

Folklife Today

August 2019: More Hidden Folklorists

Steve Winick: Welcome to the Folklife Today podcast. I'm Stephen Winick, and I'm here with my colleague John Fenn.

John Fenn: Greetings, everyone!

Steve Winick: We're folklorists at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress. John is the head of Research and Programs, and I'm the Center's writer and editor, as well as the creator of the blog *Folklife Today*, which you can find at blogs.loc.gov/folklife

John Fenn: And today on the folklife Today Podcast, we're going to talk about more Hidden Folklorists. As Steve explained a few episodes ago, in the idea for "Hidden Folklorists" he was inspired by the book and film "Hidden Figures," and some public events we held at the Library of Congress which focused on that story. The initial idea behind "hidden folklorists" was people whose folklore work was insufficiently recognized for a variety of reasons: either they were women or African Americans at a time when contributions from those groups were generally under-recognized, or just general bad luck or mitigating factors.

Steve Winick: and I guess "mitigating factors" might apply to the first Hidden Folklorist we'll talk about this time, a man named Charles J. Finger.

John Fenn: Sounds good. So, Steve, you wrote about Charles Finger on the blog. How did you come across him? And just who was Charles J. Finger?

SW: well, in brief he was a writer, and I first came across him when I found his book, *Frontier Ballads*, in a used bookshop in Maryland. Jennifer Cutting was with me on that little trip, and helped me research Finger, so she's here to talk a little about him too.

John Fenn: Hi Jennifer

JC: Hi everyone!

John Fenn: So what's in *Frontier Ballads*?

Jennifer Cutting: *Frontier Ballads* contains a collection of traditional folksongs, including cowboy standards like "The Cowboy's Dream" and "The Hell-Bound Train," outlaw ballads like "Sam Bass" and "Jesse James," a few classic ballads

like “Our Goodman” (which Steve wrote about on the blog), and some broadside standards like “The Flying Cloud” and “Morrisey and the Russian Sailor.” It even contained few sea shanties, including “Reuben Ranzo” and “Blow the Man Down.”

John Fenn: So Steve's brought in his copy and looking at it, I'm very impressed with the woodcuts as well.

Steve Winick: Yes, there are great woodcut illustrations by Paul Honore, some of which are colored as well. And another thing that's exciting to folklorists is that *Frontier Ballads* contains a narrative explanation of where and from whom Finger heard each song. It's a wide-ranging tale and it shows that he had spent time in South America, including Patagonia and as far south as Cape Horn, as well as in New Mexico, Texas, Arkansas, and other parts of the United States.

John Fenn: And in the book you also read about his time as a sailor, right—finding out that he had been shipwrecked? It all just seems like a fascinating book!

Jennifer Cutting: Yes and to clinch the deal, how about we read the books subtitle?

John Fenn: Okay.

Steve, Okay, so again the book is *Frontier Ballads*. And the subtitle is:

SONGS FROM LAWLESS LANDS

WITH SOME OF THEIR TUNES

AS

HEARD AND SET DOWN

BY

CHARLES J. FINGER

MANY HERE PRINTED FOR THE FIRST TIME

TOGETHER WITH A TRUE ACCOUNT OF THE MANNER OF
THEIR SINGING BY

GOLD HUNTERS IN THE ANDES, MEN ON SHIPBOARD, HARD-CASES

WHO WERE BEACH COMBERS, FELLOWS IN THE CALABOOSE,

SOUTH SEA SMUGGLERS, SEALERS, BARTENDERS,

AND SOME WHO HAVE SINCE ACHIEVED FAME.

John Fenn: Wow!

Jennifer Cutting: I know, right? So Steve is deciding whether to buy this book, but something about Charles J. Finger sounded really familiar to me, so I grabbed my cell phone and I did a quick google search, and I found out that we actually have four recordings of his singing in the archive.

Steve Winick: Yup. It turns out he came here to the Library of Congress in 1937, and was recorded by John and Alan Lomax in the Coolidge Auditorium. Let's hear his recording of the sea shanty "The Amsterdam Maid."

Charles J. Finger: A Seaman's chantey sung by old-time sailors, sung by Charles J. Finger.

In Amsterdam I met a maid
Mark well what I do say!
In Amsterdam I met a maid
And she was mistress of her trade
I'll go no more a roving with you fair maid
A Roving, Roving, since Roving's been my ru-u-i-n
I'll go no more a roving with you fair maid

I touched this young maid on the knee
Mark well what I do say!
I touched this young maid on the knee
Said she "young man, you're very very free"
I'll go no more a roving with you fair maid
All together, boys!
A Roving, Roving, since Roving's been my ru-u-i-n
I'll go no more a roving with you fair maid

John Fenn: again, that was Charles J. Finger singing "The Amsterdam Maid" here at the Library of Congress in 1937. So, you found out he had made these recordings, and at that point, how could you NOT buy the book?

Steve Winick: exactly. And once I read that book, I became curious and read some of his other books too.

John Fenn: So now you know a little more about him. What should we know?

Steve Winick: Well, Finger was born in Willesden, England, in 1867. His father was from Germany, his mother from Ireland, and the family moved to a middle-

class neighborhood of London when Finger was a child. As a teenager, he rebelled against the kind of Victorian strictures of his home, spending time in the servants' quarters and in the streets whenever he could get away. He briefly attended King's College, London, but he left without a degree, and then in the mid-1880s, he studied music in Frankfurt, Germany. His parents immigrated to the United States in 1887, but Finger remained in England, where he became involved with the labor reform movement and the Fabian Society of socialists. He moved in musical and literary circles, and his friends and acquaintances included William Morris and H. G. Wells. In 1890, he set out on a vacation, but he ran out of money in the Canary Islands, and joined the crew of a ship bound for Chile. And between 1890 and 1895, he traveled around South America, working as a shepherd, a gaucho, a gold prospector, a fur trapper, and a dealer in sealskins. And then in 1893, he served as an overland guide for the Franco-Russian Ornithological Expedition to Tierra del Fuego.

John Fenn: wow, that's quite a busy life!

Jennifer Cutting: yes, and he was only just getting started! He went to Texas in 1896, where he found a job in San Angelo herding sheep. And then in 1898, he established the San Angelo Music Conservatory and worked there until 1904, teaching music lessons and arranging concerts and tours. He also worked as a union organizer. And he became a United States citizen.

In 1902, Finger got married and he and his wife started a family, so naturally he needed to make more money. So he joined one of the booming industries of the time, the railroad. He began as a boilermaker's helper in a railroad shop and ended up as one of the directors of the Ohio River and Columbus Railway Company.

John Fenn: Wow, he had quite a lot of careers! But at the beginning of the episode, Steve said that, in short, he was a writer?

Steve Winick: Yes, believe it or not, he accomplished more as a writer than in these other fields. While he was in Texas in the 1890s, he began writing newspaper and magazine articles for the San Angelo Standard, the Houston Labor Journal, Searchlight magazine, and other Texas publications. But he didn't get serious until 1916, when he sent a story manuscript to William Marion Reedy, who was editor of The Mirror, which was a nationally renowned magazine of literature and politics based in St. Louis.

John Fenn: So did the Mirror accept the story?

Jennifer Cutting: Well funnily enough, they rejected it. But Reedy encouraged Finger, advising him to write “imaginative stories based on fact,” what today we might call “creative nonfiction.” And Finger took his advice.

John Fenn: so how did that work out?

Steve Winick: In 1919, Reedy bought three of Finger’s stories and assigned him to review several books, including H.L. Mencken’s *The American Language*. Of course, Reedy knew that Finger was an experienced manager in the railroad industry, and in 1920, in what seemed like a form of succession planning, Reedy offered Finger a job managing *The Mirror* while he took a trip to California. Reedy also promised Finger an ongoing role at the magazine after his return. Finger later wrote in his autobiography: “Reedy and I privately and tentatively planned a glorified *Mirror* in which we were to be co-workers in a way to be presently decided.”

John Fenn: So that would have been a big life change for Finger.

Jennifer Cutting: yes, Finger was living in Ohio, but he bought a farm outside Fayetteville, Arkansas, where he then installed his family, went to St. Louis to run the day-to-day operations of *The Mirror* until Reedy returned from his trip.

John Fenn: And what happened when Reedy got back?

Steve Winick: Sadly, he never did get back!

John Fenn: How come?

Steve Winick: He died suddenly in July 1920, while still on his trip to California. It was really sad because only an hour or so before his death he had written Finger a letter filled with praise for his writing and his handling of the magazine’s affairs, which Finger reproduced in his autobiography.

John Fenn: So was Finger able to continue on at the *Mirror*?

Steve Winick: Sadly, no. The *Mirror* was bought by an investor, and ultimately scrapped. I checked the last few issues in the stacks of the Library of Congress, and Finger was listed as “Editor in Charge” but only for the couple of issues still in the works when Reedy died. Up until then, Reedy was still listed as editor. So up until then, he was only credited on his own articles, although Finger did write all the editorial columns while Reedy was away. So if you're discerning, you can tell that Finger must have been the editor during that period. So, a couple of months after Reedy died, Finger was out of a job almost before it began.

John Fenn: A major setback.

Jennifer Cutting: Yes, but Finger was smart. As the last guy in the office, he realized he had some of the most important assets of the magazine, and they were things no one else would care if he used.

John Fenn: What do you mean?

Steve Winick: Well, first of all, he copied the subscriber list, which the new owner wasn't planning to use once the magazine was shuttered. And he realized he had the goodwill of the subscribers, to whom he could legitimately say he'd been the managing editor for the last few months of the Mirror, and if they liked the magazine they liked his work. And he used those assets to start his own magazine, which he called "All's Well, or the Mirror Repolished."

John Fenn: And how did that go?

Steve Winick: It went great. All's Well was very well received, and Finger published it almost single-handedly for 15 years, ceasing in 1935. Since it was work he could do from anywhere, he moved to Fayetteville to be with his family, and spent the rest of his life there. Through the magazine he came in contact with many writers who encouraged and helped him in his own career, especially Carl Sandburg, who became a good friend.

John Fenn: So is that his path to writing books?

Jennifer Cutting: Exactly! His friends in the industry, like Mencken and Sandburg, helped him along, and his association with the magazine was a great entrée to the publishing world as well. So once he started, he was incredibly prolific. Steve found that Finger wrote over 50 books in the last 20 years of his life. And many of those were in the Little Blue Books series.

John Fenn: that was that initiative of the Haldeman-Julius Publishing Company to create low-price paperback pocketbooks to help out the working class, right?

Steve Winick: Exactly. And we have a big collection of Little Blue Books in the Rare Books Division at the Library of Congress. And his books were really wide-ranging. He wrote biographies of Mark Twain, Robert Burns, P. T. Barnum, and Mohammed.

Jennifer Cutting: And then he wrote anthologies of historical stories with fantastic titles: "Romantic Rascals," "Valiant Vagabonds," "Courageous Companions," "A Book of Strange Murders," and "A Book of Gallant Rogues."

Steve Winick: And, on a somewhat more serious note, during the New Deal era, Finger was employed by the Arkansas Writers Program as the original editor of the Arkansas state guidebook, but he passed away before that project was completed. So Finger really was one of the most prolific and well regarded authors in the state of Arkansas at that time.

John Fenn: and that's where he made his mark as a "Hidden Folklorist," correct?

Jennifer Cutting: Yes, he wrote several books with serious folklore content. The most famous of these was the 1924 children's book "Tales From Silver Lands," a collection of folktales from South America, which was awarded the Newbery Medal in 1925. "Tales From Silver Lands" was one of the first children's books to feature South American folktales from indigenous peoples. Finger also included contextual information about how he heard the stories and the people who told them.

Steve Winick: Another of his books was the 1924 "Robin Hood and His Merry Men," which was Little Blue Book no. 538. It's interesting that, in his introduction, Finger alludes to the folkloristic theory that Robin Hood is connected to such figures as Odin in Teutonic mythology, and that his various combats are symbolic of the seasons, but he dismisses that idea as "little less than nonsense." Then he presents some of the best known Robin Hood stories and ballads, including "Friar Tuck," "Guy of Gisborne," and "Robin Hood and the Bishop of Hereford," as well as more obscure pieces such as "The Noble Fisherman," in which Robin leaves the greenwood to try his hand as a commercial fisherman!

John Fenn: Ha, that's weird! So what format does he use for these stories?

Jennifer Cutting: For some tales, he prints an entire ballad text. For others, he retells the story in his own prose. And then for some, he summarizes parts of the story but quotes from the ballads to fill in the details. His book is pretty unusual for its inclusion of traditional ballad texts in a book intended for a non-scholarly audience.

John Fenn: Interesting! And what other folklore books did he publish, Steve?

Steve Winick: Well, another book he wrote for the Haldeman-Julius company was "Sailor Chanties and Cowboy Songs" in 1923. And this was the precursor to Frontier Ballads and the kernel from which that later book grew. "Sailor Chanties and Cowboy Songs" established Finger as a very interesting figure among those who wrote down and published folksongs, because there were other former sailors

who collected chanteys, and other former cowboys who collected cowboy songs, but there were few people who were both! So, Finger's biography provided him with a claim to be one of the most authentic purveyors of these types of folksongs to the reading public.

Jennifer Cutting: And another interesting thing is that, to fit the theme of his later book "Frontier Ballads," Finger cut out many of the sailor's songs that had appeared in "Sailor Shanties and Cowboy Songs." He only included sailor's songs in the later book when he remembered them being sung in frontier situations. So the earlier book includes many more sea songs and more discussion of them.

Steve Winick: In fact, one of the songs Finger sang for the Lomaxes in 1937, "Away for the Rio Grande," was published in "Sailor Chanties and Cowboy Songs" but then omitted from Frontier Ballads.

John Fenn: All right, Let's hear it!"

Charles J. Finger: A Chantey, sung by schoonermen on the South American coast.
By Charles J. Finger of Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Our cook he was a very dirty man
Sail away for the Rio Grande
He'll cook the food as dirty as he can
Sail away for the Rio Grande
Heave away, me boys, Heave away, me boys
Heave away for the Rio Grande
Our cook he is a very dirty man
Sail away for the Rio Grande

Oh in the bread we found a handful of rocks
Sail away for the Rio Grande
And he boiled the coffee in the captain's socks
Sail away for the Rio Grande
Heave away, me lads, Heave away, me lads
Heave away for the Rio Grande
Our cook he is a very dirty man
Sail away for the Rio Grande

John Fenn: Again, that's "Away for the Rio Grande" as performed by Charles J. Finger—now, did they really pronounce "Rye-oh" that way?

Steve Winick: They did. I have listened to most of our recordings of sailors' speech, and even when they weren't singing they said Rye-o where we would say rio, and even "wined" where we would say "wind."

John Fenn: That's fascinating, and a little bit strange-sounding, I guess! So what else do you learn from "Sailor Chanties and Cowboy Songs?"

Jennifer Cutting: In "Sailor Shanties and Cowboy Songs," Finger tells how he came to write songs down during his travels, a tale he glosses over more lightly in "Frontier Ballads." The story goes that the bosun on the Seatoller, a schooner on which Finger crewed in South America, was a good singer. When the Seatoller was wrecked, the crew had to make their way overland along the coast, including the singing bosun.

Steve Winick: So I'll read some of his prose about the bosun:

He had a face like Mahogany, wrinkled and knotted, his hands were like hams. Gray bearded he was and very, very profane on all occasions, but he had a plangent tenor and from a kind of habit would sing whenever we rested. [...] When we finally reached civilization and the bo's'n found himself with a glass of hot grog in hand, he told me that it was my bounden duty to set down all the sailor chanties he had sung. "For," said he, "since steamers have come in, any clerk or beach-comber acts as a sailor and them old songs will die out like them Romans you hear tell about." The old man went on to say that no man was, nor by any possibility could be a good sailor, unless he knew a chantie for every job on board ship.

After a while, being alone on Isla Isabel in the Magellan country, and finding time hang heavily on my hands, I did as the old salt had advised me and set down such chanties as I remembered, and later, living among the gauchos and cowboys, kept up the custom, but not so carefully as I should have done.

And Finger also says this about the bosun:

I remember one night when we were crouched at the base of a cliff that ran at angle so as to shelter us from the wind so piercingly chill, he gave "The Amsterdam Maid," a song not at all polite, and with references somewhat free, as most sailor songs are, and we joined in the chorus making a kind of part song of it. The old bo's'n drilled us like a choir master and lied outrageously, saying that his father was the inventor of the melody.

John Fenn: And that's the song we just heard, right?

Jennifer Cutting: Yes! And the funny thing is that he tells a different story about hearing "The Amsterdam Maid" in "Frontier Ballads," in which the crew of his wrecked schooner sings it at a wedding on a Patagonian cattle ranch after they make it safely back to civilization.

John Fenn: Maybe it's appropriate that "The Amsterdam Maid" was the song Finger sang twice for the Lomaxes. On the second version, the Lomaxes and "Miss Finger," presumably Charles's daughter, sang along on the choruses.

"Amsterdam Maid," a sailor's chantey, sung by Charles J. Finger of Fayetteville, Arkansas, in the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Auditorium, Library of Congress, June the 5th, 19 hundred and 37.

In Amsterdam I met a maid
Mark well what I do say!
In Amsterdam I met a maid
And she was mistress of her trade
I'll go no more a roving with you fair maid
A Roving, Roving, since Roving's been my ru-u-i-n
I'll go no more a roving with you fair maid

I touched this fair maid on the toe
Mark well what I do say!
I touched this fair maid on the toe
Said she "young man, you're very very low"
I'll go no more a roving with you fair maid
All together, boys!
A Roving, Roving, since Roving's been my ru-u-i-n
I'll go no more a roving with you fair maid
Make fast there, boys!

John Fenn: Again, that was the second version of "The Amsterdam Maid" that Charles Finger recorded for John and Alan Lomax in 1937, right here in the Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress. Now, Steve: in the blog you referred to Finger as a Rogue. What did you mean?

Steve Winick: Well, I think that, among scholars, some of his practices would be, let's say, frowned upon, and that's one reason why he was never considered a folklorist, even though he knew famous folklorists like Vance Randolph and the Lomaxes.

John Fenn: OK, give me an example

Jennifer Cutting: Well, Guy Logsdon looked at the Cowboy Songs in “Frontier Ballads,” and concluded that they were pretty much the same texts Lomax had already published—much closer to Lomax than you’d expect if he was really collecting anything from oral tradition. So he probably copied some texts from other folklorists.

Steve Winick: Also, sometimes he told more than one story about how he heard a song. And that was particularly the case with a song called Annie Breen. He told two versions of how he learned the song, which you can read about in more detail on the blog. But then later in a letter to Alan Lomax that we have in the archive, he admitted that he mostly made the song up. And to add insult to injury, on Finger’s word, John Lomax had included Annie Breen in the second edition of his cowboy songs book, which was not yet published, but in press and too far along to be changed when Finger admitted the song was made up.

John Fenn: And you think some of this pertains to the last song he song for the Lomaxes too, right?

Steve Winick: Yes, the fourth recording he made for the Lomaxes was something called the Old Black Horse. And you can hear him on the disc tell the Lomaxes it was a forecastle song, which means it was sung by sailors in their off hours. But in Frontier Ballads he said it was a cowboy song that he learned from a cowboy named Turner, who professed to have written the song and to have “popularized it in a roundup at Cheyenne.”

Jennifer Cutting: And the funny thing is, it’s neither a cowboy song nor a sailor song, but it’s an English music-hall song! It was written by Corney Grain, who was an active singer and pianist on the London music-hall scene during Finger’s London days, when Finger was himself a music-hall pianist in training. It’s far more likely that he learned “The Old Black Horse” before he left London than he did at sea or in a Texas saloon.

John Fenn: Well, let’s go ahead and hear it!

John A. Lomax: The next song is an English sailor's song, sung by Mr. Charles J. Finger of Fayetteville, Arkansas, June the 5th 19 hundred and 37, in the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Auditorium of the Library of Congress in Washington, District of Columbia. The song was sung for the benefit of the folksong collection in the Library of Congress.

Charles J. Finger:

I was walking one day down Piccadilly Way
Going with the girl of my heart
Which her name was Mary Ann, and she kept a tater can
And her father kept a little donkey cart
Twas that very same day down picadilly Way
That I first saw that old black horse
He was standing on his head, was this noble quadruped
he was playing at a game of pitch-and-toss
He'd a fine Roman nose and he walked upon his toes
Well take my affadavit, tis true
And his neck was all awry and he only had one eye
And his tail was all disheveled and askew
He was age 33 and he had one broken knee
And the other one weren't quite sound
And his two hind legs was more like wooden pegs
Cause he couldn't hardly put them to the gound.
And it's oh-hi-oh, the stall in the stable's empty
Oh-hi-oh, the old black horse is gone.

[More Verses]

A Fo'c's'le [Forecastle] song.

John Fenn: Again, that was "The Old Black Horse," sung by Charles J. Finger. So Steve, what did you conclude about the roguish Finger?

Steve Winick: Basically, I'm glad I got to know him and his work. It has its shortcomings, but it's also a lot of fun. There's more about this on the blog, but my basic conclusion is that AFC's recording of his singing, along with his Newbery Medal for "Tales from Silver Lands, and his other folklore books, surely make him worthy of inclusion as a hidden folklorist.

John Fenn: I'm in agreement. And now we have another Hidden Folklorist to tell you about.

Steve Winick: Yeah, when we started this blog series, what quickly developed was a pattern where we identified a lot of people who were actually quite famous for

other things, and therefore their folklore work took a back seat. And one of the people in that category was someone you wrote about, John.

John. That's right! I wrote about the director Nicholas Ray.

Jennifer Cutting: and most people would know him as the director of the classic movie "Rebel Without a Cause," right?

John. Yes, and not only that movie. You might also know the films They Live by Night, On Dangerous Ground, or Johnny Guitar, which is listed on the National Film Registry, alongside Rebel Without a Cause, and one of my personal favorites....

Steve Winick: and then there were many other feature films he was involved with during the course of his three decade career in cinema. So what was his connection to folklore?

John Fenn: Back when we did our first Hidden Folklorists episode

Steve Winick: which was episode 7 and everyone who hasn't heard it should listen to it!

John Fenn: ha, yes! Back when we did episode 7, we talked about the novelist Ralph Ellison, and just like Ellison, Nicholas Ray was employed by the Works Progress Administration to collect folklore. In fact, in 1938, as an employee of the Recreation Project of the WPA, he was asked to join the Joint Committee on the Folk Arts, a committee of interested professionals throughout the WPA system, which was headed by Benjamin Botkin and Charles Seeger, and also included folklorists Herbert Halpert and Sidney Robertson.

Jennifer Cutting: Wow, many of the heavy hitters in our archive!

John Fenn: right! As part of this committee, he conducted fieldwork in South Dakota for the Recreation Project, resulting in eleven instantaneous disc recordings housed in the Archive of Folk Culture. In fact, let's hear one of those recordings now. This is a local band playing the Irish Washerwoman, and according to the notes with the collection, the singer who butts in with a verse is none other than Nick Ray himself.

Steve Winick: Great, let's hear it!

(Music)

Nick Ray: Did you ever go into an Irishman's Shanty
Where money was scarce and whiskey was plenty,
A three legged stool and a table to match,
And a big swingin' door that you pulled with the latch

(Music)

Steve Winick: So according to the catalog, those recordings were made in Mitchell, South Dakota in October 1939 and include folk songs (including miner, cowboy, and army songs), fiddle tunes, stories about Deadwood, and stories and poems about sheep herding.

John Fenn: Yes, those are the recordings (found in collection number AFC1939/019)—but they don't tell the whole story.

Jennifer Cutting: So what part of the story do the recordings NOT tell?

John Fenn: In correspondence that I included in the blog post, Nicholas Ray makes it clear that he wanted to go beyond Mitchell to other areas of South Dakota and to Michigan. But the government was unable to arrange it. He was frustrated both by being confined to Mitchell and by having only a few hours a day to record, since he had other job duties as part of his assignment there. And he also makes it clear that he had a whole other project in mind chronicling the "origin, development, and decline of the Folk Theatre in America." Apparently bureaucratic busyness supplanted the work he felt he had been charged to do.

Steve Winick: We have NO IDEA what that feels like, right?

John Fenn: NO IDEA at all! That Never happens!

Steve Winick: But, he did capture some gems, So, let's hear a poem about sheep herding from the Mitchell sessions.

John Fenn: OK, this is Archer Gilfillan reciting a short piece of what we might consider "found poetry." That'll make sense after you hear his intro...

The following poem was written on the back of a menu at a banquet of the Montana Wool Growers held in Helena Montana. It was composed by a college graduate who was herding sheep at that time. The poem is as follows:

This morning from a dreamless sleep
I woke to hear the goddamned sheep

Begin their daily serenade
As wandering through an upland glade
They sought with woolly enterprise
To furnish me with exercise
By putting, ere the evening lamp
Eight Miles between themselves and camp

Steve Winick: so what happened after the Mitchell sessions?

John Fenn: Ray's connection to the WPA appears not to have lasted much longer, and he didn't engage in any more folklore collecting activity for which we have any records. But his relationship with Alan Lomax continued, as it would until Ray's death in 1979.

Steve Winick: And that led to some radio work, didn't it?

John Fenn: Yes. At the start of the 1940s, Ray and Lomax began working on the CBS serial radio program *Back Where I Come From*. It ran three evenings a week between August 1940 and February 1941, and each fifteen minute episode showcased live performances of folk music and storytelling by a host of artists—the Golden Gate Quartet, Woody Guthrie, Burl Ives, Pete Seeger, Aunt Molly Jackson, and Josh White among them. Lomax and Ray collaborated on the script writing, while Ray directed the forty-three episodes that aired.

Steve Winick: You can hear some of those episodes over at the Association for Cultural Equity's website, by the way, and here at the AFC, we have a range of manuscript and sound recording holdings documenting the production of *Back Where I Come From*."

Jennifer Cutting: And you mentioned their relationship continuing until Ray's death?

John Fenn: That's right. When Ray passed away in 1979, Alan Lomax made notes for a eulogy or obituary, in which he uses terms like "big warm laughing," "powerful," "friendly," and "supportive." Those notes are part of AFC's manuscript collections.

Steve Winick: Wow, another great Hidden Folklorist!

John Fenn: Indeed, but as the more commonly known historical record shows, Ray shifted toward film as his primary medium of expression. He launched his cinema career with "*They Live By Night*," a sort of pointillist film noir that wrapped

production in 1947. It didn't see release until 1949 due to internal complications at RKO Studios—another professional frustration of many that dotted Ray's career. He never returned directly to the realm of folklore, but his artistic output on through the early 1970s explored the types of individualistic and liminal culture that he had identified during his stint as a fieldworker back in South Dakota. So, even though he didn't think of himself professionally as a folklorist, we'll have him on the team.

Steve Winick: Absolutely! Now it's time to credit OUR team, so big thanks to Jon Gold, our engineer, and to Mike Turpin and Jay Kinloch of the Music Division for help with the studio, and of course to our guest, Jennifer Cutting.

John Fenn: Thanks Jennifer.

JenniferAlso to colleagues throughout the Library of Congress who help us deploy this podcast once we make it. To John and Alan Lomax, Nicholas Ray, Charles J. Finger, and the artists they recorded: the Mitchell Orchestra from Mitchell, South Dakota, which consisted of Clark Kenyon, John Sawyer, and an unknown bones player, and Archer Gilfillan. I'd also like to thank Todd Harvey for help on the research for the Nicholas Ray blog post. Of course, thanks to you too, Steve!

Steve Winick: And to you, John! And thanks to all our listeners. See you next time! But before you go, why don't we hear one more recording by Nicholas Ray to play us out? This is Paul Martin, recorded October 1939 in Mitchell, South Dakota, singing his original cowboy song "The Sunburned Cowboy" on Folklife Today!

Paul Martin: This is Paul Martin, of White River, South Dakota. I lived on a ranch there since I was about two and a half years old. When I was 19, I moved the Chicago and lived there for six months, but I hated the city, and when I came back and started riding the range again, I composed this song:

Oh, I'm a sunburned cowboy riding o'er the range
I don't want the meadow, when I have the plains
When the golden sun sets over the rolling hills
At evening, is when I feel the thrill of ecstasy
I know that in the city I would never dwell
Because the campfire calls me still

Oh I'm a carefree ranger, riding o'er the plains
A cowboys wants are very few, camping on the range

When a million stars come out and light the purple hills
And Coyotes howling at the fading moon
I know that on the prairie I will always stay
To live my lonely cowboy way
Cowboy way, oh, way!

Nicholas Ray: Why don't you like cowboy songs?

Paul Martin: Well, the reason I don't like cowboy songs is from hearing them over the radio and these so-called cowboy singers singing 'em through their noses. If they was sang properly, I think I would like them very much.