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Folklore and Folklife

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I. Scope

This statement refers to all materials that pertain to the subject of folklore and folklife, which is defined as the traditional expressive culture shared within various groups: familial, ethnic, occupational, religious, and regional. Expressive culture includes a wide range of creative and symbolic forms such as custom, belief, technical skill, language, literature, art, architecture, music, play, dance, drama, ritual, pageantry, and handicraft. These expressions are primarily learned through oral transmission, by imitation, or in performance, and are generally maintained without benefit of formal instruction or institutional direction.

The materials covered by this statement represent many formats, including: books, manuscripts, audio recordings, video recordings, photographs, photographic negatives and contact sheets, motion pictures, scholarly journals, avocational bulletins and newsletters, microfilms, microfiche, machine-readable and born-digital materials, web sites and online publications, and ephemera. These items include published as well as unpublished material, and commercial as well as non-commercial material.

The core publications covered by this statement are found in Classes GN, GR, M, ML, NK, PN, PQ, PR, PS and PT. Ancillary to these materials are certain holdings of the Manuscript Division; the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division; the Music Division; the Prints and Photographs Division; Rare Books and Special Collections, and all area-studies divisions of the Library of Congress.

This statement deals with folklore and folklife as a subject, as it is not found in one format. Therefore, it concerns virtually all divisions with custodial responsibilities. Accordingly, when a potential acquisition in the subject area of folklore and folklife affects more than one division with custodial responsibilities, the appropriate staff of those divisions and the American Folklife Center's staff should consult with one another to determine the best course for the Library. More than one division is said to be affected when:

1. materials from the potential acquisition could be assigned to more than one custodial division, and/or;
2. the appropriate Recommending Officer is not a staff member of the division(s) receiving the material.

II. Research Strengths

The Library's collections concerning folklore and folklife are undoubtedly the largest, richest and most comprehensive in the United States. Of these, the collections in the Archive of the American Folklife Center (AFC) are especially unique and valuable.

The Archive of the AFC, which was established in 1928, maintains the Library's largest and most significant collection of folklore and folklife materials. It is the country's national archive of traditional life, and one of the oldest and largest of such repositories in the world. There are over four-million items in the collection representing all major formats.

A. Characteristics of the Collection

1. American Folk Music

World's best collection of recordings and associated paper-based and photographic records; pre-1950 collections are especially strong; includes performances of songs and instrumental music by little-known grassroots musicians as well as performances by world-famous musicians such as Elizabeth Cotten, Aunt Molly Jackson, Woody Guthrie, Huddie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter, Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton, Burl Ives, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee, Johnny Cash, and Pete Seeger; includes collections of the most important folklife fieldworkers of the 20th century, such as John and Alan Lomax, Robert W. Gordon, Benjamin Botkin, Herbert Halpert, George Korson, Eloise Linscott, Zora Neale Hurston, Vance Randolph, and Henrietta Yurchenko; extensive materials concerning the post-war American folksong revival; includes the National Council for the Traditional Arts Collection, as well as collections documenting the American Folklife Center's Neptune Plaza and "Homegrown" concert series, and the National Endowment for the Arts' National Heritage Fellows.

2. Native American Music and Narrative

World's largest collection of field recordings, including the first ethnographic field recording made anywhere in the world (Jesse Walter Fewkes's 1890 recordings of Passamaquoddy traditions); over 10,000 unique wax-cylinder field recordings of Native American songs and stories (1890-1910).

3. African American Folk Music and Narrative

Monumental recordings of African-American blues, religious music, stories, street cries, children's games, etc., made by John and Alan Lomax, Zora Neale Hurston, John W. Work, and others.

4. Ethnic and Immigrant Traditions

The largest and most diverse collection of documents on the traditions of American ethnic and immigrant groups, including early 20th century Irish American musicians in the Dunn Family Collection of Captain Francis O'Neill Cylinder Recordings; the Italian-Americans in the West Project Collection; the Chicago Ethnic Arts Project Collection; the W.P.A. California Folk Music Project Collection, 1938-1940, which documented various ethnic traditions in California; the Juan B. Rael Collection of Spanish American traditions; the Aaron Ziegelman Foundation Collection of oral histories and documents collected from the Jewish Diaspora; and the Chang Yu-Chen Chinese Opera Video Collection documenting the Chinese American opera tradition.

5. American English Regional Dialect

Nation's best collection of recordings of American regional dialect; includes the American Dialect Society Collection of stories, oral histories, and traditional practices

recorded in New England in the 1930s; and the Center for Applied Linguistics recordings from the 1960s through the 1980s.

6. W.P.A. Folklore Projects

Documentation of regional and ethnic music, narratives, and oral histories under the auspices of the Joint Committee on Folk Arts., the Federal Writers' Project, the Federal Theater Project, the California Folk Music Project, and other initiatives of the Works Progress Administration; includes important sound recordings of narratives of ex-slaves.

7. Traditional Stories, Oral Histories, and Other Narrative Material From the United States

Many collections contain material of this kind; though less well known than the collections of traditional music, the collections of narrative material constitute one of the AFC's great treasures. Two of the most extensive collections are the International Storytelling Foundation Collection, which documents over thirty years of the National Storytelling Festival, and the StoryCorps Collection, which encompasses thousands of narratives on a wide variety of subjects, and from every state in the nation.

8. Documentation of Community Life in the United States

Multi-format documentation of a wide variety of local traditions ranging from foodways to rituals to beliefs to occupational practices; of particular significance are the collections generated by AFC's multi-disciplinary field research projects conducted throughout the country (1977-1999), and the grassroots Local Legacies Project (2000).

9. International Folklore Collected by American Ethnographers

Extensive field recordings of traditional music and other expressive genres made throughout the world by collectors such as Laura Boulton (Asia and Africa), Paul Bowles (Morocco), Vida Chenoweth (Africa, Papua New Guinea, Pacific islands), Harold Conklin (the Philippines), Bruce and Sheridan Fahnstock (South Pacific islands), Joel Halpern (Laos, former Yugoslavia), Melville Herskovits (Haiti), Alan Lomax (British Isles, Italy, Spain, the Bahamas, Haiti) and Henrietta Yurchenco (Central America, Mexico, Morocco, Spain).

10. British and American Folk Music and Drama

Especially notable is the extensive James Madison Carpenter Collection, one of the most important collections of British ballads, sea shanties, dance tunes, and mummer's plays; it includes the nation's largest collection of English ritual-drama texts. Also, Alan Lomax's recordings from the British Isles.

11. Brazilian Chapbooks

The AFC's *Literatura de Cordel* Collection is one of the world's largest collections of this form of printed ephemera; over 4,000 chapbooks (1950-present) contain folk poetry that expresses grassroots perceptions of historical and political events, religious concepts, kinship, and other topics.

12. Music of Ukrainian Minstrels

Copies of 400 one-of-a-kind wax-cylinder field recordings of Ukrainian blind minstrels made between 1904 and 1939; recordings feature epics (*dumy*) concerning such topics as village life and the exploits of the Cossacks.

13. Visual Documentation of Traditional Culture

450,000 color and black-and-white images, plus motion pictures and videotapes, documenting a wide variety of cultural traditions in context throughout the United

States and abroad. Films from the extensive Pete and Toshi Seeger Collection document music, games and other traditions from around the world.

13. Occupational Lore

Extensive documentation of the occupational traditions of baseball players, barbers, boat builders, cooks, cowboys, farmers, factory workers, fishers, loggers, miners, musicians, textile workers, railroad workers, ranchers, seamstresses, soldiers, trappers, winemakers, among many others. The George Korson Collection contains pioneering documentation of the traditions of Pennsylvania coal miners.

14. Urban and Industrial Lore

Documentation of the traditions found in urban and industrial cultures, including neighborhood life, the traditions of the factory floor and workshops, and the traditions associated with labor movements and unions. The Herbert Halpert New York City Collection, the Working in Paterson Project Collection, the Lowell Folklife Project Collection, and the Joe Glazer Collection of labor union songs are among the most significant collections in this category.

15. War Veterans' Oral Histories

Extensive collection of audio-taped and video-taped first-person accounts of the experiences of American war veterans; photographs, letters, memoirs and other materials are also included. This documentation flows from the Veterans History Project, mandated by Congress in 2000. The Project's collection, presently including the stories of some 60,000 individual veterans, is believed to be the nation's largest oral-history collection.

16. Printed Ephemera

The Archive's collection of folk festival posters and programs, folk club newsletters, songbooks and the like is one of the largest in the country.

17. Botkin Lectures Series and AFC Symposia

The AFC sponsors 6-10 scholarly lectures per year as part of its Benjamin Botkin lecture series. In addition, it produces two symposia per year. These events are documented on videotape and audiotape, providing a sampling of contemporary, cutting-edge research and scholarship in folklore and folklife.

III. Collecting Policy

The Library of Congress places primary emphasis on American folklore and folklife and collects comprehensively in this area. However, in recognition of the fact the United States is "a nation of immigrants," the Library collects material about the traditions of other countries and regions in order to illuminate dynamic connections between American traditional culture and that of other lands over time (the connections between Irish-American folksong and Irish folksong, for example). Specifically, the Library collects significant books, scholarly journals, audio and video recordings, electronic media, and ethnographic field collections (to give a few examples) concerning the folklore and folklife that characterizes other countries and regions. Materials rendered in English and all other languages are collected. As collections are acquired, we will change priorities for collecting. As we become aware of gaps in the collections we will add these to the priorities.

A. Formats

1. Books and Periodicals

The Library will endeavor to acquire for its permanent collection monographs and serials that contribute to research about the history, theories, genres, styles, and performance of folklore and folklife in all its variety within the following guidelines:

a. The Library will maintain comprehensive collections of:

- works published in the United States
- works on American folklore and folklife published abroad
- works published abroad about the folklore and folklife of countries other than the United States, about cultural politics and policies abroad, and works published by foreign scholars and other important figures in the field (including prominent tradition bearers) of national or international significance.

b. The Library will maintain research-level collections on:

- works published abroad on folklore and folklife in general
- avocational newsletters, bulletins, and similar periodicals published abroad
- works with a local focus within the United States that have been created mainly for local distribution

2. Paper-Based Records

The Library will collect the papers of important scholars and collectors, including those of folklorists, ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, and other ethnographers. The Library will also collect the papers of folk artists (including traditional singers, instrumental musicians, storytellers, and craftspeople) and folk-revival performers and songwriters of national and international significance. Materials of particular significance are the ethnographic fieldnotes of cultural specialists, along with associated catalogs of audiotapes, videotapes, motion pictures, photographs, and digital recordings made in the field. The Library will maintain selected, research-level collections of the institutional papers of folklife organizations and granting institutions of national significance (e.g., the Folk Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Folk Festival papers of the National Council for the Traditional Arts).

3. Sound and Moving-Image Recordings

The Library will acquire sound and moving image recordings in any format that document folklore and folklife in context; explicate the history, forms, functions, and/or styles of traditions; and depict the lives of artists and scholars of national or international significance. Works of particular importance are unpublished ethnographic audio and video recordings made in the field by cultural specialists. (Commercial sound recordings and archival copies of moving image recordings will reside in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division.)

4. Photographs

The Library will acquire original color and black-and-white photographs in any format depicting such things as folklore and folklife in context, material culture, and folk artists and scholars of national or international significance. In general, images recorded as documentary photography will be of highest interest. (These materials will reside in the archive of the American Folklife Center and also in the Prints & Photographs Division.)

5. Ephemera

The Library will maintain research-level collections of ephemera concerning American folklore and folklife, including such items as posters advertising performances of folk music, folk festival programs, folk-organization newsletters, and newspaper articles on aspects of folklore and folklife in the United States.

6. Multi-Format Ethnographic Collections

The Library will collect multi-format ethnographic collections made in the field by folklorists, ethnomusicologists, anthropologists and other cultural specialists of national or international significance. Such collections will typically include interrelated manuscripts, audiotapes, videotapes and/or motion pictures, photographs, machine-readable and online materials, catalogs, lists, and printed ephemera. These documentary collections will include, but will not be limited to, those generated by field-research projects sponsored by the American Folklife Center.

B. Collecting Priorities: Archive of the American Folklife Center

A guiding principle for AFC acquisitions is broad representation, both nationally and internationally, of cultural groups and their traditions. Areas in need of strengthening are:

1. Original, unpublished field documentation (e.g., audio recordings, motion pictures, photographs, fieldnotes) of bearers of traditional culture, in the United States and abroad, who are of national or international significance, and field documentation of cultural traditions in context, also in the United States and abroad, that are of national or international significance.

a. Published and unpublished materials concerning the regional folklore and folklife of the United States.

b. Published and unpublished materials concerning the traditions of ethnic groups in the United States.

c. Published and unpublished materials concerning calendar customs practiced in the United States and abroad (e.g., New Year's, Easter, Passover, Juneteenth, Halloween, Ramadan, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah).

d. Published and unpublished materials concerning life-cycle traditions practiced in the United States and abroad (e.g., anniversaries, bar mitzvahs, birthdays, funerals, retirement parties, and weddings).

e. Published and unpublished material concerning urban, industrial, and occupational traditions, including the traditions of labor movements and unions, corporate traditions, and organizational folklore and folklife.

2. Multi-format documentation that constitutes the work of leading folklorists and other cultural specialists, or the careers of folk artists and folk-revival musicians of national or international significance.

3. Original, unpublished sound recordings, motion pictures, photographs, digital material, and other documentation of folk festivals and other public programs of national or international significance that feature traditional musicians, dancers, storytellers and other performers.

4. Original, unpublished audio and video recordings of interviews with American war veterans, and associated materials. (See II. A.15, above.)

C. Exclusions

In general, the Library does not collect three-dimensional artifacts (e.g., baskets, quilts, costumes) that are products of folk-cultural practice. In most cases, persons offering to donate or sell such items are referred to the Smithsonian Institution's Office of Folklife and Cultural Heritage; regional, state, or local museums; or other appropriate repositories.

Materials that are not considered to be of national or international significance are generally not considered to be of high priority. Persons offering collections that do not meet this criterion may be advised to contact local, state, or regional archives, museums or other appropriate repositories.

IV. Acquisition Sources: Current and Future

Acquisitions for the American Folklife Center's archive come from two primary sources: donors of collections, and sellers of collections. With regard to collections obtained from donors, the majority come from individual scholars (e.g., folklorists, anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, oral historians) and amateur collectors of documentary materials. However, donors also include non-profit organizations, state cultural agencies, federal agencies, libraries and archives in the United States, libraries and archives in other countries, other divisions of the Library of Congress, and LC overseas offices.

Collections are obtained from sellers using appropriated funds, as well as funds from benefactors for specific purchases. The majority of the collections AFC has purchased have been obtained from individuals, including folklorists and other cultural specialists, other documentarians (e.g., filmmakers, sound recordists, and documentary photographers), and the heirs of persons who created ethnographic collections.

In addition to the above, collections are acquired in the following ways:

Through AFC's own documentary efforts.

For example, concerts, lectures, symposia and other public programs are video-recorded and recordings are added to AFC's collection. AFC-generated acquisitions also include multi-format documentation that results from its own field research around the country.

Through loan/duplication initiatives.

For example, a collection owner loans a collection to AFC so it can be duplicated and the copied works can be added to AFC collection. Frequently, an agreement specifies that LC will provide the collection owner with a digital copy made from analogue materials.

Through solicitation initiatives.

A prime example is AFC's Veterans History Project, which solicits the donation of videotape and audiotape interviews with American war veterans.

Through agreements with ongoing documentation projects.

An example of this is AFC's agreement with Sound Portraits, Inc., that led to the donation of interviews recorded in connection with its nationwide StoryCorps project.

Through the enhancement of AFC's collections. For example, relatives or friends of traditional artists documented in AFC's collections will donate biographical and other information about those artists. Often, this information is provided in exchange for copies of AFC's field recordings of the relative or friend.

Through copyright deposit and cataloging-in-publication.

Future Acquisition Opportunities

Current trends indicate that the following will be among the new opportunities for acquisitions by AFC that will become more viable in the future.

Large quantities of digitized or born-digital sound recordings, photographs, motion pictures, manuscripts, etc. (i.e., "digital surrogates") from other archives.

Digitized and born-digital multi-format ethnographic collections from national libraries and archives around the world that can be obtained through an exchange program.

Pertinent web sites that can be harvested or acquired.

Multi-format production materials that result from the creation of films, radio and TV programs, and other productions concerning cultural heritage.

V. Collecting Levels

The AFC collects material at several levels of concentration:

Comprehensive Level:

Works on folklore and folklife published in the United States

Works on American folklore and folklife published abroad

Works published abroad about the folklore and folklife of countries other than the United States, about cultural politics and policies abroad, and works published by foreign scholars and other important figures in the field (including prominent tradition bearers) of national or international significance.

Unpublished manuscripts, field recordings, photographs, digital files, and other ethnographic documentation created by important scholars and documenters, including the work of folklorists, ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, and other ethnographers.

Papers, unpublished recordings, photographs, digital files, and other documentation of

folk artists (including traditional singers, instrumental musicians, storytellers, and craftspeople) and folk-revival performers and songwriters of national and international significance.

Research Level:

Works published abroad on folklore and folklife in general
avocational newsletters, bulletins, and similar periodicals on folklore and folklife
published abroad

Works with a local focus within the United States that have been created mainly for
local distribution

Collections of the institutional papers of folklife organizations and granting institutions
of national significance

Collections of ephemera concerning American folklore and folklife, including such items
as posters advertising performances of folk music, folk festival programs, and
newspaper articles on aspects of folklore and folklife in the United States

Instructional-Support Level:

Pamphlets; announcements of exhibitions and concerts, press releases; unpublished
bibliographies and other such reference tools; downloads from web sites; various
compilations by AFC reference staff; and other vertical-file materials collected or
generated by AFC staff while conducting reference and research work, and covering a
wide range of specific folklore and folklife topics. These materials are found in the
Subject and Corporate Subject files in the AFC reading room.

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