

FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

October 1979

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
PRESERVATION OFFICE

NOV 15 1979

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Volume II, Number 4

AMERICAN FOLKLIFE ON CYLINDER RECORDINGS: A FEDERAL CULTURAL CHALLENGE

When Jesse Walter Fewkes took Edison's new cylinder recording machine in 1890 to document songs and stories of the Passamaquoddy Indians in Maine, he inaugurated for the United States and the world the use of the phonograph to preserve folk cultural expression. From that date until the early 1930s, though disc-recording machines were in use by commercial record companies, the only portable recording apparatus for field documentation of folk music and folklore was the cylinder recording machine. During that era a wide variety of scholars and other collectors made cylinder recordings in the field, for research purposes as well as to preserve those forms of expression for posterity.

Many of those early recordings have long since perished through breakage, disintegration, mold, melting of the wax, or other reasons. Still others are yet extant in private hands and in various museums, libraries, or other institutions. But the largest body of cylinder recordings lies in the hands of various Federal agencies concerned with cul-



Mountain Chief of the Blackfoot Tribe listens to a cylinder recording and translates the song into sign language for Frances Densmore. The picture was taken in 1916 in Washington, D.C., by Harris and Ewing. (Smithsonian Institution)

tural affairs—principally the Library of Congress, but also the Smithsonian Institution, the National Archives, and perhaps other agencies. These cylinders preserve many different traditions, but the great majority of them are historic documents of Native American culture.

The need to locate, organize, and preserve the large body of cylinder recordings and related documentary materials found in these collections has

led to the development of the Federal Cylinder Project. Cooperating in this two-year program are the American Folklife Center, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Smithsonian Institution, with advisory and planning assistance from the National Endowment for the Arts and other Federal agencies. The project's goal is to duplicate all the cylinder recordings of folk cultural expression now in the hands of the Fed-

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FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

a quarterly publication of the

American Folklife Center

at the

Library of Congress

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DIRECTOR'S COLUMN

Based upon the Folklife Center's field projects and office contacts, it is fair to say that the preservation movement is a profound impulse at America's grassroots today. I hasten to add that I am not speaking exclusively of those Americans who formally identify themselves as "preservationists." American Indians—so often a barometer of national cultural stirrings—are energetically seeking to preserve and revive tribal history and traditions. Language maintenance has become a serious concern among the millions of Americans who hold ethnic title to languages other than English. Older forms and styles of music, craft, story, building, and custom are waxing everywhere in local

esteem. Emblematic of the times, judging from documentation in Center field projects, are the "home museums" every community seems to have spawned, where the collecting and preserving impulse of the home-owner has come to dominate the interior decor of the house.

This broadly based movement raises interesting questions about what I shall call the "custodians of culture." Fieldworkers in folklore and folklife have often thought of themselves as, in some sense, the official custodians of traditions that have been preserved only unconsciously and by chance, if at all, at the grassroots. But local communities have probably always had their own custodians, whether formally designated by the community or self-appointed through personal devotion. If, as many people assert, the positions of these community custodians were eroded by the juggernaut of progress throughout much of the 20th century, they are certainly beginning to flourish again today. It is impossible to do fieldwork in American communities without meeting or being referred to local people who have already isolated certain aspects of traditional culture as worthy of preservation, documentation, serious research, and formal revival within their community.

What, then, is the role of the "professional"—whether a folklorist, historian, anthropologist, museum curator, librarian, or other cultural specialist—in the burgeoning preservation movement? Have the professionals, after generations of communicating their views and concerns to the general public, helped kindle grassroots awareness and activity that supersedes their own work?

To the contrary, at least for professional folklorists, the demand has never been greater. But the day is past when folklorists can afford to imagine that they are the sole official custodians of the nation's folk cultural expression. Rather, professionals must establish a

relationship which both strengthens the legitimacy and enhances the effectiveness of community custodians. I should like to suggest three key functions for professional folklorists which are in harmony with both their academic training and their responsibility to the communities they study. The first function is *know-how*, particularly with regard to the use of the cultural forums of the modern world. A good folklorist can create a dignified, thoughtful, and accurate book, or produce an attractive exhibit, or edit a documentary LP record, or create a

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NEW REFERENCE AND FINDING AIDS AVAILABLE FROM ARCHIVE OF FOLK SONG

The Archive of Folk Song has recently expanded its inventory of reference and finding aids available to the public. Listed below are the aids, giving pagination and compiler, that have been revised or compiled over the past twelve months, primarily through the efforts of several interns.

New Reference Aids

Autoharp: A Select Listing of Instruction Books and Articles. 4 pp. Marsha Maguire.

Five String *Banjo*: A Listing of Contemporary Instruction Books. 7 pp. Richard Brislin.

Dobro Instruction Books: A Bibliography. 1 p. Katherine W. Johnston.

Hammered *Dulcimer* and Related Instruments: A Bibliography. 7 pp. Evan Stein.

A Bibliography of the Plucked (Appalachian or Mountain) *Dulcimer* and Related Instruments. 10 pp. Bethany Aronow.

Logging and Lumbermens' Songs of the U.S. and Canada. 3 pp. Elizabeth Knapp.

Rhythm & Blues: A Bibliography of Books. 4 pp. David B. Goren with Barry Lee Pearson.

Irish *Tim-Whistle* Instruction Books. A Bibliography. 1 p. Susan Rainsford.

Revised Reference Aids

Folklore and Folk Music *Archives* in the United States and Canada. 11 pp. Joseph C. Hickerson.

Copyright and Folksongs. 3 pp. Katherine W. Johnston.

Folklore *Graduate Programs* in North America. 1 p. Joseph C. Hickerson.

North American *Record Companies* Specializing in Folk Music and Folklore. 8 pp. Joseph C. Hickerson with Ritchie J. Porter.

Long-Playing Recordings of *Sacred Harp* Singing. 2 pp. Marsha Maguire.

Folklore and the *W.P.A.*: A Preliminary Bibliography. 7 pp. Joseph C. Hickerson with Herbert Halpert.

New Finding Aids

Mexican-American Folksong and Music on Field Recordings in the Archive of Folk Song. 2 pp. Katherine W. Johnston.

Michigan Material in the Archive of Folk Song. 2 pp. Janet C. Moore.

Revised Finding Aids

Archive of Folk Song: A Bibliography. 6 pp. Joseph C. Hickerson.

Archive of Folk Song Description. 4 pp. Joseph C. Hickerson.

Commercially Issued Recordings of Material in the Archive of Folk Song. 2 pp. Joseph C. Hickerson.

Field Recordings of *California Indians* in the Archive of Folk Song. 2 pp. Joseph C. Hickerson.

Georgia Materials from the *W.P.A.* in the Archive of Folk Song. 1 p. Charles Perdue.

Additional lists in the final stages of preparation include bibliographies on computers and folklore, graffiti in America, Native American music, Jimmie Rodgers, and recent folios of early country and bluegrass songs. A finding aid on recorded songs sung by American children will be available shortly, as well as revised directories of

folklore societies and serial publications in North America.

Requests for individual lists and for the complete inventory of the Archive's 170 published aids, all of which are offered free of charge, may be addressed to Joseph C. Hickerson, Head, Archive of Folk Song, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540.

WORKSHOPS ON THEME OF ETHNIC COMMUNITY LIFE PRESENTED IN SEATTLE

A grassroots movement has been developing over the past year among Seattle's numerous ethnic communities: as a result of monthly meetings held at ethnic community centers throughout the city, community groups have been learning more about each other and discovering that they have similar concerns and aspirations. Initiated by ethnic community representatives, the meetings have been supported by Rosanne Royer, wife of Mayor Charles Royer. The interest and awareness has caused individuals representing over forty ethnic communities and cultural organizations to form the Ethnic Heritage Council of the Pacific Northwest, dedicated to preserving and strengthening regional ethnic culture and history.

In response to the Council's enthusiasm, the American Folklife Center has organized an Ethnic Heritage Workshop, a series of presentations for those interested in exploring, enriching, and documenting ethnic community life. The workshop was offered at Seattle Center from September 28 through September 30, 1979, to registered applicants. Joining the Folklife Center in sponsorship of the workshop were the Ethnic Heritage Council of the Pacific Northwest, the Seattle Public Library with assistance from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and Seattle Center. Workshops outlined the criteria and techniques

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Agnes Vanderburg.



Removing the sack of roasted camas.

JOTTINGS FROM MONTANA

The sweet smoky aroma of baked camas is surpassed only by its taste when it comes out of the roasting pit: a flavor not unlike that of a sweet potato or fig. Camas, a member of the lily family, is a wild plant that was once a staple food for Native Americans of the Flathead Tribe. The technique for preparing camas is one of the tribal traditions taught by Agnes Vanderburg at her camp on the Flathead Reservation in northwestern Montana.

In July, several members of the Montana Folklife Survey team visited Mrs. Vanderburg's camp. The survey, conducted during the summer of 1979 by the American Folklife Center in cooperation with the Montana Arts Council, was described in the July 1979 issue of *Folklife Center News*.

Mrs. Vanderburg's camp is spon-

sored by the tribal council, and most participants are school-aged children from the tribe, with a few young adults. Located at the edge of a clearing in the mountains west of Arlee, the camp is surrounded by conifers and situated near a fast-flowing mountain stream. Mrs. Vanderburg teaches by having students participate in camp activities ranging from catching and cleaning trout to tanning elk and deer hides. Students also gather berries, roots, bulbs, and other wild plants.

In the 1880s the Flathead Tribe was moved north from the Bitterroot Valley around Stevensville to the present-day reservation. Mrs. Vanderburg's parents were born near Stevensville in the 1870s, and she was born at Valley Creek on the reservation in 1901, not far from the location of her camp. The tribe looks up to her as a person with extensive knowledge of their cultural traditions, and her camp

provides a much appreciated summer learning experience.

During our visit we joined the students in the roasting of camas. The bulbs, which had been dug before our arrival, must be carefully identified to avoid mistaking them for a look-alike which is extremely toxic. They are roasted for three days in an earth-covered pit lined with layers of stones, branches, and ferns; the later stages of the process involve heating the pit with a surface fire. We joined in the work of burying the camas and later stood in the circle of children and adults who watched Mrs. Vanderburg spade into the ashes to uncover the cache of roasted bulbs.

We were pleased to have been invited to participate in this traditional activity, and to have had summer-long opportunities to document the traditions of all the people who give Montana its vital character.

—*Kay Young*



Agnes Vanderburg and Kay Young.



Raw and roasted camas. (Photos by Michael Crummett)

AMERICAN FOLKLIFE CENTER CONTINUES FIELDWORK IN PARADISE VALLEY, NEVADA

Another phase of the American Folklife Center's Paradise Valley Folklife Project will take place in the latter part of October 1979. This portion of the project will supplement the documentation of ranching and community life in the valley begun in May 1978 and continued with visits in July and October 1978 to observe seasonal changes in ranching activities.

As in the earlier phases, the coordinator of the fieldwork team will be Howard W. Marshall of the Center staff, who will complete his documentation of vernacular architecture in the valley. A study of the town of Paradise Valley will be undertaken by Dr. Keith Cunningham of Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, who will interview residents on the history and development of the valley within the context of regional development and traditions.

An historical archaeological perspective will be added to this phase of the project through the excavation and analysis of "dugout" dwellings, remnants of the town's short-lived Chinese community on the banks of Cottonwood Creek. A team of archaeologists from the University of California at Berkeley will undertake the research, led by Dr. James Deetz, director of the Lowie Museum and professor of anthropology at the university. William Smock, a professional photographer from Oakland, California, will accompany field team members.

Marshall and Richard E. Alhborn, curator, Division of Community Life, Smithsonian Institution, will also continue their visits to ranchers in the valley to gather information and solidify plans for an exhibit on buckaroo life in northern Nevada. The exhibit is tentatively planned for joint presentation

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Cylinder Recordings

eral Government. Contributing to the organizational and preservation activities of the project are Thomas Vennum of the Smithsonian Institution's Folklife Program, serving as project director, ethnomusicologists Maria La Vigna and Ronald Walcott from the University of California at Los Angeles, and Erika Brady, a folklorist from Indiana University as well as an experienced recording technician. The project is being carried out in the Library of Congress, which contains both the largest existing cylinder collection and the best engineering and archival expertise for the project.

The machines that Fewkes took into the field in 1890 and that were later used by Walter McClintock, Helen Roberts, Frances Densmore, and many other early ethnographers, were variants of the prototype cylinder sound recorder first demonstrated by Thomas Edison in 1877. The original design was simple: a handcrank rotated a spiral-grooved cylinder wrapped with tinfoil. On one side of the cylinder, a needle attached to a thin, sound-sensitive diaphragm could be engaged to emboss a pattern made by sound onto the tinfoil; on the other side, a similar device could be engaged to pick up and play back the sounds from the embossed pattern in the grooves on the foil. Over the next two decades Edison perfected and refined his phonograph into a highly marketable commodity. By 1900 an Edison Home Phonograph could be purchased for thirty dollars, with blank wax cylinders priced at a quarter. The machine was compact, portable, and self-contained; spring-driven models were available as well as electrical for use in areas with no electricity.

Such ingredients as paraffin, stearic acid, caustic soda, and aluminum oxide, possibly with a touch of olive oil or frankincense, went into the composition of the wax cylinders themselves. Produced from carefully guarded formulas, the cylinders were both soft and

brittle; the softness of the outer layer allowed the phonograph needle to cut a program on the cylinder, and the brittleness provided some resistance to damage. While they are more difficult to store and maintain than the later phonograph discs, cylinders are not subject to the same distortion problems that plague disc recordings, and the sound quality of a well-preserved cylinder recording can be quite good.

Organization and preservation of the cylinder recordings begins with locating the cylinders. Once located, an inventory is taken to determine whether



Wax cylinders.

the cylinders have been properly identified. Labels may appear on the storage boxes themselves, listing the name of the collector, performers, tribes represented, titles of songs recorded on the cylinder, dates and recording locations, and the collector's catalog numbers. Often, however, only a number and collector's name appear on the storage boxes. Once the cylinders are identified, they are grouped by collector.

Next a packet of documentary materials is prepared for the engineer who will transfer the cylinders to tape. The packet will include whatever is available that may provide identification and technical information on the cylinders. A complete packet can include listings

of the cylinders made by the collector, published and unpublished manuscripts related to the collection, with transcriptions of some of the recordings, and field notebooks with technical entries on the recordings. During the duplication, engineer and ethnomusicologist consult to insure correlation between identification details and cylinder content.

In transferring the cylinders to tape each cylinder is cleaned and placed on a cylinder machine model closely resembling the apparatus on which the recording was made; the program is then recorded acoustically or electrically. Acoustic recording is relatively simple: the machine is set up much as Edison would have done it, with original reproducer and horn attached and a separate electrical motor providing the power. Then a microphone is carefully lowered into the horn and the preservation recording is made. In most cases, however, electric recording is preferable; a cartridge which accepts specially designed styli is fitted to the speaker of the original machine. The technician chooses a stylus for the cartridge from an assortment of stylus sizes and configurations in order to match the unique groove size of each cylinder. While the cylinder revolves, the technician must control the angle of the needle's contact with the wax manually. Speed of the original recordings is variable, and this too is manually controlled. An equalizer is used to filter out surface noise when possible, and to coax the voice of the singer into full prominence.

The order in which the cylinders are being duplicated relates to the amount of information accompanying them. Fully identified cylinders of which no copies exist will be transferred to tape first. The collection being processed at this writing consists of 55 cylinder recordings of the Karuk Tribe of northern California, collected by Helen Roberts during March and April 1926. This collection has detailed labels on the storage boxes, and the supplementen-

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Cylinder Recordings

tary materials include all of Roberts' unpublished manuscripts and field notebooks relevant to the collection, among which are 703 pages of musical transcriptions of the recorded songs. Duplication of unidentified collections will be scheduled later to allow time for careful research which will involve consulting collectors' lists, listening to the recordings, grouping the cylinders by the geographic area of the recorded materials, and consulting individuals who have expertise and knowledge about a particular musical region. Through this means, annotations will be written to accompany the preservation tapes of the unidentified cylinder recordings.

The project team is preparing a companion catalog which will contain all of the data that they have been able to gather on each selection of a given cylinder. There will be space in the catalog to list the original collector's catalog number for the cylinder; the "title" of the selection and other information on song genre; the performer; the tribe; date and location of the recording; Library of Congress inventory numbers for relevant card files, tape copies, disc



Federal Cylinder Project team: Erika Brady, seated, Ronald Walcott, and Maria La Vigna.

copies, and storage boxes; and related sources of documentation, such as transcriptions and translations.

The goals of the Federal Cylinder Project are not only to preserve the cylinders, in the literal sense of copying them before they deteriorate, but also to make possible a useful dissemination of those copies so that their contents are more widely available to the public, including current members of tribal and other groups originally recorded on the cylinders. By combining preservation and dissemination as mutually complementary goals, and by mounting the project comprehensively and with all available scholarly expertise, the challenge posed by the cylinder recordings can be addressed most effectively and for the greatest public benefit.

NATIVE AMERICAN VISITORS TO FOLKLIFE CENTER

Native Americans have been frequent visitors to the Library of Congress over the years, often particularly attracted to the collections of the Archive of Folk Song. During the week of August 20-24, the Folklife Center was visited by a group from Laguna Pueblo, New Mexico, associated with the Johnson O'Malley Indian Education Program. Stan Lucero, director of the Acoma/Laguna district, accompanied by Patricia Duran-Weatherman, Tracy Wright, Katherine Smith, and Victoria Yawea, researched print and photographic materials in the Library's collections relevant to projected publications on their pueblo and the surrounding area.

Simultaneously Frank Wright, Sr., and William Sterud, representing the Salish-speaking Puyallup tribe of Washington State, spent several days in the Archive researching tape recordings of ancestral stories, songs, and tales. With copies of these materials

they hope to enrich the cultural life of their tribe, while encouraging language maintenance.

Both groups were introduced to the Center's Federal Cylinder Project team and their activities.

REPORT PREPARED FROM ARIZONA FOLKLIFE SURVEY

A report based on responses to the Center's Arizona Folklife Survey, conducted by mail during 1977, has been prepared this summer with the assistance of Mary Hufford of the University of Pennsylvania. The survey canvassed museums, libraries, institutions, cultural organizations, and individuals throughout the state to determine the nature and extent of the region's folk cultural resources. Some results of the survey were reported in the October 1978 *Folklife Center News*.

In all, 45 specific collections varying in size from holdings of hundreds of thousands of artifacts and printed materials to collections of several dozen items are listed and described in the report. While there are undoubtedly further resources in the area that were not located by this survey, the itemization of public and private collections of all sizes provides an overview of the range and composition of Arizona's folk cultural resources. The report is available upon request from the American Folklife Center.

Director's Column

radio or television program. The *know-how* required for such efforts is one of the finest boons a professional can offer, and community custodians will be grateful for it. The second function is *networking*, the administrative ability to link up community custodians with each other and with the wider world of cultural endeavor. And the third is *perspective*, the ability to clarify, modify,

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Director's Column

correct, and extend a community's intuitive perception of itself and its folk traditions through a broader comparative knowledge of folklife. If these functions are effectively supplied by professional cultural custodians, the resulting partnership with community custodians will help to insure that the current preservation impulse leads to the creation of work of lasting value.

Paradise Valley

by the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian Institution at the National Museum of History and Technology in 1980.

After field research materials are completed, a collection of essays by the team members on traditional life and work in the valley will be published. Summaries of some essays which have been written for publication from previous visits to the valley will be presented by project team members at the 1979 annual meeting of the American Folklore Society in Los Angeles on October 25. The presentation on the theme of buckaroo life in northern Nevada will be chaired by Howard W. Marshall, and the other participants

will be Richard Ahlborn, Carl Fleischhauer, Linda Gastañaga, Thomas Vennum, and William A. Wilson.

Seattle

employed by folklorists and cultural specialists in their study of America's diverse cultural groups.

Conceptualization and planning of the workshops for the Folklife Center was directed by Elena Bradunas. The lectures, seminars, and demonstrations were conducted by fifteen professional folklorists and ethnic specialists, with assistance from Bradunas, Center media specialist Carl Fleischhauer, and Alan Jabbour, the Center's director. Presentations explored the components of current ethnic community life, examining the value of family and community activities in the context of past and present traditions. Discussion also centered on how to document and preserve features that embody the spirit of ethnic communities.

The Ethnic Heritage Workshop weekend coincided with the inception of a two-year project by the Seattle Public Library, entitled "This City, Seattle," which will feature illustrated lectures, tours, displays, and printed

materials based on the history of the city. Jean Coberly, director of the Library's project, notes, "We feel that the September workshop will initiate a flow of historical information from the ethnic communities into area schools and libraries, so we can do a better job of presenting the history of this area." Rosanne Royer, chairperson of the Ethnic Heritage Workshop Committee, thinks that the workshops have given participants the kind of help they need to begin the documentation many groups have wanted to do for some time.

The Seattle workshop is the third major experiment by the Folklife Center in community workshops. The South-Central Georgia Folklife Project included a series of community workshops and a special presentation for teachers, and the Chicago Ethnic Arts Project included as one important component a round of workshop sessions with interested individuals from various Chicago ethnic communities. The Center hopes to have further opportunities to investigate and refine the use of the workshop format in the presentation of technical information, theories, and viewpoints.

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