

THE ARCHIVE OF FOLK SONG

Origin and Development

On July 1, 1928, the Library of Congress established within its Music Division a national repository for documentary manuscripts and sound recordings of American folk music. Originally designated "The Archive of American Folk-Song," its name was changed in 1955 to the Archive of Folk Song. In recent years, this unit has operated as the national folklore archive, in practice if not in title, and within its walls are concentrated the Library's acquisitions, reference, and reader service activities in the broad fields of folklore and ethnomusicology.

COLLECTIONS

The Archive presently houses over 30,000 recordings - cylinders, discs, wires, and tapes - containing over 300,000 items of folksong, folk music, folk tale, oral history, and other types of folklore. In addition, the Library has acquired thousands of commercial recordings pertaining to folklore and ethnomusicology; these are housed in the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division.

The Archive controls over 225,000 sheets of manuscript material, including the 180,000 pages amassed by the WPA Federal Writers' Project in its operations in folklore, ethnic studies, and ex-slave narratives. The Archive maintains its own Reading Room with over 3,500 books and periodicals dealing with folk music, folklore, and ethnomusicology selected from the thousands of relevant items in the Library's collections. In addition to standard publications, the Archive has assembled a sizable collection of magazines, newsletters, and ephemera of interest to folklorists and ethnomusicologists, as well as a variety of unpublished theses and dissertations.

Every region and every state of the United States is represented in the Archive. The collection is particularly strong in recordings from Appalachia, the Deep South, the Ozarks, Texas, California, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, New York, Vermont and Maine, but many other areas have solid representation. In addition to recordings of the British-American tradition, there are extensive examples of black American folk music and folklore; many other ethnic groups, such as Jewish, Polish, French, and Mexican, are well represented. The Archive's collections of American Indian music are quite large, featuring in particular the 3,591 cylinders of the Frances Densmore-Smithsonian Institution (Bureau of American Ethnology) collection transferred to the Library in 1948, and Jesse Walter Fewkes' March 1890 cylinders of Passamaquoddy Indians, the earliest field recordings made anywhere in the world.

In addition to material from the United States, the Archive maintains representative collections of traditional music and lore from all parts of the world. By exchange with other institutions and through the generosity of foreign broadcasting stations and other organizations, the Library has received a variety of recordings published outside the United States. In addition there

are a number of large field collections from various foreign countries, mostly recorded by American collectors. In the Americas the collections from Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Quebec, the Bahamas, Haiti, Trinidad, Mexico, Panama, Puerto Rico, Brazil, and Venezuela are particularly impressive. The largest European collections are from the British Isles, Greece, and Yugoslavia. In Africa, the collections from Morocco, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Upper Volta, and South Africa are strong, and several other African countries are represented. There are also large collections from the Orient and the Pacific Islands. A recent acquisition of special importance is the Laura Boulton collection of over 2,000 discs and tapes from several continents. At present approximately 20 percent of the Archive's recorded collection is from abroad, and an additional 20 percent from the United States is in languages other than English.

ORGANIZATION AND SERVICES

To make the Archive's recorded materials more widely obtainable, the Library publishes a series of long-playing recordings selected from the Archive's holdings; to date 68 discs of representative folksongs and tales have been issued. For the American Revolution Bicentennial, a special 15 - LP series entitled "Folk Music in America" was issued, under the editorship of Richard K. Spottswood. Catalogs and order forms for these series may be obtained from the Recording Laboratory, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540.

The reference services provided by the staff are varied. Congress, government agencies, the academic community, elementary and secondary educators, authors, publishers, performers, and the film, radio, and television industries regularly draw upon the Archive's resources. The staff answers requests for locally unavailable information, for reference and finding aids, for tape duplications of Archive holdings, for photocopy of manuscripts, and for referrals to specialists and resources elsewhere in the Library or around the country. To facilitate these services, the Archive has compiled more than 155 bibliographies, directories, and other reference and finding aids (including the "Current Bibliography" section of the journal Ethnomusicology) and has instituted an intern program for students seeking archival and library experience in folklore and ethnomusicology. A listing of the bibliographies and a description of the intern program are available from the Archive.

Location and Hours of Service

The Archive of Folk Song is located in room G-152 of the Library of Congress Building. Its hours are 8:30 -5:00, Monday through Friday except national holidays. The Reading Room is open to the public during these hours; no appointments are required except for listening. The address is: Archive of Folk Song, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540; telephone 202/426-5510.

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