Gabriel Brown in Eatonville, Florida, in 1935. LC P&P repro. no. LC-USZ61-1777

(right) Hurston helped record this unidentified girl singing for singing games in Eatonville, Florida, in 1935. LC P&P repro. no. LC-DIG-ppmsc-00388

sity later published, I would select the material and sprinkle it around as “seasoning” in the Florida Guide. It reminds me that Zora was very good with idiom herself, as well as having an ear for it. And she once defined - she said, “folklore is the boiled down juice or pot liquor of human living.” And I certainly agree. I don’t think anyone can improve upon that. And I would take this pot liquor and sprinkle it all through the guide for seasoning.

Jim Crow would not allow us, black and white, to travel together and work together in public, especially black/white, male/female [teams], and there were no accommodations [in many places] for African-Americans, so she had to sleep in her car. So I used to send Zora ahead as a scout, and she would go into a community and identify what I called “ambulatory repositories”: people who had taken it upon themselves to absorb all the lore and customs of their community. Almost invariably, there was one particular person in a community who had done that, so it was vital to find that person. That was Zora’s job, and she would provide us with names and addresses, and lists of some of the things they knew. And we would follow with the recording machine.

The academicians, the professional folklorists, frequently took exception to the things that Zora did with the material she collected. Instead of putting it into learned journals and scholarly treatises, Zora made use of it in novels and plays and so forth. And even in polemics she would resort to Black English and idiom on occasion when she was trying to make a point in a scholarly article. And academia, some sectors of it, took exception to that use of it. But needless to say, I approved, and I did as much of that in my first book, *Palmetto Country*, as I possibly could, and have continued, ever since, to try to put it to good use.

I was struck by the fact that Zora Hurston sidestepped [protest lore]. Protest lore goes all the way back into the slave days, and the slave folklore and their folk heroes. Big John the Conqueror and later on John Henry, all these people were protesting. And in fact, that protest was the only form that you could protest. If it didn’t rhyme and you didn’t dance a jig, you were dead, so that there’s this vast body of protest lore created and put to song for the most part. She was hearing it because it was everywhere, but she never turned much of that sort of thing in to the office or to the Library of Congress. So, taking note of that, I made it one of my specialties.

My other specialty was dirty songs. I felt Botkin and Lomax and all these people had already preempted the field with John Henry and so on. So I said, “Well, probably no one’s done the



(left) Zora Neale Hurston in the late 1930s or early 1940s. LC P&P repro. no. LC-USZ62-62394

(below) Two unidentified women recorded by Hurston and Alan Lomax in 1935 in Belle Glade, Florida. LC P&P repro. no. LC-DIG-ppmsc-00395



dirty songs. I’ll make a name for myself with that.” You couldn’t sell [those songs] today to television and Hollywood; they’re not dirty enough!

I’ve got a little story about [one of the dirty songs], involving Zora. This is one of the few things I did as her boss. It occurred to me that we could save a lot of gas money (it was nineteen cents a gallon back in 1938) by, instead of running around the woods looking for Zora, we’d just bring Zora up to Jacksonville and put her in a chair and pick her brains for everything possible. We figured she was carrying an awful lot of valuable stuff in her head. So we did that, and in the course of the interviewing, and pursuant to my focus on dirty songs, I said, “Zora, you ever hear a song called ‘Uncle Bud’?” And she

said, “Yes, I heard it.” And I said, “What kind of song would you call that?” She said, “Well, that’s one of those juke songs.” I said, “What do you mean, juke song?” She said, “Well, a juke song is a song you wouldn’t sing in front of anybody but a juke woman.” So I said, “Well, you heard it!” And so she said, “Yes, I heard it.” So she proceeded to sing it. (*Hurston’s version of “Uncle Bud,” and Kennedy’s questions about it, can be heard on the AFC website, in the online presentation Florida Folklife from the WPA Collections, 1937–1942—ed.*)

In Florida we had, I suppose you could call it good sense, when we came to recording the ex-slave interviews. We took those six [African American employees] and [asked] them to do the ex-slave interviews. And as a result, historians have said that the Florida ex-slave interviews were more substantive than those in other states where they used whites to interview and try to get the nitty-gritty out of the former slaves.

A Yankee Indian, I think Oswego or another northern tribe, walked into our office in Jacksonville one day. And he was a graduate of one of the Ivy League schools, had a PhD. But he wanted one of those thirty-seven dollar jobs. And that’s the Depression for you. And it occurred to me, I said, “Well, possibly our Seminoles down in the glades will tell this Indian things they won’t tell us.” Whenever we were going into a particular ethnic culture, we would try to find someone from that culture to do the interviewing. And that, I think, was a commendable thing; not only back then, but forever.

Even so, our white [state government] was trying to coach me and the staff that Florida wasn’t really part of the plantation south, and that Florida slave-owners were usually kindly mas-

ters, and the cruel masters were up in Georgia and Alabama. So we were under orders to look for [stories about] these kindly masters. I remember I asked one former slave: "How does slavery compare to the way things are with you now?" He said "It wasn't too much different, then from now. I always had to work hard just to live."

I recall there was one former slave who was known as Mama Duck near Tampa. And when I asked about, you know, talking about slavery, she said, "Well, I prayed and got all the malice out of my soul, so I ain't going to tell no lies for them or on them." And I thought that was about as good as any piece of folklore, that you can't find a better definition of objectivity than that: "never tell no lies for them or on them."

My first book, *Palmetto Country*, was a volume in the *American Folkways* series with Erskine Caldwell as editor of the entire series. And when Alan [Lomax] got a copy, I was gratified that he said that he very much doubted that a better book about Florida folklife would ever be written. So of course I put that on the blurb, and it's still there. Alan passed his copy on to Woody Guthrie. And the next thing I knew, I received in the mail a "Palmetto Country" jacket from the book, and Woody had written me a fan letter on the inside of the jacket and mailed it to me. The jacket just turned up last year, a half century later. Some woman in the Carolinas had the jacket, and I don't know how it got out of my hands or into her hands. Anyway, it's back in the Guthrie archive in Manhattan now, and I have copies in my place in Beluthahatchee, in Florida. But that was a welcome homecoming.

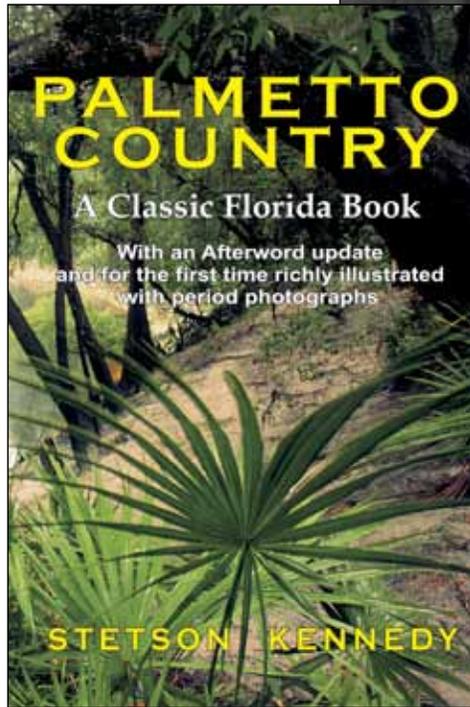
In that book jacket fan letter Woody said, "Don't be surprised if I come staggering up to your door some day with my guitar, and we'll have some good long talks," and so forth. And in reality, he didn't actually come staggering up; I received a phone call from the Greyhound bus station in Jacksonville asking me to come get him. So I get there and Woody's sprawled out on the sidewalk, sound asleep, with his head resting on his guitar, the same guitar on which he had written "This machine kills fascists." And people, pedestrians are stepping over him, you know, not knowing whether he's dead or drunk or just what was going on - admiring the ability of this white man to sleep on the sidewalk in broad daylight. I looked around and said, "Woody, where's your baggage?" And he didn't answer me. He just started unbuttoning, and he was wearing five shirts. So, that was Woody on the road.



PHOTO BY CARL VAN VECHTEN

(left) *Erskine Caldwell, the series editor who published Kennedy's classic book *Palmetto Country*, in 1938. LC P&P repro. no. LC-USZ62-42488*

(below) *A recent edition of Kennedy's book, now labeled "A Classic Florida Book."*



I could go on and on about Woody. Beyond the Botkin and Lomax tradition of "two-way street" and "cultural equity,"

we have what I would consider to be the Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger school of protest, using folk idiom and folk culture as a weapon or instrument for social protest and change. And of course they didn't invent that idea. As I said, the protest goes all the way back into the slave days. But I think that transition from the Botkin-Lomax school to the Guthrie-Seeger school of protest is something significant historically, and the role which song has played and continues to play in social change is a factor. At a Woody celebration [recently] I said, "You know that there will never be a generation which will not need to hear what Woody had to say." And one of the things he said was that Pushkin and Whitman and Sandburg were all saying the right thing, but they weren't thinking the way his people thought, and

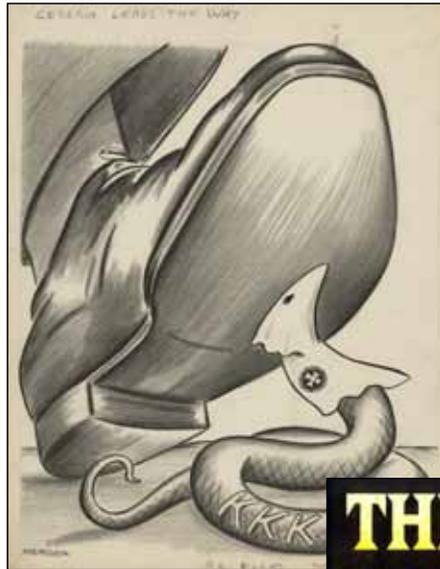
they weren't talking the way his people thought, so therefore, he said, "I guess I'll just have to keep on trying to out-push Pushkin and outwit Whitman and out-sand Sandburg." So that was Woody's way of looking at this question of voice of the people.

Rambling Jack Elliott, his sidekick in their first days - Jack was still a teenager, and he just moved in with Woody Guthrie. Bob Dylan didn't quite go that far, but Rambling Jack just moved in and stayed, would not go away. And whenever Woody came to Beluthahatchee, Rambling Jack usually came with him. We just recently discovered in the Guthrie Archive some eighty songs that Woody wrote there at my place in Beluthahatchee, in the Spring of 1953. I had just gone off to Europe, and so he was there with Anneke [Van Kirk]. Woody was 41, and she was 21. But she packed up from California and came there with him. When I returned eight years later, my Afro neighbors came up and said, "What kind of people was that living there after you left?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, me and Sandy drove up one Sunday morning to see if it was alright if we went fishing. And him and her come out buck naked. What kind of people do you call that?" I said, "Well, that's just Woody Guthrie."

Alan [Lomax] and I tried to get Woody to come overseas. Alan was in London, working with the BBC in the 1950s, and at that time I was running all over Europe. And we both tried to

(right) *Georgia Leads the Way*, an editorial cartoon by Anne Mergen referring to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation's attempts to rein in the KKK in the late 1940s. Stetson Kennedy's "Klan-Busting" activities were undertaken as part of this effort. LC P&P repro. no. LC-DIG-ppmsca-17461

(below) An edition of Kennedy's book on the Ku Klux Klan.



states they used pseudonyms. In Virginia they called themselves the American Service Patrol, and in Florida they called it Confederate Underground. I became a Colonel in the Confederate Underground. It only cost me ten dollars. When I joined the Klan, the kleagle organizer had three questions. He said, "Do you hate Negroes?" using the "n" word, of course. He said, "Do you hate Negroes? Do you hate Jews?" And, "Have you got ten bucks?"

get Woody over, but Woody was two hundred percent American, focused on his country. He wasn't all that interested.

Woody wrote a total of four songs about me. The first one was called "Beluthahatchee Bill." I don't know where he found out my first name is William, actually. I didn't find out myself until I was a grown man and received a birth certificate. But anyway, Woody wrote this song, "Beluthahatchee Bill," and never recorded it. In addition, in 1950 I took it upon myself to announce as an independent write-in candidate for the United States Senate. Claude Pepper had just lost the Democratic primary election, and George Smathers had won the primary. And Smathers was talking about being such a good southern traditionalist, by which he meant segregationist. And I decided I would announce for the general election as a color blind candidate on the platform of total equality. And that was 1950. And it was sort of like putting my life on the line at that point. So I asked Woody to write me some campaign songs. And he wrote three of them. I forget now whether I paid him the twenty dollars or nothing; I don't know whether I have copyright to them or not. But anyway, the radio stations refused to broadcast them.

So I had to appeal to the Federal Communications Commission, and of course they waited until 24 hours before the election and ordered the Florida stations to broadcast. So I ran out to the nearest juke joint to see what the reaction of the good ole boys would be to Woody's songs. And of course they almost fell off their stools when it got around to total equality and color blind candidacy, things like that. But just recently, several years ago, Billy Bragg, the British singer, took it upon himself to take some of Woody's thousands of unsung songs and sing them. And one of those he chose for his disc, *Mermaid Avenue II* was one of those campaign songs, called "Stetson Kennedy." One of the real Woody lines in that song was:

I ain't the world's best writer nor the world's best speller
But when I believe in something I'm the world's loudest yeller

I've been asked to talk also about how I infiltrated the Klan. That's a long story, and I recommend my book to you for a fuller account. We're talking about World War II. The Klan didn't wait for the war to end to come out from hiding. And in some

One of the first things that happened at the first

meeting, I could see the police uniforms sticking out from under the Klan robes, you know, and the sheriff deputies' khaki uniforms. And in attendance there was a judge and a prosecutor and all kinds of politicians and public servants in Klan robes. So I knew that my goal of getting hard, actionable evidence that could be taken into a court of law [would be difficult]. I couldn't go to the lawmen because so many of them were Klansmen.



So that was simply a dead end. So I knocked on the door of the FBI in Atlanta, and they showed little or no interest. I might say this was the FBI of J. Edgar Hoover in 1947. And at that time the FBI had six African American employees nationwide, and those six were chauffeurs here in Washington. There were no black agents or other personnel. But anyway, even then, before the liberation movement had really begun, the FBI was taking no notes about what I had to say about the Klan. They said, "What do you know about these black militants? That's the real problem."

So, at the very next Klan meeting the Grand Dragon gets up and says, "Well, I had a little call from the FBI last week, warning me that the Klan has been infiltrated, and I'd better watch my step." You can't ask for better cooperation than that. So, that was the tie-in between the KKK and the FBI in 1947.

In desperation, I tried to get the House Un-American Activities Committee to take an interest. And Rankin of Mississippi was Chairman at the time, and he said, "Oh, well, the Klan is a patriotic organization. They're just as American as apple pie." So, all my efforts to get a hearing before the Un-American Activities Committee about the Klan were in vain. And eventually I took my large briefcase and stuffed it full of evidence



(left) A postcard from 1900 and two travel posters from the 1950s idealize travel to Paris. Stetson Kennedy's experience was somewhat different. (LC P&P repro. nos. LC-DIG-ppmsc-05221, LC-USZC4-13462, LC-USZC4-13460.)

(right) Richard Wright, author of the classic novels *Native Son* and *Black Boy*, at his typewriter in 1945. Wright was one of Stetson Kennedy's best friends during his years in Paris. LC P&P repro. no. LC-USZ62-112318



against the Klan; so much that I couldn't even close it. It was

sticking out of the briefcase. And I came up to Washington and got in the back of a cab and started putting on my Klan robe. And the cab driver of course saw me in the mirror and we almost crashed, and so I had to hurry up and explain to him what I was up to. He put me out at the House office building.

I went in and knocked on the door of the Un-American Committee, and all the little ladies inside started screaming and running out of the office, left me sitting there all by myself. And eventually a man stuck his head through the door, and took one look and slammed the door shut. And I was just sitting there with a briefcase in my lap. And finally they sent four Capitol police up here. I was flattered that they sent four to take me into custody. And they took me into the basement and I explained to them what I had in mind, and they did not arrest me. They just told me not to come back in a robe anymore.

But all of that having happened, then my first thought was

the court of public opinion and the media, and my first contact was with Drew Pearson. He wrote the "Washington Merry-Go-Round" column, and had a nationwide radio program. So we broadcast every Sunday the minutes of the Klan's last meeting, with the names of all these public servants and politicians and businessmen and lawmen. Of course, none of those people ever showed up again, and attendance generally hit rock bottom. And best of all, violence came to a halt. I think there's a moral in that for our current war on international terrorism; that infiltration is one of the effective ways we can go.

Revealing the KKK's passwords came up after Pearson and I went to the producers of the radio program *Superman*. They hired me as a consultant, and came up with a series called *Superman Versus the Grand Dragon*. I would telephone the password signs and countersigns, [for example,] the sign would be "white" and the countersign would be "man." Or the sign would be "native" and the counter sign would be "born." I would phone this in to *Superman* [and they would incorporate it into the week's storyline]. So all the kids in America knew all the Klan passwords! Just as fast as the Grand Dragon could think up new ones, the kids would have them. And the Grand Dragon went so far that one night he said, "As soon as I adjourn, I might just as well go call *Superman* myself."

I went to Europe in 1952. I had hoped to get away from my Klan nightmares; you know, [my fears about] the Klan catching up with me. But I got to Paris, where it rains quite often, and there were the French traffic cops all wearing white rubber raincoats with white capes, just like the Klan, and making all the traffic signals. So the nightmare went right on.

In Paris I spent most of my time with Richard Wright, and Richard was astounded. I don't know that he had ever met a white American southerner who thought and felt everything exactly the way he did. So we were the best of buddies and spent all our days in Café Tourneau. And Richard said a number of things that are probably worth passing on, such as, "You know,

it took me five years of getting lost in the greatness of Paris before I could stop thinking and seeing everything in black and white." And on one occasion he said, "I got sufficiently homesick. I got back as far as the Canadian border, but then I looked across the line and I just couldn't cross it. Got back on the plane and went back to Paris." So I think that's a commentary on us. Here's a native son, native born black boy, home-sick, and couldn't face it.

Every time I crossed a national border in Europe, it seemed I was under house arrest. In France they knocked on my door. They always arrest you at 2:00 a.m. So they knocked on the door and threw me into a camion with Algerian, I guess, freedom fighters. And they took me off to the Interior Ministry holding pen and gave me a 24-hour expulsion notice. And they had a rubber stamp, and it says under reason, "presence in France undesirable." That was the reason for my expulsion. But *Le Monde*, a newspaper, got hold of it and reported it as "Kennedy, correspondent for the great black American newspaper *The Pittsburgh Courier*, has been ordered to quit the country."

An Afro-French Senator from Senegal in Paris, reading the *Le Monde* notice, assumed that I was black, writing for *The Pittsburgh Courier*, and put a written question to the French government: "Since when is not having a passport grounds for expulsion?" He raised the question whether it was a French ini-

tiative or an American Embassy request. So they kept me there. Every day I would report. I would go home at night, and each morning I would go back to police headquarters, to the detention room, and they would keep me sitting in the room all day. And at the end of the day they would hand me another 24-hour expulsion notice. I was refusing to leave.

And that went on for over a year. And eventually they had a shelf in the office, and a little note on the shelf saying, "Don't scribble on the buffet," or whatever they called it. And I not only scribbled, but I brought my book, the Klan manuscript. I was working on it. So I'd bring it to the police headquarters, and I finished writing it there at police headquarters. And eventually word got out to the officers that I had been employed by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation in some of my Klan work, so they came to regard me as a fellow police agent. And then we were very buddy-buddy, and they would say, "We understand your position, and it's just the Interior Ministry that doesn't know what it's doing," and so on. And so they ended up serializing my Klan book in their police gazette!

In conclusion, I've been asked about how my experience with the WPA in the 1930s affected the rest of my life. Because of our experiences in those days, in Florida we pioneered a state folklore agency. Then along came some different politicians, who killed the project. And there was an effort to revive the State Folk Festival, and I wrote a letter of support along with many other people. In my letter, I said that cultural well-being is just as vital to any people and nation as is physical or mental well-being. I learned that in the 1930s. Therefore, it's an altogether legitimate area for us to spend our tax dollars on. I think that connects with what Dr. Botkin did and also what you do at the American Folklife Center. ○



Former WPA artist Gertrude Goodwin, Stetson Kennedy, Eleanor Roosevelt Seagraves, and Glory Southwind at the Library of Congress in 2008 for an AFC symposium on the New Deal. Seagraves is the granddaughter of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, and grew up in the White House with her grandparents.



Stetson Kennedy signing books at AFC's 2008 symposium on the New Deal.



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PHOTO BY STEPHEN WINICK, AFC

Incoming AFC Director Betsy Peterson (front and center) poses with AFC Trustees (l-r) Thomas S. Rankin, Patricia Atkinson, Joanna Hess, C. Kurt Dewhurst, Wilsonia Cherry, Donald Scott, Judith McCulloh, Jean Dorton, Jason Baird Jackson, and Harris M. Berger. Peterson is Director of AFC as of January, 2012. Read about this and other staff and board changes in our next issue.