

FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

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American Folklife Center • The Library of Congress



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 the Archive of Folk Culture, 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.

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FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Interns

Interns in Washington don't have a very savory reputation these days, although intern positions, often unpaid, continue to be popular at many federal agencies. *Folklife Center News* can't hope to correct an impression created perhaps by the national media, but

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Cover: The Folk Alliance honored the American Folklife Center with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Alliance's annual conference in Memphis, Tennessee, February 12. Jim Hirsch, executive director of the Old-Time Music School in Chicago and co-chair of the Lifetime Achievement Award Committee (left), presented the award to Judith McCulloh, chair of the Center's Board of Trustees, and Alan Jabbour, director of the Center. Photo by James Hardin

American Folklife Center Receives Folk Alliance Lifetime Achievement Award



Members of the Board of Trustees of the American Folklife Center proudly display the Center's Lifetime Achievement Award at the Folk Alliance conference in Memphis, February 12. From left to right: James Hoy, William Kinney, Judith McCulloh, Juris Ubans, Alan Jabbour, Winston Tabb (Associate Librarian for Library Services at the Library of Congress), and Nina Archabal. Photo by James Hardin

The American Folklife Center has received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the North American Folk Music and Dance Alliance, one of three presented this year in Memphis, Tennessee, at the Folk Alliance's Tenth Anniversary Conference, February 12-15. The other two winners were Jean Richie and Huddie "Lead Belly" Ledbetter.

The Lifetime Achievement Awards program of the Folk Alliance is designed to honor members of the folk community who have made lifelong contributions to sustaining and enriching the

fields of folk music and dance. There are three categories for the awards, for living performers, deceased performers, and for a business or organization that has contributed in non-performing ways, such as recording, archiving, producing, or otherwise facilitating folk music and dance.

The recipients are chosen each year from a list of nominees by a panel of electors who have been in the field for many years and thus have the experience and perspective to judge the lasting nature of the nominees' contributions. Past

honorees have included Pete Seeger, Alan Lomax, Woody Guthrie, Moe Asch, Utah Phillips, and Chris Strachwitz.

The North American Folk Music and Dance Alliance exists to foster and promote traditional, contemporary, and multicultural folk music, dance, and related performing arts in North America. The Folk Alliance seeks to strengthen and advance organizational and individual initiatives in folk music and dance through education, networking, advocacy, and professional and field development.



Folksinger Jean Richie also received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Folk Alliance. She is shown here with folksinger Tom Paxton (left) and award committee co-chair Jim Hirsch. (See Lucy Long's article in this issue for comments on Richie's contributions to the dulcimer tradition in Appalachia.) Photo by James Hardin

Prominent folklorist and former head of the Archive of Folk Culture, Alan Lomax (center) was a visitor at the February meeting of the Center's board of trustees, along with his daughter, Anna Lomax Chairetakis (right). The meeting was held in Memphis to coincide with the Folk Alliance annual conference. Photo by James Hardin



Retiring members of the Center's board of trustees (left to right): Nina Archabal (Minnesota), Carolyn Hecker (Maine), Juris Ubans (Maine), and Judith McCulloh (Illinois). Photo by James Hardin

Appalachian Plucked Dulcimer: Field Recordings in the Archive of Folk Culture

By Lucy Long

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, popular images of the dulcimer have tended towards the romantic, associating the instrument with the notion of Appalachian residents as “our Elizabethan ancestors” and with simplistic conceptions of folk music as a spontaneous, natural outpouring of musical tradition. Repertoires were assumed to be limited to older pieces (balladry, play party songs, and religious hymnody harking back to the British Isles) and playing styles limited to simple melodic lines with drone accompaniments, requiring little technical skill or musical talent. Even the origins of the instrument itself were shrouded in the mists of the past, leaving it open to speculation and mythologizing. Popular magazines and literature portrayed the dulcimer as an ancient instrument played by barefoot, long-haired maidens who sat in front of their log cabins, dreamily strumming their hand-hewn instruments while singing medieval English epics.

My own Appalachian heritage made me suspicious of this image. My relatives in northwestern North Carolina did not seem very Elizabethan to me, and most of them had not seen a dulcimer until I showed them one. My own introduction to the instrument was in high school, in the early 1970s, when an older brother bought one at a gift shop in a summer resort town. Then, when I heard mountain residents play the dulcimer, it sounded much more vigorous and energetic than the few existing commercial recordings.



Stanley Hicks, 1980. Photo by Lucy Long

Thus began a lifelong interest in the dulcimer, one that led me to, among other places, the Archive of Folk Culture at the Library of Congress, where I did an internship in 1978. Archive head Joe Hickerson quickly discovered my interest and has continuously fed my enthusiasm and curiosity over the years. In 1983 I began a finding aid on the dulcimer, noting down the tuning, playing style, and repertoire of each recording in the Archive; and I have incorporated this work into numerous papers and articles, including my doctoral dissertation. In 1997 I re-

ceived a grant from the Parsons Fund for Ethnography in the Library of Congress, which I used to cover travel expenses to continue my research. The Archive's materials have enabled me to speculate more knowledgeably about the musical development of the dulcimer.

The Archive's holdings contain over forty-one collections that include dulcimer material. The earliest recordings were made in 1934 at the American Folk Song Festival in Ashland, Kentucky. Other record-



Edd Presnell making a dulcimer at Craftsman's Fair in Asheville, North Carolina. Travel Information Division, Department of Conservation, Raleigh, North Carolina

ings from the 1930s were collected by figures significant in the history of the discipline of folklore as well as the development of the Archive: John A. Lomax, Bess Lomax Hawes, Alan Lomax, Herbert Halpert, Charles Seeger, Sidney Robertson Cowell, Duncan Emrich, and Frank C. Brown. The performers on these recordings include a range of academics (such as I.G. Greer, Artus Moser, and Josiah Combs), knowledgeable collectors and revivalist players (such as Anne Grimes and Maurice Matteson), and native mountain families (such as the Ritchies from east Kentucky, the Hickses and Proffitts from western North Carolina, and the Meltons from Galax, Virginia).

How accurately do these collections reflect the development of the musical traditions of the dulcimer? Fortunately, the Archive also possesses researchers' fieldnotes from the collecting trips, as well as miscellaneous ephemera (newspaper accounts, publicity brochures, lecture notes, itineraries, photographs) and correspondence from collectors and individuals interviewed. These written materials help provide a

fuller picture of the purpose of the recordings and the relationship between the collectors and their informants, a perspective that is needed to understand the selection process behind the pieces and playing styles recorded. These materials, along with my own fieldwork, suggest some preliminary conclusions about the musical traditions of the dulcimer.

Because few historical records of the dulcimer exist, the origins of the instrument were open to speculation until recently, when scholars Ralph Lee Smith and L. Alan Smith reconstructed the history by analyzing older dulcimers. The dulcimer originated in the region that extends from southwestern Pennsylvania to western Virginia, sometime in the late 1700s or early 1800s, through the adapta-

tion of a Germanic folk instrument, the Scheitholt, which was reduced in width and depth and placed on a soundbox. The early style of playing this new instrument reflected a blend of British instrumental traditions and musical sensibilities, including the use of drones and modal melodies.

Easily constructed by hand of local materials, the dulcimer spread through the southern Appalachian region by chance encounters and active peddling of several makers, particularly J. Edward Thomas of Knott County, Kentucky, who had connections to the Hindman Settlement School and made dulcimers between 1871 and 1930, and C.P. Prichard of Huntington, West Virginia, who manufactured what he termed an "American dulcimer" and offered strings through mail order. Both makers used an hourglass form and three strings, possibly helping to make this form the standard.

The dulcimer, however, was not widely known. Frequently, it was associated with a single individual or family, suggesting that it was part of an idiosyncratic tradition.

Variations in shape and construction further suggest "pockets of tradition" rather than a homogeneous, pan-Appalachian regional dulcimer tradition.

Toward the end of the 1800s, the settlement school and crafts movements brought the dulcimer to the attention of outsiders, and it became emblematic of an imagined and romanticized Appalachian culture. This view simultaneously encouraged mountain residents to preserve the dulcimer as it was at the time and discouraged them from developing it further.

After the 1940s, the dulcimer entered the urban northeast folk music revival scene, largely due to Kentucky-born musician Jean Ritchie. Dulcimer making has now become a hobby and cottage industry throughout the United States, dulcimer clubs abound, and a quarterly magazine *Dulcimer Players News* began publication in 1975. Although a wide variety of playing techniques and repertoires have developed, the dulcimer still carries the aura of a simplistic Appalachian folk culture.

The recordings in the Archive challenge the popular stereotype of dulcimer music as domestic, quiet, female, and tied to older styles of music. The individual pieces in the Archive's holdings suggest that the early repertoires of traditional players were much more varied than supposed. There are examples of ballads, older hymns, and play party songs being accompanied by dulcimer, but these do not make up the largest percentage of the repertoire. Dance tunes are the most common, and these recordings reveal that the dulcimer was frequently played with other instruments—banjos, fiddles, guitars. It was played by men as well as women. Recordings also include examples of pieces coming from the popular commercial repertoires of the day and from African-American spirituals and blues.

How much did collectors influence the content of the recordings? Most were seeking older, more traditional forms, and many had time and monetary restrictions that limited their exposure to the cultural contexts in which they

were collecting. An example of a collector actively selecting the repertoire to be recorded comes from a 1939 WPA-sponsored project. In recordings made of the Hicks family of Beech Mountain, North Carolina, the collector sounds impatient and urges them to start singing. The recording makes clear that he is looking for songs that have historical continuity in the family. When his informant mentions that she learned the words of a ballad from another collector, the recording machine is abruptly turned off. When it is turned back on, she introduces another tune, stating hesitantly that she learned this piece "from my mother and my father."

Collectors also tended to seek out those individuals thought to represent tradition, and to select those aspects of an individual's repertoire that fit prevailing academic expectations. The Hicks family again provides an example. In the 1930s Nathan Hicks was "discovered" by collectors. Known within his community as an innovator and experimenter, Hicks was upheld by outsiders as an exemplar of traditional mountain culture and was used as the authoritative source for dulcimer music and older ballads. It is obvious from his correspondence with collectors, however, that Hicks recognized the commercial possibilities of his music. If the older stuff was selling, then that was what he would offer. This attitude, coupled with a sense of hospitality, led him to put down the guitar, pick up the dulcimer, and relearn the songs of the older people in the community. For outsiders with whom he developed strong friendships, such as folksong collectors Frank and Anne Warner, he performed a wider selection from his repertoire.

The Archive's recordings document a wide array of dulcimer playing styles and techniques, and this may reflect collectors' interest in capturing such variation. The use of feather quills canonized by Jean Ritchie seems to have been a local tradition in eastern Kentucky; players elsewhere preferred a thin piece of wood or a stick. Many contemporary mountain players use plastic picks cut from

milk jugs or other recycled plastic objects. There are also accounts, but no recordings, of early players using bows, a practice possibly drawing from northern European folk techniques.

Some early players also used their fingers to strum the strings, either substituting the thumb for a pick or adapting other instrumental playing techniques to the dulcimer, such as the clawhammer style of playing the banjo or fingerpicking techniques of playing guitar. Such adaptations were natural, since there were no dulcimer instruction books to establish standard techniques and the instruments were being disseminated by peddlers who might not have known how to play them.

The portrait of dulcimer music that emerges from the recordings in the Archive of Folk Culture is of a diverse and eclectic mixture of playing techniques and repertoires, which drew upon southern Appalachian musical traditions as well as the popular music of the United States. There was no single tradition of dulcimer music among the mountain people recorded but rather there were many family-based traditions. And rather than

confirm the conservative, nostalgic holding to the past posited by the popular stereotypes, the recordings document an innovative, inventive approach to cultural resources.

Selected Reading

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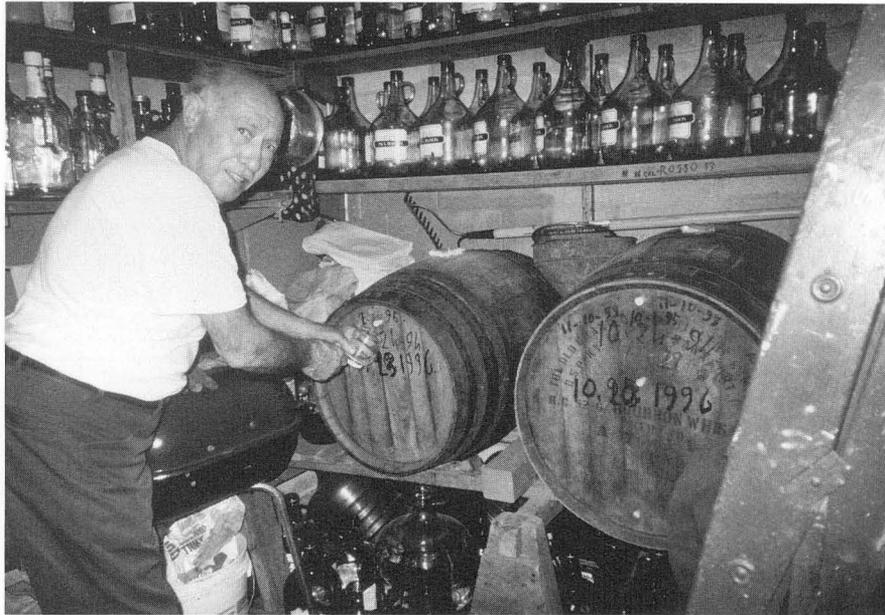
Smith, Ralph Lee. *Appalachian Dulcimer Traditions*. Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1997.

Lucy Long teaches folklore in the Department of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University in Ohio.



Five dulcimers from the collections of George Holbert Tucker. Upright on chair: three-string dulcimer by Edd Presnell of Banner Elk, North Carolina; against tree: four-string dulcimer by Edsel Martin of North Carolina; flat on chair: six-string dulcimer by Bill Davis of Gatlinburg, Tennessee; on stool with feather pick: three-string dulcimer by Frank N. Proffitt of Vilas, North Carolina; on stool, front: three-string dulcimer by Arlo Jeffreys of Roanoke, Virginia. Photo by S. H. Ringo, *The Virginian Pilot*, Norfolk, Virginia

A Summer at the American Folklife Center: My Experiences as an Intern



Vincenzo Scordo, originally from Calabria, Italy, in the basement of his home in Cliffside Park, New Jersey, with barrels of his homemade wine, August 11, 1997. Photo by Simon Phillips

By Simon Phillips

The afternoon sun shines down on this green piece of land as the old man takes me on a walking tour of his backyard. I follow him down a path of wooden planks laid across the moist summer earth and find myself deep in the garden. Rows of beans stretch skyward along their guideposts as nearby tomato plants collapse under the weight of their fruit. A chicken coos softly from a hidden coop as a hunting dog greets us from his pen across the yard. Crossing under the shade of the grape arbor, Guisepppe offers me some of his early harvest. Excellent! Inside the home, friends and family have gathered. I will stay with these new companions well into the night, drinking home-made red wine, listening to traditional southern Italian tarantella music, and eating home-made sausage and cheese. [Excerpt from senior thesis, based on field research, summer 1997]

How unexpected are the paths of life's journeys. During the win-

ter of 1996 I first traveled to the home of Vincent Scordo, a college friend whose family lives in Cliffside Park, a veritable "Little Italy" of New Jersey. It was there that I first heard the Calabrian dialects of Italian, tasted home-made wine, and pondered long and thoughtfully the curious sight of fig trees bowed over and wrapped up in burlap and blankets against the chill of a frozen winter. Even in the depths of January, entering the Scordo's home and neighborhood gave me the impression of having traveled a distance of thousands of miles culturally, across the Atlantic and into the rugged Mediterranean hill country of rural southern Italy.

I carried my impressions of a transplanted Italian culture back to school with me to the University of New Hampshire. In the fall semester of 1996, I took a course taught by Prof. Burt Feintuch entitled "Folklore and Folklife." From Professor Feintuch I learned the approach that folklorists take

towards traditional culture and how the traditions I observed in New Jersey could be understood as examples of folklife. He also told me about an internship opportunity working with the collections in the Archive of Folk Culture at the American Folklife Center in the Library of Congress. In the spring of 1997, I received a grant from UNH, under Professor Feintuch's sponsorship, to conduct "Archival and Ethnographic Research on Italian-American Gardening and Wine-Making Traditions." By June 1997, I was on my way to Washington.

On June 20, I made my way from a dormitory room at Georgetown University to the Capitol South Metro stop and then up to the Jefferson Building at the Library of Congress. Soon after entering the Folklife Reading Room, I met my new boss, Joe Hickerson, and soon I had my first assignment. Joe asked for my name,

phone numbers, and addresses on a three-by-five notecard—type-written. Having been raised as part of the “computer generation,” preparing this notecard was an intimidating task. The last time I could remember sitting in front of a typewriter was 1989, when I was fifteen, during a typing class in my freshman year of high school. Nevertheless, as I fumbled through several versions written and rewritten on a number of three-by-fives, the lesson was clear and the introduction fitting. Here at the Archive, things were to be done the right way—even if that meant the old-fashioned way.

The stipulations of my university grant obligated me to spend a significant portion of my time in Washington completing research on my project. As an intern, it was important that I spend as much time as possible on assignments of direct importance to the Folklife Center. Arrangements made ahead of time with Joe ensured that a balance between the two would be possible. As an intern, I would focus on three major tasks. First, I would work toward the completion of an already-begun “finding aid” of materials in the Archive of Folk Culture related to the traditions of Italian Americans. Second, I would aid Dance Heritage Coalition archivist Michelle Forner in processing materials related to the Center’s Italian-Americans in the West Project. With these two jobs as a starting point, I hoped to further my research on the topics of the history and folklife of Italian Americans, with a particular emphasis on migration out of southern Italy and the nature and significance of gardening and wine-making traditions. Such research would lay a foundation for a senior thesis and prepare me for my own field research, to be completed later during the summer following my internship.

Finding aids function as indexes to the cultural information that the Folk Archive has accumulated over the years. Working on an IBM word processing system, I rewrote drafts of entries that had been previously prepared, while researching files throughout the Archive in order to write new ones. In doing so, I learned how to use a word-processing system

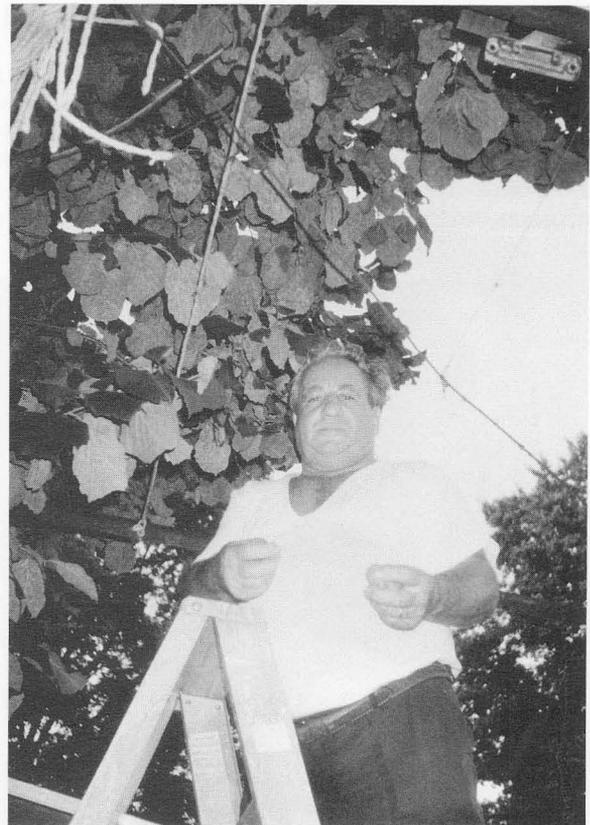
new to me, while gaining knowledge of various material that would prove helpful in my research.

But I also had a personal interest in the Library of Congress collections. As the grandson of a folksinger active in the New York City region until quite recently, I was curious to see if any record of his musical activities could be found, either in the Archive or elsewhere in the Library. Once I told Joe of my interests, he became an active and dedicated participant in my search. We spent time each day over the next week scanning Archive and Library collections. Through this exercise I learned of the Music Division, found out where records are processed and stored, and how information on folk music has been recorded and indexed, but we failed to find a record album in the collections. Finally, in the Copyright Office, we came across a copyright record of an LP album of folk music recorded by my grandfather, Murray Phillips, in the 1950s. Working with Joe, my family and I donated a copy of *Murry Phillips Sings*, recorded on Truetone Records in the late 1970s, so my grandfather’s music is now included in the Library’s collections.

My work with Michelle Forner proved rewarding as well. The Center’s Italian-Americans in the West Project, which surveyed the folklife of Italian Americans in a five-state region during a period from 1989 to 1992, resulted in a considerable number of interviews recorded on reel-to-reel tapes. In order to be more accessible to researchers and the general public, these tapes required copying onto cassettes. I spent much of my time working for Michelle in the

completion of this task. For someone interested in the folklife of Italian Americans, such as myself, it was a fortuitous assignment. Once I mastered the art of correctly looping and turning the audio tape on the recording machine, I gained access to an incredibly rich source of information on the lives and culture of Italian-Americans. At the same time, I learned how professionals such as Michelle organize and label cultural materials, lessons that would prove important later in the summer when I needed to record and label the collection of tapes and photographs from my own fieldwork.

The life stories and other cultural information contained in the tape-recorded interviews were very useful to my study. After listening, I decided to look at the way the folklife of Italian Americans is an important part of the ties that bind families and communities. While the focus of my project remained on the wine-making and gardening traditions of southern



Guiseppe DeFranco, originally from Calabria, Italy, in his backyard gathering nuts from a “Valarn” nut tree, Belleville, New Jersey, August 13, 1997. Photo by Simon Phillips

Italians in New Jersey, I extended its scope to include the family and other social implications of this folklife. Before I could head for the field, however, I had much more research to do in the Library.

At first, navigating the Library's massive resources seemed an overwhelming task. During this portion of my research, I received critical help and guidance from Center folklife specialist David Taylor, who directed the Italian-Americans in the West Project. Through David's help, I learned how to use the various databases associated with the Library's Main Reading Room. Research on these databases led me to books and periodical articles on Italian history, Italian immigration to the United States, and wine-making and gardening in ethnic communities. At David's suggestion I visited the Library's Geography and Map Division, where I found a map that included Pelligrina, the small southern Italian village from which my friend's parents had migrated many years ago.

Prior to my departure for New Jersey, Center staffer Peter Bartis loaned me a tape recorder and microphone through the Center's Equipment Loan Program. As I struggled through the last few days of my internship, completing projects and wrapping up loose

ends, Peter made sure I knew the basics of recording equipment operations, such as where the "on" button was located (a surprisingly challenging task for this technically challenged history major). In August, I said my final farewells to Washington and headed north for the Garden State.

On August 11, I set out through the notorious New Jersey traffic for my first appointment with my friend Vinny's grandparents, Vincenzo and Roseanna Scordo. Prior to my interview, Vinny informed me that these two natives of southern Italy maintained the largest garden in the family, and that most of the Scordo's wine-making activity occurred in their backyard "wine cellar." Although confident of my preparation, I approached this first interview with nervousness and trepidation. As I neared Cliffside, I reviewed the preparations I had made. My list of questions, tape recorder, microphone, audio tapes, notebook, camera, and extra film were all in place and I felt ready for fieldwork.

Following David Taylor's advice, I first asked my informants basic questions that indicated my interest in certain subject areas, and then allowed them to elaborate and follow up on those with

which they were most comfortable. As a result, each interview developed in its own way and contributed to different aspects of the project. During that first appointment with the Scordos, I learned about Mr. Scordo's process for wine-making. I also learned about what kinds of vegetables he grew, where they were from, and how Mrs. Scordo used them in her cooking. For my second interview I spoke with all the members of Vinny's immediate family, who told me about the importance of family to southern Italians and about the way the traditions they sustained here in America were key to the maintenance of a meaningful family life.

My third interview, with the DeFrancos of Belleville, came about as a result of a contact I had made at the Folklife Center with folklorist Anna Lomax Chairetakis, who has completed extensive research on southern Italian musical traditions in America. When I mentioned my project to her, she suggested that I contact the DeFranco family, who are remarkable traditional musicians. The interview began as an exploration of their extensive vegetable garden and wine cellar and then evolved into a joyous and celebratory evening of live southern Italian tarantella music. Though not directly related to my subject, musical traditions are very important to this family, and I began to see the interconnectedness of one folklife tradition to another.

Returning to school in September, I found that I had amassed an incredible amount of written, tape-recorded, and photographic material for my project. Although sorting through and reviewing the data took no less than a semester, I was well prepared for the task by my experience as an intern. I left Washington with a broadened perspective on the subject of folklife and the skills for completing my own fieldwork and writing a senior thesis.

Simon Phillips graduated this year from the University of New Hampshire. After spending the summer in Calabria, Italy, he will become a teaching intern at a high school in Connecticut.



Simon Phillips (right) with his senior-thesis advisor, Burt Feintuch, at the University of New Hampshire. Photo by Doug Prince, Instructional Services, Dimond Library, University of New Hampshire

Interns and Volunteers at the American Folklife Center

By Joseph C. Hickerson
and James B. Hardin

The first volunteers at the Archive of Folk Culture, established 1928 in the Music Division as the Archive of American Folk-Song, were relatives of the staff: Mrs. Robert W. Gordon and Roberta Gordon, for example, the wife and daughter of the first head. In 1938, Pete Seeger became the first non-family member to volunteer, working under the supervision of Alan Lomax.

In the early sixties, occasional volunteers did typing and performed other routine clerical tasks. For example, Peter Hooven typed an inventory of reference disc copies of Archive recordings, which a succession of folksingers listened to and learned a number of songs therefrom in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Ivy League colleges sponsored a "Summer on the Hill" program, designed primarily for work at congressional offices, and in 1963 Naomi Ware from Vassar College insisted that she be al-

lowed to work at the Folk Archive as part of that program.

In the late sixties, student protests at colleges and universities resulted in new academic schedules, which in turn allowed students more freedom to plan for internships away from campus. Many came to work in the Archive from Oberlin College, the alma mater of Folk Archive head Joseph C. Hickerson. Hickerson began to distribute flyers advertising internships at folk festivals, professional meetings, and other gatherings of persons interested in folklore, folk music, and ethnomusicology, and eventually the program was included in published listings.

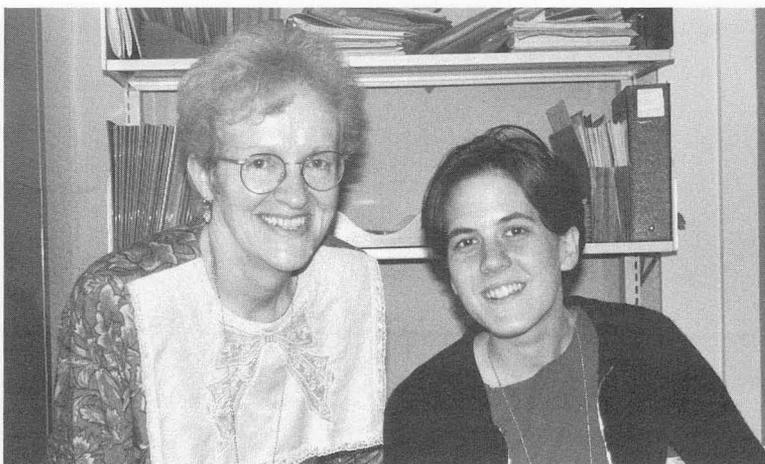
Hickerson continued to coordinate the intern and volunteer program when the Archive became part of the American Folklife Center in 1978. Legislation for the American Folklife Center, the Center for the Book, and the Division of the Blind and Physically Handicapped specifically allowed for volunteers.



Marie Walter has helped edit a finding aid, filed correspondence in the Folklife Reading Room, and done transcriptions of letters from the John A. Lomax collections.

At the Center interns work part time or full time throughout the year, with occasional "peaks" of volunteer activity during the summer months. Volunteers who live in the Washington area often work one day a week. Volunteers do typing and filing, work on bibliographies, and compile reference and finding aids. Many assist with special projects that are underway, such as organizing and labeling material from documentary field collections. Debbie McClatchy, a folksinger with an international reputation, drove to Washington from her home in Pennsylvania once a month for a number of years to volunteer, as a way of paying back the Archive for help it had given her with her researches.

Both volunteers and interns say they work here because they love folklife materials and are devoted to the collections in the Archive of Folk Culture. Many interns become folklorists, and, because the program has been underway for over thirty years, many of those in the professional folklore community today have had a personal experience working at the Library of Congress.



Carol Moran (left) has compiled finding aids, reshelved books and filed reference material in the corporate and subjects files in the Reading Room, and filled requests for publications. Rachel Howard (right), now a temporary employee for the National Digital Library Program, was an unpaid intern. Like so many other interns at the American Folklife Center, Howard compiled a state finding aid (hers on West Virginia), a listing of material available for study in the Archive of Folk Culture.

Joseph C. Hickerson: A Folk Archivist's Folk Archivist

By James Hardin

Joseph C. Hickerson, head of the Archive of Folk Culture, head of acquisitions for the American Folklife Center, reference librarian extraordinaire, folksinger, storyteller, and punster, retired on July 2, after thirty-five years at the Library of Congress. Hickerson chose the date in part because his term of service equaled one-half the life of the Archive, which was established in the Music Division on July 1, 1928.

Hickerson came to the Library of Congress in June 1963 as a reference librarian in the Archive of Folk Song. He became its eighth head in 1974. Several years after the Archive became part of the American Folklife Center (in 1978), Hickerson became head of acquisitions, but he continued to serve in the capacity of reference librarian and chief resource person for many researchers from around the country and the world. Folksong scholar Norm Cohen writes, "On many occasions I have telephoned Joe for details about a song that I had only some dim clues about—a few notes here, a phrase there—and have heard him sing to me twenty-eight verses from memory over the telephone before I could even find a pencil and paper."

Hickerson was born in Highland Park, Illinois, in 1935, and spent his early years in New Haven, Connecticut, where he graduated from high school in 1953. His interest in folk music began in earnest while he was a student at Oberlin College, where he received his B.A. degree in physics in 1957. He met Pete Seeger while at Oberlin, and in 1960 he composed the fourth and fifth verses for a song Seeger had recently recorded, "Where Have All the Flowers Gone," based on a Russian folksong text. By chance, Seeger heard the new verses being sung at Camp Woodland in

Phoenecia, New York, where Hickerson was working that summer. He noted them down and they were used subsequently in popular recordings by such artists as The Kingston Trio; Peter, Paul, and Mary; Johnny Rivers, Marlene Dietrich, and Joan Baez. Hickerson earned a master's degree in folklore at Indiana University in 1961, and stayed on until 1963 to do graduate work in folklore and ethnomusicology and to direct the Indiana Folklore Archive.

Hickerson has been bibliographer, council member, and secretary of the Society for Ethnomusicology, chairman of the archiving committee of the American Folklife Society, founder and president of the Folklore Society of Greater Washington, member of the advisory boards for *Sing Out!* and *Foxfire*, a book review editor, music critic, and lecturer. His participation in the folksong revival during the 1960s alerted many persons to the resources at the Archive, attracting such visitors as Judy Collins, Michael Cooney, and

José Feliciano. Cooney showed his appreciation by helping to establish the Friends of the Folk Archive Fund in 1978, and in a note to Hickerson more recently, he wrote, "'Tis said that the service we render others is the rent we pay for our room on earth, and you certainly paid yours, Joe. You were always ready and willing to share your vast knowledge, teach a song, or ferret out a whole clutch of variants for the eager prospector. Your interest was OUR interest."

Notable among Hickerson's activities at the Archive and the Center is his management of an intern program. For the past thirty years, he has been encouraging students to work with the ethnographic materials here, and as a result many of those in the professional folklore community today (including several Library employees) have been able to develop their archival and library skills, pursue their research interests, and make a contribution to the national folk archive.



Joseph C. Hickerson in the Folklife Reading Room playing the guitar that Burl Ives donated to the Folk Archive in 1989. Photo by James Hardin

For even longer than he has been helping others do research at the Library, Joe Hickerson has been entertaining audiences with his guitar and songs, in the Washington, D.C., area, as well as at folk festivals, coffeehouses, and universities throughout the United States. He has recorded three solo albums of folk music for Folk-Legacy Records and may be heard on a number of others, such as a 1968 Folkways LP by The Folksmiths that included the first published recording of "Kum Ba Yah." Backed by an intimate knowledge of the great musical heritage in the Archive's collections, his own performances have earned him the name "folksinger's folksinger." To that accolade might well be added the epithet "folk archivist's folk archivist."

The Board of Trustees of the American Folklife Center presented Hickerson with the following "resolution" at its May Meeting in Washington:

A Resolution of Appreciation

Whereas, Joseph C. Hickerson has indicated his desire to retire from his position as head of the Archive of Folk Culture of the American Folklife Center during July 1998;

Whereas, Joe Hickerson will have completed thirty-five years of service to the Archive of Folk Song and Archive of Folk Culture, this representing one-half of the time these Archives have been in existence;

Whereas, Joe Hickerson has been a constant and continuing influence in attracting collections to the Archive and in helping make these collections known and available to the general public;

Whereas, Joe Hickerson is renowned as a folk musician, both as a vocalist and as a guitarist, and is widely known throughout this nation as a performer who presents folk music in its original style;

Whereas, Joe Hickerson has been of great service to the American Folklife Center and to the Board of Trustees since joining the Center staff in 1978;

Now, Be It Resolved, that the Board of Trustees of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in the City of Washington hereby publishes this Resolution of Appreciation and Recognition to Joseph C. Hickerson for his long and distinguished service to the field of folklife in the United States, to the Archive of Folk Culture, and to the American Folklife Center and its Board of Trustees, and requests that a copy of this resolution be spread upon the minutes of this meeting of the Board of Trustees at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., on this date of May 22, 1998.

The Archive's Greatest Treasure

By Stephen Wade

Washington-area musician and indefatigable Archive researcher Stephen Wade made the following remarks at a workshop entitled "What I Learned from Joe Hickerson," at the Washington Folk Festival, May 31, 1998.

When Joe Hickerson first told me of his retirement plans, he described the decision in terms of numerology. He would retire in July 1998, after thirty-five years at the Library of Congress, which is half of the Folk Archive's seventy years of life. There is a certain mathematical wonder in imagining the sheer size and extent of the nation's largest folklore collection nestled within the marble confines of the world's largest library. And no one knows better what lies within this one corner of the Li-

brary than this former physics major from Connecticut. He reminds me of the old New England sea captain:

The decision as to just where a schooner shall fish depends a great deal on the depth of the water and the character of the bottom. By constant sounding with a lead line an expert captain gets to know the realm beneath the waters very thoroughly. The story is told of a certain old Nantucket skipper who could invariably tell just where the vessel was by examining the soil his lead brought up. In order to perplex him his crew once put some garden loam from the home island in the cup of the lead, made a pretense of sounding, and then asked the skipper to name the

position of the schooner. The old fisherman tasted the dirt on the lead—his favorite method of determining its individuality—and suddenly exclaimed, "Nantucket's sunk, and here we are right over Ma'am Hackett's garden!"¹

In the same way the captain pinpointed his position, Joe locates with accession numbers, shelf lists, finding aids, and bibliographies. With these markers bobbing in a sea of accumulated information, Joe has piloted countless researchers (including me) down the endlessly deep, thoroughly irregular channels of folklore and its study. If you ask him a question, particularly a recondite one, details will flood into his mind, and with one leap for the card catalog, he will

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In Washington for their spring meeting, members of the Center's board of trustees met for lunch with newly appointed chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities William Ferris, an ex officio member of the board. Left to right: William Kinney, Ferris, Charles Trimble, and James Hoy. Photo by Donna Urschel



Lucy Ann Hurston at the Folklife Center, April 14, to discuss possible events and other products growing out of the Center's collections concerning her aunt, Zora Neale Hurston. She is working on a book on the famous folklorist and novelist, to be published by Doubleday. Photo by James Hardin



Three generations of Blooms in the Folklife Reading Room: Jerome, Jonathan, and Jacob, along with Jacob's mother, Frances Goldstein. On vacation in Washington from their home in Boston, the Blooms saw a reference in *Fodor's 1998 Pocket Washington, D.C.* to a Library of Congress recording of Brer Rabbit folktales and stopped by the Folklife Reading Room to listen to *Animal Tales Told in the Gullah Dialect*, told by Albert H. Stoddard of Savannah, Georgia. Mrs. Bloom said they wanted to spend their time in the nation's capital doing "other than the usual tourist things." Photo by David Taylor

fathom a route that can bring you home. Joe provides living proof of what the Library of Congress knows to be its greatest asset, those reference librarians Dr. Billington, the Librarian of Congress, calls its "knowledge navigators."

Many also know that Joe's day job of managing this collection has taken place against a lifetime of his own song-making. From one role to another, whether culling references from what he sometimes calls "ephemeral publications" or marveling at the ties between singers and their songs, Joe revels in the data that brings lives together. When Erika Brady, now a professor of folklore, but once an intern at the Archive, was visiting and in walked Duncan Emrich, its former head in the late nineteen-forties, Joe instantly recognized the possibilities and said, "Duncan, meet Brady!"²

Called on today to acknowledge what I've learned from Joe Hickerson, from this man who is himself a folktale—"Why, that's Joe Hickerson, he knows more songs than anyone else"—I want to mention a project I recently completed. It's an album called *A Treasury of Library of Congress Field Recordings*. This collection is indebted to Joe Hickerson, who inspired my research at the Library over a period of twenty-three years and provided me with a compendium of information. There can be no question that Joe Hickerson, who knows where everything is, is the treasurer of the national folk archive and its chief treasure.



Bluesman Mississippi John Hurt at the Library of Congress recording studio in March 1964. Behind him are Rae Korson, head of the Archive of Folk Song and Joseph C. Hickerson, then the Archive's reference librarian. Library of Congress photo

Notes

1. From Clifton Johnson, *New England, A Human Interest Geographical Reader* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917), pp. 84-86.

2. Hickerson's wordplay comes from the bad-man ballad called "Duncan and Brady." Many know its refrain, "He's been on the job too long."

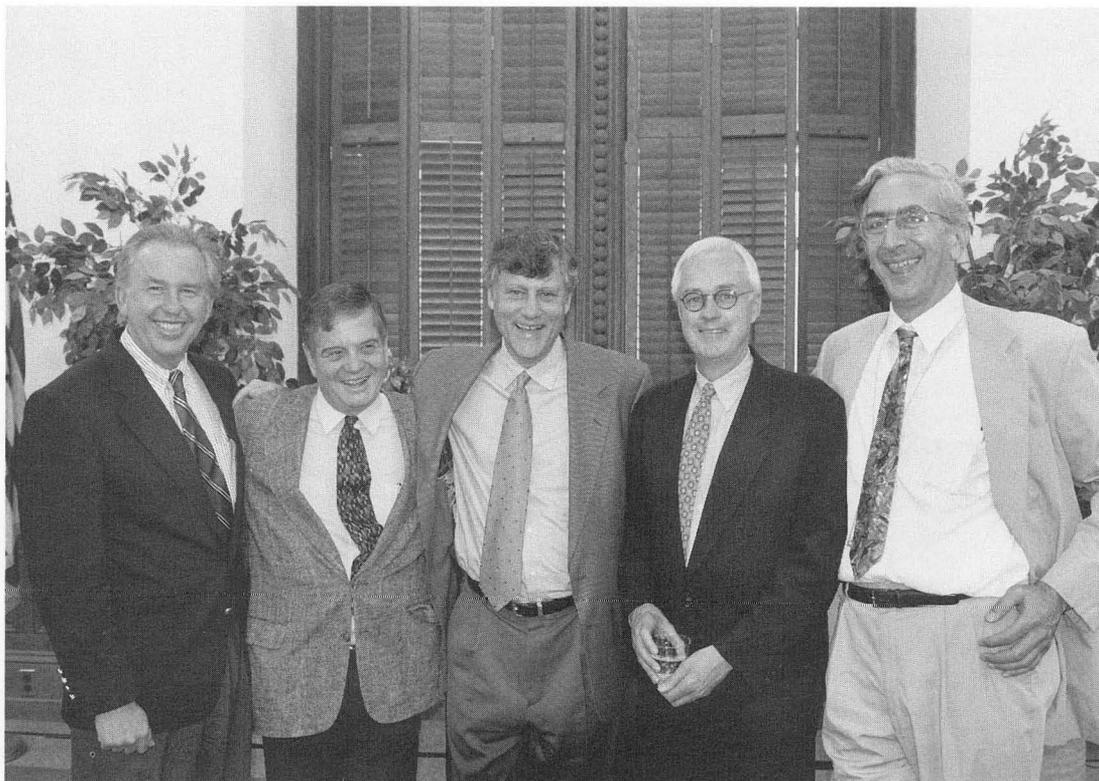
EDITOR'S NOTES from page 2

the summer issue offers two articles by former Folklife Center interns whose work with the materials in the Archive of Folk Culture has contributed to their academic careers and deepened their understanding of their chosen fields of interest. A recent graduate of the University of New Hampshire, Simon Phillips is proud to say he has worked at the national folk archive in the na-

tional library. Lucy Long, like many professional folklorists, also profited from the experience of working at the Library of Congress.

Both authors credit the assistance, guidance, and inspiration of Joseph C. Hickerson, former head of the Archive of Folk Culture, head of acquisitions for the American Folklife Center, and reference librarian extraordinaire. Joe retired on July 2, to the consternation and dismay of many folklife

researchers around the country, and several tributes to his thirty-five years of federal service are included in this issue. Incidentally, Joe has already indicated that he will soon return to the Library as a volunteer, an appropriate new role for one who has so ably directed the volunteer and intern program at the Archive and the Center.



A gathering of Washington-area folklorists at the swearing-in ceremony for William Ivey, newly appointed chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, May 28. Left to right: Dan Sheehy, director of Heritage and Preservation, National Endowment for the Arts; Joe Wilson, director, National Council for the Traditional Arts; William Ferris, chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities, who administered the oath; William Ivey; and Alan Jabbour, director, American Folklife Center. Photo by David Taylor

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