

News, Views, & Stuff

Our esteemed acting Past President, William A.S. Sarjeant, was recently elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. Bill is a respected geologist when he's not singing songs, playing the harmonica, critiquing Sherlock Holmes, or writing historic fantasy novels. Congratulations!



Elmer Bolinger, of Gleichen, Alberta, died in Arizona in January of this year at age 84. Elmer, a lifelong farmer in the Gleichen district, had studied violin in Calgary as a young man in the Thirties. He spent a few years in the city, attending Crescent Heights High School; he'd had lessons under various "itinerant" teachers in the country and in the city, but finally took lessons under Mary Short, who gave instruction to many of Calgary's prominent violinists. During those years, he played dance band music, a mix of current and out-of-date popular music, with the odd square dance thrown in, that was favored on the northern prairies, for both rural and urban festivities. He put the fiddle aside for several decades while he farmed successfully and raised a family. In the early 80s, he

attended a fiddle contest with his wife Ralphene. After the event was over, he said to Ralphene, "You know, that looks like fun. I think I'll give it a try."

With Ralphene accompanying him on piano, Elmer returned to the instrument and became a contest winner in the prairie provinces and the western USA. The couple spent their winter vacations in a recreational vehicle scouring the Southwest for contests.

While contest fiddling is often no more than a parade of instrumental athletics, Elmer and Ralphene made *music*. Their close relationship made itself felt in their communication on stage; at times their music felt like a duet, not a soloist with accompaniment. They had, as his obituary in the Calgary Herald observed, "... a devoted partnership of fifty-five years" (January 13, 1995).

Elmer's background in the dance bands also influenced his contest fiddling, giving him a sense of rhythm and swing not easily available to those who've only learned the tunes and variations. While his reels may have lacked the *oomph* a younger fiddler—or one who hadn't interrupted his career—might have offered, Elmer's waltzes were elegant and

occasionally breathtaking.

For a portrait of Elmer Bolinger, see GWL, "Fiddling around is serious business." *Western People* 472 (December 15, 1988): 3. Beginning with a Christmas gift from their children in 1985, the Bolingers recorded a few cassettes of Fiddle Favorites, to give to friends and to sell at contests. I don't know whether any of these are currently available, but inquiries should be sent to Ralphene Bolinger, Gleichen, Alberta, T0J 1N0.

There are only a few sad aspects to the love of old time music, but one of them is that friends, favorites, and heroes are bound to disappear before you. One can only wish that they would all have had such a full life as Elmer and have left behind so many who will miss them. [GWL]

I caught a wonderful story on the radio recently amidst the VE/VJ celebrations: apparently listeners to Radio Tokyo during the war were surprised one night to hear a North American-style pop song playing. "I'll Never Say Goodbye Again" (poignant title!) had been written while in a prison camp by Elmer McKnight of the Winnipeg Grenadiers, a musician in private life. He was captured on Christmas Day 1941 at the fall of Hong Kong. The performance was prefaced by a request that the Canadian Government copyright the song for McKnight. The brief radio clip I heard did not explicate the politics that allowed the Japanese broadcast to happen, which is too bad, since the story must be fascinating. This may not be a tale of how music-allows-humanity-to-break-through-the-horror-of-war, like the WWI yarn of how singing "Silent Night" led to an informal Christmas truce, but it certainly says something about the complexity of human motivation.

The British Columbia Folklore Society

The British Columbia Folklore Society was established in November 1994 for the express purpose of bringing together and preserving the traditions of the province. Specifically its mandate is, "To Collect and Preserve the Traditional and Contemporary Folklore and Folklife of the People of British Columbia."

The Society is administered by a board of seven made up of writers, storytellers, musicians, singers, and folklore field-workers, some of whom qualify on a number of levels.

As a first step the Society has begun a campaign to promote public awareness and public appreciation of the folk traditions of the province. Old traditions from the family, the workplace, and the countryside are very much in evidence all around us, and newly introduced traditions constantly evolve to add to our folk heritage. New settlers and immigrants bring their family folkways with them from the homes they leave behind, and many of these folkways are adapted to existing customs. But, however, they evolve, they always form part of BC heritage and add to the traditions that establish provincial

identity.

Many of these traditions are unwritten and are only passed on orally. They need to be collected, recorded, and preserved in the same way as the physical, material heritage: the collections that one can see in museums throughout the province. However, without our oral traditions, our physical heritage amounts to little more than the dry bones of our past: the fleshless skeleton of our folkways.

Volunteers and members of the British Columbia Folklore Society are undertaking the task of preserving heritage by recording family histories and oral traditions, through tape-recorded interviews, throughout the province.

Donations of folklife artifacts, books, and records, have already been given into the keeping of the Society and form the nucleus of the Society's collections. These donations and field recordings, in turn, are the foundation of the Society's future reference library, museum holdings, and archives.

Membership fees assist the Society in fulfilling its mandate and member who wish to be more active are encouraged to help preserve our heritage through active field work, transcribing tapes, cataloguing and research.

The Society's Fee Schedule:

- \$ 10 Students, Seniors, Unwaged
- 15 Individual
- 20 Household
- 25 Institutions, Organizations
- 50 Supporting Business
- 100 Supporting Member
- 500 Benefactor

The Society's Logo—The Distaff and Spindle



The distaff is a stick or shaft to hold wool, linen, or some other raw material for making thread. Strands of the material on the distaff are drawn from the larger mass and secured to a weighted drop-spindle. When the strands are fed by hand to the spinning spindle, they twist together to form a single thread. From these threads cloth is made.

The distaff and spindle are implements common to many cultures in the world.

The British Columbia Folklore Society has chosen the Distaff and Spindle as a symbol to represent the many ethnic groups coming to together to make up the society of peoples of the province.

It also represents the multiplicity of traditions within our society that form a single thread we can all recognize and be proud of.

Folklore, what is it?

The name "Folklore" was first coined by W.J. Thoms in August 1846 to describe a study of antiquities, an offshoot of anthropology. The remnants of some of the early studies in folklore still exist and commonly tend to manifest themselves as a vague, lingering belief that folklore is either a subject for scholars or has something to do with ancient Greek myths and legends. Others might associate folklore with folksongs, with ancient ballads or with Native Indian tales.

Folklore is all of these things, but it is much, much more and a great deal of it relates to our daily life. It is Granny's memories and what was passed on to her from her mother, Aunt Mary's quilt and rug patterns, Uncle Albert's fresh-water well and why he doesn't line it with cedar, and mother's family recipes. It is song parodies, riddles, jokes and shaggy-dog stories, and what landmarks coastal fishers recognize, and what they call them and why. It is the stories of loggers and miners and their work-a-day language, the fiddle tunes of British Columbia, the planting seasons in the Peace District and the Chilkat blankets of the North West. It is the tales of hardship and humour of British Columbia's lesser known communities such as the Hawaiians and the Finns, who came here in the 19th century and brought with them the folk tales and traditions of their countries of origin. Also it is cowboy poetry, wooden toy logging trucks, and the Morris Dances of British immigrants. True folk art still exists and evolves, and is still being newly created. Examples of folk art can be seen if one is aware of the parameters within which folk art exists and, occasionally, pieces can be found hidden amongst craft works in galleries and local craft stores. And yet all these things only scratch the surface of folklore and folklife.

Folklore is a living thing that affects us all. It is something that we can all be proud of, and it needs to be both documented and preserved as an important part of our heritage.

For more information please write:

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The response to the call for papers for the International Ballad Conference 1996, which we listed in the previous Bulletin, has been overwhelming. A selection procedure will be necessary. The deadline for offers of papers and preliminary registration has therefore been brought forward to July 1, 1995. If you wish to give a paper or plan to attend without giving a paper, please contact Tom Cheesman, SEL (German), U. Wales Swansea, Swansea SA2 8PP, GB (Fax: 01792-295710; email: t.cheesman@swansea.ac.uk) as soon as possible. There is a form to be submitted, available from Cheesman. An abstract of up to 250 words should accompany offers of papers. Speakers will have about 25 minutes. New offers of papers are still very welcome.



Prior to their concert in Calgary, Jorge Coulon of the Chilean group *Inti Illimani* made some interesting comments to a reporter for the Herald. A sampling of his thoughts: "People like Peter Gabriel or Paul Simon are maybe a little bit tired with the classic rock and they went to learn something about other cultures. But the problem for us is that we cannot wait to be discovered by some rock star in England or America. When people living in North America or Europe want to look for some culture, some music, outside of their own, then we exist. When they are tired of us, we do not exist.

"Look at what happened to Brazilian music. Many Brazilian musicians, fantastic musicians, went to Europe or the United States to work because their music was suddenly popular. But after that, it was dark.

"It is no longer in fashion and nobody now knows what happens in Brazil...

"For us it is important to say to the people, look, we are only one group. It is an enormous continent with an enormous range of music and talent. *We* are only one group in this ocean....

"We know absolutely everything about North America or Europe but in Europe or North America the people know very, very little about South America or Africa or Asia. And that is a problem more for you than for us.

"Marginal cultures are important in music, in philosophy, about the earth, about relationships.

"We are a little bit prisoners of a western conception of life and I think, I feel, the results are not the best." (Calgary Herald November 22, 1994)