

Card Catalog Goes Digital  
New Lead Belly Song  
NVLP Collection  
Laborlore



Summer 2007

American Folklife Center  
The Library of Congress



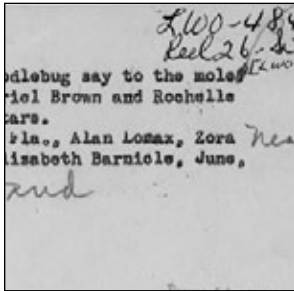


# FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

AMERICAN FOLKLIFE CENTER



## IT'S ALL IN THE CARDS:



**3** AFC's historic card catalog has long been an essential research tool for visitors to the Library. Now you can access it online!

## LABORLORE:



**8** A recap of the symposium, "Laborlore Conversations IV: Documenting Occupational Folklore Then and Now," held at AFC on August 15 and 16, 2007.

## WISDOM FROM THE ELDERS:



**11** The National Visionary Leadership Project (NVLN), a private, non-profit organization, has donated more than two hundred videotaped interviews with prominent African American elders to the American Folklife Center.

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

### Librarian Appointees:

Tom Rankin, *Chair, North Carolina*  
Jane Beck, *Vice-chair, Vermont*  
Donald Scott, *Nevada*  
Kojo Nnamdi, *District of Columbia*

### Congressional Appointees:

Daniel Botkin, *California*  
C. Kurt Dewhurst, *Michigan*  
Mickey Hart, *California*  
Dennis Holub, *South Dakota*  
William L. Kinney Jr., *South Carolina*  
Marlene Meyerson, *New Mexico*  
Charlie Seemann, *Nevada*  
Kay Kaufman Shelemay, *Massachusetts*

### Presidential Appointees:

Carl Artman, *Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior*  
Mary Bomar, *Director, National Park Service*  
Lisette M. Mondello, *Assistant Secretary for Public and Governmental Affairs, Department of Veterans Affairs*

### Ex Officio Members

James H. Billington, *Librarian of Congress*  
Cristián Samper, *Acting Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution*  
Dana Gioia, *Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts*  
Bruce Cole, *Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities*  
Bill Ivey, *President, American Folklore Society*  
Philip V. Bohlman, *President, Society for Ethnomusicology*  
Peggy A. Bulger, *Director, American Folklife Center*  
Judith McCulloh (Emerita), *Illinois*

## AMERICAN FOLKLIFE CENTER

The American Folklife Center was created in 1976 by the U.S. Congress to "preserve and present American folklife" through programs of research, documentation, archival preservation, reference service, live performance, exhibition, publication, and training. The Center incorporates 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.

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

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

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

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

The Folklife Information Service is a cooperative announcement program of the American Folklore Society and the American Folklife Center. It is available only on the American Folklore Society's server: [www.afsnet.org](http://www.afsnet.org). The service provides timely information on the field of folklore and folklife, including training and professional opportunities, and news items of national interest.

## FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

VOLUME 29, No. 3 SUMMER 2007

Stephen D. Winick, *Editor*  
David A. Taylor, *Editorial Advisor*  
Michaela McNichol, *Art Director*

**Cover:** U.S. Representative Stephanie Herseth Sandlin, of South Dakota, stands between the Lakota hoop dancers Jasmine Pickner (left) and Dallas Chief Eagle (right), on the stage of the Coolidge Auditorium.

Pickner and Chief Eagle performed on November 15, 2007 as part of AFC's Homegrown Concert Series. Herseth Sandlin, along with other members of the audience, danced with them on the stage.

## AMERICAN FOLKLIFE CENTER STAFF

### Administration:

Peggy A. Bulger, *Director*  
Mary Bucknum, *Acting Assistant to the Director*  
Doris Craig, *Administrative Assistant*  
Michael Taft, *Head, Archive*  
David A. Taylor, *Head, Research and Programs*

### Research and Programs:

Theadocia Austen, *Public Events Coordinator*  
Nancy Groce, *Folklife Specialist*  
Debra Murphy, *Special Assistant*

Guha Shankar, *Folklife Specialist*  
Stephen D. Winick, *Writer-Editor*

### Processing and Cataloging:

Catherine Hiebert Kerst, *Archivist*  
Maggie Kruesi, *Cataloger*  
Valda Morris, *Processing Technician*  
Marcia Segal, *Processing Archivist*  
Nora Yeh, *Archivist, Coordinator*

### Reference:

Jennifer A. Cutting, *Folklife Specialist*  
Judith A. Gray, *Folklife Specialist, Coordinator*

Stephanie A. Hall, *Automation Specialist*  
Todd Harvey, *Folklife Specialist*  
Ann Hoog, *Folklife Specialist*

### Audio Engineering:

Jonathan Gold, *Audio Technician*

### Digital Conversion:

John Barton, *Specialist*

### Veterans History Project:

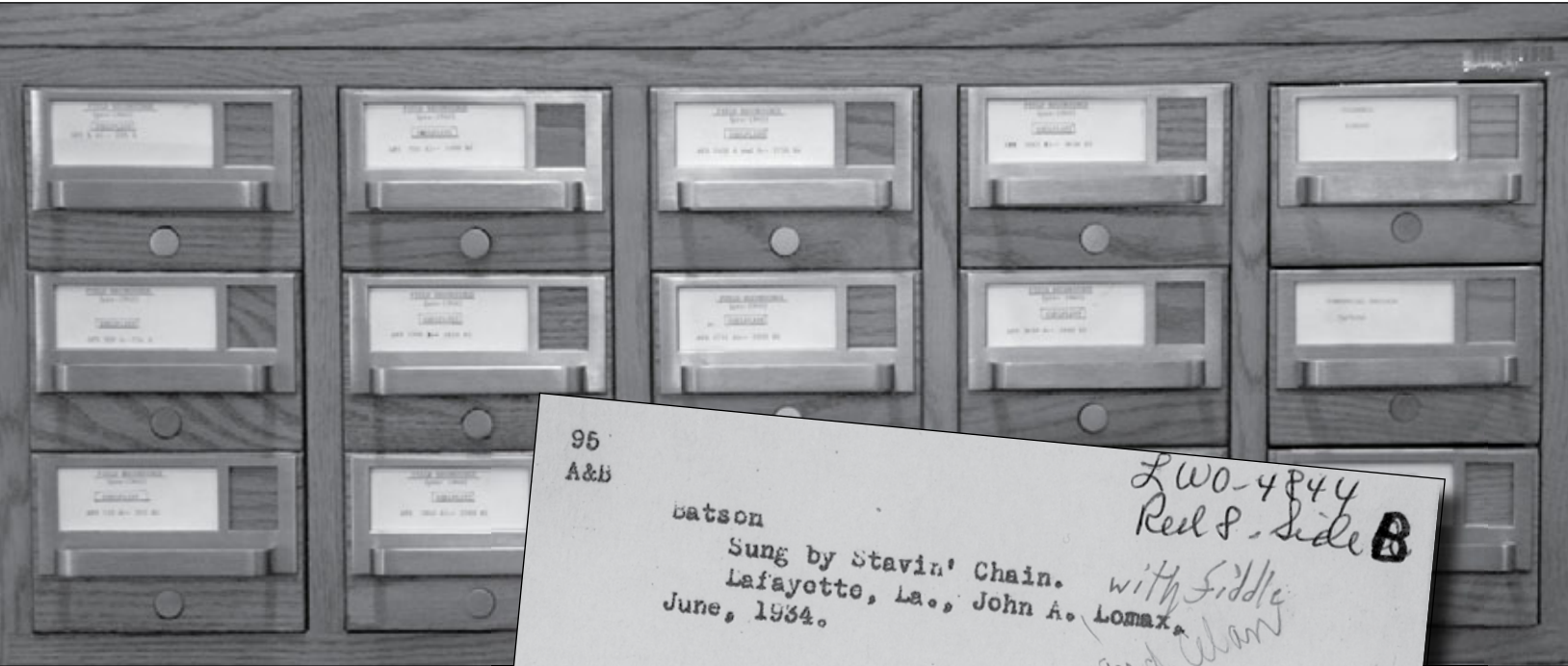
Bob Patrick, *Director*  
Peter T. Bartis, *Senior Program Officer*  
Jeffrey Lofton, *Public Affairs Specialist*

Rachel Mears, *Archivist*  
Monica Mohindra, *Program Officer*  
Sarah Rouse, *Senior Program Officer*  
Timothy Schurttter, *Program Officer*  
Tom Wiener, *Historian*

### American Folklife Center:

Tel: 202 707-5510  
Fax: 202 707-2076  
E-mail: [folklife@loc.gov](mailto:folklife@loc.gov)  
[www.loc.gov/folklife](http://www.loc.gov/folklife)

# It's All in the Cards: AFC's Historic Card Catalog Is Now Online



STEPHEN WINICK

By John Barton,  
Jennifer Cutting, and  
Stephen Winick

**A**FC is proud to introduce the online version of its historic card catalog. This important resource allows users to search for information on the most frequently used recordings in the Center's archive, without traveling to the Library. This represents a significant enhancement of AFC's service to the public. The new resource, entitled *Traditional Music and Spoken Word Catalog from the American Folklife Center*, has been under development for over two years. It was released on November 1, 2007, and is accessible at <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/ih/as/html/afccards/afccards-home.html>.

The majority of the audio recordings listed in the catalog were recorded in the 1930s and 1940s. Most are instantaneous disc recordings, made on acetate and aluminum discs, while a few are ear-



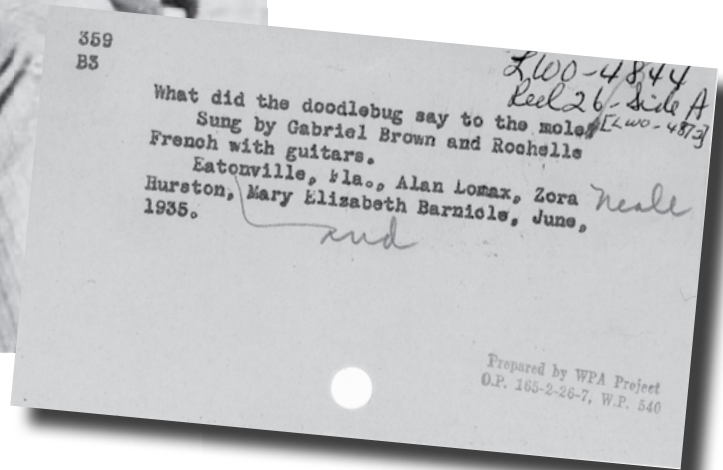
ly tape recordings. The best-known recordings listed in the catalog include the seminal fieldwork conducted by John A. Lomax and his son Alan, during the time they worked for the Library of Congress; they recorded such legendary American musicians as Lead Belly, Woody Guthrie and Jelly Roll Morton. Also listed are Alan Lomax's less well-known field collections in Haiti in 1936 and 1937, and in the upper midwest of the United States in 1938. There are also hundreds

Left: This photo of Stavin' Chain and an unidentified fiddler is rare, in that the photographer, Alan Lomax, noted which song was being performed when it was taken. The catalog card for that song, "Batson," is above.

of well known and lesser-known treasures by other notable collectors including Herbert Halpert, Zora Neale Hurston, Henrietta Yurchenco, Vance Randolph, and Helen Creighton, among many others. In addition, the catalog reflects exchange projects with institutions outside



Left: Gabriel Brown and Rochelle French. Eatonville, Florida, 1935. Below: The catalog card for one of their performances identifies the date, and shows that Alan Lomax, Zora Neale Hurston, and Mary Elizabeth Barnicle were present. Typing in the upper left identifies the original disc on which the song is to be found, annotations in the upper right identify the reel-to-reel tape numbers for the reference copy in AFC's stacks, and a stamp in the lower right identifies the card as part of a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project.



the United States, notably the Discoteca Publica Municipal de São Paulo Collection (1938-1943) of field recordings from Brazil, and many field recordings collected in Oceania. Users should keep in mind that this catalog represents only a portion of AFC's recordings; in fact, the majority of the Archive's recordings were acquired later, and thus are not represented here. But the catalog represents the rich collections of the golden age of disc recording, including many of the treasures that make AFC's archive one of the most valuable and well known folklife resources in the world.

The new online resource includes images of the approximately 34,000 cards in the master catalog, as well as a fully searchable database. The database allows researchers to conduct searches using multiple criteria, including song or tune title, first line, refrain, performer name, place, date, musical instrument, language, and recordist's name. In addition, it allows researchers to search for a string of text in all these fields at once.

A search for "Galveston," for example, would turn up any card that mentions Galveston, as the place of recording, within a title, refrain or first line, or indeed anywhere it appeared on the original card. Since the physical card catalog in the Folklife Reading Room is searchable only by the five criteria of title, performer name, state, shelflist number (AFS number), and foreign country or language, this represents a significant improvement in researchers' ability to search the catalog. For the first time, it is possible, for example, to easily find all recordings of the dulcimer, all recording sessions attended by Duncan Emrich while he was working at the Archive of Folk Song, or all recordings in the catalog associated with any member of the Seeger family.

A search, executed through the simple user interface, immediately returns images of all the relevant cards, allowing the offsite researcher to see the same information as someone in the reading

room: both the information originally typed on the cards, and the penciled-in corrections and additions made by reference staff over the years. This provides researchers with the best of both worlds: the information they need in a digital format, along with the nuances conveyed by a card catalog emended over seventy-five years of use.

### History Of The Card Catalog

AFC's physical card catalog, located in the AFC reading room, was begun in 1933. At that time, the Lomaxes were eager to start publishing the material they had collected, and needed a way of organizing the information for easier retrieval. The vast chore of typing the thousands of cards was done by Works Progress Administration (WPA) workers in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and continued by Archive of Folk Song staff through



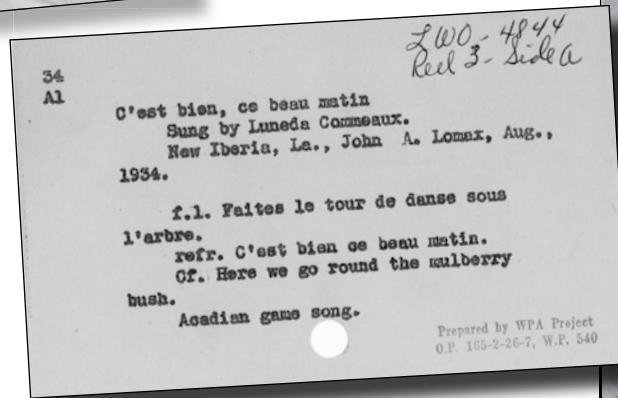
ROBERT HEMMING

Some of the many singers and collectors who made recordings documented in the card catalog. Clockwise from top left: Charles Todd recording the singing of Mrs. Myra Pipnick with a Presto recorder, Arvin, California, 1941. John A. Lomax (left) recorded Uncle Rich Brown (right) near Sumterville, Alabama, 1940. Cajun singer Luneda Commeaux was recorded by John and Alan Lomax in New Iberia, Louisiana, 1934.

RUBY TERRILL LOMAX



ALAN LOMAX



the late 1960s. Its purpose was to provide the public with access to the thousands of individual songs, tunes, folk tales, sermons, monologues, and life stories in the Archive's collections.

Encased in antique golden oak, the catalog is endowed with the patina that comes of almost seventy-five years of researchers opening the drawers, and thumbing through the thousands of cards, to unravel its mysteries. From the early 1930s to the present time, it provided the only item-level access to AFC's treasure trove of field recordings. In order to find a version of "Barbara Allen," a blues guitar performance from Mobile, Alabama, or a recording of the singing and banjo playing of Theophilus G. Hoskins, researchers had to look it up in the card catalog.

Until now, those researchers had to travel to Washington to use the catalog, and they certainly did; folks from all over the world have made pilgrimages to the Library of Congress to see this fabled resource. Each AFC reference staff member has a favorite story about a passionate visitor; one of these involves a luggage-laden Scotsman who fell over the reading room threshold, exhausted

after a long international flight. He had come straight from the airport, without checking in at his hotel, just to search the card catalog for traditional music collected by the Lomaxes. Delighted to have arrived at AFC, he exclaimed, "I've been dreaming of this moment ever since I was a wee bairn!" Retired AFC archivist Joseph Hickerson has his own story: "My own initial pilgrimage to the Archive was in August 1958," he said. "I was blown over by the 'LC/Folk Item Card Index,' which was our name at the time for the item-level card catalog. This was, in part, my inspiration in creating a comprehensive folksong index for the Indiana University Folklore Archive when I was its director from 1960 to 1963." Later, Hickerson brought his inspiration to what was then the Music Division's Archive of Folk Song; he served there, as archivist and head, for over thirty-five

years, during which time the archive was moved to AFC.

Before now, there was only one way to see even a fraction of the card catalog's riches at a distance: the *Check-List of Recorded Songs in the English Language in the Library of Congress Archive of American Folk Song to July, 1940*. This three-volume tome was originally published by the U.S. government in 1942, and re-published in a single volume in 1971, by a commercial press. "Copies of the three-volume *Check-List* were still being mailed out in the 1990s," recalled AFC's coordinator of reference, Judith Gray. "It was the only way people could get any kind of handle on what we have

here, from a distance.” Still, it was not perfect, as Hickerson remembered. “I noticed early on that a number of items in the card catalog had not been included in the *Check-List*, including protest, topical and bawdy titles,” he said.

With the new online version of the catalog, all that has definitively changed for the better, according to Hickerson. “The Archive has played a leading part in the Library of Congress’s pioneering activities in documentation, preservation, cataloging, and electronic technologies,” he said. “The present project continues that tradition by making available a vast card catalog of its seminal collections from the 1930s and 1940s to anyone and everyone throughout the world. Also, personally, it is an extreme pleasure to see our dreams of forty or more years ago become a reality.”

### **The Development of the Project**

The card catalog digitization project was conceived one afternoon in October, 2004, when a frequent visitor to the archive asked a pointed question: “Why isn’t this information online?” The researcher, who wishes to remain anonymous, quickly put his money where his mouth is, and offered a donation of significant seed money for AFC to begin digitizing the catalog. With the support of AFC director Peggy Bulger, and under the leadership of reference librarian Jennifer Cutting and digitization specialist John Barton, AFC staff members formed a project team to meet this important goal. During all phases of the project, the team consulted with colleagues in other divisions of the Library, only to find that they were wrestling with many of the same problems of how to digitize, and make machine-searchable, the information in their old but priceless card catalogs. Thus, this was a cross-divisional, highly collaborative project.

Since this was the first of the Library’s card catalogs to be digitized for public access, the team needed to develop a process and workflow to support the project. First came the problem of how to

scan the 34,000 cards. By conducting a series of test scans, digitization specifications were developed to best capture the information on the somewhat brittle and significantly yellowed cards, which often contained handwritten notes and broken type. Because of the large number of cards, the team needed to consider the size of the image files generated by the scans, as well as the image quality, when determining the specifications. Finally, preservation of the cards, and preservation of their original shelflist order, was also crucial. A scanner was selected that could not only produce the required specifications, but could also scan the cards quickly, safely and efficiently. A special “card catcher” was designed and built by Library of Congress staff, to catch the cards as they emerged from the scanner, maintaining their original order. With the proper scanner and the card catcher, the team was able to achieve a scan rate of approximately 1,000 cards per hour.

The next component of the project was to convert the information on the cards into full-text, searchable data. This phase took about one year to accomplish. After experimenting with several optical character recognition (OCR) engines, the team leaders decided that it would not be possible to adequately capture text through OCR. Consequently, the team designed a database entry system that allowed staff to input information to the database while looking at the card images (rather than by accessing the physical cards). Significant effort was devoted to defining the fields to be included in the database, as well as developing data-entry procedures. Two part-time contractors with experience working at AFC were hired to perform the data entry.

The final phase of the project was to develop a website to display the cards. After the team finalized requirements, Library Service’s Network Development and Marc Standards Office created the website and the Library’s Office of Strategic Initiatives reviewed the site to

ensure conformity with Library standards. The team decided to place the site on LC Presents Music, Theatre & Dance, a platform developed by the Music Division. This provides the flexibility to search and display data in a clear and user-friendly fashion.

### **The Future of the Catalog**

AFC already has plans to improve the *Traditional Music and Spoken Word Catalog*, by adding audio links, lyrics, and additional information. Currently, the catalog can only give researchers information about the recordings in AFC’s collections; to listen to the recordings, researchers still have to visit the reading room, or locate the recordings they wish to hear in AFC’s online collections. For example, a researcher looking into the collections of John Wesley Work might search the card catalog and discover that Allison Mathis recorded a version of “Bottle up and Go” for Work in 1941. In order to hear the performance itself, however, the researcher would need to visit AFC’s online collections page, notice that *“Now What a Time”: Blues, Gospel, and the Fort Valley Music Festivals, 1938-1943* would be likely to contain this item, and then search the collection for it. In the near future, however, AFC intends to add links from the catalog to those recordings that are available online; thus, a link will lead directly from the card catalog record of Mathis’s performance to the recording, making access considerably easier. In addition, AFC has digitized its collection of approximately 1,500 transcribed song lyrics, and the images of these transcriptions will be linked to their corresponding card catalog records. By adding links each time new material becomes available online, AFC staff can continue to expand the usefulness of the catalog. Making the field recordings and their texts available, and linking them to the catalog, will be of inestimable value to folksong scholarship and to the field of folklife at large.

AFC staff will also continue to improve the catalog by correcting various errors

and omissions. Because the database reflects the information exactly as it was typed on the catalog cards from the 1930s to the 1960s, there is some information that is incorrect or incomplete. Also, for some of the non-English recordings, the researcher may encounter duplicate or multiple cards, or no cards at all; for a few of the non-English recordings from this period, no cards were ever made.

The AFC reference staff is continually working to make corrections in all of these areas, and hopes to expand the catalog in the future, adding bibliographic data for the sound recordings that are now represented only as "Spanish" or "foreign." Users who see an error should feel free to notify the reference staff at [folklife@loc.gov](mailto:folklife@loc.gov).

"We hope that the digitization and databasing of the American Folklife

Center's historic card catalog will help researchers all over the world in learning about our unparalleled collections," said Archive head Michael Taft. "At the same time, here at home, it may serve as a template for other Library of Congress divisions who are trying to accomplish the same thing with their own historic card catalogs. The project can serve as a model, not only for inter-division cooperation at the Library, but for cooperation between the Library and outside donors."

Richard Nevins, president of Shanachie Entertainment, agrees. On his Shanachie and Yazoo labels, Nevins has made a career of issuing obscure recordings organized around a particular theme. Occasionally, as on the 2003 Yazoo box set, *Kentucky Mountain Music*, his releases contain field recordings from the American Folklife Center's archive.

But, in order to even begin his research on these field recordings, Nevins had to come all the way to Washington from his company's headquarters in Newton, New Jersey, or send a deputy to do the research for him. Now that has changed, and Nevins can do the work from his home or his office in New Jersey. "Residing in the American Folklife Center at the Library Of Congress is the largest and finest archive of early American traditional music in existence," Nevins commented. "Now, at last, anyone in the world can instantly access all the [card catalog] data covering 34,000 performances simply by turning on their computer and going to the Folklife Center's website. With this grand accomplishment, the Folklife Center takes a giant step forward in fulfilling its mission as the nation's first and foremost preserver and disseminator of American music and culture." ○

---

## The Ethnographic Thesaurus is Now Available

Over the past four years, the AFC has been working with the American Folklore Society and a team of experts to produce the Ethnographic Thesaurus. This resource is a controlled vocabulary of terms used in folklore, ethnomusicology, cultural anthropology and related fields, and will help in the coordinated indexing and description of archival materials, publications, and other sources of traditional culture. With the help of a developmental grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities

and a sustaining grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Ethnographic Thesaurus has grown to a list of over 9,000 terms related in a hierarchical structure under 25 categories, including Belief, Health, Art, Music, Performance, and Transmission.

The AFC has been centrally involved in this project from the beginning by coordinating the work of subject specialists, a lexicographer, and a database manager, organizing regular meetings of the team, chairing the project's advisory

board, and publicizing the project at academic conferences. AFC staff Cathy Kerst and Michael Taft are the co-chairs of the advisory board, and Maggie Kruesi is a member of the board. The Ethnographic Thesaurus is now available on the American Folklore society website at <http://et.afsnet.org/>. Users are able to suggest additional terms or changes to existing terms through a comments box on the site; through this means, the Ethnographic Thesaurus will continue to grow and evolve. ○

## Library of Congress Seeks New Deal Workers

In preparation for the 75th anniversary of the New Deal in March 2008, the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress seeks to establish contact with Works Progress Administration (WPA) researchers, writers, and photographers who worked on documenting American culture during the Roosevelt Administration. We are especially interested in alumni of the arts and culture projects collectively known as "Federal One." In some cases, the Library would like to interview documentation workers about circumstances surrounding the production of the New Deal's now-iconic recordings, images, and historic interviews. Alumni will be formally acknowledged at the *Art, Culture & Government: The New Deal at 75* symposium at the Library in Washington on March 13 & 14, 2008. (For more information on the symposium go to [www.loc.gov/folklife](http://www.loc.gov/folklife).)

New Deal alumni are asked to contact folklorist Dr. Nancy Groce at the American Folklife Center. (Phone 202-707-1744; email: [ngro@loc.gov](mailto:ngro@loc.gov).) ○

# Laborlore: an Interdisciplinary Symposium at AFC

By Guha Shankar

On August 15 and 16, 2007, the Library of Congress was the site of a remarkable interdisciplinary gathering of scholars, musicians, artists, and community representatives, who came together for a public symposium titled *Laborlore Conversations IV: Documenting Occupational Folklore Then and Now*. The American Folklife Center's extensive research collections pertaining to occupational folklife and work culture provided a focus for the symposium.

Sponsored by the AFC, in collaboration with the San Francisco-based Fund for Labor History and Culture, the symposium was the fourth in an ongoing series of such gatherings that have been held over the last several years. The symposium's goals were to: provide a forum in which to examine the ethnographic work of several generations of documentary fieldworkers; explore the use of archival collections for contemporary research on work and community life; and analyze the challenges confronting labor scholars, advocates, and community members in today's global economy. A related aim of the gathering was to honor the career and accomplishments of folklorist and professor emeritus, Archie Green, the "dean of laborlore," who was given the Library's prestigious Living Legend Award.

The symposium began on the evening of August 15, with the Library's premiere of documentary filmmaker Anne Lewis's 2007 film, *Morristown*. The documentary provides an in-depth, multi-faceted view of the impact on one Tennessee town of globalization, immigration, and the relocation of various industries to Mexico. During a question-and-answer session after the screening, Lewis discussed



Deanna Marcum, Associate Librarian for Library Services, presents the Living Legend Award to Derek Green. Green accepted the award for his father Archie Green, who was unable to attend the event.

her experiences in producing the film, and her commitment to chronicling the perspectives of workers on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Nick Spitzer's keynote speech, on August 16, addressed the historical and contemporary relationship of workers in the skilled building trades to the music and culture of New Orleans. Spitzer, who is a folklorist, a university professor, and the host of the nationally syndicated radio show *American Routes*, played samples of music from various traditions, along with excerpts of interviews with longtime residents and veteran workers in New Orleans. Spitzer highlighted the resilience and creative spirit of New Orleans communities, and their continuing struggle to rebuild after the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Their struggle, in Spitzer's view, is one in

which all Americans should assist.

Other panels were equally timely. Robert McCarl, a folklorist and professor of anthropology at Boise State University, convened the panel "Social Justice, the Environment, and the Ethics of Collaboration." He provided a particularly somber reminder of the dangers that confront workers in some industries. At the start of the session, he asked the audience to stand in remembrance of workers who had become trapped in a mine in Salt Lake City the previous week. The panel, comprising scholars and members of mining communities in the southern and western U.S., discussed issues facing mining communities and researchers who work in those communities.

McCarl provided a retrospective analysis of pioneering scholar George Korson (1900-1967), one of the most





STEPHEN WINICK, AFC

A panel at the symposium focused on folklorist George Korson and the folklore of coal mining. The panel featured (l-r) community activist Barbara Miller, filmmaker Anne Lewis, cultural anthropologist Brian McNeill, community organizer Freda Williams, and singer-songwriter Elaine Purkey.

prolific collectors and publishers of the folksongs, folklore and cultural history of American miners. Dating from the 1940s, Korson's rich collections of field recordings, manuscripts, and other materials are housed in the AFC's archive. The panel linked Korson's focus on local economic and political concerns to larger global, environmental, and human rights issues, particularly in contemporary mining sites in West Virginia and Idaho. The panelists, who included community representatives Barbara Miller, from Idaho, and Elaine Purkey and Freda Williams, from West Virginia, opened up several broad avenues for discussion. These concerned the responsibility of scholars and documentary fieldworkers to engage in thorough fieldwork and alliance-building in the communities in which they work, to focus on both tradition and change in these communities as technology shifts from handwork to mechanization, to analyze and more thoroughly represent the political and public contexts in which work cultures are situated, and to consider how best to represent community perspectives in the course of those collaborative projects.

Other presentations also drew on materials in the American Folklife

Center's archive. Carl Fleischhauer, of the Library's Office of Strategic Initiatives, focused on the self-documentation methods employed by Les Stewart, rancher and owner of the Ninety-Six Ranch in Paradise Valley, Nevada. Stewart's home movies, which capture an insider's perspective on ranching life in the West, are part of the collection materials gathered by the AFC-led team of researchers that conducted the Paradise Valley Folklife Project from 1978 to 1982. Selected documentation from that collection is available on the Library's American Memory website in a presentation titled *Buckaroos in Paradise: Ranching Culture in Northern Nevada, 1945-1982*. (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammen/nrcrhtml/crhome.html>).

Fleischhauer, who was a fieldworker on the Paradise Valley project, presented his case study as part of the panel titled "Collecting and Contextualizing Laborlore." The panelists, who focused on maritime traditions as well as ranching culture, addressed strategies with which folklorists and others might present labor culture and traditions to a broad public audience through museum displays, on the Internet, and at live gatherings such as festivals. Especially interesting were

the comments of community members Janice Marshall of Smith Island, Maryland, and James Lane, of the waterman's community of Crisfield, on Maryland's Eastern Shore. The pair reflected on the ways in which their work with professional folklorists, such as co-panelists Elaine Eff and Paula Johnson, had helped them articulate and represent their intimate knowledge of community history and work traditions to a broader public.

The final panel of the day, "Expressive Culture, Work Culture and the Art of Representation," considered the ways in which work is portrayed in art and the media. For example, Maribel Alvarez, professor of folklore at the University of Arizona, provided a thought-provoking case study of Mexican craftsmen who make figurines for the tourist market along the U.S-Mexico border. The panelists debated issues of self-representation, the aesthetics and politics of portraying work culture for various audiences, and the ways in which workers incorporate traditional and emerging technologies into their creative expressions of place and community history.

The evening concluded with a musical tribute to Archie Green, and the presentation of the Living Legend Award, which



STEPHEN WINCK, AFC

Community scholar James Lane is a resident of the maritime community of Crisfield, MD. He spoke at the symposium about documenting the traditions of watermen and other aspects of local culture in his hometown.



STEPHEN WINCK, AFC

Musicians Mike Seeger and Hazel Dickens performed traditional songs about labor.



STEPHEN WINCK, AFC

Folklorist and radio host Nick Spitzer gave the keynote address

was accepted by his son Derek on his behalf. AFC screened a video presentation that reviewed Green's life through photographs, manuscripts, publications, and sound recordings. Several of Green's colleagues, including emeritus professors Roger Abrahams and Daniel Patterson, and American Folklife Center Board member Judy McCulloh, shared their reminiscences of Green. Folklorist Joe Wilson mediated a performance/discussion session with Hazel Dickens and Mike Seeger, celebrated performers of

old-time music. All three individuals reminisced and shared stories about their various projects undertaken with Green over the last forty years.

The conference was a great success, bringing together participants from academia and the world of organized labor in unusual ways. Audience member Robert Cantwell, a folklorist and professor at the University of North Carolina, highlighted this aspect of the symposium in his comments. "I was impressed by the various meetings and greetings among people whose worlds have been mostly separate over the last thirty years or so," Cantwell said. "It left me with a sense that important fences were being mended, and in a sense a legacy being transmitted." Mike Munoz, a symposium participant, journeyman pile driver, and thirty-three year member of Pile Drivers Local 34 in Oakland, California, agreed. "I have been a union organizer since 1981 and I am currently Director of Organizing for the Northern California Carpenters Regional Council," he said. "It was a great honor for me to be on the panel, especially because the event was held at the Library of Congress." Kerry Taylor, an organizer and graduate student, attended all four of the Laborlore Conversations, and reported, "this was really the strongest."

Archie Green was not able to attend the events because of recent eye surgery. Asked about the symposium, he

would only say that it sounded as though his high expectations had been met. Asked about his Living Legend award, he expressed quiet satisfaction at the honor. In his typical, self-deprecating manner, he alluded to another prominent winner of the Living Legend Award: "If it's good enough for Dolly Parton, it's good enough for me!"

For more information about the symposium, and to access webcasts of the welcoming remarks by AFC Director Peggy Bulger, the keynote address by Nick Spitzer, and the panel discussions, please visit the symposium website, at <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/laborlore/>



STEPHEN WINCK, AFC

Materials from AFC collections relating to work were on display during the symposium.

# Wisdom From the Elders: NVLP's African American Oral Histories

By Debra Murphy

The National Visionary Leadership Project (NVLP), a private, non-profit organization, has donated more than two hundred original videotaped interviews with prominent African American elders to the American Folklife Center (AFC). NVLP recognizes these leaders as "Visionaries," whose extraordinary lives have shaped much of American history. Many of the interviews were conducted by NVLP's co-founders, educator and producer Camille O. Cosby and award-winning journalist Renee Poussaint, over the five years since the establishment of the organization. The collection also includes interviews with less well-known elders, from local communities across the country, who were selected and interviewed by college students participating in the NVLP Visionary Heritage Fellows Program (VHFP).

The first increment of the donation comprises fifty interviews with elders from all walks of life, such as: U.S. Representative Charles Rangel of New York; former U.S. Senator Edward Brooke of Massachusetts; former U.S. Representative Shirley Chisholm of New York; civil rights leaders Dorothy Height and Myrlie Evers-Williams; former New York City mayor David Dinkins; poet Maya Angelou; musicians Ray Charles and Quincy Jones; former Virginia governor, and current Richmond mayor, Douglas Wilder; basketball great Bill Russell; actors Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee; dancer and choreographer Katherine Dunham; historian John Hope Franklin; and photographer, writer, artist, and film director Gordon Parks. Transcripts of the interviews, along with photographs of the interviewees, are also included in the donation.

James H. Billington, Librarian of Congress, commended Cosby and Poussaint "for their work in collecting oral histories of African American elders, and for bringing together young people and their elders in celebration of that remarkable history. I am glad that the officers of the NVLP chose the Library of Congress as the repository for this collection of memorable and powerful stories." JoAnn Jenkins, Chief Operating Officer of the Library of Congress, agreed. "Thanks to the work of the NVLP and its partnering with the AFC," she said, "students and scholars will have ready access to the wisdom and experiences of many of today's black leaders. These videotaped oral histories complement our other African American collections, and will offer historians new and valuable perspectives on the African American experience." "I am delighted that the NVLP collection is coming to the American Folklife Center," added



Associate Librarian for Library Services Deanna Marcum speaks at the NVLP reception.

Peggy Bulger, the director of AFC. "It will join and complement other collections of great historical and cultural significance, including interviews by and with Zora Neale Hurston, as well as the Library of Congress/Fisk University Mississippi Delta Collection, and the Alan Lomax Collection, among many others."

## The Intergenerational Summit

To coincide with this donation, AFC and NVLP co-hosted the fourth annual NVLP Intergenerational Summit on the State of Black America, which was held at the Library on October 16, 2007. As is the case each year, the Summit honored six individual Visionaries for excellence in their respective fields. Each honoree received the NVLP Wisdom Award. The Summit provided a forum for an intergenerational dialogue on contemporary issues between these Visionaries and an audience of several hundred students, from all levels between elementary school and college. The students included a contingent from New York City, representing the Schomburg Library's Junior Scholars Program. The events also honored winners of NVLP's Capitol-area high school essay contest, each of whom wrote a biographical essay about one of the Visionaries. The events began with a reception for honorees in the Librarian's ceremonial office in the Library's Thomas Jefferson building. Deanna Mar-



*Renee Poussaint (left) and Camille O. Cosby (far right), with the winners and finalists in the NVLP student essay competition.*

cum, Associate Librarian for Library Services, joined Cosby and Poussaint in greeting current Visionaries and NVLP supporters. Several past Wisdom Award Honorees, including Height and Franklin, also attended. Last year, Franklin was also the 2006 winner of the Library’s John W. Kluge Prize.

An awards luncheon followed the reception. At the luncheon, Cosby and Poussaint recognized the essay contest winners, who received monetary awards for their first-prize essays, and dined with the Visionaries who were the subjects of their essays. Also during the luncheon, the NVLP co-founders presented each current Visionary with a copy of their videotaped interview, and a commemorative plaque. The luncheon audience was presented with copper medallions bearing the inscription “National Visionary Leadership Project, Library of Congress, in perpetuity.” In explaining the meaning of this inscription, Poussaint quoted Debra Murphy, a special assistant at AFC. “As long as there is a United States of America, there will be a Library of Congress,” she said, “and, as long as there is a Library of Congress, these precious stories will be preserved and made available to the public.”

Following the luncheon, the NVLP Intergenerational Summit began. It opened with a ceremony in which the NVLP publicly donated the first installment of its collection to the American Folklife Center’s archive. Children from the J. C. Nalle Elementary School of Washington, D.C., brought out a carved, wooden “treasure chest” of videotaped interviews, and presented it to Deanna Marcum, who accepted on behalf of the Library of Congress. “I salute the National Visionary Leadership Project, and commend its co-founders for collecting these inspiring oral histories of African American elders who have made extraordinary contributions to the African American community and to

our country,” Marcum said.

Shortly thereafter, the ceremony to honor the 2007 Wisdom Award recipients began. The six honorees were: Lucy Allen, plaintiff in the landmark case *Allen v. Ummerteskee*, which established the descendants of black slaves once owned by Cherokees as members of the Cherokee Nation; Derrick A. Bell, Jr., the first tenured African American professor at Harvard Law School; Rep. John Conyers of Michigan, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee and founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus; Norman C. Francis, the president of Xavier University in New Orleans; Rt. Rev. Barbara C. Harris, the first woman elected bishop in the Episcopal Church; and Faith Ringgold, story-quilt artist and author of award-winning children’s books. The first-place student winners introduced the elders by reading their prize-winning essays. Upon completion of the awards ceremony, a seventy-minute dialogue ensued, in which scores of high school and college students discussed current events with their elders; the discussions, moderated by Poussaint, were lively, touching on the war in Iraq, crime, and higher education opportunities.

Murphy worked closely with Poussaint on the programming and logistics of the summit. They enlisted the aid of the Old Dominion Chapter, The Links, Incorporated, an organization of African American professional women, to evaluate and select winners from the hundreds of high school essays that were submitted for the contest. In addition, the Eastern Area of The Links, Incorporated funded the food and transportation costs for most of the high school students who attended the summit. For many of these young people, the exposure to our nation’s capitol, the Library of Congress, and the honorees was, in their teacher’s words, “a truly life-changing experience.” ○



ROBERT HEWING

# A New Old Recording by Huddie Ledbetter

by Michael Taft

The AFC is always acquiring new collections. Some collections are made up of thousands of items and require months of negotiation with the donor or seller; some are no more than a single recording or a few sheets of paper, casually dropped off at the AFC's reading room desk. Others are surprise discoveries, entirely unexpected, and completely delightful in the way that they fill in a void in the history of American folklife.

Such was the case when David Johnson of Falmouth, Maine, telephoned me, wanting to know if the Center was interested in a Lead Belly disc that he had in his possession. The Center holds hundreds of field recordings of Huddie Ledbetter ("Lead Belly"), the legendary Texas/Louisiana singer of blues, ballads, children's songs, religious songs, and other African American traditions. He was first recorded by John A. Lomax in 1933, and over the next sixteen years, John and Alan Lomax, among

other fieldworkers, continued recording Lead Belly's massive repertoire. As well, beginning in 1935, Lead Belly recorded for commercial record companies and radio stations.

I was therefore expecting that Mr. Johnson had a copy of a recording already held by the Center, or one of Lead Belly's many commercial discs. But when I asked him what was printed on the label of the recording, Mr. Johnson said, "Presto." Presto was not a record company label, but a brand of recording blank that the Library of Congress used for its Presto disc recording machines in the 1930s and 1940s. Mr. Johnson also confirmed that the disk had three holes in its center, rather than the single hole found on commercial recordings. The extra two holes helped to anchor the blank disc while the grooves were inscribed onto its surface during field recording. Now I was intrigued, and readily accepted Mr. Johnson's kind offer to donate the disc to the Center.

*Charles Todd at the Presto recording machine, surrounded by a group of Mexican boys and men, at the El Rio F.S.A. Camp in California, 1941*



*This undated, four-frame print of Lead Belly, by an unknown photographer, was included in the Todd-Sonkin collection. It testifies to Lead Belly's friendship with the two collectors.*

As I later learned from Mr. Johnson, he received the disc from his twin brother, Donald Johnson. As a college student in the early 1960s, Donald Johnson had been interested in folksong, and had received the disc from a friend. Donald no longer recalled the name of this friend or where he had obtained the disc, but although neither brother was ever able to play the old 78 rpm recording, they kept it out of harm's way for the next forty-five years.

When I received the disc from Mr. Johnson, I immediately recognized it as a twelve-inch, glass-based lacquer field recording of the type that Library of Congress fieldworkers used. There was no information on the disc itself, but the accompanying disc sleeve gave the titles of four songs: "Irene," "Pretty Flower in Your Backyard," "Careless Love," and "Todd Blues." The first three are well known from Lead Belly's repertoire, with "Irene Goodnight" being his most successful and much-recorded hit. The fourth song, however, was a mystery, not previously known from his recordings.

When I listened to the disc, I found that "Todd Blues" was indeed a song not previously recorded from Lead Belly's repertoire, and was in fact the key to the history of this particular recording. Lead Belly prefaces this song with the following statement: "Now this is to our friend. Mr. Sonkin's friend and my friend, and my wife's friend—which is Martha. He's going away. We're dedicating this blues that brings sad news..." In the impromptu blues lyrics that follow, Lead Belly sings:

...Mr. Todd went away, Lord, just after Christmas Day  
He's going to California...

...Mr. Sonkin sitting here with his head hung down...

In his recording of "Careless Love," Lead Belly includes the following lyrics:

...I may be right, Mr. Todd, and I may be wrong

But you know we're going to miss you for the time while  
you're gone...

It's clear that Lead Belly's "Todd Blues" is dedicated to Robert Sonkin's friend, Charles L. Todd. Todd and Sonkin, together and separately, conducted a number of folksong recording trips for the Library of Congress in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Their most ambitious recording project occurred in the migrant camps of California in 1940 and 1941 (see *Voices*



Will Neal plays the fiddle; Charles Todd is second from right, and his recording partner Robert Sonkin is second from left. Arvin, California, 1940.

from the Dust Bowl: The Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection, American Memory Online Presentation, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammen/af-ctshtml/tshome.html>).

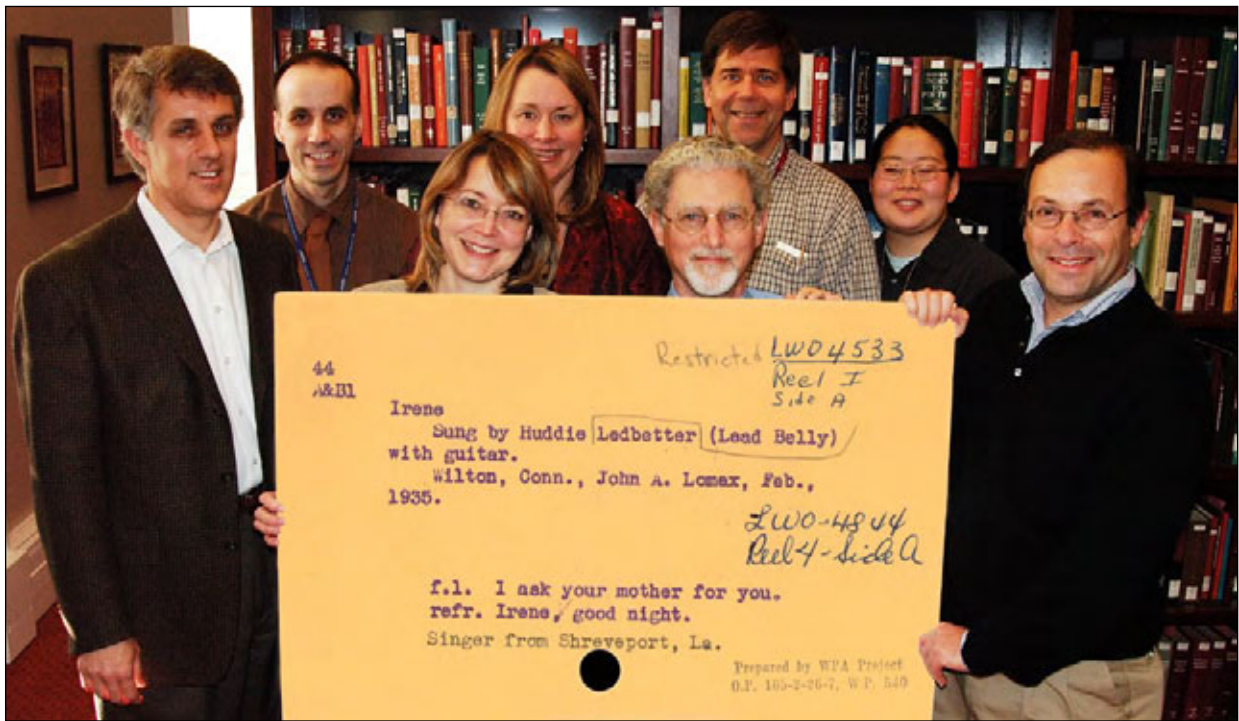
But there was another piece of information on the disc sleeve that presented a problem: the date, January 20, 1941, was written above the list of songs. Yet both Todd and Sonkin had returned from California in the summer of 1940, and only returned, together, to that state in the summer of 1941. In addition, it is known that Todd and Sonkin recorded Lead Belly in New York City on January 20, 1942,

for an Office of Emergency Management radio program entitled "Dear Mr. President"—a series of recorded messages to President Roosevelt expressing the views of Americans on the Pearl Harbor attack (see *After the Day of Infamy: "Man-on-the-Street" Interviews Following the Attack on Pearl Harbor*, American Memory Online Presentation, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/af-cphhtml/afcphtml.html>).

We also know that Todd returned to California, without Sonkin, in early 1942 to work as associate manager of the Tulare Migrant Camp, in Visalia. In a March 27, 1942, letter to Alan Lomax, Robert Sonkin writes from New York City: "I could paint you a picture of the [City] College which from sheer foolishness wd. be not believed. And, with poor old Todd gone, there's not even anybody around to grouse with." It seems likely that Mr. Johnson's disc was part of the January 20, 1942, recording session held by Todd and Sonkin with Lead Belly, mistakenly documented as happening a year earlier.

How the disc became separated from those Todd and Sonkin handed in to the Library remains a mystery. Perhaps because it was not on the theme of "Dear Mr. President," the two fieldworkers decided to keep the recording, and the disc changed hands over the next eighteen-plus years until it arrived in the safekeeping of the Johnson brothers. It is unlikely that the complete history of this recording will ever be known, but thanks to the care and interest of David and Donald Johnson, this hitherto unknown disc now joins the Center's other recordings of the great Huddie Ledbetter. ○

*Author's Note: The recording is available in the AFC reading room as Donald and David Johnson Collection of Huddie Ledbetter Recordings. Thanks to Library staff members Ann Hoog, Todd Harvey, Brad McCoy, and Mike Turpin, for their help with this article.*



Members of the card catalog project team pose in the Folklife Center Reading Room, holding a facsimile of the card for Lead Belly's classic song "Irene." L-r: Nathan Trail (Network Development and MARC Standards Office), Andrew Cook (Office of Strategic Initiatives), Jennifer Cutting (AFC), Betsy Miller (Network Development and MARC Standards Office), Michael Taft (AFC), Mike Fitzella (Office of Strategic Initiatives), Judy Ng (AFC), John Barton (AFC). Other members of the team, not pictured here, included Jeremy Foutz, Ann Hoog, Catherine Kerst, Maggie Kruesi, and Carol Moran of AFC; Morgan Cundiff and Julie Mangin of the Network Development and MARC Standards Office; Timberly Wuester of the Office of Strategic Initiatives; and Maureen Harrington of the Office of the General Counsel.



AMERICAN  
FOLKLIFE  
CENTER

101 Independence Avenue,  
S.E. Washington, D.C. 20540-4610

PRESORTED STANDARD  
POSTAGE AND FEES PAID  
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS  
WASHINGTON, D.C.  
PERMIT No. G-103



The LIBRARY of CONGRESS

OFFICIAL BUSINESS  
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE, \$300