

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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ONLINE INFORMATION RESOURCES

The American Folklife Center's Web site provides full texts of many 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 contents is available at <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/afcindex.html>

The Web site 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/folklife/vets>

The Folklife Information Service is now 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. The service provides timely information on the field of folklore and folklife, including training and professional opportunities, and news items of national interest.

EDITOR'S NOTES

Happy Birthday, Archive of Folk Culture

Anniversaries, however arbitrary such dates may seem, invite individuals and institutions to take a backward glance. The Archive of Folk Culture has an institutional history well worth remembering and celebrating, from the vision of its founders that our American grassroots traditions belong in the national library to the determination of its present-day custodians that the great audio treasures of the past century be preserved for future generations. The archive's history is also a lesson in the relationship between individuals and institutions.
(Continued on page 15)

Cover: Robert W. Gordon, 1928. Photo by Bachrach, courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Bert Nye

The Archive of Folk Culture at 75: A National Project with Many Workers



Robert W. Gordon, first head of the Archive of American Folk-Song at the Library of Congress, with part of the cylinder collection and recording machinery, about 1930. *Library of Congress photo*

By James Hardin

In 1928, when the Librarian of Congress, Herbert Putnam, invited Robert W. Gordon to become “specialist and consultant in the field of Folk Song and Literature,” Gordon had already conceived and launched his lifetime mission to collect the entire body of American folk music. He called it a “national project with many workers.” Gordon attended Harvard University between 1906 and 1917, and then left in order to devote all his free time to this collecting enterprise. Supporting himself through teaching, writing, and the occasional grant, Gordon traveled from the waterfronts of Oakland

and San Francisco, California, to Asheville, North Carolina, and Darien, Georgia, collecting and recording folksongs with his Edison wax-cylinder machine. He wrote a monthly column in *Adventure* magazine, “Old Songs That Men Have Sung,” asking readers to send in copies of all the folksongs they could remember. And he contacted Carl Engel, chief of the Music Division at the Library of Congress, to discuss his dream and seek institutional support.

Engel believed that American grassroots traditions should be represented in the national library, and wrote in *The Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress* for 1928:

There is a pressing need for the formation of a great centralized collection of American folk-songs. The logical place for such a collection is the national library of the United States. This collection should comprise all the poems and melodies that have sprung from our soil or have been transplanted here, and have been handed down, often with manifold changes, from generation to generation as a precious possession of our folk.

Countless individuals, numerous walks of life, several races have contributed to this treasure of songs and ballads. It is richer than that of any other country. Too much of it has remained scattered or unrecorded. The preservation of this

material in the remote haunts where it still flourishes is endangered by the spread of the radio and phonograph, which are diverting the attention of the people from their old heritage and are making them less dependent on it.

The Library of Congress is vitally interested in the collecting of these folk verses and folk melodies. The collecting must be done in a scholarly manner and the collection, safeguarded against improper use, should be made freely accessible to scholars.

Heads of the Archive of Folk Culture

Robert W. Gordon (1928–32)
John A. Lomax (1932–42,
keeping the title “hon-
orary curator” until his
death in 1948)
Alan Lomax (1937–42,
with the title “assistant
in charge”)
Benjamin A. Botkin (1942–
45)
Duncan Emrich (1945–55,
with the title “chief of
the Folklore Section”)
Rae Korson (1956–69)
Alan Jabbour (1969–74)
Joseph C. Hickerson (1974–88)
Alan Jabbour (1988–99), as
director of the American
Folklife Center
Peggy Bulger (1999–2002),
as director of the Ameri-
can Folklife Center
Michael Taft (2002–)

Robert Gordon was not the first to use the latest technology to document our national traditional culture, nor Carl Engel the first to acknowledge its importance. Thomas A. Edison invented the wax-cylinder recording machine in 1877, and it became available commercially about 1888. The machine facilitated documentary work by many private individuals, as well as those employed by government agencies and public museums. These ethnographers shared a common vision. They believed that the history of the American nation ought to include the many voices of its diverse population, a notion that later figured

in the creation of the American Folklife Center. They believed that sound—both song and spoken word—was a vital part of the historical, cultural record.

Harvard anthropologist Jesse Walter Fewkes was the first to use the Edison cylinder machine for ethnographic research. Field recordings made on wax cylinders could be brought back to a studio for study, and Fewkes used Edison’s machine in Maine, in 1890, to record the songs and stories of Passamaquoddy Indians. These wax-cylinder recordings, the first ethnographic recordings extant, are in the collections of the Archive of Folk Culture. Between 1907 and the early 1940s, Frances Densmore collected more than twenty-five hundred recordings from members of forty tribes. She was one of a number of pioneering women in the field of ethnographic documentation (including Alice Cunningham Fletcher, Helen Heffron Roberts, and Laura Bolton) whose collections are now in the Archive of Folk Culture.

The Archive of Folk Culture

When the Archive of American Folk-Song was first established in the Music Division, it was funded from private sources. Periodic disagreements over his methods erupted between Robert Gordon and Library of Congress officials during his tenure as head, and the private money that Carl Engel had secured to fund Gordon’s position eventually came to an end. But the idea of a national folk archive had taken root, and it was revived when John A. Lomax

came to the Library in 1932. Lomax too was devoted to collecting American folksong, and the decade-long association of John A. Lomax and his son, Alan, with the Library of Congress established the documentation of traditional culture as an important and integral activity of the institution.

Alan Lomax became the Folk Archive’s first federally funded staff member in 1936, and served as “assistant in charge.” He made collecting expeditions for the Library throughout the South, in the Midwest, and in New England; produced a seminal series of documentary folk music albums entitled *Folk Music of the United States*; conducted interviews with performers, such as Jelly Roll Morton; and, over the years, introduced audiences in Washington, D.C., and radio listeners nationwide to an array of traditional artists.

An arrangement with the Library initiated by John A. Lomax, wherein he would “give to the Library, in return for the use of a recording machine, any



Frances Densmore with Mountain Chief of the Blackfoot Tribe, Washington, D.C., early 1900s. Densmore spent fifty years collecting several thousand recordings of Native Americans from all over the United States and British Columbia, and her extensive collection is housed in the Archive of Folk Culture. *Library of Congress photo*



Alan Lomax with guitar, in a publicity photo, 1940. *American Folklife Center*

records that he might obtain with it" (*Report of the Librarian of Congress for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1933*), facilitated his own collecting activities and launched a documentary equipment-loan program that has lasted for seventy years. Using successive types of equipment from the Library, as recording technologies evolved from cylinder to disc to tape, collectors such as Vance Randolph, Charles Todd, Robert Sonkin, Eloise Hubbard Linscott, Zora Neale Hurston, Herbert Halpert, William Fenton, Melville Herskovits, Helen Hartness Flanders, Austin Fife, and many others were able to pursue their personal collecting activities and, at the same time, contribute to the national collection. The strategy of lending equipment and recording supplies to a network of regional collectors was

Mexican girls Josephine Gonzalez (probably at center), Aurora Gonzalez, Pearl Manchaco, Lia Trujillo, and Adela Flores sing for John A. and Alan Lomax, San Antonio, Texas, 1934. The Lomaxes were in south Texas on a Library-sponsored trip to document Mexican American folk music. *Prints and Photographs Division*. Photo by Alan Lomax

enormously productive, both in building the collection and in creating a community of folklorists with ties to the Library.

The desire to distribute the Folk Archive's holdings for public and educational uses led to the creation of the Library's Recording Laboratory, which produced the first releases in the Folk Music of the United States series in 1942. In the 1950s, the early 78-rpm albums were converted to 33-rpm, and new LP releases appeared through the early 1980s. As new technologies developed for making field recordings—wax cylinder, disc, wire, tape, and so forth—the laboratory staff acquired machines, developed expertise, and initiated publishing projects to make available to the public traditional music that was thought at the time to have no commercial value. It was also necessary for the laboratory to buy and maintain recording equipment associated with each succeeding technology. In the 1990s, CD versions of many of these early recordings, as well as new releases from the world music collections, were produced and distributed through cooperative agreements with commercial recording companies.

The expertise developed by the Recording Laboratory, the equipment-loan program, and the growing reputation of the Library of Congress as a repository for ethnographic documentation were appealing to folklorists and cultural documentarians working in this country and in foreign lands as well. Library of Congress collections are international

in scope, and Library officials supported an international acquisition policy for the Folk Archive. A recording trip to the Bahamas that Alan Lomax made in 1935, during his tenure at the Library, may have been the first instance of seeking folklife materials from outside the United States. The Folk Archive now holds material from nearly every region in the world.

During the 1940s and 1950s, for example, Arthur S. Alberts made remarkable recordings of West African music, from a dozen ethnic groups and six different colonial territories, all of which he contributed to the Library of Congress during the tenure of archive head Duncan Emrich. When portions of this collection were made available commercially, they did much to counter stereotypical notions about the "Dark Continent" by presenting examples of authentic cultural expressions. During her long career, anthropologist Henrietta Yurchenco has documented the traditions of African Americans on John's Island, South Carolina, and in Puerto Rico. She has also conducted fieldwork in Mexico, Guatemala, Spain, Morocco, and Ireland. Like many such collectors of international folklife materials, Yurchenco has made periodic donations to the Library of Congress.

The Folk Archive also received an infusion of material



Musicians of the Haha Tribe, of Tamarar, play the *bendir* (a tambourine-shaped drum) and the *aouda* (a long-reed flute), while Paul Bowles records them, Essaouira, Morocco, August 8, 1959. Paul Bowles conducted extensive fieldwork in 1959, documenting the folk and art music of Morocco, which was his adopted home. With a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, support from the Library of Congress, and assistance from the Moroccan government, Bowles collected examples of every major Moroccan musical genre, over a period of six months, and donated his recordings to the Library of Congress. *Paul Bowles Moroccan Music Collection*. *Photographer unknown*



when John A. Lomax, Benjamin A. Botkin (who followed Alan Lomax as head of the archive), and others associated with the Folk Archive participated in New Deal-era programs such as the Federal Writers' Project. During the 1930s, hundreds of federal workers were employed in cultural projects around the country, including the Ex-Slave Narrative Project and the California Folk Music Project. When the Work Projects Administration (WPA) offices finally closed down, in response to a shifting of emphasis to national defense as the United States entered the Second World War, Library of Congress officials facilitated the transfer of cultural materials collected by its various agencies to the Library.

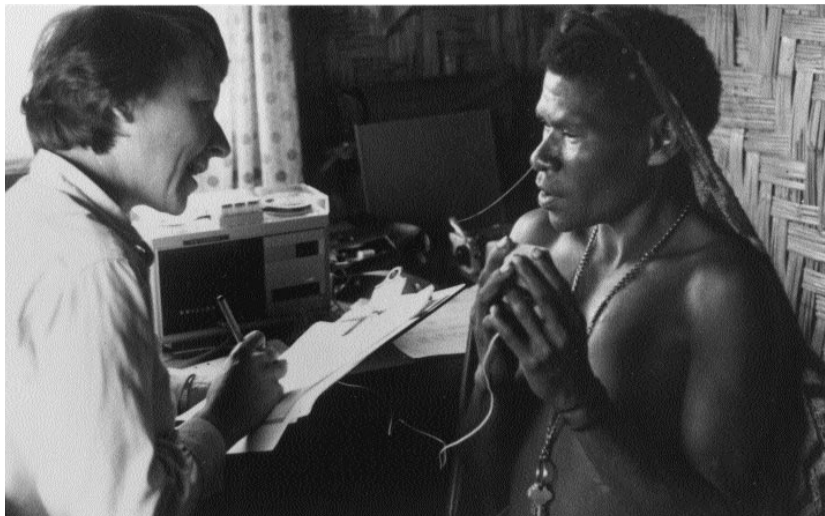
Thus, by the 1940s, the Archive of American Folk-Song had expanded its documentary scope to include folklore, verbal arts, and oral history. In addition to his work as "assistant in charge" at the archive, Alan Lomax was hosting and produc-

ing programs for the *CBS School of the Air* in New York City, and participating in the Rockefeller Foundation-funded Radio Research Project at the Library of Congress. One activity of the project was to conduct recorded interviews that sampled public opinion from around the country, and the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, Lomax put out a call for folklorists to collect "man on the street" reactions to the event. Sixty years later, the American Folklife Center followed Lomax's example by asking folklorists from across the nation to document immediate public reactions to the tragic events of September 11, 2001.

With national energies focused on the Second World War, folklife collecting activities slowed, but successive Folk Archive heads continued the policies and practices established by the Lomaxes—lending

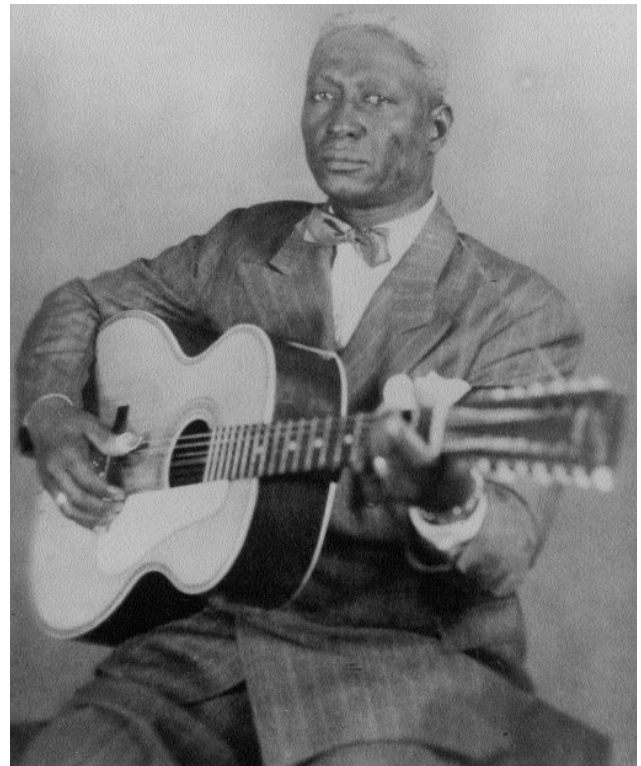
documentation equipment and supplies, publishing materials from the collections, and encouraging donations of material from this country and around the world. Benjamin A. Botkin helped to redefine and broaden the purview of folklore research to include ethnic studies and cultural traditions found in urban settings. He also encouraged folklorists to become involved in public performances and presentations by traditional artists. He is best known for his many popular anthologies, such as the *Treasury of American Folklore* (1944) and *Lay My Burden Down* (1945), which draws on the Folk Archive's recordings of ex-slave narratives.

Duncan Emrich was another Harvard-trained folklorist and historian (like Robert Gordon, John Lomax, and Benjamin Botkin) who advanced Folk Archive acquisition efforts. The growing reputation of the archive following World War II resulted in a flood of requests for reference information and



Ethnomusicologist Vida Chenoweth interviews Taaqiyáa, her chief Kaagú Usarufa music and text contributor, Papua New Guinea, 1967. Donations from ethnographers whose international collecting efforts, often over a lifetime, have resulted in large collections of cultural expression from many regions and cultures have enriched the Archive of Folk culture. *Vida Chenoweth Collection*. *Photographer unknown*

Huddie “Leadbelly” Ledbetter, with his twelve-string guitar, in a 1940s publicity photograph. Through his connection with Alan Lomax, Leadbelly became known to the New York City political Left and emerged as one of the stars of the folk revival movement that began in the 1930s and lasted for several decades. The Folk Archive holds Leadbelly recordings and letters he wrote to Alan Lomax. *American Folklife Center*



services, both from private individuals and from radio, motion picture, and publishing firms. Emrich argued vigorously for a larger staff to help respond to the many demands of acquisition, processing, and reference. The Library failed to hire additional staff but did name Emrich chief of a Folklore Section created within the Music Division. (The unit was abandoned after Emrich’s departure.) Emrich developed a visionary four-year plan for acquiring recordings from twelve states whose traditional culture was not represented in the archive, with a particular interest in the narrative, in occupational culture, and in materials from urban areas and minority language groups. He also proposed documenting traditional performers from foreign lands, such as Asia, Africa, the Pacific, and Australia. To facilitate his plan, Emrich visited twenty-one col-

leges and universities around the country to initiate a network of university-based documentary programs and to urge the creation of state folklore archives.

A new generation of regional collectors was at work following World War II. Wayland Hand was working among the miners in Butte, Montana; Arthur Campa, collecting Hispanic songs in New Mexico; and Thelma James, recording among the minority communities in Detroit. The Archive of Folk Culture profited from all this effort, and collections eventually arrived at the Library, on the new documentary medium of tape, from Anne Grimes (Ohio folksongs), Ray B. Browne (Alabama folklife), Sherman Lee Pompey (folksongs and folklore from the Ozarks), Joseph S. Hall (folklife from the Smokey Mountains of Tennessee), Harry Oster (Iowa and Louisiana cultural traditions), and Alan Jabbour (fiddling traditions, featuring the

legendary Henry Reed of Glen Lyn, Virginia).

In the Library’s annual report for 1950, halfway through his tenure as head, Duncan Emrich reported that the number of discs in the collection had reached ten thousand, and that henceforth the medium of choice for the documentation of sound would be tape recordings. Significantly, he reported to the Librarian, Luther Evans:

It is possible to say, in 1950, that the pioneering phase of field collecting and the establishment of Archives has come to a close and that in the future emphasis should be directed to coordinated efforts, to elimination of duplication, and to strong encouragement for scholars and others to use—in fairly exhaustive studies—the materials already gathered.

In 1955, when Emrich resigned his position, his assistant, Rae Korson, was named head of the Folk Archive. Her husband, folklorist George Kor-



Margaret O. Moody, age ninety-five, sings for Anne Grimes, Chillicothe, Ohio, September 9, 1955. Moody learned many songs from her family, who first settled in southeastern Ohio in the early 1800s. *Anne Grimes Collection. Photo by James Grimes*

son, documented songs and lore of Pennsylvania coal miners, and that work is included in the archive today. Rae Korson had served as assistant and reference librarian to Lomax and Botkin, as well as to Emrich. In her new position, she stressed the importance of maintenance and preservation of the vast holdings that had accumulated, an emphasis that was consistent with the policies of L. Quincy Mumford, then Librarian of Congress. She was particularly interested in improving reference service and publishing additional recordings from the Folk Archive. In 1963 Korson hired Joseph C. Hickerson (to take the place of reference librarian Donald Leavitt) and Pat Markland (to fill a new position as secretary), bringing the staff to three. Hickerson himself would later become head of what was by then called the Archive of Folk Song.

Alan Jabbour followed Korson as head (1969–74). He had both strong academic credentials and fieldwork experience, and in keeping with his own interests as a folksong collector he resumed the practice of making field expeditions. With Carl Fleischhauer, he conducted a field project in West Virginia, from 1970 to 1972, to study the expressive traditions of the Hammons family of Pocahontas County, and this effort resulted in a boxed set of two LP recordings (1973) consisting of music, song, storytelling, and oral history. In addition, Jabbour traveled to various places in pursuit of important collections, and he acquired significant holdings in Native American traditional culture, including a small collection of early cylinders from the Peabody Museum of Harvard University, among them Jesse Walter Fewkes's 1890 recordings of Passamaquoddy Indians. In 1972 Jabbour also acquired a large and important collection documenting songs, ballads, and folk plays of the British Isles from the American folklorist James Madison Carpenter, an

effort inspired by a letter he discovered in the Folk Archive from Carpenter to Alan Lomax. The elderly Carpenter had disappeared from the scene twenty years earlier, but through the Harvard University Alumni Association Jabbour was able to track him to his home in Booneville, Mississippi, and purchase the collection for the archive.

The 1950s and 1960s spawned a folksong revival in the United States that included the release of commercial recordings from many popular performers and groups, a proliferation of coffeehouse "folksingers," and spontaneous hootenannies everywhere. The Folk Archive both nourished and profited from this renewed interest and the new popularity of music with traditional roots. The collections were a resource for performers of many sorts seeking examples of traditional musical performance, and the Folk Archive gained attention that brought in new collections.

In 1974 Alan Jabbour moved to the National Endowment for the Arts to direct its newly created Folk Arts Program, and Joseph C. Hickerson became head of the Folk Archive. Hickerson did much to argue the case for the importance of documenting and collecting material from the folksong revival. Folk festivals were enormously popular during the 1970s, and Hickerson encouraged donations of material documenting the move-



Frank Proffitt sings and plays for Anne Warner in 1941, Pick Bitches Valley, North Carolina. In 1938 Frank and Ann Warner traveled from their home in New York to Beech Mountain, North Carolina, for the first of several collecting trips. Frank Proffitt played a number of songs for them, including "Tom Dula," a nineteenth-century local murder ballad. Twenty years later, the Kingston Trio's recording "Tom Doolley" shot to the top of the popular charts, contributing significantly to the 1960s folk revival. *Frank Warner Collection. Photo by Frank Warner*

ment. Under Hickerson's leadership, special emphasis was placed on the organization and cataloging of the archive's collections, the creation of listening tapes to facilitate the study of the holdings by visiting scholars, and the further production and dissemination of recordings. Between 1974 and 1976, as part of its American Revolution Bicentennial program, the Library of Congress issued the first five albums in a new fifteen-album series *Folk Music of America*, with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The American Folklife Center

During the decade preceding the establishment of the American Folklife Center in 1976, a number of factors conjoined to bring about the legislation that created it. In 1967 the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife was held for the first time on the National Mall, bringing a wide range of traditional artists to Washington and winning enthusiastic congressional support. About the same time, the approaching American Revolution Bicentennial stimulated a reexamination of pluralism in American life. A number of dedicated people, notably folklorist and labor historian Archie Green, walked the halls of Congress to lobby for congressional recognition of the importance of regional and ethnic cultures. Many cultural specialists believed the time was right for a national center devoted to the preservation and study of folklife.

The American Folklife Preservation Act, Public Law 94-201, which resulted from these efforts, defines the term “American folklife” as “the traditional



“Fancy dancers” participate in the Grand Entry at the 1984 Omaha Tribal Powwow in Macy, Nebraska. The powwow is a social gathering that helps to ensure the cultural conservation of Native American song and dance traditions. The Folk Archive holds the largest collection of Native American music documentation in the world, from recordings made of Passamaquoddy Indians in Maine in 1890 to recordings and photographs made of several Omaha powwows held in the 1980s. *Photo by Dorothy Sara Lee*

expressive culture shared within the various groups in the United States: familial, ethnic, occupational, religious, regional.” It states that “the diversity inherent in American folklife has contributed greatly to the

cultural richness of the Nation and has fostered a sense of individuality and identity among the American people.”

The American Folklife Preservation Act was approved by both houses of Congress at the end of 1975, and signed into law by President Gerald Ford on January 2, 1976. Initially intended for the Smithsonian Institution, the center was placed in the Library of Congress, in part to build upon the work of the Folk Archive already there.

The Folklife Center operates under the supervision of the Librarian of Congress and a board of trustees composed of individuals from private life appointed by the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, the president pro tempore of the Senate, and the Librarian of Congress; officials from federal agencies with cultural programs, appointed by the president of the United States; and ex officio members—the Librarian of Congress, the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, the chairs of the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, the director of the American Folklife Center, and



William Clark with the “junkyard robots” he created from recycled automotive parts, Newtonville, New Jersey, 1983. Known as “Robot Man” in his hometown, Clark uses the tools and skills of his trade as automotive repairman and the materials at hand in his shop to fashion robot sculptures and other artful constructions. *Pinelands Folklife Project Collection. Photo by Joseph Czarnecki*



In Wefing's Marine Supplies store, field-worker Nancy Nusz (right) speaks with a local engine mechanic while a store clerk looks on, Apalachicola, Florida, 1986. Stores such as the one shown here are often meeting places for members of the community and, in the case of this marine supply store, good sources of information about local fishing activities, practitioners, and traditions for field-workers doing research. *Florida Maritime Project. Photo by David A. Taylor*



Three generations of Collettes at the family-run business Collette Catering and Carry-out, March 1990. Al and Joanna Collette (shown here, right) established the business as a way of involving their children in their everyday lives, and six of their seven children work in the catering service. *Italian-Americans in the West Project. Photo by David Taylor*



Aerial photo of the Joseph Delume Ranch, Lincoln County, Nevada. The American Folklife Center's 1990 field project Italian-Americans in the West included a team of teachers and students from the University of Utah's Graduate School of Architecture, who documented with photographs and drawings buildings constructed by Italian immigrants. *Italian-Americans in the West Project Collection. Photo by Blanton Owen*

the presidents of the Society for Ethnomusicology and the American Folklore Society.

The Folklife Center's enabling legislation directs it to "preserve and present American folklife" through programs of research, scholarship, training, live performances, exhibits, publications, and preservation. The legislation also calls for the establishment and maintenance of a national archive "with any Federal department, agency, or institution." But, of course, a folk archive was near at hand, and the Archive of Folk Culture was transferred from the Music Division to the center in 1978. Thus, the traditional archival activities of acquisition, processing, preservation, and reference have remained central to the mission and the daily life of the American Folklife Center.

In September 1976, Alan Jabour, who had served earlier as head of the Folk Archive, became the first director of the American Folklife Center. In 1977, the first full year of its operations, the center launched two field documentary projects, the Chicago Ethnic Arts Project and the South-Central Georgia Folklife Project, setting a pattern that came to characterize much of its early work. One project was urban and one rural, but both emphasized the importance of documenting artistic traditions professionally, using both sound recordings and still photography, with an eye both to creating public products such

Federal Cylinder Project sound technician and folklorist Erika Brady, in the Recording Laboratory of the Library of Congress (circa 1980), makes a copy of a wax-cylinder recording using a reel-to-reel tape machine. By the early 1970s it was clear that time was taking its toll on the Library's cylinder recordings and preservation duplication was urgent. Renewed interest on the part of American Indian tribes in their own cultural heritage heightened the need to preserve and catalog this extensive collection. *American Folklife Center photo by Carl Fleischhauer*

as books and exhibitions and to building the collections in the Folk Archive. Teams of center field-workers sought to document not only music but also verbal arts, material culture, and occupational traditions, as well as other aspects of culture.

The creation of the American Folklife Center also engaged the U.S. Congress in the folklore enterprise. Whereas most Folk Archive collections had resulted from the vision and interest of individuals—both private citizens and those working for government agencies and large public institutions—many of the center's field documentary projects were now carried out in cooperation with the National Park Service, often at the behest of a member (or members) of Congress. The center has worked with the Park Service on cultural heritage surveys in northern Maine; Lowell, Massachusetts; the New Jersey Pine Barrens and Paterson, New Jersey; along the Blue Ridge Parkway in Virginia and North Carolina; and at New River Gorge in West Virginia.

In 1979 the Folklife Center launched the Federal Cylinder Project, one of its most ambitious undertakings. Over the decades the Folk Archive had received thousands of original, one-of-a-kind wax-cylinder

recordings of ethnographic material from field documentation conducted from 1890 through the 1930s, primarily of American Indian music. The Library's Recording Laboratory had developed a special expertise in the technically challenging work of copying these recordings. In the 1930s and 1940s some were copied onto disc, and beginning in the 1960s others were copied onto magnetic tape. Now a commitment was made to copy all of the more than ten thousand wax cylinders and cylinder-based recordings in the archive for preservation and access. Word of the project brought even more cylinders to the Library.

The Federal Cylinder Project was established to arrange, catalog, and transfer to preservation tape this priceless heritage of music. In addition, the project made cassette-tape copies of the recordings to return to the tribes of origin. This last activity exemplified a central philosophical tenet of the Folk Archive and of many ethnographic archives throughout the United States, that the documentary materials ultimately belong to the communities of origin. For many years representatives of American Indian tribes have visited the American Folklife Center to use the collections for their own programs of cultural





The American Folklife Center's Save Our Sounds project is preserving as digital files many thousands of endangered audio recordings, made in different formats, from the 1890s to the present. In this photo Peter Alyea, digital conversion specialist and sound engineer in the Library's Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, transfers the sound from a disc recording to a digital file. *Photo by James Hardin, February 2003.*

manent authorization by the U.S. Congress. In 2002 Michael Taft was appointed head of the Folk Archive.

Today, the archive contains more than 3 million items and is truly the national folk archive of the United States. In keeping with the multicultural character of American society and the international scope of the Library of Congress, its holdings also encompass folklife materials from around the world. Yet many items in this storehouse of information are imperiled because of the fragile nature of sound recordings. In urgent need of preservation are thousands of original audio recordings made over the course of the twentieth century by folklorists, ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, and other ethnographers, on wax cylinder, wire, aluminum disc, acetate, audiotape, and videotape. Many, including those from the

past several decades, require immediate conservation treatment and copying to other formats. Also in need of preservation are scores of photographs, drawings, diagrams, maps, and field notes that complement and provide interpretive information on the recordings.

In July 2000 a joint project proposal by the American Folklife Center in the Library of Congress and the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage of the Smithsonian Institution was awarded a grant for \$750,000 to preserve the historic sound recordings housed at the two institutions. The White House Millennium Council's preservation program Save America's Treasures, in partnership with the National Park Service and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, made the grant.

Among its several aims, the Save Our Sounds audio preservation project, as it came to be called, serves as a model and is building expertise at the American Folklife Center that can then be shared with others. All ethnographic collections will have to face the inevitable deterioration of their sound recordings, and all will need standards and guidelines for preservation. If the last hundred years have been a time of great accumulation of

preservation and revitalization.

Since the Folklife Center's establishment in 1976, the Folk Archive has grown dramatically, both from the field documentation initiatives undertaken by the center itself and from the acquisition of major collections. By 1981 the archive was officially named the Archive of Folk Culture to reflect the breadth of its collections. In July 1999 Peggy A. Bulger succeeded Alan Jabbour as director of the American Folklife Center. In October 1999 the center was granted per-

Jackie Torrence, a former reference librarian from High Point, North Carolina, now a professional storyteller, at the 1986 National Storytelling Festival, Jonesborough, Tennessee. *International Storytelling Collection. Photo by Tom Raymond.*





Mingo Saldívar plays *tejano conjunto* music on the Library of Congress's Neptune Plaza, part of the American Folklife Center's Homegrown 2002 concert series, September 19, 2002. Photo by David Taylor

recorded sound, then the twenty-first century promises to be a time of major preservation of sound recordings to ensure that they remain accessible.

The American Folklife Center is a small agency with a very large mission. The Library of Congress provides essential institutional support, of course,

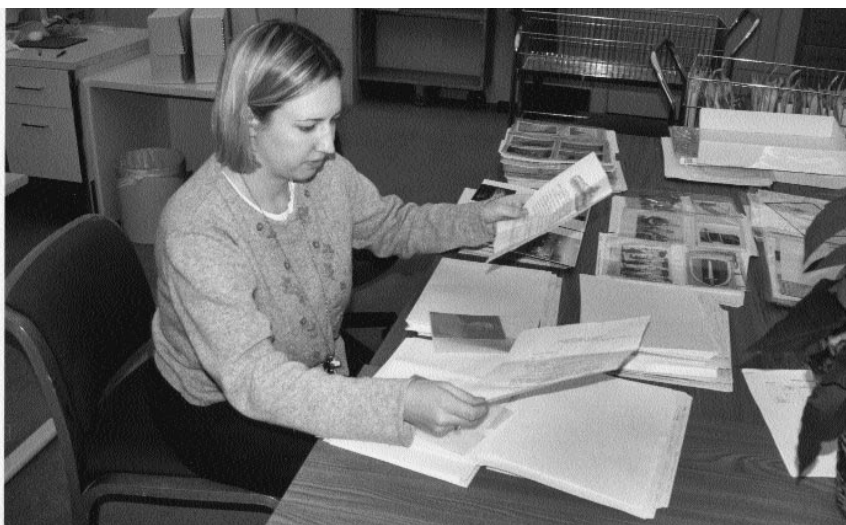
but to extend its reach the center engages in cooperative agreements with other public and private organizations, such as those with the National Park Service for field documentation projects and others with commercial firms for various print and music recording publication projects. For example, the

center has a cooperative arrangement with the International Storytelling Foundation of Jonesborough, Tennessee, to collect, preserve, and disseminate information about storytelling. The center has likewise acquired thousands of hours of audio and video recordings, photographs, manuscripts, and publications from the National Storytelling Festival. Through an innovative arrangement with the National Council for the Traditional Arts, based in Silver Spring, Maryland, the center is acquiring a vast collection of five thousand hours of recordings from the National Folk Festival and other events.

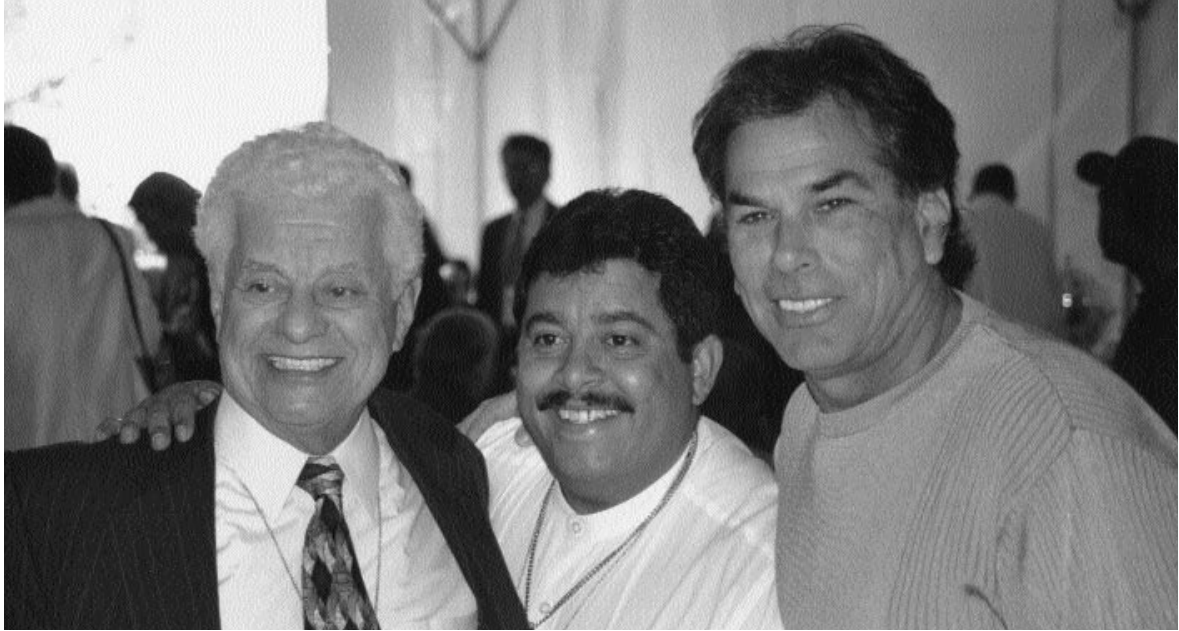
In November 2000 the American Folklife Center launched the Veterans History Project, which was authorized by Public Law 106-380. Approved by President Bill Clinton on October 27, 2000, the Veterans History Project is designed to collect and preserve the personal stories of America's war veterans and to make selections from these stories available on the Internet. This immense project has been undertaken with the cooperation and participation of many project partners, including the military service organizations and numerous individual volunteers, and is supported by a major grant from AARP.

Thus does the American Folklife Center find itself newly engaged in its mission "to preserve and present American folklife" in the new millennium, as it continues to fulfill the dream of the Folk Archive's first inspired collector, Robert W. Gordon, who sought to gather together in a national archive all our songs and stories, a great task he regarded as "a national project with many workers."

Veterans History Project assistant Mandy Brown sorts and arranges materials sent to the Library of Congress that document the experiences of America's war veterans. Photo by James Hardin



Mickey Hart in Search of the World's Music



Mickey Hart (right) with two fellow percussionists, Tito Puente and Giovanni Hidalgo, at the Library of Congress for its Bicentennial celebration concert, June 1, 2000. *Photo by James Hardin*

By James Hardin

"It all started innocently enough in a childhood encounter," writes Mickey Hart in his new book *Songcatchers: In Search of the World's Music*, with K.M. Kostyal (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2003). A recording of African pygmies he discovered in his parents' record collection opened for him a new world of musical possibilities and, as he says, "lit my imagination with an intensity that would ultimately guide my life."

Mickey Hart took up the drums, played with a band during a tour of duty with the U.S. Air Force, and eventually found himself in 1960s San Francisco with a band called the Grateful Dead. He had his first experience attempting to document the sounds of others when band colleague Bob Weir suggested that they make a night-time expedition to the San Francisco zoo to record the animals. With a borrowed Nagra tape recorder, the two attempted to sneak through the front gate, but

found themselves tangled in microphone cable and thwarted in their documentary efforts when their panicked commotion alerted the zoo guards.

The late sixties was a time of social and cultural experimentation, and Hart's musical imagination was open to a range of influences and possibilities, his "antenna scanning for new sounds." He met and recorded Indian musicians in San Francisco. On a 1978 trip to Egypt for a Grateful Dead concert at the foot of the Great Pyramids, he traveled to Aswan to record the music of those who navigate the Nile in their feluccas. In 1985 he met the Gyuto Tantric Choir at a concert in Amherst, Massachusetts, and invited them to California to perform and record. In 1988, on a cultural expedition of another sort, Hart arranged to record a concert of the San Quentin prison choir.

"Songcatching is not easy," says Mickey Hart. "It takes artists who create music," and listeners who appreciate it. "It

takes technology to record and preserve it. And it takes recordists who are willing to travel, sometimes to the remote corners of the earth."

Songcatchers pays tribute to the many men and women who have devoted their lives to recording and preserving the infinitely diverse rhythms and sounds that make up the world's music. The book traces audio documentation from the invention of the cylinder recording machine by Thomas Alva Edison in 1877 and the first ethnographic field use of the machine, by Jesse Walter Fewkes, to document Passamaquoddy Indians in Maine in 1890. It offers homage to Prussian-born Franz Boas, who settled in America in 1887, and his protégé at Columbia University, George Herzog, the fathers of American anthropology and ethnomusicology. It tells of Alice Cunningham Fletcher giving up a comfortable life to live on the Nebraska prairie to document Omaha Indian music, with the help of Francis La Flesche, the son of an Omaha chief. It profiles the

indefatigable Frances Densmore, from Red Wing, Minnesota, who spent fifty years collecting several thousand recordings of Native Americans from all over the United States and British Columbia.

Songcatchers also profiles the work of collectors working outside the United States, such as the Hungarians Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók, the Australian Percy Grainger, and the English team of Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles; as well as Americans Laura Boulton, Paul Bowles, Margaret Mead, and Henrietta Yurchenco.

Many of the collections of American songcatchers have found their way to the Archive of Folk Culture at the Library of Congress, and Hart and Kostyal pay tribute to the role that several institutions have played in supporting documentary expeditions and housing and preserving the resulting materials—from Berlin's Phonogramm-Archiv and New York's Museum of Natural History to the Bureau of American Ethnography at the Smithsonian Institution and the American Folklife Center.

In a chapter titled "Folksay," Hart and Kostyal describe the next step that songcatchers have taken in the process of collecting and archiving the world's musics: publication. From 1932 to 1942, John A. Lomax and his son, Alan, headed the Archive of American Folk-Song, which was established at the Library of Congress in 1928. Both devoted their lives to collecting songs and making them available through concerts, books, radio, and published recordings. In 1942 Alan Lomax launched the Library of Congress LP-recordings series Folk Music of the United States. Lomax feared that modern life was "sweeping completely off the globe what unspoiled folklore is left," replacing it with "just one type of diet and one available kind of music." Moses Asch, a Polish immigrant to New York in 1910, had a similar view. Inspired as a

young man by John Lomax's *Cowboy Songs and Other Ballads* (1910), Asch founded Folkways Records, which brought out "countless groundbreaking records" of folk and ethnic music, featuring Woodie Guthrie, Leadbelly, Pete Seeger, Mary Lou Williams, Josh White, Sonny Terry, Bess Hawes, and many others.

When Folkways Records was transferred to the Smithsonian Institution, Tony Seeger invited Mickey Hart to serve on the board of directors for Smithsonian Folkways. Smithsonian ethnomusicologist Tom Vennum advised Hart that he should visit the Library of Congress to explore the riches of the Archive of Folk Culture. As a result of the visit, Hart eventually produced a series of six CDs called The Endangered Music Project, with former American Folklife Center director Alan Jabbour. Hart now serves as a trustee of the Center and chairs the Leadership Committee to support the American Folklife Center/Smithsonian Institution joint audio preservation project, Save Our Sounds. In addition, he serves on the National Recorded Sound Preservation Board at the Library of Congress.

In telling the story of the extraordinary men and women who carried cylinder, disc, tape, and all manner of recording devices throughout the United States and the world to capture the fleeting sounds of musical traditions from many cultural groups, Hart also tells the story of the Archive of Folk Culture, the national repository of grassroots cultural tradition, now celebrating its seventy-fifth birthday.

The twentieth century was a great period for the documentation of traditional music, and at the start of the twenty-first it is the responsibility of archives and libraries to find ways to preserve a great legacy of recorded sound. Richly illustrated with historic photographs, *Songcatchers: In Search of the World's Music* tells the story of those

efforts to ensure that the infinite variety of the world's musical traditions will be available to enrich human experience for generations to come.

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tions, as chronicled in this issue of *Folklife Center News*, and the way in which motives and missions may either conflict or coincide.

A review of the history and contents the Folk Archive also reveals and reflects a time of extraordinary change that spans the twentieth century, from the first cylinder recordings that made audio documentation possible to the latest technologies for publication and preservation. The period has witnessed the social and cultural disruptions of many forces and events, including two world wars and the Great Depression.

For Further Reading

"The Archive of Folk Culture at 75" is adapted from "The American Folklife Center: An Illustrated Guide," by James Hardin, Library of Congress, forthcoming. Debora Kodish's *Good Friends and Bad Enemies: Robert Winslow Gordon and the Study of American Folksong* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986) is an excellent account of an important (but little known) figure in the history of American folklore studies. Peter Bartis's "A History of the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress: The First Fifty Years" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1982) chronicles the tenures of the men and women who built the Folk Archive. Alan Jabbour's "The American Folklife Center: A Twenty-Year Retrospective" (*Folklife Center News* 18: 1-2, winter-spring 1996, part 1; 18:3-4, summer-fall 1996, part 2) offers a lucid and insightful history of the Center.



Carrie B. Grover, Gorham, Maine, 1943. The Eloise Hubbard Linscott Collection of New England folksongs and folklore comprises the life's work of an amateur collector devoted to the preservation of the traditional music of her region. The collection includes the performances of several New England fiddlers, including Carrie B. Grover, the only woman among them. The Linscott Collection is one of more than three thousand collections in the Archive of Folk Culture, which marks its seventy-fifth anniversary this year. *Photo probably by Eloise Hubbard Linscott*

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