Recording the Nation: Folk Music and the Government in Roosevelt’s New Deal, 1936–1941

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ABSTRACT

Mark A. Davidson

Recording the Nation: Folk Music and the Government in Roosevelt’s New Deal, 1936–1941

Beginning in the mid-1930s, government-sponsored fieldworkers canvassed the nation as part of a series of unprecedented folk music research, collecting, and recording projects, conducted under the auspices of the Federal One arts programs of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Works Progress Administration. In most cases, the thousands of instantaneous recording discs, transcriptions, and song texts were deposited at the recently established Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress, under the watch of Harold Spivacke and John and Alan Lomax. The network of individuals involved in these projects reads like a who’s who of folklore and folk music scholarship of the era: Benjamin A. Botkin (Federal Writers’ Project, WPA Joint Committee on Folk Arts); Sidney Robertson Cowell (California Folk Music Project); Herbert Halpert (Federal Theatre Project, Joint Committee); George Herzog (Columbia University); Zora Neale Hurston (Federal Writers’ Project), and Charles Seeger (Federal Music Project, Joint Committee). The reasons behind making these collections were as varied as the individuals involved, but mainly reflected intellectual currents of the time: functionalism, comparative musicology, salvage ethnography, and an archival instinct. This dissertation explores the institutionalization of folk music during the New Deal era and the place of “the folk”
within the prevailing “national fabric” metaphor used to describe the United States as, in theory, a culturally pluralistic nation.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the four years that have elapsed since I submitted my dissertation prospectus in early May 2011, my project, perspective, and life have changed significantly. Only a few weeks after completing the prospectus I lost my father Harold Lee Davidson. In the summer of 2012 I moved to Austin, Texas to pursue an MSIS degree in archiving and librarianship at the University of Texas. In early May 2013, my friend and mentor Frederic Lieberman passed away in Santa Cruz. Over the course of the research and writing process I have endured floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, and fires, yet through all of these events, my wonderful friends, loved ones, and family remained a constant in my life. I am eternally grateful for the many well-timed talks, walks, games of pool, and Topo Chicos that the people in my life have offered me. Thanks also to David Hunter, music librarian at the UT Fine Arts Library for his many words of wisdom, and to Douglas Brinkley for keeping me afloat with research work as I finished up my writing.

Special thanks to my dissertation committee for their patience, guidance, and support throughout the process. My thesis supervisor Leta Miller spent countless hours reading manuscripts and talking me off the ledge in critical moments. Amy Beal offered ever-honest assessments of my work up to the end. Tanya Merchant always pushed me to explore the wider cultural and political contexts within the study. Finally, Stephen Wade offered friendship, support, and an encyclopedic knowledge of these folk music collections. Thanks also to Dard Neuman for his
wonderful comments during my defense and to Laura McShane for keeping the ship righted. I could not have finished this project without all of their help.

I dedicate this dissertation to my brother Matt, on whose birthday it is submitted, my mother Claudia, with whom I have spoken on the phone nearly every day for the last two years, and especially to my father Harold (6 June 1936–23 May 2011), who used to say to me when he was about to impart some bit of special wisdom, “Son, you might want to write this down...” Well Dad, I did. (And then some.)
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INTRODUCTION

“The last Indian has arrived. The cowboys are here—and the lumberjacks, Acadians, fiddlers, and ballad singers. The town is full of them. Navajos in silver bells, the town crier in Pilgrim clothes, Mexicans in swishing skirts, Norwegians toting around strange-looking Viking ’cellos, hillbillies with fiddles under their arms, and Scotch with kilts and bagpipes.”¹ So stated a Washington Post article dated Friday, 6 May 1938, the day that Sarah Gertrude Knott’s fifth-annual National Folk Festival was set to begin. Since 1934, the festival had appeared in St. Louis, Chattanooga, Dallas, and Chicago, but in 1938, in the midst of an economic downturn known colloquially as the “Roosevelt Recession,” the nation’s capital seemed a fitting, if not somewhat ironic, given the economic and political climate of the day, locale for the weekend-long gathering of “the folk.” In a Post article published less than a week before the festival began, Knott acknowledged the moment: “Now in this period of economic depression, when there is such a genuinely felt need for leisure-time activity, it is only the natural thing that people should turn to the old ways of recreation with renewed devotion.”²

Press coverage of the festival was tremendous, due in no small part to the five-year sponsorship contract the Washington Post signed with the National Folk Festival coordinators during the festival’s residency in Washington, D.C. between 1938 and 1942. The Post devoted numerous articles to the event, beginning at least a

month in advance, including a twelve-page “Folk Festival Edition,” published on 25 April.\(^3\) Selections from the festival could be heard nationwide over the radio on CBS and NBC stations.\(^4\) Moreover, as the Post reported, Washington, D.C.–based Radioscriptions, Inc. made recordings of the entire festival and then made copies available to “educational institutions and recreation groups interested in United States folklore.” “Experts consider the opportunity so rare that the entire festival is to be recorded electrically,” reported one Post article. “These [recordings] will make invaluable supplements to the written compilations of folklore now treasured by many libraries.”

Over the course of the three-day event over 500 musicians and dancers from two-dozen states traveled to the nation’s capital to perform for “approximately 15,000

\(^3\) “Folk Festival Edition,” Washington Post, 25 April 1938, (insert, 12 pp.). The Post also boasted that it was the only newspaper allowed to provide photos of the colorful characters who traveled from across the country for the festival. Michael Ann Williams notes that, “The Post not only printed the schedule itself as well as special school editions of the program but also closely covered the planning stages.” Michael Ann Williams, Staging Tradition: John Lair and Sarah Gertrude Knott (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 66–67.


\(^5\) “ Entire Program Of Folk Music To Be Recorded: Mormon, Dunkard Songs Among ‘New’ Items at Festival,” Washington Post, 5 May 1938, X3. Other groups made “various partial recordings” of the festival as well, “among them [a group] from Columbia University, of New York, with Dr. George H. Hibbitt in charge.” Michael Ann Williams states, “During the Post years Knott … contacted first with the Electreporter Company and then the U.S. Recording Company to record performers at the festival.” Williams, Staging Tradition, 66. Williams also notes that in 1942 Botkin pushed to locate the discs and to make copies for the Archive of American Folk Song due to nationwide aluminum rationing during WWII. Ibid., 70. Some of the discs are at the American Folklife Center (AFC) at the Library of Congress. See the AFC collection, “National Folk Festival, 1938 (AFC 1950/017), Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.”
There were two concerts a day—at 2:15 pm. and 8:15 p.m.—and tickets cost 50 to 75 cents each, with box seats going for $1 in the afternoon and $2 in the evening. Each concert opened with an appearance by “the nation’s only town crier,” Amos Emanuel Kukik, of Provincetown, Massachusetts, followed by ten to twenty acts, each including fifteen and twenty minutes of music. Featured at the concerts were folk dancers from the Lithuanian Society of Chicago; musicians from the Pipers Guild of America of New York City; Mormons from Salt Lake City who performed “pioneer marching songs”; the Plainsong Chanters of Prestonsburg, Kentucky, who sang “pure religious folksongs in a manner similar to that used for sixth-century Gregorian chants”; cowboys and cowgirls from Anson, Texas who presented a “Cowboys’ Christmas Ball”; one hundred lumberjack singers and dancers from Michigan; a twenty-person choir from the Dunkard community in Easton, Maryland, who sang shape-note hymns; a Tamburitza Orchestra from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh who performed “South Slavonic and Russian folk music”; a group of Mexican musicians from the Our Lady of Guadalupe Center in Kansas City, who presented a traditional Los Posadas pageant; and an African American spiritual choir from Somerset County, Maryland. Additionally, representatives from four Native American tribes—the Kiowa, Navajo, Chickasaw, and Blackfeet—appeared at the festival to perform

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6 “All Sections In Greatest Folk Show: 21 States Are Represented in Pageant Opening May 6,” Washington Post, 25 April 1938, FF2; “Folk Festival Closes; 15,000 At 3-Day Fete.” The subtitle of the “All Sections In Greatest Folk Show” article gives the number as twenty-one, and the text of the same article as twenty-nine.

traditional music and dances and to display what the *Post* called “one of the most select exhibits of Indian folkcraft ever presented in America.”

The Roosevelts were also public supporters on board of the festival. The festival’s organizing committee named Eleanor Roosevelt “honorary chairman” of the festival’s sponsoring committee, which featured a number of “official, social, and educational leaders” from throughout the Washington elite. She released the following response shortly after her appointment: “The National Folk Festival seems to me a wonderful opportunity to bring everyone’s attention to our heritage in dance and song and to develop both educational and recreational avenues for our people.”

Franklin Roosevelt sent along his own message—most likely penned by a press secretary—in the form of a letter to Paul Green, renowned playwright and president of the National Folk Festival, praising the festival and noting the importance that folk cultures brought to the overall diversity of the United States:

> We in the United States are amazingly rich in the elements from which to weave a culture. We have the best of man’s past on which to draw brought to us by our native folk and folk from all parts of the world. In binding these elements into a National fabric of beauty and strength, let us keep the original fibres so intact that the fineness of each will show in the completed handiwork.

Roosevelt’s populist message about the “national fabric” is an important recurring theme when discussing the folk as a marker of culturally pluralistic ideas of

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U.S. society in the 1930s. And it was not the first time such a metaphor appeared in the Post’s coverage of the festival. Knott herself used the metaphor when discussing the role of folk and folklore in the United States, arguing: “Both forms likewise constitute the warp and woof a folklore which is being woven into a pattern of national consciousness.”\textsuperscript{11} The Post article titled “Nation Rich in Blending of Folklore” also returned to this theme, noting, “America is the largest seedbed of folklore in the world. Into the texture of her civilization have been woven and is being woven the customs, the songs, the dances of many lands, Across her doorstep have poured the cultures, the attitudes, and the patterns of thought native to almost every part of the globe.”\textsuperscript{12}

The Post’s folk festival insert also highlighted another persistent and critical topic: the corrupting influences of modern media on “authentic” folk traditions and the urgency of salvaging authentic folk traditions. “It will be almost the last call for some of the songs and dances to be presented,” the article stated. “There are not many Indians left, for instance, who have been trained in the precise ceremony of tribal dancing; the ranks of sailors who sang while hauling up an anchor are thinning fast; civilization with its Big Apples and six-week Tin Pan Alley tunes is creeping fast into the last mountain retreats of the Appalachians.”\textsuperscript{13}

On Saturday morning, 7 May, at the historic Raleigh Hotel in Washington, D.C., prominent folklorists from across the nation gathered to discuss, according to

\textsuperscript{11} Knott, “Our Folk Material Of Old-World Origin.”
\textsuperscript{12} “Nation Rich in Blending of Folklore,” \emph{Washington Post}, 25 April 1938, FF3.
\textsuperscript{13} “The Folk Festival.”
the Post, “folk ‘discoveries’ of the year, similarity and differences in ballads common to various parts of the country, the cultural implications of folksongs and customs, [and] the manner in which folk crafts may be of benefit to those with whom they are native.”14 The list of participants and attendees at the panel discussion was a who’s who of scholars, government administrators, musicians, and folksong enthusiasts, including Ataloa, a Native American scholar and advocate Ataloa; Henry G. Alsberg, the director of the Federal Writers’ Project (FWP); Herbert Halpert, head of the Folksong and Folklore Department of the Federal Theatre Project’s National Service Bureau; “Father of the Blues,” renowned composer, W. C. Handy; Zora Neale Hurston, the author of numerous books and an employee of the Florida FWP; Alain Locke, philosopher, leading light of the Harlem Renaissance, and professor at Howard University; and composer and musicologist Charles Seeger, who had recently left his position as music director of the Special Skills Division of the Resettlement Administration.15

Chairing the roundtable was folklorist and University of Oklahoma professor Benjamin A. Botkin, who opened the panel with a discussion about the relationship

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15 “St. Louis Blues’ Writer Coming For Festival”; “Folk Round Table At Morning Session”; and “Folklore Panel Warned to Stick To Amateurism.” Also present were Sterling Brown, Negro affairs editor for the FWP and Howard University professor; Arthur L. Campa, consultant to the New Mexico Federal Music Project (FMP) and a Hispanic folklorist at the University of New Mexico; William Cunningham, the former director of the Oklahoma FWP and current national FWP administrator; Adrian J. Dombush, director of the Special Skills Division of the Farm Security Administration (formerly the Resettlement Administration); George Korson of Bucknell University (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania); John A. Lomax, former national folklore editor for the FWP, folk music collector, and former “honorary curator” for the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress; William C. Mayfarth, administrator for the FMP; and Charles Seeger, former music director for the Special Skills Division of the U.S. government’s Resettlement Administration.
between amateur and academic folklorists and the need for greater collaboration among the groups. The panel participants also discussed metaphors of national identity, from—in Botkin’s terms—“the abortive melting pot,” to the national fabric and the place of “the folk” in these metaphors. Race and ethnicity were central to the discussion, and Ataloa discussed the treatment of Native Americans under Roosevelt’s New Deal, and W. C. Handy, Alain Locke, and Zora Neale Hurston debated African origins and folk themes in African American popular musical forms such as jazz, ragtime, and blues.16

The National Folk Festival was a pivotal moment for the folk music research, collecting, and recording projects under the Federal One arts projects of Roosevelt’s Works Progress Administration (WPA). Shortly after the festival ended, Benjamin Botkin was appointed John A. Lomax’s successor as national folklore editor of the FWP, and Charles Seeger accepted a position as deputy director of the Federal Music Project, under FMP director Nikolai Sokoloff. Almost immediately the two began discussing strategies for coordinating the disparate WPA folklore and folk music projects, which resulted in the formation of the WPA Joint Committee on Folk Arts. Zora Neale Hurston returned to Florida to begin planning the Florida FWP’s folksong-recording trip, which resulted in the collection of music from African American, Arabic, Bahamian (“Conch”), British-American (“Cracker”), Cuban, Greek, Italian, Minorcan, and Seminole Indian communities from across the state.

16 I discuss roundtable panel in greater detail in the “Interlude” between the first and second parts of this dissertation.
The 1938 National Folk Festival in Washington, D.C. represents a microcosm of nearly all of the threads of the present study. From the marketing of folklore and folk music to mainstream America; to populist interpretations of folk culture as expressions of a democratic and pluralistic society; to the need to save folk culture from the corrupting influences of modern society; to the vigorous debates among scholars about what actually constituted “authentic” folk music, and how folk music differed from other musical genres, including “primitive” music and the blues; to discussions about the boundaries of cultural pluralism in the United States and the limits of metaphors of national identity, persistent questions emerged that folklorists and folksong collectors were forced to address. Folk music, as one of the few musical genres to contain within its own name its subject, was open to any number of seemingly divergent interpretations as to its nature, and by extension, so were “the folk” themselves.

This dissertation investigates these questions by examining the broader institutionalization of folk music under Roosevelt’s New Deal programs and policies. In particular, I explore the place of folk music within the Roosevelt White House; the folksong research, collecting, and recording projects under Roosevelt’s New Deal programs, conducted between 1936 and 1941; and the role of the Archive of American Folk Song as both a central storehouse for folk music and a popularizing arm of the federal government. I investigate the network of institutions and individuals devoted to the study and proliferation of folk music and the theories and worldviews that drove them to collect in the first place and that shaped their
conception of “the folk.” Although such an approach might suggest a wholly top-down, hierarchical approach to the subject, I argue that it is the ways in which these individuals diverged from these bureaucratic structures, institutional policies, and administrative recommendations that provide the basis for this study. Moreover, through investigating the deployment of folk music as a stand-in for national identity, I seek to highlight the insider/outsider status of the American folk, as both a symbol of the “common man” and a target for cultural stereotypes and derision.

I draw a distinct line around the folksong collecting, recording, and research projects of these New Deal–era government programs (i.e., the Resettlement Administration, Works Progress Administration Federal One arts projects, National Youth Administration, etc.), although, in truth, the interactions between these government-sponsored collectors and other folksong collectors and researchers of the era make such lines of demarcation blurry at best. However, I believe the government imprimatur to be important on numerous levels. In a number of cases these government fieldworkers had done little in the way of folksong collecting or ethnographic research prior to joining the WPA. Moreover, the interaction between “government worker” and civilian, particularly in the case of white workers knocking on black residents’ doors, at least had the potential to affect the recording session (a point to which I return later). There was also the difficulty of operating within the types of bureaucratic constraints—budget, time, hierarchies—that shaped the way that these projects operated. Moreover, by the end of the 1930s, around the same time
that many of the folk music projects were just getting underway, these government programs began to disintegrate, and by 1943, the WPA was finished.

Dissertation Overview

On 8 April 1935, Roosevelt signed the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935 into law. It was the largest single appropriations bill in the nation’s history, earmarking $4.88 billion dollars for relief projects and employment.\textsuperscript{17} The following month, using the funds allotted him through the ERA Act, he issued Executive Order \#7034, which established the Works Progress Administration (WPA). According to the WPA’s final report, between 1 July 1935 and 30 June 1943, the WPA provided white- and blue-collar jobs to approximately 8.5 million Americans, with three million people employed at the WPA’s peak in the beginning of 1939.\textsuperscript{18}

Roosevelt’s WPA also put unemployed artists, writers, musicians, and actors to work through an historic government arts program titled Federal Project No. 1, or simply “Federal One.” Part of the Division of Women’s and Professional Projects, the Federal One units included the Federal Art Project (FAP), Music Project (FMP), Theatre Project (FTP), Writers’ Project (FWP), and the Historical Records Survey (HRS). \textit{Washington Post} writer, Marguerite Drennan, heralded the “new


governmental ‘department of culture’” as “probably the most comprehensive of its kind set up by a national government.”

Although the Federal One arts projects were largely autonomous, all of them were involved, to varying degrees, with the preservation and popularization of folklore and folk culture in the United States. In 1939 FWP national folklore editor Benjamin Botkin declared,

In its belief in the public support of art and art for the public, in research not for research’s sake but for use and enjoyment by the many, the WPA is attempting to assimilate folklore to the local and national life by understanding, in the first place, the relation between the lore and the life out of which it springs; and by translating that lore back into terms of daily living and leisure time activity. In other words, the WPA looks upon folklore research not as a private but as a public function and folklore as public, not private property. This function is a collective and cooperative one, a synthesis of anthropology, sociology, psychology, and literature, the results of which are being pooled and cleared for an ever-widening public.

Botkin’s characterization of the WPA folklore projects as both preservation and popularization aligned firmly with his overall functionalist leanings, and his description of the interdisciplinary nature of folklore collecting was apt, with the obvious omission of music. In fact, with the exception of the Federal Art Project, each of the Federal One arts projects engaged in folk music collecting, recording or research at one time or another during its history. Under the aegis of these projects, folk music was a form of entertainment, a source for incidental music, an example of a centuries-old literary tradition, an object for serious musicological study, and source

19 Marguerite Drennan, “New Deal’s Cultural Program Launched with $27,000,000 Fund; Four Technical Aids Named by Hopkins,” Washington Post, 8 September 1935, B9.
material for building an archive. To be sure, folk music was not central to any of the projects, but I argue that the ways in which these projects incorporated folk music into their overall missions make the myriad uses of folk music under the Federal One projects worthy of investigation.

Under the direction of Federal Writers’ Project director Henry G. Alsberg, the FWP engaged in a massive social documentation and oral history program, the likes of which had never been attempted in the United States. Workers in the FWP’s social-ethnic, folklore, and Negro affairs sub-units collected thousands of interviews with ordinary American from across the country, including numerous volumes-worth of ex-slave narratives. The texts of folksongs and ballads were part of their efforts. These song texts were subsequently published—often only single stanzas—as representations of local color in the FWP’s landmark multivolume American Guide Series of tour books devoted to states, cities, and regions of the United States.

Although there were a few recording projects under the FWP, including the Florida FWP’s statewide collecting project under the watch of state director Carita Doggett Corse, Stetson Kennedy, and Zora Neale Hurston, for the most part the folksong collecting of the FWP followed in the literary tradition of textual ballad studies.

The Federal Theatre Project used folksongs in its activities as well, generally as incidental music for its productions. However, the National Service Bureau of the FTP, led by Folksong and Folklore Department director Herbert Halpert engaged in some of the most substantive folk music research projects of all of the Federal One programs. Between 1937 and 1939, Halpert, working alongside Columbia University
professor and comparative musicologist George Herzog, published a series of folk music editions including Arthur Palmer Hudson’s *Folk Tunes from Mississippi*; Robert Winslow Gordon’s *Folk-Songs of America*; John Harrington Cox’s *Traditional Ballads Mainly from West Virginia*, and *Folk Songs Mainly from West Virginia*; and Phillips Barry’s *Folk Music in America*.

The Federal Music Project, under the direction of Nikolai Sokoloff, also conducted folk music collecting and recording projects, albeit never on a national scale nor for any sustained length of time. Sokoloff’s chief concerns were putting to work trained musicians in FMP ensembles and offering the highest quality of music that the FMP could muster. A few state-level FMP administrators authorized folk music projects in 1936, the first year of the FMP’s existence, though most of these projects were abandoned within a year for various reasons, not the least of which was federal funding. In the summer of 1938, Charles Seeger was hired as deputy director to Sokoloff and was put in charge of the social, recreational, and educational aspects of the FMP. At nearly the same time, Sidney Robertson Cowell, who had worked under Seeger in the Special Skills Division of the Resettlement Administration, embarked on a large-scale collecting project in her home state of California with sponsorship from the University of California, the California FMP, and the Archive of American Folk Song. Robertson’s collection was not only one of the largest recording projects under the aegis of the WPA, but also the most diverse, including Armenian, Basque, Croatian, Finnish, Gaelic, Hungarian, Icelandic, Italian (including
Sicilian), Norwegian, Portuguese (from the Azores), Russian Molokan, Scottish, and Spanish performers.

The most ambitious of the folklore and folksong research projects was Botkin and Seeger’s WPA Joint Committee on Folk Arts, officially established in the fall of 1938 and designed to coordinate all of the folklore and folk music activities of the various Federal One programs. Unfortunately, less than a year later the WPA was restructured and federal funding was cut off, leaving WPA administrators scrambling for state funding for projects. Yet in the interim, the Joint Committee was able to organize and execute the largest folksong-collecting trip of any of the WPA projects: Herbert Halpert’s 1939 Southern States Recording Expedition. Between March and June 1939 Halpert traveled through Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina in an old World War I–era U.S. army ambulance that his colleagues at the New York FTP had outfitted for the journey. With the aid of WPA workers in each state who lined up performers and venues, Halpert collected 418½ discs over the course of his three-month trip, which was by far the largest collection made by any WPA-related folk music recording project.

Of critical importance to all of these WPA folk music collecting and research projects was the Archive of American Folk Song (AAFS) at the Music Division of the Library of Congress. Established in 1928 by folksong collector Robert W. Gordon and Music Division chief Carl Engel as a “great centralized” repository for the nation’s folk music, the AAFS blossomed in the 1930s under the watch of Gordon’s
replacement John A. Lomax and his son Alan, due in no small part to their folksong collecting efforts and the contributions of the government-sponsored folk music collectors of Roosevelt’s New Deal programs. The AAFS not only served as the storehouse for these and many other folksong collections, but also provided critical assistance to collectors in the field in the form of recording machines, discs, and other equipment as well as instructions on how to approach informants and what to look for while in the field. In so doing, AAFS administrators, including John and Alan Lomax, Harold Spivacke (chief of the Music Division of the Library of Congress), and Benjamin Botkin, Alan Lomax’s replacement as head of the AAFS, acted, in some respects, as both tradition keepers and tireless promoters of folk culture.

The Impulse to Collect: Theoretical Perspectives, Interdisciplinary Connections, Fieldwork Philosophies and Practices

Historically, the study and collection of folksongs had fallen under the provenance of a variety of scholarly disciplines, which were, to a large degree, isolated from one another. Textual scholars in English departments pored over published folksong collections and printed broadsides in search of versions and variants of classic English and Scottish ballads, as in the case of Francis J. Child of Harvard University, whose collection of 305 ballads—known popularly as the “Child ballads”—became the standard for the discipline. Folklorists in the United States also looked to printed materials for sources of research, but they supplemented this study by traveling into the field to find folksingers in their own element. So-called
“songcatchers,” including Cecil Sharp and Olive Dame Campbell in the Appalachians and John A. Lomax in Texas and the Great Plains, canvassed untapped regions in the United States in search of folksongs they believed to be untouched by the contaminating effects of urban culture, mass media, and modernity. Anthropologists and comparative musicologists such as George Herzog, Helen Heffron Roberts, and the members of the Berlin School of Comparative Musicology (Gesellschaft für vergleichende Musikwissenschaft), which included Otto Abraham, Erich M. von Hornbostel, Robert Lachmann, and Carl Stumpf, used scientifically based, musical analysis to describe and understand non-Western, folk, primitive, and traditional musics within a largely Western framework. This thumbnail sketch of the disciplinary differences is by no means complete, nor is it representative of all individuals at any given time. Rather, in most cases the delineating lines among disciplines, philosophies, and fieldwork practices were malleable and the boundaries permeable.

By like token, there were numerous reasons behind the impulse to collect folksongs, outside of the pleasure of the vocation. One central reason was a feeling of responsibility to save a tradition on the verge of extinction. This “salvage ethnography” or “urgent ethnography” paradigm had roots in late-nineteenth-century evolutionary and diffusionist theories of anthropology and social theory as posited by scholars such as Edward B. Tylor and Lewis Henry Morgan, but it was most closely associated with the anti-evolutionist and culturally relativistic theories of Franz Boas.
and the Columbia school of anthropology. This approach to fieldwork had its drawbacks, however, including the potential for the anthropologist or collector to assume a role of authority over the at-risk culture in the field or in the scholar’s writing, which at times led to the author acting as a stand-in for the culture itself. As James Clifford notes in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*,

> The theme of the vanishing primitive, of the end of traditional society (the very act of naming it “traditional” implies a rupture), is pervasive in ethnographic writing. … Traditions are constantly being lost. But the persistent and repetitious “disappearance” of social forms at the moment of their ethnographic representation demands analysis. … And I question, too, the mode of scientific and moral authority associated with salvage, or redemptive, ethnography. It is assumed that the other society is weak and “needs” to be represented by an outsider (and that what matters in its life is in its past, not present or future). The recorder and interpreter of fragile custom is custodian of an essence, unimpeachable witness to an authenticity.

The role of the folksong collector as the “unimpeachable witness to authenticity” is also a recurring trope throughout this study, particularly in the case of the WPA and AAFS administrators in charge of deciding what was worthy of collecting.

Aside from the ethnographic, anthropological desire to collect and preserve, there was in the early twentieth-century United States a growing movement within historical studies for preservation, and Roosevelt was an important figure in fostering this archival instinct. On 19 June 1934, he passed the National Archives Act, which

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created the first permanent national archivist position: the “Office of Archivist of the United States,” at a salary of $10,000 per year (approximately $173,000 in 2015). The Act also established the National Archives as the central repository for all government records, which up to that point had been spread across libraries, archives, basements, and attics. The following year, the original National Archives and Records Administration building opened in Washington, after nearly a decade of preparation, legislation, and construction. In 1936, the Society of American Archivists was formed, the first scholarly and professional society devoted to the archival profession as distinct from its past in the discipline of history.

The establishment of professional organizations in the 1930s extended to the realm of music scholarship as well. In 1930, Charles Seeger, along with Henry Cowell, Otto Kinkeldey, Joseph Schillinger, Carleton Sprague Smith, founded the New York Musicological Society, which, four years later, became the American Musicological Society. In 1933, Seeger, George Herzog, and Helen Heffron Roberts established the short-lived, but influential, American Society for Comparative Musicology (ASCM), holding their first meeting on 13 February at the New School for Social Research in New York, where ASCM member Henry Cowell taught courses in non-western musics and where Herzog and von Hornbostel occasionally taught.

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Modeled in part on the Berlin School of Comparative Musicology, where Herzog began his music studies, the ASCM attempted to assist their German colleagues during the uncertain times surrounding Hitler’s rise to power in the mid-1930s by donating a dollar from each ASCM membership to the Berlin School.\(^\text{26}\)

The influence of the Berlin School, along with the work of other folksong collectors and researchers including Béla Bartók, Ilmari Krohn, Oswald Koller, and Hans Mersmann, manifested itself in the musicological or musico-scientific studies of these New Deal–era researchers. Herzog, in particular, engaged with typological approaches to folksong melodies that were, in part, a musical equivalent to the types of variant studies that textual ballad scholars practiced. By analyzing folk melodies in this manner, comparative musicologists such as Herzog were able to find commonalities and differences among various regional and individual folksong styles. Herzog noted, “The advantage of the [typological] system is that it gives a brief and not over-explicit formula defining a number of salient features of the song and that it can be used for purposes of publication as well as for typology and indexing.”\(^\text{27}\)

Moreover, these comparative musicologists, both German and American, relied on the use of sound recording technology in the field not only as a means by which to preserve folksongs, but also as a musicological tool. These sound recordings


\(^{27}\) George Herzog, “Musical Typology in Folksong,” *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 1/2 (June 1937): 54
were indispensable aids in creating transcriptions, which would then form the basis for larger-scale studies. The musicologists of the Berlin School had amassed one of the largest collections of cylinder recordings with which to work in its landmark Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv, which became the model for many European and American sound recording archives in the first half of the twentieth century. (In fact, both Herzog and Cowell had “demonstration collections” from the German collection, which they used in their lectures.) Folksong collectors of the 1930s, however, were not beholden to phonographic cylinder technology, which although revolutionary at the turn of the twentieth century, left much to be desired in terms of fidelity and durability. Instantaneous disc-recording technology, which replaced the wax cylinder by the late 1920s, offered a much better alternative with regard to sound quality and playback capability. (Cowell had his cylinder collection transferred to disc for this very reason.)

Preservation and musicological research were not the only motivating factors behind making these collections, however. Benjamin Botkin, in his article “The Archive American Folk Song: Retrospect and Prospect,” written in 1945 while he was head of the AAFS, noted, “Because the notion of an archive, like that of a folk song, is inseparable in most people’s minds from the idea of the past, an archive of folk song is under double threat from the archaic and archaeological.”

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29 Ibid., 56–57.
other folklorists and of his era believed in the living, organic nature of folk materials, and subscribed to a more socially conscious approach to folklore studies that was in large part grounded in the anthropological tenets of functionalism.

Functionalist theory, which focused on groups, communities, and larger social structures, and the ways that cultural expressions operated within these larger networks, had emerged after the end of the First World War through the work of two figures: Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, and British anthropologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, both of the British school of social anthropology. For Malinowski, functionalism was concerned with

the explanation of anthropological facts by the part they play within the integral system of culture, by the manner in which they are related to each other within the system, and by the manner in which this system is related to the physical surroundings. The functional view of culture insists therefore upon the principle that in every type of civilization, every custom, material object, idea, and belief fulfills some vital function, has some task to accomplish, represents an indispensable part of a working whole.”

For these WPA administrators and collectors, functionalist theory offered a near-perfect lens through which to frame the study of folk music in a pluralistic, socially conscious manner. Benjamin Filene notes, “The move toward functionalism naturally affected the way folklorists conducted their fieldwork. … Field trips became not a chance to record the last whispers of a dying culture but an opportunity to examine

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how a culture sloughed off or adapted the old and incorporated the new into a constantly revitalizing mixture.”

Moreover, the results of such a functionalist approach allowed these folksong collectors and WPA and AAFS administrators a means by which to re-inject folk culture back into mainstream America. Alan Lomax, at a folksong-collecting workshop at Fisk University in 1941, noted that the approach of the AAFS with regard to classifying songs was “largely functional—that is the songs are divided up according to the way they function in community life. This classification approximates—I believe—that which is current among the people, themselves.”

The Lomaxes published two collections of folksongs during this time, *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (1934), and *Our Singing Country* (1941), segmented in terms of the style and function of the music (e.g., work songs, spirituals). Benjamin Botkin also published his wildly popular collection *A Treasury of American Folklore* in 1944, shortly before he left the AAFS. Radio was another important medium for these collectors and administrators, with Alan Lomax as a key figure in the use of radio to promote folk music during the 1930s and ’40s in both America and England.

Thus, functionalism becomes a two-way street. It is both a means by which to study folk culture within communities, and a way to reinstitute folk culture into

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American society. Speaking at the Midcentury International Folklore Conference at Indiana University in 1950, Alan Lomax argued, “We [as folklorists] have become in this way the champions of the ordinary people of the world who aren’t backed up by printing presses, radio chains, and B29’s. We believe in the oral tradition, we believe in the small cultural situation, we think that some of these folk of the world have something worthwhile culturally, morally, etc.”34 Lomax noted the reciprocal role that folklorists played in the promotion and popularization of folk cultures,

Now I propose that we should be two-way bridges and form a two-way inter-communication system. We, who speak for the folk in the marketplace here, have obligations to the people whom we represent. If our activity is solely to enrich a city, urban, middle-class structure, the suspicion that some of the folk have of us might actually be justified, that we are folklorists basically because we are enriching ourselves, either with prestige or actual money. So, I think, that we have to work in behalf of the folk, the people. We have to defend them, to interpret them, to interpret to them what is going on in the world which they do not make, but which begins to move in upon them and to crush their culture.35

But speaking for the folk, interpreting the folk, and interpreting the world for the folk is a presumptuous and somewhat-manipulative sentiment that calls into question the work that these folklorists were doing in the first place. Taken another way, the role of professional folklorist, then, becomes as much an arbiter of taste for “the folk” themselves as it is for the mainstream public; neither role is particularly noble.

Yet, in many respects, the responsibility that many of these New Deal–era folklorists and collectors felt in re-presenting folk cultures and in bringing folklore and music to the widest audience possible presaged in many respects the types of

34 Stith Thompson, ed., *Four Symposia on Folklore* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1953), 158.
35 Ibid., 159.
“applied folklore” and “public folklore” that folklorists practiced in the latter half of the twentieth century. Jerrold Hirsch notes, “Although New Deal folklorists used neither the term applied nor public sector folklore, they clearly saw themselves as working for the public and thought of their [in Botkin’s words] ‘folklore research not as a private but a public function.’”\(^36\) Botkin himself, writing in 1953, took up the mantle of applied folklore, arguing, “But as long as the folklorist stays inside folklore and regards is ‘from the point of view of folklore itself,’ he remains a ‘pure’ folklorist. It is only when he gets outside of folklore into social or literary history, education, recreation, or the arts that he becomes an ‘applied’ folklorist.”\(^37\)

Botkin’s distinction between “pure” and “applied” folklore is crucial, not simply because the work of the New Deal folk music researchers encompassed both (i.e., functionalist, musicological, archival, and other approaches), but also because his statement points to the debates that had been brewing about the proper role of folklore studies from the 1930s onward. Richard Dorson—who coined the term “fakelore” to describe folklore-popularization efforts such as Botkin’s bestselling *A Treasury of American Folklore* (1944), which Dorson called an “uncritical encomium”—believed applied folklore to be an intellectual fashion:

> The twinge of social conscience and impulse to contribute one’s expertise for the betterment of underprivileged man are certainly commendable. One scholarly discipline after another—sociology, political science,

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anthropology—has agonized over applied versus pure research, and it is inevitable that folklorists, working so closely to the grass roots, should suffer the same recriminations and respond to the same idealisms. But, in the case of these WPA workers and administrators, their approach was not borne out of a response to recriminations, although their beliefs could certainly be accused of being idealistic. The act of bringing folklore out of the academy and into public view fit seamlessly into the general zeitgeist of the New Deal era. Robert Baron and Nicholas Spitzer, in the edited collection *Public Folklore* argue that this approach “is not, and never was, a merely vocational endeavor subordinate to the main business of folklore studies. At its best, the study of public folklore brings into high relief the issues of representation, ideology, and practice at the center of the discipline.”

Baron and Spitzer define public folklore as “the representation and application of folk traditions in new contours and contexts within and beyond the communities in which they originated, often through the collaborative efforts of tradition bearers and folklorists or other cultural specialists,” which crystallizes perfectly the worldviews of these New Deal collectors and administrators.

Given the overall mélange of disciplinary viewpoints, fieldwork practices, and individual worldviews that these collectors and administrators brought to their work under the aegis of Roosevelt’s New Deal programs, there was certainly potential for

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40 Ibid., 1.
the people whom these collectors studied to get lost. But as folk musician and scholar Stephen Wade notes, “the folk” remain:

To be sure, the living human traditions available on those products had previously filtered through the field collectors who made on-site decisions about whom and what they would record, and then was channeled again through Lomax’s and Spivacke’s editorial and auditory choices that governed these collections. Yet that winnowing did not dilute the immediacy of the performances or diminish the role of the performers. For the most part they are not anonymous. The album brochures usually identify them, and often the singers and instrumentalists spoke their names after they finished their numbers, “recorded for the benefit of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.”

This dissertation explores this sprawling, meandering, and rarely linear process of mediation from the top-down administrative decisions made prior to the collectors going into the field, to the on-the-ground decisions that resulted from the culture contact between performer and collector, to the voices of the individuals—not necessarily famous, yet not anonymous—that ended up in the archives of the Library of Congress. To use Sarah Gertrude Knott’s metaphor, it is the “warp and woof” of these seemingly divergent threads that made these research and collecting projects successful, despite the political, economic, and sociocultural conditions under which these government employees were working.

Project History and Research Overview

This dissertation represents the first full-length study of these WPA folk music research, collecting, and recording projects. Over the course of the dissertation I provide detailed histories of the individual projects and the individuals involved

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with them, while at the same time treating the overall folk music projects holistically and organically by situating them in the wider historical, sociocultural, and political context of the 1930s. Whenever possible I attempted to allow the voices of the collectors and administrators to speak for themselves, while framing their contributions within the context of my overall arguments about the place of the folk under Roosevelt’s pluralistic and populist New Deal government programs and policies. Much more work is yet to be done, however, particularly with regard to the recording projects of the Florida Federal Writers’ Project and Ruby Pickens Tartt of the Alabama FWP. Moreover, many of the projects discussed herein could warrant their own dissertation-length study.

Because these folk music collectors and researchers were approaching their work from myriad disciplinary perspectives, I engaged with sources from a variety of intellectual lineages, including anthropology, archival history, cultural studies, critical race theory, digital humanities, ethnomusicology, folklore studies, historical musicology, literary history and theory, sound recording history, and sound studies, among others. The bulk of my research, however, came from primary source materials, and over the course of my research I visited numerous archives across the United States including what was formerly the Archive of American Folk Song, now the Archive of Folk Culture located in the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress, where the bulk of the New Deal era–research and recordings are held. While at the Library of Congress, I consulted the Sidney Robertson Cowell Collection, the Harold Spivacke Collection, and the Federal Music and Theatre
Collections in the Music Division, as well as the Federal Writers’ Project manuscripts in the Manuscript Division. Additionally I visited the Hargrove Music Library at the University of California, Berkeley (Sidney Robertson Cowell California Folk Music Project materials); the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) branches in College Park, Maryland (general WPA materials), and San Bruno, California (California specific WPA materials); the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts (Henry Cowell Collection); the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Mississippi FWP, FMP, and WPA Joint Committee materials); and the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin (John A. Lomax Family Papers).

**Methodological Approaches**

Throughout the study I investigate the structural elements surrounding the WPA folk music research and recording projects, and the institutions and individuals involved. I employ archival and historical research to ethnographic fieldwork, in what I consider ethnographic forensics, or fieldwork autopsies. This approach is certainly not new, but, as Jonathan McCollum and David Hebert note, “Although historical studies have been a major part of ethnomusicology for much of the field’s development, in recent years both the distinctiveness and significance of historical

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42 I consulted other archives remotely, including the State Archives of Florida, in Tallahassee, where much of the Florida Federal Writers’ Project materials are kept; the Columbia University Center for Oral History, which held the transcript for a valuable and little-known Harold Spivacke interview; and the Indiana University Center for the Study of History and Memory, which held an until-recently-restricted interview with Herbert Halpert. I researched in the archives of Sonoma State University as well for information on the Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin migrant worker recordings, but ended up leaving the topic for future research.
inquiry appear to be receiving notable acknowledgement at the same time that the field has clearly placed more emphasis on ethnographic studies of contemporary music practices.\textsuperscript{43}

There are, however, inherent difficulties in approaching fieldwork and ethnography from an historical perspective, including the fundamental methodological difference between examining that which represented a cultural present, in the case of fieldwork, and situating it into an historical past. The process of doing historical research is difficult enough. As Hayden White notes, “Theorists of historiography generally agree that all historical narratives contain an irreducible and inexpungeable element of interpretation” because “the historical record is both too full and too sparse.”\textsuperscript{44} In White’s estimation, any historical narrative is “thus necessarily a mixture of adequately and inadequately explained events, a congeries of established and inferred facts, at once a representation that is an interpretation and an interpretation that passes for an explanation of the whole process mirrored in the narrative.”\textsuperscript{45}

In the case of the present study, I was both fortunate and plagued by choosing a topic related to the federal government. On the one hand, because government documents are not under federal copyright, I was able to use and photograph any of the materials that I wanted. Additionally, because of Roosevelt’s National Archives

\textsuperscript{44} Hayden White, Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 51.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
Act of 1934 and the establishment of the National Archives system, I had at my disposal many of the government records in a generally centralized area. However, as is the case with any large-scale bureaucracy, government workers generally documented everything in triplicate, and most every scrap of paper, regardless of its importance, ended up in the NARA files. NARA workers had the monumental task of attempting to organize the voluminous amount of paper into a usable system, which is difficult, at best, to decipher. Of course, no single archive contains all extant documents on a given subject, and in the case of the WPA projects, I had to piece together research from across a variety of archives. The final liquidation of the WPA projects in 1943—and the progressive shutdown of various projects and arts programs up to that date—was hardly well organized. Until his death in 2012, Florida FWP worker Stetson Kennedy had in his possession boxes of FWP materials that had been destined for the trash. These materials are now being accessioned at the archives at the University of Florida. Too full, yet too sparse.

Ethnographic analysis is equally problematic, albeit for different reasons. James Clifford warns, “The historian of fieldwork is hampered by limited and foreshortened evidence; it is always difficult, if not impossible, to know what happened in an ethnographic encounter.” Clifford’s point is particularly apt with regard to these Federal One field collections. Although these WPA and AAFS administrators pronounced their theories on why folklore needed to be collected, and

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46 Sadly, Kennedy died in August 2012, while I was researching at the American Folklife Center.
the value of the work that these projects were doing, they had little actual control over the workers they sent into the field, many of whom had little fieldwork experience or knowledge of the music they were collecting. Some projects (the FWP, Joint Committee, and Sidney Robertson Cowell) provided fieldworkers detailed sets of instructions and questionnaires that they were to use in the field, although these documents tended to be formulaic, excessively long, and otherwise seemingly of little practical use. The resulting collections, in particular the handwritten transcriptions written on the fly and the field notes which were written some time later, are particularly problematic. Field recordings presented an additional set of problems. They were limited to the time allotted on a given disc, which meant that longer songs had to be cut or that performances had to be pre-scripted so that the collectors could capture the parts they felt were most interesting (generally single stanzas, refrains, or particular variations). Cost of materials was a factor as well. Recording machines, discs, and cutting needles were not particularly cheap, and in the run-up to the Second World War aluminum rationing made the problem even worse.

But the primary problem these administrators and collectors faced was the constantly shifting political landscape that kept the future of their projects in flux. Congress was quick to cut funding to the WPA programs, particularly during the Roosevelt Recession of 1937–38, and it also gutted the entirety of the Federal One arts projects in 1939 with a reorganization that transferred these projects from federal to state control, putting additional financial pressure on already cash-strapped state legislatures. This same reorganization defunded and dissolved the Federal Theatre
Project entirely, on political grounds. By the time the United States entered the war in December 1941, the folk music projects of the WPA had come to a close.

**Structural Overview**

This dissertation is divided into two large halves: Part 1, encompassing the first six chapters, situates the folk music research and collecting projects into the larger social, cultural, and political contexts of the New Deal era. In chapter 1 I investigate the 1930s as a period of social documentation and cultural nationalism and trace the lineages of two metaphors of U.S. national identity—the assimilationist melting pot and the culturally pluralistic national patchwork—through the era of Franklin Roosevelt. Chapter 2 investigates the history of folklore studies and nationalistic uses of “the folk” from the German romantic nationalist movement of the late-eighteenth century through the populist political movements of the early decades of the twentieth century in the United States. I address the difficulties of adequately defining “the folk,” and folk music in particular as a means by which to discuss the myriad viewpoints that the New Deal collectors and administrators held in the course of these WPA collecting projects. In chapter 3, I examine the place of folk culture in the New Deal, including the rise of folk festivals in the late 1920s, the prevalence of folk music in mass media outlets such as commercial recordings and radio broadcasts, the folk arts movement of Thomas Hart Benton, Charles Pollock, and others, as well as the use of folk and regionalist themes in literature of the era. I examine the place of folk music in the Roosevelt White House in chapter 4, including
its use as a populist political tool and as a form of light entertainment that allowed the Roosevelt family to relate to the “common man.” In tracing the history of the Roosevelts’ public appearances at folk festivals and with folk musicians, the folk music concerts they programmed while in office, and the musicians with whom they were associated, I detail some of the fundamental divergences between Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt with regard to government policy, public need, and culturally pluralistic approaches to race, class, and gender. Chapter 5 is devoted to the history of the Archive of American Folk Song, the overall mission of the AAFS’s principal figures, including Robert W. Gordon, Carl Engel, John and Alan Lomax, Harold Spivacke, and Benjamin Botkin, and the assistance that these administrators provided collectors in the field.

In the second part of the dissertation I provide a history of the folk music research, collecting, and recording projects of the WPA projects by devoting individual chapters to each of the projects. Chapter 6 investigates the work of FWP folklore editors John Lomax and Benjamin Botkin and situates their units within the larger context of oral history and social documentation projects under the FWP, including the collecting of ex-slave narratives. Rather than examining all of the folk music activities of the FWP, in particular the recording projects of the Florida and Alabama FWP units, I focus on the textual lineage of ballad collection, which I contrast with the musicological study of folksongs in chapter 7, with the work of Herbert Halpert and George Herzog for the National Service Bureau of the Federal Theatre Project. I also explore Halpert’s role as director of the folksong department of
the NSB and the use of folk music in FTP productions as a means by which to hearken to a constructed sense of “American-ness.” In chapter 8, I explore the establishment of the WPA Joint Committee on Folk Arts in late 1938 as a means by which its directors Charles Seeger and Benjamin Botkin could attempt to put to use the voluminous and largely overlooked cache of folklore materials collected by the WPA projects. Additionally, I provide an overview of the Joint Committee’s largest endeavor: Herbert Halpert’s 1939 Southern States Recording Expedition. I devote chapters 9–11 to the Federal Music Project. Chapter 9 is an overview of folk music research and collecting within the project and the administrative philosophies of FMP director Nikolai Sokoloff and deputy director Charles Seeger. In chapter 10, I look at the folk music activities of various state-level FMP projects, focusing on four in particular: Kentucky, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. I devote chapter 11 to Sidney Robertson Cowell’s California Folk Music Project and situate her approach to fieldwork and her broad definition of “folk music” within the larger context of cultural pluralism in the 1930s. I conclude the dissertation by tracing the paths of the principal figures in these collecting and research projects, and the history (present, and future) of the recordings and documents collected, placing them into the context of the rise of digital preservation and access and current thoughts on pluralism and multiculturalism in the twenty-first century.
PART ONE

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF FOLK MUSIC UNDER ROOSEVELT’S NEW DEAL
CHAPTER 1.

“A Nation Hungry for News of Itself”: Social Documentation, Nationalism, and Cultural Pluralism in the United States

“Never before did a nation seem so hungry for news of itself,” wrote literary critic and social commentator Alfred Kazin about the Depression years in his 1942 book *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature*. Pointing to a “reawakened interest in the whole of American past,” and “a need to give the whole spirit of social inventory in New Deal America a basic foundation in the reclaimed American inheritance,” Kazin noted,

“Chanting America, loving it, celebrating it, there was suddenly a whole world of marvels on the continent to possess—a world of rivers and scenes, of folklore and regional culture, of a heroic tradition to reclaim forgotten heroes to follow. America was here, now a continent to be surveyed… an inheritance to rejoice in and find strength in.”

However, as historian Charles C. Alexander observed, “to many millions of Americans, the Depression brought only lessened confidence, lowered morale, and finally despair.” There arose in the early decades of the twentieth century a dichotomy between the industrial “machine age” and a romanticized, imagined past of The United States’ rural agrarian roots. In 1927, Charles and Mary Beard published as part of the popular “Book-of-the-Month-Club,” a study titled *The Rise of American Civilization* (1927). The widely popular publication, divided into two volumes—“The Agricultural Era” and “The Industrial Era”—“portrayed American

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history almost exclusively in terms of the struggle between economic elites and the toiling masses,” as historian Gary Gerstle observes. The Beards’ book was but one of a number of cultural debates about the nature of society and civilization during the era. Modernity and modern living were firmly entrenched at the time these volumes were published, and historian Warren Susman notes that, “by 1927 the words ‘modern’ and ‘streamlined’ were being used not only in reference to design of particular objects but to a whole quality of living, a whole life-style.” It was the realization of the limits of the promises of modernity, and the reevaluation of the nation’s reliance on modern industrial society that was one of the most palpable shocks of the 1929 crash.

Kazin was correct in his statement that the period was a time of rampant U.S. nationalism, of reassessment, of looking inward to the point of political and cultural isolationism in the wake of the financial crash that called into question not only the strength of the U.S. and world financial systems, but also the reliability of the industrial society that brought the crisis to bear. Moreover, the use of folklore and regional culture (“a heroic tradition”) as a nationalistic response to the crisis to which Kazin points is neither surprising, nor unprecedented, as evidenced in the history of the folklore movement in Germany in the previous chapter. And Kazin was not alone in his overall appraisal; the era provided historians with the perfect narrative arc—the crisis brought on by the stock market crash and a fearless, yet vulnerable president

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who led his nation out of the turmoil. Historian Alfred Haworth Jones pointed to “a change in the national mind” and “a new social consciousness” that had been awakened “by the very threat of adversity,” which resulted in “an adventure in national rediscovery” in the form of Roosevelt’s cultural projects. Historian Richard Pells wrote, “Behind this discovery of rural virtue lay an assertion of faith in a simpler, innocent, uncomplicated America … despite the breakdown of its modern, complex political and economic system. …If [writers of the era] could locate a fundamental stability and resilience in the American people, they might again feel at home in their native land. This search for roots led them to praise not only the past but also the democratic instincts of the common man.”

Typical narratives of the era tend to focus on a single moment of crisis: the Wall Street crash of 1929 and the subsequent slide into Depression, which was followed by a concomitant and equally forceful nationalistic response, particularly on the part of Roosevelt and his New Deal–era cultural programs. A rise in social consciousness and a more general concern for the “common man” certainly occurred in the 1930s, due in no small part to the social and cultural programs of FDR’s New Deal. But presidential policy decisions and the financial bulwark they provided were merely a part of what was a significantly more complex national landscape. In fact, the Depression years and Roosevelt’s place therein, are not so much a distinct period in U.S. history than they are an extension of, and particular reaction to, the decades

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that preceded them. Susman agreed that the 1930s represented a high-water mark in terms of U.S. national sentiment, though he locates the roots of such nationalistic tendencies in earlier decades, as part of a more gradual shift:

The issue, then, is not that the 1930s produced a new era of nationalism. Certainly few, if any, decades in our history could claim the production of such a vast literature—to say nothing of a vast body of films, recordings, and paintings—that described and defined every aspect of American life. It was not, then, simply that many writers and artists and critics began to sing glowingly of American life and its past. It was rather the more complex effort to seek and define America as a culture and to create the patterns of a way of life worth understanding. The movement had begun in the 1920s; by the 1930s it was a crusade. … The search was to continue throughout the decade in the most overwhelming effort ever attempted to document in art, reportage, social science, and the history the life and values of the American people.⁷

To be sure, the 1930s were an era in which any number of social theories that had their roots earlier in the century, such as cultural pluralism, cultural relativism, and cultural nationalism, flourished because of the particular historical moment. And it is undeniable that the reevaluation of American culture, including the documentation of the folk and folk culture, was of critical importance to a sense of national identity in the face of crisis. This reevaluation took the form of any number of what historian William Stott refers to as “documentary expressions” of the folk: the photographs of Dorothea Lange, the book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* by James Agee and Walker Evans, the social commentary and rural depictions of American regionalist painters, the reportage and social documentation of migrant workers by John Steinbeck, and even the folksong collections made for the Archive of American Folk Song. According to Kazin, the “drive toward national inventory [of

writers of the era] began by reporting the ravages of the depression and ended by reporting on the national inheritance.\(^8\) The “national inheritance” was itself a construction, much in the sense of Van Wyck Brooks’s imploration in 1918 for writers in the United States to search for a “usable past,” one that eschewed academic historicism in favor of a national history upon which a distinctly U.S. national culture could be built. Brooks argued, “If we need another past so badly, is it inconceivable that we might discover one, that we might even invent one?”\(^9\) Alfred Haworth Jones finds the influence of Brooks’s call for a “usable past” within much of the nationalistic cultural products of the 1930s, which “stimulated an emphasis upon the uniqueness of American ideas and values,” and “encouraged an emphasis upon the classless, inclusive character of the national experience.”\(^10\)

**The U.S. Financial and Democratic System, Popular Front, and the American Communist Party (CPUSA)**

The notion of the “classless, inclusive character of the national experience” took many forms, however. For a number of U.S. citizens the economic collapse signaled an endemic crisis surrounding the U.S. economic system, and perhaps the beginnings of the fall of capitalism altogether. In particular, the decades-long growth of corporate power leading up to the collapse was a particular focus for criticism. Previous presidents, including Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, had to

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\(^8\) Kazin, *On Native Grounds*, 487.


contend with protecting the nation from corporate interests and concomitant malfeasance, but Roosevelt’s attempts to grow government in order to face the Depression drew sharp criticism from many different sides. There was a particular fear on the part of some critics that Roosevelt had plans to collectivize the economic system. Conservative critic and columnist for the New York Herald-Tribune Walter Lippmann was one of these critics, and in 1937 he published *The Good Society*, which warned that any such collectivism and restriction of individual liberties within a governmental system would lead straight to the sorts of totalitarian governments that had been cropping up across Europe.\(^\text{11}\) It was not simply that Roosevelt’s New Deal threatened a sense of American rugged individualism; it was that Roosevelt’s New Deal smacked of socialism, or at least the version of socialism that was familiar to many people in the United States.

In truth, many of Roosevelt’s decisions during the early years of the Depression were not, in fact, dissimilar from the reaction of a number of leaders throughout the Western nations who had been similarly affected by the economic collapse. In his book *Three New Deals*, Wolfgang Schivelbusch investigates the comparisons to be made among three nations in the 1930s: the United States, Italy, and Germany, each of which had an increasingly enlarged centralized government headed by a strong and charismatic leader, who used the power of the state to enact

\(^{11}\) Lippmann was originally for what he termed “free collectivism” but changed his mind as events unfolded in Europe. See Charles C. Alexander, *Nationalism in American Thought, 1930–1945* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), 20–22.
policies that attempted to deal with millions of disaffected citizens.\textsuperscript{12} It was a time of upheaval in nearly every country in the Western world. Totalitarian dictatorships cropped up across Europe, due in large part to the unrest that resulted from weakened economies and desperate citizens. In 1933, Hitler began his ascent into power, following a similar path as Mussolini had done nearly ten years earlier. Joseph Stalin’s grip on power through the 1930s grew even tighter, as he led a bloody purge of what he viewed to be his nation’s dissidents (in many cases innocent or otherwise loyal citizens) known as the Great Terror. In Spain in 1936, the Popular Front party was elected to power, which soon sparked a civil war between the Spanish Republicans, who had won the election, and the fascist dictator General Francisco Franco, who was backed by Germany and Italy. Stalin, who was staunchly anti-fascist, landed firmly on the side of the Republicans, providing them with as much support as he could muster.

In spite of the actions by Stalin in Russia, or perhaps in ignorance of them, many people in the United States regardless of whether they identified as communists, fervently believed that the capitalist experiment had run its course, and that the promise of the twentieth century would result in an end to what they believed to be a new form of feudalism. In fact, during the Depression 100,000 U.S. citizens applied to work in Soviet Russia.\textsuperscript{13} The American Communist Party (CPUSA), which had come into existence in 1919, worked diligently throughout the Depression to


\textsuperscript{13} David Eldridge, \textit{American Culture in the 1930s} (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 2.
organize the unemployed and disaffected. In the preface to his 1932 book, *Toward Soviet America*, William Z. Foster, the head of the CPUSA, laid out his organization’s aims:

There is a great and growing mass demand in this country to know just what is the Communist party and its program. The masses of toilers, suffering under the burdens of the crisis, are keenly discontented and want to find a way out of their intolerable situation. They are alarmed at the depth, length and general severity of the crisis. They begin to realize that “there is something rotten in Denmark,” that there are fundamental flaws in the capitalist system. Their growing realization of this is further strengthened as they see the spectacular rise of Socialism in the Soviet Union. The masses are beginning rightly to sense that Communism has an important message for the human race, and they want to know what it is.\textsuperscript{14}

It was Thomas’s belief that “only the Soviet Union” was “immune” from the effects of the Great Depression, and only through uprising could these ideals be achieved in the United States.\textsuperscript{15}

For both the Popular Front and the CPUSA, however, the U.S. economic situation was not only an inevitability, but it also was an opportunity. Warren Susman noted this sense of timeliness for the movement: “The [Communist] Party linked its movement to historic American tradition … so that the socialist movement would no longer be alienated from American life. … It put ideological conditions to one side and stressed its relationship to the American way of life.”\textsuperscript{16} The CPUSA was calculated in its attempts to cater their message to a wider U.S. public, putting forth their slogan of the time period: “Communism is twentieth-century Americanism.”\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} Foster, *Toward Soviet America*, 3.
\textsuperscript{16} Susman, *Culture and Commitment*, 19.
\textsuperscript{17} Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 129.
The Party ran a candidate in the 1932 presidential election, William Z. Foster, and enlisted over fifty prominent writers including Sherwood Anderson, John Dos Passos, Langston Hughes, and Waldo Frank, to write a manifesto extolling the virtues of the Party and their candidate, titled *Culture and the Crisis: An Open Letter to the Writers, Artists, Teachers, Physicians, Engineers, Scientists and Other Professional Workers of America*.

According to historian David Eldridge, however, “Despite all the apocalyptic rhetoric of the early 1930s and for all that the CPUSA and Popular Front galvanized the American Left into action for specific causes, the evidence for a broad-based Marxist movement in the United States simply does not exist.”

Actual membership in the CPUSA in 1934—at the time of a number of general strikes in the United States—was around 300,000 members, at least a third of which lived in New York City. But, as Michael Denning argues in *The Popular Front*, party membership does not necessarily reflect everyone whose political leanings overlapped with the ideals of the CPUSA. There were a great number of people working within the Popular Front framework who were not actually Party members. Denning states that in many histories on the influence of the Popular Front and the CPUSA that there has been “a fetishization of Party membership and an overemphasis on the narration of affiliation and disaffiliation,” and that “many people passed through the Party at different times, and the large majority of Popular Front radicals were never

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19 Ibid., 7. Denning puts the number of CPUSA members in New York at up to one half. See Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 16.
members.” Rather, Denning states that many people who held political affinities with the CPUSA “thought of themselves as generic ‘communists,’ using the term with a small c.”20 “The heart of the Popular Front as a social movement lay among those who were non-Communist socialists and independent leftists,” Denning argues, “working with Communists and liberals, but marking out a culture that was neither a party nor a liberal New Deal culture.”21

Warren Susman is also suspicious of such narratives, in particular for the large swath of the population that they tend to overlook: “There is a tendency when treating this period,” Warren Susman suggests, “for historians suddenly to switch their focus and concentrate on the newly discovered poor, the marginal men and women, migrant workers, hobos, various ethnic minorities deprived of a place in the American sun.” Susman also notes that there is “equally a tendency to see the period in terms of the most radical responses to its problems, to see a ‘Red Decade’ in which cultural as well as political life is somehow dominated by the Left.” But Susman is suspicious of what falls away in such narratives, arguing that “the period, while acknowledging in ways more significantly than ever before the existence of groups outside the dominant ones and even recognizing the radical response as important, is one in which American culture continues to be largely middle-class culture.”22 It is necessary, then, to take a holistic approach to discussing the era particularly with regard to the ideas of

20 Ibid., xviii.
21 Ibid., 5.
populism, cultural pluralism, and nationalism, which undergird the New Deal cultural programs at the core of this study.

“Culture” in the United States in the 1930s

Historian Jane De Hart Mathews positions Roosevelt’s New Deal–era cultural projects as a larger push towards a “cultural democracy,” or the highlighting of the U.S. national character through its arts, in an attempt to define art as “unmistakably American,” an art that would be both “expressive of the spirit of a nation” as well as “accessible to its people.”23 This cultural democracy was, according to Mathews, the fulfillment of a long-standing desire to bring together artist and people and to use the uplifting power of art to enrich the lives of ordinary citizens. Translated into New Deal terminology, this meant creating a nation of cultural consumers, for, if recovery were to be achieved in the arts as well as the economy, government would have to provide potential consumers access to the arts. Only through accessibility would people come to regard arts, not as an expendable luxury, but as a community asset.24

Placing aside for a moment some obvious problems of defining cultural products as being distinct representations of a singular national identity, in particular an “American” identity, the quest for a cultural democracy can be framed as part of a larger push in the 1930s towards a “new era of nationalism” and, in particular, “cultural nationalism.”25 The appendage of the word “culture” in in the early decades of the twentieth century—as was the case with the word “folk”—was commonplace.

24 Ibid., 319.
25 Susman, Culture as History, 157. See also Alexander, Nationalism in American Thought, 70, 72; Eldridge, American Culture in the 1930s, 170–78; and Becker, Selling Tradition, 5.
Ruth Benedict’s *Patterns of Culture* (1934) became an unlikely hit among the general readership of the United States. Through this publication, Benedict became the public face for the Franz Boas school of anthropology at Columbia University. Charles C. Alexander noted that anthropologists such as Boas, Benedict “refused to measure cultural values by Western standards of ‘progress’ recognized the genius inherent in all human social organization” by taking a relativist and pluralist—and humane—approach to the discipline, which “gave added substance to the mounting attack on Caucasian assumptions of racial authority.”26 Benedict’s teacher, Margaret Mead, stated in a later version of the book’s introduction, “That today the modern world is on such easy terms with the concept of culture, that the words ‘in our culture’ slip from the lips of educated men and women almost as effortlessly as do the phrases that refer to period and to place, is in very great part due to this book.”27

Warren Susman also argued the term’s importance, stating, “It is not too extreme to propose that it was during the Thirties that the idea of culture was domesticated, with important consequences.”28 Susman noted,

Americans began thinking in terms of patterns of behavior and belief, values and life-styles, symbols and meanings. It was during this period that we find, for the first time, frequent reference to an “American Way of Life.” The phrase “The American Dream” came into common use; it meant something shared collectively by all Americans; yet something different than the American Mission, the function of the organized nation itself.29

If the “American Way” held common currency among all Americans during this time period, the term “culture,” like “folk,” was much more tenuous and polysemous. Culture, both on its own and as a descriptor carried a variety of meanings, both historically and within the era, leading cultural historian Raymond Williams argued that “culture” was “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” because of “its intricate historical development, in several European languages, but mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought.”

“Culture,” James Clifford famously noted, “is a deeply compromised idea I cannot yet do without.”

In Williams’s study of the term, what had begun as a description of the process of tending or “cultivating” crops and livestock had, by the early seventeenth century, also been applied to aspects of people and society, often as a descriptor of class difference. Offshoots of culture, such as the terms “cultivated,” “cultured,” or their stand-in “civilized” were in regular use throughout the Enlightenment era throughout the English-speaking world and in other European nations such as France and Germany. By the middle of the nineteenth century the German idea of Kultur (originally Cultur) became an evolutionary ideal, as in the trajectory “from savagery through domestication to freedom.” In nearly all of these cases “civilized culture”

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30 Raymond Williams, “Culture,” in Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, 87.
31 Clifford, The Predicament of Culture, 10.
meant European culture, which was placed in direct contradistinction to the colonial interests of these European nations, which were considered uncivilized or primitive. Edward B. Tylor, in his 1871 study *Primitive Culture: Researches Into The Development Of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion Language, Art, and Custom*, offered the following definition: “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”

“Culture” could also denote to a form of elitism, as in “high culture,” “cultured,” or “cultivated.” Van Wyck Brooks, who coined the terms “highbrow” and “lowbrow” in his book *America’s Coming-Of-Age* (1915), used both terms being used as derogatory classifications, as in the difference “between academic pedantry and pavement slang.” Brooks wrote,

The “Highbrow” is the superior person whose virtue is admitted but felt to be an inept unpalatable virtue; while the “Lowbrow” is a good fellow one readily takes to, but with a certain scorn for him and all his works. And what is true of them as personal types is true of what they stand for. They are equally undesirable, and they are incompatible; but they divide American life between them.

Lawrence Levine’s study, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, which tackles these categories, resulted from a persistent question he faced while writing about the 1930s in the United States: “How did one distinguish between “low,” “high,” “popular,” and “mass” culture?” For Levine, these constructed cultural categories, “which no one

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33 See Williams, *Keywords*, 87–90.
seemed able to define with any real precision,” were “the products of ideologies which were always subject to modifications and transformations, the perimeters of our cultural definitions have been permeable and shifting rather than fixed and immutable.”\(^{36}\) The result, in Levine’s estimation, was a “tendency to equate the notion of culture with that of hierarchy so that to examine closely the manner in which the hierarchy of culture was translated almost inevitably into an attack on the idea of culture itself.”\(^ {37}\) But, as Raymond Williams notes, culture could also be used simply as a catchall term, an “independent and abstract noun” for “the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity. … Culture is music, literature, painting and sculpture, theater and film.”\(^ {38}\)

**National Metaphors, Part 1: The Melting Pot and the Americanization Movement**

The “reawakened interest in the whole of American past,” to which Alfred Kazin referred was not simply a result of the new era of nationalism, nor merely a reaction to national crisis. Roosevelt’s 1938 letter to Paul Green, director of the National Folk Festival, in which he referred to folk cultures as part of a “national fabric” points to a metaphor of American that was, in part, a culturally pluralistic replacement for another previously dominant metaphor—the assimilationist “melting pot” ideal—which can be located as far back as the colonial origins of the Unites


\(^ {37}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^ {38}\) Williams, *Keywords*, 90.
States. In 1782, French émigré J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur wrote an essay titled “What is an American?” in which he attempted to locate the essence of “American-ness”:

What then is the American, this new man? He is either a European or the descendant of an European; hence that strange mixture of blood which you will find in no other country. … He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. … Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity [descendants] will one day cause great changes in the world.39

Ralph Waldo Emerson also used a similar metaphor—the “smelting pot”—to defining American society. In a journal entry from 1845, in which he was responding to the anti-immigrant/anti-Catholic views espoused by the “Native American Party,” Emerson wrote:

As in the old burning of the Temple at Corinth, by the melting and intermixture of silver and gold and other metals a new compound more precious than any, called Corinthian brass, was formed; so in this continent— asylum of all nations—the energy of Irish, Germans, Swedes, Poles, and Cossacks, and all the European tribes—of the Africans, and of the Polynesians—will construct a new race, a new religion, a new state, a new literature, which will be as vigorous as the new Europe which came out of the smelting-pot of the Dark Ages.”40


The question of what it meant to be an American was taken up in the late
nineteenth and early twentieth century by a number of writers who were themselves
immigrants to the United States. Novels such as Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half
Lives* (1890); Mary Antin’s *The Promised Land* (1912); and Edward Bok’s *The
Americanization of Edward Bok* (1920) were widely read during this time period. But
it was a theater production that brought the term “melting pot” before the public in
the early twentieth century. In 1908, Israel Zangwill, a British writer of Russian
Jewish descent, wrote the play *The Melting-Pot*, which extolled the virtues of
assimilating into the greater U.S. society though a loose adaptation of the Romeo and
Juliet story told through the lens of Russian-Jewish immigrants to the United States.
Although the backstory of the play was bleak—the play begins soon after the
protagonist, the Jewish composer David Quixano’s entire family has died in a
Russian pogrom—the overall message appealed to many U.S. audience members’
sense of national pride, particularly when David proclaims,

America is God’s Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of
Europe are melting and reforming. Here you stand good folk, think I, when I
see them at Ellis Island, here you stand, in your fifty groups, with your fifty
languages and histories, with your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries. But you
won’t be long like that, brothers for these are the fires of God you’ve come
to—these are the fires of God. A fig for your feuds and vendettas! Germans
and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians—into the
Crucible with you all! God is making the American.41

One of the biggest admirers of Zangwill’s play—and to whom the play was
dedicated—was President Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt, who was perhaps the most

1917), 33.
vocal proponent of the Americanization movement, took up the notion of the crucible and the melting pot in an essay he wrote titled “The Children of the Crucible” at the time of the nation’s entry into First World War when tensions surrounding nationalistic sentiments were particularly high:

We Americans are children of the crucible. The crucible does not do its work unless it turns out those cast into it into one national mould; and that must be the mould established by Washington and his fellows when they made us into a nation. We must be Americans; and nothing else.42

The “nothing else” in Roosevelt’s essay referred to the practice—to which he was staunchly opposed—of identifying as a hyphenated American (e.g., a German-American, Chinese-American, or Italian-American). For Roosevelt, using the English language was not an option; it was a requirement for U.S. citizenship, stating, “We must have in this country but one flag, the American flag, and for the speech of the people but one language, the English language.”43

Theodore Roosevelt’s nationalistic chauvinism was not entirely uncommon, however, particularly within the political landscape of the United States. In much the same way that Zangwill’s play limits its candidates for inclusion into God’s Crucible to people of European descent, so too did federal, state, and local governments limit citizenship through policies and legislation under the guise of Americanization during the first decades of the twentieth century. Some of these efforts were, on the surface, rather benign, as in the case of the national “Americanization Day,” first held on

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43 Ibid., 73.
Independence Day in 1915 in over 150 cities across the nation. The holiday was designed, in the words of one of its most vocal advocates Frederic C. Howe, the Commissioner of Immigration at the Port of New York, to “give dignity to the ceremony [of naturalization] and at the same time impress it meaning upon all citizens,” and that the celebration would ensure that immigrants’ “interests and … affections are deeply rooted in America.” That the first such holiday occurred shortly after the beginning of the First World War, when the allegiances of immigrants to the United States were in question was not a coincidence. The number of cities participating in the holiday rose from 150 in its first year to nearly 1,200 two years later, shortly after the United States entered the war.

Legislation, on both the state and federal level, was perhaps the strongest, and most often used, weapon to counter problems of immigration. More than half of the states in the nation passed some types of laws designed to promote assimilation into U.S. society, including compulsory night school for non-English-speaking immigrants. Some of these laws were relatively benign; other laws of the era followed a similar trajectory as previous anti-immigrant legislation such as the Anti-Catholic laws of the 1880s, which were aimed at an increasing Irish immigrant presence; and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, (as well as similar laws aimed at other Asian immigrants such as Japanese or Filipino immigrants in subsequent decades).

Language and literacy were prime targets for such legislation, and citizenship was made contingent upon learning English in the early decades of the twentieth century.

In 1906, the federal government passed the Nationality Act, which mandated that all immigrants who wanted to seek naturalization know English. A decade later they went further with the Immigration Act of 1917, which excluded illiterate immigrants from entering the United States. The Immigration Act of 1924 placed quotas on the number of immigrants that were allowed to enter from European countries that did not share traditional Western cultural norms (i.e., language). At the state level, foreign-language instruction was prohibited in thirty-seven states, and many of these states made English the official language. This movement aimed to address the rising problem of immigration in the United States, particularly among non-English-speaking immigrants from Eastern Europe.\footnote{According to the 1910 U.S. census, the country had the largest percentage of immigrants per capita in its history: nearly 15 percent. Reflecting in 1919 on the issues that led to the movement toward Americanization, Howard C. Hill noted that perhaps the most striking of problems was illiteracy: “[According to the 1910 census] there were some 13,000,000 foreign-born whites in the United States, 3,000,000 of whom were ten years of age and over and were unable to speak, read, or write the English language. Over 2,500,000 of these were twenty-one years of age and over. Of these 2,500,000, over 1,500,000 were illiterate, and only 35,614 of the total 2,500,000 were in school. In other words, but a fraction over 1 per cent were undergoing any systematic training in the rudiments of Americanization.” Howard C. Hill, “The Americanization Movement,” \textit{American Journal of Sociology} 24, no. 6 (1919): 611. Widespread illiteracy meant for many legislators that these immigrants would not only not be able to interact in normative U.S. society, they also would not be able to vote, join the workforce or the military, or contribute to the larger U.S. economy. Furthermore, the start of the First World War, and the United States’ subsequent involvement therein added a new wrinkle to the problem: that of national allegiance.}

\textbf{National Metaphors, Part 2: The National Fabric and Cultural Pluralism}

In February 1915, only a few months prior to the first “Americanization Day” the Jewish American philosopher and psychologist Horace M. Kallen published in
The Nation magazine a two-part essay titled “Democracy versus the Melting Pot.”46

In it he laid out his own views for a national identity, that of a “national fellowship of cultural diversities,” and argued against the Americanization movement and its melting-pot ideal, which for him seemed “too self-centered and self-conscious” and appeared “too much like an achievement, a tour de force, too little like a growth.”47 Kallen recognized the need for common ground among U.S. citizens, particularly in the realm of language and history, but he also believed that it was the diversity of the U.S. populace that provided its richness, which he likened to an orchestra.48 “As in an orchestra, every type of instrument has its appropriate theme and melody in the whole symphony,” Kallen stated, “so in society each ethnic group is the natural instrument its spirit and culture are its theme and melody, and the harmony and dissonances and discords of them all make the symphony of civilization.”49 Kallen furthered the musical metaphor, stating,

At the present time there is no dominant American mind. Our spirit is inarticulate, not a voice, but a chorus of many voices each singing a rather different tune. How to get order out of this cacophony is the question for all those who are concerned about those things which alone justify wealth and

48 Kallen’s philosophy did allow for a degree of assimilation into the national fabric, however, and was somewhat far removed from the sorts of multicultural efforts made in the United States later in the century. According to Stephen Whitfield, in the introduction to the reprint edition of Kallen’s book, “Cultural pluralism was much more ambivalent [than multiculturalism] in its understanding that the European immigrants and their children wished to be accepted as full citizens, even if it meant a repudiation of the past (however partial), even if it entailed a distancing from previous generations (however reluctant), even if a family name may be treated as a source of shame.” Whitfield, “Introduction” to Kallen, Culture and Democracy in the United States, lv.
power, concerned about justice, the arts, literature, philosophy, science. What must, what shall this cacophony become—a unison or a harmony? 

Kallen stated that such a nationalistic vision “is possible only in a democratic society whose institutions encourage individuality in groups, in persons, in temperaments, whose programs liberates these individualities and guides them into a fellowship of freedom and cooperation.”

In his dissertation on the history of cultural pluralism movement in the United States, James Henry Powell locates a possible point of origin for Kallen’s views on the nature of U.S. national identity within Kallen’s own heritage as an orthodox Jewish-German immigrant: “In fact it is his interest in Zionism which may have had the most direct bearing on the development of his ideas on the immigrant question.” Added to that were his experiences at Harvard, and in particular the ideas of Harvard president Charles W. Eliot, and his teacher, the philosopher William James.

Although Kallen claimed that he first used the term cultural pluralism “around 1906 or 1907 when Alain Locke was in a section of a class where I served as assistant to George Santayana,” he did not publish the term until 1924, in his book *Culture and Democracy in the United States.* In the chapter titled “Culture and the Klan,” Kallen attacked groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Americanization movement, as well as individuals such as author Edward Bok and Theodore Roosevelt, for

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50 Ibid.
promoting what he viewed as an American *Kultur*, which cultural historian Susan Hegeman notes was a term “synonymous with racially justified, belligerent national chauvinism.” Kallen argued, “Cultural growth is founded upon Cultural Pluralism” and noted that cultural pluralism “is possible only in a democratic society whose institutions encourage individuality in groups, in persons, in temperaments, whose programs liberates these individualities and guides them into a fellowship of freedom and cooperation.” “The alternative before Americans,” Kallen concluded, was either “Kultur Klux Klan or Cultural Pluralism.”

Randolph Bourne, a recent graduate from Columbia University and student of John Dewey’s, was the other major figure to further anti-assimilationist ideals in the early decades of the twentieth century. In July 1916, at a time when arguments for U.S. involvement in the First World War were reaching a fever pitch (most notably on the part of Dewey himself), Bourne published a landmark article titled “Transnational America” in the *Atlantic Monthly*. In it he railed against the sorts of insular and chauvinistic nationalism that had begun to pervade the United States, and he defended the “hyphenates” by arguing that much of U.S. culture was itself a form of hyphenated Americanism—that of the Anglo-American tradition, which he believed was no less insular or exclusive than any German-American or Jewish-American communities were. Ultimately Bourne was in favor of a sort of cosmopolitan approach to U.S. national identity—similar to that which he had witnessed during his recent travels through Europe. “America is coming to be, not a nationality but a

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54 Kallen, *Culture and Democracy in the United States*, 35.  
transnationality,” Bourne argued, “a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors. Any movement which attempts to thwart this weaving, or to dye the fabric any one color, or disentangle the threads of the strands, is false to this cosmopolitan vision.”56 “In this vision,” Susan Hegeman asserts, “the immigrant ‘threads’ not only produced the unique national pattern of the American ‘cloth,’ but also reached outward, cords of attachment from the shores of this country to their homelands.”57

**Cultural Pluralism and Its Limits during the New Deal**

On 28 October 1936, President Roosevelt appeared before a throng of onlookers at a celebration for the fiftieth anniversary of the unveiling of the Statue of Liberty on Liberty Island in New York Harbor. On that date in 1886, President Grover Cleveland had presided over the dedication of Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi’s copper statue, and the celebration was accompanied by New York’s first ticker-tape parade. Now, fifty years later, less than a week before the presidential election, Roosevelt, echoing in many respects the assimilationist views of his distant cousin Theodore Roosevelt, spoke about placing aside a “reverence for a common past” by uniting in the hopes for a “common future”:

We take satisfaction in the thought that those who have left their native land to join us may still retain here their affection for some things left behind—old customs, old language, old friends. Looking to the future, they wisely choose that their children shall live in the new language and in the new customs of

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56 Ibid., 96.
this new people. And those children more and more realize their common destiny in America. That is true whether their forebears came past this place eight generations ago or only one.

The realization that we are all bound together by hope of a common future rather than by reverence for a common past has helped us to build upon this continent a unity unapproached in any similar area or population in the whole world. For all our millions of square miles, for all our millions of people, there is a unity in language and speech, in law and in economics, in education and in general purpose, which nowhere finds its match.58

In truth, Franklin Roosevelt had perhaps more in common with Grover Cleveland than he had with his distant cousin, at least in terms of his approach to minority rights. Cleveland, the first democrat in a long line of republican presidents was the victim of failed policies based on seemingly good intentions. He had railed against the policies of Chinese against Chinese immigration, yet he extended the Chinese Immigration Act of 1882 and passed the Scott Act, which prohibited Chinese laborers who had left the country from returning. Although Cleveland had declared in his first inaugural address of 4 March 1885, “In the administration of a government pledged to do equal and exact justice to all men there should be no pretext for anxiety touching the protection of the freedmen in their rights or their security in the enjoyment of their privileges under the Constitution and its amendments,” he did little during his time in office to break from his Southern democratic colleagues approach to Jim Crow segregation and discrimination.59 Cleveland also passed the Dawes Act, which was an attempt to foster Native American assimilation by transferring lands.

under federal trust to individuals in exchange for automatic citizenship provided these people lived separately from their tribes. The results of this allotment plan were devastating to tribal unity and did little to further integration of Native American peoples into the larger U.S. society.

Franklin Roosevelt’s time in office, albeit a half-century later, was beset by many of the same problems Cleveland faced. Roosevelt also found himself having to appease a Southern democratic party hostile to anyone who opposed their segregationist status quo. Roosevelt attempted to reverse some of the damage that the U.S. government’s policies regarding the allotment of Native American lands through his 1934 passage of the U.S. Indian Reorganization Act (Wheeler-Howard Law Act)—part of FDR’s so-called “Indian New Deal”—under the watch of Roosevelt’s commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, John Collier. In part the Indian Reorganization Act attempted to institute Native American self-government by appointing tribal councils that reported to the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. The effect however, was a policy that ignored difference among tribal histories and customs, and one that increased governmental oversight into nearly all aspects of tribal decision-making.60

At heart, however, Roosevelt was a populist, with an abiding and honest desire to help all Americans, and despite his well-to-do upbringing in the Hudson

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River Valley and his family name, Roosevelt portrayed himself as the president of the “common man.” His regular fireside chats over the radio brought the American populace closer to a president than ever before. And Roosevelt was committed to a number of projects in the United States aimed at bolstering public approval and beautifying the nation, including numerous national and state parks, monuments, and civil works projects. Moreover, he was a hit with the press, posing for photo opportunities at every turn, whether he was big-game fishing in the Florida Keys, posing with folk musicians in the Appalachian mountains, or visiting patients at his polio institute in Warm Springs, the site of his second home the so-called “Little White House.”

In his first inaugural address, Roosevelt declared, “The money changers have fled from their high seats in the temple of our civilization. We may now restore that temple to the ancient truths. The measure of the restoration lies in the extent to which we apply social values more noble than mere monetary profit.” The president’s “sermon,” replete with biblical allusions, reads as essentially a comforting lecture on the dangers of materialism in the face of an economic collapse due to malfeasance and speculation. Roosevelt called for a new era founded on “ancient truths”—social welfare, common decency, and compassion—that would be necessary to conquer “our common difficulties,” which concerned “thank God, only material things.”

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“Our greatest primary task is to put people to work,” Roosevelt insisted, adding that the “way to [immediate] recovery” would not emerge merely through his presidency, but rather through the romantic and well-worn trope of the “American spirit of the pioneer.” Roosevelt’s vision for recovery was his New Deal, which would be “accomplished in part by direct recruiting by the government itself, treating the task as we would treat the emergency of a war,” by putting into place “greatly needed projects to stimulate and reorganize the use of our natural resources.”

In his first 100 days, Roosevelt pushed through Congress fifteen major bills in his first 100 days, including the Emergency Banking Relief Act; the Reforestation Act/Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC); the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA); the Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA); the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA); the Federal Securities Act; the National Employment Systems Act; the Homeowners Refinancing Act; the Banking Act of 1933 (Glass-Steagall); and the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), which established the National Recovery Act (NRA), and the Public Works Administration (PWA). Roosevelt’s “Second New Deal,” begun in 1935, included the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935, which earmarked $4.88 billion-dollar for relief projects and employment, to be divided up among the PWA, the CCC, and the newly established Resettlement Administration, National Youth Administration, and Works Progress Administration. It was the largest single appropriation bill in the nation’s history.

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62 Ibid.
To help develop the programs central to his New Deal, Roosevelt surrounded himself with a so-called “Brains Trust,” which included Columbia University law professors Adolf Berle, Raymond Moley, and Rexford Tugwell. The group expanded over Roosevelt’s “first” and “second” New Deals to include John Collier, Harry Hopkins, Harold Ickes, Louis Brandeis, Thomas Corcoran, and others. With the exception of Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins; head of the Women’s Division of the Democratic party Molly Dewson; and Ellen S. Woodward, director of the WPA’s Division of Women’s and Professional Projects, all of the members of Roosevelt’s cabinet and his closest advisers were men. Historian Susan Ware, in her book *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal*, discusses this “women’s network,” noting

> In all twenty-eight women belonged to the network. The remaining network members [outside of Dewson, Perkins and Woodward] were scattered among various New Deal agencies and the Democratic party apparatus. Many were concentrated in the Labor Department, particularly in the Women’s Bureau and Children’s Bureau. Others found jobs in the new relief agencies established to meet the crisis of the depression, such as the Works Progress Administration, the National Recovery Administration, and the Social Security Administration. Several found positions within the Democratic party structure, and two women were members of Congress.  

The success of these women did not necessarily translate to greater opportunities throughout the New Deal organizations. Ware notes, “Being a ‘good woman’ in government merely showed that some women could make it to the top; it did nothing

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to change the basic conditions that kept the great majority of women out.”

Ware explains,

Because the women in the network saw themselves as exceptional, they failed to question women’s second-class status in American society. Never did they delve deeply into the causes of discrimination against women. Never did they challenge the stereotypes of women as “family oriented” which have contributed so significantly to the continued oppression of women. Because the feminist impact of women in the network was so dependent on their individual contributions, it was difficult to institutionalize even the limited gains that were won in the 1930s.

This distribution is echoed in the administrators of the Federal One arts projects. Of the five (including the Historical Records Survey), only one director was a woman: Hallie Flanagan, who was a friend of Harry Hopkins’s from their time at Grinnell College in Iowa. There were, however, a number of women administrators in charge of various state-level Federal One projects, including Helen Chandler Ryan, Jerome Sage, Eri Douglass, and Carita Doggett Corse. Many of the folksong collectors in this study were women as well, including most of the staff of the Mississippi FMP, Sidney Robertson, Marian Buchanan, and Zora Neale Hurston. In general, however, the national-level administrative seats were relegated to men.

Roosevelt’s jobs programs were designed to provide jobs for all out-of-work Americans, to establish fair labor practices, and to raise wages across the nation. His aim was to put workers of all classes and skills to work through a variety of blue- and white-collar jobs in an attempt to reduce the unemployment rate at the time of his inauguration—a staggering 25 percent. And he was largely successful. By the end of

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64 Ibid., 130.
65 Ibid., 130.
Roosevelt’s first term the unemployment rate was approximately 17 percent. A second crash, dubbed the “Roosevelt Recession” occurred between 1937 and 1938, and by the end of his second term unemployment was below 15 percent. In 1942, after the United States went to war, that number had dipped below 5 percent.

But these numbers can be misleading. At the time of his inauguration, the unemployment rate among African Americans was double that of the general population: up to 50 percent in some areas. Moreover, blacks were the first to lose their jobs after the crash, with unemployed white workers taking their place. Added to that was the rampant rise in racist activity throughout the 1930s. Membership swelled in groups like the Ku Klux Klan. Historian Robert McElvaine notes that the number of reported lynchings in the United States “rose from eight in 1932 to twenty-eight, fifteen, and twenty in the three succeeding years,” and slogans appeared throughout the South stating “No Jobs for Niggers Until Every White Man Has a Job” and “Niggers, Back to the Cotton Fields—City Jobs are for White Folks.” Columnist Hilton Butler in a July 1931 article in the *New Republic*, stated, “Dust had been blown from the shotgun, the whip, and the noose, and Ku Klux Klan practices were being resumed in the certainty that dead men not only tell no tales but create vacancies.”

Added to the problem of unemployment and race were the segregated projects under Roosevelt’s jobs programs. In many cases, there were far fewer jobs for

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68 Ibid.
minorities than for whites in the same (segregated) project. Approximately 350,000 African Americans worked for the WPA in any given year, which represented approximately 15 percent of the total enrollment in the program. Of the 3 million men employed by Roosevelt’s Civilian Conservation Corp over the course of its existence from 1933 to 1942, only 350,000 were African American, though the percentage of African American CCC workers improved between 1933 and 1938, rising from 3 to 11 percent. By contrast, Native American enrollment in the “Indian CCC” was approximately 85,000 during the CCC’s existence.

Similar employment rates were common in the Federal One arts projects as well, where there were numerous segregated “Negro units” across the United States. “Out of 4,500 total workers employed by the Writers’ Project in 1937,” Gary McDonogh, editor of The Florida Negro: A Federal Writers’ Project Legacy, notes, “only 106 were black—slightly over 2 percent.” In other cases, Negro units of Federal One projects had significant white influence. Rena Fraden, author of Blueprints for a Black Federal Theatre notes, “Separate Negro units [of the Federal Theatre Project] were largely directed by whites and still dependent on white reviewers and white audiences for success. The Negro units would feel particular pressure from certain whites and blacks to continue to provide popular entertainment and from others to become a national race theatre.”

But there were opportunities to be had under these projects. Historian Lauren Sklaroff, notes that the New Deal was an important step in the long civil rights movement: “The fact that the currents of a larger national agenda often shaped cultural development, which was stewarded under primarily white direction, does not mean that intellectuals, musicians, and artists did not wield authority. It is precisely because the New Deal government sponsored these programs that African Americans were offered a unique opportunity.”

Writing in 1972, former FWP worker and FWP historian, Jerre Mangione, makes a similar point: “Perhaps the greatest beneficiaries of the [FWP] were its black employees. As a result of pressures brought on the New Deal administration by a self-appointed “black cabinet” of Negro leaders… the WPA was structured to provide hundreds of American Negroes with their first opportunity to exercise skills they already had or to acquire new skills.”

Roosevelt’s philosophy, notes historian Gary Gerstle, was a “mild form of cultural pluralism.” Because Theodore Roosevelt’s “disciplinary project had accomplished its aims, reducing the number of immigrants and increasing the pressures on those already here to Americanize,” Gerstle argues, “there was no longer a need to act tough toward the newcomers. One could embrace them, laud their achievements, and welcome them into the American family.” With this viewpoint in mind, Roosevelt’s letter to Paul Green, director of the National Folk Festival in

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73 Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 139.
1938—“We in the United States are amazingly rich in the elements from which to weave a culture. … In binding these elements into a National fabric of beauty and strength, let us keep the original fibres so intact that the fineness of each will show in the completed handiwork”—takes on a different meaning, particularly the phrases “we in the United States’ and the “original fibres,” which needed to be kept intact.
CHAPTER 2.

“Speaking for the Folk”: Contexts, Definitions, and Histories of Folklore and Folk Music Research

Defining “the folk” and folk expression, as was the case with defining the term “culture” in the previous chapter, is a process fraught with difficulties. The boundaries of what Botkin termed as “folkness” are constantly shifting and highly subjective, and, as it turns out, rarely coincide with the opinions of the individuals themselves who make up “the folk.” This chapter examines the difficulties of defining of folklore, folk music, and “the folk” by tracing the history of the “the folk” as constructed category from its beginnings in late-eighteenth-century Europe through the New Deal–era United States and beyond.

The International Folk Music Council and Defining Folk Music, 1947–1955

In August 1954, members of the International Folk Music Council (IFMC) gathered in Sao, Paulo, Brazil for their seventh annual meeting. Formed in London in September 1947, with delegates from twenty-eight countries including Ralph Vaughan Williams as president, the IFMC was founded upon three principles: “To assist in the preservation, dissemination and practice of the folk music of all countries; To further the comparative study of folk music; To promote understanding and friendship between nations through the common interest of folk music.”¹ The IFMC reflected a postwar vision of folk music scholarship, one that was connected in

many respects to the beginnings of the field of ethnomusicology (IFMC member Jaap Kunst had put forth the term “ethno-musicology” in 1950). But the IFMC was also firmly rooted in the past—in particular the Anglo-American folk music collecting tradition of Cecil Sharp, and of the New Deal–era folk music collecting projects in the United States, with Sidney Robertson Cowell, Herbert Halpert, George Herzog, Alan Lomax, and Charles and Ruth Crawford Seeger counted among the members of the society.

Chief among the items on the agenda for the Sao Paulo meeting was the adoption of an official definition of folk music, to be written by the IFMC’s Committee on the Definition of Folklore. It was a question that had been at issue with the IFMC since its founding seven years earlier, but the debate started in earnest, notes James R. Cowdery in his history of the IFMC, with a paper that German musicologist and director of the Deutschen Volksliedarchiv at the University of Freiburg, Walter Wiora, gave at the society’s first meeting in Basel, Switzerland held from 13–18 September 1948. Wiora began his talk, later published as “Concerning the Conception of Authentic Folk Music,” by recounting that had occurred exactly one hundred years earlier between German folk music scholar Ludwig Erk and

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3 For an illuminating discussion of the origins of the IFMC, the 1954 conference, and the debates leading up to the adoption of the official IFMC definition of folk music, see James R. Cowdery, “Kategorie or Wertidee? The Early Years of the International Folk Music Council,” in *Music’s Intellectual History*, RILM Perspectives, no. 1, ed., Zdravko Blažeković and Barbara Dobbs Mackenzie (New York: Répertoire international de la littérature musicale, 2009), 805–11.
composer Johannes Brahms. As Cowdery notes, at issue was the authenticity of a two-volume folksong (text and tune) collection, *Deutsche Volkslieder mit ihren Original-Wiesen*, which Anton Wilhelm Florentin von Zuccalmaglio and Andreas Kretzschmer had published in 1838, which Brahms had used as settings for numerous songs. Erk questioned the genuineness of Zuccalmaglio’s contributions and accused the author of embellishing his sources and in some instances fabricating the songs entirely. Brahms countered by defending Zuccalmaglio’s “poetic, living melodies,” and attacking Erk and others’ commonplace tunes were much less artful than the ones Brahms had set.

The question of the authentic versus the aesthetic persisted, in Wiora’s estimation, to the present day because “no systematic study of the principles of folklore and sociology of folk music” had been endeavored. “Almost every investigator seems to give a different meaning to the term [folk music]” Wiora wrote. At the core of the problem was differing worldviews between scholars and creators, which he distinguished as *Kategorie* (category) and *Wertidee* (inspiring ideal). It represented the difference between a top-down categorization of folk music as a cohesive tradition, and an organic, in-the-moment conception of folk music as a process. Scholars, in Wiora’s estimation were “mostly concerned” with the former: “an objective, sober, and comprehensive conception of the term folk song. …

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6 Wiora, “Concerning the Conception of Authentic Folk Music,” 14.
authentic is to them the genuine folk song as a real fact.” Conversely, Wiora argued, “The poets and musicians … consider folk music as an inspiring ideal, and according to them only what realises this ideal deserves the honour of being classed as a folk song.”\(^7\) Wiora’s solution was functional: “Instead of continuing to use ambiguous terms such as ‘folk’ and ‘folk song,’ it is necessary to analyse the social reality and world of ideas themselves, and in this setting to renew the enquiry into what is authentic and unauthentic in folk music.”\(^8\)

For Wiora, folk music “does not signify the nation or an ethnological group, but the basic stratum of human society.” Each one of us belongs by nature,” Wiora asserted, “at least partly, to the basic stratum.” In the article, Wiora countered, point-by-point, many assumptions regarding the origins of folksongs: that they were created communally, rather than individually, that folksong creators were rural and largely illiterate, that to be “authentic” a folksong needed to be old, that folk music was relegated solely to oral tradition, and that folk music and popular music were incongruent. Wiora then offered his own definition of folk music:

I suggest that the term “authentic folk music” should be defined thus: music that is sung or played by members of the basic stratum of society and is customary and familiar to them, bearing in mind that there are differences of degree and that the degree of the authenticity of a song is dependent on the extent to which the folk co-operate by producing or refashioning the song, and the extent to which they love it as their own.\(^9\)

The “unauthentic” folksong, then, was “spurious” and “erroneously supposed.” Wiora set as an example the types of folk music one might hear at

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\(^7\) Ibid., 14–15.
\(^8\) Ibid.
\(^9\) Ibid., 16.
concerts or other entertainments, which was “often correct as far as the notes are concerned, but false in its style and method of performance. … The songs are presented in a romantic or pseudo-archaic colouring, whether sentimental or affectedly austere.” These performers might have understood how to play the music, but they misunderstood the “essence” of the music. “The true folk song,” as “glorified” by Rousseau, Herder, and Bartók, “is the natural and vigorous-opposed to the bombastic and sentimental. It is a symbol of primitive growth-opposed to all intellectual, dry and barren paper work. It is the singing of a sincere heart-opposed to all affectation, flatness and frivolity.”

Wiora argued, “In truth, authentic folk music according to the character of all music is not a purely natural growth, but a kind of art which calls for knowledge and skill, and is the expression of the ideals of a certain community.” To understand folk music fully, Wiora concluded, “We must combine the phenomenological and psychological consideration of these ideas with the sociological investigation of the reality. In determining the authenticity of folk song the conception of the ideal is no less important than the conception of the category.”

For all of Wiora’s points about the misunderstandings surrounding a proper definition of folk music, his discussion of authenticity and essence, categories and ideals, did little to clarify the matter. In fact, his article rejuvenated a debate among the committee members that ultimately led to some-years-worth of contentious

10 Ibid., 17–18.
11 Ibid., 18.
12 Ibid.
discussions. In so doing, he, somewhat ironically, only served to further his original claim that scholars were mostly concerned with “an objective, sober, and comprehensive conception” of folk music and the need to attach definitions from above.

The debate heated up two years later, when at the IFMC’s 17–21 July 1950 meeting in Bloomington, Indiana, which was immediately followed by Indiana University’s Midcentury International Folklore Conference (held 21 July to 4 August, organized by Stith Thompson). The conferences were a who’s who of international folk music scholarship and among the attendees were many of the principal figures who had been associated, either directly or by association, with the New Deal–era folk music research and collecting projects, including Samuel P. Bayard, Sidney Robertson Cowell, Herbert Halpert, George Herzog, George Pullen Jackson, Sarah Gertrude Knott, Albert B. Lord, Alan Lomax, Sirvart Poladian, and Charles and Ruth Crawford Seeger.¹³

Reigniting the folk music debate at this 1950 IFMC conference was a paper titled “Some Reflections on Authenticity in Folk Music” by Maud Karpeles, the honorary secretary of the IFMC who had assisted British folksong collector Cecil Sharp in his Appalachian trips some decades earlier, and had, earlier that year, gone back into the Appalachians with Sidney Robertson Cowell to reconnect with her earlier informants. Karpeles admitted from the outset that she would be “thinking

aloud rather than presenting you with well reasoned arguments and conclusions” because of the “extreme complexity of the subject.” “Most of us have a general sense of what is and what is not a genuine folk song or folk dance,” she noted, “but there are many border-line cases that are hard to classify, and personally I should find it difficult to state categorically what are the particular musical elements that can be said to constitute authenticity.”14 The working definition of folk music that she offered as “a point of departure” was “music that has been submitted through the course of many generations to the process of oral transmission,” which “evolved” through a process of “continuity, variation, and selection.”15 Her classification of folk music was not new; in fact, many of the attendees would have been intimately familiar with the language she used to describe folk music, as her definition was based squarely on Cecil Sharp’s ideas about folk music from nearly a half-century earlier.

Using Sharp’s rather concise definitions of folksong allowed Karpeles to discuss a variety of questions facing the IFMC at that precise moment: How should scholars approach older folk music that had been “subjected to the modern influence” (i.e., formerly unaccompanied music that employed guitar or banjo, which she described as “an innovation of the last thirty years or so”)?16 “Given the right conditions is it possible that ‘hill-billy’ and other popular music of to-day might in time become folk?” Or was it the case—as scholars had argued decades earlier

15 Ibid., 11–12.
16 Ibid., 11–12.
regarding published broadsides—that the saturation of particular versions of a folk song via commercial recordings or radio broadcasts would halt the folk process and would freeze a song into a particular version? What was the role of specialists such as the members of the IFMC, individual collectors, or folklore societies in the debate? Was there a moral obligation to save folk music from the corrupting influence of contemporary media, “to exercise discrimination in the selection of the material that we present to the public”? Karpeles concluded,

> I think that the ultimate test should be based on artistic grounds. The purest folk music is that which has been submitted to the crucible of tradition, and which emerges as a complete artistic unity. If the modern ingredients in folk music do not stand out as misfits but merge with the older elements so that together they make a satisfying whole, then I think we can be confident that this music has as much claim to authenticity as the music produced by the peasants of some isolated region who have had no contact with modern ways of life.\(^\text{17}\)

Karpeles’s middle-ground solution—that modern folk music was worthy of consideration if it conforms to the overall folk process—addressed some of the questions facing the members of the IFMC, but her paper elicited a number of additional questions from respondents such as Marius Barbeau, Albert B. Lord, Olcutt Sanders, and Stith Thompson. Sidney Robertson Cowell pointed out the music critic as a model when determining what might be deemed acceptable as folk music, noting that the critic “must try to be a musicologist on the one hand, and a philosopher or professor of aesthetics on the other. People who were responsible for the selection of folk music must take some such middle road, and the combination of subjectivity

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 14.
and objectivity was a hurdle that could not be escaped.”18 George Herzog, echoing his hero Phillips Barry, noted that scholars needed to take into account “the special techniques of folk tradition; variability, flexibility and constant re-creation.”19 For Charles Seeger’s part, he argued that “we must be careful, in our use of the term ‘tradition,’ not to limit its meaning to the idiom of folk music”:

There were traditions not only in the fine art of music, but in the popular art as well. … There were also the traditions relative to the use of folk music by professional and popular composers—the traditions that found their supporters in the trends of “folklorism” or “anti-folklorism”—and in those of “universalism” and “nativism,” colonialism and autochonism. No less important, but more difficult to survey and study, were similar trends in folk music itself—the resistance to urban influences and the seduction by them.20

Robertson Cowell’s, Herzog’s, and Seeger’s responses may not have addressed the questions that Karpeles left unanswered in her paper, but their statements are illuminating in that they reflect each person’s own personal backgrounds and philosophies on the subject.

Four years of discussion and debate followed before the Committee on the Definition of Folklore, comprised of A. E. Cherbuliez (President), Oneyda Alvarenga, Maud Karpeles, Douglas Kennedy, Egon Kraus, Jaap Kunst and Curt Lange, gathered at the Sao Paulo conference of 16–22 August 1954.21 Maud Karpeles noted in her

18 Ibid., 15.
19 Ibid. 14.
20 Ibid., 15–16.
21 International Folk Music Council, “Resolutions,” Journal of the International Folk Music Council 7 (1955): 23. Leading folklorists from around the world attended the conference, including Renato Almeida (conference chair), Oneyda Alvarenga, Ralph S. Boggs, Richard Dorson, Melville Herskovits, Douglas Kennedy, Egon Kraus, and Stith Thompson, and Jorje Dias, Albert Marinus, and Georges Henri-Riviere of the Commission des Arts et Traditions Populaires (CIAP, now the International Society of Ethnology and Folklore). The list of names is compiled from Stith Thompson, A Folklorist's
synopsis of the conference that the “subject in which our Latin-American friends appeared to be most keenly interested was the definition of folk music or the distinction between folk and popular music, and no less than eight out of a total of eighteen papers dealt directly or indirectly with this subject.”

Karpeles noted that the definition that the committee approved was “an amplification of the definition which emanated from the London Conference of 1952.” As evidenced in the twenty-five page general report from the London conference published in the IFMC’s journal, the members of the IFMC addressed a number of pressing questions, including the distinction between folk and popular music; oral versus written traditions; the vaguely scientific “evolutionary” processes of continuity, variation, and selection; the present-day significance of folk music and the proper presentation of folk materials to the public; the use of folk music in music education programs; and the influence of folk music in “art music.”

Karpeles published the results of the committee’s decision in the 1955 issue of the IFMC journal, noting that “we cannot expect that this definition will be final or that it will be agreeable to all scholars. We suggest that members should send us their views and that the matter should be raised again, not at the next Conference, but

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23 Ibid.
perhaps in two or three years’ time. Their definition in many respects reflects the paper Karpeles gave at the 1950 meeting:

Folk music is the product of a musical tradition that has been evolved through the process of oral transmission. The factors that shape the tradition are: (i) continuity which links the present with the past; (ii) variation which springs from the creative impulse of the individual or the group; and (iii) selection by the community, which determines the form or forms in which the music survives.

The term can be applied to music that has been evolved from rudimentary beginnings by a community uninfluenced by popular and art music and it can likewise be applied to music which has originated with an individual composer and has subsequently been absorbed into the unwritten living tradition of a community.

The term does not cover composed popular music that has been taken over ready-made by a community and remains unchanged, for it is the re-fashioning the re-creation of the music by the community that gives it its folk-character.\(^{25}\)

The IFMC’s definition casts folk music as both process and tradition, with “continuity,” “variation,” and “selection,” being the key qualifications in identifying this music, despite the song’s origin. A song, then, seemingly had to be re-ingested by “the folk” and subjected to the folk \textit{process}, and subsequently re-inserted into the larger tradition to be considered a folksong.

By way of contrast, Indiana University ethnomusicologist and IFMC member George Herzog’s definition of folksong, published as in 1950 as “Song” in the \textit{Funk and Wagnall’s Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend}, offers a somewhat different position:

Folk song comprised the poetry and music of groups whose literature is perpetuated not by writing and print, but through oral tradition. These groups, primarily rural, are better able to preserve some of the older culture of the

\(^{25}\) International Folk Music Council, “Resolutions: Definition of Folk Music,” 23.
national unit of which they form a part, than the population of the cities with its more sophisticated, more international civilization, which is subject to faster changes and fluctuations of fashion. Folk song is thus part of folk culture, which is distinct from that of the cities and represents only certain facets of the culture of the nation.26

Herzog’s definition also has as its centerpiece the process of oral tradition, but otherwise his characterization is more conservative. By focusing on the division between rural and urban populations, Herzog seemingly omits the types of urban lore that many folklorists had been collecting since at least his partnership with Herbert Halpert on the Federal Theatre Project publications of the late 1930s. In fact, Halpert himself was collecting New York City folklore during the time that they worked together.

The IFMC’s definition of 1954 did not meet universal approval, however. Of the fifteen nations represented at the conference, eleven voted in favor of the definition, one against, and three abstained. Stith Thompson recalled, “The Brazilians were very anxious to broaden the definition of folklore to include the making of new items which are only vaguely folkloristic and they were vociferous in their talks about all of this.”27 Folk music’s connection to, or distance from, other large-scale genre classifications—“popular” and “art” music in particular—seemed to be a sticking


27 Thompson, A Folklorist's Progress, 310–12. Stith Thompson recalled that overall “the organization [of the conference] was rather poor,” but that the “greatest amount of work” occurred in the talks of the Committee on the Definition of Folklore. Richard Dorson also noted the situation with the Brazilian folklorists: “This was, I think, the first time that many of the South American folklorists ever had a chance to meet any of their European colleagues. On the whole, the meeting was decidedly worthwhile. There was some friction between the various Brazilian folklorists, and I was disappointed that my friend, Camara Cascudo, and his disciples were uncooperative.” Dorson, Folklore Research Around the World, 118.
point, particularly in the statement about the imagined “community uninfluenced by popular and art music,” a community that would seemingly be difficult to find. Karpeles also noted that a particular weakness of the IFMC definition was its omission of the “time element”:

The definition originally placed before the Council was: “Music that has been submitted throughout many generations to the molding process of oral transmission.” But the words “throughout many generations” were omitted, because it was felt by some that the time factor does not operate to the same extent in a new country as it does in one with an older civilization. The objection may have arisen owing to an erroneous identification of the term folk music with autochthonous music. Many of the songs that are traditionally sung on the American Continent are of European origin, but their transportation from Europe to America does not invalidate their claim to be considered folk songs.  

Despite any omissions or misgivings about the definition that individuals within the IFMC might have had, this particular definition stuck, and it has been often cited in discussions of folk music to the present day.

That a society dedicated to the study of folk music spent the better part of a decade arguing about what exactly it was they were studying is telling. Such was the problem of attempting to codify folk music by committee, of academics converging to create a single, catchall category in which the music of “the folk” might live. Thus, the process of defining folk music for the members of the IFMC was seemingly very much in line with the definition itself: “continuity” with regard to employing Cecil Sharp’s definition that stretched back to the first decade of the twentieth century; “variation” among its members regarding some of the finer details of the definition (i.e., the “time element,” the exact differences between folk and popular musics, and

the subjectivity of making aesthetic judgments about a folksong’s authenticity); and “selection” by the community—in this case by the IFMC’s Committee on the Definition of Folklore—as to what version of the folk music definition would prosper.

Maud Karpeles noted in her paper “Some Reflections on Authenticity in Folk Music,” that the members of the IFMC at least should be able to “pre-suppose that there is such a thing as folk music: that it does exist as a specific genre, in spite of the incidence of border-line cases, because otherwise there is no problem to discuss.” But seemingly the members did not pre-suppose that there was “such a thing as folk music,” or at least the members’ views changed over the decades. In August 1981, at the twenty-sixth annual meeting held in Seoul, members of the IFMC voted to change the name of the organization to the International Council for Traditional Music, thus, in Philip Bohlman’s estimation, “opening the generic boundaries of its subject matter and dismantling the boundaries of what many members regarded as Eurocentric disciplinary practices.” According to Bohlman, “By the 1980s, folk music had fallen on hard times in the academic world,” and noted that professional societies, “do such things, of course, usually to signal that they are about to redefine their fields of study with greater precision. … But traditional music hardly seems more precise than folk music.”

“Traditional music” is not the only lexical stand-in for folk music, however. There are many others, including “vernacular,” “ethnic,” “rural,” “roots,” “Americana,” each of which is reflective of its time period with more or less specificity to the music the terms describe.\(^{32}\) (In this case folk music has much in common with classical music, which is alternatively called “Western art music,” “art music,” “concert music,” “symphonic music,” “the Western musical tradition,” or simply “Western music.”) The folksong collectors and researchers in this study tended to alternate between folk music, vernacular music, and traditional music, with each of the terms being used interchangeably.

Yet the term “folk music” persists, and numerous scholars have needed to attempt a definition of the music. Bruno Nettl noted of the prospect in 1965, “Defining folk music is not an easy task,” because “several criteria can be used, and each, applied alone, is unsatisfactory.”\(^{33}\) Bohlman, in his *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World*, echoed Nettl’s apprehension: “Defining folk music has always been a tempting and dangerous undertaking for the scholars of the field. … In this study I avoid offering a single definition of folk music,” because “the different

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contexts of folk music I investigate here yield very different definitions,” and “because I regard change as ineluctably bound to folk music tradition, I also assert that the dynamic nature of folk music belies the stasis of definition.”³⁴ Benjamin Filene, in his book Romancing the Folk, admits, “For me then, ‘folk music’ ceases to have much use as a descriptive term, since what I am trying to understand is the contradictory meanings Americans have given it over the years.” Instead he employs “vernacular” and “rural” to describe the music in question. And Mark Slobin, in his 2011 volume Folk Music: A Very Short Introduction—part of Oxford University Press’s “Very Short Introduction” series, which the publisher boasts “are the perfect introduction to subjects you previously knew nothing about”—boldly states that he “will not offer anything like a definition of ‘folk music,’ relying instead on the principle of ‘we know it when we hear it,’” adding later, “Folk Music is not a set of songs and tunes; it is more of a working practice.”³⁵

But maneuvering around a concrete definition folk music is not limited to scholars looking back on a tradition; it happened within the time period of the present study: In his landmark 1933 article “Communal Re-creation,” Phillips Barry posed and then answered his own question: “What, then, is a folk-singer? As folks make up the folk, so folks who sing make of any song a traditional folk-song by the process of singing from memory. To put it concretely, whoever sings a song from memory, let it be a Child ballad or Tin Pan Alley ditty, it matters not, has already become a folk-

³⁴ Bohlman, The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World, xviii. Interestingly, despite Bohlman’s statements to the contrary, the book is indexed with an entry for “Folk music, defined.”
³⁵ Slobin, Folk Music: A Very Short Introduction, 1, 3.
singer.” And German musicologist Hans Mersmann, writing in 1931, simply stated, “All songs transmitted by the people are folksongs.”

Some Origins of “the Folk” as Constructed Identity

One of the central problems in defining folk music is contending with the subject embedded within the name: “the folk.” The history of the term is rooted in, to borrow Benedict Anderson’s and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s theories, “invented traditions” and “imagined communities.” Use of the term “folk” as a constructed category dates back at least to the late eighteenth century and Prussian writer and philosopher and leader of the German Romantic nationalist movement Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803). Herder wrote,

> From ancient times we have absolutely no living poetry on which our newer poetry might grow like a branch on the stem. Other nationalities have progressed with the centuries and have built with national products upon a peculiar foundation, with the remains of the past upon the belief and tastes of the Volk. In that way their literature and language have become national. … It will remain eternally true that if we have no Volk, we shall have no public, not nationality, no literature of our own which shall live and work in us.

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38 Folk music is, in fact, is one of the only musical genre categories to imply a subject within its own name (“hillbilly music” and “punk rock” are two other cases).
The location and time period in which Herder was writing is critical: Germany was not yet a unified nation, but rather a disparate collection of nations that shared many customs and a language, but no coherent national identity. Furthermore, as folklore scholar Gene Bluestein notes, “Owing to the impact of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the domination of Latin over the German language, and the subservience of German writers to French literary traditions, Germany had been thwarted from tapping the roots of its own culture.”

Herder’s earliest explorations into the concept of the Volk came after reading Bishop Thomas Percy’s Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (1765). Herder coined the term Volkslied in 1771, and by the end of the decade had published his first collection of Volkslieder (1778), which collected songs from not only the German realm, but also songs from Danish, Eskimo, Estonian, Greek, Italian, Inca, Latin, Lettish (Latvia), Lithuanian, Old Norse, and Spanish traditions. Herder’s notion of das Volk and its relation to language and nation paved the way for other German Romantic Nationalists in the period of the Sturm und Drang and Weimar Classical periods including Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm; Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt; Adolf Bastian; and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

41 Gene Bluestein, The Voice of the Folk: Folklore and American Literary Theory (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), 6.
Hegel also wrote extensively about *das Volk* as it relates to both the notions of “people” and “nation” (in fact, he at times used the terms interchangeably).\(^{43}\) Hegel scholar Lydia Moland states that Hegel employed the term *Volk* to denote “a cultural group that has developed beyond ethnic unity and toward political configuration.”\(^{44}\) For Hegel, “The spiritual individual, the nation [*das Volk*]—insofar as it is internally differentiated so as to form an organic whole—is what we call the state,” which Moland interprets to mean that, “a nation is initially an unsystematic mass of customs and traditions; only when it articulates [socio-cultural, structural] spheres [e.g., family structures, civil society, political representation] can it become a state.”\(^{45}\) Hegel forwarded the notion of the *Volksgeist*, or spirit of a nation, stating that, “every people has its own *Volksgeist*, incorporating a unity of life which is peculiar to it,” with “every nation [possessing] its own particular constitution,” which “is only a product, a manifestation of the particular spirit of a nation [*eines Volkes*] and of the stage of the development of its consciousness of this spirit.”\(^{46}\) Thus, *Volksgeist* contained both political and metaphysical attributes.\(^{47}\) In his views on the folk, then, Hegel differed from German Romantic nationalists and philosophers, such as Herder, who employed the terms *Geist des Volkes* and *Nationalgeist*, in that Hegel was less interested in

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\(^{44}\) Ibid., 78.

\(^{45}\) G. W. F. Hegel, *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, quoted in ibid., 90.


\(^{47}\) According to Hegel, “A nation should therefore be regarded as a spiritual individual, and it is not primarily its external side that will be emphasized here, but rather what we have previously called the spirit of the nation, i.e., its self-consciousness in relation to its own truth and being, and what it recognizes as truth in the absolute sense—in short those spiritual powers which live within the nation and rule over it.” Hegel, *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, quoted ibid., 88.
ethnic and linguistic unity, or any notion of an imagined German ur-Volk, than he was with the underlying social and political structures that were folded into the notion of “people” and “nation.” (The politicized notion of the Volk becomes very powerful in the 1930s as various groups, including the U.S. government, the Popular Front, and the conservative right, vied to use “the folk” and “folkness” as a means by which to curry favor with a disaffected populace.)

Other writers in the German Romantic nationalist tradition followed in focusing on das Volk. In 1812 Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm began publishing German folk tales beginning with the first volume of their Kinder- und Hausmärchen (most commonly known as the Grimm Fairy Tales). Calling their area of study Volkskunde (translated as “folklore”), the Grimms sought out folk materials with very particular features, according to folklore scholar Simon Bronner: “Its poetry drew attention to itself; it was of ancient vintage; and it was orally passed by tradition from one generation to another, especially among the isolated peasantry rooted to the soil.” 48 The Grimms published not only children’s tales, but also books on German myths and legends (Deutsche Mythologie, 1835, expanded to three volumes by 1878) that brought German folklore, and folk nationalism to the rest of the European world and the United States, prompting writers across the Western world to search for such lore within their own borders. 49

49 For an excellent description of the influence of the Grimms in Europe and particularly the United States, see Simon Bronner, Following Tradition: Folklore in the Discourse of American Culture (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1998), 184–236.
For Herder and the Grimms, folklore collecting was not merely a means by which to salvage ancient traditions; it was an attempt to ignite a new sense of nationalism among German-speaking people using traditional materials, primarily those stories and songs in oral tradition that had been passed among the various nations’ ancestors for generations. The enemy of these expressions of the Volk was modernization and a lack of rootedness to German traditions. Simon Bronner notes,

For the Grimms and their fellow Romantics, Das Volk was a fading class of peasants and artisans who had been at the core of German vitality and peoplehood. Recovering that vitality meant a concerted preservationist effort for folklore, since the materials were the last remnants of a populace formerly flourishing in a medieval golden age. … Even if the progress of modernity could not be stopped, a nationalism based on the values inherent in the folklore could redeem a society that had lost touch with nature and the people of the land.50

The interest in folklore did not take long to emerge in other Western nations. The tradition of romantic nationalism continued in the United States and the United Kingdom through writers such as Robert Burns, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walter Scott, Walt Whitman, William Wordsworth, and W. B. Yeats. These writers were interested not only in folk poetry and ballad forms, but also that which the folk represented: a simpler, more natural expression of humanity that was in stark contrast to late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century appeals to science and modernization as the way forward for European and U.S. societies. (The tension between “folk and society” and “industrial and agrarian” is a dichotomy that recurs over and over in discussions of definitions of folk culture.)

50 Bronner, Folk Tradition, 9.
Publishing under the pseudonym “Ambrose Mertson,” author and British antiquarian William John Thoms (1803–1885) coined the term “folk-lore” in a letter to the London literary magazine the *Athenaeum* in 1846.\(^{51}\) The reason he proposed such a term was in response to the recent uptick in interest in what English scholars tended to refer to as “popular antiquities,” or “popular literature,” or “the lore of the people.”\(^{52}\) “Folklore—the Lore of the People,” Thoms proposed, was a “good Saxon compound,” which could stand in to describe more accurately “the manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs, etc. of the olden time.”\(^{53}\) Thoms made a call to the readership of the *Athenaeum* to send in any types of stories that might fit within this category, such as “some recollection of a new neglected custom … some fading legend, local tradition, or fragmentary ballad.”\(^{54}\) Thoms took Grimm’s *Deutsche Mythologie*, published in English in 1825, as his model for such a collection, and urged the *Athenaeum* readers to “gather together the infinite number of facts, illustrative of the subject I have mentioned, which are scattered over the memories of its thousands of readers, and preserve them in its pages, until some James Grimm shall arise who shall do for the Mythology of the British Islands the good service which that profound antiquary and philologist has accomplished for the

\(^{52}\) Willam John Thoms, “Folklore,” *Athenaeum* 982 (22 August 1846): 862–63.
\(^{53}\) Ibid., 862.
\(^{54}\) Ibid.
Mythology of Germany.”55 By the next issue of the Athenaeum, Thoms was editing a “Folk-Lore” column, and by the 1850s the word was being used widely by scholars.56

In the late nineteenth century, there was a rise in scholarly societies formed by “middle-class professionals who sought new intellectual pursuits outside the classical university curriculum” related to various academic disciplines, many of which were scientific, but the social sciences and arts were also well represented.57 In 1878 the English Folk-Lore Society was formed in London, with William Thoms as its director, and ten years later, scholars in the United States followed suit. In 1888, William Wells Newell founded the American Folklore Society (AFS) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in order to “encourage the collection of the fast-vanishing remains of folk-lore in America.”58 Listed among the society’s early, predominantly male, members was Francis J. Child (the first AFS president), Franz Boas, Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain), Cornell president T. F. Crane, Joel Chandler Harris George Lyman Kittredge, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Wesley Powell (founder of the Bureau of American Ethnology), as well as Rutherford B. Hayes, the nineteenth president of the United States.59 Among the list of AFS presidents between 1888 and the end of the Second World War are a number of familiar names within the present

55 Ibid.
56 Bronner, Folk Nation, 10–11.
57 Bronner, Following Tradition, 75.
study (chronologically): Francis J. Child, Franz Boas, G. L. Kittredge, Alice Cunningham Fletcher, A. L. Kroeber, H. M. Belden, John A. Lomax, Louise Pound, Edward Sapir, Martha W. Beckwith, Archer Taylor, Stith Thompson, B. A. Botkin, and Melville Herskovits. Herbert Halpert was president in 1955–56. The group consisted of folklorists, poets, writers, museum directors, anthropologists, and “congressmen, physicians, lawyers, curators, philanthropists, and business men and women,” and the comingling of disciplines and backgrounds was important. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes, “Thanks to Boas, William Wells Newell, one of the founders of the AFS, was less inclined toward the speculative evolutionism of British anthropology and the positivistic pseudoscience of racial types and philological genealogies than he might otherwise have been.”61 (The importance of the AFS to the New Deal folklore projects, particularly with regard to the society’s accusations of amateurism, is discussed in chapter 6.)

In addition to anthropological theories from the late nineteenth century, archaeological notions also underpinned the study of folklore in the United States, with Thoms as an avid proponent of the connection. Duncan Emrich notes, “Thoms made an attempt … to relate his ‘folk-lore’ to existing sciences by calling it a branch of archaeology… by indexing it in the First Series [of The Athenaeum] as ‘Folk Lore, a branch of archaeology.’”62 The relevance to archaeology deserves to be explored further, as folklore historians Chris Wingfield and Chris Gosden assert,

60 AFS, Folklore/Folklife, 7.
“Folk-lore,’ as envisaged by Thoms, like contemporary archaeology, had the quality of what anthropologists might call a salvage paradigm, preserving by recording what was seen as disappearing from the countryside. Thoms’s involvement in archaeology and folklore, as different strands of an antiquarian endeavor, make it clear that he was interested in preserving tangible and intangible remains of the past in equal measure.”63 But folklore historian and theorist Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt argues that there were significant differences between the way that literary folklorists and anthropologists viewed folklore:

Anthropologists, in carving out their discipline, developed a more restrictive definition of folklore than did those in literature, but a more inclusive view of the folk. Folklore was given a specific place within anthropology, that of oral literature. Anthropologists, who traditionally worked in cultures without writing, could not designate folklore as that which is oral since that would include all aspects of the culture. …The literary definition was more inclusive in subject matter, but more limited as to who comprised the folk. For the literary folklorists, folklore was part of the unlettered tradition within literate European and Euro-American societies. This included verbal art and traditional lifeways.64

At its core, however, the argument among anthropologists and folklorists over the place and function of folklore goes back to an interior/exterior, us/them, insider/outsider dichotomy. “The history of the discipline of folklore in Europe and America,” argues Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “is largely a commentary on the

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tensions between national identity and state building. What colonialism is to the history of anthropology, nationalism is to the study of folklore.”

In the United States, however, both of these tensions were at play. American folklore studies, of which folksong and ballad collecting was a central part, represent an international tradition, albeit from a shared, largely white, colonial tradition that contained within itself legacies of slavery and the “othering” of indigenous peoples. “Although the primitiveness of American Indians was of interest,” noted folklore historian Simon Bronner, “[Native Americans] in their view lacked the authenticity provided by a peasant class and ancient history.” This attitude persisted well into the twentieth century, as music of Native Americans, and even citizens of Asian descent, fell out of the purview of folksong scholars and into the realm of anthropologists. Moreover, some scholars believed that the United States was entirely incapable of having its own folk traditions, due in particular to what they viewed as a lack of ancient peasantry in the nation. In his The Science of Folklore (1930), the anthropologist Alexander Haggerty Krappe, who was born in the United States but trained in Germany, stated, “there exists no such thing as American folklore, but only European (or African, or Far Eastern) folklore on the American continent, for the excellent reason that there is no American “folk.”

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66 Bronner, Following Tradition, 221.
This search for an “American folk”—and by extension a larger Anglo-American heritage—was a central concern of numerous folklorists and ballad scholars in both the United States and Europe, however. Chief among these scholars was Francis J. Child (1825–1896), Harvard’s first professor of English, who had heard the Grimms lecture in Germany around 1850. Child became enamored with English and Scottish ballad tradition, and set out to create a typological catalog of all of the authentic ballads he could find. His collection of 305 ballads, titled *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (published between 1882 and 1898) became a classic in the field of ballad scholarship, with the ballads therein forever more being referred to by their “Child numbers.” Alongside his student and successor George Lyman Kittredge, Child was able to establish ballad scholarship as a respectable scholarly pursuit within the academy, and in doing so, firmly entrenched the study of ballads within the realm of literary studies.

Another central figure in the history of ballad collecting in the United States was British folklorist Cecil Sharp (1859–1924). At the suggestion of American song collector Olive Dame Campbell, whom he had met in Chicago in 1915, Sharp traversed the Appalachian region on two occasions during the First World War in search of the types of English and Scottish ballads Child had published. By the time Sharp traveled to the United States he had already established himself as an instrumental figure in the preservation and revival of British folk song and dance traditions, having already published a number of books on English folk songs and dances, and having established the English Folk Song and Dance Society in 1911.
Accompanying Sharp on the trips was Maud Karpeles, who was tasked with transcribing song texts while he collected the tunes. It was Sharp’s belief that in this region of the United States he would be able to find versions of these ballads that were largely unsullied by the corrupting effects of modernity and mass media, which he believed was simply not possible in his native England. The Appalachians, for Sharp was “an ideal society … in which singing was as common and almost as universal a practice as speaking.” Sharp’s imagined and romanticized notion of the region was a site in which “every child in his earliest years would as a matter of course develop this inborn capacity and learn to sing the songs of his fore-fathers in the same natural and unselfconscious way in which he now learns his mother tongue and the elementary literature of the nation to which he belongs. And it was precisely this ideal state of things that I found existing in the mountain communities.”

In 1917, Sharp and Campbell published the results of their collecting trips as *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*. The collection was widely revered, both in its day and thereafter, prompting Bertrand Bronson to call it “not the best *regional* collection we shall ever get, but the most representative of the whole British tradition in the United States,” and to note that Sharp had “a genius for such work” and was “almost the ideal recorder.” Folk music historian D. K. Wilgus

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notes, however, that “Sharp himself has been the subject of a kind of blind hero worship,” despite certain questionable decisions in editing the material and the lack of information about the performers. Wilgus concedes, however, that “we must be grateful for what we have: the largest and finest collection of American folk tunes yet published,” with the caveat that “[the collection] has provided a refuge for the purist who has finally recognized the folk status of non-Child material but who cannot bring himself to consider the entire repertoire of the folksinger. It has interested the musician as well as the musicologist, but it has overemphasized a portion of American folksong.”

“The Folk” and Its Implications

By taking an overall scientific, distanced approach, in part through adopting facets of anthropology and archaeology, some folklorists, who viewed themselves as the rescuers of a soon-to-be-lost tradition, at times regarded the folk culture that they studied largely to be their own property. Moreover, because of the myth of anonymity, of viewing “the folk” as an undifferentiated mass, some folklorists arrived at fraught or specious conclusions about how the folk operated. Francis Gummere (1855–1919), who took literally Jacob Grimm’s notion that das Volk dichtet (the people create poetry) believed that folk creations arose spontaneously as an act of

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72 D. K. Wilgus, Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898, 169.
73 D. K. Wilgus, Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898, 173.
communal creation.74 Other folklorists did not believe that “the folk” were capable of such creation in the first place, as in the case of Hans Naumann’s notion of primitive Gemeinschaftskultur (primitive communal culture) as gesunkenes Kulturgut, or debased culture, in which he posited that the folk had no creative powers of their own, but rather borrowed took as their inspiration the works of high culture. Writing in 1922, Naumann stated that, “To believe that progress grows from the community is romanticism. Community pulls [cultural goods] down or at least levels [them]. … Folk goods are made in the upper stratum.”75

Philip Bohlman notes that such communal theories tend to “produce a fair amount of literature steeped in ideology and bias,” and Regina Bendix went even further, calling Naumann’s theories of folk authenticity “perhaps the most dehumanizing ever proposed,” and stated that it “was the antithesis of the amalgamation of reverence, scholarly interest, documentary fervor, and protectionist impulse characteristic of folkloristic endeavor of the day.”76 But Naumann’s theories warrant further examination, not because they are “dehumanizing” outliers within the discipline of folklore, but rather because of the unfortunate fact that his theories can, without much difficulty, be placed within a larger context in folklore studies in the early twentieth century. Folklore scholar James R. Dow argues that “while

gesunkenes Kulturgut is certainly Naumann’s term, the concept of “goods” from higher, more educated levels of society “sinking” to a lower level, to the Volk, was current thinking [in Germany] at the time.”77

Depictions of “the folk” in the United States could be equally criticized. Historian Gary Gerstle notes that in the 1930s, “the way in which liberal intellectuals and reformers defined membership in the American “folk” reveals the marginality of ethnicity and race in 1930s discourse.” He continues,

The 1930s concept of the “folk” or the “people” referred to Americans, past and present, whose freedom from capitalist contamination endowed them with the strength to endure the Depression and to inspire the fight for cultural and political renewal. … Their “folk” were usually native-born Yankees or white southerners whose families, over the course of generations, had sunk deep roots into American soil. The degree to which an American pastoral ideal shaped representations of the “people” during this decade of industrial collapse can scarcely be exaggerated.78

In the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century, these approaches to the folk and to folklore studies combined with an already volatile racial and ethnic societal background, particularly in the rural and Jim Crow South, led to the furthering of stereotypes as culturally accepted terms (e.g., “Uncle Toms,” “pickanninies,” “mammies,” “hillbillies,” “Okies,” “to name only a few). This widespread proliferation of such pejoratives was an extension of a general fascination with “the folk” and folk culture. Robin D. G. Kelley, in her “Notes on Deconstructing the Folk,” levels a damning critique of “terms like ‘folk,’ ‘authentic,’ and ‘traditional,’” which, she argues, “are socially constructed categories that have

77 Dow, “Hans Naumann’s gesunkenes Kulturgut and primitive Gemeinschaftskultur,” 51.
something to do with the reproduction of race, class, and gender hierarchies and the policing of the boundaries of modernism.” The terms “folk” and “modern,” Kelley notes, “are both mutually dependent concepts embedded in unstable historically and socially constituted systems of classification. In other words, ‘folk’ has no meaning without ‘modern.’” “Such an interrogation is a critical first step,” she concludes, “if we are going to move beyond an idealized, transhistorical notion of ‘the folk’ as the bearers of some authentic, preindustrial culture.”

Cultural historian Raymond Williams echoes Kelley’s claims, stating that “the received categories of the broad cultural description—‘aristocratic’ and ‘folk,’ ‘minority’ and ‘popular,’ ‘educated’ and ‘uneducated’—have to be related, as social products, to social transformations which have out-distanced them, of which they were always a misrepresentation.”

These dialectics were concerns of folklorists in the 1930s as well. Jerrold Hirsch argues that For Jerrold Hirsch, Benjamin Botkin was one such figure: “Like many folklorists, he saw folklore as modern society’s ‘other,’ but he did not see modernity as folklore’s nemesis.” Rather, the distinction between “folk” and “popular” seemed to be an area of concern. For Botkin, folklore was “not only of, for, and by people; it is with people.” It was truly a popular art. Yet, he noted the need for a distinction between the “folk” and the “popular,” and found the term “folk” without any practical substitute:

In spite of many objections to the word “folklore”—its vagueness, its ambiguity, and its esoteric associations—it soon becomes apparent, even from a cursory comparison of synonyms, that there is nothing to take its place. The older term “popular antiquities” is no longer applicable because folklore is no longer limited to the archaic and anachronistic, and, moreover, the term neglects the real distinction existing between “folk” and “popular.”

The tension between folk and popular and folklore and modernity had been exploited by popular culture industries and various media outlets, as in the case of the terms “hillbilly” and “hillbilly music.” Folklorist Archie Green notes that these expressions had been used “both pejoratively and humorously in American print since April 23, 1900,” when political correspondent for the New York Journal wrote “a Hill-Billie is a free and untrammeled white citizen of Alabama, who lives in the hills, has no means to speak of, dresses as he can, talks as he pleases, drinks whiskey when he gets it, and fires off his revolver as the fancy takes him.” In a front-page article in the December 1926 issue of Variety magazine, music editor Abel Green described the hillbilly as “a North Carolina or Tennessee and adjacent mountaineer type of illiterate white whose creed and allegiance to the Bible, the Chautauqua, and the phonograph. … The mountaineer is of ‘poor white trash’ genera. The great majority, probably 95 percent, can neither read nor write English.”

Hillbillies began appearing in cartoon strips as late as 1934, with Paul Webb’s single-panel cartoons of what he dubbed “mountain boys,” published in Esquire

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85 Abel Green, “‘Hill-Billy’ Music,” Variety 29 December 1926, 1; quoted in Green, “Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol,” 221.
magazine. That same year cartoonist Al Capp introduced *Li’l Abner* about a hillbilly camp called “Dogpatch U.S.A.” There were also a string of animated shorts in the mid-to-late 1930s, beginning with Walter Lantz’s *Hill Billys* (1935), which, historian Jerry Wayne Williams notes, was followed by *When I Yoo Hoo* (Warner Brothers, 1936), *A Feud There Was* (Warner Brothers, 1938), *Naughty Neighbors*, with Porky and Petunia Pig (Warner Brothers, 1939), and Betty Boop in *Musical Mountaineers* (Max Fleischer Cartoons, 1939).\(^86\) Live action films depicting hillbillies continued through the 1950s.

In the mid-1920s a number of record labels including Columbia (with its “Familiar Tunes” series); Decca; Ralph S. Peer and Okeh Records (with its “Old Time” series, discussed in the following chapter); and Vocalion began issuing “hillbilly” records and artists such as Vernon Dahlhart, Fiddlin’ John Carson, Jimmie Rodgers, and the group “The Hill Billies” gained national recognition. Even Alan Lomax, in his annual report to the Librarian of Congress in 1938, casually discussed radio broadcasts of “hillbilly musicians” and his thoughts on the relative merits, and authenticity, of their music:

> The “hillbilly” musicians on the air have furnished another outlet for the homemade music of the mountains. Many of them come from rural backgrounds and their hopeful imitators in the hills of Kentucky are legion. The tempos of their square dance tunes have grown faster and their concern with the “mammy” song and the sickly sentimental love song greater, but they also sing some of the indigenous mountain ballads and “blues” and their production of new songs is large. They have been chosen by the producers of

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commercial programs, to the neglect of many interesting musicians, since the producers look for those who perform in the style of already successful radio artists; but there is a gradual trend toward the absorption of more of the traditional styles into the “hillbilly” broadcasts and this may be one of the important channels through which the homemade music of the mountains can reassert itself.  

As Archie Green notes, however, “It is obvious that mountain folk sang and played music long before the word hillbilly was printed and before it was coupled with music. Language extension is not a chaotic process isolated from other culture forms. It is my thesis that the term hillbilly music was born out of the marriage of a commercial industry—phonograph records and some units of show business—with traditional Appalachian folksong.”

David Whisnant contextualizes Lomax’s critique of the “sickly sentimental” music and his relief that such broadcasts might bring more authentic folk music to the national consciousness by noting, “Those who considered themselves ‘seriously interested’ in traditional music (that is, those collectors, academic folklorists, and composers who considered it their mission to conserve and use traditional music for ‘higher’ purposes) perceived the growing commercial popularity of mountain music to be part of a grave cultural problem.” Whisnant argued that the attack on authentic folk music came on two fronts:

On the one hand, the forces of industrial (and musical) modernity were undermining the rural and agricultural base of the traditional music that such people valued; the machine had entered the folk garden, and was wreaking

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havoc. On the other hand, they judged, the burgeoning popular interest in southern mountain music stimulated by commercial recordings was misdirected: the offerings of Vocalion and the rest were cheap and tawdry; they were vulgarizing an ancient cultural treasure.89

But as James Clifford notes in his introduction to The Predicament of Culture, “This feeling of lost authenticity, of ‘modernity’ ruining some essence or sources is not a new one. In The Country and the City (1973) Raymond Williams finds it to be a repetitive, pastoral ‘structure of feeling.’ Again and again over the millennia change is configured as disorder, pure products go crazy.”90 At least part of the problem stems from “the folk” as category, and an anonymous one at that. Robert Cantwell notes that because “folk texts and folk performances are unknown to us … they have often been attributed to an isolated, ‘untutored’ individual genius or pristine ethnomimetic community unconnected to the surrounding official or popular or commercial culture. But folklore, in fact, always issues from these relationships.”91

The question of “purity” and “authenticity” with regard to popular forms and the folk were certainly present in the discussions of the International Folk Music Council in the early 1950s as they toiled to codify folk music. But as Raymond Williams notes in his lexicographical study Keywords the terms “folk” and “popular” had been shifting and contested for some time. In the nineteenth century, Williams writes, “the formation [of folk] belongs to a complex set of responses to the new

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89 Whisnant, All That Is Native and Fine, 184.
90 Clifford, The Predicament of Culture, 4. Clifford took as his inspiration a line from William Carlos Williams’s 1923 poem “To Elsie” from the collection Spring and All, which begins “The pure products of America go crazy.”
industrial and urban society. … ‘Folk,’ in this period, had the effect of backdating all elements of popular culture, and was often offered as a contrast with modern popular forms, either of a radical and working-class or of a commercial kind.”

“Popular” in Williams’s estimation, had changed from meaning “of the people” to a series of subjective value judgments, many times meaning “inferior kinds of work … and work deliberately setting out to win favor … as well as the more modern sense of well-liked by many people.” Lawrence Levine, in his 1992 article “The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences,” echoes Williams’s claim, noting that “popular culture is seen [by some critics] as the antithesis of folk culture: not as emanating from within the community but created—often artificially by people with pecuniary or ideological motives—for the community, or rather for the masses who no longer had an organic community capable of producing culture.” For Levine, “Folklorists might have been purists; the folk rarely were. George Hay, the director of the [Grand Ole] Opry, understood this when he observed, ‘The line of demarcation between the old popular tunes and folk tunes is indeed slight.’

Charles Seeger echoed, to a degree, this “purist” posture in his July 1938 article “Music in America”: “Unquestionably the musical soul of America is in its folk music, not in its academic music; and only in its popular music to the extent that

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93 Williams, “Popular,” in Keywords, 236–37.
95 Levine, “The Folklore of Industrial Society,” 1377.
popular music has borrowed, stolen, and manhandled folk music materials.” Seeger equivocated, however, noting that “the gestures, the nervous energy, the characteristic flair of America—industrialized, sophisticated, learned America—is in its academic and popular, not in its folk music.” Therefore, Seeger, in his ecumenical role as musical diplomat, concluded,

It is quite as necessary to have both! But they should not fight with each other; for there is every reason to believe each has something the other needs for its well-being and for the well-being of the country. Great musics in the past have been formed out of just such interplay of diversity and integration can now be seen in American music. There is some reason to believe it is happening again.\(^96\)

With all of the varying theories surrounding the folk and the process by which folklore is made, it is not surprising that creating definitions for “the folk,” as it was for “folk music,” proved to be a contested and polysemic nightmare. In fact, the classic two-volume *Funk and Wagnall’s Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*, published in 1949–50, contains no definition for the term “folk,” yet it has twenty-one separate definitions for the term “folklore,” as written by scholars such as Benjamin Botkin, Melville Herskovits, George Herzog, Gertrude Kurath, Marian W. Smith, Archer Taylor, Stith Thompson, and Richard Waterman.\(^97\) There were, however, entries for “folk etymology,” “folklore and mythology,” “folk medicine,” “folk-say,” and “folktale.” (As mentioned earlier, “folksong” was not included in this section of the encyclopedia, not because it did not belong there, but

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because the entry’s writer, George Herzog, submitted his copy too late to make the printing of the first volume, letters A–I. Folk song, thus was shortened to “Song” and published in the second volume.)

The more recent *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia* (edited by Jan Harold Brunvand, Garland, 1996) similarly has no definition for “folk.” Rather, it has entries for “Folk Ideas,” “Folk Museums,” “Folk Schools,” “Folk Speech,” the “Folklife Movement,” “Folklore,” “Folklore and American Literature,” “Folk-Say,” “Folksong,” “Folktale,” and “Folkways.”

All of these subcategories of folk concepts and expressions help to narrow the scope of what the folk do, but through them there arises another form of vagueness. Botkin, in his 1933 essay “The Folkness of the Folk,” discussed the problems of attempting to define “the folk,” and the effects of appending qualifiers to the term:

> Turning from folklore to other compounds with folk—“folk song,” “folk tale,” “folk speech,” “folk belief,” etc.—we note the tendency of the first element to become more vague as the second element becomes more precise, until we begin to wonder whether “folk” has any meaning at all.

Botkin later reversed course and wrote that “the real problem with folk and folklore is not that they have no meaning but that they have too many meanings, and that each age tends to give them its own meaning in accordance with the prevailing intellectual fashion and theory of the leading scholars of the age.”

Botkin’s point about each age giving “the folk” its own meaning had precedent. In 1893, Australian folklorist

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100 Botkin, “The Folkness of the Folk,” 463.

101 Ibid., 462–63.
Joseph Jacobs argued, “The Folk is simply a name for our ignorance: we do not know to whom a proverb, a tale, a custom, a myth owes its origin, so we say it originated among the Folk. … The Folk is the publishing syndicate that exploits the production of that voluminous author, Anon. … Yes, I repeat it, the Folk is a fraud, a delusion, a myth.”

And yet “the folk” flourished in the New Deal era, and it is necessary to confront viewpoints such as Botkin’s and Jacobs’s outside of the purely theoretical, but rather within the specific folk cultural products of the era. As Jane S. Becker argues in Selling Tradition, her monograph on Appalachian folk culture, “Rather than concern ourselves with identifying the ‘authentic’ and the ‘corrupted’ or distinguishing between ‘folk’ and ‘popular,’ we must shift our attention to the very complex process of cultural change and the social and political relations that play such important roles in that process.” I take this approach in the following chapter to place the WPA folk music projects in their proper context.

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103 Becker, Selling Tradition, 40.
CHAPTER 3.

“And We Are The Folk”: Folk Cultural Expressions in the New Deal Era

To place these WPA folk music research, collecting, and recording projects in proper context, it is necessary to examine the wider proliferation of folk culture in the 1930s and what it meant to the New Deal era. To be sure, the efforts of these WPA administrators and collectors represented many of the prevailing intellectual currents of their day, but the materials they collected, specifically the recordings, were largely unknown to the general public. The primary way in which Americans experienced folk culture during the 1930s was, somewhat ironically, through the same mass media outlets that some of these collectors feared were corrupting the “pure products.” Moreover, these broadcast media—i.e., radio, film, commercial recordings—had a reciprocal effect on folk culture, at once giving folk musicians a venue through which to make a name for themselves, and at the same time acting as arbiters of taste by creating specific markets and genres for popular musicians and musical forms.

Folk Festivals

As mentioned at the outset of this study, folk festivals were a useful means by which folk musicians, artists, and scholars, could bring folk culture before mass audiences for a weekend or a week at a time. Among the festivals during the era were the White Top Folk Festival, which Eleanor Roosevelt visited in 1933 (discussed in the following chapter); Bascom Lamar Lunsford’s Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in Asheville, North Carolina, which he founded in 1928; Jean Thomas’s American
Folk Song Festival in Ashland, Kentucky, also started at about the same time, which she started in 1930; Sarah Gertrude Knott’s National Folk Festival, begun in 1934 and still running to this day; John Lair’s Ohio Valley Folk Festival, founded in March 1938; and George Korson’s Pennsylvania Folk Festival at Bucknell University in Allentown, Pennsylvania, which he started in 1935, to name only a select portion of the many festivals held across the country annually during the 1930s.¹ Robert Cantwell notes that these festivals “are bound up in various ways with these [structural, governmental] institutions, not only as expedients and occasions, but, more importantly, as forces in relation to which both the old local parochial culture and an embracing cosmopolitan culture understand themselves and the other—a fact that, in turn, shapes what each of these cultures is.” He argues, however, that the presentation of folk culture cannot arise in a vacuum. The tacit system of shared understandings that makes any presentation intelligible—in this case a ductile system of stock characters, stereotyped locales, old stage dialects, typical occupations and pastimes, and, above all, a fixed moral and social hierarchy—demands a tradition in which and through which folk festivals have their meaning.²

But not everyone agreed about what this tradition might entail. In the case of Annabel Morris Buchanan, true folk culture was rigidly defined. Buchanan, a conservatory-trained musician, railed against “crude modern folk productions with cheap tunes

based on ancient Broadway hits,” in her 1937 article “The Function of a Folk Festival.” “The folk festival is not concerned with products of the streets, nor of the penitentiaries, nor of the gutter,” but rather, “in the presentation of America’s finest native material, whether from mountains or lowlands, city or country.”3 “The White Top Folk Festival belongs to the folk,” Buchanan declared. “And we are the folk.”4

But Charles Seeger, who attended the festival in 1936, found Buchanan’s festival to be a “feast of paradox,” “reactionary to the core,” and coordinated “under a smoke-screen of pseudo-scholarship.”5 Cantwell notes that the organizers “saw no contradiction in excluding from the festival local people who could not pay the forty-cent admission fee.”6 Seeger criticized what David Whisnant describes as “the ‘holy folk’ roped off from their own music… city people held in cultural contempt for their sin of not living in southwest Virginia; a banjo picker banished for using steel picks; [and] a mother’s confidential confession that her daughter learned ballads for White Top, but never sang them otherwise…”7 Seeger wrote his superior at the Special Skills Division of the Resettlement Administration, Adrian Dornbush, with some observations about the festival: “(1) the folk-song is not the property of the public; (2) it is not the property of the singer; (3) it is the absolute property of the collector …; and (4) collectors must keep off each other’s preserves.”8 As a collector himself, and

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7 Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine*, 207.
8 Charles Seeger to Adrian Dornbush, 21 August 1936, quoted in ibid.
a person in charge of other collectors, Seeger’s vitriol is all the more striking. But the case of Buchanan’s festival speaks to the larger issue of folk constructed-ness within festivals of this type, folk or otherwise, and the overall effect that such curation can have on the notion of what folk culture was, according to a few festival organizers, in this, and any other era.

**Commercial Recordings**

Folk festivals, however, were not the most immediate, or accessible, manner in which Americans experienced folk musics in the 1930s. Commercial recordings and radio were far more common outlets for people to listen to music. Spurred in no small part to the popularity of blues and jazz records in the 1920s, and sensing that there might be market for other types of music, record labels such as Brunswick/Vocalion, Columbia, Decca, Okeh, and Victor/Bluebird, wasted no time in filling the lacunae, sending talent scouts to remote areas to find folk musicians, primarily in the South, Midwest, and Appalachian regions of the United States. Other labels, such as Gennett and Paramount, simply paid to have the performers brought in to their recording studios. Benjamin Filene described the general tactic taken by these labels:

> When recording in an area, they would establish headquarters in the nearest large city, usually setting up a temporary recording studio at the local radio station, concert hall, or ... an old warehouse. Usually, recording scouts tried to book a full recording schedule in advance, relying on local agents to gather likely prospects, or occasionally, on a timely news article or advertisement.

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9 For more information on these and other labels from this era, see Tony Russell and Bob Pinson, “Record Label Histories,” in *Country Music Records: A Discography, 1921–1942* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9–34.
announcing their recording plans. Upon arrival, the recording team would take down as many songs as possible in a few days and then pack the fragile wax discs in dry ice, ship them back to the company factory, and move on to another town.\(^\text{10}\)

The comparisons to made with the “serious” folk song collectors’ recordings of the same era are legion, particularly those recordings that were shipped back to the AAFS. The seemingly obvious difference is that these record labels were operating under the assumption that they could make a profit off of the commodity of folk music, though even there the boundaries become blurry.

Recording artists such as Clarence “Tom” Ashley, Dock Boggs, Fiddlin’ John Carson, the Carter Family, Vernon Dalhart, Uncle Dave Macon, Jimmie Rodgers, Charlie Poole and his North Carolina Ramblers, came to national attention during this time period through the medium of the radio, which only helped to fuel interest in folk and country music that would pave the way for many other performers in the years to come. Fiddlin’ John Carson’s performances of “Little Old Log Cabin” and “The Old Hen Cackled and the Rooster's going to Crow,” were among the first recordings to launch the record-buying craze among rural or hillbilly audiences. Ralph S. Peer of Okeh Records—the same person who “discovered” and popularized Mamie Smith, recorded these tracks by Carson on 14 June 1923. Although Peer found Carson’s voice to be “plu perfect awful,” Polk C. Brockman, one of Peer’s largest record dealers in Atlanta insisted he go forward with the pressing, and much to Peer’s surprise, it sold extremely well.\(^\text{11}\) In fact, the success of these rural, country, or

\(^{10}\) Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 35.
\(^{11}\) Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, 73.
hillbilly recordings caused many labels to launch fantastical advertising campaigns that often times played upon stereotypes such as poor, white, rural hicks. David Whisnant noted that

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, OKeh, Vocalion, Victor, and Brunswick were decking their fiddlers and string bands in ever more outrageous hayseed garb for promotional photos. Eager to expand their markets, they attempted somewhat ambivalently both to purge the music of the very archaisms valued by the scholars (they recorded almost no unaccompanied ballads, for example) and to appeal—through carefully shaped images of rusticity—to the nostalgic longings of a public caught in the midst of the rapid social transformations of the late 1920s.12

Commercial recordings came onto the radar of the Archive of American Folk Song as well. In 1939 John Hammond contacted Alan Lomax regarding a large quantity of records that Columbia was about to throw out if Lomax did not want to add them to his collection at the AAFS.13 Lomax went to the pressing plant and filled his trunk with hundreds of records, and repeated the process at the offices of Decca and RCA. Later that fall, Lomax brought in Charles Seeger’s twenty-year-old son Pete to the AAFS to be his assistant for fifteen dollars a week. Lomax also enlisted his sister Bess, who recalled sitting in record pressing plants with records stacked from the floor to ceiling with only twenty-four hours to go through them before they were melted down and reused. Over the course of many months they listened through upwards of 3,000 commercial recordings to find the best of the bunch. According to Bess Lomax Hawes, if a record was deemed unworthy, Alan “dramatically sailed it

12 Whisnant, All That Is Native and Fine, 183.
out the window and down an air shaft.”¹⁴ Pete Seeger recalled that he chose about one in ten to keep. The resulting list of 350 records made it into a catalog, titled “List of American Folk Songs on Commercial Records,” to be mimeographed and sent along to any interested parties. In his preface to the list, Lomax noted, “The choices have been personal and have been made for all sorts of reasons. Some of the records are interesting for their complete authenticity of performance; some for their melodies; some because they included texts of important or representative songs; some because they represented typical contemporary derivations from rural singing and playing styles of fifty years ago.”¹⁵ Without a doubt the list is wanting, given the time frame and conditions under which they had to work, as well as the subjective nature of the winnowing process, but it does illuminate at least a passing nod on the part of the AAFS administrators to folk music recordings outside of the archival, field recording realm.

**Radio**

Radio, however, was where most Americans in the 1930s went for entertainment. The radio boom in the United States, which began in the 1920s, was according to Depression historians William and Nancy Young, “Depression proof.”¹⁶ In 1922 a mere 0.2 percent of households in the United States owned radio receivers,

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the sales of which figured at about $60 million. Two years later that figure had jumped to $358 million. By the end of the decade the number of households with radios rose to 45.8 percent, and by the end of the 30s nearly 80 percent of all U.S. citizens owned at least one radio, which amounted to around 28 million households. These numbers do not take into account car radios, which from their inception in 1927 to the end of the 1930s made up another 7 million radios. Compared with the record industry, which recorded crippling losses in the early 1930s, a drop from $46 million in 1930 to $5 million in 1933. What comprised a “hit” record in the late 1920s was a sales figure of around 350,000 copies; in 1930 that number had dropped to a mere 40,000 copies for a record to be classified as a “hit.”

Radios were certainly not cheap. In fact, they were often times sold as “furniture,” with the enclosures being as ornate and stylish as to be a worthy centerpiece for any person’s living room. Regardless, as William and Nancy Young note, “very few people defaulted on their receiver payments.” With the rise in radio sales came an increase of stations to listen to, with 600 AM stations on the air at the start of the 1930s to 765 by the end of the decade. This number increased despite the regulations imposed beginning in 1934 by the Federal Communications Commission (itself an outgrowth of the Federal Radio Commission, which began in

18 Eldridge, *American Culture in the 1930s*, 95.
19 Young and Young, 2:401.
20 Ibid., 2:400.
1927), which had as its mission to regulate the airwaves and to make sure that no broadcasting company was overstepping its boundaries as a corporate entity. Most of these networks (as many as 60 percent) fell under the auspices of only a few companies—NBC, CBS, and the Mutual Broadcasting System—with the remaining stations being smaller “dawn-to-dusk operations” that operated on lower wattages and broadcast to a limited audience. One effect, good or bad, that the concentration of power within a few networks had on the medium was in limiting, or otherwise standardizing programming, which meant that many of the serialized shows produced in New York City could be heard anywhere in the country.

The radio provided a constant, though ever-varying form of entertainment, and David Eldridge estimates that the average person kept the radio on for five hours a day.21 FDR’s “fireside chats,” Father Coughlin’s staunch political speeches, serialized radio programs such as Little Orphan Annie, Dick Tracy, The Lone Ranger, and Lux and Abner (to name but a few), Walter Damrosch’s NBC Music Appreciation Hour, all could be heard with a simple turn of a dial.22 Listeners could hear aliens invade the United States, or the sound of the Hindenburg. Serialized radio

21 Eldridge, *American Culture in the 1930s*, 93.
22 Walter Damrosch’s NBC Music Appreciation Hour 1928–1942 consisted of four series of programs for four different age groups, broadcast during the school day on Fridays. Damrosch did not intend the broadcasts to supplant school programs; rather he viewed the broadcasts as important supplements to a well-rounded musical education. According to William Bianchi, “Probably the most important result of MAH broadcasts was that they enabled small, under-funded schools to provide a high level of music instruction that otherwise would have been unavailable.” William Bianchi, “Education By Radio: America’s School of the Air,” *TechTrends* 52, no. 2 (March–April 2008): 38. Series A (grades 3 and 4) focused on orchestral instruments; Series B (grades 5 and 6) explored music as an expressive and emotional medium; Series C (grades 7–9) explained musical structure and form; and Series D (for high school and above, including colleges and community groups) discussed the life and work of specific composers. Sondra Wieland Howe, “The NBC Music Appreciation Hour: Radio Broadcasts of Walter Damrosch, 1928–1942,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 51, no. 1 (2003): 67; and Bianchi, “Education by Radio,” 38.
shows were so popular that movie theaters would routinely stop their films to broadcast the latest episode of a popular show. “Otherwise,” noted historian Morris Dickstein, “few would have gone to the movies.” Radio historian Bruce Lenthall highlights the importance of the medium in the Great Depression:

More than any preceding cultural vehicle, radio created and disseminated a mass culture. …Starting in the 1930s and continuing far beyond, the mass medium of broadcasting linked ordinary Americans to a widely dispersed world, centralized the authority to determine what programs would be conveyed to listeners throughout the country, and in doing so, standardized the messages those listeners likely heard. Broadcasting delivered a massive public world into listeners’ private realms.

Not everyone in the era heralded the medium of broadcast radio, however. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno asserted that it “turns all participants into listeners and authoritatively subjects them to broadcast programs which are all exactly the same,” resulting in “the stunting of the mass-media consumer’s powers of imagination and spontaneity. The might of industrial society is lodged in men’s minds.” They had similar views on the movies, arguing that the “sound film leaves no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience ... they react automatically” and "fall helpless victims” to what is offered them. And social theorist and radio researcher Herta Herzog wrote in 1941 about the notion of a

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“borrowed experience” when listening to radio programs, as she researched the effects of radio listening on female soap opera listeners.²⁶

Without casting such criticism aside, it can be argued that one of the many benefits of this “massive public world” into which listeners could immerse themselves was the opportunity it allowed to experience outside of their day-to-day lives. William S. Paley, the head of CBS, noted the utilitarian aspects of radio culture in a 1941 article:

No other instrument can so promptly inform a whole country as a nationwide broadcasting system, and the history of network broadcasting demonstrates its ability also to present fairly all sides of important controversial questions, an essential requirement if the people are to comprehend the issues they are called upon to decide.²⁷

News and information was not the only form through which radio listeners could have their horizons widened. The ability to hear music of many types allowed radio owners the opportunity to listen to music that may well have been outside of their own social or cultural realm of experience. It allowed people who could not afford a ticket to the opera or the concert hall to hear Toscanini and the NBC Symphony Orchestra. It also allowed people in urban environs to listen to rural folk, country, or hillbilly music without having to get their hands dirty. Programs such as the WLS National Barn Dance in Chicago, the Grand Ole Opry on WSM in Nashville, or the WSB Barn Dance out of Atlanta, helped to fuel a fascination with these types of

music. The radio made it possible for a listener to hear Damrosch’s Music Appreciation Hour, and, without touching the radio, immediately be transported to a barn dance in the South. In fact, he name of the Grand Ole Opry came from just such a stark juxtaposition in musical styles. According to Bill Monroe, in his essential monograph *Country Music U.S.A.*:

In 1926 George D. Hay gave the WSM Barn Dance its present title of Grand Ole Opry. The program, then three hours long, followed NBC’s Musical Appreciation Hour, conducted by Dr. Walter Damrosch. … Then in an obvious good-natured jibe at Dr. Damrosch … Hay said that “for the past hour we have been listening to music taken largely from grand opera, but from now on we will present ‘The Grand Ole Opry.’”

Musical programs such as these barn dances also helped to bring performers and musical personalities attention on a national scale. Conversely, by broadcasting these musicians, radio programmers were able to reach a swath of society previously untapped, which meant advertising dollars. According to Alan Lomax, “In the 1920s a Nashville radio station began to broadcast music of the nearby Appalachian mountains between advertising announcements. These particular local audiences bought products so enthusiastically that other Southern radio stations followed suit by employing local musicians.” In turn, local musicians, such as Fiddlin’ John Carson, who was “discovered” after playing on Atlanta’s WSM Barn Dance, could launch recording careers. On any given Saturday night, listeners could hear Gene Autry, Jimmie Rodgers, Bill Monroe, Uncle Dave Macon, and many other performers.

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Woody Guthrie got a break early in his career when he hosted his own radio show with Maxine Crissman, or “Lefty Lou,” as Guthrie referred to her, on KFVD out of Los Angeles. Guthrie’s show also brought rural musics to the many migrant workers who had been forced out of their homes in the South and the plains states. The Carter Family similarly made a name for themselves on the radio, broadcasting from the so-called “border blaster” radio stations out of Mexico, XET and XERA, where FCC regulations held no sway. According to folk music scholar Guy Logsdon, “It is probable that more people hear the Carter Family recording of “Cowboy Jack” than any other individual’s or group’s. … Although the Carter Family’s records sold well by 1930s standards, even more people in those years heard their radio shows.” At up to 500,000 watts, ten times what the FCC allowed for stations in the United States, their music would have been difficult to miss. Woody Guthrie also worked for a border blaster for a brief time, XELO out of Tijuana, Mexico, before returning to KFVD in Los Angeles because of some of the off-color comments he made about smuggling, which got him arrested by Mexican border guards.

The radio was home to a number of shows not necessarily by “the folk,” but rather, about the folk and folk themes. Popular radio programs such as documentary radio pioneer Norman Corwin’s CBS series *The Pursuit of Happiness*, first broadcast in November 1939, revolutionized the radio documentary and drama genre. Included

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in this series were radio stagings of Robert Sherwood’s play *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*; a variety show that featured Hawaiian music and a report on American folklore; performances by Woody Guthrie; and—perhaps the most impactful show in the series—a production of Earl Robinson and John La Touche’s *Ballad for Americans*, with Paul Robeson singing the lead role. (Corwin worked again with Earl Robinson on a radio adaptation of Carl Sandburg’s *The People, Yes* for the CBS series *Columbia Workshop* in May 1941.)

Alan Lomax also worked extensively in radio documentaries, which he termed “Folk Theater,” albeit with some degree of initial trepidation. When he was initially asked by CBS to produce a number of radio programs highlighting folk music and the collections that he had been making while working at the AAFS, Lomax was initially put off: “I thought this was a joke. I didn’t know anybody that could be seriously interested in working on the radio, a pile of crap. Then I heard [Norman] Corwin’s broadcasts and I did a flip, I realized radio was a great art of the time.”

At the urging of Nicholas Ray, his friend and fellow folk music enthusiast, Lomax produced two twenty-six-week series on folk music for CBS’s *The American School of the Air*, titled *American Folk Songs* and *Wellsprings of Music*, respectively.

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The programs were broadcast across the nation by CBS affiliates and even piped into classrooms as part of the educational radio programming that CBS produced. Lomax and Ray also worked on “staged” programs replete with written scripts and plots that featured famous folk music performers of the day. In the fall of 1940 and the winter of 1941 they worked on *Back Where I Come From*, which featured regular performances by musicians such as Lead Belly, Josh White, Woody Guthrie, and the Golden Gate Quartet, among others. At roughly the same time that these programs were airing Lomax began working on radio projects under the auspices of the Library of Congress’s newly established Radio Research Project, including one that featured his father John A. Lomax’s recordings and recollections of his field trips, titled *The Ballad Hunter*.35 (Lomax’s involvement with radio as regards the AAFS is discussed in more detail in chapter 5.)

**Folk Culture in the Visual Arts**

Rural and vernacular themes played a pivotal role in the realm of the visual arts as well, where the notion of “art for the masses” arose in large part as a reaction to the (largely urban) modernist art that had been dominating the art world for decades. American Scene painters, such as the artists who were employed by the Civil Works Administration’s Public Works of Art Project in 1934, and the artists associated with the U.S. Regionalist movement, used natural settings and folk tropes to portray a romanticized, simpler version of the United States. The three artists most

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35 For more on the Radio Research Project, see the chapter on the Archive of American Folk Song in the present study.
generally associated with the Regionalist art movement came from largely rural regions of the United States: Thomas Hart Benton (Missouri), John Steuart Curry (Kansas), and Grant Wood (Iowa), and each in his own way railed against the sway that cities, particularly New York, had over the art world. Benton romantically outlined the regionalist ideal of painting in his autobiography: “Let your American environment … be your inspiration, American public meaning your purpose.”

Although Benton lived in New York from the early 1920s through the mid-1930s, he was devoted in his art “toward strong representation and clearly defined meanings which may be shared and verified by large groups of people.” (In fact, it was during Benton’s time in New York where he introduced Charles Seeger to much of the “authentic” folk music that would shape his worldview on folk music in the United States. Seeger even served as guitarist in Benton’s band.)

Grant Wood, on the other hand had no use for New York City, or any other large urban area. In 1935 Grant Wood published a manifesto titled *Revolt Against the City*, which art historian James M. Dennis called “a populist stand against the cultural colonialism of eastern cities.”

The Regionalist movement was not without its detractors, however. Historian David Eldridge notes that, “Regionalism was deemed guilty of escapism, offering false, utopian views of rural life which exploited the nostalgic feelings of Americans who

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had migrated from the countryside to cities in recent years.”

Other critics, particularly members of the Popular Front, called the Regionalists conservative, at best, and fascist at worst.

The Social Realist movement in the art world of the 1930s, which included artists such as Hugo Gellert, William Gropper, and Ben Shahn, was much more palpable to Popular Front critics. But it was the photography from this time period that depicted images of the lives of the displaced “folk” in the United States in stark detail. Photographers for the Farm Security Administration Photography Unit, led by Roy Stryker captured (albeit in sometimes staged scenes) the lives of the migrant workers in FSA camps across the nation, particularly in California. The photographs of Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Russell Lee, Carl Mydans, Marion Post, Arthur Rothstein, and Ben Shahn, encapsulated the sorts of “documentary expression,” in William Stott’s description, that so captured the imaginations of the nation’s citizens who had little idea of what certain swaths of the country were experiencing.

According to Lawrence Levine, “The ubiquitous image of the victim was originally intended to help galvanize public opinion behind the need for governmental help and reform and has served historically to explain the necessity for the massive federal intervention that took place and to justify what happened to the American polity

39 Eldridge, America in the 1930s, 137.
40 Dennis, Renegade Regionalists, 69 ff.
during the Thirties.”\footnote{Levine, “The Historian and the Icon,” 33–34.} The reach of the impact of these photographs was only widened through large multi-page spreads in *Life* magazine or in books such as Margaret Bourke-White’s *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937, with text by Erskine Caldwell), or in James Agee’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941).\footnote{See “The U.S. Dust Bowl,” *Life Magazine*, 21 June 1937, 60–65; Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell, *You Have Seen Their Faces* (New York: Viking Press, 1937); and James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Three Tenant Families* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941).} The social realist, documentary form also had its many corollaries in the world of film. Two important films in this vein were Pare Lorentz’s government-sponsored public service films, *The Plow That Broke the Plains*, made for the Resettlement Administration in 1936, and *The River*, for the Farm Security Administration in 1938, with folk music–inspired scores by Virgil Thomson.

Interest in folk art extended outside of the realm of the professional artists and galleries. In much the same way as folk music was coveted in the 1930s, so too was the handiwork made by “the folk.” The Arts and Crafts movement of the first decades of the twentieth century is closely associated with the social reform movement in the United States, and took shape in women’s clubs and settlement houses such as Jane Addams’s Hull House and the Denison House in Boston. According to Jane S. Becker, in her book on the Arts and Crafts movement in the twentieth century, “In these endeavors, middle-class women found a way to create spheres of influence in a progressive but still patriarchal and hierarchical culture. … In both the handiwork of their own ancestors and the folk crafts of other cultures they discovered a unique
women’s presence, and they saw such craftwork as a wholesome alternative to industrial labor for wage-earning women."^{44}

The Arts and Crafts movement served a dual purpose in both attracting wealthy patrons to buy their wares as well as to shift more generally the perception of the public away from mass-produced items to handcrafted, more “simple” or “pure” commodities. Arts and Crafts guilds began to appear in the early decades of the twentieth century, such as the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild, which was established in 1929 as “a loose federation of craft-producing centers and schools,” which was, according to Jane Becker in her book on folk art of the Southern Appalachians, “the arbiter of quality and taste with regard to mountain-made crafts.”^{45} Director of the Russell Sage Foundation’s Department of Arts and Social Work, Allen H. Eaton helped organize the Guild through his work with them published a landmark book on Appalachian handicrafts, *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*, which featured Doris Ullman’s powerful photos of rural craftspeople.^{46}

The Arts and Crafts movement soon caught the attention of art critics and museum curators alike, particularly in that bastion of the modernist art world, New York City. In 1924 the Metropolitan Museum of Art opened its “American Wing,” which housed exclusively early decorative arts from the United States. Victoria Grieve, in her book on the Federal Art Project and “middlebrow culture” notes that

^{44} Becker, *Selling Tradition*, 16–17.
^{45} Ibid., 73.
the art displayed in this wing of the Met “was not the equivalent of European fine art—painting and sculpture—but a distinctively American form of fine art: utilitarian objects such as furniture and pottery made primarily white and professionally trained artisans and craftsmen.”

That same year the Whitney Studio Club in New York put on an “Early American Art” exhibition featuring the art of members of the wealthy artist, critic, and collector Hamilton Easter Field’s Ogunquit School in Maine, and sculptor Elie Nadelman and his wife Viola put their own personal collection of folk art on display at their estate in Riverdale-on-Hudson, called the Museum of Folk Art.

It was during the late 1920s and early 1930s that folk arts took off as a saleable commodity within the established art world, due in large part to the efforts of art dealers Isabel Carleton Wilde and Edith Gregor Halpert (no direct relation to folk music collector Herbert Halpert), and museum curator Holger Cahill (later the director of the WPA Federal Art Project). Wilde’s and Halpert’s approaches to the display and sale of folk arts differed greatly, however: Wilde sold her “American Primitives” through her antique store; Halpert displayed hers in a museum space in downtown Manhattan, opening her American Folk Art Gallery in 1929, which she described as “the first of its kind in this country.”

It was through this conscious and conspicuous branding that Halpert was able to attract the attention of wealthy patrons.

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49 Quoted in ibid., 152.
such as Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, who bought numerous works of folk art for her own personal collection. It was, in turn, Rockefeller’s collection of folk art that formed the basis for two of the most important exhibitions of folk art in the 1930s, both curated by Holger Cahill: the “American Folk Sculpture” exhibit at the Newark Museum in 1931, and the monumental “American Folk Art, The Art of the Common Man” exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1932.\textsuperscript{50} It was this latter exhibition, according to Becker, that firmly “established the definition and place of folk art in relationship to the fine arts.”\textsuperscript{51} Cahill used his experiences with these folk art exhibitions during his tenure as director of the Federal Art Project, particularly through his work with Constance Rourke on the Index of American Design (discussed later in the dissertation), a compendium of nearly 18,000 watercolor paintings of traditional arts and crafts of the United States to the turn of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{52}

Eleanor Roosevelt was also keenly interested in the Arts and Crafts movement, and in the value of handcrafted goods over mass-produced ones. In 1926, Roosevelt and her friends Nancy Cook, Marion Dickman, and Caroline O’Day—with whom she shared a cottage at Val-Kill near the Roosevelt estate at Hyde Park—founded the furniture-making venture, Val-Kill Industries.\textsuperscript{53} According to National Park Services website for Val-Kill Industries, Val-Kill “was a direct response to

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 154.
\textsuperscript{51} Becker, \textit{Selling Tradition}, 209.
changing demographics in the local community. At Val-Kill, the Roosevelts promoted cottage industry as a means to employ young men, supplement the income of farming families, and sustain a healthy balance between rural agriculture and urban industry. Of the group, it was Roosevelt and Cook who were most involved with Val-Kill, with Roosevelt taking most of her earnings from speaking engagements and putting them into the business. She was also the face of the business, and promoted it in newspapers and public appearances. Nancy Cook, with her background in woodworking, designed most of the furniture and served as the shop’s manager. According to the National Park Service website about Val-Kill Industries, “At Val-Kill, skilled artisans produced high quality replicas and adaptations of early American furniture in response to the immensely popular Colonial Revival style. Frank Landolfa, Otto Berge and Arnold Berge were the principal craftsmen.” The business expanded after some years to include the Val-Kill Forge, which produced colonial and contemporary pewter pieces, and the Val-Kill Looms, with Nelly Johannesen as the principal weaver, producing homespun woolen cloth. They dissolved Val-Kill in 1937, the forge to Arnold Berge, and the furniture equipment to Otto Berge, who continued making furniture under the Val-Kill name for decades to come.

The Folk in Literature

55 Ibid.
The representation of “the folk” and folk culture proliferated in the 1930s, through literature, poetry, ethnography, regional studies, sociological studies, and journalism. Many of these studies had nationalist implications—what “the folk” meant to the nation in the era—particularly with regard to what folk culture meant in a post-economically dominant United States. In fact, “folkness” was attributed as a sort of revisionist history for the nation, as in the case of the numerous writings on Abraham Lincoln in the 1930s, many of which recast him as a sort of folk hero during his early life in Illinois (this conception of Lincoln persists to this day), as in the case of Robert Sherwood’s play Abe Lincoln in Illinois: A Play in Twelve Scenes. Ellsworth P. Conkle’s play for the Federal Theatre Project, Prologue to Glory (1938), similarly portrayed Lincoln’s early years and small-town roots. (Conkle later had a weekly radio program about Lincoln, named Honest Abe.) There were also films about Lincoln during the 1930s, including John Ford’s Young Mr. Lincoln, about D. W. Griffith’s Abraham Lincoln (1930), made fifteen years after his controversial The Birth of a Nation, which cast Lincoln as a Southern sympathizer. The crowning achievement of the Lincoln revival during the Depression was Carl Sandburg’s (1878–1967) mammoth multivolume biography of Lincoln, divided into two large parts: Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years, published in two volumes in 1926, and Abraham Lincoln: The War Years, published in four volumes in 1939. Sandburg won the Pulitzer Prize for History for this work in 1940.

Sandburg was also a major figure in the writing about the folk and folklore in the United States. His interest in folk music had come to national attention in 1927
with the publication of his compendium of folk songs from across the nation titled *The American Songbag*, a book that was popular with musicians, folk music enthusiasts, and the general public alike. Sandburg had traveled the country in the 1920s collecting folk songs, including a number of trips to the Ozarks according to folklorist and song collector Vance Randolph.\(^{56}\) Judith Tick noted his influence on folk musicians and composers in her biography of Ruth Crawford Seeger, who also admired Sandburg’s *Songbag*:

> As a populist poet, Sandburg bestowed a powerful dignity on what the ’20s called the “American scene” in a book he called a “ragbag of stripes and streaks of color from nearly all ends of the earth … rich with the diversity of the United States.” Reviewed widely in journals ranging from the *New Masses* to *Modern Music*, the *American Songbag* influenced a number of musicians. Pete Seeger, who calls it a “landmark,” saw it “almost as soon as it came out.” The composer Elie Siegmeister took it to Paris with him in 1927, and he and his wife Hannah “were always singing these songs. That was home. That was where we belonged.”\(^{57}\)

In 1936, Carl Sandburg published his nearly three-hundred-page, book-length poem *The People, Yes*, “a sequence of over one hundred versified anecdotes, political lectures, tall tales, and moralizing fables,” replete with folk themes and phrases common with the American people, which were aimed at uniting what Sandburg referred to as “the family of man.”\(^{58}\) Benjamin Botkin was particularly impressed with Sandburg and called *The People, Yes* “great folk poetry that is also social

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poetry.” Jerrold Hirsch notes that, in Botkin’s opinion, “Sandburg represented a poet who turned to living folk cultures to create and American epic, in contrast to poets such as Eliot, who had, in creating the myths for their anti-epics, relied on materials from dead cultures. … Botkin saw in Sandburg a poet who had gone to the folk and emerged an individual with values and a voice to express them.”

Zora Neale Hurston also wrote extensively about the folk, and folk culture in the 1930s, though she occupies a unique space in that she was writing both as an anthropologist coming out of the Boasian school at Columbia University and as an African American female writer closely associated with the writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Between 1934 and 1942, Hurston published three novels (Jonah’s Gourd Vine, 1934; Their Eyes Were Watching God, 1937; and Moses, Man of the Mountain, 1939); a book of African American folklore (Mules and Men, 1935); a book about her fieldwork in the Caribbean (Tell My Horse, 1938); and her autobiography (Dust Tracks on a Road, 1942). Hurston also penned numerous essays on African American dialect, customs, and music, including her essay “Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals,” which was published in Nancy Cunard’s landmark Negro: An Anthology. Hazel Carby called Hurston “a central figure in the cultural struggle among black intellectuals to define exactly who the people were that were going to

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become the representatives of the folk,” and in doing so she “constructed a discourse of nostalgia for a rural community.”

Perhaps no author did more to illuminate the figure of the folk in the eyes of the public than John Steinbeck. Between 1936 and 1939, Steinbeck made it his mission to publicize the plight of the farm worker in California, publishing two novels, a novella, a number of short stories, and newspaper articles on the subject, including *In Dubious Battle* (1936), an account of a farm workers’ strike in 1933; a series of seven newspaper articles titled “The Harvest Gypsies,” published in the *San Francisco News* between the fifth and the twelfth of October 1936, and later compiled and published as *Their Blood Is Strong* (1938); the novella about two displaced migrant ranch workers *Of Mice and Men* (1937); the short story collection *The Long Valley* (1938), which was set in Steinbeck’s home of the Salinas Valley in California, and his masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), about the Joad family’s travels to the Okie migrant camps in California. Director John Ford made *The Grapes of Wrath* into a film the following year, which won two Academy Awards (best

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62 George West, editor of the *San Francisco News*, who had met Steinbeck at the home of radical journalist Lincoln Steffens, asked Steinbeck after the publication of *In Dubious Battle* to do a series of articles for the *News*. During the summer of 1936 Steinbeck traveled to migrant camps in California, and spent a few days at the Weedpatch camp in Arvin. It was at Weedpatch that he met Tom Collins, the iconic manager of the Arvin camp (also known as the “Weedpatch” camp) in Kern County. During his stay at the camp, Steinbeck interacted with camp residents, attended camp council meetings and dances, traveled with Collins, and read through Collins’s camp reports. Steinbeck used Collins as a model for his character in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Jim Rawley, the manager as the thinly veiled “Wheatpatch Camp,” and dedicated the novel to Collins, with the inscription “To Tom, who lived it.” See Charles Wollenberg, Introduction to John Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies: On the Road to The Grapes of Wrath*, (Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 1988), vi, vii, ix. The titles of the seven articles were “The People, Who They Are,” “Squatters Camps” “Corporation Farming,” “Government Housing,” “Relief, Medicine, Income, Diet,” “The Foreign Migrant,” and “The Future.”
director and best supporting actress) and was nominated for five other Oscars. Steinbeck’s works during this time period influenced both Woody Guthrie, who wrote songs about the migrant workers and the Joads in particular, as well as Charles L. Todd, who in 1940 and 1941, alongside Robert Sonkin, recorded the music of the migrant workers in the camps in California.

Steinbeck’s writings from this time period place him alongside other social realists, documentarians, and regional writers of California such as Carey McWilliams and Dorothea Lange, both of whom he knew personally. Part of what made the novel such a paragon of social documentary was Steinbeck’s research process and initial intentions on writing about the subject of migrant workers. He traveled extensively through migrant camps in southern California, and met the iconic manager of the Arvin “Weedpatch” camp Tom Collins, to whom *The Grapes of Wrath* was dedicated, and on whom the character of Jim Rawley was based. Steinbeck had not initially intended to write the novel, but rather a long spread for *Life* magazine and a book with pictures with photographer Horace Bristol. It was Steinbeck’s approach at making a “documentary book” with photos rather than a novel that gave it its impact, prompting *Life* magazine to state, “never before had the facts behind such a great work of fiction been so carefully researched by the camera.”63 Steinbeck scholar David Wrobel noted that, “in emphasizing the centrality of the politics of place to the migrants’ struggle, Steinbeck created what is arguably

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63 Quoted in Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*, 122.
the most significant single work of the regional revival of the interwar years, one that illuminated both the most positive and negative manifestations of regionalism."64

**Regionalism**

Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, as a regionalist novel was only one publication in what was perhaps the most prevalent trend in literature during the late 1920s through the Second World War. The Federal Writers’ Projects state guides for their *American Guide Series* were but one example, but the FWP also produced studies on individual communities in the United States, including the Georgia Costal Negroes, Italians of New York, and the Armenians of Massachusetts. Nor were regional studies limited to the rural folk: Lewis Mumford published two studies on urban industrialization: *Technics and Civilization* (1934), and his landmark *The Culture of Cities* (1938). Benton MacKaye made a study on post-industrial, indigenous New England, titled *The New Exploration* (1928). In 1931 Texan scholar Walter Prescott Webb penned *The Great Plains* his landmark study of the Great Plains region, covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas to the western side of the Rocky Mountains. Folklorist J. Frank Dobie also wrote numerous books about Texas life and folklore. Writers including Josephine Herbst, Meridel Le Sueur, and Joe Jones authored stories about the Midwest. These studies comprise only

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a fraction of the books written about various regions in the United States during the era. According to regionalist historian Michael C. Steiner,

Regionalism seemed to become an American preoccupation during the great depression of the 1930s. During that decade regionalism was widely and urgently discussed by artists, folklorists, social scientists, planners, architects, and engineers. Scores of conferences, roundtable discussions, federal commissions, and symposia were devoted to regionalism, while a swarm of journals sponsored continued debates on the topic.65

Part of the reason that regionalism held such sway in the 1930s had to do with the fact that it encompassed nearly every section of the nation, ran the political gamut, from Communist to conservative, and existed as an academic pursuit in nearly every discipline in the social sciences and humanities, including anthropology, geography, history, political science, and sociology. As Christine Bold argues, “Such national self-scrutiny brought a heightened awareness of the qualities and significance of individual regions and a reinforcement of the ties among members of communities as they looked to the resuscitation of their own landscape.”66 And regionalism came under the guise of many names. Steiner notes, “During the decade of the great depression, people who described themselves as agrarians, distributists, decentralists, back-to-the-land and subsistence-homesteading advocates were often affected by regional sentiments.”67 Southern regional sociologist, Howard W. Odum defined “regionalism” as:

67 Steiner, “Regionalism in the Great Depression,” 430.
essentially the framework for the scientific study of regional cultures in relation to the total or composite society of which they are constituent parts. All cultures have their genesis and grow up in the physical regional setting, expand in multitudes of a varied social structure, and retain a perspective to their component regional conditioning. Regionalism, therefore, is a key to folk-sociology, which also studies comparative society through regional folk culture.  

As evidenced in Odum’s definition, regionalism had profound implications for the study of folklore and folk communities (“folk-sociology” and “regional folk culture”) within the United States.  

Constance Rourke (1885–1941), who was discussed previously in her capacity as vice president of the National Folk Festival Association and as consultant for the Federal Art Project’s *Index of American Design*, was a primary figure in literary regionalism, and was particularly interested in the ways that regionalism could be used to highlight folk cultures in the United States. In her essay “The Significance of

69 The precursor to regionalism was the theory of sectionalism, which also divided the nation into a series of region, but these sections were politically, geographically, and economically determined, rather than culturally determined, as in the tenets of regionalism. It is somewhat surprising, then, that in 1932 Frederick Jackson Turner, perhaps the best-known of the sectionalists, published *The Significance of Sections in American History*, his collection of essays on sectionalism that he had written over the course of his lifetime. It included his most famous essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” which presented his “frontier thesis,” which posited that the American character was created largely by the nation’s move westward in the nineteenth century. He had presented the theory initially at the World’s Columbia Exposition in Chicago in 1893 and later published a book on his frontier thesis titled, *The Frontier in American History* (1921). Turner’s *Significance of Sections* received the Pulitzer Prize for history in 1932, right at the moment that the regionalist movement was reaching its pinnacle. Regionalism differed from sectionalism in that regionalism was not inward looking and isolationist, but rather typically ecumenical and progressive. Howard Odum, outlined the differences between these approaches to difference in the nation: “Regionalism envisages the nation first, making the national culture and welfare the final arbiter. On the other hand, sectionalism sees the region first and the nation afterwards. … Where sectionalism features separateness, regionalism connotes component and constituent parts of the larger national culture.” Howard W. Odum, “Regionalism Vs. Sectionalism in the South’s Place in the National Economy,” *Social Forces* 12, no. 3 (March 1934): 338.
Sections,” Rourke wrote that it is the “the slow accretion of folk elements” that help to form a national identity, and that it would be a mistake to “discount the spirit of a region, its customs, folklore, and native speech” and “the humble influences of place and kinship and common emotion that accumulate through generations to shape and condition a distinctive national consciousness.”

Rourke’s major writings on regionalist topics during the era were *American Humor: A Study in National Character* (1931), and *The Roots of American Culture and Other Essays*, published in 1942, a year after her death. Charles C. Alexander wrote that “More than anybody else, Constance Rourke tried to provide a coherent theory not only for folk painting and sculpture [in her time with the WPA’s Index of American Design] but also for the whole range of American vernacular expression.”

Archie Green wrote, “Among the critics and documentarians who sought strength in useful traditions, Constance Rourke’s name shines. In books and reviews or from open platforms, she declared American lore to be abundant, subtle, and sinewy.” Her importance to the movement, and to folk culture in the United States in general, cannot be understated.

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70 Constance Rourke, “The Significance of Sections,” *New Republic* 20 (September 1933): 149.
As Jane S. Becker argues, regionalist studies, particularly in the South, carried “nativistic overtones that upheld the nobility and supremacy of America’s Anglo-Saxon citizens in response to the waves of southern and eastern European immigrants that filled the nation’s cities and factories.”75 This nativism is exemplified in the work of a group of writers based at Vanderbilt University named the “Southern Agrarians,” including Donald Davidson, John Gould Fletcher, Henry Blue Kline, Lyle H. Lanier, Andrew Nelson Lytle, Herman Clarence Nixon, Frank Lawrence Owsley, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, John Donald Wade, Robert Penn Warren, and Stark Young. In 1930, these writers published an essay collection titled *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, which featured chapters on Southern religion, traditions, and culture with titles such as “Reconstructed but Unregenerate,” “A Critique of the Philosophy of Progress,” “The Irrepressible Conflict,” “Not In Memoriam, But In Defense,” and “Whither Southern Economy.”76 Many of their views were staunchly conservative, even “retrograde,” as 1930s literature historian Peter Conn deems them, with regard to race, class, and gender, and most of all, industrial society in the United States, which they believed had stripped the South of its rural, agricultural identity.77 Donald Davidson continued his attack on industrial society in 1938, and criticized competing approaches to regionalism in his book *The

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“Leviathan” being the United States writ large.78

Howard Odum and Harry Estill Moore, the “Chapel Hill Sociologists” associated with the Institute for Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina, countered *I’ll Take My Stand* with their book *American Regionalism* (1938). In it they called for a more inclusive and less isolationist approach to regionalism, and collected over forty definitions of the term “region” from various sources to support a liberal view of what regionalism had been historically to illuminate what it could be in the late 1930s. They divided the United States into six discrete regions, each of which had its own distinct attributes that made the sum total of all of the regions stronger as a result, calling for a “pluralist ‘unifying regionalism,’ whereby each region made a distinct contribution to the whole.”79 According to Odum scholar, Lynn Moss Sanders, “Odum’s plan was national in scope; he repudiated the current trend of sectionalism or localism, which affirmed cultural differences in America, in favor of a regionalism that could unify America in order to solve common problems while still maintaining the cultural diversity that was the root of society.”80

*American Regionalism* was, however, only part of a series of studies about the South by the sociologists at Chapel Hill. In 1924 the Institute for Research in Social Science at UNC was established, with Odum named its director three years later. The

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Institute, whose members included Guy B. Johnson, Harreit Herring, Roy M. Brown, H. D. Meyer, and Rupert Vance, became a force in the study of Southern culture, publishing numerous books including Vance’s *The Human Geography of the South* (1932), and Odum’s landmark *Southern Regions of the United States* (1936). Odum, for his part, was also a collector of folk music, primarily songs of African Americans in the South, publishing two books on African American folk song alongside Guy B. Johnson, *The Negro and His Songs* (1925) and *Negro Workaday Songs* (1927), both of which were published by the University of North Carolina Press.  

Benjamin A. Botkin was a pioneer in the study of regionalisms and regional literature. In fact, more so than a writer, folklorist, literary critic, or poet, Botkin proclaimed himself a regionalist early in his career while a professor of English at the University of Oklahoma. For Botkin, there was “not one folk [in the United States] but many folk groups—as many as there are regional cultures or racial or occupational groups within a region.” The first of his publications on regionalism was his introduction, a manifesto of sorts on the topic, titled “The Folk in Literature: An Introduction to the New Regionalism,” in his landmark multivolume collection of regional literature *Folk-Say: A Regional Miscellany*. Botkin noted that regionalism “does not simply provide source material—it can create new forms … by drawing

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81 For more on Odum’s folk song collections, see Lynn Moss Sanders’s chapter “Odum and Johnson’s Collaborative Folk-Song Collections,” in *Howard W. Odum’s Folklore Odyssey*, 24–50.
82 Benjamin Botkin was also influenced by the Boasian school of anthropology while at Columbia University, where he completed his master’s degree in English in 1921. Jerrold Hirsch and Lawrence Rodgers, “Introduction,” in *America’s Folklorist: B. A. Botkin and American Culture*, ed. Lawrence Rodgers and Jerrold Hirsch (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 4.
upon place, work, and folk for motifs, images, symbols, and idioms.” He argued that “in the very process of transplanting, these imported cultures and traditions have undergone changes that make them a new tradition.”

Botkin’s views on the function of folk materials and their plasticity in modern society were somewhat progressive for his day, which put him on the margins of the realm of many regionalist folklore scholars. “Botkin’s commitment to the idea of folk materials as grounded in contemporary experience and to the artist’s right to appropriate those materials in creative works led him into conflict with those who thought of folklore as a legacy of the past to be preserved in pristine form,” wrote regionalist scholar Barbara Allen. “As a result, his view of regional folklore did not have widespread impact on other folklorists.”

But Botkin’s progressive approach to regionalism and folklore did bring him to the attention of other regionalists, including Carey McWilliams and Meridel Le Sueur. By the middle of the decade, Botkin’s political views were changing, though, as Jerrold Hirsch notes, to a point: “It marked the end of a transition for him. It was an embracing of Popular Front cultural politics, but as always in his distinctive

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Botkin coined the term “proletarian regionalism” and dabbled in Marxist thinking, in part as a reaction to the conservative views held by the Southern Regionalists, and in part as a sort of manifesto on the way forward for regional studies: “Regionalism, properly controlled, becomes a valuable social adjunct to literature, along with ethnology, folklore, and Marxist economics. In common with these disciplines, regionalism marks a trend away from the belletristic-pure literature and absolute poetry—toward a social and cultural art—from literary anarchy toward literary collectivism.”

In March 1938, Botkin wrote his friend and publisher at the University of Oklahoma Press, Joseph Brandt that, “personally I think the regionalism movement is almost played out, and this might be a good time to take stock.” Two years earlier, in his essay “Regionalism: Cult or Culture,” he noted what he believed to be the shortcomings of the movement: “The dilemma of the southern agrarians is the dilemma of all regionalists who conceive of regionalism as taking things for granted and accepting as final a certain social order—whether it be the South before the Civil War, the West before the passing of the frontier, or the Indian and Spanish Southwest before the Anglo-American invasion.” He believed, however, that “in spite of these obvious anachronisms of neo-primitive, Arcadian, and Utopian regional revivals,

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89 Botkin to Joseph Brandt, 1 March 1938, quoted in Hirsch, “Theorizing Regionalism and Folklore from the Left,” 153.
90 Botkin, “Regionalism: Cult or Culture?” 203.
especially of a genteel-tradition-in-decay-and-at-bay, preaching a theological war between an agrarian god and an industrial devil, regionalism is capable of solid contemporary and forward-looking social science."\(^{91}\) But after becoming national folklore editor for the FWP in 1938, Botkin reassessed once again his relationship with regionalist studies through the folklore and folk music collecting projects under his aegis, and again in his work with the WPA Joint Committee on Folk Arts, in particular in the 1939 Southern States Recording Expedition, led by Herbert Halpert, who later noted that the “development of a regional consciousness is part of a growing nationalism.”\(^{92}\)

\(^{91}\) Ibid.

\(^{92}\) Herbert Halpert, “American Regional Folklore,” *Journal of American Folkllore* 60 (1947): 356.
CHAPTER 4.

“Music of the Open Spaces”: Folk Music and the Roosevelt White House

At ten in the morning on the twelfth of August 1933, a train arrived at the station in Abingdon, Virginia carrying Eleanor Roosevelt and her personal staff. Her arrival was no secret: close to a thousand people, including the town’s mayor, reporters from across the nation, and scores of eager onlookers waited in anticipation to catch a glimpse of the nation’s new First Lady. Roosevelt was in rural Washington County to attend the third White Top Folk Festival on Whitetop Mountain, at the invitation of the festival’s organizer Annabel Morris Buchanan. Buchanan had written Eleanor Roosevelt back in February, soon after the Roosevelts arrived in Washington,
noting that the mountain’s wonderful vistas and folk musicians would offer “a refreshing change from Washington.”

A change from Washington was exactly what the Roosevelts desired after a whirlwind first five months in office, which saw FDR pass a record number of bills in his first hundred days in office designed to halt the Depression’s precipitous economic slide. The Roosevelts were on the eve of their first summer vacation, which would keep them away from the White House for three weeks, until just after Labor Day, while they enjoyed some time at their residence in Hyde Park and on a camping trip in the Adirondacks. But first they had to attend to a few public relations obligations. While Eleanor attended the White Top festival, FDR was on a “whirlwind tour through the Shenandoah Valley,” where he met with residents at the Civilian Conservation Corps [CCC] camps he had established earlier in the year. At his side was a full press junket of “three newsreel photographers and a corps of newspaper cameramen,” who were there to capture the FDR’s glad-handing as well as a performance in the president’s honor by a resident “hill-billy band” that “serenaded him with ‘Turkey in the Straw’ and similar tunes.”

For her part, Eleanor Roosevelt was only beginning to get used to the platform that she had been given upon her arrival at the White House, one that allowed her to shape public opinion. The press and public were getting used to Eleanor Roosevelt’s

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3 Quoted in Anderson, “A First Lady in a False Kingdom,” 188.
role in the White House, soon realizing that she was not interested in merely attending to “the pleasant, though arduous, duties of First Hostess of the Land.” In fact, only two days earlier she had spoken out publicly about wage disparities among men and women in industrial jobs designed to jumpstart the economy, though her statement revealed a coy and calculated understanding of the role she was supposed to play as First Lady: “I have no right to interfere, but I have a very great interest in social conditions, and I hope that any such discrepancies may be only temporary in deference to the major necessity of getting people back to work as quickly as possible.”

Eleanor Roosevelt’s trip to Abingdon it attracted much more attention than had FDR’s visit to CCC camps. National newspapers had been covering her visit for weeks, and local and regional papers had been reporting the August visit for two months with the goal of drumming up more visitors to the festival. The publicity worked: What had been a successful but by no means “sold-out” festival of four thousand attendees the year before ballooned to three to five times that number, with estimates ranging anywhere from ten to twelve to upwards of twenty thousand people, including “more than 100 celebrities from twenty-three states,” one of whom was Henry Morgenthau, FDR’s Secretary of the Treasury.

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7 “‘Equal Pay’ Urged By Mrs. Roosevelt.”
9 A reporter for the Chicago Daily Tribune who attended the festival gave 10,000 as the number of people there. Herrick, Genevieve Forbes, “Singers Of Hills Cheer Visit Of Mrs. Roosevelt: She Attends Fete Her Father Described,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 13 August 1933, 3; Many scholars put the number at upwards of 20,000 people in the audience, including Benjamin Filene, Romancing the Folk:
Eleanor Roosevelt’s visit to Whitetop Mountain did not merely offer a chance for face time with the press and public, however. It had very personal associations for her as well: in the early 1890s, her father, Elliott Roosevelt (brother of former president Theodore Roosevelt) had spent his last years in the region, leaving home when Eleanor was only eight years old. At the train platform in Abingdon, Mayor Ray B. Hagy declared Elliott Roosevelt a “prince of good-fellows” and described him as “a loyal churchman” and “splendid American.” The press was quick to seize on this fact as well, and nearly every article about her trip took great care in detailing her father’s time in Virginia. “Mrs. Roosevelt has a sentimental interest in the occasion,” noted one article in the New York Times, “for less than a half century ago the Roosevelt and Robinson families of New York owned vast tracts of virgin forest land on the slopes of White Top Mountain and in the early Nineties her father came down to manage the property.” This much of the story was true: Elliott Roosevelt had moved to Virginia in 1892 to take a position with the Douglas Land Company, which was owned by his brother-in-law Douglas Robinson. What the news articles left out was the reason he went to Virginia in the first place. Elliott Roosevelt was a notorious alcoholic, womanizer, and profligate spender, and in the interest of the family they

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10 “Folk Music Festival Held On Mountain: Mrs. F. D. Roosevelt to Be the Guest of Honor During the Program Today,” New York Times, 12 August 1933, 14.


12 “Folk Festival of Mountaineers,” XX10.
exiled him in a last-ditch effort to reform him, believing that the responsibility would keep him occupied and the distance would keep the family’s name unsullied, particularly as Theodore Roosevelt pursued his political career. Elliott Roosevelt’s time in Virginia did not turn out to be the cure-all that the family hoped for, however; he attempted suicide by leaping out of a window in 1894, and though the fall did not kill him, a seizure associated with the incident did a few days later.¹³

From the train platform at Abingdon, Eleanor Roosevelt and her entourage traveled by car the forty or so miles to Whitetop Mountain, along the same trails that her father had ridden on horseback some forty years earlier. The route along the way was festooned with signs designating inns where her father spent evenings, and the offices and mills of the land company that he managed. Although the townspeople had been working the entire summer on improving the roads in advance of the festival, the trip was still difficult, and their automobile overheated on at least two

¹³ Elliott Roosevelt had been sent to Abingdon, Virginia in 1892 as a last-ditch effort to put him to some use, having been given a position with the Douglas Land Company, owned by his brother-in-law Douglas Robinson. The articles about Elliott Roosevelt tended to gloss over any of the more lurid details of his life. A New York Times article from 6 August 1933, titled “Virginia Hill Folk to Greet Mrs. Roosevelt at Festival as Daughter of Old Friend” stated, “There are many tales in the southwest hills of Elliott Roosevelt. Those who did not know him have heard of his rides over the countryside as manager of the Douglass-Robertson [sic] Land Company, of $5 bills given to boys who opened gates, of his attendance at barn dances and his stays at humble cabins when night found him away from home. There are stories of disputes he settled for both himself and others.” Another article from the Richmond-Times Dispatch alluded to his popularity with women: “The young ladies were in their seventh heaven of delight when invited to drive with him on the high seat of his swanky trap or in his two-seated yellow jersey wagon...” though the reasons that the article gave for his being there were almost stranger than fiction: “In 1892 Elliott Roosevelt came from his business in New York and his home on Long Island to Abingdon. He had left his young wife and his three little children, Eleanor, Elliott Jr. and Hall, in New York. He came searching for health and the restoration of shattered nerves. He was then 32 years old. The heavy strain of his work and his gay social and sporting life had combined with a smashup from a fall riding in an amateur circus to undermine a constitution already seriously impaired by fever contracted while hunting tigers in India.” Goodridge Wilson, “When a Roosevelt Found Health in Virginia Hills,” Richmond Times-Dispatch, 24 February 1935.
occasions. They bypassed the festival, driving straight to the top of the mountain where Eleanor Roosevelt viewed the landscapes of Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky and West Virginia.

Upon arriving at the festival, Eleanor Roosevelt was “cheered by all types of persons—mountain people and college professors; girl campers in sport slacks and overalls, and by white and Negro Conservation Corps workers.”\(^{14}\) She made a brief statement, acknowledging both her position as a special guest of honor and her personal feelings about visiting her father’s former residence: “To the people who live here I want to say a special word of gratitude. They have given me that feeling that they remember affectionately my father, whom I adore. … For the rest of the day I hope to be just a spectator.”\(^{15}\) Any hopes she might have had about being a mere spectator were soon dashed, however, as she was whisked away to a luncheon in her honor, where she would dine on a meal of fried chicken, meet local luminaries and musicians, and hand out the prizes to the contestants in the folk competitions held during the festival.\(^{16}\)

During the luncheon she was regaled with gifts including, according to various sources, hand-woven bedspreads, dogwood and laurel canes, a book of local recipes, a painting of a mountain cabin where her father occasionally stayed, and

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\(^{14}\) “Mountain Folk Hail First Lady: Mrs. Roosevelt Revisits Old Home of Father; Ovation Given by Thousands of Tourists; Virginia Festival Occasion of Rustic Gathering,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 August 1933, 3.

\(^{15}\) Anderson, “A First Lady in a False Kingdom,” 188.

\(^{16}\) “Folk Music Festival Held On Mountain.”
various other tokens from local artists and craftspeople. She also was introduced to her father’s “faithful old Negro servitor,” seventy-eight-year-old John Smith who presented her with an old cracked china cup from a tea set that her father used for entertaining friends.

Also in attendance were folk music scholars John Jacob Niles and George Pullen Jackson, poet and playwright Percy MacKay, and the second-prize winner in the festival’s ballad competition, Texas Anna Smith Gladden. Gladden had been “discovered” the previous year when she recorded for Arthur Kyle Davis, and it was through this relationship that she would come to the attention of Alan Lomax, with whom she recorded in September 1941 at her home in Salem, Virginia. At the time of the White Top Festival she was pregnant, and after her audience with the First Lady, she decided to name the child Eleanor.

Although Eleanor Roosevelt was able to meet African American CCC workers, her father’s former servant John Smith, and the cooks that the festival organizers hired, she would not encounter any non-white faces among the performers at the festival. One New York Times touted the festival as highlighting “folksongs and dances by the mountain people hereabouts who are reputed to be among the purest-blooded Anglo-Saxon stock in the world, the remnants of a vanishing race.”

18 “Throng Welcomes Mrs. Roosevelt.”
20 “Folk Festival of Mountaineers,” XX10.
exclusion of non-white performers was by design, namely by John Powell, a composer, concert pianist, and folk music enthusiast who was Annabel Morris Buchanan’s partner in coordinating the festival. Although like many modernist composers in the early part of the twentieth century, Powell had flirted with African American vernacular music in his compositions including *Sonata Virginiaeque* (1906) and *Rhapsodie Nègre* (1918), his views on race and racial purity were hardly a secret. Powell grew increasingly concerned about racial elements in classical music, stating that the African American was a “child among the peoples, and his music shows the unconscious, unbounded gaiety of the child, as well as the child’s humor; sometimes Aesopian, often, unfortunately too often, Rabelaisian.”21 In a letter to Daniel Gregory Mason, Powell confessed,

> I’ve gone and done one silly sin. I got hold of a little tune that seemed to me to be rather ‘nigger’ and I have worked it into a little Scherzino. I can imagine your groans and other exhibitions of disgust when you receive it, but just the same I must confess it. I can see the niggers, men and women, dancing under the sway of the fascination of rhythm until the sweat fairly rolls off them, and the little singsong tune goes on and on with monotonous persistency.22

Powell’s views on race were not merely innocuous extensions of his aesthetic views, however. They had real teeth. Musicologist David Kushner notes: “Aligning himself with leaders of the burgeoning eugenics movement, Powell was instrumental in gaining political support for passage of the Racial Integrity Act, which was signed

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into law on March 20, 1924 by the Governor of Virginia, Elbert Lee Trinkle.”

Powell’s views extended to the programming for the White Top Festival as well.

There is no evidence that Eleanor Roosevelt was aware of Powell’s personal views on race, but it would not be the final time that she met Powell and Buchanan: A few months after the festival she invited both of them to lecture about folk music in Washington D.C. and hosted some of the musicians she had met at White Top in the East Room of the White House. Early the following year, on 29 January 1934, Eleanor Roosevelt gave a press conference in which she agreed to introduce a series of seven radio broadcasts for the NBC Red Network, beginning on 21 February, “to be made by folk singers at Richmond, Virginia, and one at Nashville, Tennessee, with orchestral introductions from New York.” At her side was John Powell, who told the throng of reporters gathered at the press conference, “People are beginning to realize [that] much so-called hill-billy music is not representative [of authentic folk music]. Our purpose is to present the true folk music, which comes from the same

23 Ibid., 7.
24 “Mrs. Roosevelt Hears Mountain Fete Plans,” Washington Post 12 April 1935, 3. The New York Times reported on one instance in which John Powell presented music at the White House, for a dinner honoring New York governor Herbert H. Lehman: “Participants in the musicale had in various instances never been more than a few miles from their mountain homes until taken to Richmond a few weeks ago by John Powell, the Virginia composer, to sing and play old folk-tunes in a broadcast. Mrs. Roosevelt, long interested in mountain music, invited the mountain people here to appear under Mr. Powell’s direction. The party included Horton Barker, balladeer who sang ‘The Farmer’s Curst Wife’; ‘Aunt Betty’ Smith, who fiddled ‘Hell Broke Loose in Georgia’; and Victoria Morris, ballad singer, who sang ‘Jack, He Went a-Sailin.’ The male instrumentalists were Jim Chisholm, fiddler in ‘The Lady of the Lake’ and ‘Fine Times at Our Old House,’ and C. B. Wohlford, banjo player in ‘Mississippi Sawyer,’ and ‘Jenny Put the Kettle On.’ ‘Haste to the Wedding,’ a fiddle duet, was played by ‘Aunt Betty’ and her brother Jim.” Lehmans Honored In The White House: President and Wife Hosts at Dinner Preceding Program of Mountain Music,” New York Times, 18 May 1934, 20.
sources as English speech and which goes back at least two centuries to be authentic.”  

As she left the White Top Folk Festival at 7:30 that evening in August 1933 Roosevelt declared, “Some day, I want to motor through this beautiful country, and I should like to ride horseback over the trails my father covered. The day has been lovely and I enjoyed it all so much!” She had been invited back to the festival in 1935, but politely declined. She never returned.

**Folk Music and the Roosevelts**

In a 1979 lecture at the New York Public Library, Alan Lomax told the following perhaps-apocryphal story of FDR’s love for folk music:

> When [FDR] went to Warm Springs, he fell in love with all the old fiddlers, and they used to get drunk together on moonshine and he loved fiddle tunes. And it was him that converted Eleanor to square dancing. And when he wanted to relax after a hard day, he’d send everybody away but a few favorite cronies, and he invited in a banjo player, and they played all kinds of scandalous songs especially political ones from Tammany and his favorite one was [the Civil War–era, anti-Union song, “I’m a Good Old Rebel”] a favorite anthem of his Southern cronies with whom he organized and who helped all that legislation through. Meantime, the secretaries were dancing on the desks with martinis…

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28 Alan Lomax, lecture at the New York Public Library, “Voices at the New York Public Library, from Lead Belly to Computerized Analysis of Folk Song,” a Lecture by Alan Lomax as broadcast over WNYC New York Public Radio (originally given in 1979), *Association for Cultural Equity* website, http://research.culturalequity.org/get-dil-details.do?sessionId=83. Lomax’s story was likely embellished to a great extent for the audience. The song that he quotes comes from a folksong compendium that he and his father published in 1934, *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (see footnote 2 below), and it is entirely possible that he was cobbbling together and conflating stories for the sake of the lecture.
Lomax also recited some of the lyrics to this unlikeliest of favorites for the president:

“I’m a good old rebel / And that’s just what I am / And for this land of freedom / I do not give a damn / I’m glad I fought against her / And only wished we’d won / And I don’t ask any pardon / For anything I’ve done.”

Two years later, Alan Lomax was conducting his own research into the role of folk music in the Roosevelt White House. He had left the Archive of American Folk Song in 1942, and though he was loathe to reminisce, he was charged with putting together a “reunion” of sorts of the concert the Roosevelts had given for King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in August 1939 celebrating the centenary of FDR’s birth, on 30 January 1882. The retrospective concert, which was to be held at the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian on 31 January 1982, was to feature lectures, reminiscences, and performances by those musicians and participants in the 1939 concert, as well as contemporary folklorists and living relatives of deceased performers. In preparation, Lomax called or visited everyone he could think of, including Roosevelt’s chief aide, Grace Tully, folk singer Josh White’s wife Carol, Marian Anderson, William R. Emerson of the FDR Presidential Library, and other authors who had written on Roosevelt and the New Deal arts projects, including Jerre Mangione and Bernard Asbell.

29 “I’m a Good Old Rebel” is attributed to James Innes Randolph, Jr., a poet and Confederate soldier in the Civil War. John and Alan Lomax reproduced the song in their American Ballads and Folk Songs (New York: Macmillan, 1934), 535–39.

What Lomax found over the course of his research was that, although folk music certainly occupied an important place in the Roosevelt White House, Roosevelt himself actually said very little of substance on the subject. There were, of course, any number of photographs of the president listening to folk music, and anecdotes about what his favorite songs might be, but many of his interviewees simply could not recall instances in which FDR had anything to say on the matter. One author, Joseph Alsop, a distant cousin to both the Roosevelts and an author on a book about the president, went so far as to doubt that the Roosevelts had any real interest in folk music, or any other type of music, at all: “I should say that they were about as philistine as people of their sort were in those days.”31 Alsop’s point in calling the Roosevelts philistines spoke not only to their class and privileged upbringing, but also to the fact that by putting on “folk” airs, Roosevelt could in some substantive way appeal to the “common man.” The truth, however, is much more complex, and in need of scrutiny.

The Roosevelts were indeed one of the first administrations to afford folk music respect in a substantive manner. Many studies reference FDR’s claim during an early campaign stop that “Home on the Range” was his favorite song, the president’s love of sea chanteys, the nine folk music concerts that he and Eleanor programmed during their years in the White House, and the photos with folk musicians. There were also a number of informal gatherings of folk music, at the White House or the Roosevelt’s residence in Warm Springs, Georgia, and the couple spent some evenings

listening to folk music field recordings presented by folksong collectors such as Alan Lomax, Charles L. Todd, and Robert Sonkin.

The Roosevelts had close personal relationships with some of the folk musicians whom they met while in office, and musical events at the White House, many of which involved folk music, marked important moments in Roosevelt’s presidency. Two of Roosevelt’s closest associates, vice president John “Cactus Jack” Nance Garner and Tommy “the Cork” Corcoran both enjoyed playing folk music, Garner on his fiddle, and Corcoran on his accordion. A string band and square dancers from one of Roosevelt’s resettlement camps, Skyline Farms in Alabama, performed at a White House garden party in 1938.

To be sure, music in general at the White House during the Roosevelt administration offered much of the same fare as had been heard in the White House for generations. The Roosevelts hosted renowned classical performers and ensembles such as Amy Beach, Antonia Brico, the Curtis String Quartet, Percy Grainger, Jascha Heifetz, Lotte Lehman, and Lawrence Tibbett, to name only a few. Each season, they received on average about 250 requests to perform, to which their social secretary Edith Helm responded personally. Furthermore, during the Roosevelt presidency,

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32 Tommy “the Cork” Corcoran (Thomas Gardiner Corcoran, of Irish descent) was an adviser to the president. FDR often had Tommy “the Cork” Corcoran play for him on his accordion while Marvin McIntyre and other intimate friends sang in close harmony. Roosevelt’s personal aid Grace Tully and her sister would dance Irish jigs, which they made up, to Tommy Corcoran’s accompaniment on the piano or the accordion. Eleanor Roosevelt, “Folk Music in the White House by Eleanor Roosevelt,” 8; and Grace Tully, phone conversation with Alan Lomax, late 1981, Association for Cultural Equity, http://research.culturaequity.org/get-dil-details.do?sessionId=126.


Steinway donated a new grand piano to the White House to replace the “Gold Piano” that had been in the East Room since the time of Theodore Roosevelt in 1903. This new piano was designed to represent a more ecumenical approach to music, which reflected the Roosevelts’ tastes. Although it was still gold leafed throughout, it featured a mural around the case that depicted different types of music from around the United States: the Virginia reel, a Native American ceremonial dance, a New England barn dance, African American folk music, and cowboy songs of the West.\(^{35}\)

President Roosevelt had been involved with music from a very early age, taking part in choirs and drama clubs as a young student, attending concerts and operas with his family, and gathering around the family piano for impromptu singing sessions. At Harvard he was the president of his Freshman Glee Club, and during his time as assistant secretary of the Navy during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, he collected sheet music of sea chanteys and pieces that had nautical themes.\(^{36}\)

Roosevelt’s taste in music as an adult typifies that of a person of his upbringing; that is to say it was educated, but not necessarily terribly sophisticated. He once remarked to his wife, “I wish that once, just once, these musicians would

\(^{35}\) The new 9’7” piano replaced the “Gold Piano” (also a Steinway) that had been there since 1903. Steinway donated the new piano to them in December 1938. It also featured three carved, gold-leafed eagles for the piano’s legs. Architect Eric Gugler, of New York, designed it. Sculptor Albert Stewart designed the eagles. The old Steinway was donated to the Smithsonian, the new one remains in the East Room. Elise K. Kirk, *Musical Highlights from the White House* (Malabar, FL: Krieger, 1992), 116–17.

play or sing a tune I’ve heard before.”

He also made a public statement about the accessibility of grand opera and the democratic ideal found in the medium of radio. In a letter to David Sarnoff, chairman of the Radio Division of the Metropolitan Opera—which was read on-air during that week’s broadcast—Roosevelt proclaimed, “Grand opera has now become in a real sense, the people’s opera rather than the possession of only a privileged few.”

Roosevelt had a number of favorite hymns and songs, many of which he recalled from his time as a student or while he was Secretary of the Navy. In an interview that Lomax conducted in 1981 with William R. Emerson, the director of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library at Hyde Park, New York, Emerson read off a list of hymns and songs that FDR liked, as given to him by Margaret “Daisy” Suckley, FDR’s confidant (and the person who gave him his dog Fala).

Included in the list were the Navy hymn “Eternal Father, Strong to Save,” “Art Thou Weary, Art Thou Languid,” “Rock of Ages,” and “A Mighty Fortress,” and the songs “Anchors Aweigh,” “La Madelon” (a French WWI song), “Home On the Range,” “Wild Irish Rose,” and “The Yellow Rose of Texas.” Emerson confirmed that Roosevelt had named “Home on the Range” his favorite song during his first campaign, but Grace Tully, FDR’s personal aide, claimed that “The Yellow Rose of Texas” was actually his favorite: “I know what he liked particularly was ‘The Yellow Rose of Texas.’ … Lots of people thought it was ‘Home on the Range,’ well, it

37 Quoted in Raymond Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom: Marian Anderson, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Concert that Awakened America (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010), 95.
38 FDR to Sarnoff, 31 January 1940, quoted in Kirk, Musical Highlights from the White House, 111.
wasn’t, that was [presidential secretary] Marvin McIntyre’s favorite. It wasn’t the president’s.”

Alan Lomax, a native Texan, responded, “Well, I’ll be goddamned.”

Roosevelt made only a few public statements while president about the arts or music in particular. In most cases they read as the types of diplomatic tracts that would come from the pen of a polished speechwriter. In a complimentary, though simplistic statement for the opening of National Music Week in May 1938, for instance, Roosevelt stated,

Music is the universal language of cheer and good-fellowship. It unquestionably aids in inculcating the spirit of good-will now so greatly needed among all peoples of the earth. Music, because of its ennobling influence, should be encouraged as a controlling force in the lives of men. Discord vanishes with music; hence, music-loving people are amongst the happiest people in the world. With the brighter outlook which comes from a happy spirit we can keep a saner view of life and its problems and see values more nearly in their true perspective.

And in a statement about the role of music in a time of leisure, which was brought about by technological advances, and not, as it might seem in 1935, due to massive unemployment, FDR proclaimed,

Music plays an important role in the life of any people. It is of growing importance, however, when, through the development of science and progress through education, leisure time is greatly increased, thus making possible the influence of music in ever-widening circles.

But Roosevelt’s public exhortations of the richness of the arts in the United States belied, to a degree, Roosevelt’s more pressing concerns: the Great Depression and the coming of World War II. New Deal historian William McDonald notes,

For all his sympathy for it, the cultivation of the arts by the government during the Depression was in his mind a minor issue, not because it was unimportant but because it was less important than mastering the Depression as a whole and surviving the international crisis that followed. In the earlier years there were those on the President’s staff and among his followers who persuaded him that the welfare of the arts and artists was worthy of his official attention; and the President, with a genuine concern for the cause, allowed them to establish a secondary front. When, in 1939, world events forced him to concentrate his resources against a major attack from without, he left the art front and those who were fighting it undefended.43

Jerre Mangione, author of the landmark study on the Federal Writers’ Project, The Dream and the Deal, echoed McDonald’s claim, stating that by the time that the arts projects were transferred from federal to state control in 1939 “FDR had lost interest in all the arts projects and he was concentrating on the forthcoming war.”44 Viewed through this lens, the 1939 concert of folk music for the king and queen of England (discussed below) reveals a politically savvy Roosevelt rather than a mere lover of folk music.

In contrast to her husband, Eleanor Roosevelt had a genuine interest in all types of cultural experiences, including folk music. It was generally she who requested folk music for her concerts and invited folk music collectors to the White House to play their field recordings (as in the case of Lomax, Todd, and Sonkin).

43 William McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969), 362.
Speaking in 1945, Eleanor Roosevelt recounted some of these intimate evenings with folk musicians and collectors, stating,

My husband and I had many such memorable evenings of song. He was particularly fond of American folk-tunes, although as a lover of the sea, he delighted most in the old sea chanties. John “Sailor Dad” Hunt, now seventy years old, “went before the mast” at 14, had a rich and varied repertoire, and often came to sing for us. Mr. Alan Lomax… when he learned of our interest, often assembled complete programs for our entertainment. My husband loved to relax to music. … The songs he most enjoyed were those of the open spaces.  

According to Elise Kirk, in her study of music in the White House, “Eleanor Roosevelt enjoyed the American traditional dances, especially the Virginia reel, which she danced at the White House newspapermen’s parties. The president often served as caller.” John Jacob Niles, who performed at the White House on four separate occasions, once sent Eleanor Roosevelt a dulcimer as a present, telling her “It can be played at the supper table if you like.” (According to Niles biographer, Ron Pen, he also sent her other gifts, including “handbags, a carved wooden mule, [and] stone-ground white cornmeal.”)

Eleanor Roosevelt wrote about her experiences listening to folk music on a number of occasions in her daily syndicated column “My Day.” Alan Lomax later

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46 Kirk, Music at the White House, 240–41.
47 Pen, I Wonder as I Wander, 171.
48 Ibid. John Jacob Niles was also at White Top when Eleanor Roosevelt made her visit. His first White House performance was at a musicale in the East Room held 22 March 1934.
related what he felt Eleanor Roosevelt’s role to have been with regard to the interest of folk music during their presidency:

Mrs. Roosevelt served, in a sense, as the President’s contact with actual people, events, and communities. She went into the coal mines, saw the things that were going on, and had a strong interest in them. Mrs. Roosevelt began to hear enough of the people’s music so that she developed a considerable taste for it. She had a critical discernment in the field, and when we discussed concerts at the White House she could pick and choose intelligently among the things I proposed to her.49

The Concert for the King and Queen of England, 8 June 1939

The most famous and ostentatious of the folk music events held at the White House was the concert for the visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth on 8 June 1939. The concert was to be the extravagant opening event of a longer diplomatic trip that had been planned in order to shore up relations between the United States and England on what was then a seemingly unavoidable conflict in Europe. In August of the previous year, Roosevelt got the news that the king and queen were to be visiting Canada the following summer, and on 25 August he penned a letter to the regents promising “a bit of rest and relaxation” by way of the “simple country life” at Hyde Park—a decided change of pace from the formal State visit the King was to have in Canada. “It would,” Roosevelt added, “be an excellent thing for Anglo-American

relations” if they were to accept the invitation.\textsuperscript{50} The Roosevelts played the role of excellent hosts, treating the royal family to a picnic replete with hot dogs and beer (famously dubbed the “hot dog summit”), a trip down the Potomac River on the presidential yacht, and a sightseeing tour of Washington, D.C. attractions, all culminating with a dinner banquet and after dinner a concert of, according to the concert brochure, the “three distinct living idioms” of music in the United States: “a folk, a popular, and an art music.”\textsuperscript{51} Roosevelt’s intentions were not merely to show the King and Queen a good time, but rather to discuss some military deals that had been in the works in the run up to the Second World War, to foreground in a very public display the burgeoning relationship between the two nations, and to dispel any perception that the Royal Family were too highbrow to mesh with the folksy persona that FDR had tried so hard to cultivate throughout his presidency.

The concert program was a bit of a gamble.\textsuperscript{52} Eleanor Roosevelt later recalled that the decision to program folk music had raised concern among the president’s

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\item \textsuperscript{50} Letter from Franklin D. Roosevelt to King George VI, 25 August 1938, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library and Museum, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/aboutfdr/pdfs/ royal_fdrinvitation.pdf.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Not all of the Roosevelts musical advisers were as amenable to folk music as were the Roosevelts themselves. Elise Kirk discusses at some length Eleanor Roosevelt’s other musical assistant, Henry Junge, who worked both for the Steinway Company and for twenty-five years at the White House. She writes, [The Roosevelts’] simple art was somewhat too undignified for genteel Henry Junge, who told Edith Helm that ‘a little of Kentucky ballads,’ like a fine bottle of Kentucky whiskey, goes a long way with me.” Kirk also wrote about the performance of Kentucky ballad singer Iva Roberts and her dulcimer, and Junge’s response to it: “‘She accompanies herself on a quaint old instrument, called I think, a dulcimer, which she places on her knees like a lap dog.’ … ‘However, it does not bark nor bite, and when the strings are gently agitated by the fingers of the singer, a rather plaintive, but not
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\end{footnotesize}
advisers because, “most people thought we should have singers from the Metropolitan Opera, at the very least.” The Roosevelts thought otherwise, however: “whereas my husband and I thought we should try to give the king and queen something they would not have at home. The opera would be nothing new to them; and we thought it would be interesting to entertain them with some of the American folk arts. For the same reason we tried to give them American food while they were with us.”

Folk music also served another purpose: it created an artistic link, however subtle, between the two nations. Classical music in the United States, such as the opera that the Roosevelts’ advisers wanted to program, had its origins within the European tradition, and in particular the nations of Germany, France, and Italy. Folk music, however, was firmly rooted in the England and its Anglo neighbors. The concert organizers were careful to highlight this European heritage in the official brochure, without, of course, mentioning Germany when referring to the art music tradition within the United States. They also acknowledged contributions that the United States had made to its own musical traditions within the realm of vernacular music, and, by extension and metaphor, set out to prove America’s own ingenuity, resourcefulness, and ability to make meaningful contributions on the world stage:

unpleasant sound is emitted.” Kirk also relates a story about a song that John Jacob Niles wanted to perform for the Roosevelts, the lyrics of which were: “‘Have you heard about Frank Roosevelt’s woman / Have you heard about Frank Roosevelt’s wife / How she clum up White Top Mountain / At the peril of her sweet life / She come and give us a present / She gave us a five-dollar bill.’” According to Kirk, “Junge quickly expunged the song from the program.” Kirk, Music at the White House, 240–42.  

53 Eleanor Roosevelt, This I Remember (New York, Harper and Bros., 1949), 197. For Eleanor Roosevelt’s description of the visit of the king and queen, see “The Royal Visitors” chapter, of Roosevelt, This I Remember, 188–204.  

54 Ibid., 197.
The traditions of all these three [folk, popular, and art music] derive from Europe: The bulk of our folk music from the British Isles, that of our art music from the great composers of the continent. As in the case of the American language, the folk music has undergone sea change in its migrations across the Atlantic.

In addition, certain other national and racial minorities have created new hybrids, the French in the Southeast, the Spanish in the Southwest, the Germans and the Scandinavians in the North. Above all, the Negro has made the most distinctive contribution.

FMP deputy director Charles Seeger was tasked with putting together the folk music for the program, and his former boss, Adrian Dornbush, head of the Special Skills Division of the Resettlement Administration, whom Seeger noted had “caught the virus of American folk music,” headed up “the mechanical and managerial end of things.” The program was to feature “the best folk musicians [Seeger and Dornbush] could get” from various folk traditions within the United States, including cowboy songs, African American spirituals, fiddle tunes and square dances, and any other types of folk music Seeger might include. The final program included music by the North Carolina Spiritual Singers, an all-African American choir directed by Nell Hunter, head of the North Carolina FMP; Alan Lomax, who performed two cowboy songs; the Coon Creek Girls from the Renfro Valley of Kentucky, who sang four folksongs; five square dances by the Soco Gap Dance Team, directed by Bascom Lamar Lunsford, with Sam Love Queen calling the dance; Kate Smith, who performed three popular songs; Marian Anderson, who sang “Ave Maria” and two spirituals; and Lawrence Tibbett, who sang three art songs by Tchaikovsky, Oley

56 Ibid.
Speaks, and Joseph Marx. The program ended with a performance by the U.S. Marine Band of “God Save the King” and “The Star Spangled Banner.” Vice president John “Jack” Nance Garner—who was affectionately referred to as “Cactus Jack”—kept his fiddle at the ready under his chair. (He had sat in with the Coon Creek Girls the day before, and Coon Creek Girl Lily May Ledford remembered, “He was pretty good.”) The decision-making process on who was to be included on the program was not entirely straightforward, nor entirely up to Seeger’s discretion, however. Fearing that the concert would be ill received, FDR’s advisers decided to include more famous and polished performers. Seeger later recalled, “The committee who is always hanging around to manage things at the White House managed to filter in some things that were rather [out of place],” as in the case of including Kate Smith and Lawrence Tibbett. Kate Smith was included on the program not only because she was an internationally renowned singer on radio, but also because the king specifically

57 The full program is as follows: the North Carolina Spiritual Singers, of the North Carolina FMP, directed by Nell Hunter: “De Ol’ Ark’s A Moverin’,” “Wade in the Water,” and “I Don’t Feel Noways Tired”; Alan Lomax: “Whoopee Ti Yi Yo, Git Along, Little Dogies,” and “The Old Chisholm Trail”; the Coon Creek Girls from the Renfro Valley of Kentucky: “Cindy,” “The Soldier and the Lady,” “Buffalo Gals,” and “How Many Biscuits Can You Eat?”; the Soco Gap Square-Dance Team, directed by Bascom Lamar Lunsford, with Sam Love Queen the square-dance caller: “Wagon Wheel,” “Ocean Wave,” “King’s Highway,” “Dive and Shoot the Owl” and “London Bridge; Kate Smith: “These Foolish Things,” “Macushla,” and “When the Moon Comes Over the Mountain”; Marian Anderson: “Ave Maria,” “My Soul’s Been Anchored in the Lord,” and “Tramping”; and Lawrence Tibbett: “The Pilgrim’s Sound,” “Sylvia,” and “If Love Hath Entered Thy Heart.” The program ended with a performance of “God Save the King” and “The Star Spangled Banner.” From “Folk Music in the Roosevelt White House,” 24–28. Kate Smith had to be moved in the program’s order at the last minute because of scheduling conflicts with her radio show. Eleanor Roosevelt recalled, “Then Kate Smith thought she was going to be later for her broadcast so we had to rearrange the program and let her sing first!” Roosevelt, This I Remember, 197. Alan Lomax remembered that Smith was moved to the slot immediately before him, after the North Carolina Spiritual Singers, a fact that did nothing to calm his nerves. Lomax, “Folk Music in the Roosevelt Era, 94.

58 Ledford, “The Coon Creek Girls Perform for the President and the King and Queen by Lily May Ledford,” 13.
requested to hear her theme song, “When the Moon Comes over the Mountain.” Tibbett, similarly, played a dual role: he leant gravitas to the proceedings, but he also was a personal favorite of the Roosevelts, and especially Eleanor. He had performed twice for FDR’s first inauguration and sat at the head table at a dinner for Eleanor Roosevelt in November 1935. Marian Anderson seemed an obvious choice, as she was another of Eleanor Roosevelt’s favorite singers, and had agreed to perform for the king and queen in March, before the debacle with the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Lincoln Memorial concert on 9 April (discussed below). Anderson, however, was at first wary of the selections she was to perform. Eleanor Roosevelt later recalled, “Marian Anderson was loath to sing Negro spirituals [for the king and queen], but we discovered it in time to persuade her that people coming from England would want to hear the music that above all else we could call our own.” Alan Lomax was somewhat of an afterthought. Lomax biographer John Szwed notes, “When Seeger couldn’t find a cowboy who could sing, he asked Alan if he would perform some of the songs from his father’s collection.”

The rehearsals did not go off without a hitch either, particularly with regard to the Soco Dance Troupe, which some of the organizers were afraid would be too loud for the king and queen. Seeger later recalled the confrontation,

At the afternoon rehearsal one of the aides came up to me and said, “Mr. Seeger, we just can’t present this to Their Majesties. You’ve got to do something about it; the racket is unbearable.” The Soco Gap Square Dance

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59 Roosevelt, This I Remember, 197.
60 Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 175.
61 Roosevelt, This I Remember, 197.
62 Szwed, Alan Lomax, 149.
Team danced a heavy clog, and the platform was about a foot off the hardwood floor, making a superb sounding board. So I said to him, “Don’t say a word about this. I’ll fix it up I know the caller very well, and I’ll just tell him to slip the word to them to just ease up on that clog.” “Oh,” he said, “for heaven’s sake, do.” So I went up to [Samuel] McQueen, the caller, afterwards and said, “If anyone speaks to you about the clog being too loud, don’t you pay any attention to them at all. It’s magnificent. Some of these sillybillies around here are afraid that the noise will make the king and queen uncomfortable, but I’ll bet they’ll like it.”

The concert, held in the East Ballroom, began after dinner, at 10 o’clock in the evening. It was to be, according to one newspaper report, a “rich dish of American musicstemming largely from the very soil from which the nation sprang.” This was no school house or movie theater,” Lily May Ledford recalled. “All that splendor. Dresses, white tie and tails, jewels, jewels, jewels! The stage was beautifully decorated with ferns bordering it, and there were giant sparkling chandeliers, softly glowing on the spangled gowns and jewels.” Around eighty people were invited to dinner, with another 200 or so arriving for the concert afterwards.

63 Seeger, “Reminiscences of an American Musicologist.”
65 Lily May Ledford, “The Coon Creek Girls Perform for the President and the King and Queen by Lily May Ledford,” in “Folk Music in the Roosevelt White House: A Commemorative Program,” 12–13; reproduced from Lily May Ledford Pennington, Coon Creek Girl (Berea, KY: Berea College Appalachian Center, 1980).
66 “King and President Pledge Peace; Capital's Throngs Welcome Royalty; State Dinner Climax to Dazzling Display,” Los Angeles Times, 9 June 1939, 1. Lily May Ledford noted that there were eighty-nine people present. Ledford, “The Coon Creek Girls Perform,” 12. The press was forbidden from attending, but reported a fact that was evident in reading their accounts of the event, which listed the order of the performers as it was given in the official brochure, and not as it actually occurred during the concert. (Kate Smith had to be moved earlier in the concert given a conflict with her radio broadcast schedule.) They did report at length about the decorations for the event and the menu that was to be served, much in the manner of a newspaper’s society section: “The table for the slate dinner
The entire evening had been tightly choreographed, down to the comings and goings of the performers. Alan Lomax recalled, “We were staggered on the stairs leading up to the East Ballroom from the downstairs dressing rooms so there would be no delay about getting us on and off the stage.” The anxiety on the part of the organizers about getting everything “just right” did little to help the nerves of the performers, particularly the folk musicians who were not used to such controlled performances. Alan Lomax, for his part, was not a performer at all, and was much more comfortable being on the receiving end of a performance. He later recalled,

I was anxiously trying to tune my guitar. I played my three chords, wondering where my voice was and sweating up a storm in my tuxedo. I was about 22 and felt about 15. Finally we went on to perform. … As I was singing, I looked at the King and Queen. They were so much better groomed and so much more perfectly turned out than all the Americans, so perfectly polished that you could really see an aura about them. I remember their toes were just barely touching the ground in the large American chairs. They were right up close to the edge of the stage. I don’t think I was ever more frightened in my whole life.

Performance jitters turned out to be the least of Lomax’s worries that evening, however. “The only problem was,” John Szwed noted, “everywhere Alan went in the White House people were bumping into him and then begging his forgiveness.” Lomax figured out later that it was the Secret Service who was checking to see if he was set with Irish linens, gold-plated flatware and a fourteen-foot centerpiece purchased in France by President Monroe. Great clusters of white orchids tinged with lavender added a fragile beauty to the table.” The menu consisted of “clam cocktail, calf’s head soup, terrapin and corn bread, boned capon with cranberry sauce, peas, buttered beets, sweet potato cones, frozen cheese and cress salad, maple and almond ice cream, white pound cake, and coffee.” “Rich Dish of American Music Set Before Royal Visitors: Kate Smith, Marian Anderson, Lawrence Tibbett and Others Provide After-Dinner Entertainment,” Los Angeles Times, 9 June 1939, 3; and “King and President Pledge Peace; Capital’s Throng Welcomes Royalty; State Dinner Climax to Dazzling Display,” Los Angeles Times, 9 June 1939, 1.

68 Ibid., 94.
had any weapons, because “some woman who said she was my aunt had warned the
FBI that her crazy nephew was going to blow up the building.”

The concert was an overwhelming success, despite any difficulties in its
planning and execution. From the stage the performers could see the Roosevelt’s and
the king and queen’s approval. Alan Lomax recalled,

Roosevelt was on the front row with his head cocked over, smiling and
swinging in time to the music. Oh, yes, he loved that concert, he was having a
ball. The Roosevelts towered over the King and Queen. They looked like little
dolls compared to them. Even Roosevelt in his invalid’s chair was a huge
man. This presence and the vitality that poured out of him made that concert, I
think, one of his peak moments.

Lily May Ledford had a similar experience while looking out on the audience:

Right there in the front row, about five feet from the stage, sat the King and
Queen and the Roosevelts! … Our spirits rose as we realized the Queen and
Mrs. Roosevelt were smiling, as well as Mr. Roosevelt; but the King, with
rather a long-faced, dour, dead-pan look, worried me a little. Then as I
glanced down I caught him patting his foot, ever so little, and I knew we had
them.

The plan to highlight the English-American musical connection seemed to
have worked as well. Eleanor Roosevelt noted that she and her husband “were most

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69 Alan Lomax, interviewed by John Szwed, 1970, quoted in Szwed, _Alan Lomax_, 149. For more on the
woman who “turned him in” and Lomax’s FBI files, see ibid., 149–50, 203–4, and 300–1. Eleanor
Roosevelt wrote about the harassment of Alan Lomax in her autobiography some years later: “One of
the young men who had been asked to sing some folk songs had been reported to the FBI as a
communist or a Bolshevik and likely to do something dangerous. The charge was completely untrue
and made by someone who wanted to be disagreeable, but when the FBI reported it to the secret
service men they had to be true to their traditions and follow the tip through. When the young man
came in after dinner he was “frisked” by our secret service men and then by the Scotland Yard people,
and apparently was so frightened he could hardly sing. I hoped fervently he would not reach for his
handkerchief during the performance because I was sure both the secret service and Scotland Yard
would jump on him. Roosevelt, _This I Remember_, 197.
70 Lomax, “Folk Music in the Roosevelt Era, 95.
71 Ledford, “The Coon Creek Girls Perform for the President and the King and Queen by Lily May
Ledford,” 13.
entertained at the surprise of the King and Queen showed to find that most of the tunes given were of English origin. Her majesty was especially fond of ‘Barbara Allen.’ She could not seem to hear of the innumerable verses of this talk-song. … Her Majesty asked for more and more of these verses, enjoying them so much she would not let the singers go.”

Seeger was not invited to watch the performance, as he was “a technical man in the situation,” but he was able to “peek around the corner of the door and watch the faces of President and Mrs. Roosevelt and the king and the queen and the celebrated personages around them, all wreathed in smiles; Vice-President Garner and some of the Americans who came from the country had their feet tapping.” In the end, however, Seeger felt vindicated about the folk music side of the concert, because, “it was the folk music that gained the evening.” When the concert was over he met the king and queen, who were told that he was responsible for the program, which garnered Seeger “an especially hearty handshake” from the king and queen.

Seeger’s takeaway from the evening had less to do with the meeting of powerful world leaders than it did with the power of communal music making:

But it simply proved that this kind of music is the only kind of music that kings and queens, presidents and cabinet ministers and ambassadors could make for themselves—if only they dared. They can’t make it very well; they can’t make it half as well as the ordinary child could. But at least it is the kind of music they can try to make, and they can’t try to make any better and they know they can’t make any better, but whether they will or not, it gets a

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72 Eleanor Roosevelt, “Folk Music in the White House by Eleanor Roosevelt,” 8–9.
73 Seeger, Reminiscences, 263–64.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
reaction out of them, if the circumstances are such that it’s all right from the point of view of status for them to accept it.\textsuperscript{76} 

As a final memento for the king and queen, the performers went the next day to record their songs at a Washington, D.C. recording studio, the discs of which were given to the regents as they left the capital.\textsuperscript{77}

**An Evening of Songs for American Soldiers, 17 February 1941**

In October 1940 Alan Lomax visited to the White House to play some recordings for Eleanor Roosevelt and her guests, which she mentioned in her “My Day” column from 11 October 1940:

> Mr. Alan Lomax came up from New York City bringing his guitar. We spent a delightful evening listening to folk songs of various kinds and talking over the questions which concern us all so deeply. Mr. Lomax is anxious that the storehouse of American culture, which he has helped to build up in the Congressional Library, should be of some value to the youth of the nation during its year of compulsory service. I hope Mr. Archibald MacLeish, Librarian of Congress, will find some way to make the life of America, as recorded in our folk songs, a part of the knowledge of all young Americans, for this year of service should be more than a period of military training.\textsuperscript{78}

Alan Lomax had been realizing for some time that the run up to war was making the endeavor of folksong collecting seem rather unnecessary—in fact, Congress had just

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Adrian Dornbush later brought copies of the recordings to the White House to play for Eleanor Roosevelt. She noted the event in her “My Day” column, stating, “Mr. Adrian J. Dornbush, from Washington, spent the night with us. … After supper, Mr. Dornbush played us the records which he has had made of some of the music given at the White House the night the King and Queen were with us. We all enjoyed the music, especially the ballad of the soldier and the lady, and Mr. Alan Lomax's rendering of a cowboy song which tells of ‘winning his true love across the Red River.’” Eleanor Roosevelt, “My Day,” 1 July 1939, http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1939&_f=md055307.
cut the budget for the AAFS considerably, and would make even more drastic cuts in the years to come. Moreover, Lomax was beginning to realize the power that folk music could have in the education of the American people through his radio programs for CBS, and through the programs that he had been producing for the newly established Radio Research Project at the Library of Congress. He was seemingly able to convince Eleanor Roosevelt about the importance of folk music in a time of war, and her column was a call-to-arms of sorts to MacLeish.

MacLeish hardly needed the push. In his response to Eleanor Roosevelt three days after the column appeared he noted, “I have been harping on this one string for so long that an answering echo anywhere is extremely encouraging.”\(^79\) He had been discussing such a program with Alan Lomax for some months, with the possibility of sending the Archive’s sound truck into military camps in search of singers and of creating songbooks for soldiers in the camps.\(^80\) Given the window of opportunity that Roosevelt’s column opened, MacLeish proposed that the Library, with money from the national defense funds, create a “center to supply the Morale Division of the War Department” or other such agency, “with the materials of instruction in the rich culture of the American people.”\(^81\) The center, as he proposed, would include experts in the fields of folk music, folklore, rural sociology, social anthropology, and

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\(^81\) Letter from Archibald MacLeish to Eleanor Roosevelt, 14 October 1940.
population studies, who would cull the materials at the Library of Congress and come up with appropriate educational programming for soldiers.\footnote{Ibid.}

Eleanor Roosevelt penned a letter to the Librarian apologizing for her public oversight and extending her full support in such an endeavor.\footnote{Ibid.} They soon came up with an idea that might make the notion of such a center in the Library a reality by way of a concert of such folk music at the White House for Washington luminaries with influence and money at their disposal as well as the military’s top brass. As was the case with the concert for the king and queen, this concert was planned as an after-dinner affair, with sixty guests comprising the elite of Washington at dinner, and another fifty attendees arriving at the time of the concert.\footnote{Roosevelts Hosts To Sixty At Dinner: Secretary of Treasury and Mrs. Morgenthau Head the List—Harry Hopkins Attends; Musical Program Given; Fifty Additional Guests Join the White House Party for the Evening’s Entertainment,” \textit{New York Times}, 18 February 1941, 20. The day log for 17 February 1941 notes that there were sixty-one guests at dinner. Franklin D. Roosevelt, \textit{Day By Day: A Project of the Pare Lorentz Center at the FDR Presidential Library, 17 February 1941}, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/daybyday/daylog/february-17th-1941/.} The concert was to feature seasoned folk music performers alongside musicians from the ranks of nearby military camps.\footnote{Lomax, “Folk Music in the Roosevelt Era,” 95–96. Lomax states that this was the first meeting that he had with Eleanor Roosevelt, though he met with her in October 1940 to play her some recordings. It is unclear whether he met her at the concert for the king and queen. See, Eleanor Roosevelt, “My Day,” 11 October 1940, http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1940&_f=md055707.}

Among the performers Lomax chose were some of the musicians that he had featured on his \textit{Back Where I Come From} radio show for CBS, including Burl Ives, the Golden Gate Quartet, Wade Mainer and his Sons of the Mountaineers group, and

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\footnote{82 Ibid.} \footnote{83 Ibid.} \footnote{84 Roosevelt Hosts To Sixty At Dinner: Secretary of Treasury and Mrs. Morgenthau Head the List—Harry Hopkins Attends; Musical Program Given; Fifty Additional Guests Join the White House Party for the Evening’s Entertainment,” \textit{New York Times}, 18 February 1941, 20. The day log for 17 February 1941 notes that there were sixty-one guests at dinner. Franklin D. Roosevelt, \textit{Day By Day: A Project of the Pare Lorentz Center at the FDR Presidential Library, 17 February 1941}, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/daybyday/daylog/february-17th-1941/.} \footnote{85 Lomax, “Folk Music in the Roosevelt Era,” 95–96. Lomax states that this was the first meeting that he had with Eleanor Roosevelt, though he met with her in October 1940 to play her some recordings. It is unclear whether he met her at the concert for the king and queen. See, Eleanor Roosevelt, “My Day,” 11 October 1940, http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1940&_f=md055707.}
Josh White.\textsuperscript{86} Lomax also brought in John M. “Sailor Dad” Hunt, who, according to Lomax, “had settled down in the Virginia mountains after long years as a clipper ship sailor” to begin the evening with some sea chanteys, as Lomax knew the president was particularly fond of them. Lomax also gathered “two or three marvelous country and western groups who could really sing and play up a storm” and a “Negro cavalry quartet” at some of the local boot camps.\textsuperscript{87} For the program brochure, Lomax collected a number of images and sayings from the Davey Crockett/American Frontier tradition.\textsuperscript{88} Aside from two minor incidents (the septuagenarian “Sailor Dad” Hunt had some difficulties remembering lyrics, and Wade Mainer accidentally spilled a bowl of ice cream down the front of Eleanor Roosevelt’s dress) the evening was largely a success.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{86} See also, Szwed, \textit{Alan Lomax}, 171–72.
\textsuperscript{88} Alan Lomax later remembered, “The first singer was Sailor Dad Hunt. He began with “When Jones’s Ale Was New.” He got to the climax of the first verse and blocked—forgot the line. By that time the Golden Gate Quartet had fallen in rhythm with him, and Burl Ives and all the rest of us were all tapping time until he came in with the missing line, and then the audience burst into applause. It was the whole show. He was obviously an old guy and he was trying to entertain them. That incident made the concert. It had become a human as well as a cultural event. Everybody stayed. When the young recruits came on with all their energy —most of the audience had never heard hillbilly music—it was a revelation to them. Fiddles, banjos, guitars, and good country songs: all performed with enthusiasm by their trainees—they just couldn’t get enough of that. They applauded and they stomped and wanted to hear one more number and then one more.” Lomax, “Folk Music in the Roosevelt Era,” 95–96.
A columnist for *Time* magazine described Burl Ives as a “onetime Eastern Illinois State Teachers College footballer, Burl Ives bummed around the U.S. with a guitar,” and Josh White as the “Negro …who sings at rehearsals with a lighted cigarette behind his ear.” Katherine Graham of the *New York Times* highlighted the organizers’ desire to place folk music in the hands of soldiers, that they might use it as a weapon for solidarity:

With national defense uppermost in the public mind songs that soldiers sing have again become a problem for consideration from Tin Pan Alley to the White House. It may be that some unknown genius will come forth with a melody tomorrow that will spread through army camps and naval stations like wild fire. Or it may be that for its songs, the country will look to its heritage. The people may hit on folk songs. But most of all the [folk] songs speak of America, and that is why they may be used to defend the country from which they sprang.

Eleanor Roosevelt also wrote about the concert in her “My Day” column on 19 February, lauding the performers and expressing her desire that folk music might be instilled into military camps as a way both to boost morale:

I hope these songs spread through all the branches of the services. I would like to see musical instruments available and records of these songs in the recreation centers of every group and in every community center near a camp throughout the country. I think it would serve to make us conscious of our own rich background of folk literature and music.

In the end, however, the concert did not bolster the kind of support with regard to getting folk music into military camps that Lomax, MacLeish, and Roosevelt wanted. Lomax recalled: “The Pentagon considered the morale of the armed forces a strictly

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90 “Music: Folk Songs in the White House” *Time*, 3 March 1941.
military matter. I believe that’s a mistaken idea. Morale, like culture, is everybody’s creation. Both belong to the people.”

Race and the Roosevelt White House

The Roosevelts also included more African American music and performers on their programs than had any other administration in the nation’s history. Mahalia Jackson sang at a rally event for FDR’s first election campaign in 1932. Count Basie and singer Viola Wells performed at FDR’s inaugural ball in 1941. Eleanor Roosevelt was a fan Paul Robeson, and wrote a number of times in her daily columns about Earl Robinson’s *Ballad for Americans*. (Robinson himself performed for the Roosevelts and Winston Churchill at the White House in 1942, alongside Argentinian pianist Maria Ines Gomez-Carillo and Brazilian singer Olga Praguer Coelho.) In 1933, Tuskegee Choir made a special stop from their Radio City Music Hall concert schedule to perform at FDR’s mother’s birthday celebration, and he invited them to sing at the White House. In November 1934, the Roosevelts made a brief stop to listen to the Fisk University Singers in Nashville in front of a crowd of 25,000 people,

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95 Eleanor Roosevelt, “My Day,” 2 January 1942. She also mentioned listening to recordings of Earl Robinson’s music in 1945: “One of our two leisure evenings here at the cottage was spent in listening to some beautiful new recordings of Earl Robinson’s ‘Lonesome Train.’ Although he himself had played it for me on the piano, I had never heard it as a complete record. I missed his personality, but it is a marvelous recording and I shall enjoy having it whenever I have other leisure moments.” “My Day,” 6 July 1945.
who were there to catch a glimpse of the president and his wife. The Roosevelts also heard the choirs from two other historically African American institutions, Howard University and Morehouse College. The all–African American jubilee choir, the Golden Gate Quartet performed at two major White House concerts, the concert for the king and queen in August 1939 and the “Evening of Songs for American Soldiers” in February 1941. Groups such as Mississippi Sheiks, the Sedalia Quartet from South Carolina, and the Soul Stirrers also performed for the president. In December 1940, at Eleanor Roosevelt’s request, the Highlander folk school of Grundy County, Tennessee, presented Katherine Garrison Chapin’s ballad poem “And They Lynched Him to a Tree” in 1940, with music arranged by William Grant Still for a mixed choir of “14 Negro and white voices picked from the Washington Choral Society and Howard University Glee Club.” A newspaper clipping about the event noted that Still “while a modern technician … has retained the original strain in the native songs.” And the list was not limited to musicians: In 1937, Martha

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97 Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 41.
98 The Golden Gate Quartet formed in 1934 at the Booker T. Washington College in Norfolk, Virginia, and soon rose to some degree of fame on radio broadcasts in Columbia, South Carolina and later in Charlotte, North Carolina. In 1937 they began recording for Bluebird Records, and the following year appeared as part of jazz critic and talent scout John Hammond’s sold-out *From Spirituals to Swing* concert at Carnegie Hall on 23 December 1938. Also on the bill were Count Basie’s Orchestra with singers Oran “Hot Lips” Page and Jimmy Rushing, Benny Goodman, Meade Lux Lewis, Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Albert Ammons, Big Joe Turner, Big Bill Broonzy, Sonny Terry, Pete Johnson, James P. Johnson, The Kansas City Six jazz ensemble, and Mitchell’s Christian Singers.
100 “Folk School to Give Ballad Here Friday: Highlander Group Program Sponsored By Mrs. Roosevelt,” *Washington Post*, 1 December 1940, 16. Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish was also on hand to recite his poem “America Was Promises.”
Graham performed at the White House at Eleanor Roosevelt’s request.\textsuperscript{101} (FDR, for his part, was reportedly “crazy about” Bill “Bojangles” Robinson.)\textsuperscript{102}

The inclusion of African American performers at the White House—and in this study—is not merely an exercise in list making, however. Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff notes in her book \textit{Black Culture and the New Deal} that the “focus on black performance was integral to the Roosevelt administration’s development of federal cultural programs and its larger racial policy by the end of the 1930s.”\textsuperscript{103} Moreover, the issue of race and civil rights was personal, particularly for Eleanor Roosevelt. She spoke out on numerous occasions about racial inequality and equal rights for African American citizens. In an address at the National Conference on Fundamental Problems in the Education of Negroes in Washington, D.C., on 11 May 1934 she declared, “I think the day of selfishness is over the day of really working together has come, and we must learn to work together, all of us, regardless of race or creed or color; we must wipe out, wherever we find it, any feeling that grows up, of intolerance, of belief that any one group can go ahead alone.”\textsuperscript{104} She was seemingly perpetually in the news regarding her stance on equal rights. Allida M. Black notes, in her article on Eleanor Roosevelt and the DAR’s ban of Marian Anderson performing at Constitution Hall (discussed below), that,

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{kirk} Kirk, \textit{Music at the White House}, 234.
\bibitem{rijn} van Rijn, \textit{Roosevelt's Blues}, 39–40.
\bibitem{sklaroff} Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff, \textit{Black Culture and the New Deal: The Quest for Civil Rights in the New Deal Era} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 16.
\end{thebibliography}
Her persistent support of the Costigan Wagner Anti-lynching bill and her refusal to support a segregated seating pattern at the Southern Conference on Human Welfare’s conference in Birmingham, Alabama the previous summer already had attracted national attention. Yet the stance she took in support of [Marian Anderson] forms the most celebrated example of Eleanor Roosevelt's White House civil rights legacy.105

In a conversation with FWP historian Jerre Mangione, Alan Lomax stated that, “Eleanor comes off as a better human being [because] FDR never could take a strong position on blacks. He left that to Eleanor. She was hated for it and he never could speak out in defense of her.”106 There is seemingly some truth to what Lomax had to say. Sklaroff writes that FDR was in a bind with regard to the issue of race, especially early on in his career: “Highly dependent on southern states for political backing, and a self-described ‘adopted son of Georgia,’ due to his purchase of a home in Warm Springs, Roosevelt was unwilling to make mention of any racial issues that might alienate his supporters.”107 W. E. B. Du Bois leveled a backhanded compliment at the president after Roosevelt came out against the lynch law on national radio in 1933. Du Bois criticized Roosevelt for his “dependence upon the … reactionary South for his political salvation,” but that it was “unusual to have a president of the United States admit [that lynching is murder]. These things give us hope.”108 Indeed, Southern Democrats played a significant role in his election, as did African Americans in the South, who had, since the time of Lincoln, voted almost exclusively

107 Sklaroff, Black Culture and the New Deal, 17.
for the Republicans. Although the Roosevelts’ own political goals had much to do with their public stands, it would be cynical to relegate all of their motives to such a context.

Indeed, the Roosevelts formed strong bonds with some of these folk musicians, most notably Graham W. Jackson and folk singer Josh White. Jackson was one of FDR’s favorite performers, and he played for the Roosevelts at the “little” White House in Warm Springs as well as at the White House at least two-dozen times. Jackson was a child prodigy on the piano, and later learned to play the organ and accordion. He had a band for some time in the 1920s called the Seminole Syncopators, from Richmond, Indiana, and played on bills with Count Basie, who recalled Jackson’s organ playing in his autobiography.109 Jackson was present as Roosevelt’s remains pulled away from the train station in Warm Springs, Georgia on its way back to Washington, a moment that was captured by photographer Ed Clark. In this iconic photograph, Jackson is seen in his Chief Petty Officer’s (U.S. Navy) uniform weeping while playing the song “Goin’ Home” on his accordion.

The musician with whom the Roosevelts formed the strongest bond, regardless of race, was African American folk singer Josh White, so much so that White was dubbed “the Presidential Minstrel.”110 White had come up through the nascent Greenwich Village folk scene of the late 1930s and had appeared as part of

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109 van Rijn, 36–37. Guido van Rijn gives a brief biography of Jackson’s life in this section.
110 Wald, *Josh White*, 88–89. That White was associated with this label did not necessarily help his standing within the African American community. Carol White, the wife of the singer, told Alan Lomax during his research for the FDR centenary concert that “black people were not into folk music. They would say, ‘Your husband sings those hillbilly songs.’” Alan Lomax, interview with Carol and Beverly White, 1981, *Association for Cultural Equity* website, http://research.culturaequity.org/get-dil-details.do?sessionId=127.
Alan Lomax and Nicholas Ray’s *Back Where I Come From* radio program for CBS, alongside Woody Guthrie, Burl Ives, Pete Seeger, and the Golden Gate Quartet.\(^{111}\) It was through this radio program that the combination of Lomax, White, and the Golden Gate Quartet began.\(^{112}\) The “Gates,” as they were also known, with White as guitarist, would perform together on a number of occasions, with Lomax generally acting as concert producer. On 20 December 1940, White and the Golden Gate Quartet performed together at the Coolidge Auditorium at the Library of Congress in a concert put together by Alan Lomax and sponsored by Eleanor Roosevelt, with lectures by Howard University professors Alain Locke and Sterling Brown. They performed together again at FDR’s inaugural ball at Constitution Hall on 19 January 1941 alongside the National Symphony Orchestra, Charlie Chaplin, Nelson Eddy, Irving Berlin, and Mickey Rooney. White and the Golden Gate Quartet were the first African American performers to step on stage at the Hall, and, according to a headline in the *Washington Daily News*, “The D.A.R. didn’t say Boo.”\(^{113}\) Less than a month later the Quartet and White were performing at the White House on another Lomax and Eleanor Roosevelt concert, “An Evening of Songs for American Soldiers.” It was the first time that White was able to perform before the Roosevelts as a solo act, and not, as he had before, the accompanist for the Golden Gate Quartet.

In September 1941, Josh White’s album *Southern Exposure: An Album of Jim Crow Blues* came out, which the president heard and liked to such a degree that he

\(^{112}\) See Wald, *Josh White*, 68–71.
\(^{113}\) Ibid., 70.
invited White to perform again at the White House, though this time by himself. White performed all six songs from the record as well as some spirituals, and the two men spoke for some hours that evening. Thereafter Josh White would perform regularly for the Roosevelts at the White House. He worked for the Office of War Information during WWII, and after the Roosevelts were out of office, went on a public relations tour with Eleanor Roosevelt while she was an ambassador for the United Nations. More than simply a professional relationship, however, White and the Roosevelts were friends. The Roosevelts would invite Josh White and his family to Christmas and Thanksgivings. Josh White’s wife Carol told Alan Lomax in 1982 that Eleanor Roosevelt was like an unofficial godmother to them, and periodically sent the family gifts including trees for Christmas. Even after Josh White died in 1969, the Whites continued to spend holidays with Eleanor Roosevelt and her family.

The signature moment of the equal rights movement of the 1930s, however, was Marian Anderson’s Easter Sunday concert at the Lincoln Memorial on 9 April 1939, an event preceded by a fracas by the Daughters of the American Revolution and followed by a firm, ethical, and highly public action by Eleanor Roosevelt, who resigned her membership in the DAR in protest.114 Eleanor Roosevelt and Marian Anderson had been acquainted for more than three years at the time of the DAR

114 Much has been written about this concert, Roosevelt’s resignation from the DAR, and Marian Anderson as an early figure in the Civil Rights movement. For books and articles not specifically cited below, see also, Nina Sun Eidsheim, “Marian Anderson and ‘Sonic Blackness’ in American Opera,” American Quarterly 63/3 (2011): 641–71; Russell Freedman, The Voice That Challenged A Nation: Marian Anderson And The Struggle For Equal Rights (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004); Allan Keller, Marian Anderson: A Singer’s Journey (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); “Mrs. Roosevelt Indicates She Has Resigned From D.A.R. Over Refusal of Hall to Negro,” New York Times, 28 February 1939, 1.
scandal. On 19 February 1936, the day after a sold-out concert in the nation’s capital at the Armstrong High School auditorium, Eleanor Roosevelt invited Anderson to perform an after-dinner concert in the intimate Monroe drawing room that evening.\textsuperscript{115} Although Roosevelt requested a program of African American spirituals from the singer—due in part to the president’s grumblings about the highbrow nature of many of the concerts at the White House—Anderson insisted upon giving a concert that was more representative of her own predilections and repertory. She sang six songs, a mix of spirituals and Schubert lieder.\textsuperscript{116} After the performance Eleanor Roosevelt introduced Anderson and Anderson’s mother to the president. Anderson’s longtime accompanist Kosti Vehanen recalled the scene: “After she sang there was a very touching scene. Mrs. Roosevelt, our charming hostess, took Marian’s mother by the hand, and led her over and introduced her to the President. … In all of Mrs. Anderson’s being, there was evident the feeling that this was one of the greatest moments of her life. Her face reflected the gratitude and pride that she felt.”\textsuperscript{117}

Eleanor Roosevelt wrote about the evening in her “My Day” column of 21 February:

My husband and I had a rare treat last night in listening to Marian Anderson, a colored contralto who has made a great success in Europe. She has sung before nearly all the crowned heads and I hope she will be successful here, for I have rarely heard a more beautiful and moving voice or a more finished artist. She sang three Schubert songs and finished with two Negro spirituals, one of which I had never heard before.\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{115} Franklin D. Roosevelt, Day By Day: A Project of the Pare Lorentz Center at the FDR Presidential Library, 19 February 1936, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/daybyday/daylog/february-19th-1936/.

\textsuperscript{116} Arsenault, The Sound of Freedom, 93–95.


Eleanor Roosevelt had already invited Marian Anderson to be on the concert for the king and queen in August 1939 at least a month before the DAR scandal started. Seemingly neither Roosevelt nor Anderson was aware of the magnitude of what was on the horizon. In her autobiography Anderson noted that she “left bookings entirely to the management” and “did not give it much thought.” “I had no inkling that the thing would become a cause célèbre.”

But Marian Anderson was not the only African American performer banned from performing at Constitution Hall by the DAR: Paul Robeson, the Hampton Institute Singers, and Harry Belafonte all shared a similar experience. Moreover, as mentioned in the prologue of this study, African American performers, including W. C. Handy and Zora Neale Hurston, among others, performed at Constitution Hall as part of the white-organized National Folk Festival, held in Washington, D.C. between 1938 and 1942. But cultural historian Scott Sandage notes that the Marian Anderson incident was different: “First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt’s public resignation from the DAR and black activists’ skill at press relations elicited a flurry of pious editorials about national value.”

According to historian Harvard Sitkoff,

Every major Negro organization and newspaper rushed to the attack. Tens of thousands of letters and telegrams poured into the offices of the DAR demanding that it reverse the decision. Such world-renowned musicians as Walter Damrosch, Leopold Stokowski, and Lawrence Tibbett [who would perform with Anderson months later at the White House] decried the DAR’s action. A New York Times editorial claimed that the DAR’s bigotry warranted

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121 Sandage, “A Marble House Divided,” 143.
its losing the adjective “patriotic” and a petition from clergymen termed the DAR’s policy “pagan.”

Despite all of the protestations, the DAR did not budge, and the concert organizers and Walter White and the NAACP decided on the Lincoln Memorial as an apt substitute venue, not only because the monument was a symbol of emancipation, but also because its use would double the impact of the protest, despite the drawbacks of an open-air venue. They took the idea to Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes’s deputy Oscar Chapman, who passed it along to Ickes, who cleared it with FDR, who reportedly responded, “She can sing from the top of the Washington Monument if she wants to!”

Eleanor Roosevelt’s own relationship to the DAR was fraught, and for the most part she was hardly active with the organization. She appeared before the group five years earlier on 20 April 1934 to speak about the DAR’s patriotic duty as bringers of peace and understanding. “If there is any group which ought to lead the way to world peace,” Roosevelt stated, “it is your group, because you have the education, the background, and the love of your country.” She also gave a lecture that day titled “The Education of Our Mountain People,” after which she was given a dulcimer, “a quaint mountain instrument made by Kentucky mountain folk at the Hinds Settlement School,” reported the Washington Post.

122 Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, 326.
123 Quoted in Sandage, “A Marble House Divided,” 144.
125 Ibid., 3.
Sandage notes that Eleanor Roosevelt’s involvement with the concert has been exaggerated, and that because of this fact the concert’s real impact has been overlooked:

Hagiographers have made the Anderson affair into a story about Eleanor Roosevelt, who neither planned nor attended the concert. Emphasis on the First Lady obscures the event’s larger importance: With the concert, the civil rights movement began to develop a strategy of mass, symbolic protest that used ritual and appeals to memory to make race a national issue.\footnote{Sandage, “A Marble House Divided,” 145.}

In fact, Eleanor Roosevelt struggled with the decision to resign from the DAR, taking at least six weeks to do so (the ban was imposed on 9 January 1939, and she resigned on 26 February).\footnote{Allida M. Black, “Championing a Champion: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Marian Anderson” Freedom Concert,” \textit{Presidential Studies Quarterly} (1990): 719.}

Part of the problem for Eleanor Roosevelt was figuring out “how to support Anderson without upstaging the local community or further angering the powerful Southern Democrats.”\footnote{Ibid., 724.} When she finally decided to resign, she did it in one of the most public forums she had available, her daily newspaper column “My Day.” She wrote, “I belong to an organization in which I do no active work. They have taken an action which has been widely talked on in the press. To remain as a member implies approval of that action, therefore I am resigning.”\footnote{Eleanor Roosevelt, “My Day,” 26 February 1939.} For her part, Anderson made a statement on 27 February from San Francisco, where she was performing, that “I am not surprised at Mrs. Roosevelt’s action because she seems to be the one who really comprehends the true meaning of democracy. I am shocked beyond words to be
barred from the capital of my own country after having appeared almost in every other capital in the world.”

**Songs about FDR and his Policies**

Roosevelt’s easygoing public persona, his status as a president for the hopes and dreams of the common man, and his reputation as a lover of folk music resulted in the composition of dozens of folk and popular songs about him and his policies, which could be either glowing or critical, or both. Lead Belly recorded two pro-Roosevelt songs for the Library of Congress soon after Pearl Harbor, titled “Dear Mr. President,” and “President Roosevelt” (even though he had written a campaign song for Wendell Willkie, the Republican candidate, the year before). \(^{131}\) Other songs about FDR included, “President Roosevelt is Everybody’s Friend,” “The Roosevelt Song,” “Roosevelt a Poor Man’s Friend,” “Tell Me Why You Like Roosevelt,” and “Why I Like Roosevelt,” and the song “F.D.R. Jones,” about children’s naming conventions among African Americans, a song that was first recorded by Ella Fitzgerald in 1938. \(^{132}\) And song writers came up with every type of blues imaginable, including the “C.W.A. Blues,” “C.C.C. Blues,” “F.D.R. Blues,” “G.I. Blues,” “N.R.A. (National Recovery Act) Blues,” “President Blues,” “President’s Blues,” “President Roosevelt

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\(^{132}\) van Rijn, *Roosevelt’s Blues*, 40–42.
Blues,” and “Roosevelt Blues,” “Ration Blues,” and “W.P.A. Blues” (and another titled “W-P-A- Blues”), to name but a few.

The Roosevelts had a sense of humor about the songs that were critical of the president. The *Washington Post* reported that Eleanor Roosevelt was scheming to get one such song, titled “I Don’t Want No More of the C.C.C.,” programmed into a White House musicale for the president.\(^{133}\) Roosevelt had heard the song before, however, at a Civilian Conservation Corps camp the previous year, when two young men in the camp sang it for him, the lyrics of which were: “The salary they pay you / They say it’s mighty fine / They give you thirty dollars / And they fine you twenty-nine.” He reportedly enjoyed it.\(^{134}\) Not all songs about Roosevelt’s public works programs were critical, however. The T.V.A. Song” as collected by Jean Thomas—ended up in the Federal Theatre Project production titled, *Power*, about the electrification of the South, with the lyrics “The Government employs us / Short hours and certain pay / Oh things are up and comin’ / God bless the T.V.A.”\(^{135}\) And there were many, many others, including “The Man on the W.P.A.,” “304 Blues (Lost My Job on the Project),” “Working for the PWA,” “Working on the Project,” “W.P.A. Rag,” “Don’t Take Away My P.W.A.,” and one titled simply “W.P.A.”\(^{136}\)

Moreover, the government folksong collectors often found that the performers thought, that because they were recording for the Library of Congress, that the

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\(^{134}\) Ibid.


\(^{136}\) See the list of songs in van Rijn, *Roosevelt’s Blues*, 267–72.
president himself would be listening to their songs. Alan Lomax recalled in his book *The Land Where the Blues Began*, “The performers were heartened when they heard their own music and often spoke into the microphone as if the machine were a telephone, connected directly to the centers of power. One black sharecropper began, ‘Now listen here Mr. President, I want you to know they ain’t treatin’ us right down here.”

Herbert Halpert had a similar experience, but he did not feel altogether comfortable misleading the performer into thinking that he or she might be heard by the powers-that-be in Washington:

> For a great many people the idea of the Library of Congress… down there in Washington… and of course Alan [Lomax] did it much better because he was telling them ‘you can talk to the president’—I never tried that because it was very doubtful that Franklin Delano Roosevelt would really be interested, even if his wife made him listen, he wouldn’t listen very long. … But it would be heard back in Washington. Washington has all these people in the Library of Congress… all these experts.

One performer even used the opportunity to say thank God for Roosevelt and the opportunity to record. Stetson Kennedy, state director of Florida Federal Writers’ Project’s Folklore, Oral History, and Ethnic Studies division, recorded the following prayer given by Eartha White, of the Eartha White Mission in the African American section of Jacksonville, Florida: “Dear Lord, this is Eartha White talking to you again. I just want to thank you for giving mankind the intelligence to create such a

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137 Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began*, xi. Lomax retold this story on more than one occasion. In his essay “Folk Music in the Roosevelt Era,” he wrote, “After a few more stanzas, [the performer] spoke into the recorder horn as though it were a telephone. He said, ‘Now, Mr. President, you just don’t know how bad they’re treating us folks down here. I’m singing to you and I’m talking to you so I hope you will come down here and do something for us poor folks here in Texas.” Lomax, “Folk Music in the Roosevelt Era,” 92.

marvelous machine. And for a president like Franklin D. Roosevelt that cares about preserving the songs the people want to sing.”

The purpose of this section, then, is not to give an exhaustive catalog of every instance of folk music in the Roosevelts’ lives, nor is it the purpose to insist that the Roosevelts loved any particular genre over another. Rather, the opposite of such a claim is true: The Roosevelts were ordinary, average music listeners with tastes that could be termed rather pedestrian or not particularly cultivated, somewhat “philistine” according to Joseph Alsop. These types of value judgments miss the mark, however. The importance of their place within the 1930s had less to do with any role that they might have played as arbiters of taste, and, to paraphrase William McDonald, the Roosevelts simply had more pressing issues on their plate. To be sure, the Roosevelts were one of the first families to program, in any substantive manner, music that reflected the more vernacular tastes of listeners within the nation, and to lend credence to music outside of that which had typically been the fare at White House concerts. Moreover, they were also the first to highlight music of African American performers, and to request “command performances” of black musicians. They did so not only because they liked the music, but also because the music had a particular purpose within the moment, as evidenced in the concert for the king and queen, in the concert of folksongs for the use of soldiers, and in the many public appearances that the Roosevelts made that featured the music of “the common folk,” as well as other

musical genres that were particularly popular during their time in office. It was their very public roles as political figureheads that, in turn, pointed a national spotlight on these musical genres and musicians, and served to highlight a period in the history of the United States both culturally and politically. As Alan Lomax stated some forty years after he left the Archive of American Folk Song,

This period, the Roosevelt period, was not only one of political development, when, for the first time America became conscious of its social responsibilities to the whole population. It was also a time when a rising interest in American culture flowered and bore fruit. … The developing concern about what our own American culture was actually like, about who we were as people peaked at this time. And the search for American folk roots was a part of this.¹⁴⁰

“A Great Centralized Collection”: The Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress

Founded in 1928 as a part of the Music Division of the Library of Congress, the Archive of American Folk Song served as a principal repository for nearly all of the folk music recordings made in the United States during the 1930s, and in particular for the government-sponsored recordings of the WPA, Resettlement Administration, and other organizations. (See Appendix 1 for a list of the New Deal-era government-sponsored collections.) The Archive served a much more important purpose than merely a place to deposit discs, however; the equipment, staff expertise, and overall philosophy of the place, as well as the meaning behind the act of collecting folksongs, dovetailed with the aims of the collectors and Federal One administrators themselves. In fact, the growth of the Archive and the success of the folksong collecting projects of this era were largely entwined, although each organization had its own successes and difficulties at different times in the second half of the 1930s (e.g., the Archive received a huge grant at nearly the exact time that Federal One programs were transferred from federal to state control). More often than not, however, the work of the staff, including Harold Spivacke, Benjamin Botkin, and John and Alan Lomax, was so imbricated with the folk music collections of Sidney Robertson, Herbert Halpert, and others in the government projects as to be nearly inseparable.
The Archive was first conceived in a considerably different political and economic landscape, however. Moreover, the collection of folk music was not nearly as widespread as it would be a decade later, nor would it signify the same privileging of the “common American” as it would during the height of the Depression. Carl Engel broached the idea of what he termed an “American Folk Song Project,” in his report to the Librarian of Congress, Herbert Putnam, in 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.¹

Engel estimated the time frame for funding the project as “not less than five years” at a cost of “at least $5,000 a year.” Moreover, he asserted that the “regular functions” of the Library of Congress could not, at present, support such an Archive. He was aware that such funding was outside of the realm of what the Library could provide, noting, “It must depend on the cooperation of public-spirited citizens. Such cooperation has begun to be extended in a generous, though still insufficient, way.”²

Engel punctuated his call-to-arms with a number of familiar tropes surrounding the collection of folk music at the time: “Too much of it has remained scattered or unrecorded,” he stated, and he blamed the rise of media as one of the largest factors in the disappearance of a source of U.S. heritage: “The preservation of this material in the remote haunts where it still flourishes is endangered by the spread

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² Engel also listed the supporters who had donated money to the establishment of the Archive. Ibid., 144.
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.” To add weight to his argument, he invoked the argument that folklore “is a science,” which “demands a scientific and critical approach,” and that folksong collections “must be done in a scholarly manner.”

But the idea for the Archive was not Engel’s alone. In fact, folksong collector Robert W. Gordon (1888–1961) was the driving force behind its initial conception, and was the natural person to fill the role of director for this “American Folk-Song Project” (as it was initially called). Gordon, Engel noted in his 1928 report to the Librarian of Congress, had “exceptional qualifications” and had proven himself over the past decade “an authority in the field of American folk song.” Gordon had been a student and lecturer in the English Department at Harvard (ca. 1906–1917), the center of ballad scholarship in the United States; a professor of English at the University of California (ca. 1918–1923); and an author of a series of popular articles on folk music.

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in the pulp publication *Adventure* magazine, titled “Old Songs That Men Have Sung,” as well as another series in the “Sunday Magazine” section of the *New York Times*.5

By 1928, Engel and Gordon had become well acquainted through Engel’s numerous research trips to the Music Division. Gordon had even sent Engel a complete set of his *Adventure* articles in January 1927.6 Engel reiterated his support for Gordon, this time publicly, in the April 1928 issue of *Musical Quarterly*, stating,

> In a series of eighteen [sic: fifteen] entertaining and illuminating articles, recently published in the Sunday Magazine of the “New York Times,” Mr. R. W. Gordon has conclusively shown how wide an area the term “American folk-songs” covers. He has also proved himself probably the one scholar most familiar with the whole extent of it. That the public enjoyed reading Mr. Gordon’s articles is self-evident by the exceptional number he was asked to write for the “Times.” The value of Mr. Gordon’s research from the historical, philological, and musicological points of view is equally self-evident. Yet, what he has accomplished he has had to do practically single-handed, without the proper support. There is no “margin” for the purely historical and scholarly aspects of music.7

Folk musician and scholar Stephen Wade, in his liner notes for *A Treasury of Library of Congress Field Recordings*, states,

> As a research scientist, Gordon combined exhaustive field collecting with technological acumen. A tireless experimenter not unlike his friend Thomas Edison, Gordon brought the technology of the cylinder recorder to San Francisco wharves and Georgia prayer meetings. These ventures were, he said, steps leading to the creation of “a great history of national folksong.” He made nearly a thousand field recordings. Among them are the songs of North Carolina mountain banjoists, Georgia ring shouters, and old-time windjammers adrift on the San Francisco waterfront. As the Library of Congress’s first professional folklorist, Gordon wanted to be “in intimate

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touch with every section of the country and with every class of the American people.”

Yet for all of his exuberance and brilliance, Gordon did not last long as head of the Archive. First, and perhaps foremost, he was not particularly adept at dealing with the bureaucracy of a large governmental institution. According to his biographer Debora Kodish, “He looked at the archive as his laboratory and demanded control over his materials from the first. He seemed to squirrel things away and to maintain a paternal attitude toward his work. He was reluctant to open up his collection as yet. This ran counter to the philosophy of a national library.” At the same time, Gordon was reluctant to spend any time at the Archive, preferring to collect folksongs and publish in the same manner as he had before becoming director. According to folk music scholar Paul J. Stamler, “Engel … seems to have had the odd idea that the director of the new archive should actually show up in Washington and run it.” In fact, during his first year as head of the AAFS Gordon was essentially

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9 By many accounts Gordon was rather casual about his position at the Library, often times prompting Engel and Putnam to question where he was and whether he was working. In fact, he did not deem it necessary to move to Washington D.C. until a year after his employment began. Gordon also frustrated other donors to his cause. He was able to convince the American Council of Learned Societies to provide him with funding for a planned recording trip in Charleston, South Carolina, as well as to develop recording equipment for the field. He met neither of these goals, prompting an ACLS official to write a letter expressing his frustration: “[Gordon] has nothing to show in the way of songs collected, or even in the way of equipment. I have periodically called on him to find out what progress has been made, but the report is always the same: there is no perfect recording machine. It is my opinion that Mr. Gordon has a preternaturally keen eye for flies in the ointment; at any rate, he has expended much time and some money (though not a great deal) in a series of experiments without positive results.” Quoted in Kodish, *Good Friends and Bad Enemies*, 187. Bartis argues that Gordon’s contributions were many, not only with regard to the materials acquisitioned by the AAFS, but also with regard to the problem of developing adequate recording technology. See Bartis, “A History of the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress,” 36–41.
M.I.A., remaining at his residence in Darien, Georgia. His absence prompted a number of letters from both Engel and Librarian of Congress Herbert Putnam as to Gordon’s whereabouts (they even wrote Gordon’s wife after getting no response from Gordon himself). Although Gordon finally moved his family to Washington in the fall of 1929, proximity did not cure his inability to toe the company line, let alone assure his employers he was in fact collecting songs for the Archive.

In March 1932 the Library informed Gordon that his services would no longer be needed as of the end of June that year. That same month Gordon submitted his final report to Engel, dated 18 March, which listed what he had collected during his tenure: some 8,000 song texts, 700 of which had tunes; 900 songsters; more than 1,500 pulp magazines that had sections on folksongs; 350 discs that had been donated by the Victor company; and nearly 1,000 cylinders that Gordon himself had recorded between 1923 and 1928.\textsuperscript{11}

Not only had the AAFS lost its guiding force in Gordon, but also it was in financial dire straits. By 1931 the archive was practically out of money and the following year it was broke. Although Gordon was ultimately let go in his official capacity as head of the archive, he was allowed to stay on for a period of six months (until the end of 1932) in order to work with the materials he had already provided. An $800 grant from the American Council of Learned Societies financed this extension, with the stipulation that if his work hadn’t been completed he would stay on, without remuneration, until he was done. According to John Lomax’s biographer,\textsuperscript{11} Kodish, \textit{Good Friends and Bad Enemies}, 189.
Nolan Porterfield, Gordon “not only agreed to the arrangement but offered to stay on indefinitely for the nominal sum of a dollar a month, even after the index was completed, with the hope that he might be rehired when the economy improved.”¹² Gordon remained at the Archive until September 1933, when he was replaced as the Archive’s consultant by Gordon’s classmate at Harvard, John A. Lomax.¹³ Kodish noted that Putnam told Gordon, in a letter dated 14 September 1933, that he should “no longer feel responsible for the archive since the library had accepted the assistance of [John] Lomax in such matters.”¹⁴ Gordon was nearly written out of the history of the Archive that he was instrumental in helping to build.¹⁵

**John A. Lomax and the AAFS**

John Lomax had been on the Library’s radar for some time. He had visited Herbert Putnam at the Library in 1931 and discussed his travel plans for an upcoming recording trip throughout the South. This visit coincided with Gordon’s research into recording machines, and Putnam, who was eager to keep the Library on the technological forefront, offered to supply Lomax with the “newest portable electric

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¹³ Wade, liner notes to *A Treasury of Library of Congress Field Recordings*.
¹⁵ Ibid., 192. Kodish also noted that Gordon’s achievements largely went unnoticed, or were intentionally obscured, by subsequent Music Division chiefs Oliver Strunk and Harold Spivacke, ibid., 194–95. The Lomaxes also largely eschewed Gordon’s role in the AAFS, asserting that the archive began in 1933 rather than 1928. Personal communication with Stephen Wade, 6 May 2015.
recording machine” (a Garwick disc-cutting machine) for his use.\textsuperscript{16} In exchange for the machine, Lomax agreed to give the Archive copies of whatever recordings he and his son Alan made along the way. John Lomax also used the Library’s resources and reputation in other ways on this trip, namely by asking Engel to provide him with letters of introduction for prisons and other institutions he hoped to visit during his trip—Lomax told Engel to “put on your seal and make the document as overpowering officially as possible.”\textsuperscript{17}

In August 1933, upon completion of their song-collecting trip through the South, John and Alan Lomax arrived at the Archive to deposit with Engel the recordings they had made, and to find a home base from which to work on their upcoming book \textit{American Ballads and Folk Songs}, which was published the following year. Engel arranged for Alan to deliver a lecture about the Lomaxes’ collecting trip and to play some of the recordings, in the hopes that the publicity would reignite interest in the Archive.

The following month, John Lomax wrote to Engel offering his services as a consultant to the Archive without any form of compensation, with the idea that this official position might bolster his standing as a folklorist.\textsuperscript{18} Within days Putnam agreed, offering him the position of Honorary Curator of the Archive of American Folk Song” at the pay scale of $1 a month (the same amount Gordon had proposed for

\textsuperscript{16} Memorandum, John A. Lomax to Harold Spivacke, 6 March 1941, AFC/LC; quoted in Bartis, “A History of the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress,” 43. Bartis places the date of Lomax’s initial visit with Putnam in 1931.

\textsuperscript{17} Letter, John A. Lomax to Carl Engel, n.d. (ca. 7 July 1933), quoted and cited in Porterfield, \textit{Last Cavalier}, 299, 523n31.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 305.
his services at the previous year). Putnam’s conditions for Lomax’s appointment also stipulated that Lomax could continue making recordings “with our machine, at your own expense, to record and collect material in the field, and, while in Washington, [assist] in the response to inquiries involving the Archive itself.” The Archive would also have the right to copy any materials Lomax had made prior to the appointment.

Although the salary and stipulations surrounding Lomax’s appointment might seem to have favored the Archive, the deal would prove to be mutually beneficial to both parties. Engel and Putnam had a replacement for the face of the Archive, someone who was a national figure in the realm of folksong scholarship, and someone who might prove to be a bit more reliable than his predecessor. Lomax would be able to use the Library of Congress as a calling card, which would help with not only gaining access to performers, but also with garnering for him some respect within the field of academic folklore studies, a matter about which he had been self-conscious for some time. The Library’s name would also open doors for Lomax on the lecture circuit. Furthermore, he would have a recording machine, assistance from the Library, a repository for his work, and, within a year or so, financial reimbursements for his trips. And he could (seemingly) come and go as he pleased.

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19 A number of other sources, including Kodish, place the salary at $1 per year, though the correct amount seems to be $12 per annum. Kodish, Good Friends and Bad Enemies, 194.
20 Letter from Putnam to John A. Lomax, 13 September 1933, AFC/LC, quoted in Porterfield, Last Cavalier, 305.
21 Porterfield, Last Cavalier, 306.
This arrangement proceeded relatively smoothly for the next year, until July 1934, when Engel resigned and Oliver Strunk replaced him as Chief of the Music Division. Although Strunk had been Engel’s assistant at the Music Division since 1928, the Lomaxes had some concerns that he might not be as supportive as had Engel of the Archive’s activities, a concern that turned out to be prescient. “In a passage deleted from his autobiography,” notes Nolan Porterfield, “Lomax wrote of an early meeting with Strunk and Strunk’s indifference, ‘an indifference that later grew into downright opposition, unfortunately intermingled with double-dealing.’ Their relationship over the next three years, until Strunk managed to get himself fired, was not a harmonious one.” In fact, their relationship was inharmonious from the start: Lomax would later refer to Strunk as “young, greedy for power, selfish, arbitrary, and vain.”

With the problem of Robert Gordon still fresh in his mind, Strunk began badgering Lomax almost immediately about what Strunk perceived was a lack of productivity on the song collector’s part. Although Lomax had collected and deposited some 150 discs at the Archive—nearly doubling its holdings of disc recordings—Engel told Lomax that “we have so little to show in the way of positive

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22 William Oliver Strunk (1901–1980) served as chief of the Music Division for three years, from 1934 to 1937. Aged thirty-three when he accepted the position, he was twenty years Engel’s junior. Although Strunk never earned a degree in music, he was an important figure in the field of musicology, helping to found the American Musicological Society, and publishing a number of books including Source Readings for Music History (1950). He was also the son of William O. Strunk, co-author with E. B. White of The Elements of Style.

23 Porterfield, Last Cavalier, 326, 383.

24 Quoted in ibid., 385.
accomplishment.” In a letter to Lomax in early 1935, Putnam doubted whether he could convince the Carnegie Corporation to continue funding the Archive based on Lomax’s contribution of “only around 200 records,” although the actual figure for the previous year was closer to 300, with another 261 coming in 1935.

In the end, Putnam did not secure additional funding from the Carnegie Corporation, and the fate of the AAFS seemed doubtful. Undeterred, Lomax turned to his friends in Washington, relationships he had cultivated in Austin during his time as secretary of the Alumni Association of the University of Texas (1910–1925). Lomax had taken to having meals with Democratic senators from Texas Tom Connally and Morris Sheppard, and Edgar E. Witt, whom FDR personally appointed chairman of the special Mexican Claims Commission in 1935. According to Porterfield, “When they heard how Putnam and Strunk had cut the ground from under Lomax with the Carnegie Corporation, Connally and Sheppard strolled across the Capitol grounds to the Library of Congress and called upon the Librarian.” Lomax’s gamble worked. The next day Putnam, Lomax, and a visibly shaken Strunk had a meeting in which Lomax was promised free rein over the Archive, a new recording machine, a car and traveling expenses, a salary, and most importantly, renewed talks with the Carnegie

25 Quoted in ibid., 383.
26 Peter Bartis writes that “By late 1936 it was becoming increasingly evident that the work of the Archive was gaining in stature within the Library. Since they began their work, the Lomaxes themselves had added over 700 discs, each containing two to twelve songs or other performances. Moreover, they had, in all amassed a collection of 2,789 items by June 1936. … Fully three-quarters of their collection was designated ‘negro,’ and there was an especially strong representation of Texas-Mexican performances. Bartis, “A History of the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress,” 63.
27 Porterfield, Last Cavalier, 385.
Corporation and the Rockefeller Foundation. “His many years of playing scrub politics had not been wasted,” noted Nolan Porterfield.28

The Harold Spivacke Years (1937–1972)

Strunk was not long for his position at the Library. In the summer of 1937, after only three years on the job, he was fired. Although the precipitating event occurred when Strunk misplaced a check from one of the Library’s principal donors, his removal had been some time in the making.29 His firing opened the door for Harold Spivacke (1904–1977), who had been Strunk’s assistant since 1934. Spivacke seemed a natural choice (although fellow Music Division assistant Edward N. Waters felt the job should be his). Spivacke improved relationships between the Music Division and the Library of Congress’s top brass as well as with the Library’s donors and patrons.30 Furthermore, unlike Strunk, Spivacke was vitally interested in the Archive, and saw the need for it to grow. He later remembered, “I’d spent my life in music, or at least part of my life at all times—though I never majored in music, I majored in economics. … But I always studied music, and of course it was the music

28 Ibid., 385.
29 Ibid., 405.
of Aeolian Hall, Town Hall, and Carnegie Hall. I’d never heard any of this sort of stuff [folk music], and I fell in love with it.”

Spivacke’s claims about not majoring in music were only somewhat true. He indeed did not initially study music, but rather economics and philosophy, receiving his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from New York University in 1923, and 1924, respectively. Five years later, after spending time as a music teacher and concert performer, he enrolled in the University of Berlin to study music with Karl Erich Schumann, Arnold Schering, and Curt Sachs. He completed his Ph.D. in 1933 with a dissertation titled “Über die objektive und subjektive Tonintensität” (“On the Objective and Subjective Intensity of Tone”). After leaving Berlin, Spivacke returned to New York City, where he became an assistant to New York Times music critic Olin Downes. The following year, in 1934, Spivacke relocated to Washington, where he became the assistant chief of the Music Division, under Oliver Strunk. Spivacke was also active in a number of professional organizations. He served as the vice president of the American Society for Comparative Musicology (1933–37) was a founding member of the American Musicological Society (1935), the National Music Council, and both the Music Library Association and the International Association of Music Librarians.  

Spivacke also had, over the course of his tenure at the Music Division, developed a strong bond with the Lomaxes. Spivacke would often take John Lomax

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31 Spivacke, interview by Isabel S. Grossner, 9.
out for lunch in order to be regaled by Lomax about his latest foray into the field, or about political or other gossip. Lomax even convinced Spivacke to accompany him on a field recording trip, to a Virginia prison in June 1936.\textsuperscript{33} “I went on one short trip to Virginia with him,” Spivacke later recalled, “recording, and of course being an uppity city fellow I loused it up and made more mistakes per square minute than anybody could. … He took me into a prison. I had never been into a prison. I was scared stiff. I didn’t know how to act. Anyway, we had a lot of fun.”\textsuperscript{34}

The trip was more than just “fun,” however. It instilled in Spivacke an understanding and appreciation of the difficulties and rewards of fieldwork, and reinforced the fact that the process was more than just merely showing up and setting up the machine. He also gained insight into the mechanics and the craft of making the recordings, the temperamental nature of the equipment, and the need for the Library of Congress to keep up with the latest technology. In short, over the course of two days with Lomax, Spivacke understood what the Archive was trying to achieve in a way that neither of his predecessors possibly could have, regardless of how enthusiastic they might have been for the project’s success and growth. Moreover, Spivacke shared the Lomaxes’ belief that the purpose of the archive was “not to serve as a storage warehouse but rather as a source of living material. Its location is appropriate—in a governmental institution in the nation’s capital.”\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{33} For more on Spivacke’s trip and relationship with John Lomax, see John Lomax, Adventures of a Ballad Hunter (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 156–59; Spivacke, interview by Isabel S. Grossner, 5–10; and Porterfield, Last Cavalier, 392–93.

\textsuperscript{34} Spivacke, interview by Isabel S. Grossner, 9.

Over the course of his first year as Music Division chief, Spivacke’s involvement with the AAFS grew. He became the primary contact for many of the collectors in the field, ensuring (alongside his assistant Edward Waters) that they had everything that the needed for their trips. Bartis noted the sea change in the status of the Archive within the Library under Spivacke:

Although Engel might have still planned to leave the Archive’s budget outside of direct Library support, when Spivacke inherited the program in 1938, he appears to have acknowledged it as an established program no longer on the periphery of the Library’s domain, and he accorded it with a general concern that characterized his administration.  

Coupled with Spivacke’s commitment to the Archive came its first appropriation of funding from Congress in July 1937. Spivacke wasted no time in putting this newfound funding to work. A major priority for the AAFS was obtaining additional recording equipment, which the Archive could then loan out to collectors in exchange for the recordings. Perhaps more importantly, however, was the need for adequate staffing to keep up with all of the recordings that were streaming in every month from not only the Lomaxes, but also other collectors in the United States. Spivacke hired the twenty-two-year-old Alan Lomax to head the Archive, under the title “Assistant-in-Charge” beginning at a salary of $1,620 a year. He would be the first salaried employee of the AAFS. The following year, in 1938, Alan Lomax

37 Borrowers of the Archive’s equipment who were not directly affiliated with the WPA projects included Amos Burg, Fletcher Collins, Seamus Doyle, Charles Draes, John Faulk, William Fenton, Melville Herskovits, Eloise Linscott, Vance Randolph, Juan B. Rael, Nikol Smith, and Charles Todd and Robert Sonkin, among others. Ibid., 89.
was given a raise, to a salary of $1,800 a year, and an assistant, and that same year Charles Seeger and George Herzog were made consultants to the Archive.\textsuperscript{38}

**The Alan Lomax Years (1937–1942)**

Alan Lomax’s official presence at the Archive paid immediate dividends, and heralded a number of significant changes. According to AAFS historian Peter Bartis,

First, there was a broadening repertory collected for the Archive; second, a special focus was developing which brought performers into the Library to record; third, special attention was delegated to increasing acquisitions as a result of gifts, exchange, and duplication projects—a direct result of full-time staffing; and fourth, the Archive’s work and service was increasingly developing in a coordinative function with other awesome federal efforts such as WPA.\textsuperscript{39}

In fact, these early years of the Spivacke/Lomax collaboration proved to be a high-water mark for the Archive. Acquisitions of new records skyrocketed. Alan Lomax, who had taken over from his father the task of writing the Archive’s annual reports to the Librarian of Congress, reported that in 1938 alone the number of discs accessioned into the Archive was 1,638 (an increase of more than 300 discs from the previous year), with over 1,500 of those being recordings made in the field.\textsuperscript{40} During this time Alan Lomax also developed his persona as a public spokesperson for folk music during this time, putting together high-profile concerts of folk musicians, giving numerous lectures on folksong, and producing a series of radio programs on

\textsuperscript{38} Szwed, *Alan Lomax*, 120.

\textsuperscript{39} Bartis, “A History of the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress,” 75.

folk music for the Columbia Broadcast Company. In so doing he was not only able to attract new listeners to folk music, but was also able to convince a number of prominent collectors that the Archive was a worthy repository for their recordings.

Government programs, such as the Resettlement Administration (later the Farm Security Administration) and the WPA Federal One arts projects, also began to lend assistance to the Archive. Project workers provided the AAFS with new recordings and provided the Lomaxes with new leads for potential folk musicians. Moreover, WPA and RA workers helped to pore over and catalog the thousands of recordings in the Archive that had not yet been touched due to lack of staffing. In 1937, by way of these workers’ assistance, the Archive was able to produce a mimeographed catalog of the Archive’s holdings, titled “Provisional Check-List of Disks (Excluding Primitive Music) in the Archive of American Folk Song in the Library of Congress.”

Clerical assistance was but a minor part of these government agencies contributions, however: Due to the efforts of not only the staff of the Resettlement Administration and the WPA arts projects, but also various other federal agencies such as the National Youth Administration and the WPA Recreation Department, hundreds of discs began to stream into the Archive (see Table 4.1 below).

Among the collectors who recorded and provided discs were Fletcher Collins, Jr., Herbert Halpert, Stetson Kennedy, Nicholas Ray, Sidney Robertson, Margaret Valiant, and Charles Seeger himself. Some contributions were small, perhaps eight or

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a dozen discs from a given performer or locale, but other collections sent to the
Archive, such as Sidney Robertson’s California Folk Music Project, the folksong
collections of the Florida Federal Writers’ Project, and the largest of all, Herbert
Halpert’s Southern States Recording Expedition for the WPA’s Joint Committee on
Folk Arts, comprised hundreds of discs, each containing approximately two to four
songs, that covered an entire state or region of the country. These contributions
helped extend the reach of the Archive—the Lomaxes could only make so many trips
to a limited number of areas—and also helped fulfill Engel’s original goal of
collecting “all the poems and melodies that have sprung from our soil or have been
transplanted here.” 42 Despite, or perhaps because of, the assistance from these
government organizations, there was simply no way for the Archive to keep up with
the backlog of uncataloged recordings in its possession, let alone continue to build its
collection. Moreover, the AAFS staff did not have the requisite equipment to make
the promised copies of the recordings that the collectors sent to them. Alan Lomax
hinted at as much in his report to the Librarian of Congress in 1938: “Despite
difficulties arising from the lack of proper equipment, a large number of duplicates
essential to the work of the Archive have been made during the past year.” 43 The next
year, however, many of their prayers would be answered.

The Carnegie Foundation Grant and the AAFS’s Recording Laboratory

42 Quoted in Hardin, “The Archive of Folk Culture at 75,” 3.
“It is doubtful if any single year in its history was as important [for the Archive of American Folk Song of the Music Division] as that which ended June 30, 1940,” wrote Harold Spivacke in his annual report to the Librarian of Congress for the year 1939.\textsuperscript{44} Funding and staffing issues had hindered the Archive from the outset, and its growth over the previous two years was far outpacing its ability to keep up with itself. The solution to the first of these problems came early in the year, a solution that marked perhaps the biggest windfall for the Archive in its short history, as well as for the Music Division and its reputation. In January 1939 Herbert Putnam appealed to Frederick D. Keppel of the Carnegie Foundation for a grant to fund a recording laboratory to assist with the backlog of duplications that the Archive had on its plate. Keppel, who had been a friend to both Putnam and the Lomaxes, was eager to help, and in June of that year the Carnegie Foundation approved a grant for $41,520, equivalent to approximately $715,500 in 2015—a staggering amount considering the worsening recession of the previous two years. In his annual report for the Music Division, Spivacke outlined the ways that he envisioned this money being used, including,

the installation of elaborate stationary recording equipment, the purchase of a sound truck and six portable recorders, the salaries of a technical staff to assemble and operate the equipment, and a revolving fund to finance a service through which the public will be enabled to purchase copies of the Library’s holdings at reasonable rates. Once installed and in operation, this sound laboratory will be equipped to solve adequately all the present acoustical problems of the Archive of American Folk Song. Moreover, it will enable the Library to extend its activities into the field of sound recording and

transmission. The laboratory will have apparatus for duplicating phonograph recordings of all types, for making master recordings which can be pressed and distributed, for making transcriptions of radio broadcasts, and even for originating broadcasts within the Library building.45

Although the grant did not cover everything that the Library had originally hoped for—the disc recording machines had gone up in price between the time the grant was proposed and disbursed—it did cover most of the items on Spivacke’s list, and it ultimately had a profound effect on the Archive’s goals regarding its collection development, management, preservation, and outreach. Perhaps most importantly, the grant enabled the Archive to put machines in the hands of more collectors, thus expanding the Archive’s reach, and ultimately, its own holdings.46 By 1941 the Recording Lab was fully operational.

The Carnegie Corporation funding was in question for a time, however, not because the project was not worthy, but because Putnam had decided to retire at the end of a forty-year tenure as Librarian of Congress, and his replacement had yet to be determined.47 Putnam’s eventual replacement was an inspired, if controversial, choice, in the form of Pulitzer Prize–winning poet, and friend and former

45 Spivacke remembered that the recording equipment consumed only about half of the money, about $16,500, for two Scully recording lathes with amplifiers, and a sound truck for mobile recording trips. There was also a revolving fund of $5,000 (which Spivacke noted “became the bane of my existence for a quarter of a century), as well $5,000 a year allotted for three years for the purposes of paying an engineer, with the thought that after the three years were up that Congress would take over the cost of the engineer. Spivacke, interview by Isabel S. Grossner, 26. The grant information comes from this interview, pp. 24–26.
46 Spivacke, “Division of Music, From the Report of the Chief, Dr. Spivacke,” (pub. 1941), 134.
speechwriter of FDR, Archibald MacLeish. His appointment almost immediately caused consternation on both sides of the political spectrum. Conservatives in Washington were rankled because he was an expatriate in Paris in the 1920s, and MacLeish was perceived, according to Spivacke, “as a radical left-winger.” The American Library Association, which was then a powerful voice in Washington, was angered because MacLeish did not have a library background. Alan Lomax, however, was thrilled at the appointment. MacLeish was familiar with the Lomaxes’ work and reputation prior to his appointment. He had even gone out on his own folksong collecting trip in Arkansas.

With new equipment and leadership in place, it was time for Lomax and Spivacke to find someone to run the new recording laboratory. Neither Alan Lomax nor Spivacke had the time or technical knowledge to run such an operation. The solution came in the form of a twenty-four-year-old University of Michigan graduate with degrees in electrical engineering and mathematics named Jerome Wiesner, whom Spivacke later recalled was a “genius” and someone with a “great mind.” (In fact, Spivacke may have been underselling Wiesner, as he went on to become a science adviser for three presidents and later the president of MIT.) Wiesner’s work

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48 Spivacke, interview by Isabel S. Grossner, 12.
49 Szwed, Alan Lomax, 164.
50 Ibid., 164–65.
51 Spivacke, interview by Isabel S. Grossner, 28–29;
52 Jerome B. Wiesner (1915–1994) was mainly a behind-the-scenes figure at the Library, but his work there was indispensable. He was educated at the University of Michigan, receiving both a bachelor of science degree in mathematics and electrical engineering in 1937, and a masters in electrical engineering the following year (he completed his Ph.D. in electrical engineering there after the war, finishing in 1950. He had been appointed the chief engineer for the Acoustical and Record Laboratory of the Library of Congress, a position that began on 3 June 1940. He worked for the Library until 1942,
with the Library was indispensible, in part because he was able to solve seemingly insurmountable problems on a shoestring budget. Spivacke remembered, “I would say, ‘Oh we can’t do that,’ [he] would say, ‘I don’t know. Give me time. Go away.’ I’d come back in the morning, and with a piece of wood and a hunk of string and screws and bolts, there it was, working.” Over the course of his two years with the Library, before he went to work at MIT doing research for the war effort, Wiesner was able to save the Library thousands of dollars with his “work-arounds.” He was also instrumental in setting up and running the Recording Laboratory and the project most closely associated with it, the Radio Research Project (discussed below).

The WPA’s “Library of Congress Project”

Finding staff to do the non-technical, brute-force cataloging and organizational work for the recordings that had been piling up was another matter altogether, one that was solved, somewhat ironically, by the layoff of scores of WPA project workers at nearly the same time as the Archive’s new projects were getting underway. At the end of the summer of 1939, all WPA projects shifted from federal to state control, leaving many WPA employees out of jobs. William McDonald noted, “Since only state and local projects were now permissible, there was no place for

when he joined the research staff at the new Radiation Laboratory at MIT, where he helped develop microwave technology. He was also a prominent figure during the war in the development of radar technology. Wiesner was later a prominent science adviser to Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson. He was also an outspoken advocate for the control and limitation of nuclear arms, and helped establish the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency under the Kennedy administration. In 1971 Wiesner was appointed president of MIT, an occasion for which Archibald MacLeish himself wrote a poem. He would hold the post until 1980. “President Emeritus Jerome Wiesner is Dead at 79,” MIT News, 26 October 1994, http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/1994/weisner-obit-1026.html.

53 Spivacke, interview by Isabel S. Grossner, 28–29.
federal project employees; and since the WPA was unwilling to place them on the administrative payroll of the national office, the employees of this unit were, for a few weeks, literally on the streets.”

The solution was a new interdepartmental collaborative project, not unlike the WPA Joint Committee on Folk Arts, called the Library of Congress Project (officially called the District of Columbia Project). Officials at the national offices of the Federal Writers’ Project and the Historical Records Survey in Washington D.C. proposed the project soon after the Federal One arts projects were dismantled.

The LC Project enabled the foundering FWP and HRS workers to continue work on in-progress projects, and it also created a branch within the LC Project for the other Federal One arts projects. Librarian of Congress Herbert Putnam approved the project on 20 September, and Roosevelt signed the proposal on 16 October. On 21 October 1939 the LC Project was underway, with its offices in the Annex of the Library of Congress. Benjamin Botkin was appointed head of the Writers’ Program Unit of the LC Project. MacLeish also brought in former director of the HRS Luther Evans at the end of November 1939 to be the director of the Library’s Legislative Reference Service, which placed Evans in the middle of these LC Project activities.

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54 McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts*, 787.
57 Luther Evans resigned from his position as head of the Historical Records Survey on 30 November 1939 to be the director of the Library’s Legislative Reference Service. Within a year Evans was appointed Chief Assistant Librarian under MacLeish and director of the Library’s Reference Department. Evans became the Librarian of Congress in 1945 upon MacLeish’s leaving to become assistant secretary of state. Evans would hold the position until 1953. McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts*, 786–87.
For the first year of its existence the LC Project helped to edit publications of the Federal Writers’ Project and the Historical Records Survey. But MacLeish and Evans soon decided that the work on the national editorial endeavors was “not of the first interest to the Library.” It was reconfigured twice, in February and August 1940, in order to shift the focus from the creation of new projects to the organization and preparation of the mass of WPA materials for accession into the Library’s holdings. The LC’s annual report for 1941 reflected this new focus and trajectory for the project: “The Library of Congress Project was established by the Work Projects Administration in the District of Columbia … for the purpose of collecting, checking, editing, indexing, and making available for use certain materials of the Federal Arts Projects and other cultural projects of the Work Projects Administration.”

Due to the fear that WPA materials already in existence that were now under the aegis of poorly funded state WPA offices might founder or otherwise disappear, MacLeish requested duplicates of all WPA materials be shipped to the Library for processing, a request that left the Library swimming in WPA materials for years to come. By July 1941, the LC Project was largely finished due to, as the 1941 annual report noted, “a drastic reduction of employment in Work Projects Administration projects in the District of Columbia,” which left only a single unit of “ten persons engaged in completion of the Annotated Bibliography of American History,” working

60 John Cole put a “conservative estimate” on the amount of materials shipped to the Library by WPA offices across the nation between 1939 and 1941 at over five thousand cubic feet, with more to come over the course of the next five years. Cole, “Amassing American ‘Stuff’,” 371.
for the project. As Jerrold Hirsch and Lawrence Rodgers note, “For two years [Botkin] worked to catalogue the Federal Writers’ Project materials and also to give the study of folk culture a kind of sanctioned stature in the federal government. In this latter effort Botkin failed, though he recognized the failure as a learning experience,” one that he would take into his role as the head of the AAFS.

Benjamin A. Botkin and the AAFS

Luther Evans was not the only major figure in the WPA to associate himself with the Library after the restructuring of Federal One. Upon the transfer from federal to state jurisdiction of the FWP, Benjamin Botkin, who had been serving as the FWP’s national folklore editor, was named the chief editor of the Writers’ Project subsection of the Library of Congress Project. The position was ideal for Botkin, given that one of the major aims of the Joint Committee on Folk Arts, of which he was director, was to organize and centralize the voluminous amount of folklore materials generated by the various WPA projects. One of Botkin’s first tasks was culling and editing the thousands of ex-slave narratives in the Library’s possession from a project that had had its history early in Roosevelt’s New Deal era.

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64 The ex-slave narrative project, originally proposed by Lawrence D. Reddick of Kentucky State Industrial College, had begun in 1934 in the Ohio River Valley, by the Federal Emergency Relief
put together a provisional history of the AAFS from the decades-worth of annual reports to the Librarian of Congress, written by John and Alan Lomax. Botkin wrote in the preface that these sections from the reports “form a history of development significant not only in itself—for the inception and growth of an institution—but also for the light it throws on certain fundamental aspects and problems of folksong study.” Rather than write a typical institutional history of a repository that held long-dead cultural artifacts, Botkin used the platform to put forward his functionalist view of the vitality of folklore and folk music, concluding the piece with a quote from Alan Lomax’s report from the previous year: “The whole should not be read simply in the light of techniques and materials, but ‘as part of a developing consciousness of the significance of a native culture.’”

Administration in the Ohio River Valley. Once the WPA had commenced the interviews continued under the auspices of the FWP and John A. Lomax, the FWP’s first national adviser on folklore prior to Botkin’s appointment to the position in 1938. The FWP contributed the bulk of the interviews in the overall collection, covering at least seventeen states between the years 1936 and 1938. It was, according to former director of the LC’s American Folklife Center Alan Jabbour, “perhaps the first major oral history project ever, and certainly one of the most significant.” While working for the LC Project, Botkin oversaw the editing, indexing, and accessioning into the Library’s holdings of the ex-slave oral histories and transcripts, the result of which was a multivolume collection of more than two thousand narratives, as well as the published FWP collection, edited by Botkin, *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery* (1945). See Cole, “Amassing American ‘Stuff’,” 376–77; Jabbour, “Ben Botkin and the Archive of American Folk Song,” http://www.alanjabbour.com/BenBotkinArchiveAmericanFolkSong.pdf; and Benjamin A. Botkin, ed. *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945).

65 Botkin was careful to couch the compendium as not merely a transcription of the reports themselves, nor as a collection of mundane interdepartmental Library-speak. Rather, he attempted to create a larger narrative out of the reports, one that was concerned with many larger theoretical and philosophical concerns surrounding the collection and study of folksongs. Benjamin A. Botkin, preface to “Archive of American Folk Song: A History, 1928–1939; Compiled from the Annual Reports to the Librarian of Congress,” Library of Congress Project, Work Projects Administration, 1940, 27 April 1940, American Folklife Center, Corporate File, Folder “Archive of American Folk Song: A History, 1928–1939.”

66 Botkin addressed the following topics: “the improvements in recording equipment and technique in field trip and archive procedure; the nature and function of certain folk song types and usages; the
Botkin was also in charge of planning the workflow for the folklore activities of the LC Project. A Project memorandum dated 5 August 1939, titled “Proposal for Sponsorship by the Archive of American Folksong of a WPA Service Bureau in Folk Music, Folklore, and Folk Art,” outlined the process for culling, organizing, and making available the stacks of untouched materials that caused the Archive’s shelves to groan. The list consisted mainly of tasks typically associated with library research and organization, including inventorying and cataloging all folk music and folklore research materials in the District of Columbia; creating bibliographic entries, abstracts, and analyses of these materials; transcribing the melodies and texts of the discs already on deposit at the AAFS; and developing standardized union and subject catalogs for the Archive’s holdings. Sandwiched in between these seemingly mundane tasks, however, was a glimpse into what Botkin and the Archive staff hoped to accomplish with the LC Project: “To make the Archive of American Folksong in the Library of Congress a central repository for folk music and folklore collections psychology and sociology of folk singers and singing; folk song areas; the folk song traditions of regional, occupational, and national groups; names of singers and folk song collectors; individual collections and collaborative projects; the attitudes of collectors; and various factors affecting or attending the growth and decay of folk song through the vicissitudes of oral transmission and cultural change.” Botkin, preface to “Archive of American Folk Song,” n.p. The Lomax quote comes from Alan Lomax’s report on the Archive in the 1939 annual report: “Interest in the work of the Archive of American Folk-Song has grown steadily in recent years as part of a developing consciousness of the significance of a native culture. Recently, however, this interest has been intensified and the Archive has experienced a correspondingly rapid growth both in the direction of acquisition of new material and in demand for this material from a wide variety of sources.” Alan Lomax, “Archive of American Folk-Song: From the Report of the Assistant-in-Charge, Alan Lomax,” in the “Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1939,” (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1940), 218.
deposited by universities and other educational institutions, government agencies, folklore societies, and individual collectors.”\textsuperscript{67}

Botkin clearly wanted to expand the scope of the LC Project beyond a library classification and archival recovery endeavor. He saw in the Project the opportunity to accomplish his larger goals as folklore editor of the FWP, and to realize his greater vision for folklore as a living, breathing, vital entity. In another memorandum titled “Proposal for Sponsorship by the Archive of American Folksong of a WPA Service Bureau in Folk Music, Folklore, and Folk Art,” Botkin laid out his vision for this new collaboration in a point-by-point list of LC project objectives:

1. To make the Archive of American Folksong a central folklore repository;
2. To make the Archive a central bureau and clearing house for folklore and related socio-ethnic materials;
3. To make the Archive a national research center, with folklore seminars and conferences;
4. To direct more efficiently the folklore and socio-ethnic studies of the Federal Writers’ Program;
5. To promote and assist in the utilization of folklore materials in WPA community programs in education, recreation, music, etc.;
6. To promote and assist in leaders’ training institutes utilizing these materials.\textsuperscript{68}

The Archive, in Botkin’s mind, would be more than merely a folksong repository; rather it would follow and expand on Engel’s original vision of a “great centralized collection” of all of the nation’s folklore materials: the beating heart of folklore

\textsuperscript{67}“Description of a District of Columbia Folklore [Research and Records] Project Sponsored by The Library of Congress”—draft, 5 August 1939, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Corporate file: WPA Folklore Manuals.

research in the United States. To accomplish this goal, Botkin laid out a number of services that the Archive should provide, including

- an intelligence service for locating and recording materials;
- a cataloguing service, for indexing and classifying Archive materials;
- a research service, for collating and documenting materials;
- a writing service, for preparing manuals and directives, state folklore collections, and special publications;
- an information service, for publicizing the location, quantity, condition, and availability of materials, work in progress, and results;
- and an Ozalid duplicating service, for supplying inexpensive copies of materials to scholars.69

To oversee this project, Botkin named himself, Charles Seeger of the FMP, and Morton W. Royse, also of the folklore section of the FWP.

The LC Project’s efforts within the Music Division and the Archive of American Folk Song had an impact on folk music research almost immediately. In Spivacke’s annual report he stated that 1939 was the largest single year of the Music Division’s history in terms of its accessions due mainly to the work of the WPA Music Program of the District of Columbia and their work of “sorting and making more accessible over 1,000,000 copyright deposits stored in the Library building but hitherto not incorporated in the Music Division’s collection.”70 The LC Project workers also assisted in transcribing and indexing the recordings from Halpert’s Mississippi recording sessions, completing transcriptions for 410 of the

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69 Ibid.

Perhaps the largest, and certainly the most useful, project that the LC Project workers assisted in was the creation of an index, and subsequently a multi-volume checklist, for the 15,000 folksongs recorded for the Archive between 1933 and August 1940. Under the supervision of Seeger, Botkin, Helen Bush, and many others, the LC Project’s Music Unit alongside workers from the National Youth Administration created multiple index cards for each song. These cards allowed a patron or researcher to search for a song by its shelf number, title, geographical location, and singer’s name, and are still in use by the LC’s Archive of Folk Culture to this day.\footnote{72}{Aubrey Williams, director of the National Youth Administration was apparently extremely eager to help. In a letter to Spivacke in February 1939, Alan Lomax relayed the possibility of getting the NYA involved: “Do you think you can use NYA help in the Archive? The last person I saw in Washington was Aubrey Williams and he practically swore at me for not having asked the NYA in on the folk song business.” Letter from Alan Lomax to Harold Spivacke, Letter Alan Lomax to Harold Spivacke, 17 August 1938, in in Ronald D. Cohen, ed.,\textit{ Alan Lomax, Assistant in Charge}, 125.}

Thereafter they compiled a three-volume compendium of the folksongs, titled the \textit{Check-List of Recorded Music in the English Language of the Archive of American Folk Songs to July, 1940}.\footnote{73}{Alan Lomax noted the people responsible for its genesis in his introduction to the checklist: “This checklist and geographical index are the collaborative handiwork of the Library of Congress and the Library of Congress Project of the Works Projects Administration, which was a unit of the Public Activities Program of the Community Service Programs of the Works Projects Administration for the District of Columbia, sponsored by the Library of Congress. The original catalog was made by untrained workers under the supervision of Charles Seeger, B. A. Botkin, Leonard Ellenwood, Helen Bush, Francesco Bianco, Mary Nan Gamble, Gorham B. Munson and G. M. White. The whole operation was under the general direction of Dr. Harold Spivacke, Chief of the Music Division. Stencils were cut by the WPA Music Project under the direction of Dr. Charles Seeger. The mimeographing was done in the Supply Office of the Library of Congress under George Morgan and} Alan Lomax edited and provided an introduction to the list, which was issued in an edition of 1,500 copies in 1942.
Lomax was intent on using this transitional period to his advantage, and he set about trying to complete projects that might put the Archive’s holdings in front of the widest possible audience. Between 1939 and 1941, he and Sidney Robertson assembled for publication an annotated bibliography of both general and regionally specific folksong and folklore sources, titled *American Folk Song and Folk Lore: A Regional Bibliography*, similar in scope and intent to Robertson’s checklist for her California Folk Music Project, published in 1940 by the University of California Department of Music and the WPA. Intended for a general audience rather than the scholarly community, Robertson and Lomax divided the catalog in much the same way that Lomax and his father had compiled their folksong anthologies: general sources on folk music and folklore, with subsequent chapters for “four broad folksong regions”: the North, “the White South,” “the Negro South,” and the West.74 (These categories reflect not only the racial divide in the Jim Crow South, but also the separation that folk music researchers saw in African American and white music in the South.) Thereafter Robertson and Lomax divided the catalog into basic song types such as occupational ballads, dances and games, and white spirituals, as well as those songs that were not in English, including “Spanish-American,” and “French-American” categories.

In early 1941, with the LC Project winding down and much of the indexing and check-listing of the Archive’s holdings having been completed, Alan Lomax attempted to expand the Archive’s holdings along the lines of Botkin’s vision for the Archive. On 22 March 1941 he sent a lengthy memorandum to Luther Evans (currently Chief Assistant to MacLeish as well as the Director of the Reference Department) requesting the acquisition all WPA folklore materials. Lomax explained that because the folklore units of the various Federal One projects often shared informants it made sense to collect them all under one roof. Moreover, the wider collection of folklore materials was “intimately related to music,” and “so thoroughly interwoven that music provides background for tales, and tales for music.”

In fact, Lomax noted, “The WPA folklore material was in good part collected because of the stimulus of the Archive and has partly come to the Library because of the Archive’s continued interest and support of WPA’s interest in it.” The Archive, Lomax argued, already had in its possession a number of non-musical folkloric recordings and documents, and it had in place not only an intimate knowledge of the materials, but also, and most importantly, a Recording Laboratory and phonoduplication service that would allow for both the dissemination and preservation of the materials on a scale that no other Library department could offer. Lomax’s real reason behind his desire to acquire these materials came out in his second of five points detailed in the memo, that of international recognition and scholarly approval: “The deposit here of these manuscripts would give the Archive the status of an Archive of Folk Lore and should

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75 Memorandum from Alan Lomax to Luther Evans, 22 March 1941, Lomax, Alan, Correspondence AFC 1993/001.
make the establishment of such an Archive in the Library an actuality,” which “has been the desire of such distinguished folk lore scholars as Reed Smith, Ralph Boggs, and Stith Thompson.” That many of the WPA folklore materials exist in multiple divisions within the Library to this day is indication of the results of Lomax’s request.

**The Radio Research Project**

One of the immediate fruits resulting from the collaboration of MacLeish and Lomax was the Radio Research Project (referred to hereafter as the RRP), started soon after the Recording Laboratory was being put into place. What began as a volley of ideas between Lomax and MacLeish became a new form of experimental documentary radio that pushed the existing boundaries of how documentaries were produced and assembled, using novel approaches to recording and editing technology alongside mobile field recordings and the Library’s and the Archive’s vast holdings. The RRP also represented a conjuncture of a number of different currents of thought that were popular at the time, including the trend toward documentary expression, the use of folksongs in a functionalist manner, and the interest in regional diversities within the United States.

Lomax had just left CBS, where he had been producing a number of folk music radio programs, including his twenty-six-week series on folk music called “American Folk Songs” for CBS’s The American School of the Air. The next year he produced another twenty-six-week program called “Wellsprings of Music,” this time

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76 Memorandum from Alan Lomax to Luther Evans, 22 March 1941; Lomax, Alan, “Correspondence,” American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, AFC 1993/001.
jointly produced by the Library of Congress and CBS. CBS broadcast these programs
twice weekly across the nation and they were also part of the educational radio
programming that CBS piped into schools at the time. These programs featured not
only pre-recorded folk music and field recordings from the Archive, but also some of
the most well-known folk musicians of the time, including the Golden Gate Quartet,
Woody Guthrie, Burl Ives, Aunt Molly Jackson, and Lead Belly. One of Lomax’s
programs, co-produced with Woody Guthrie, won an award from the National
Association for Music Education (MENC).77

MacLeish was intrigued, particularly because he wanted to extend the reach
and visibility of the Library as widely as he could, and the medium of radio, for
MacLeish, seemed the perfect avenue for doing so. MacLeish noted in a press release
that “These radio broadcasts and transcriptions will create channels through which the
Library’s buried treasures of art and knowledge can be brought directly to the people
to whom they belong.”78 But bringing the nation’s “treasures” before the people was
not simply a source of entertainment for MacLeish; it represented the first line of
defense against a descent into fascism. In a speech before the Carnegie Institute in
Pittsburgh on 19 October 1939, MacLeish argued, “We will either educate the people
of this Republic to know, and, therefore, to value, and, therefore, to preserve their
own democratic culture for the nonculture, the obscurantism, the superstition, the

77 “Radio Programs and Ballad Operas,” Association for Cultural Equity website,
http://research.culturalequity.org/home-radio.jsp.
78 Archibald MacLeish, “Press Release: Sound Laboratory in Library of Congress,” 19 April 1940,
Library of Congress Central Files, Box 900, Manuscript Division, quoted in Gevinson, “What the
Neighbors Say,” 98.
brutality, the tyranny which is overrunning eastern and central and southern
Europe.”

For MacLeish, “an effective program of popular education,” was key, and
represented “one of the greatest, if not the greatest, need at the present moment in this
country.”

The Radio Research Project, though not technically associated with the Music
Division, was under the aegis of the Archive and housed adjacent to the Archive and the Recording Laboratory. Funding for the RRP came through the Rockefeller
Foundation, first in 1940 with two fellowships to cover staff salaries, and the next
year with a larger grant of $23,320. Although MacLeish initially approached
Carnegie for such a grant, the Rockefeller Foundation turned out to be a natural
choice, as it had been involved in providing grants for radio and film research since
1937. The Library would not be responsible for the actual broadcasts, however—it
did not have a transmitter. Rather the RRP would produce and record the programs and send them along to national networks to be broadcast across the nation.

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80 From MacLeish’s application to the Rockefeller Foundation, quoted in Gevinson, “What the Neighbors Say,” 98.
82 Bartis, “A History of the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress,” 102; Gevinson, “What the Neighbors Say,” 100. According to Spivacke, Keppel of the Carnegie Corporation had in initially been approached about supporting the RRP, but after some negotiations it was decided that the Rockefeller Foundation, under David H. Stevens, would be in charge of funding the radio portion of the Recording Laboratory, Spivacke interview, Columbia Center for Oral History Collection, transcript, 18–19. The first fellowship covered the salary for Charles T. Harrell and another for Philip H. Cohen.
84 Spivacke interview, Columbia Center for Oral History Collection, transcript, 27.
The staff for the RRP, under MacLeish’s charge, included three people with extensive radio production and broadcasting backgrounds: Philip H. Cohen as project chief, Joseph Liss as script editor, and Charles T. Harrell as program editor. Alan Lomax served as music and folklore director and Jerome Wiesner was chief engineer. Gevinson describes the nature of the collaboration and the contributions of its constituent parts:

Alan Lomax, with his field recording experience, knew the appeal and the importance that actual voices and sounds would have for presenting American communities. The experimental nature of the project with its trial-and-error ethos provided an atmosphere that allowed Jerome Wiesner to work out his ideas about editing the field recordings. Philip Cohen’s background knowledge of the documentary work of the BBC provided a direction. … And Archibald MacLeish’s propagandistic goal, to educate the populace so they would not willingly accept fascism, provided a strong purpose.

By the end of March 1941, the first series of programs were aired on stations throughout the United States. These programs were also transmitted to other English-speaking countries across the globe via shortwave radio. The RRP productions built upon the types of radio programming that Alan Lomax had been making for CBS, as well as current American radio dramas and a BBC radio series that focused on life in the English countryside. The RRP produced a number of programs (although not all

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85 Cohen, Harrell, and Liss became employees of the Library beginning January 1941. Cohen had been a former radio production director at the New York office of the U.S. Department of Education and subsequently the first director of the Radio Workshop of New York University; Liss was a former writer for CBS’s hit radio show Columbia Workshop; and Harrell was a former program director for the University of Minnesota radio station. Gevinson, “What the Neighbors Say,” 100. Information on Harrell from “News from the Classes,” The Michigan Alumnus 47 (8 March 1941), 333.

86 Gevinson, “What the Neighbors Say,” 120.

were aired) that included titles such as *Books and the News*,\(^{88}\) *Hidden History*,\(^{89}\) and a “Regional Series”\(^{90}\) of broadcasts. But the RRP productions were not merely exercises in passive listening for these radio audiences. Lomax and his staff wanted the audience to be active participants, first by soliciting comments and additional materials from the audiences once the programs were aired, and later by going into the field to record average citizens. These “oral history” programs included

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\(^{88}\) *Books and the News* was a series of six five-minute shows that were devoted to recent books and current events, including topics such as the Balkans, the machine tool industry, Latin America, aviation, the Far East, and automotive construction. Charles T. Harrell, “The Radio Research Project of the Library of Congress,” *ALA Bulletin* 35/7 (1941): 448–49, 452.

\(^{89}\) The *Hidden History* programs were a series twenty-six programs broadcast on Sundays from May through November 1941—which attempted to reconsider U.S. history from the standpoint of average U.S. citizens, and to question the standard accounts of the nation’s past as given in history books, including programs on the Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg Address, stories of immigrants, the Erie Canal, and Buffalo Bill, and how Chicago recovered after its fire in 1871. Each show concluded with an appeal to audience members to send in any materials they thought might be pertinent to the week’s theme. By asking listeners to contribute to the greater repository of knowledge, the *Hidden History* series encouraged average listeners to take part in the search for U.S. history and identity, and ultimately to take charge of their own identities. The themes of the programs, according to Gevinson, matched “the unstable, insecurities of the Depression era” and they were successful because they “attempted to form a community of listeners by appealing to them to send materials so that a new meaning could be found from Americans searching and interpreting together.” The titles of some of the programs aired between September and November of 1941 are as follows: “The Iron Horse,” “Great American Fall Guy,” “Scoops at Fort Sumter,” “Buffalo Bill and the Buffalo,” “Dr. Waterhouse,” “The Erie Canal,” “Yankee Doodle,” “Great American Hero.” Gevinson, “What the Neighbors Say,” 106–114.

\(^{90}\) Gevinson states that the “Regional Series” was intended to present “half-hour dramatized programs based on documentary evidence dealing with contemporary problems faced by different types of American communities.” MacLeish summed up the aims of the RRP’s Regional Series in a statement that not only echoed the role of the “common person” in U.S. history, but also repeated the recurring tale of American rugged individualism: “The significance of America is the fact that it is a country—a society—which millions of anonymous men and women of many generations tried to make for themselves and were willing to accept readymade from the hands of any ruler or dictator or whatever.” Archibald MacLeish, *Archibald MacLeish: An American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 107, quoted in Gevinson, “What the Neighbors Say,” 103, 110. Emphasis in original. The RRP wrote and produced programs on such cities or areas such as New Orleans, Williamsburg, Nantucket, the Hudson Valley, and Barrow’s Inlet, though only the last of these programs was actually broadcast.
playwright Arthur Miller’s “Wilmington, North Carolina,” in which he visited shipyards in Wilmington and recorded residents’ feelings on the eve of World War II as their population swelled more than 300 percent with new workers, and Alan Lomax’s “Man-on-the-Street” interviews shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. In so doing, Alan Lomax and the RRP staff engaged in many of the same goals that Lomax had for the AAFS: preservation, participation, and popularization.

The Radio Research Project’s greatest achievement in terms of content and novelty of documentary form was their Documentary Series, originally titled “America in the Summer of 1941,” which, unlike traditional radio programs, shifted the story’s narrative from the script writer and actors to the fieldworker, the producer, or the audio engineer. Alan Lomax heralded the series as “a new function for radio; that of letting the people explain themselves and their lives to the entire nation.” But to develop the series took another pioneering act, this time by Spivacke’s so-called

91 Miller, then a script writer for the Radio Research Project, developed and narrated a program titled “Wilmington, North Carolina,” in which he visited shipyards in Wilmington and recorded residents’ feelings on the eve of World War II as their population swelled more than 300 percent with new workers. Miller also recorded a strike at the shipyard, but it was left on the cutting room floor, mainly because of concerns about network support, a common consideration for the RRP workers. (Such omissions were not uncommon for the RRP, particularly in the case of responses about race, class, and political ideology. Lomax had left out a number of responses from his show about the T.V.A. in which he asked farmers about freedom and democracy, with some obvious leftist ideological leanings on Lomax’s part.)

92 Lomax sent out ten RRP representatives across the country to collect interviews and put together a half-hour-long program of later “Man-on-the-Street” interviews, which were later used in a program put out by the Office of Emergency Management titled “Dear Mr. President” in January and February 1942. Its final program, “Mr. Lincoln Speaks to the People and to the Soldiers,” was a live broadcast on 11 February 1942, Lincoln’s birthday, with Walter Huston as the narrator and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., as President Lincoln. For the “Man-on-the-Street” interviews, see http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/afcphhtml/afcphhome.html; for the Dear Mr. President program, see Szwed, Alan Lomax, 187; and Gevinson, “What the Neighbors Say,” 119.

genius, Jerome Wiesner. Over the course of their fieldwork with the sound truck, Lomax and his compatriots found themselves with hours of unedited materials with no way to winnow the content (typically they had ten hours of material for a single fifteen-minute program). Lomax later recalled, “Jerome Wiesner … assured us that it would be possible to edit field recordings in such a way so as to eliminate materials that would not be pertinent to any story we might wish to tell and to tie smoothly together speeches, interviews, and conversations, so that the listener would never be aware that the editing had been done.” But in the early 1940s, before the advent of reel-to-reel tape editing, such a process did not exist. Building upon contemporary film editing techniques, Wiesner devised a way to take all of the disparate bits of interviews, field recordings, and background music from discs and transfer them to celluloid tape (essentially film), then edit the tape, and re-record the material onto transcription discs that radio stations used for broadcasting. Their first attempt was the May 1941 field expedition that Wiesner and Joseph Liss undertook in rural Delaware and eastern Maryland, where they made a survey of folk music and conducted interviews with locals. Although they found that the transfer and editing process caused some loss in fidelity, it worked, and Lomax and Wiesner were able to create a successful product that was new and exciting.

Lomax and the RRP staff also produced a number of programs on folk music. The first of these programs was a retrospective of Alan’s father’s career, titled “The Ballad Hunter.” This series of ten fifteen-minute programs included a number of different types of folksongs, including sea chanteys, African American spirituals, work songs, blues and hollers, and prison songs. It was broadcast to more than 150 stations across the country, and albums were later offered to the public for a cost of $2.50 per record through the Federal Radio Education Committee of the U.S. Department of Education. Lomax also tapped Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin for a program about the Farm Security Administration’s migrant worker camps in California, where they had been recording folksongs and other aspects of camp life since the summer of 1940. Lomax and Todd put together two shows for broadcast, titled “Lookin’ for a Home,” which were designed to “show how the Okies are building a rich and democratic life for themselves in the Federal Security Administration camps.” Lomax also used his own field recordings for RRP programs. In the summer of 1941, while putting together a program devoted to the effects of the Tennessee Valley Authority dam in Union County, Georgia, titled “Ledford and His Friends,” Alan Lomax attended Bascom Lamar Lunsford’s

99 For more on the Todd/Sonkin migrant worker camp recordings, see the American Folklife Center’s online presentation, Voices from the Dust Bowl: The Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection, http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/afrtshome/tshome.html.
Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in Ashville, North Carolina. There he recorded a fiddling contest, folk tales and songs, and a white revival service, and interviewed a number of musicians about “mountain life” and their views on the war in Europe.

The Radio Research Project folded on 28 February 1942 due largely to lack of funding. Despite the RRP’s decision to edit out questionable content where possible, the Rockefeller Foundation had apparently become a bit leery of the project once it strayed from using existing Library holdings and moved toward its later documentary format. Lomax acknowledged his project’s accomplishments in his annual report with some degree of hope for the future: “With the expiration of the special grant of funds, the Radio Research Project suspended operations on February 28, 1942. That it accomplished much in its experimental work in the field of cultural broadcasting there is no question. It is hoped that future arrangements may make possible the continuance of such work and the further documentation of the history and life of the American people.” Many members of the RRP staff went on to work for the Office of War Information’s radio broadcasts, including Cohen, Harrell, Liss, Lomax, and Miller. MacLeish would become its assistant director. Wiesner went to work for the war effort as a researcher at MIT.

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The Archive in the Second World War, and the End of an Era

The U.S. involvement in World War II pushed folk music collecting to the side and forced the Archive to fight for government funding. After the Spivacke and Lomax requested an additional $15,000 to expand the Archive’s activities over the fiscal year 1943, Congress put its foot down.\footnote{The Appropriations hearing for fiscal year 1943, for which the $15,000 was asked, give little indication of the furor of which Lomax and MacLeish spoke. In it Congressman O’Neal asked MacLeish whether the $15,000 “was a practical thing right now, during this emergency,” to which MacLeish responded affirmatively that the song collecting had been useful in the Army’s morale program and that the “recrudescence of interest in American folk songs” was “a very gratifying thing.” \textit{“Legislative Branch Appropriation Bill, 1943; Hearings Before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, Seventy-seventh Congress, Second Session on the Legislative Branch Appropriation Bill, 1943, H.R. 6802,”} 19, 20, 23 February 1942 (Washington, D.C. United States Government Printing Office, 1942), 57–58.} Alan Lomax recalled the incident in a 1960 article he wrote called “Saga of a Folksong Hunter”:

Then came the day when a grass-roots Congressman, casually inspecting the Congressional Library’s Appropriation Bill, noted an item of $15,000 for further building up the collection for the Archive of American Folk Song. This gentleman thereupon built up a head of steam and proceeded to deliver an impassioned speech, demanding to know by what right his constituents’ money was being spent “by that long-haired radical poet, Archibald MacLeish, running up and down our country, collecting itinerant songs.” A shocked House committee rose to this national emergency. It not only cut the appropriation for the Archive out of the bill, but along with it a million dollars earmarked for the increase of the entire Library. Our national Library would have to get along without the purchase of books, technical journals, and manuscripts for a year—but at least that poet would also have to stop doing whatever he was doing with those “itinerant songs.”\footnote{Alan Lomax, “Saga of a Folksong Hunter,” \textit{HiFi/Stereo Review} 4/5 (May 1960): 40–46, reprinted in \textit{Alan Lomax: Selected Writings}, ed. Ronald D. Cohen (New York: Routledge, 2003), 176–77.}

MacLeish shot back in a speech delivered to the American Library Association (the same outfit that had opposed his appointment) in Milwaukee on 26 June 1942:
When an attempt was made in an ill-attended session of the House of Representatives this last spring to cut the appropriation of the Library of Congress to such a point that the national library of the United States would have been unable to buy new books beyond its regular continuations and subscriptions—an attempt which might have succeeded had not the House and Senate by common and non-partisan action reversed its initial success—when this attack was made upon a great symbol of learning, a great institution of scholarship, no public outcry was aroused. No public resentment was expressed even by those who might most readily have voiced resentment.\footnote{Archibald MacLeish, “The Revolt Of Man Against Himself,” speech delivered before the American Library Association, Milwaukee, 26 June 1942, \textit{Vital Speeches of the Day} 8/21 (1942): 665–67.}

Although the $15,000 appropriation for the Music Division was ultimately granted, Congress eliminated $3,200 that had been allotted for one of the Archive’s existing positions, and Alan Lomax felt himself to blame in part for the decision.\footnote{Spivacke wrote to Alan Lomax in May 1941 describing the current funding situation: “First of all let me give you the news both good and bad. The House passed our bill and included the $15,000 (\textit{all of it}) for recording but omitted the $3,200 position. The Librarian is trying to have it inserted by the Senate. They allowed me only two positions ($2,000 and $1,440). If that is all we get finally, I shall recommend that the $2,000 job, originally supposed to go to our reference section, be assigned to the Archive. We can then use your present position for an assistant who can also take dictation and typewrite. So we shall have plenty of money for recording (over $25,000 with what we get from the State Department) but our staff situation is only slightly improved. At any rate keep your fingers crossed until the Senate acts. But even if we lose there, I still have a few other plans which may work.” Letter from Spivacke to Alan Lomax, 27 May 1941, subfolder, “Spivacke, Harold to AL, 1941-05-27,” in folder “Correspondence, Lomax, Alan—1941, May,” American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, AFC 1933/001.}

Ultimately, neither he nor MacLeish would last very much longer at the Library. MacLeish was appointed the first director of the Office of Facts and Figures in 1942, then the assistant director of the Office of War Information, and subsequently, in December 1944, the Assistant Secretary of State.\footnote{Bartis, “A History of the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress,” 122–23.}

Alan Lomax also left the Archive for the Office of War Information in early October 1942, for a number of reasons, not the least of which was his increased involvement in radio broadcasting, as well as the cuts to the funding for folksong
collecting activities at the Archive.\textsuperscript{110} Lomax had not initially been opposed to the Archive’s involvement in pre-war effort. He had suggested to Spivacke in the summer of 1940 that he might send the sound truck into military camps to find talented singers, and that he would like to put together songbooks for the military camps, based on regional preferences (e.g., books for the West, the South, the Northeast, as well as a book for African American troops).\textsuperscript{111} Peter Bartis noted that “Curiously enough, it was Alan Lomax of all of the participants of the Radio Research Project who clearly promoted the functional application of the ‘documentary’ to the war effort.”\textsuperscript{112} Lomax’s enthusiasm was soon dashed, however, when funding for the Archive’s recording projects was gutted. According to Lomax biographer John Szwed,

\begin{quote}
Even before Alan returned to Washington… Spivacke wrote to tell him [on 11 July 1942] that the archive had not been budgeted for any additional money to make recordings for the following year, and any projects that Alan wanted to undertake would have to be related to the library’s war efforts. … Alan bitterly responded that he thought the democratic heritage of song should not be abandoned because of the war. More than ever, he insisted, a folklore program was crucial “for morale with teachers, musicians, Negroes, and people in the minority field.”\textsuperscript{113}
\end{quote}

Lomax lasted at the Archive for another three months, leaving for the OWI soon after MacLeish accepted the position as its assistant director. The move reflected both Lomax’s relationship with MacLeish and his understanding that the Archive no


\textsuperscript{111} Szwed, \textit{Alan Lomax}, 168–69.

\textsuperscript{112} Bartis, “A History of the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress,” 110.

\textsuperscript{113} Szwed, \textit{Alan Lomax}, 192.
longer supported him in the way it had in previous years. He would continue his
endeavors in folksong collecting and radio broadcasting under the aegis of the OWI
until May 1943, when he went on leave to work once again for CBS.\textsuperscript{114}

Lomax’s replacement at the Archive was Benjamin Botkin, who, after his
time as chief editor of the Library of Congress Project, was appointed Associate
Fellow in Folklore, and thereafter Resident Fellow in Folklore.\textsuperscript{115} Botkin was a
natural choice. However, his tenure was beset with many more problems than either
Gordon or the Lomaxes had had to face. The rationing of supplies during the war
years directly affected materials the Archive used to assist collectors in the field,
including aluminum, which had formerly served as the base for the instantaneous
discs used in the field. Furthermore, gasoline and tires, which allowed the sound
trucks to be in the field, were in short supply. Botkin lamented in an early annual
report, “Another year of war has continued to restrict the Archive of American Folk
Song from its peacetime activity of collecting folk songs in this country. It is
impossible to arrange for recording expeditions without an uninterrupted supply of

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 200–1.
\textsuperscript{115} The LC Annual report (1942) detailed Botkin’s duties as Resident Fellow: “In connection with their
review of the Library’s collections, the Resident Fellows of the Library of Congress have taken an
active part in bibliographical work. Dr. Benjamin A. Botkin, Resident Fellow of the Library of
Congress in Folklore, has had as his major project the preparation of a classed catalog of the folklore
holdings of the Library, which is designed to improve the accessibility of the collections and to lay the
groundwork for type and thematic classification of folklore and folk song.” “Annual Report of the
Government Printing Office, 1943), 44. Botkin remained Honorary Fellow in Folklore from the time of
his appointment to head the Archive until 1956. Bruce Jackson, “Benjamin A. Botkin (1901–1975),” in
\textit{America’s Folklorist: B. A. Botkin and American Culture}, ed. Lawrence Rodgers and Jerrold Hirsch
(Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 73.
gasoline and tires.\textsuperscript{116} The Archive, however, continued working closely with the Recording Laboratory. The Archive increased its duplication endeavors and produced a series of albums of folksongs culled from the Archive for wide public release, beginning in 1942, titled “Folk Music in the United States.”

During his time as head of the Archive of American Folk Song, Botkin continued as an active folklore scholar, writing, lecturing, and publishing, and serving as the president of the American Folklore Society. Botkin remained as chief of the AAFS until 1945, when he left to work on American folklore collections in the wake of the success of his 1944 collection, \textit{A Treasury of American Folklore}, which quickly became the bestselling folklore collection of all time. One of his final acts as head of the Archive was to pen a history of the AAFS titled “The Archive of American Folk Song: Retrospect and Prospect” for the Library’s \textit{Quarterly Journal of Current Acquisitions} (1945). Although the essay was written and published for Library staff, it stands as perhaps Botkin’s greatest statement about the purpose and trajectory of the Archive, and its larger place in U.S. culture. As such, it requires careful examination and exegesis. Given the article’s timing as his final statement as Archive chief at the end of a long and costly war, it reads as both a compendium of the lessons he had learned over decades of folklore research, and as a call-to-arms for the future of folklore and folk music research. Its sense of urgency is palpable.

Botkin argued, above all, for Engel’s and Gordon’s original vision of a “great, centralized” repository for folk music and folklore, “organized on a professional basis, to prevent duplication, waste, and misdirected effort.” Only by studying folk music and folklore on a large-scale regional, if not national basis, Botkin argued, could an adequate comparative study be made, and these studies must be collaborative:

What was formerly an individual task, haphazard and piecemeal, subject to all the whims and perversities of private collectors who came to look upon folk song as their private property, should be collective, co-operative, and comprehensive, with as short a distance as possible between collector and utilization.117

Botkin warned that the Archive should not stray from the functionalist purpose that he, Lomax, and Spivacke had so fervently pursued and become a mausoleum for the folk music and lore of the United States: “Because the notion of an archive, like that of a folk song, is inseparable from most people’s minds from the idea of the past, an archive of folk song is under a double threat from the archaic and archaeological.”118

Recordings, Botkin believed, were the key to authentic fieldwork. Mere textual transcriptions of song texts and melodies left too much room for error and improper interpretation. Botkin argued, “direct sound recording is the only scientific, accurate and complete recording, since by reproducing the individual performance and preserving the traditional style it gives flesh and blood to the otherwise dry bones of text and tune.”119 He reiterated his stance on the primacy of recordings in an article

118 Ibid., 61.
119 Ibid., 66.
in the April 1943 issue of the *Music Educator’s Journal*, which read as essentially an advertisement for a new series of recordings published by the Archive:

For a number of years the Archive of American Folk Song in the Library of Congress has been receiving requests from teachers for pressings of its folksong records. With the publication of six albums of Folk Music of the United States from Records in the Archive of American Folk Song, a selection of the best of the country’s largest folk-song collection is now made available. At last the Archive of American Folk Song realizes its ambition to give back to the people what it has taken from them. … As authentic and authoritative field recordings of … performers in their own environment, the records have a documentary value. … They bring us into direct contact with the people—workers, prison inmates, housewives, and school children—white, Negro, and Indian—who made these records.”

But getting to the bottom of who these performers were was still a point of concern for Botkin. He took the opportunity in this final publication as head of the AAFS, “The Archive of American Folk Song: Retrospect and Prospect,” to point the way forward for folklore and music scholarship. This new trajectory would take collectors away from the mere hunting-and-gathering expeditions that had filled the Archive to date, and lead them toward a new type of ethnographic research about the people who made and performed the music, one that was more in keeping with the Boasian anthropological tradition:

We also need to know much more about the history of individual songs and singers, why people sing, how they learn their songs and why songs live and die. Only in this way can we learn to use folk songs, not only for greater understanding of American life but also for greater joy of living.”

Botkin concluded his essay with an impassioned plea for the Archive’s future, its vitality, and its integrity, which is worth quoting in full:

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What impresses us most about American folk music as we listen to these Archive records is its tremendous vitality and variety, an upsurge of energy, a complexity and multiplicity of content, function, and style that belies the common assumption of the simplicity of folk song and that reflects the diversity of American life. This is the American rhythm, the American declamation, the American experience. It is a rich and wonderful heritage, and the job of preserving it and making it better known and more widely understood and enjoyed calls for a program of popular education in which the Archive should lead rather than follow. The philosophy of this program of acquainting America with its wealth of oral tradition is a simple and practical one—to give back to the people what belongs to them.  

Recording Technology and the Archive of American Folk Song

The development of the recording technology between the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the Second World War mirrors in many ways the history of the Archive itself. Although field recording technology had been around for nearly half a century when Robert Gordon and Carl Engel established the AAFS, advances in the machines and the fidelity and stability of the recording media allowed the Archive to operate in ways that would have been impossible earlier in the century.

The earliest recording technology used in the field was the phonograph, patented in the United States in 1877 by Thomas Edison. Recording into wax cylinders, the machine became the go-to recording technology used by anthropologists, ethnologists, and music researchers well into the 1920s. Among the

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122 The phonograph was invented at nearly the same time by two individuals: Thomas Edison in the United States and Charles Cros in France, though Edison is the person most recognized for the phonograph’s invention. For more information about the history of the phonograph and its impact on the history of recorded sound, see for example, Erika Brady, *A Spiral Way: How the Phonograph Changed Ethnography* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999); David L. Morton, Jr., *Sound Recording: The Story of a Technology* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); and Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
first music collectors to use the machine was anthropologist Jesse Walter Fewkes, who recorded Zuni and Passamaquoddy Indians in 1889. Many other collectors soon followed, including Frank Hamilton Cushing, Frances Densmore, and Alice Cunningham Fletcher of the Bureau of American Ethnology (of which Fewkes was the director), as well as Franz Boas and his students at Columbia University.

The effects of the phonograph on scholarly research, in particular research on music, cannot be understated. The use of cylinder recordings became a pillar in the discipline of comparative musicology, led by the Berlin School of Erich von Hornbostel, Curt Sachs, and Carl Stumpf, who in turn influenced music scholars through the first half of the twentieth century, including the collectors discussed in this study. Archives of cylinder recordings began appearing by the end of the 1890s, the most significant of which was the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv, founded in 1899 by the staff of the Berlin School, in particular Stumpf and von Hornbostel. Many other scholars worked or researched at the Archive, including George Herzog, Henry Cowell, Marius Schneider, and Mieczyslaw Kolinski. Of particular importance to the status and reach of the Archive, as well as to the history of music scholarship as a whole, was von Hornbostel’s Demonstration Collection of cylinder recordings dating between 1900 and 1913.

The advantages of the phonograph cylinder recorders were many: they were relatively cheap, portable, and easy to repair; they were designed for instant playback after recording, which alleviated any need for post-recording processing; and they were driven by a spring-wound motor, which meant that there was no need for batteries or electrical current, though the operator needed to wind the machine every two or three minutes.\(^{124}\) Moreover, the cylinders could be shaved down and reused, which proved to be a boon for the resourceful collector. According to cylinder recorder historian Erika Brady, “Only the surviving cylinders attest to the fact that phonographic recordings provided documentation for much of the most significant anthropological and folkloristic research from the time of its invention through the second decade of the century, continuing to prove its value even today.”\(^{125}\)

Folksong collectors at the beginning of the twentieth century, such as Cecil Sharp and John A. Lomax were also using phonograph cylinder machines in the field. Lomax later recalled that he used an Edison phonograph, which “weighed about fifty pounds,” to collect cowboy songs “during vacations and week-ends during the years 1907 and 1910,” transcriptions of which he included in his collection *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (1910).\(^{126}\) “The first, now antiquated, portable recording machines were looked at as marvelous thirty years ago,” Lomax wrote in an essay on the history of field recordings. “The singers, especially in the Far West, were

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\(^{126}\) Lomax, “Field Experiences with Recording Machines,” 57.
delighted and amazed as the screechy representations of their voices issued from the recording machines.”¹²⁷ The machine’s capacity for instant playback was, according to Lomax, “helpful and even necessary in securing cooperation of the timid or indifferent [performer].”¹²⁸

Given that these early machines existed before the advent of “electrical recording”—i.e., before the advent of microphones—Lomax also needed to carry along a “large horn through which the singers sang their songs, and also a head phone which [the performers] put over their ears to hear their singing brought back to them [upon playback].”¹²⁹ Lomax noted, however, that his horn was “never popular” and that he “lost many a song because the cowboys didn’t look the looks of it.”¹³⁰ Visual aesthetics aside, the sound quality of the phonograph recordings left a lot to be desired. The “squeaky reproductions,” as Lomax described them, which “would today [ca. 1938] sound laughable,” were often incredibly noisy and not suited for much more than a tool for transcriptions. Moreover, the wax cylinders were quite delicate—it took little force to break a cylinder, and many recordings were lost due to a minimal amount of handling.

By the end of the First World War phonographs had largely fallen out of fashion in the commercial music market. By the end of the nineteenth century the gramophone disc, as pioneered by Emile Berliner and later Eldridge Johnson and the Victor Company, was beginning to surpass cylinders in popularity among consumers,

¹²⁷ Ibid., 58.
¹²⁸ Ibid.
¹²⁹ Ibid.
¹³⁰ Ibid.
in particular because the discs were easier to use, maintain, and store. Furthermore, they were prerecorded, which, according to Erika Brady, was “a shrewd self-protective business move” on the part of record company executives because “the disc format eliminated the possibility of home recording, the market for prerecorded discs would be assured, protected from uncontrolled duplication.”

Even Edison, who had championed the phonograph cylinder, relented and began issuing the Edison Diamond Disc in 1912, though the company continued to produce blank and prerecorded cylinders after it stopped making machines to play them.

Phonographic cylinder recorders, however, remained popular among music collectors well into the 1920s for a number of reasons. First and foremost, there was no viable alternative: disc recorders for personal use did not really emerge until the late 1920s to the early 1930s. But because the commercial market had moved on from phonographs, collectors could find them for relatively cheap in second-hand stores. Additionally, although companies such as Edison had stopped producing machines, they continued to make blank cylinders for personal use, which ensured that collectors and other consumers could continue to use their machines for personal recording.

The development of disc-recording technology for non-commercial, non-professional recordings was slow to emerge for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the process of recording an producing discs in the first place. For traditional, commercial disc recordings, one would record onto a wax master, which

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would then be processed by an electroplating procedure from which copies could be made. This intermediary step of processing and plating wax masters was prohibitively expensive; and only record companies that had the means to make the record production process a fiscally viable option. In the era before electrical recording and microphones (pre-1925), the fidelity of disc-recording technologies was extremely poor. Recording technology historian Michael Biel notes that “whereas acoustical instantaneous systems were little more than toys, electrical instantaneous recording was eventually developed to a point where it replaced wax as a medium for mastering.”

Instantaneous disc-recording machines in the late 1920s and early 1930s solved both the problem of the expensive intermediary step of processing the discs and the issue of sound quality, though this latter aspect took some years to “perfect,” and even then, produced a new set of problems. The earliest instantaneous discs were aluminum discs that were either pre-grooved or entirely smooth with a light wax coating to reduce friction. The discs were embossed (rather than etched or scratched) with a heavy metal stylus and could be played back immediately, but needed a fibre

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132 According to recording technology historian David Morton, the preparation of a wax master for duplication could cost between $100 and $150 in the 1930s (up to $2,500 in 2015), with subsequent copies costing between $1.50 and $2.00 per disc ($25–$35 in 2015). Morton, Jr., Sound Recording, 97.
(casin) or thorn needle for playback. These needles were gentle enough to reproduce sound without damaging the disc, but were too delicate to last for more than a few playings. In fact, these needles might not even last the length of one side of a longer 33-1/3 disc. Furthermore, these bare metal discs could be quite noisy, though markedly better than the sound of a cylinder recording.

The major innovation in instantaneous disc recording technology that allowed it to become the standard for the recording and radio industries was the development of coatings for the discs around 1934. Noting the importance of the development of coated discs, sound recording historian and audio preservationist Michael Biel remarked, “Although the aluminum and celluloid disc systems were beginning to make an impact … between 1930 and 1934, it was not until the coated disc was introduced in 1934 that instantaneous recording blossomed. … The perfection of the coated disc was a true saga of ingenuity and persistence of individuals and small companies,” one which “required the overcoming of vast technical problems.” The “vast technical problems” largely had to do with finding an appropriate coating for the discs. The earliest attempts involved all types of materials, including acetate and celluloid, many of which were not particularly stable, and in the case of the celluloid, highly flammable.

The first company to develop a coated disc that both had the quality of sound necessary for recording and playback, and had the durability needed to make the discs

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last beyond a few listenings was the Presto Corporation of New York City.\textsuperscript{137} After some years of experimentation (and one death) founders Morris Gruber and George Saliba came across a cellulose nitrate lacquer that would eventually replace all other coatings and make the bare aluminum disc obsolete, though these new lacquer discs would still be given the misnomer “acetate,” a term that persists to date.\textsuperscript{138} These new lacquer discs, which still used aluminum for its base, offered the advantages of drastically reduced surface noise, and could be played back with sapphire or steel needles, which although were more durable than fibre or thorn needles, they also would wear out and would need to be re-sharpened or replaced frequently. Alan Lomax later recalled that “acetate was harder to engineer than aluminum, because you had not only to keep the mike focused and monitor the volume, but also to prevent the acetate chip from piling up under the recording needle. However the

\textsuperscript{137} Founded in 1934 by radio technicians and recording engineers Morris Gruber and George Saliba (with partners Aaron Benjamin, and Benjamin’s son-in-law Mr. Sholes) in 1934, the Presto Recording Corporation of New York quickly became one of the leading manufacturers of this fledgling technology.\textsuperscript{137} Their ascendancy was due in no small part to Saliba, who was an early, and vocal, proponent of home disc recording, publishing in 1932 a sixty-two page “treatise” on the subject (George J. Saliba’s \textit{Home Recording and All About It: A Complete Treatise on Instantaneous Recording, Microphones, Recorders, Amplifiers, Commercial Machines, Servicing, Etc.,} Radio-Craft Library, No. 10 [New York: Gernsback Publications, 1932]. The publication was a compilation of eleven articles on various aspects of disc-recording technology that Saliba had written previously for the publication.) The Presto company existed until 1956, when it was sold to Unitronics Corporation NY, then merging to Bogen-Presto. For a history of the Presto company, see “The Presto History Page,” http://www.televar.com/grshome/Presto.htm; “Presto Recording Corporation,” \textit{Museum of Magnetic Sound Recording} website, http://museumofmagneticsoundrecording.org/ManufacturersPresto.html; and “History of the Radio Manufacturer Presto Recording Corporation, New York,” Radiomuseum.org, http://www.radiomuseum.org/dsp_hersteller_detail.cfm?company_id=8354.

tracks were much quieter and best of all, every side could hold [up to] fifteen minutes of sound.\footnote{Lomax, \textit{The Land Where the Blues Began}, xi. Lomax was almost certainly referring to the use of 16” transcription discs, which he refers to later in the book during his discussion of recording Muddy Waters.}

Disc-cutting machines, for both lacquer and uncoated discs, required a stronger motor than would be found in a regular record player that had enough torque to emboss or engrave the disc. These machines generally also had separate cutting and playback arms, which both accommodated the weight needed for recording onto a disc as well as alleviated the need to switch the stylus between recording and playback. In addition to the standard middle hole in a record, discs and disc-cutting machines employed at least one additional hole and post, which helped to stabilize the disc and provide a constant pressure and even cut. As the disc was cut, a thin layer of lacquer would be produced (called, depending on the medium and individual describing it, a “cut,” “chip” “thread,” “swaf” or “swarf”), which had to be cleared away so as to prevent the cutting head from getting stuck or knocked out of its groove. Moreover, this byproduct of the cutting process was particularly flammable. In some cases machines were equipped with a small brush or vacuum attachment that would keep a clear cutting path for the needle and would keep the groove clean for playback.

Dozens of companies produced recordable discs from the 1930s onward, from Audiodisc to Zenith, with names such as DuoDisc (by Duotone), Duralite (Musicraft), Green Seal (Presto), Marvel Voice, PermaDisk (Federal Recording Co.), Tru-Kut,
Speak-O-Phone, and Voice-O-Graph. The standard recording speed for these discs was 78 rpm, though some machines also had a 33 1/3 rpm speed, which would allow the user to make longer recordings, though with a loss of fidelity. Discs came in a wide range of sizes, though 10” and 12” were the most common, with 16” discs being the industry standard for broadcast radio.

The amount that one could fit on a disc depended on a number of factors, including the size of the disc and the speed at which the machine was operated (78 or 33 1/3 rpm). Presto founder George Saliba noted in a brochure that a “12-inch 78 rpm record plays 4 1/2 minutes [per side], while the 12-inch 33 1/3 record plays a full ten minutes. The 16-inch record will play 15 minutes.”

The ideal recording speed for music was 78 rpm, as the increased speed offered greater fidelity. Collectors typically used the slower 33 1/3 speed for recording longer events that might not suffer from the lack of recording quality, as in the case of interviews, speeches, sermons, and camp meetings (as in the case of the Todd–Sonkin migrant worker camp recordings). Depending on the type of disc, the manufacturer, and the speed at which the recording was made, discs could be recorded either from the outside in, or the inside out.

Aluminum remained the base of choice for most disc manufacturers, though they experimented with other materials as well, including solid gelatin, ceramic, steel,

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140 Saliba, *Home Recording and All About It*, 53.
141 Saliba recommended that all 33 1/3 recordings be recorded from the inside of the disc, although not too close to the label as the revolutions per minute and needle speed suffered the closer the needle was to the center of the disc. He does note that the slower speed “entails a few more problems than 78 R.P.M. recording.” Ibid.
The use of some of these alternative materials, such as solid gelatin and ceramic, were simply part of the time of early experimentation with the medium. The move away from aluminum, however, came as a result of the run-up to the Second World War in the United States, when, by early 1941, aluminum production had become tightly controlled. Alternative bases at this time included fibreboard, steel, and glass, each of which had its own set of problems. Fibreboard was, of course, the least stable of the three, prone to warping, bending, and therefore, flaking of the lacquer coating. These discs were generally used only for novelty purposes, for radio reference discs, and for providing a copy of a field recording to a performer, as some collectors for the Archive did. Steel was also not a viable option from the beginning, in particular because it was magnetic, and therefore nearly unusable on many machines with a magnetic playback head; steel also did not hold the lacquer very well. Michael Biel noted that there were some uses for steel discs, however: “[they] flourished for home use on amateur equipment because most of these machines used crystal heads which did not suffer from this problem [of magnetism].”

Glass, on the other hand, did have some advantages over other base materials; it provided a smoother surface than aluminum did for adhering the lacquer (though over time it had a tendency to shed the lacquer), and it did not have the same

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145 Ibid., 1036.
propensity for warping or bending as did aluminum. Glass was, however, much more prone to break, and was not nearly as roadworthy or useful for field recordings as aluminum discs.\textsuperscript{146} The Archive dealt with this problem firsthand on at least two occasions. In the summer of 1941, the Archive gave Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin glass discs for recording in migrant camps in California. Some of these discs inevitably broke, the result of which was the loss of the entirety of the Mexican migrant music that they recorded. Alan Lomax also had some missteps with glass discs, writing Jerome Wiesner in early September 1941 that, “the glass records are pretty fragile. Three or four have been cracked by being bumped around in the car and one of the best records, I found today, was broken right through the middle. Perhaps we can repair it or help it in such a fashion that we can cover up the crack.”\textsuperscript{147}

The Use of Disc-Cutting Machines in the 1930s

Because of their cost and relative ease of use, instantaneous discs quickly became a godsend for many industries that employed sound recordings. Broadcast radio was chief among these industries, and although it was initially slow to embrace the technology and move away from the live radio shows that had made the medium popular throughout the 1920s and 30s, the use of discs quickly began to dominate the medium. Stations soon discovered that they could produce programs cheaply and

\textsuperscript{146} For a discussion of alternate bases for instantaneous discs, see ibid., 1034–37.
\textsuperscript{147} Letter from Alan Lomax to Jerome Wiesner, 5 September 1941, in Cohen, ed., \textit{Alan Lomax, Assistant in Charge}, 240.
distribute them widely through the use of 16” “transcription” discs, which, because of the size and recording speed (generally 33-1/3 rpm), could accommodate long programs. Stations also used discs to record the programming they aired. In some cases these “air checks” were used for archival purposes, but in other cases as proof for paid sponsors that their advertisements were indeed being broadcast. One famous instance in which a live event was broadcast, with copies sent to affiliates across the nation was the crash of the Hindenburg on 6 May 1937.\textsuperscript{148} What makes this recording worth noting is that the sound of the impact was captured on the disc itself. As the sound waves from the impact reach the recording machine, one is able to hear the cutting needle dig into the lacquer, thus causing a muffling of the recording for some seconds before the engineer is able to lift the stylus and commence recording again.

By the end of the 1930s, disc-recording technology for home or personal use was also becoming common. Large mail order companies such as Sears Roebuck (Silvertone), Montgomery Ward (Airline), and Lafayette Radio Corporation (which distributed machines by companies such as Wilcox-Gay, Presto, and Rek-O-Kut), and other electronics companies including Packard Bell (Phono-Cord) and Motorola produced non-professional machines designed for the non-specialist consumer.\textsuperscript{149} During the Second World War, personal recordings became a popular method for communicating with troops overseas. In fact, some companies began producing special machines such as the Wilcox-Gay Coin Recordio-Gram or International

\textsuperscript{148} For a discussion of the crash, and what really happened with the disc, see Michael Biel’s email correspondence at http://jeff560.tripod.com/hindenburg.html.

\textsuperscript{149} Brock-Nannestad, “The Lacquer Disc for Immediate Playback,” 25.
Mutoscope Reel Company’s “Voice-O-Graph Automatic Voice Recorder,” which were similar in many respects to a photo booth. For a mere twenty-five cents a person could speak whatever he or she felt into a telephone receiver and have it saved for posterity on a cardboard disc. For an additional five cents the concerned relative or would-be recording star could purchase a “handy mailing envelope,” also provided by the machine.\(^{150}\)

**Field Work, Disc Technology, and the Archive of American Folk Song**

The advent of disc-recording technology had a major impact on the act of field recording. Although discs were far from perfect in terms of their fidelity, stability, and longevity, they were a vast improvement over wax cylinders from the first part of the century. Alan Lomax reflected on the transition from cylinder to disc recording in 1949, on the eve of the use of tape machines for field recordings:

> Until the early thirties musicologists struggled with a system of notation unsuited to exotic musical systems or else endured the nerve-shattering surface of the cylindrical record. Nevertheless, Hornbostel, Sachs, and others gathered material that was suitable for study, if not for listening. The appearance in the early thirties of the portable electric recorder, which engraved with a diamond point on aluminum disc, greatly stimulated field recording, Surface scratch was still present, but at least the amplifiers produced a realistic musical sound.\(^{151}\)

It was the fidelity that disc recording provided—the realistic musical sound—that provided the opportunity for not only studying the folksongs collected, but also for

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distributing the songs publicly through commercial releases. Although the field recordings were not nearly as listenable as commercial recordings from record companies, they were good enough to release, and the extramusical noise and conversations captured on the discs lent an air of authenticity to the recording and invited the listener, for a moment, into the field. Alan Lomax noted that these field recordings, with their idiosyncrasies and mistakes, offered a product “that no commercial recording company can ever hope to achieve.”

It was not until the mid-1930s, however, that the Archive possessed suitable machines for recording in the field, though there had been a number of attempts to acquire such equipment, often with frustrating results. The first person to use a disc machine at the Archive was Robert Gordon in 1932, shortly before his departure, borrowing for a time an Amplion recorder in New York to make field recordings and create duplicate copies of his cylinders for the Archive.

Around the same time, John Lomax attempted to procure such a machine for a recording trip he had been planning with his son Alan throughout the South. Lomax eventually tapped Walter C. Garwick, a former engineer from the Fairchild electronics company, to design a machine, because Garwick promised it would be “smaller, lighter, better, and cheaper than anyone else’s.” Although it was cheaper

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152 From Alan Lomax’s instructions to field workers, see letter from Alan Lomax to Charles Todd, 20 July 1940, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=afcts&fileName=cor001/cor001.db&recNum=3.
154 In the fall of 1932, shortly before his official association with the Library of Congress, John Lomax had attempted, unsuccessfully, to get an Ediphone cylinder machine on loan from the Edison Company.
than other machines ($450), it did not live up to any of the other promises. According to Lomax biographer Nolan Porterfield, “Garwick’s machine … was an immediate disappointment. … it weighed over 300 pounds, in contrast to the one hundred pounds or less that Garwick had promised, and initial tests in a laboratory at Louisiana State University were unsatisfactory. A week later the machine was still not working properly; as soon as they got one thing fixed, another conked out.”

“Junk” was what the University of Texas professor whom John Lomax had look at the machine called it, and “a low order of junk at that.”

The story of this recording trip in the summer of 1933 and the details about how the Lomaxes had to return to using a cylinder machine while he waited for its arrival, and how the Lomaxes “converted” their car into a mobile recording studio—by ripping out the back seat and filling the entire back of the car with upwards of 500 pounds of equipment (the machine itself weighed over 300 pounds)—has long since passed into legend.

In exchange for the recordings he made on his trip. The Edison Company was shutting down its operations in the field of phonographs and recordings, however, so a loaner machine was out of the question, though Lomax was not interested. He appealed to both the American Council of Learned Societies and RCA Victor without luck. At an impasse, he decided to ask the Library of Congress for advice. Upon learning that Gordon’s Amplion recording machine had been sold, Lomax suggested that the Music Division have a portable machine built, which he would use in the field in exchange for copies of the recordings. Lomax ended up consulting with Garwick. Porterfield explained that one of the reasons it was so difficult to get the kind of machine that the Archive wanted was because “the technology—disc records that could be played back immediately upon recording, from equipment that was simple and easy to carry—was in its infancy in 1933, and almost no one had envisioned the use for which he intended it. After some months of wrangling with Garwick for him to finish the machine, it was finally ready by the middle of July 1933. See Porterfield, *The Last Cavalier*, 294–95, 297, 299, 301.

156 John Lomax wrote of this trip: “I remember well the first electrically driven machine that I operated in 1933. The amplifier weighed more than one hundred pounds; the turntable case weighed another one hundred; two Edison batteries weighed seventy-five pounds each. The microphone, cable, the tools, etc. accounted for sufficient weight to make the total five hundred pounds. The different cases were bulky, unwieldy, and hard to handle. In order to carry them in my car I tore out the back seat and installed the different parts in a specially built-in wooden framework. The two big batteries were
Perhaps the more important point to be made, however, is the underlying story, which is ultimately about the struggle to find an adequate disc-recording machine in the early 1930s.

John Lomax recounted his many frustrating experiences with recording machines in the field in an article published in a 1937 issue of the *Southern Folklore Quarterly* that was dedicated to the “Report of the Committee on Folksong of the Popular Literature Section of the Modern Language Association of America.”

Much had changed since his aforementioned field trip in July 1933. By 1936 the Archive had been able to purchase its own machine. Lacquer discs had supplanted bare aluminum discs. Machines were considerably lighter and more portable. And perhaps most importantly—at least in terms of the Archive’s budget—the machines were a lot less expensive. Lomax noted that current machines, which recorded “on aluminum discs, the groove in the plate being pressed in or embossed,” were dangerous. On one of our field trips the car overturned, and as a result my son got acid burns and lost a suit of clothes.” Lomax, “Field Experiences with Recording Machines,” 58–59. Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell place the weight at 315 pounds; John Lomax at 350 pounds (though 500 pounds with the microphone, the cables, and any necessary tools); and Alan Lomax at closer to 500 pounds. See, respectively, Charles K. Wolfe and Kip Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 111–13; Alan Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), xi; and Lomax, “Field Experiences with Recording Machines,” 57–60.

Lomax shared the issue with the likes of George Herzog, Reed Smith, Arthur Kyle Davis, Jr., and Phillips Barry, and the list of people name checked in the issue, whether in the acknowledgements section or as part of the editorial board reads as a who’s who of folksong and folklore study at the time: Martha Beckwith, H. M. Belden, Ruth Benedict, Ralph S. Boggs, Frank C. Brown, Robert W. Gordon, Mellinger Henry, Arthur Palmer Hudson, Sigurd Hustvedt, George Lyman Kittredge, Louise Pound, Archer Taylor, and Stith Thompson, among others. Alton Morris, who recorded songs alongside the Florida FWP, was the journal’s editor. “Report of the Committee on Folksong of the Popular Literature Section of the Modern Language Association of America,” *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (June 1937).

“improved in many particulars [over previous machines], with bulk decreased by one-half, the entire weight with full equipment being less than one hundred and fifty pounds—a reduction of seventy per cent in weight within three years.”\textsuperscript{159}

The Archive and the Lomaxes had in their possession during this time at least two Presto machines (a model K6 and a model Y), and a Sound Specialties Company’s SoundScriber machine, dubbed the “Thompson” after the company’s president Lincoln Thompson.\textsuperscript{160} Each company’s machine had its own set of problems, however. Alan Lomax complained that the Prestos, though lightweight and easy to use, and “superb” in their recordings, were ultimately “flimsy” in their construction.\textsuperscript{161} Moreover, it was still simply too big. He wrote Spivacke in 1938, “If we buy Presto, strongly urge them to cut down on overall size. There is no sense in

\textsuperscript{159} Lomax, “Field Experiences with Recording Machines,” 59. (A footnote in the article at this particular passage notes that at the time of publication, the Archive had purchased a machine that weighed less than 100 pounds, and cost $250.)

\textsuperscript{160} According to the Presto History Page, the Model Y “consisted of 87A amplifier and a 75A turntable. This unit was one of the earlier models in the line, and also remained through the history of the company. It sold for between $595 and $670 pre-1941, and for $737 post war.” (Another source puts the price at about $600 in 1939, see http://museumofmagneticsoundrecording.org/images/R2R/cat40AlliedBoat4.jpg). “The 87A amplifier was also available separate, and also as the 87B. The 87A had input for HiZ mikes, the 87B had transformers for lo Z mikes. the 87A was priced at $314, the 87B at $352.” From, “The Large Systems,” The Presto History Page, http://www.televar.com/grshome/ Presto1.html. The Presto History Page also describes the units in the “K” series of machines, including the K6, which the Archive owned; “The ‘K’ series was a very popular unit in the PRESTO catalog. It changed very little, especially in the basic design of the electronics, which used a pair of 45”s in push-pull output. The unit had an output of 10 watts. Major changes were from 78 only in the K6, to 2 speed, and then a 45 speed adapter for the model K10. There was an adapter with a second turntable and shaft which would stand on top of the K turntable, and with a second playback arm on a pedestal, would enable duplicate records to be made. This locked the turntables together, and no wow was introduced as the speed was locked together. The K series remained in the catalog from about 1936 to the demise of the company.” From, “Portable Recorders,” The Presto History Page, http://www.televar.com/grshome/Presto2.html.

\textsuperscript{161} Alan Lomax’s desire—which never materialized—was for the Archive to develop its own machine: “a multiple purpose unit with one turntable that will run by spring and another by alternating current so that the recording may be done independently of electricity and easy transportation and in centers where batteries and AC current are available.”\textsuperscript{161} Letter from Alan Lomax to Laura Boulton, 21 October 1941, in Cohen, ed., \textit{Alan Lomax, Assistant in Charge}, 250–51.
their machine being as large as it is.”162 The Thompson machine had essentially been a work in progress from the beginning, although Lincoln Thompson proved to be more than eager to accommodate Spivacke and the Lomaxes with whatever changes they might have in mind.163

Thompson even offered to produce machines made especially for field recordings for the Archive’s use, which would be lighter and more portable (through separating the turntable and speaker) though still durable enough for use in the field.164 In July 1937, Thompson at Sound Specialties offered Lomax a gasoline

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162 Lomax also wrote Spivacke about the Presto and his complaints: “The Presto is not bad especially with sapphires on the new discs (superb I think) but we do need and require a better piece of equipment than they can offer. I suggest 16” 33 rev/sec turntable as a possibility and the best cutter they have. Also it may be difficult to plug a $15 mike (dynamic) into an expensive outfit. If we buy Presto, strongly urge them to cut down on overall size. There is no sense in their machine being as large as it is. Use of metal tubes, perhaps.” Letter Alan Lomax to Harold Spivacke, 17 August 1938, in Cohen, ed., Alan Lomax, Assistant in Charge, 96–97.

163 Lincoln Thompson, president of the Sound Specialties Company of Stamford, Connecticut, started the company in 1932, taking over the work in sound recording and reproduction from The Bristol Company. Thompson had worked for Victor for a number of years, and then worked in the film industry on the integration of sound onto film. The machine was essentially a work in progress and had its problems from the beginning, such as Alan Lomax’s complaint that it would not track on aluminum discs, and would skip grooves when the volume increased unexpectedly. Thompson seemingly was interested in improving the machines as problems arose, as Alan Lomax noted in a letter to Putnam in 1936 that Thompson had made a number of improvements to the cutting head, and that “the machine makes the highest quality aluminum records I have yet heard.” Letter from Alan Lomax to Herbert Putnam, 21 December 1936, in Cohen, ed., Alan Lomax, Assistant in Charge, 16.

164 Thompson was also a businessman, however, and the Archive could provide him with money and exposure. Although Thompson was ambivalent about entering into the field recording market—which may or may not have been an avenue for growth—he was certainly willing to experiment. In a letter to Spivacke in December 1937, Thompson articulated his interest in “the problems of the field collector of music in remote regions,” offering to reconfigure the machines he had been working on to reduce their weight to about forty-five pounds, with the provision that the loudspeaker would be enclosed in a separate cabinet, which would weigh about fifteen pounds. Although Thompson noted that he was busy with his regular machines, and could not foresee much of a market for such a machine, he was willing to build one provided the Archive would purchase it. Letter Lincoln Thompson to Harold Spivacke, 11 December 1937, in subfolder “Sound Specialties Co. to Spivacke, Harold, 1937-12-11,” in folder “Lomax, Alan, Correspondence, 1937, July,” AFC 1933/001. Recording machines offered by Thompson at Sound Specialties: SoundScriber University type machine, $450 (cost of turntable alone, $165), in two cases, including a Bursh sound cell microphone, weight, and diamond cutting stylus for aluminum discs, weight: approximately 115 pounds, 12” turntable at 78 rpm only; SoundScriber Professional type recording machine, $500, identical to the University type machine, except that it had
engine to power their machine for $80. Thompson called “simple” the gas generator “simple” to use, but acquiesced that “it is not quiet enough to operate it near the microphone, it can be [placed] in the next room, in a car, etc.” Later that year, Thompson wrote another letter, this time to Spivacke, in which he reiterated his pitch for the gasoline generator, stating that it was “a better answer than the storage battery and converter,” because they used only “about a gallon of gas a day,” were “simple and foolproof,” could be run with an extension cord “from a couple of hundred feet [away] if wanted,” and weighed seventy-two pounds, which was the weight of a twelve-volt battery alone. Lomax and Spivacke never went with Thompson’s gas-powered alternative; instead they continued to use batteries and generators.

The AAFS and Assisting Collectors in the Field

a 16” turntable and could run at both 78 and 33-1/3 rpm; SoundScriber Junior type recording machine, $285, with Astatic duo-diaphragm microphone, 10” speaker, Audak cutting head, lower-powered amplifier, SoundScriber oil-damped head (as used in more expensive machines) an additional $20. Duplication machines for creating copies of discs and wax cylinders (Thompson recommended a dual-turntable system: Professional type recording machine (described above), $500; additional turntable, $195; Amplifier panel for switching between sources, $90–95 (depending on whether Edison cylinder machine or Dictaphone); Special preamplifier with filters for older sound sources, $175. Letter from Lincoln Thompson to Harold Spivacke, 23 December 1937, in subfolder “Sound Specialties Co. to Spivacke, Harold, 1937-12-23,” in folder “Lomax, Alan, Correspondence, 1937, July,” AFC 1933/001. 165 Letter from Lincoln Thompson to Alan Lomax, 22 July 1937, American Folklife Center, folder “Lomax, Alan, Correspondence, 1937, July,” AFC 1933/001. 166 Letter Lincoln Thompson to Harold Spivacke, 11 December 1937, in subfolder “Sound Specialties Co. to Spivacke, Harold, 1937-12-11,” in folder “Lomax, Alan, Correspondence, 1937, July,” AFC 1933/001. 167 The Archive also used a BC-AC Genemotor. Letter from Alan Lomax to Harold Spivacke, 26 October 1939, in Cohen, ed., Alan Lomax, Assistant in Charge, 149. Spivacke stated in a memorandum to Librarian of Congress Putnam that “110 volt AC current not available in many of the remote areas, so a power converter and batteries were often necessary,” with the Presto converter (12 volt DC to 110 volt AC) costing $54.40. The collectors would also need two “150 ampere-hour storage capacity batteries for the converter.” Memorandum from Harold Spivacke to Herbert Putnam, 14 August 1937, American Folklife Center, folder “Lomax, Alan Correspondence, 1937, August,” AFC 1933/001.
The Archive’s recording equipment-lending and disc-duplication policies were crucial to their desire to “accumulate a representative collection of American folk music on records.” But the Lomaxes, with their administrative duties and own views on the types of music they wanted to record, could only do so much. By placing machines into the hands of “competent” collectors, the Archive was able to serve its collection development needs, particularly in terms of reaching locales and performers that it had not yet recorded. In a memorandum to prospective collectors, Alan Lomax detailed the Archive’s policy on loaning machines:

Recently the Archive has adopted a policy of loaning its equipment to competent collectors for short periods of time, furnishing them with materials and duplicates of the records, in return for the master recordings. Usually the collector spends a good deal of money on his field trip and desires to publish the results of it under his own name. In such cases also the Archive has granted a reasonable and definite restriction on the records, enabling the local collector to publish his research. In most such cases we have insisted that the records remain available for duplication and use in their recorded form for educational and scientific purposes.168

Collectors were able to stipulate “reasonable and definite” restrictions on their recordings—from two to five years—in the event that they had plans to publish their research, with a possibility for renewal if publication had not yet occurred.169 (Further restrictions could be in place as well depending on the nature of the material, as in the case of recordings of popular songs under copyright, recordings of a sensitive nature regarding their content, or recordings performed by musicians who were under

169 Spivacke noted in a letter to George Palmer Putnam, “The restrictions on the use of many of the records have been placed on them by collectors and singers because of the lack of protection afforded such material by the current copyright laws.” Letter from Harold Spivacke to George Palmer Putnam, 29 July 1938, America Folklife Center, folder “Lomax, Alan—Correspondence, 1938, July” AFC 1933/001.
contract, such as the Archive’s recordings of Jelly Roll Morton, Aunt Molly Jackson, or Burl Ives.  

Because recording machines were in short supply, even after the Carnegie grant in 1939, Spivacke and Lomax had to be selective about which “competent collectors” warranted AAFS support. In a 1938 article describing the Archive’s goals and policies, Spivacke noted that the Library’s ability to lend out recording machines could not “be employed indiscriminately”: “Machines can only be lent to recognized authorities from whom the Archive may be assured of receiving an significant addition to its collection. Moreover, the Archive must exercise the necessary precaution in protecting its machines from damage at the hands of inexperienced operators.”

Few collectors had experience with these disc-recording machines, however, so Alan Lomax sent out a form letter to each collector with instructions on machine operation and proper cataloging information, as well as suggestions about ancillary materials to record (e.g., the tuning of instruments, interviews):

Enclosed you will find a letter of introduction and authorization from the Librarian and a set of operating instructions for the recording equipment from Jerome Weisner [sic]. In addition, I should like to make a few suggestions which will make your material more useful to the Archive. Most of these suggestions, I’m sure will be mere repetition, but if they’re followed exactly, the records can be much more easily catalogued.

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170 According to a list of restricted records in the AAFS’s collection such restricted records included the recordings of Lead Belly, Aunt Molly Jackson, W. C. Handy, Jelly Roll Morton, Burl Ives, Bascom Lamar Lunsford, as well as a number of various other recordings. “Restricted Records in the Archive of American Folk Song (Preliminary List)” American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

1. Give your trip a name, vis, “John Doe’s Expedition to Kalamazoo,” or something of the sort.

2. Number the records in the order they are recorded, writing or stamping the titles of your trip and the number of your particular recording on the top of each record envelope.

3. Scratch or write [on]/in the center of each side the letter A or B, thus identifying the record side.

4. The strips on each side should be Nos. 1, 2, 3, and etc. in the order of their cutting and each of these strips should be identified by giving the title of the song as the singer gives it (followed by the recordist’s title or other title), the name of the singer(s) with instrumentation, the place of the recording and the date. The slip cover, where such notations are generally made, should then look like this: A1—Barbara Allen, sung by John Doe with guitar and with fiddle by Jim Henry, Pasadena, N.Y. Dec. 6, 1844.

5. Naturally we hope that you will be able to furnish us with a great deal of additional material surrounding the recordings, both, in terms of careful field notes and interesting interviews recorded with the songs. You’ll find a questionnaire enclosed which has been used in the field to some extent. It contains a great many pertinent suggestions for questions. My personal opinion is that it is valuable to get the informant talking eloquently for himself, rather than interrupt him or push him with questions. The recording interview can be as significant as the song itself and is valuable as a fresh field document, especially, if the informant does not know that the interview is being recorded, and if he never learns it.

6. It is very important to record the tunings of all instruments which play a part in the music, to photograph the instruments and get the informant to explain how he plays it. In the case of unusual instruments, it would be worthwhile to make accurate drawings or send the instruments where they could be drawn to scale. If part singing is recorded, it would be a real contribution to record the parts in the harmony separately. This can be done by shifting the singers in front of the microphone.

7. As you know, valuable material is to be had from comparison of different versions of the same song from different regions. So also, are different performances of the same songs in the same community by different singers, or the same song by different members of the family, or the same song by the same performer at different times. Therefore, it is not so important to us that material be always rehearsed without a mistake or hesitation. The great beauty of field recordings is that performers take their own time and do things their
own way, feeling that if they make a mistake, they can try again. The results are such that no commercial recording company can ever hope to achieve. Even with the instructions, many of the collectors had little prior experience with the recording machines and did not know how to fix them when they broke down, which was a relatively frequent occurrence. The amount of equipment that these collectors needed while in the field was considerable: a machine, discs, needles, microphones, headphones, cables, and stands, and if necessary, batteries and a generator. Even the machine itself was a handful. Stetson Kennedy recalled that it was “more like a coffee table and so heavy that we needed two good men to carry it into the field and out on the railroad tracks and so on, and it was powered by two automobile batteries.” Charles Todd, as well, had difficulties with using the machine, stating that it was “a very primitive outfit. Sometimes [the needle] would

172 This letter, which dates from after the time that the Recording Laboratory was operational and Wiesner was chief engineer, was sent along to both Juan B. Rael of Stanford University and Charles Todd and Robert Sonkin for their migrant worker camp recordings in California. See Letter from Alan Lomax to Charles Todd, 20 July 1940, American Folklife Center, American Memory Project, Voices From the Dustbowl: The Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection, 1940–1941, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=afccts&fileName=cor001/cor001.db&recNum=3; also see, for a duplicate letter, Correspondence between Juan B. Rael and the Archive of American Folk Song/Music Division, Music and Culture of the Northern Rio Grande: The Juan B. Rael Collection, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/rael:@field%28DOCID+afcraelcor001%29.

173 The Archive loaned Stanford professor Juan B. Rael the following equipment, which was typical for a recording trip: 1 Presto 6K serial 279 recorder; 1 Eicor B1180 convertor; 1 Turner type 99 serial 2893 microphone; 2 Firestone type 2H storage batteries; 5 Sapphire needles 60’ Microphone extension; 60’ A.C. power cord extension; 1 Collapsible microphone stand; 1 Pair trimm head phones. Memorandum from Jerome Wiesner to Harold Spivacke, 27 June 1940, Correspondence between Juan B. Rael and the Archive of American Folk Song/Music Division, Music and Culture of the Northern Rio Grande: The Juan B. Rael Collection, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/rael:@field%28DOCID+afcraelcor001%29.

174 One of the major problems for the collectors was the lack of a consistent power source, particularly in remote or rural areas where a consistent AC current might not be available. Although the machines were equipped with batteries and AC/DC converters, there still could be problems with generating a consistent current, particularly as the battery charge waned.

stick, get stuck. It would do all kinds of strange things.”

176 Halpert, on the other hand, noted that “the Presto was a magnificent thing… it was not more than 75 or 80 pounds… this was a featherweight affair [compared with earlier recorders].”

Although Spivacke and Lomax desired to be as helpful as they could with providing collectors materials, the AAFS was still on a tight budget. Discs typically cost approximately 75 cents each (nearly $13 each in 2015) and sapphire needles cost $3.60 each (nearly $62 in 2015). Thus, it was necessary for Spivacke, Lomax, Seeger, and Botkin to encourage their collectors to be judicious about what they recorded, but they did not always succeed in explaining what they felt was worthy for inclusion in the AAFS’s holdings. In 1939, when Botkin and Seeger were consulting with the AAFS regarding all WPA-related folk music research projects, Seeger sent a confidential memorandum to Spivacke regarding the recordings that members of the Florida FWP had made. “Dr. Botkin and I felt that the records as a whole were not

177 Herbert Halpert, interview with Gerald Parsons, Peggy Farber, and Debora Kodish, 17 November 1978, Library of Congress, American Folklife Center, AFC 1979/024.
178 Memorandum from Jerome B. Wiesner to Harold Spivacke, 27 June 1940.
179 State director of the Florida FWP Carita Corse and her employees apparently had some difficulties getting started with the machine once they received it. She wrote the WPA administrator for Florida Roy Schroder that “When the machine was unpacked one tube was found to be broken. This was replaced. It was discovered that the whole machine and especially the traveling arm needed greasing—this improved the quality of records after cause was located. The steel cutting needles seemed to give clearer results than the sapphire needles, so these were used on the later records. The inside edge of the record seemed to be where sound recordings were least audible. Our operator reported that there should have been three small screws, rubber covered, to hold the record to the rubber mat. Only two screws arrived and they were no longer rubber covered. When Mr. [Alton] Morris arrives I will make a further report. Letter from Carita Doggett Corse to Harold Spivacke, 6 October 1939, Carita Doggett Corse Correspondence File, Florida Folklife from the WPA Collections 1937–1942, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/flwpa:@field(DOCID+afclfwpacor039).
giving us the best kind of material,” Seeger noted, stating that “Dr. Botkin’s remarks about ‘speaking as much as possible’ refers only to informants whose material is worth recording. The informant who indulges in a whole lot of trivia should either not be recorded at all or the cutting should be stopped (without letting him know). Above all, stuff that can be written just as well on paper should not be put on the record.”

The longevity of the discs was also in question at the time that the Archive was expanding its holdings. Spivacke, somewhat presciently, discussed the need for the “permanent preservation” of the discs, which he noted “involves more than mere protection against fire and theft. The materials used in their manufacture—wax cylinders, metal or “acetate” discs—are by no means permanent in their nature. A few dozen playings may remove completely any vestige of the recording.”

Spivacke continued,

It has not been possible, however, to place these records at the disposal of the many who have expressed interest in them because of the physical limitations of the recording materials used. These discs are made of aluminum or so-called acetate compounds which are suitable for immediate but not frequent playings without a noticeable impairment of their acoustical qualities. In the interests of preservation, therefore, it was decided to avoid using these discs until the Library should acquire the apparatus necessary for their duplication, so that only duplicates would be played and the originals set aside as reserve master records.

Duplication was of major importance for the AAFS, not only for preservation purposes, but also for ensuring that the Archive lived up to its end of the bargain with

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181 Spivacke,” Archive of American Folk-Song in the Library of Congress,” 34.
the collectors the AAFS staff assisted. Once collectors sent in their recordings to the AAFS, Spivacke, Lomax, and Wiesner duplicated the discs, and returned copies to the collectors (keeping the originals for the AAFS).\textsuperscript{183} The Archive had at its disposal two disc-recording machines and a phonograph machine (commercial disc player), which the AAFS staff would use to make duplications. Spivacke explained that for “duplicating purposes, the records are played on the phonograph, whose pickup is then connected with one of the recording machines. Although this apparatus may seem primitive, hundreds of records have been successfully duplicated by this method.”\textsuperscript{184} But the one disadvantage that the Archive had was that at times both disc-cutting machines could be in use for field recordings, which meant that disc duplications had to be temporarily discontinued.\textsuperscript{185}

\textsuperscript{183} For more on duplicating records, see “How to Make Duplicate Recordings,” in Saliba’s \textit{Home Recording and All About It}, 60–62.
\textsuperscript{184} Spivacke, ” Archive of American Folk-Song in the Library of Congress,” 35.
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
INTERLUDE

“The Place of the Folk and Folklore in Modern Life and the Arts”: The National Folk Festival Roundtable Panel, Washington, D.C., 7 May 1938

Timothy C. Lloyd, director of the National Folk Festival (NFF) in Dayton, Ohio from 1996–98 and creator of the “third version of [Knott’s] festival produced annually since 1983,” notes in his dissertation on the NFF, “Knott was nothing if not a builder of partnerships … and during the event’s early period she also worked to create an active alliance with the emerging academic field of folklore.”¹ In the case of the 1938 festival, Knott, appearing before the Barnard Women’s Club on 9 April to gain the organization’s support for her festival, claimed,

Scholars who later recorded [traditional] music and dances made a conscious contribution to the social life and history of the country. But we are now in an age of transition, when neither the unconscious contribution of the singers nor the conscious one of the scholars is enough. There is so much ready-made entertainment we no longer have need for spontaneous expression such as gave birth to our folk music and there is danger of its being lost as a living art. If we desire to keep our tradition of the folk arts alive we must do something about it.²

NFF historian and folklorist Michael Ann Williams argues that Knott often “eagerly exploited mass media … when doing so furthered [her] goals” including making efforts “to court academics” by frequently taking stands “that she felt would please them.”³ But Knott may not have viewed the two approaches as mutually exclusive: mass media could be used for ready-made entertainment and to further folk

² “National Folk Festival Aims Outlined to D. C. Barnard Club,” Washington Post, 10 April 1938, S8.
³ Williams, Staging Tradition, 38.
traditions. Either way, she relied heavily on the support of academic and professional folklorists, and her festival advisory board included Martha Beckwith, H. M. Belden, Frank C. Brown, Frances Densmore, J. Frank Dobie, Helen Hartness Flanders, Melville Herskovits, George Pullen Jackson, Louise Pound, Vance Randolph, Jean Thomas, and Stith Thompson.⁴

The 1938 Folk Festival is testament to Knott’s commitment to this goal. At the festival were W. C. Handy, whom a writer for the *Post* described as “the internationally famous colored composer who is popularly known as ‘the granddaddy of the blues’”; Zora Neale Hurston, folklorist, author of numerous books, and Florida Federal Writers’ Project worker; George Korson, director of the Pennsylvania Folk Festival in Lewisburg, journalist, and a folklorist of the anthracite region of the state; and Bascom Lamar Lunsford, founder and director of the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in Asheville, North Carolina. Benjamin A. Botkin, University of Oklahoma folklorist and soon-to-be national folklore editor of the Federal Writers’ Project, who had been associated with the festival since 1934, was put in charge of the “serious and learned part of the festival”: a folklore roundtable titled “The Place of the Folk and Folklore in Modern Life and the Arts,” held on the morning of Saturday, 7 May, at the historic Raleigh Hotel in Washington, D.C.⁵

Botkin wrote an article for the Post’s festival insert, titled “The Function of a Folk Festival,” in which he traced the history of culturally pluralistic attitudes towards the folk and folk culture in the United States. For Botkin, “The central problem of American culture” had been “the quest for an independent ‘expression-spirit,’ which is at once native and cosmopolitan,” a dualism he found “inherent in the paradox of Old World backgrounds and New World foregrounds.” Framing his argument in terms of class and nationalism, Botkin asserted, “Since the breaking away from European patterns virtually coincided with the change from an agrarian to an industrial economy, America had no sooner passed from colonialism into provincialism and later sectionalism than it found its cultural diversity menaced by aggressive nationalism and standardized mass culture.” But Botkin noted a change in the nation’s attitude around the end of the First World War toward “the development of folk and regional resources,” which he viewed as “the growth of a new social consciousness … favorable to a cultural renaissance.” In Botkin’s view, the social, cultural, and political climate of the 1930s—in particular the “restriction of immigration, the depression, and the breakdown of the older isolation and individualism”—had served to augment “the new feeling of cultural diversity and

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7 Botkin, “The Function of a Folk Festival.”
roots,” which “succeeded the abortive ‘melting-pot’ myth.” 

“Folklore in its living, functional aspects is an integral part of life and a response to the total situation,” Botkin concluded. “And only by relating folk expression to the rest of life and to the philosophy and problems of a democratic society can a folk festival function as an integral part of modern America in search of its past and future.”

Two weeks prior to the Saturday morning discussion panel, which the Post promoted to “serious-minded folklore students and experts,” Botkin sent the Post a list of potential topics for discussion, including “folk ‘discoveries’ of the year, similarity and differences in ballads common to various parts of the country, the cultural implications of folksongs and customs, [and] the manner in which folk crafts may be of benefit to those with whom they are native.” On the panel that morning were a who’s who of prominent folklorists, folk music collectors, and intellectuals of the New Deal era, many of whom figured prominently in the folk music and folklore collecting and research projects under the WPA’s Federal One arts projects. Among the participants was FWP director, Henry G. Alsberg; chair of the panel, Benjamin Botkin; folklorist and Federal Theatre Project worker, Herbert Halpert; Florida FWP writer in charge of African American folklore, Zora Neale Hurston; and former music director of the Resettlement Administration, Charles Seeger.

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
11 “‘St. Louis Blues’ Writer Coming For Festival”; “Folk Round Table At Morning Session”; and “Folklore Panel Warned to Stick To Amateurism.” Among the individuals present were Henry G. Alsberg, head of the Federal Writers’ Project (FWP); Ataloa, a Native American scholar and advocate; Sterling Brown, Negro affairs editor for the FWP and Howard University professor; Arthur L. Campa, consultant to the New Mexico Federal Music Project (FMP) and a Hispanic folklorist at the University
Botkin opened the Saturday morning panel with a discussion of the seemingly divergent roles of popular and academic folklorists in the preservation and popularization of folk culture, asserting that the “academician stepped in to save folklore from the amateur, but made of it a professionalized research project.” In Botkin’s view, the study of folklore had become in recent years “an elegant pastime for antiquarians.” In the article devoted to the panel, titled, “Folklore Panel Warned to Stick To Amateurism; Botkin Counsels Against Sentimentalist Gaining Control,” a Post writer recounted Botkin’s thesis, that “American folklore needs to be saved from both the sentimentalist and the academician,” and that what was really needed was “a higher standard of amateurism.” Botkin called for greater collaboration among academics and professionals alike, declaring, “There is nothing isolationist about the folk arts.”

The discussion panel soon shifted to a wider debate about race, difference, and the place of cultural pluralism in folklore studies of the era. Leading the discussion was a Native American woman identified by the Post only as “Ataloa,” described as a

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of New Mexico; William Cunningham, the former director of the Oklahoma FWP and current national FWP administrator; Adrian J. Dornbush, director of the Special Skills Division of the Farm Security Administration (formerly the Resettlement Administration); Herbert Halpert, the director of the Folksong and Folklore Department of the Federal Theatre Project’s National Service Bureau; W. C. Handy; Zora Neale Hurston; George Korson of Bucknell University (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania); Alain Locke, Howard University professor and Harlem Renaissance luminary; John A. Lomax, former national folklore editor for the FWP, folk music collector, and former “honorary curator” for the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress; William C. Mayfarth, administrator for the FMP; and Charles Seeger, former music director for the Special Skills Division of the U.S. government’s Resettlement Administration.

12 “Folklore Panel Warned to Stick To Amateurism.”

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.
“Chickasaw maiden” who “hated her title as princess.”\textsuperscript{15} Ataloa, whom the \textit{Post} also noted was “a leader in the movement to perpetuate and develop the Indian folk arts,” framed her discussion of Native Americans and Native American culture in terms of New Deal policies such as the Indian Reorganization Act (or “Indian New Deal” of 1934), which sought to reverse many of the U.S. land allotment policies that had stripped Native Americans of their lands and had forced assimilation on the tribes.

“There has been a great awakening during the past five years,” she admitted, but warned that the renewed cultural contact between Native American tribes and mainstream American society had created some unintended consequences. “The only danger is in trying to take the culture of the Indian up literally,” she argued, noting that “the Indian is going to have to fight to keep what is real to him.” In Ataloa’s view, cultural stereotypes perpetuated by institutionalized racism under the white American system were largely to blame:

[The Native American] has suffered from the sentimentalist who sees in him a super-child who lives in communion with the birds and bees, and to whom the trees talk in his own language. Else that, or as a stoic who can only grunt “ugh.” From the beginning the stories about him have been wrong. Even his name is wrong. But now he is becoming stylish.\textsuperscript{16}

In many respects, Ataloa’s final two statements can be interpreted as somewhat autobiographical. Born “Mary Stone” to a white father and a one-quarter Chickasaw mother in Duncan, Oklahoma in 1895, Ataloa had been raised in what was seemingly a privileged household. After attending public and private schools in her youth, she

\textsuperscript{15}“Ataloa, a Chickasaw Maiden, Will Relate Legends of Her Tribe; Princess, Who Hates Title, Will Present Program of Indian Songs and Lead Her Delegation in the Corn Ceremonies at Festival,” \textit{Washington Post}, 25 April 1938, FF2.

\textsuperscript{16}“Folklore Panel Warned to Stick To Amateurism.”
went to college at the Oklahoma College for Women and finished her bachelor’s degree at the University of Redlands in California. She then moved to New York to attend the Columbia University Teachers College, where she received a master’s degree.\textsuperscript{17}

While in New York she adopted the name Ataloa (translated as “Little Song” in the Chickasaw language), and began building a career as a noted “Chickasaw contralto” who dressed in traditional Native American garb and gave lecture recitals on Native American music and culture. She was soon performing before social and political luminaries including Eleanor Roosevelt and Secretary of Interior Ray Wilbur.\textsuperscript{18} She performed pieces such as “By the Weeping Waters,” “Invocation to the Sun,” “Indian Spring Song,” and, as one New York Times article reported, “the canoe song” from Charles Wakefield Cadman’s ‘Shanewis.’\textsuperscript{19} On the surface, it would seem that Ataloa was similar in many respects to other “costume performers” during an era in which the primitivist, Indianist movement was in full swing.

\textsuperscript{18} Garnet Wind and Matthew S. DeSpain state that Eleanor Roosevelt saw Ataloa perform in Albany, New York and that she was “so impressed with Ataloa … that she invited Ataloa to give the first program in the White House for President Roosevelt’s term in office in 1932 [sic].” I can find no notice of the concert, however. See Garnet Wind and Matthew S. DeSpain, “‘As Tall in Her Moccasins as These Sequoias Will Grow on Mother Earth’: the Life of Ataloa,” The Journal of Chickasaw History and Culture 11, no. 2 (2008): 28. Ataloa had performed with another noted Native American singer and performer, her close companion Te Ata, in February 1933, less than a month before Roosevelt took his oath of office. Te Ata performed alongside Marian Anderson in the concert for the King and Queen of England in May 1939. See “Indian Princesses On Program Tonight,” Washington Post, 19 February 1933, S1; and “Miss Anderson, Tibbett to Sing For King Here: Colored WPA Chorus Also on Program for White House Party,” Washington Post, 23 May 1939, 6.
Ataloa, however, was different. She had spent the past decade as an advocate for educational opportunities for Native American women, founding an “Art Lodge” (a Native American art museum) at Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma—the only Native American college in the country—where she taught English and philosophy. She also used her lectures as a platform to discuss the treatment of Native Americans in U.S. society, using the proceeds from her lectures to fund scholarships for women in her community. For example, during an 11 July 1928 lecture recital at a Women’s Mission Conference in East Northfield, Massachusetts, Ataloa told her audience, “The Indian has been tricked and fooled many ways and times by the white man, and all of the 300 treaties signed between Indians and the government have been broken by the government.”20

Prior to her appearance at the National Folk Festival, Ataloa had been conducting research into Native American tribes in the United States, support for which came through a Rockefeller grant she received. At the NFF panel, she noted the preponderance of misconceptions about Native Americans among her audience members, noting “I have just completed a study of 300 Indian tribes and a whole series of Indian lectures. In each audience I find from 1 to 100 descendants of Pocahontas, always.”21 In fact, the sensational articles in the Washington Post devoted to the four Native American tribes at the festival did little to counter Ataloa’s

21 Ibid.
assertions.\textsuperscript{22} “Blackfeet, Navajos, Chickasaws, and Kiowas are coming,” one Post writer declared, later describing two Kiowa dancers as “the two bronze-skinned Nijinskys.”\textsuperscript{23} And although Washington Post authors acknowledged that Ataloa had turned “all her spare money into scholarships for Indians,” the focus of their articles tended toward less important details such as the fact that she was “entitled to the title princess but does not like it,” or the “Indian treasures” that filled her Chickasaw lodge in Oklahoma.\textsuperscript{24}

Speaking before a room full of professional folklorists was not merely a way for Ataloa to vent her frustrations about her experiences with ill-informed audiences or cultural stereotypes in the mass media, however. Fascination with the “stylishness” of Native American cultures was rife within academic circles as well. Native American tribes had long been the provenance of anthropologists, which only reinforced a sense “otherness,” and Native American music in particular was classified as “primitive” (alongside Asian, African, and other musics). In fact, Federal One project administrators explicitly warned against collecting Native American cultural materials in their field manuals to their collectors, although Sidney Robertson Cowell and the Oklahoma and Mississippi FMP units included Native American music as part of their larger music collecting projects. For Ataloa, then, generations of entrenched modes of thinking could not be easily erased by seemingly pluralistic New

\textsuperscript{22} “4 Indian Tribes Lending Color To Folk Fete,” Washington Post, 13 April 1938, X12; and “Tribe To Bring Unusual Dance To Folk Festival; Range People to Show How They Welcome Persons into Their Tribe,” Washington Post, 25 April 1938, FF6.
\textsuperscript{23} “4 Indian Tribes Lending Color To Folk Fete.”
\textsuperscript{24} “Chickasaw Maiden Will Lead Corn Dance in Folk Festival,” Washington Post 11 April 1938, X3.
Deal government policies, and by speaking out in front of the panel she was, to a
degree, both putting the onus on, and implicating, her peers.

But the most nuanced, and contentious, debate about the place of race in
folklore studies emerged out of W. C. Handy’s contribution to the panel. Although
the inclusion of the sixty-four-year-old Handy, known as “the father of the blues” on
a “folk music” roundtable might seem out of place, the festival organizers had
brought him in to be a representative of folk lineages in the blues. The following day
he was to give lecture recitals on “Negro Blues of Folk Origin” at both the afternoon
and evening concerts, performing selections of his pieces and discussing their
relationship to African American folk musical styles, particularly the spiritual.25 The
Sunday evening concert program included a quotation from Handy describing both
the emotional connections between these genres and the group versus individual
consciousness of the expressions: “The Blues and the Spirituals are first cousins.
Born out of group suffering, the spirituals give voice to the slave’s song of a better
world to come. The blues, also rising from a cauldron of pain and misery, are the
expression of an individual singer, and bear the hope that although today is filled with
unhappiness, tomorrow’s sun will bring a new, happier day right here on earth.”26

Although Handy’s quotation reads largely as a platitude designed as concert
program fodder, that Handy, Hurston, and other African American performers were
able to perform at Constitution Hall in the first place was no small feat. The

25 “St. Louis Blues’ Writer Coming For Festival”; and “Folk Festival Program, Sunday Evening, May
26 “Folk Festival Program, Sunday Evening, May 8, Constitution Hall, 8:15 P.M.”
organization responsible for concert programming at the venue, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), had a longstanding policy against allowing blacks to perform on their stage (culminating in the famous incident of Marian Anderson’s performance on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in April 1939). But the National Folk Festival, it seems, was an exception to the DAR’s rule, as Knott was able to program her festival as she wished during its years in the nation’s capital, from 1938 to 1942. Cultural historian Robert Cantwell notes that Knott’s was “the first folk festival to address conscientiously, with clear social and political aims, the cultural diversity of America. … Like Annabel Morris Buchanan, [Knott] was concerned about the leveling effects of commercial records and radio, and, like most folklore scholars in that period, regarded folk culture as an endangered species,” noted Cantwell, “but, far from commitment to a particular vision or strain of culture, with all the social and political allegiances such commitments imply, her outlook was

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27 Handy’s claim to the title of “father of the blues” was hotly contested, however, in particular by another person living in the nation’s capital at the time of the National Folk Festival: Ferdinand Joseph LaMothe, more famously known as Jelly Roll Morton (1890–1941). In fact, one of Morton’s friends, Roy Carew, wrote a letter to the editor in the Post, published on the day of the roundtable, disputing Handy’s progenitor status, citing the music of Morton and R. Emmett Kennedy as predating that of Handy’s. Later that year the Morton/Handy dispute found its way into the pages of Down Beat magazine, where the two musicians each made their case. Also that year, Alan Lomax, after being told about Morton by Alistair Cooke, began a long series of recordings with Morton at the Library of Congress, which were later released publicly. Lomax also used the time with Morton as seeds for a later book. See, “Letter to the Editor: Birth Of The Blues; New Orleans,” Washington Post, 7 May 1938, X6; Vic Hobson, Creating Jazz Counterpoint: New Orleans, Barbershop Harmony, and the Blues (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 53–55; Alan Lomax, Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and “Inventor of Jazz” (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1950); and Eileen Southern, The Music of Black Americans: A History (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1971), 336–38. Thanks to Stephen Wade for the information about Cooke’s involvement, and the overall critical role he played.

28 Williams, Staging Tradition, 63–64.
generously democratic.”

Writing in 1939, Knott declared that the “picture of our folk life today would not be complete without the contributions of the Negro.”

During the roundtable, Handy discussed his upbringing in the “deep South … where the songs were in the making,” and admitted, perhaps due to his present company, that he had not done “much research” when composing hit song “St. Louis Blues,” published in 1914. “I don’t know that ‘St. Louis Blues’ is a folk song,” Handy told his colleagues, “but I know it has folk music in it. Some of the harmonies in the blues are African. From what we know today, it is true that jazz has always been with the primitive Negro.” But Handy’s proclamation that he had not done “much research” when composing “St. Louis Blues” belies his writings only a few years later. In his autobiography Father of the Blues, Handy recalled that while composing his song he sought to “combine ragtime syncopation with a real melody in the spiritual tradition.” In the chorus section, Handy stated that he used “plagal chords to give spiritual effects in the harmony.” “There was something from the tango that I wanted too,” he recalled, believing there was “something racial in … this rhythm.” For the lyrics, Handy “decided to use Negro phraseology and dialect,” which, he noted, “often implies more than well-chosen English can briefly express.”

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31 “Folklore Panel Warned to Stick To Amateurism.”
32 Ibid.
33 William Christopher (W. C.) Handy, Father of the Blues (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 120.
34 Ibid., 121.
35 Ibid., 120.
Handy’s choice of melodic content in St. Louis Blues and other pieces he wrote during the time were also the product of his own musical investigations. As Handy noted in a fantastic story he provided for the Sunday afternoon concert program,

In 1894, while sleeping on cobblestones in St. Louis, near the Mississippi, I had heard roustabouts and stevedores singing “I walked all the way from ol’ East St. Louis and I didn’t have but one po’ measly dime.” The tonality impressed me, because in this they exaggerated the minor third and flatted the seventh. I had never heard such tonality expressed by a white musician or a sophisticated Negro musician, and in studying it I was led to make use of these exaggerated notes in … the “St. Louis Blues.”

Handy referred to this kind of tonality as the “blue note,” which he described as a “scooping, swooping, slurring tone” and a “curious, groping tonality” that was “so clearly a throwback to Africa,” used by the “primitive Southern Negro” (and not “white” or “sophisticated Negro” musicians). As Handy explained, “The slurring chromatics are, at best, an approximation of several principles: 1) Of a tonality found exclusively in the Negro voice. 2) Of the quarter tone scale of primitive Africa. 3) Of a deep-rooted racial groping for instinctive harmonies.”

Thus Handy’s peripatetic, or in this case, prostrate, process of musical discovery indicates that he certainly researched his blues compositions. These tunes were carefully constructed works based on musical tropes he discovered while listening to other African American forms of music. They represented, for Handy,
“the full racial expression of the Negro, and its distinguishing characteristics are throwbacks to Africa,” as well as “the expression of the emotional life of a race.”

“Altogether,” Handy concluded, “I aimed to use all that is characteristic of the Negro from Africa to Alabama.”

Alain Locke took issue with Handy’s characterizations of African American music’s origins and influence and expressed doubts about “the amount of African culture brought to these shores by the Negro” believing that “all his folk background was developed [in the United States].” But in Locke’s 1936 publication, The Negro and His Music, Locke pointed to a shared “racial mastery of rhythm,” among peoples of African descent, which, he asserted, was “the obvious connecting link between all styles and varieties of Negro music.” “Even where the stream divides between two different cultures,” Locke argued, “as in the case of the basic triple rhythm characteristic of Creole, Carib, and Negro South American music and the two-four or four-four rhythm with the displaced beat characteristic of North American Negro music, if we trace both back far enough we find them side by side in Africa.” Locke concluded, “Similarly, the distinction still made by many critics between the Afro-American and the African music generally fades out at the source.”

Locke, as a student of Horace Kallen’s, the person credited with coining the term “cultural pluralism,” used the opportunity at the National Folk Festival

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40 Handy, Father of the Blues, 121.
41 “Folklore Panel Warned to Stick To Amateurism.”
43 Ibid., 138.
44 Ibid., 138–39.
roundtable to open a larger conversation about race, pluralism, and relativism in folklore studies. As Paul Allen Anderson argues in his book *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought*, “Locke critiqued the provincial loyalties of racial supremacist thought and phrased his enthusiasm for black folklore research in terms of a strategic cultural racialism and a nonchauvinistic interest in classic folk materials.”

For Locke, such origin theories only served to complicate, and ultimately belittle, the achievements of African Americans, and he declared that “as long as one minority culture is slighted and another overemphasized ‘something undemocratic exists.’” Locke continued,

One might think that the Negro folk culture has had a good time in America. For several generations the Negro has been popular and influential in the cultural picture, but in many cases—in most cases, I believe—there has been serious distortion and dilution, until today the folk value of the Negro is beginning to disappear.

Locke’s statement about the “serious distortion and dilution” of African American folk culture might very well have been aimed at Handy himself, or at least to the influence of his compositions. Locke had written extensively about Handy’s music in *The Negro and His Music*, noting that the “‘blue note’ is in official music the invention of W. C. Handy,” but also stating that Handy’s compositions were responsible for the “avalanche of artificial blues composition,” which led to the blues

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45 Paul Allen Anderson, *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 137. Anderson’s book provides a wonderful exegesis of cultural pluralist and assimilationist theories in the early decades of the twentieth century. Anderson’s discussion of the complicated natures of Zora Neale Hurston, Alain Locke, and others of the time period is one of the best written to date. Special thanks to Stephanie Doktor for her insights into these issues as well.

46 “Folklore Panel Warned to Stick To Amateurism.”

47 Ibid.
becoming “a generic name for all sorts of elaborate hybrid Negroid music.”

But Locke was sympathetic to Handy’s role in the generic avalanche, instead blaming Tin Pan Alley composers for the “distortion and dilution”: “Others are reaping what these men sowed; for the most part their careers had an element of tragedy. … Handy, making millions for song-brokers, himself went bankrupt.”

This narrative followed Handy well after he died in 1958, however. Amiri Baraka, in his 1963 book *Blues People* (then writing as LeRoi Jones), made a similar point about Handy’s work: “W. C. Handy, with the publication of his various ‘blues compositions,’ invented it for a great many Americans and also showed that there was some money to be made from it. … There was even what could be called a ‘blues craze’ (of which Handy’s compositions were an important part) just after the ragtime craze went on the skids. But the music that resulted from this craze had little, if anything to do with legitimate blues.”

But Locke’s and Baraka’s criticisms speak to a number of larger issues undergirding this study, including notions of legitimacy and authenticity and the process of musical composition and transmission. Popular expressions of “folk” idioms were prevalent in the 1930s, including mass media portrayals of “hillbillies” and “singing cowboys,” blackface minstrels and Tin Pan Alley hucksters. Separating folk fact from folk fiction, in the minds of these scholars and collectors, was largely their responsibility. Yet Benjamin Botkin, whom FWP director Alsberg brought in to replace John A. Lomax as national folklore editor in

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49 Ibid., 67.
part because of Botkin’s academic credentials (the American Folklore Society was reluctant to support the folklore work of the FWP on the grounds that it was too amateurish), came under attack in the 1950s by another prominent academic folklorist, Richard M. Dorson, who accused Botkin’s folklore popularization efforts as being evidence of what he referred to as “fakelore.”

At the roundtable panel, Zora Neale Hurston disagreed with Locke’s assessment of African survivals in African American musical styles, stating that she believed “the African pattern to be still present in Negro songs and customs.”

Hurston’s views on African survivals in African American folklore were certainly influenced by her experiences as a graduate student at Barnard College, where she studied under Columbia University anthropologists Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict. Hurston’s statement echoes in many respects the theories that Melville Herskovits, another student of Boas’s, would make in his landmark book on African American culture in the United States, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, published in 1941. But Hurston’s relativistic views on race and culture in the United States drew criticism from her peers, including Arna Bontemps, Alain Locke, Sterling Brown, and Richard Wright. Bontemps, for example, in a review he wrote of Hurston’s autobiography *Dust Tracks on the Road*, stated, “Miss Hurston deals very simply with the more

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52 “Folklore Panel Warned to Stick To Amateurism.”
serious aspects of Negro life in America—she ignores them.”

For Hurston’s part, argues Paul Allen Anderson, “The hybridizing cosmopolitanism of the Lockean New Negro … betrayed Hurston’s sense of the folk continuum and produced an inauthentic ‘musical octoroon’” (a term used to describe people of mixed race, specifically of one-eighth African origin).

Hurston’s extensive fieldwork in the Caribbean and throughout the southern United States also informed her approach to these issues in her writing and research. For Hurston, folklore was an amalgamation of different cultures and influences, or in her words, “the boiled-down juice of human living. It does not belong to any special time, place, nor people. No country is so primitive that it has no lore, no country has yet become so civilized that no folklore is being made within its boundaries.”

Even her relativistic viewpoints on folklore seemed to have their limits, however. Shortly

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54 Arna Bontemps, “Review of Zora Neale Hurston’s Dust Tracks on the Road,” New York Herald Tribune, 1942, quoted in Valerie Boyd, Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 359. Richard Wright remarked of Hurston’s 1937 novel Their Eyes Were Watching God, “In the main, her novel is not addressed to the Negro, but to a white audience whose chauvinistic tastes she knows how to satisfy. She exploits that phase of Negro life which is ‘quaint,’ the phase which evokes a piteous smile on the lips of the ‘superior’ race.” Richard Wright, “Review of Their Eyes Were Watching God,” New Masses, 5 October 1937, 22–23. Alain Locke, in a review of the same book he published less than a month after their appearance on the folklore panel, offered a somewhat-less-damning, yet still critical assessment: “It is folklore fiction at its best, which we gratefully accept as an overdue replacement for so much faulty local color fiction about Negroes. But when will the Negro novelist of maturity, who knows how to tell a story convincingly—which is Miss Hurston’s cradle gift, come to grips with motive fiction and social document fiction? Progressive southern fiction has already banished the legend of these entertaining pseudo-primitives whom the reading public still loves to laugh with, weep over and envy. Having gotten rid of condescension, let us now get over oversimplification!” Alain Locke, “Review of Their Eyes Were Watching God,” Opportunity, 1 June 1938.


after she left the National Folk Festival, she sent out a proposal to FWP director Henry G. Alsberg regarding a possible statewide folk music recording project for the Florida FWP. In her essay, titled “Proposed Recording Expedition into the Floridas,” she outlined all of the reasons that Florida was an ideal candidate for such a study:

There is not a state in the Union with as much to record in a musical, folklore, social-ethnic way as Florida has. To be sure, California has the Chinese, Japanese, Filipino population which Florida lacks, but these Asiatic cultures seem so far from our own that they don’t enter the stream of American culture at all. No other state in the Union has had the history of races blended and contending. Nowhere else is there such a variety of materials. Florida is still a frontier with its varying elements unassimilated. There is still an opportunity to observe the wombs of folk culture still heavy with life. Recordings in Florida will be like backtracking a large part of the United States, Europe, and Africa, for these elements have been attracted here and brought a gift to Florida culture each in its own way. The drums throb: Africa by way of Cuba; Africa by way of the British West Indies; Africa by way of Haiti and Martinique; Africa by way of Central and South America; Old Spain speaks through many interpreters. Old England speaks through black, white, and intermediate lips. Florida, the inner melting pot of the great melting pot America.57

Hurston’s outright dismissal of “Asiatic cultures” echoes in many ways Ataloa’s statements about Native American cultures in the United States and the way that scholars viewed outsider cultures as “primitive.” In addition, Hurston’s portrayal the racial and ethnic characteristics of the state reads as somewhat contradictory: Florida is at once an assimilationist project—the “inner melting pot of the great melting pot” with a “history of races blended and contending” and also “a frontier” where one could find “varying elements unassimilated.” Moreover, Hurston’s depiction of

conducting fieldwork within the state—“backtracking” as she terms it—is somewhat-safari-like, replete with throbbing drums and African survivals.

But Hurston is a complicated figure, and her position as an educated African American female author and folklorist working for the Florida FWP must be taken into account. After growing up in the all-black town of Eatonville, Florida, otherwise surrounded by the Jim Crow South, she eventually accepted a scholarship to attend Barnard College as the college’s only black student. After leaving Barnard she published numerous books, plays, essays, and articles before finding herself on the government dole, earning a salary less than that of her supervisor Stetson Kennedy, twenty-five years her junior. Thus, Hurston’s views on folklore were subjective and constructed, the result of many factors including her upbringing, education, and current position. And in this sense Hurston is representative of all of the folklore collectors and administrators connected with the WPA projects. It is the intermingling of these particular perspectives on “the folk,” folklore, and folk music that forms the core of the second part of this study.
PART TWO

THE FOLK MUSIC RESEARCH, COLLECTING, AND RECORDING TRIPS OF THE WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION’S FEDERAL ONE ARTS PROGRAMS
CHAPTER 6.
A “Motley Crew”: The Federal Writers’ Project and Folk Music as Textual Tradition

The place of folk music research and collecting within the Federal Writers’ Project is significant on a number of levels, mainly because folksongs and ballads were not particularly privileged over any other type of folklore materials that the FWP workers gathered over the course of the project. But folk music, for these workers and administrators, also represented a living, changing tradition in the United States that was in need of not only documentation, but also re-distribution. By placing folk music within the larger context of the FWP’s American Guide Series, Social-Ethnic Studies, Folklore Studies, and African American studies, these FWP workers and administrators highlighted regionalist and functionalist approaches to the music in a manner that was unique to the Federal One projects. This chapter examines the role folk music played within the FWP, the project’s literary approach to the music, and the administrators’ functionalist and regionalist leanings through the FWP’s publications and fieldworker questionnaires.

The Organization and Administration of the Federal Writers’ Project

Directing the Federal Writers’ Project from its inception was former journalist, correspondent, and supervisor of reports for Roosevelt’s Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Henry G. Alsberg. In August 1935, WPA assistant director Jacob Baker tapped Alsberg for the position not only because he had previous experience working within New Deal administrations—in fact, Alsberg was
the only New Deal insider to head a Federal One project—but also because, according to William McDonald, he had the “cast of liberalism which Baker sought in all the directors of Federal One.”¹ Former FWP worker and Writers’ Project historian Jerre Mangione noted that “no one, not even Alsberg, had ever contended that he was a talented administrator.” Rather, Alsberg’s “chief value as director was his intuitive understanding of what the [FWP] was capable of doing, within the limitations of its personnel.”²

Part of the reason that the FWP personnel was “limited”—a “motley crew” as FWP historian Jerrold Hirsch called the workers—was because the project became a catchall for WPA clerical workers.³ It was by far the cheapest Federal One project, with operational costs amounting to approximately one-fifth of one percent of the total cost of the WPA, and thus the FWP existed in all forty-eight states. Over the course of the FWP’s existence it employed approximately 10,000 workers, whose

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¹ McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts*, 663, 665. Other people involved in the FWP’s administration included Reed Smith (assistant FWP director, under Alsberg), Negro affairs editor Sterling A. Brown, folklore editors John A. Lomax and his successor Benjamin A. Botkin, and social-ethnic studies editor Morton Royse. For background on these FWP directors, see Jerrold Hirsch, *Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers’ Project* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 22–33. Because of the great need for competent writers, editors, and researchers, the FWP required a larger technical staff than the other Federal One projects. To deal with this on an efficient administrative level, a National Technical Project was created, which had four main functions: editorial, technical, research, and coordination. This federal department was in charge of oversight for all of the state and local FWP branches, and also acted as liaison to the publishers used for the various FWP project.


abilities, according to Hirsch “varied widely”: “Some were not competent to do the work they had been assigned. Some performed adequately. A few were talented.”

The list of these “talented” workers, however, reads like a veritable who’s who of U.S. writers in the mid-twentieth century: Conrad Aiken, Nelson Algren, Saul Bellow, John Cheever, Jack Conroy, Katherine Dunham, Ralph Ellison, Zora Neale Hurston, John Steinbeck, Studs Terkel, Richard Wright, Margaret Walker, Dorothy West, among others. Even composer Harry Partch found work for a time with Arizona and California units of the FWP, assisting with each state’s state guides. Historian Dixon Wecter quipped, “At its peak [the FWP] supported over six thousand journalists, freelance writers, novelists, poets, Ph.D.s and other jobless persons experienced in putting words on paper. Hacks, bohemians, and local eccentrics jostled elbows with highly trained specialists and creative artists of such past or future distinction as Conrad Aiken, Maxwell Bodenheim, Vardis Fisher, and Richard Wright.”

Although the FWP was well staffed and inexpensive to run, Alsberg faced pressures with which other Federal One projects did not have to contend. Chief among these obstacles was the project’s ability to publish materials quickly, and

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4 Ibid., 1–2.
7 The initial appropriation for the FWP was around $6.3 million, and by the end of the program in February 1943, the FWP had spent around $27.2 million dollars, (or approximately 1/5 of 1 percent of the total expenditures of the entire WPA). Christine Bold, The WPA Guides: Mapping America (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1999), xiv.
Alsberg and his staff were under constant pressure to produce, and “to explain, both publicly and to their superiors, why it would take longer to write … than to produce a play, give a concert, or paint a mural.” Moreover, the variance of talent levels within the rank-and-file FWP employees also created some difficulties. Writing, it seemed to many in both the general public and within the WPA administration, was a skill everyone possessed—anyone, it seemed, could be a “writer,” whether one did clerical work, gathered stories, or wrote poetry or prose. Because of the great need for competent writers, editors, and researchers, the FWP required a larger technical staff than the other Federal One projects. To deal with this on an efficient administrative level, a National Technical Project was created, which had four main functions: editorial, technical, research, and coordination. This federal department was in charge of oversight for all of the state and local FWP branches, and also acted as liaison to the publishers used for the various FWP projects.

The FWP’s American Guide Series

The project that united Alsberg’s fledgling and disparate FWP units was the American Guide Series, a multivolume collection of state, regional, and local tour guides designed to promote tourism in the Depression-era United States based on the popular series of European travel guides published by the Baedeker family of Germany. The inspiration for the AGS had predated the WPA, however. In 1935, Eleven CWA and FERA workers from Connecticut, with the help of approximately

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9 See Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal*, 46–47;
one thousand volunteers, produced a 320-page state guide, titled *The Connecticut Guide: What to See and Where to Find It*.\(^{10}\) One of the principal figures behind the American Guide Series was Tours Editor for the FWP and former Resettlement Administration employee Katherine Kellock, who had used the Baedeker guides extensively while traveling in Europe and Russia as an international relief worker in the 1920s.\(^{11}\) Guide Series historian Christine Bold notes that Kellock’s “experience with Baedekers had convinced her of the cultural importance, indeed the patriotic contribution, of thoroughly informed, mile-by-mile tours that would introduce visitors and natives alike to the details of America’s heritage.”\(^{12}\) Moreover, the Baedeker guide for the United States, titled *The United States: With Excursions to Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Alaska*—published in 1893, and revised in 1909—was well out of date and in need of replacement. “Written for European tourists,” an FWP press release read, “[the U.S. Baedeker from 1909] contained such useful information as that carrying firearms was no longer necessary in the U.S., travel now being as ‘safe as in the most civilized parts of Europe.’ But it did advise Europeans to bring their own matches, buttons, needle and thread, dress gloves.”\(^{13}\)

The original plan for the American Guide Series was the publication of a five- or six-volume national guidebook, but the sheer amount of materials collected in the first year made Alsberg and the national office decide to produce a guide for each of

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the forty-eight states, and Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico. Additionally, the FWP prepared numerous guides to cities (Washington: City and Capital), towns (Old Newbury Tales), regions (Mississippi Gulf Coast: Yesterday and Today), trails (Three Hikes through Wissahickon), waterways (Intracoastal Waterway: Norfolk to Key West), interstate driving tours (U.S. One: Maine to Florida), and nature guides (Who’s Who in the Zoo, and Birds of the World). Although the first guide appeared as early as 1937, most of the books were published between 1939 and 1941. State director of the Mississippi FWP and chief supporter of Herbert Halpert’s time in Mississippi during his Joint Committee recording expedition, Eri Douglass, noted that as of 1939 the FWP had published 268 guides, with 298 more in preparation, with four to five published every week.

The American Guide Series, published in many cases by large-scale national presses, were extremely popular. An FWP inventory from 1937 stated that the U.S. One guide alone was “about to exhaust a run of 50,000” copies. The national media heralded the volumes, with Time magazine noting that “almost every book shows flashes of inspired writing,” and Harry Hansen of the World Telegram (New York)

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15 Ibid., 73.
16 The partial list of guides is as follows: a one-volume national guide (first comprehensive guide book to the United States of America); regional guides (New England, Central States, etc.); guide for each of the forty-eight states, the District of Columbia, New York City, Alaska, Puerto Rico, and the other protectorates of the United States; guides on national highways, waterways, rivers, and lakes, including the Oregon Trail, the Santa Fe Trail, the Intracoastal Waterway, the Mississippi River, and a “Story of the Great Lakes”; and guides to various national monuments and parks. For a comprehensive list of FWP publications, see Jeutonne Brewer, The Federal Writers’ Project: A Bibliography (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1994).
17 Ibid., 72.
stating that “Having read most of the entertaining essays and looked at the pictures [in the New Orleans City Guide], I am now going to take the evening and enjoy a tour of New Orleans, street by street.”19 Historian, sociologist, and author of numerous books pertaining to study of the city in the United States, Lewis Mumford, noted upon the publication of the first volumes,

Of all the good uses of adversity, one of the best has been the conception and execution of a series of American guidebooks; the first attempt, on a comprehensive scale, to make the country itself worthily known to Americans. These guidebooks are the finest contribution to American patriotism that has been made in our generation.20

Because of the Guide Series’ utilitarian, American-based focus and seemingly uncontroversial subject matter, it was a project that seemingly everyone in the WPA administration and the federal government could support. “The lack of competing publications and the inability of publishers to take on such a massive project during the Depression,” Christine Bold notes, “meant that the American Guide Series provided a distinct national service that would stimulate tourism and well as regional and national pride without undercutting private industry.”21

Each of the guides followed a similar format: they contained a history of the state, a list and description of principal cities and towns, and a series of “tours” that the reader could take, complete with maps, photographs, and drawings. The background section for each guide included a “modern” or “contemporary” description of the state, followed by a number of subsections that described such

19 Ibid.
20 Quoted in ibid.
topics as agriculture, industry and commerce, labor, education, sports and recreation, folklore, literature, music, theater, art, and architecture. In addition to basic facts about population, location, and elevation, the city sections provided information regarding public transit, accommodations, and local attractions, entertainment, and annual events. The tours included within the book were designed to highlight not only various towns and cities within a state, but also attractions and landmarks within a state or region.

“The tour form is a difficult form,” Alsberg asserted, “it is like a sonnet; but if you can learn it, you can be more interesting in the description of a tour than in any novel.”\(^{22}\) Alsberg’s nod to literary forms reveals both his desire to create publications that were interesting to read and his and other FWP administrators’ interest in working with philosophical currents of the era. As Christine Bold notes, “Articles of faith brought by the national editors to the project—tenets such as regionalism, nationalism, and cultural diversity—changed from cultural characteristics which the guidebooks would record into cultural values into which project employees (and, by extension, entire communities) had to be educated.”\(^{23}\) These tenets are evidenced not only in the American Guide Series, but also in the various regional, ethnic, and oral history projects of the FWP, such as *The Swedes and Finns of New Jersey*, *The

\(^{22}\) Alsberg, quoted in McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts*, 694. Mangione notes that Alsberg made this statement before an indifferent congressional committee, and argued that Alsberg’s platitudes largely fell on deaf ears within the FWP: “No one knows whether Alsberg actually believed such statements, but there is no doubt that they were made with the hope of appeasing those members of the Writers’ Project who felt cheated because the Project failed to give them enough opportunity to develop their talents as poets, short story writers, and novelists.” Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal*, 241.

Italians of New York, and The Hopi (of Arizona). Alsberg’s desire to highlight the various communities and regions within the United States led naturally to the development of focused, discrete units within the FWP that focused on folklore, social-ethnic studies, and African American history.

The Folklore Unit of the FWP, 1936–1937

Although the American Guide Series books were the most visible contribution of the FWP, it was Alsberg’s sub-projects within these publications that represented a larger New Deal–era commitment to cultural diversity, pluralism, and romantic nationalism. In an attempt to capture what FWP historian Ann Banks called “first-person America,” Alsberg created two specialized units in 1936: the folklore unit, directed by John A. Lomax (replaced by Benjamin Botkin in 1938), and the Negro Affairs, run by Sterling Brown, associate professor of English at Howard University.

Alsberg’s choice of John A. Lomax for the position of national folklore editor seemed an obvious choice. The FWP director had been, according to Hirsch, desperate to find “someone with the knowledge and experience to help channel all of this [folklore research] information and supervise its collection.” He found in the sixty-eight-year-old Lomax a tireless promoter of folk music in the United States through his numerous books and lectures who had a direct connection to the Archive

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25 Porterfield, Last Cavalier, 386. Lomax accepted the position and began working for the FWP on 25 June.
of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress. Lomax was put in charge of reviewing the voluminous folklore materials already collected and judging whether these materials were worthy of publication. He also suggested a number of new areas of for the FWP, including “tall tales, local geographical eccentricities (e.g., ‘lovers’ leaps,’ ‘proposal rocks’), table manners, religious customs, epitaphs, accounts of people with supernatural powers, [and] stories about animal behavior.”26 That same month, Historical Records Survey director Luther Evans offered Lomax a position serving “part-time as advisor on Folk-Lore collecting” at a salary of $3,200 per year (approximately $55,000 in 2015).27 Lomax accepted both positions, and in so doing he was responsible for a considerable portion of all folklore materials collected by the Federal One projects.

The folklore manuals and instructions for fieldworkers from 1936—the first from 12 March, three months before Lomax was hired, and an addendum dated 27 July—reveal both the overall goals of the folklore unit and the influence Lomax had on the project when he arrived. The initial instruction manual from March notes that the “bulk of the material will be used in connection with the sectional descriptions or place descriptions” in the American Guide Series, and it differentiates between folklore and folk customs, and notes that the latter is more important for use in state guides because these customs “can be tied to one place, one section or one object.”28

26 Ibid., 388.
27 Ibid., 386.
(The July addendum adds the following: But where folklore items can be placed geographically, they also are usable in the Guides."

The March 1936 manual also describes two types of folklorists: academics or “antiquarians,” and functionalists who recognize that folklore is a living and vital tradition:

There are two classes of collectors of folk-lore, folk customs and folk tales in America. The first values only what can be traced back to a past for which they have a nostalgia; a ballad, to interest them, must have an Elizabethan origin. They are akin to the antiquarians who reject buildings and furniture that do not follow classical patterns. The second class of collectors believes that creative activity is still functioning; they recognize the European origins of American culture but are interested in the mutations and developments wrought by transfer to a new and pioneer land. Their interest is in America, not in Europe, and they value a recital of the woes of Clementine and her forty-niner parent above those of the Lady Claire. The American Guide is being compiled primarily to introduce Americans to their own rich culture.

The March 1936 manual also details a history of the music of the United States and gives suggestions regarding the types of music that FWP fieldworkers might collect, noting that it is “quite impossible for Guide workers to survey the American musical field completely” but that it was possible “to make a general survey, indicating the high-lights and trends” of a locale. Despite the manual being part of the folklore unit of the FWP, it discusses the history of music in the United States broadly, and includes sections on folk, popular, and classical music, a combination of genres that can be found in many of the American Guide Series books. (See Appendix 3 for a selection of folk music printed in these books.)

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29 “Supplementary Instructions #9—A to the American Guide Manual (Replacing Part A Of #9, March 12, 1936), Folklore And Folk Customs,” form 9692, 27 July 1936, 1, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, folder “Folklore Manuals.”

30 “Supplementary Instructions #9 to the American Guide Manual,” 1.

31 Ibid., 4.
history is largely Euro-centric, and the guide states, “For the last hundred years there has been a conflict between the ‘popular’ and ‘folk’ music, which branch from the 17th and 18th century folk music of Europe, and the highly commercialized importation of European ‘high art,’ mostly of 19th century origin.” In this narrative, folk music had been supplanted by the institutionalization of European classical music in the United States, with the rise of jazz being the vernacular savior for American music, though jazz, too, became institutionalized:

After the World War a brake was put on the excesses of “modernism” in “high art,” but “jazz” went in for more and more radical experimentation until, at the present time, the two types of urban music, “high art” and “jazz,” are practically one—concert pieces written by jazz “kings” and entertainment pieces by concert composers being superficially indistinguishable.

Folk music, in the manual’s description, was a rediscovery of the American musical tradition, and a source for a distinctly American identity for both jazz and classical music. However, the manual notes, “In spite of the hopes of folklorist antiquarians, the old-time music will not return to any section of the country in untouched form because the modern urban adaptations are penetrating into remote places through the radio and the phonograph.” The function of music, regardless of genre, was the main question that FWP workers needed to address:

Research workers need to be warned against one bias in making their evaluations; 19th-century writers taught that music should be judged by its appeal to and play upon the “higher centers” and emotions of the individual, but emphasis has now shifted to the social nature of all art. Music serves a social function in communication, play, work, ritual, celebration, recreation,

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32 Ibid., 4.
33 Ibid., 4.
34 Ibid., 5.
and use is its main purpose. It is in the light of its social usefulness that any musical material should be examined.\(^5\)

The accompanying questionnaire reflects this functionalist, yet broad-based, approach to the study of music:

1. What objects of historical interest does the state, district or town hold? (Instruments, music notation, monuments, pictures, records.) The slightness of a lead should not be considered unimportant. That it differs or departs from the ordinary is not a criterion of wrongness or ignorance. Much can be learned from a study of newspapers and other sources not primarily musical.

2. Who are the past and present outstanding personalities in the state and district musical life? In folk music, popular music and high art music—performers, composers, critics, patrons? (Conventional estimates of a musician’s importance are often far wide of the mark. Theoretically speaking, technical and stylistic excellence are balanced against breadth and size of the audiences.)

3. What are the musical habits, customs and attitudes of the community, or district? (The genealogy of those is important; their involvement, for example, in the routing of “shape” or “buckwheat” notes of old tradition by the “round” notes of modern professional and popular music. What social elements sponsored the one or the other? What was the music of the pioneers, of their early churches, theaters, dance-halls, colleges, political campaigns? What is it now? What racial heritage governed the musical tradition?)

4. What commercial development of music has there been, and how much of the community or district does it involve? Is intensive effort needed to put across a concert or orchestra program and is much work needed to get support for them? What types of commercialized music get spontaneous support?

5. What group or collective music activity is there? What part of the population takes part in music-making of some sort—in bands, choruses, singing-schools, community “sings,” and the like? Is there any part of the population writing its own songs and other music? Is there appreciation of local ballad-makers and how many such are active in the district? Does music play any vital part in the lives of the population and what is the type of music that has the strongest hold?

\(^5\) Ibid., 5.
At the same time, however, the questions reveal a tension between writing about music as a functional part of the community, regardless of the people making the music, and a desire to give the history of music within a certain locale, particularly the questions about the popularity of a musician and his or her talent level, and the amount of support that a concert or orchestra needs to receive to remain extant.

The manual also lists a number of printed sources that the workers might consult when writing the sections on music, including the journals *The Musical Quarterly* and *Modern Music*, as well as a number of reference books such as J. T. Howard’s *Our American Music*, George Pullen Jackson’s *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands*, John and Alan Lomax’s *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, the American Supplement to the *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, and Oscar Sonneck’s *Early Concert Life in America*. Additionally, the manual lists a number of “authorities on American music” who might be used as resources, including Henry Cowell, Carl Engel, Eleanor Hague, J. T. Howard, John A. Lomax, Earl Vincent Moore, Helen Roberts, and Oliver Strunk.36

The July addendum to the folklore manual is similar in many respects to the version published four months earlier, but there are some additions that seem to reflect Lomax’s influence. The new version contains specific types of folksongs and ballads: “Old English ballads; colonial ballads; native American songs, like Jesse James and Springfield Mountain; Negro spirituals and work songs; children’s songs” and other instances that reveal Lomax’s Texas heritage, including the list of

36 Ibid., 7–8.
“community songs; square dances and dance calls; play parties; singing and counting out games of all types; spelling matches; gander pullings; horse shoe pitching; pitching dollars; mock marriages to show intentions of individuals to the object of those intentions; riddles; fortune telling” and the references to specific types of dialect, including “‘culch,’ ‘finnicky,’ ‘kerhoot,’ ‘mosey,’ ‘faze,’ ‘caint,’ ‘axes,’ (for asked); Tombstone (Arizona): The Road to Ruin (name of a Texas saloon), dogie (motherless calf).”

Moreover, Lomax revised the general instructions for the fieldworkers to reflect both his interest in folksong as well as his approach to fieldwork:

As far as possible … take down the answers in the exact words of the informant. Do not, however, write down more than is absolutely necessary in the presence of the informant, unless you have first gained his confidence and consent. A remark like the following will often prove helpful in breaking down prejudice against note-taking: “What you say is so good that I want to get it down just as you say it.”

Folksong collectors should ask their informants for all kinds of musical and oral material, including game and dance songs and folk tales, to be recorded on discs, and have informants speak as much as possible of the accompanying information for recording. Group materials, such as sermons and conversations, should also be recorded.

Lomax’s statement about the use of recording machines might well have been either wishful thinking or his thoughts on the future of the FWP folklore projects. In general, the FWP did not use recording machines in the field (with a few notable exceptions, as in the case of Ruby Pickens Tartt’s recordings in Alabama, and the Florida FWP’s recording project).

38 Ibid., 5.
The Ex-Slave Narrative Project of the FWP

In addition to collecting folklore for the in-progress state guides, Brown and Lomax collaborated on one of the most ambitious oral history projects in the history of the nation: a multi-state ex-slave narrative project, conducted between 1936 and 1939. This project, like the American Guide Series, had its roots in FERA, when in 1934, at the urging of Lawrence D. Reddick of Kentucky State Industrial College, FERA workers began collecting throughout the Ohio River Valley. The FWP followed suit beginning in 1936, although Charles L. Perdue, Jr., editor of the 1976 collection *Weevils in the Wheat* notes that “the FWP interviews were not a direct extension of [the FERA project]. … the FWP interviewing of ex-slaves seems to have begun initially in separate states and then to have expanded into a national project as the Washington office became aware of the interviews.”

The national office—specifically John A. Lomax, Sterling Brown, and FWP associate director George Cronyn—first became aware of the ex-slave narratives in March 1936, when Carita Doggett Corse, director of the Florida FWP, sent in a collection of interviews conducted by members of her staff. Lomax and Brown saw the potential for a multi-state oral history project and within weeks developed a questionnaire, which they sent to state offices on 1 April. “With his lifetime interest

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41 Ibid., xv–xvi.
in blacks and their way of life,” Lomax biographer Nolan Porterfield notes, “Lomax was well prepared for the task and came up with a set of questions [for FWP interviewers] that elicited valuable information.”42 (As discussed below, however, Lomax’s approach to folklore and African American studies became a liability for Alsberg’s FWP.) As Jerrold Hirsch notes, the FWP was “the first government-sponsored program that rejected either a racial or an assimilationist definition of American nationality.” Its “pioneering oral history projects” provided “not only a social history of ordinary southerners, ex-slaves, ethnic minorities, and industrial workers but also a new view of American life and culture.”43

Over the course of the next two-and-a-half years, FWP workers—both African American and white—embarked upon a massive expedition throughout the South, Midwest, and Great Plains, with collection projects in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The slave narrative interviews continued until the federal-to-state reorganization of the WPA in 1939, when the projects were largely abandoned, the materials transferred to the Rare Books Division (now the Manuscript Division) of the Library of Congress. Library of Congress and FWP workers arranged the approximately two thousand narratives, photographs, and other ephemera into a seventeen-volume collection. The FWP also published single volumes from these materials through Brown’s Negro affairs unit, including These are Our Lives (1939),

42 Porterfield, Last Cavalier, 388.
43 Hirsch, Portrait of America, 7.
These slave narratives and other African American folklore and life histories became the source material for a number of other volumes, published in the years following the reorganization, including Stetson Kennedy’s *Palmetto Country* (1942); Botkin’s *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery* (1945), and an abandoned project of the Florida FWP, *The Florida Negro*, partially edited by, and with substantial contributions from, Zora Neale Hurston, which remained unpublished in 1992.

The Social-Ethnic Studies Unit, and Lomax’s Replacement, Benjamin A. Botkin, 1938

Although FWP workers and administrators continued their work on the state guides and ex-slave narratives through 1937, Alsberg wanted to expand the project’s study of regional and ethnic communities. So in 1938, Alsberg added the social-ethnic unit to the project’s roster, and tapped Morton Royse, a Columbia University graduate who had studied with John Dewey and Franz Boas, to be the project’s director. Royse fit Alsberg’s pluralistic model for documenting “first-person

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46 Many sources give Royse’s name as “Royce,” including the Library of Congress’s online resources for the FWP, Jan Harold Brunvand’s *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia* (p. 1067), and Stetson Kennedy in his essay “Florida Folklife and the WPA: An Introduction.” The 1940 U.S. Census states that his name was “Royse,” that he was 43 years old and had lived in New York City while working
America.” Eschewing the “rare ‘outstanding’ individual” (i.e., people who had attained fame), Royse focused on what he viewed was the majority of most communities: “workers, farmers, and others of lower social and economic status,” whose culture, Royse believed was less tainted by popular tastes and culture industry meddling.\(^47\) Moreover, as Hirsch notes, Royse “labeled the idea that ‘American culture is the culture of the old-American, Anglo-Saxon group’ a historical myth comparable to the Nazi myth about German nationality.”\(^48\) For Royse, placing hyphenated Americans in a margin-center relationship with the dominant white culture was misleading. The culture of non-majority communities, Royse argued, “is American culture, not merely a contributor to American culture.”\(^49\)

John A. Lomax, whom Jerre Mangione described as an “unreconstructed Southerner,” seemed increasingly at odds with Alsberg’s current vision for his project.\(^50\) As Jerrold Hirsch notes, Lomax “saw folklore surviving only when it was separated from the mainstream of modern American life. Diversity and change were folklore’s enemies. It did not disturb him that to preserve folklore, he implicitly consigned those at the bottom of the social scale, such as southern blacks, to permanent poverty and low status.”\(^51\) Alsberg, Nolan Porterfield notes, was

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\(^47\) Royse, quoted in Hirsch, \textit{Portrait of America}, 137.

\(^48\) Ibid.


\(^50\) Mangione, \textit{The Dream and the Deal}, 265.

“apparently willing to overlook Lomax’s racial attitudes—or [he] chose to see them in their full complexity.”\textsuperscript{52}

Lomax was also not particularly well respected among academic folklorists, whom Alsberg wanted on his side to lend credence to the folklore collecting of the FWP. In December 1937, Lomax and Alsberg attended the American Folklore Society’s annual conference, held at Yale University, with the intention of obtaining the endorsement of the members of the AFS, but the results were not what Alsberg had hoped. After conferring about whether to assist the FWP in their folklore studies, the members of the AFS drafted an official statement, which read:

\begin{quote}
With regard to the Folklore material collected under the auspices of the Federal Writers’ Project, it was agreed that no blanket endorsement of the material be made without examination of it, and the following resolution was passed: The American Folk-Lore Society feels that the extensive folkloristic materials collected by the Federal Writers Project can contribute effectively to folk studies only if their evaluation, super-vision, and continuation were placed under expert guidance; we proffer our help in this endeavor. A committee consisting of the President of the Society and Dr. George Herzog was named to survey the Folklore archives of the Federal Writers’ Project, and the Archives of American Folk Song, Library of Congress, Music Division, Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

Lomax, who was wounded by the slight, later remarked, “Presumably the collector must go out among the people dressed in cap and gown.”\textsuperscript{54} Lomax, however, had already quietly resigned his position as national folklore editor in July 1937 to focus on his own work, including a new edition of \textit{Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier}

\textsuperscript{52} Porterfield, \textit{Last Cavalier}, 389.
Ballads, another in a series of American folksong compilations, and his autobiography. More significantly, however, Lomax’s years of traveling and working had caught up with him. He told Spivacke that August that he was exhausted, “tired down to the inner recesses of the marrow of my bones.”

Alsberg’s desire to appeal to the academic folklorists for legitimization was perhaps shortsighted. As Jerre Mangione argues, it was the FWP’s distance from the academic community that made the project’s folklore collecting unique: “Until the advent of the Writers’ Project, American folklore had been the almost private reserve of scholars, who, with few exceptions, dealt with it formally as part of a remote past. Without any deliberate intent to be revolutionary, the Project, in its determination to produce books that would provide an introduction to American culture, broke down the barriers of academic formalism by stressing the contemporary aspects of American folklore.” (Lomax, of course, ad his own allegiance to the “remote past,” which was one of the reasons for his replacement.) But given the amateur nature of the collections, many of which had been made by people with no formal training in folklore studies, a person with formal academic credentials seemed to Alsberg the proper way forward.

In the spring of 1938, most likely around the time of the 6–8 May National Folk Festival in Washington, D.C., Alsberg hired Benjamin A. Botkin, who had recently been on a Julius Rosenwald Fellowship at the Library of Congress to study

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56 Ibid., 406.
Southern folk and regional literature, to be Lomax’s replacement. It was an inspired choice: Botkin fit perfectly with the other FWP administrators’ approaches to pluralism, and he pushed the FWP to expand its functionalist and regionalist leanings, fundamentally changing the way that FWP employees conducted fieldwork. Jerre Mangione notes, “Botkin’s appointment produced a favorable change of attitude on the part of the American Folklore Society, one which he carefully nurtured. In a surprisingly short time the Writers’ Project, thanks to his efforts and his prestige, won the endorsement of the folklore scholars as a valuable facility for gathering material.”

Botkin worked to integrate his folklore unit into the units of Royse and Brown, and to expand the FWP’s scope of folklore studies to include aspects of folklore that existed outside of rural traditions. Included in Botkin’s vision for his folklore units was the study any tradition current in the nation, regardless of whether it was “educated or uneducated” or “rural or urban.” In Botkin’s view, folklore was “an activity or experience ... an interchange between cultural groups or levels, between the folk and the student of folklore,” which brought together “the disciplines of literature, history, and anthropology, for the understanding of the science and art of

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59 Benjamin Botkin was also influenced by the Boasian school of anthropology while at Columbia University, where he completed his master’s degree in English in 1921. Jerrold Hirsch and Lawrence Rodgers, “Introduction,” in America’s Folklorist: B. A. Botkin and American Culture, ed. Lawrence Rodgers and Jerrold Hirsch (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 4.
60 Mangione, The Dream and the Deal, 276.
61 Benjamin A. Botkin, “Manual for Folklore Studies,” 3, 15 August 1938, NARA–College Park, RG 69, FWP Files, Box 69.
society.” Botkin noted, “Folklore is not only of, for, and by people; it is with people.”

In an interview conducted in the mid-1960s, Charles Seeger echoed, Botkin’s open-ended view of folklore, extending it to include nearly every facet of society:

There’s a folklore not only of the most “backward” people in the Appalachian Mountains, but there’s a folklore of the local county boss and city boss, and a folklore of the businessman and the clerical workers and the workers in the factories; and if [academic folklorists] would follow this strand of folklore up into the higher echelon of the government, they would find that Congress runs itself very largely in terms of a folklore more or less of its own, with its roots in the state legislatures, the state political parties, and the ward bosses. Then there’s also, of course, the folklore of all the branches of human activity, whether it’s law or religion or science.

One of Botkin’s major early contributions to the FWP folklore unit was his commitment to what he termed “living lore” projects. “In the very naming of these units Botkin made a scholarly and ironic point,” noted Jerrold Hirsch and Lawrence Rodgers. “William Wells Newell, one of the founders of the American Folklore Society, had used the term “living lore” to make a distinction between what he saw as the living culture of American Indians and folklore survivals, the dead or dying remnants of earlier stages in the evolution culture, found in ‘civilized’ society.” Botkin recalled in a 1958 article titled “We Called It ‘Living Lore’” that what these

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FWP units did, however unwittingly at the time was “to effect a compromise between folklore as a creative expression and folklore as a cultural record.”  

He noted,

The key to living lore was the relating of the foreground, lore, to its background in life. This living relationship was expressed or implied on almost every page of the nineteen-page mimeographed Manual for Folklore Studies, which was my first formal assignment as national folklore editor and which was issued in July, 1938, shortly before my first visit to the New York City Writers’ Project. “The emphasis,” I wrote, “is on ways of living.” Ways of living, of earning a living and looking at life, were also part of the companion social-ethnic studies. But whereas the folklore studies dealt with “a body of lore in relation to the life of a group or community,” the social-ethnic studies dealt with “the whole life of a group or community,” including its folklore.

In the fall of 1938 Botkin established Living Lore units in Chicago, New York City, and New England to focus, in part, “on the collection of urban and industrial lore and to explore the relationship between lore and creative writing.” Botkin noted that “in New York City alone, 27 workers in 88 working days from September through December, 1938, produced 355,000 words of copy, out of a national total of some 50,000,000 words reported by 176 workers in 33 states from 1936 to 1939,” although he admitted that “Not all of this wordage was of great folklore value. It was necessarily uneven, and a good deal of it was unreliable.” The value, as Botkin saw it was that this fieldwork taught the FWP workers to “‘talk American’ and ‘think American,’” and that they could not “collect folklore by simply walking the streets of the city.” Botkin recalled,

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65 Botkin, “We Called It ‘Living Lore.’”
66 Ibid.
68 Botkin, “We Called It ‘Living Lore.’”
Folklore is not on the surface. You gather folklore between shifts or during the lunch hour, from members of Compressed Air Local No. 147, in the hoghouse or locker rooms of the construction company engaged in building the Queens Mid-town tunnel. Or in the hiring hall of the National Maritime Union, with the windows overlooking the piers and the ships’ funnels.69

In Sterling Brown’s view, the work that he and his Negro affairs unit employees were doing was not necessarily indicative of what Botkin termed “folkness.” Rather, it was part of the larger social documentation movement, both a “search for a usable past,” in Van Wyck Brooks’s term, and an attempt to capture American lives in the present. “I know some of the difficulties in defining this ‘folk,’ and I imagine that many of the people I have gone to are not folk,” Brown later recalled. “This hasn’t bothered me particularly, since my interest was not scientific. I wanted to write of people with some accuracy as to their life and character. That gets one not into folklore, but into a living-people-lore, of groups that couldn't be considered folk except by a very wide extension of the word.”70

At the Modern Language Association’s annual meeting in December 1938, Botkin gave a paper before the MLA’s Popular Literature Section titled “WPA and Folklore Research: ‘Bread and Song’” (later published in the Southern Folklore Quarterly), detailing the folklore research under his FWP units and the recently established WPA Joint Committee on Folk Arts.71 In it, he acknowledged the “sympathetic encouragement and stimulation” of Alsberg, as well as the work of his

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69 Ibid.
predecessor, John A. Lomax. But more than that, he heralded the folklore materials that the FWP had collected to date, noting,

In addition to its folkloristic value, its popular interest, and its creative uses, the material collected will have important bearings on the study of American culture in both its historical and functional aspects, including minority groups (ethnic, geographical, occupational), immigration and internal migration, local history, regional backgrounds and movements, [and] linguistic and dialect phenomena.\(^72\)

But, ultimately, Botkin concluded that “the most important task confronting the folklorist in America is that of justifying folklore and explaining what it is for, breaking down on the one hand popular resistance to folklore as dead or phony stuff, and on the other hand academic resistance to its broader interpretation or utilization.” For Botkin, this meant studying folklore as “living culture” and understanding its “meaning and function not only in its immediate setting but in progressive and democratic society as a whole.”\(^73\) Botkin thus attempted to model his folklore unit and its fieldwork on these progressive, pluralistic, and functionalist principles, and he found the perfect partner in social-ethnic studies editor Morton Royse.

**FWP Manuals and Questionnaires for Folklore and Social-Ethnic Studies**

Botkin and Royse worked together closely, taking field trips together throughout the northeast to visit FWP offices and to survey the landscape of the work these units had been doing. Their collaboration, Botkin recalled taught both men “not

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\(^72\) Ibid., 13.
\(^73\) Ibid.
only how to work together but how to work with people.” In truth, their units were nearly indistinguishable: “whereas the folklore studies dealt with ‘a body of lore in relation to the life of a group or community,’” Botkin noted, “the social-ethnic studies dealt with ‘the whole life of a group or community,’ including its folklore.” In August 1938 they distributed a new set of manuals and questionnaire for the FWP fieldworkers, titled “Supplementary Instructions to the American Guide Manual, Manual for Folklore Studies.” (See Appendix 2 for the FWP’s manuals and questionnaires.) Their manual began with an announcement about the FWP’s new direction:

As an important part of its immediate program the Federal Writers’ Project is planning two series of cultural studies — the folklore studies and the social-ethnic studies.

In both the folklore and the social-ethnic studies the approach is functional. The studies will be organized around nationality groups, regions, and communities. The emphasis is on ways of living and cultural diversity with special reference to population distribution and change.

Botkin and Royse outlined the differences between their units in the manual, noting that state and regional supervisors should relay these differences to their workers, as in many cases the fieldworkers would work for both units:

1. The social-ethnic studies deal with the whole life of a group or community, including cultural backgrounds and activities; the folklore studies deal with a body of lore in relation to the life of a group or community.

74 Botkin, “We Called It ‘Living Lore.’”
75 Ibid.
2. The social-ethnic studies involve special and separate treatments of nationality groups; the folklore studies fit native and imported traditions into the diversified American pattern.

There was, however, a great deal of overlap between Royse’s social-ethnic unit and Botkin’s folklore unit, particularly with regard to fieldwork practices and the structure of their questionnaires. Botkin and Royse instructed their units to employ “a staff of field workers drawn from the group or community being studied,” which would offer “the advantage of familiarity with local conditions, inhabitants, and organizations.” Botkin and Royse also instructed the social-ethnic and folklore unit workers to engage in “full cooperation with consultants drawn from the ranks of State writers, historians, folklorists, anthropologists, sociologists, economists… and with historical and folklore societies, foreign-language organizations, etc.”

Botkin offered suggestions for some of the types of folklore he wanted collected, including folklore of special types (tall tales and children’s rhymes), and the folklore of “regions, occupations, localities, and ethnic groups,” which would form the basis for a possible national compendium of folklore materials, including “American Folk Stuff, representing all states and types, and A Folklore Atlas of America, showing the distribution of folk groups and folklore types.” Botkin noted that although the field data and any recordings would be deposited at the Library of Congress, that the resulting publications should be “designed to meet the needs of the general reader rather than the specialist, but a high standard of accuracy as well as interest will be aimed at throughout. By means of large, cheaply printed editions,

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78 Ibid., 4.
pamphlets, school readers, etc., the folklore studies are expected to reach a large audience and to find increasing use in education.” “By viewing the materials with a fresh eye,” Botkin believed, FWP workers would “uncover a new as well as an old America, and will have a part in awakening it to a new understanding and appreciation of its cultural heritage.”

Botkin also used his manual to codify his vision of what folklore in the United States encompassed, and what types of materials the FWP workers should attempt to collect:

Folklore is a body of traditional belief, custom, and expression, handed down largely by word of mouth and circulating chiefly outside of commercial and academic means of communication and instruction. Every group bound together by common interests and purposes, whether educated or uneducated, rural or urban, possesses a body of traditions which may be called its folklore. Into these traditions enter many elements, individual, popular, and even “literary,” but all are absorbed and assimilated through repetition and variation into a pattern which has value and continuity for the group as a whole.

Botkin added that although it is difficult in many cases to ascertain a precise origin for folklore materials, that the fieldworker should make every effort to record as much information about the source of the materials and the people who provided them, what Botkin described as the “living background” of the material. “As part of this social and functional approach,” the manual stated, “the folklore studies are further interested in the process of making and remaking which, in the course of its adaptation to time and place, folklore is constantly undergoing.”

79 Ibid., 4–5.
80 Ibid., 5.
81 Ibid., 6.
of the “making and remaking” of folklore echoes the types of “communal re-creation” and transmission processes that folksong scholar Phillips Barry espoused, and that Sidney Robertson and George Herzog adopted. Botkin also noted the need to capture multiple versions of a song, particularly from non-rural areas: “Not only do modern conditions (as in urban and industrial areas) give rise to new forms and materials, but every variant and variation has, above and beyond its intrinsic interest, value for the student of the history of a particular item and the processes of oral and popular composition and transmission.  

Botkin instructed his directors and supervisors to look locally for folklore and to attempt to avoid duplication of materials already in print. He also noted that the workers should not concern themselves with “‘cast-offs,’” “degenerate groups” or “the exotic and eccentric.” Rather the folklore unit workers were to concentrate on groups that were “indigenous or rooted in the local life,” and that workers should take all materials from oral sources “exactly as heard.” “Every collection should have a purpose and reason for existence,” Botkin noted. “It should be tied up with the life of the community or group and of the individual informant as a part of the community or group.”

Folklore unit supervisors, Botkin noted, were to select the fieldworkers cautiously, making sure that these workers were placed in their own communities and that they had a strong familiarity with the people and the materials they encountered. He advised the supervisors to test out potential fieldworkers first by assigning them

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82 Ibid.
83 Ibid., 6.
smaller interviewing tasks, which would then be evaluated by the regional or national offices. Those workers deemed “unsuited for actual interviewing” could be used for obtaining “exploratory information” such as locating sources or collecting background research on the communities or folklore materials in question. (He also advised his regional directors to make use of the Historical Records Survey to obtain naturalization records, census reports, church records, tax records, and other vital statistics.) Botkin warned, “A good informant can be spoiled by bad handling” and that “A tactless worker may do considerable damage to the work by needlessly stirring up prejudice.”

Despite Botkin’s desire to obtain sources of folklore that were outside of the rural tradition, his suggestions to fieldworkers regarding the types of people to seek out were relatively standard: “people over 60 with good and reliable memories”; “square-dance managers and callers”; “individuals who own or play folk or unusual instruments or who play instruments in a folk fashion (that is, without notation and in a traditional form); “local and ‘homespun’ poets (who rhyme local events and characters or make up ballads)” and work gangs and camps and other occupational groups with a distinctive folklore.” He also advised fieldworkers to inquire about local instrument makers, the location and dates of “old-time dances and parties, country auctions, and fairs,” and “old-fashioned religious gatherings and meetings of modern cults.” Included in the manual was a list outlining the types of materials to be collected, including songs and rhymes; tales; linguistic “floating” materials;

84 Ibid., 9.
85 Ibid., 9–10.
groups, gatherings, and activities; and beliefs and customs. The types of folk music that workers were to seek out included “square dance calls, play-party songs of adults, game songs and rhymes of children (including counting-out, rope-skipping, and ball-bouncing rhymes), nursery songs and rhymes, riddles, street cries, religious songs, work songs, labor songs, ballads of local characters and events, love songs, and blues.”\(^86\)

The folklore manual also provided detailed instructions to the FWP employees regarding the proper manner in which to conduct fieldwork, including inviting liaisons on the trip if the informant was not well known to the collector, and visiting informants on numerous occasions to gain the person’s trust. “Do not rush him,” the manual stated. Moreover, Botkin noted that the fieldworkers should “stress the historical nature and value of the work” and to invoke the federal government when approaching informants: Often it will pave the way for a successful interview if the questioner leads with some statement such as, ‘The Works Progress Administration of the United States Government is endeavoring to preserve some of the local history and traditions of this region and you have been recommended to the project as a person with accurate knowledge and a good memory.”\(^87\)

Botkin provided fieldworkers with a detailed set of methodologies for conducting interviews in the field. Workers were to “establish a friendly and confidential relation” in order to get the informant “talking freely about himself.” Botkin noted that “to do this successfully” the worker should be able to “talk the

\(^{86}\) Ibid., 14.
\(^{87}\) Ibid., 10.
same language” and make the informant feel important as a collaborator and have the feel of “a social occasion and outlet.” Botkin’s manual also offered a number of suggestions regarding things to avoid while conducting fieldwork, including avoiding “skipping from point to point,” nor should the worker slavishly rely on the fieldwork manual to guide the interview: “use these instructions as a guide to be kept in mind and adapted to the specific situation and person.”88 Rather, the fieldworker was to focus on “drawing the informant out” by conducting the interview “naturally and spontaneously” by guiding “him skillfully along so that in progressing you exhaust each topic before leaving it.” In all cases, the manual noted, the informant should be treated with respect: “The people who know folklore are sensitive and intelligent,” the manual stated, “and respond to a sensitive and intelligent approach.” Botkin warned his collectors to “forget your own preferences and prejudices” and told them not to “cross-examine,” antagonize, contradict, or argue with the informant: “Unless from the start your attitude is one of sympathy and respect, your chances of a successful interview are spoiled.”89

Fieldworkers were instructed not to use or display the forms while in the field, but rather fill out the forms after the interview from field notes. Additionally the manual stated, “Take down everything you hear, just as you hear it, without adding, taking away, or altering a word or syllable. Your business is to record, not to correct or improve.” Moreover, workers were instructed to write down “all obscure and peculiar terms” and to be faithful to “grammar, idiom, typical vowel and consonant

88 Ibid., 10.
89 Ibid., 11.
sounds, mutilations, and corruptions” when noting dialect. Once all of the unedited, typed field notes had been prepared, they were sent to the regional or federal editors.

The amount of mediation involved in the fieldwork process of the FWP created a number of problems with the resulting materials collected. FWP workers did not have the aid of recording machines, and thus had to rely on the accuracy of their field notes. George E. Lankford, who worked with the slave narratives of Arkansas, notes,

Some of the interviewers may have been able to use stenography, but it seems that most of them simply took notes and wrote the interviews from their notes and from memory when they returned to their typewriters. At the very least, that means the interviews are the work of the interviewer, and the correlation of the typescript with what the informant actually said can only be conjectured.  

Between the time that these materials were collected and when they were ultimately published there were numerous levels of mediation and opportunities for mistakes or editorial decision making. The collector had to rely the accuracy of his or her memory and the thoroughness of the field notes to transfer the notes onto the appropriate forms, which themselves were a distillation of the fieldwork experience. Once the forms were submitted to the regional or national editors, the materials were examined, edited for content, and subsequently published.

And none of these parts of the process takes into account the reliability of the experience in the field nor the effects that culture contact has on the fieldwork experience for both the collector and the informant. Reflecting upon his time with the

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90 George E. Lankford, Bearing Witness: Memories of Arkansas Slavery Narratives from the 1930s WPA Collections (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003), xxi.
Florida FWP, Stetson Kennedy offered an insider’s perspective into the fieldwork that went into the guides in a 1990 essay titled “Florida Folklife and the WPA, An Introduction.”

From the outset, the veritable army of FWP “fieldworkers” who set about the formidable task of gathering material for the guides focused its attention not so much upon libraries as upon such primary sources as “old-timers,” old newspapers, and on-site probing. What they found was an enormous amount of firsthand information, past and present, about the lives and lores of the peoples who made America. Such terms as “Folklife” and “oral history” had not yet come into use, but one might say we of the FWP were among the first American professionals in the field of folklore collecting. We were hard at it, even at $37.50 per fortnight—the going WPA wage scale in rural Florida counties for “Professional and Technical” staff. In those days, before either the tape recorder or video camera, fieldworkers were admonished to “look with fresh eyes” and to “stick to the precise language of the narrator.” A set of forms was devised to accompany the text of each oral interview, to provide biographical and occupational background data on the informants. A final reference page was required for the listing of name and address of each informant, together with any published sources utilized.91

In the case of the ex-slave narratives, Lankford notes that the “white interviewers were frequently related to the local elite, a relationship that was known by the old black men and women being interviewed,” and that there was a general reluctance on the part of the informant “to be honest about certain issues, especially cruel punishment and sexual depredations by former masters,” which was “surely exacerbated when the interviewers were white.”92 (The 333-question questionnaire that the FWP workers used, as well as results from the interviews, field reports, and

91 Kennedy, “Florida Folklife and the WPA, An Introduction.”
John A. Lomax’s suggestions for capturing dialogue can be found in the edited collection *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves.*

Botkin himself was critical of the results of the slave narratives, which he explained in his introduction to the 1945 collection *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery.* “The workers of the Federal Writers’ Project approached their task of interviewing ex-slaves frankly as amateurs,” Botkin noted, and described the narratives as impressive in “their very bulk,” but that they were “at the same time, uneven”: “Many are damaged or weakened by internal contradictions and inconsistencies; obvious errors of historical fact; vague, confused, or ambiguous statements; lapses of memory; and reliance on hearsay rather than first-hand experience.” Additionally, Botkin notes that the “informant himself is often guilty of flattery and exaggeration, of telling only what he wants to tell or what he thinks the interviewer wants to hear.” But the reliability of the narratives reveals itself when the editing process is taken into account. Botkin argues,

Finally, the narratives display considerable variation in style and treatment, ranging from fragmentary and scrappy accounts to full, well-rounded recitals, from correct to colloquial English, from modified to extreme dialect, from rambling and at times senile garrulousness to clear-cut reconstruction of the past, from mere generalization to rich circumstantial detail, from stilted self-consciousness to complete naturalness and spontaneity, from sheer triteness to highly imaginative and dramatic realism.

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95 Ibid., xii.
96 Ibid.
Botkin ultimately forgives the narratives as its own type of folklore, however, deeming them a “mixture of fact and fiction … colored by the fantasy and idealization or old people recalling the past, the narratives constitute a kind of collective saga of slavery.”

An anecdote by Stetson Kennedy of the Florida FWP reveals another concern with the veracity of the items collected for the folklore units: that of trusting the fieldworkers with providing newly collected materials. Kennedy recalled, Hurston’s production was sporadic, as was many writers’ [production] who were on their own in the field, again myself included. There were times when those in the office did not hear from Zora for several weeks. Periodically, Dr. Corse would pop out of her office (she never merely emerged), look around the editorial room, and ask, “Anybody heard from Zora?” When we all looked blank, Corse would look at me and say, “Better write her a letter and jog her up!”

In response to my letters, we would receive a thick packet of fabulous folksongs, tales, and legends, possibly representing gleanings from days long gone by. We did not care how, where, or when Zora had come by them—each and every one was priceless, and we hastened to sprinkle them through the Florida Guide manuscript for flavoring.

This “collusion” of director, supervisor, and fieldworker (although probably not the norm) and the other mediating factors surrounding folklore collecting under the FWP is a necessary lens through which to view the folksongs and ballads printed in the American Guide Series, and in many cases Kennedy’s use of the word “flavoring” is apt.

97 Ibid., xiii.
Folk Music and the American Guide Series

Nearly all of the guides featured folksong and ballad texts (and not musical notation), although the placement of these texts within the books varied from state to state. For the most part these folksongs appeared in either the “music” or “folklore” sections of the books. Seemingly the song texts’ placement depended on a number of varying factors, including where the editors felt the songs might best be inserted, who was writing the particular section on folklore or music, and what the state’s musical infrastructure was like. Moreover, many of the guides placed folk and popular tunes alongside one another. The guide for the state of New York, for example, placed its discussion of folk music in the “Folklore” section, alongside Dutch and English folk tales and Native American customs and lore, whereas the brief section on was devoted to classical music ensembles and societies, brass bands, and choral groups in New York City and Rochester. The Georgia state guide, on the other hand, began its music section with a discussion of early colonial music and the Anglo-American ballad tradition, and focused on Georgia’s rich African American musical heritage. Classical and concert music was placed in the middle of the section, and featured a profile of Savannah-born composer Lowell Mason, as well as various musical companies that had traveled through the state. In many cases, FWP workers wrote these sections on folk music, but guest authors were also included at times, as in the

case of the music section of the New Mexico guide, which Helen Chandler Ryan helped write, and the “Folklore and Folk Music” section of the Kentucky guide was written in large part by Jean Thomas. Although the guides do not indicate where the song texts came from, it is likely that workers either consulted folksong books that had songs from their respective states, or that they used songs that they themselves had collected as part of the ancillary FWP folklore projects under the FWP’s folklore units.

Although there were recording projects under the auspices of the FWP—most notably the work of Zora Neale Hurston, Stetson Kennedy, and others of the Florida FWP and Ruby Pickens Tartt of the Alabama FWP—these types of projects were limited. In large part, the FWP’s folksong and ballad collecting efforts were in line with a textual tradition of ballad studies that stretched back at least as far as Francis J. Child in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, and the folklore collecting of the German Romantic nationalists and others before that. I discuss the relationship of text and tune and the interactions among textual scholars and music scholars in the 1930s in the following chapter as part of a larger discussion of musicological research under the Federal Theatre Project, particularly with the work of George Herzog and Herbert Halpert under the FTP’s National Service Bureau.

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101 Although I researched these recording expeditions, and in the case of the Florida FWP, have written and given papers on the subject, due to time constraints I was unfortunately unable to include this material in the present study.
CHAPTER 7.

“Amphibious Forms”: The Federal Theatre Project, Folk Music Research and the National Service Bureau, and the Role of the Musicologist

No other Federal One project garnered the same attention, approbation, criticism, and condemnation as did the Federal Theatre Project. One major reason for its extensive exposure was the aim of its director, Hallie Flanagan, to provide affordable theater to the widest possible audience while attempting to rival the productions of professional theater troupes.¹ And in that goal she largely succeeded. Over the course of its four-year existence, the FTP attracted more than 30 million people, and for many of them it marked their first exposure to live theater. In an attempt to exhort Congress to reconsider its disapproval of the FTP, actress Tallulah Bankhead spoke before the Senate Committee on Appropriations about the many accomplishments of the project, particularly with regard to outreach:

The project has been the means of bringing theater to all the people, not to just a privileged few. It has done this by presenting thousands of performances in city parks, settlement houses, churches, hospitals, and other institutions free of charge; by presenting many other performances in regular theaters at prices that are roughly one-fourth of commercial theater prices; and, most important,

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¹ The FTP was established in August 1935, and was for its entire existence under the direction of Hallie Flanagan (1890–1969). Flanagan was the former head of the Vassar College of Experimental Theatre, and was also one of the first women to be awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, which allowed her to study theater in Europe in 1926–27. Although Jacob Baker was charged with finding a suitable director for the FTP, it is probable that Harry Hopkins played a large role in the final decision. Hopkins and Flanagan were classmates at Grinnell College, and had been friends for nearly three decades. It was Hopkins’s goal to have a theater program that was “free, adult, [and] uncensored,” and Flanagan fit the bill exactly. Hiltzik, The New Deal, 285–86. (Hopkins made his famous pledge to have a “free, adult, uncensored” theater program at the National Theatre Conference at the University of Iowa in the summer of 1935, the day after he met with Flanagan, as he was bolstering support for the Federal One projects.) Her background in experimental theater provided her with the ability to think outside of the norm, to work within a tight budget, and to view the theater as something more than a venue for rehashing the theatrical canon.
making the theater once more a national institution instead of one limited to New York and a handful of other large cities.\(^2\)

Over the course of its four-year existence, the FTP staged thousands of stage productions across the nation, including classical and newly written plays, vaudeville shows, revues, musical comedies, children’s programming, foreign-language plays, and dance productions, among others. To expand its appeal, the FTP a number of creative sub-programs, such as the Experimental Theatre, the Living Newspaper productions, Negro Theatre, Popular Price Theatre, Puppets and Marionettes, Circus and Vaudeville, and Federal Summer Theatre.

Putting on such a quantity and quality of productions was not cheap, however: The FTP consumed the largest portion of Federal One’s budget, nearly 30 percent, much of which was taken up by production and labor costs.\(^3\) Flanagan, like her former Grinnell College classmate Harry Hopkins, was not afraid to spend money, nor was she averse to keeping herself in the middle of the action. Although the administrative branch of the FTP was “in theory but not always in fact” based in Washington, D.C., Flanagan moved her operations to New York City in 1937, as it

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\(^3\) At its peak in the summer of 1936, the FTP employed upwards of 14,000 people, ninety percent of whom were on work relief. (William McDonald puts the peak employment figure at 14,010 at the end of July 1936. McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts*, 523.) Nearly half of the workers were actors, with the rest consisting of writers, designers, dancers, and technical and administrative staff. (Library of Congress website, “The WPA Federal Theatre Project,” http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fedtp/ftwpa.html.) As was the case with other arts projects under Federal One, the FTP was divided into a number of distinct geographical regions, thirteen in total at the beginning, each of which had its own regional director. The FTP had divisions in a number of cities across nearly thirty states and more populous states or cities, such as New York, Boston, or California often had a number of separate FTP units.
was the theater capital of the United States, leaving the D.C. office in the hands of an assistant.⁴

The overall success of these FTP productions led Sinclair Lewis to allow the FTP to make the first production of his script *It Can’t Happen Here*, over offers from Broadway producers. Flanagan jumped at the opportunity and made the production a nationwide event. On 27 October 1936 the play opened simultaneously in twenty-one theaters across the country. She allowed the various regional FTP projects to make their own versions of the play to fit local tastes, and the resulting iterations included a Negro Unit version the play in Seattle, A Yiddish version in New York City, and a Spanish-language version put on in the largely Cuban Ybor City neighborhood of Tampa, Florida.

One of the most groundbreaking projects of the FTP was its “Living Newspaper” series, which tackled current events in a stark, minimalist, and uncompromising manner, or as historian Michael Hiltzik described, “transferring the immediacy of the newspaper in a straphanger’s hand directly to the stage.”⁵ These plays were a page out of Flanagan’s earlier experiences in experimental theater and were intended to elicit a response from the audiences and critics alike. They did not disappoint. The Living Newspaper series confronted such issues as the Agricultural

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⁴ McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts*, 515–17. The FTP was divided into a system of three separate branches: administrative, service, and special productions. The service and special productions branches included the Maintenance Department, Promotion Department, the Radio Unit, the Motion Picture Unit, and the Bureau of Research and Publication. It was this last department, later renamed the National Play Bureau, and then the National Service Bureau, that was responsible for finding folksongs for FTP productions, and the publication of a number of important folksong collections, under the direction of Herbert Halpert and George Herzog.

Administration Act, which remunerated farmers for destroying their own crops (Triple-A Plowed Under, 1936); FDR’s second inaugural speech about providing for the less fortunate (One-Third of a Nation, 1938); the struggles of organized labor in the court system (Injunction Granted, 1936); and even the dangers of syphilis (Spirochete: A History, 1938).

The Federal Theatre Project had the most inclusive policy toward, yet complicated relationship with race of all of the arts projects (though the Federal Writers’ Project was a close second). There were sixteen “Negro Units” of the Federal Theatre Project across the country (also referred to as the NTP, Negro Theatre Project), which were some of the most successful troupes of the FTP. In large part, whites held the administrative and directorship positions for the NTP, however. In 1936, one FTP Negro Unit produced a version of Macbeth (commonly referred to as “Voodoo Macbeth”), set in Haiti, and performed by an all-African American cast, replete with an African drum ensemble and authentic “witch doctor.” A twenty-year-old Orson Welles came up with the idea for this setting of the Shakespeare classic, and directed the production himself. It was an immediate hit, and played to sold-out crowds for nine weeks after its premiere. Other successful Negro Unit productions included Frank Wilson’s Walk Together, Chillun! (1936), Arna Bontemps and Countee Cullen’s The Conjur Man Dies (1936), William Du Bois’s Haiti, and Gentry Warden’s Swing Mikado (1938), among others.

No FTP production had as storied, troubled, and infamous a path from genesis to production as did Marc Blitzstein’s The Cradle Will Rock, directed by Orson
Welles, and produced by John Houseman. The Cradle—a musical about a fictitious “Steeltown, U.S.A.” on the verge of a strike—mixed a number of musical idioms including modernist classical music, jazz, and popular themes. It was slated to be part of the 1936–37 season, under the direction of Orson Welles, and produced by John Houseman, but it quickly ran into problems, including concerns over its overall cost (Welles had grand visions for elaborate stage settings and a full orchestra), and its subject matter, which reflected a general wariness on the part of the public and Congress about leftist influences in government arts projects. In fact, from start to finish the production was a fiasco, and public and governmental backlash proved to be an embarrassment for both the FTP and the WPA arts programs writ large (see footnote below for more detail). This production was only the beginning of the FTP’s troubles, however. (The Living Newspaper series was a particular target for

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6 The Cradle Will Rock has been the subject of numerous articles, chapters in books, and a film of the same name (Cradle Will Rock, dir. Tim Robbins, Touchstone Pictures, 1999).

7 Welles's vision for the production was wildly out of step with Flanagan's idea for the project, not to mention the FTP's budget in 1936. But the budget itself would come under fire within a year. In 1937, Congress voted to cut the budgets of all of the Federal One projects by about a third, which, given its operating costs, had a deleterious effect upon the FTP in particular. Because of these cuts, all new FTP productions were postponed until 1 July, while it sorted out the changes it needed to make. The opening night for the Cradle was supposed to be 16 June. If that concern had not been reason enough for concern, there had been a bloody crackdown on a labor uprising on Memorial Day, 30 May 1937, in which the Chicago police department shot and killed ten unarmed protestors. Word of the musical’s leftist, pro-labor, plot raised a number red flags within Washington, and there was obvious nervousness on the part of some Washington officials (which trickled down to Hopkins and Flanagan) about the staging of a pro-labor production within weeks of the massacre. Given all of the factors mentioned above, it is perhaps justifiable that, by many accounts, the principals of the Cradle were paranoid. The climax of the Cradle happened on opening day. Houseman and Welles had defied the postponement the previous night by staging a final dress rehearsal, which only served to further annoy WPA officials, who in turn locked down the theater the following morning and placed armed guards around its perimeter. Scrambling to find another venue—which they did twenty blocks away at the small Venice Theater—Houseman alerted the press that the premiere would happen as scheduled, with a few “minor” changes. The cast, which contractually could not appear on stage, would perform from the audience, standing when it was their time to sing or speak. Marc Blitzstein would provide the music by performing from an upright piano offstage. In the end, the theater was packed and the show was a resounding success—experimental theater at its finest. Furthermore, the story behind its
criticism, which was hardly surprising given the topics these plays attempted to cover.)

Controversy surrounding FTP productions—such as its Living Newspaper series and the Cradle fiasco—as well as attacks from the likes of Martin Dies and his House Committee on Un-American Activities (discussed below), caused the FTP to become a political liability for the WPA, one which after a time it could no longer protect. The final report for the WPA gives a measured, but relatively accurate, account of what actually happened:

In 1939, the Federal theater projects were particularly subjected to Congressional criticism because they were comparatively expensive, because they sometimes dealt with controversial themes (as in the Living Newspaper productions), and because of an alleged domination of such projects in New York City by Communists. …

The Federal theater productions, however, made important contributions to American theatrical history; they were marked, at their best, by vitality, freshness, and boldness.

Flanagan, for all of her best intentions and integrity in her defense of the program, was unable to stop the inevitable. FTP employees were forced to scramble to find employment with other programs such as the Education or Recreation Divisions; the FTP was terminated on 30 June 1939.

__production immediately became the stuff of legend, and helped to launch the careers of Houseman and Welles.__

8 For more on the demise of the FTP, see Jane DeHart Mathews, The Federal Theatre, 1935–1939: Plays, Relief, and Politics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 198 ff; McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, 533–40. McDonald states that the reasons for the abolition of the FTP were threefold: the FTP failed to achieve a non-metropolitan character; the New York City’s Living Newspaper productions, particularly Power, proved to be too controversial; and the problems surrounding the production of the Swing Mikado in New York City. Ibid., 533.

Folk Music and the FTP

Music, and folk music in particular, played an important role in the FTP’s productions. The FTP programmed a number of musical productions that were either created specifically for the FTP or performed by its theater units, including Kurt Weill and Paul Green’s *Johnny Johnson* (1936, performed by the FTP in 1937); Marc Blitzstein’s *The Cradle Will Rock* (1936–37, produced by John Houseman, directed by Orson Welles); and Ned Lehac’s musical revue *Sing for Your Supper* (1939), to name only a few.10 The FTP Negro Units also contributed some of the most successful musical productions in the FTP’s history, the most famous of which were Hall Johnson’s *Run, Little Chillun!* (1933); Orson Welles and John Houseman’s Harlem Federal Theatre Project production, “Voodoo *Macbeth*” (1936), and Gentry Warden’s *Swing Mikado* (1938).11

Unlike the Music and Writers’ Projects, however, the Federal Theatre Project was not directly involved with folk music collecting. Aside from FTP employee Herbert Halpert’s folksong and folklore collecting trips in New York City and New Jersey, which were only loosely affiliated with the FTP’s National Service Bureau

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(NSB, formerly the Bureau of Research and Publication), there were no FTP employees actively engaged in music collection. The FTP was involved in folk music research, however, and its series of five folk music publications for the NSB, edited by George Herzog and Herbert Halpert, served as important resources for scholars and collectors in the field. Moreover, folk music played a vital role in the FTP’s performances, and the project had a department designated for music, and folk music research. Despite the FTP’s lack of collectors in the field, the program’s efforts served as an integral piece to the larger puzzle that was WPA folk music collecting and popularization.

In addition to having its own musicians and performing ensembles, the FTP had its own Music Department within its NSB, which was responsible for all of the behind-the-scenes administrative, consulting, and technical details for the FTP productions. Moreover, the NSB was the one unit directly involved in folk music research and publication. In 1939, NSB director Emmett Lavery stated that the Music Department would work to “assemble and make available to our projects and to the general public collections of folksongs and folk lore, and to integrate this material

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12 The Bureau of Research and Publication went through a number of restructuring moves and name changes over the course of its existence. After a departmental reorganization in 1936 it became the National Play Bureau, and one of the changes in this reorganization was the addition of a music department that was charged with providing scores for use in musical productions, shepherding music clearances, and reading musical plays. The Play Policy Bureau was formerly called the Playreading Bureau, initially a part of the Bureau of Research and Publication. The Playreading Bureau became an autonomous unit in May 1936, and became the Play Policy Board in early 1937. In July 1937, due to budget cuts, the Play Bureau was combined with the policy board and was renamed the National Service Bureau (NSB). Upon the formation of the NSB in July 1937, Emmet Lavery became director. See McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, 547–49; and Kazacoff, Dangerous Theatre, 31.
with the American dramatic scene.” The integration of folkloric materials into FTP productions proved to be immensely successful for the project, dovetailing with a more general trend toward folk-inspired art throughout U.S. popular culture. Moreover, folk and vernacular music was extremely malleable, and could be used to set any number of scenes easily, from conjuring a sense of a bygone, romanticized past, to creating an exotic scene of rural life—generally Southern or African American cultures—for urban audiences who might otherwise be unfamiliar with such a setting. It also had the added advantage of needing fewer highly trained musicians to portray a sense of authenticity of performance, as in the case of a cappella work songs, spirituals, or choral pieces.

Perhaps most importantly, the use of folk music saved the Theatre Project a lot of money: for the most part the FTP tried to use folk music of unknown authorship or music that was in the public domain. The Federal Theatre Project was beholden to the same copyright concerns as any other theater outfit, and was required to pay public performance remuneration to any rights holders over the music it used. In an internal FTP memorandum, NSB worker Herbert Halpert, who in July 1936 set up the Music Research Department for the FTP’s Bureau of Research and Publication, offered his services as a folk music researcher for FTP employees interested in using folk music in their productions:

Do you want to know what tune should be whistled by a Confederate soldier or what ballad a Tennessee mountain woman might sing that is not a “hillbilly” song? Do you need a sea shanty from a southern cotton port or a hobo song not used by comedians? Can you use a cowboy song not done to death by the radio or the 1790 tune to which Yankee Doodle was sung or anything of a folk nature from play party songs to a country dance melody? The Music Research Department will get it for you.

Specific information concerning music for old stage productions can be had on short notice. We can furnish you with the music for Andrew Barton’s “The Disappointment,” the first American opera, and shall soon be able to send you scores for the popular period songs incorporated in the script of “Barnum Returns.”

Our emphasis, for the time being, will be primarily on American music material, since that is what is most in demand, but we are also able to assist you with music of other races and nationalities. In addition to the work of our own staff, we had evolved a tentative program of mutual co-operation with the Federal Music Project. This means that the resources of that organization will be added to ours for really difficult problems, and that we shall avoid duplicating any work already done by them.14

Halpert continued his cheerleading for his department on a much wider scale by way of an article published in the July 1938 issue of Southern Folklore Quarterly titled “Federal Theatre and Folksong.”15 Quoting liberally from Hallie Flanagan’s February

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15 Herbert Halpert, “Federal Theatre and Folksong,” Southern Folklore Quarterly 2, no. 2 (1938): 81. As discussed below, Halpert was a graduate student in folklore and anthropology at Columbia University (M.A. 1946), where he studied with George Herzog and Ruth Benedict, and where he had begun collecting folk rhymes of New York City children, and investigating folk music in the Piney region of New Jersey. See Herbert Halpert, “Children’s Rhymes and Games,” unpublished manuscript, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Federal Writers’ Project—Folklore, Box A647; Herbert Halpert, “Folk Rhymes of New York City Children,” M.A. thesis, Columbia University, 1946; Robert Baron, “‘I Saw Mrs. Saray, Sitting on a Bombalerry’: Ralph Ellison Collects Children’s Folklore in
1938 briefing before the House of Representatives’ Committee on Patents, Halpert wrote, “New American plays ‘based on belief that American life is full of exciting possibilities for drama’ have been important lines of development.” After cataloging the plays that employed such folk materials, including *America Sings* (Frances Hall Ward, 1936); *Feet on the Ground* (Harry Archibald, 1936); *The Lost Colony* (Paul Green, 1937), the Living Newspaper play, *Power* (Arent, 1937); and *How Long Brethren?* (Helen Tamiris, Federal Dance Project, 1937), Halpert stated, “It was easy to see the need for folksongs in productions dealing with folk figures or historical development.”

An internal memorandum from the head of the FTP Play Department, Converse Tyler, to Ben Russak, the Coordinator of New Plays, indicates that as of March 1939 the FTP had staged no fewer than two-dozen productions listed under the classification “American Historical and Regional Plays,” with subcategories for Harlem, in *New York State Folklife Reader: Diverse Voices*, ed. Elizabeth Tucker and Ellen McHale (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 68–69, 76–79.

Halpert, Federal Theatre and Folksong,” 81. Hallie Flanagan’s brief reads, “New American Plays: This is one of our most important lines of development, since it is based on belief that American life is full of exciting possibilities for drama. Some of these plays deal with legendary or historic figures of American life—John Bunyan, Davy Crockett, John Brown, Abraham Lincoln. Others deal with whole periods of America’s development, such as the history of Arkansas, done in America Sings; the saga of the Dunkards in Pennsylvania, in Feet on the Ground; the peopling of the plains, in Chicago’s new symphonic drama, Midwest; the story of The Lost Colony in Paul Green's drama, done last summer on Roanoke Island. Others attack problems of industrial and economic life as may be gained from such titles as Altars of Steel, in Atlanta; Big White Fog, in Chicago; Class of ’29, in Boston; and Turpentine, in Harlem. “The Living Newspaper,” a terse, cinematic, hard-hitting, dramatic form evolved on the project, deals with contemporary factual material: Agriculture in “Triple A Ploughed Under”; labor in the courts in “Injunction Granted”; housing in “One-third of a Nation.” Oregon has a living newspaper on flax, and New Orleans is preparing one on flood control. … In stressing this material of the past and present we hope to build a theatre out of the fabric of American life.” Hallie Flanagan, “A Brief Delivered by Hallie Flanagan, Director, Federal Theatre Project, Works Progress Administration before the Committee on Patents, House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., February 8, 1938,” 6–7; available online at http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fedtp/twpa.html.

“Living Newspaper and Documentary Plays,” “Folk and Regional Plays,” and Historical and Biographical Plays,” and within those subcategories, designations for “historical” or “frontier” plays. Although some of the plays in the memorandum had been written outside of the auspices of the FTP, such as The Ballad of Davy Crockett (Hoffman R. Hays, 1936), Miracle of the Swallows: California’s Romantic Legend Play (Ramon Romero, 1937), and The Farmer Takes a Wife (Frank B. Elser and Marc Connelly, 1934), other productions had been written specifically for the project, such as Created Equal (John Hunter Booth, 1938); Battle Hymn (George Goldschmidt, Michael Blankfort, and Michael Gold, Experimental Theatre, 1936), and the Living Newspaper Plays Triple-A Plowed Under and 1935 (Arent, 1936, and 1938, respectively, both with scores by Lee Wainer). To be sure, not all of these plays

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18 At Russak’s request Tyler compiled a list of these plays in March 1939. Letter from Converse Tyler to Ben Russak, 21 March 1939, Federal Theatre Project Correspondence—1939—American Historical and Regional Plays—Tyler, Converse, AFC–LC. Absent from this list were any regional or historical productions written or performed by non-mainstream FTP groups, in particular the “Negro units.” Such an omission is certainly glaring, but the purpose of the memo is not entirely clear. Given the timing of the request, which was made only a few months before the end of the FTP, it is possible, albeit speculative, that the list was made to compile the plays that promoted a sense of nationalism in the face of criticism to the contrary, and given the marginalized status of the NTP, its exclusion may have been intentional. However, the amount of contact that these NSB administrators had with the African American units to begin with is not entirely clear, as there was a distinctly separate status given to them in practice if not in name. For a thorough discussion of the “Negro units” of the FTP, see Fraden, Blueprints for a Black Theatre 1935–1939.

19 Kurt Weill spent a considerable amount of time working with Hays in 1938 to develop a musical play based on Davy Crockett, but the project was ultimately abandoned, due perhaps to the tenuous position of the FTP soon thereafter. Ethan Mordden, Love Song: The Lives of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya (New York: MacMillan, 2012), 192.

20 For information on Created Equal, see Elizabeth A. Osborne, Staging the People: Community and Identity in the Federal Theatre Project (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 54 ff. The FTP’s Living Newspaper productions focused on current events such as the Agricultural Administration Act, which remunerated farmers for destroying their own crops (Triple-A Plowed Under, Arent, et al., 1936); FDR’s second inaugural speech about providing for the less fortunate (One-Third of a Nation, Arent, 1938); the struggles of organized labor in the court system (Injunction Granted, Arent, et al., 1936); and even the dangers of syphilis (Spirochete: A History, Arnold Sungaard, 1938). Due to their topical and often times left-leaning, subject matter, they were more widely scrutinized by conservatives and other FTP critics, and factored heavily into the ultimate demise of the program as a
used folk music, but a brief survey of the FTP productions that used traditional or vernacular music (Anglo-American folksongs, African American spirituals and work songs, cowboy songs, etc.) shows a wide variety of music taken from a number of different sources. (For a list of some of the sorts of music used in these productions, see Appendix 4).

The Five NSB Publications of George Herzog and Herbert Halpert, 1937–1939

The series of five publications, published by the National Service Bureau and spearheaded by Herbert Halpert and his former Columbia University professor, George Herzog, were perhaps the most significant contribution to folk music research that the FTP made. That the Theatre Project, and not the Music or Writers’ Projects, was responsible for these publications is somewhat surprising, though the FTP’s National Service Bureau, with its well-established publication infrastructure turned out to be an ideal venue.\(^{21}\) Neither Halpert nor Herzog possessed extensive knowledge of U.S. folk music—Halpert had only just embarked on what was to become a lifelong passion for folklore, and Herzog had studied mainly Native American and European folk musics—but the collaboration between Halpert, the curious and enthusiastic student, and Herzog, the young, iconoclastic teacher ten years Halpert’s senior, turned out to be fortuitous, not only for the FTP, but also for whole. For information on Lee Wainer, see Stuart Cosgrove, “The Living Newspaper: History, Production, and Form” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Hull, 1982), 108. (Cosgrove spells the composer’s name “Rainer.”)\(^{21}\) The NSB was responsible for publishing all of the plays and play indexes and catalogs for the Federal Theatre Project.
the state of folk music research in the United States in general. But before discussing the NSB publications, it is necessary to understand the work of George Herzog.

**George Herzog’s Publications on “Folk” and “Primitive” Musics**

Between 1928 and 1950, George Herzog published widely on Native American music, African music, and U.S. and European folk music, as well as general studies of “primitive” and “folk musics.” Herzog also contributed numerous transcriptions for published folk music collections, including the Lomaxes’ *Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly.* His entry for folk song (“Song”) in the *Funk and Wagnall’s Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend* remains an important resource for scholars of folk music. David McAllester, in his obituary for Herzog in 1984, stated “[Herzog’s] was the pen that reviewed anything on ‘primitive’ music and much that was on ‘folk’ music. His were the transcriptions not only in his

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23 Herzog’s entry was originally supposed to be “Folk Song” and was to be included in the first volume of the two-volume collection, but as was his habit, he was late with the submission, so the entry was cut to “Song” and was included in the second volume. See Nettl, *Becoming an Ethnomusicologist,* 73.
own work but also in the publications of a long list of colleagues. No one has ever revised them.”

Herzog’s foundational publication from this period was his bulletin for the American Council of Learned Societies, published in April 1936, titled Research in Primitive and Folk Music in the United States. On the surface, Herzog’s survey is essentially a two-part bibliographic study of all of the scholarship on primitive and folk musics made in the United States, with the first part devoted to primitive music, and the second to folk music. (Herzog admitted that “the political boundary has been overstepped in a few instances” mainly because he found it difficult to exclude not only studies that were connected to the United States collections, including some from Canada, but also studies that reflected his own wide-ranging musical knowledge.) But Herzog’s survey was more than a simple exercise in list making; it encapsulated his own worldview on music collecting and research, and it also pointed a way forward for the discipline of comparative musicology. Herzog began his foreword to the survey by listing the potential audience for the study, and in so doing, he revealed his own synthesis of the role of musician, anthropologist, and comparative musicologist, and where he believed the intersections among the disciplines existed:

The student of culture records such music for preservation as historical documents; the anthropologist (or “comparative musicologist”) studies these records as expressions of formal esthetic, and emotional trends; and through

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such studies the psychologist hopes to find some of his problems clarified. The musician is eager to know whether some of his experiments have been paralleled before, whether there are principles of musical structure other than the ones with which he is acquainted; and the lay public is anxious to satisfy its curiosity in the highlights of all these viewpoints.  

Herzog also admitted from the outset that an exhaustive survey was simply not possible, chiefly because of “the nature of the materials and their study”:

The study of primitive music is carried on chiefly as a branch of anthropology, and the materials are for the most part concentrated in institutions concerned with that science. On the other hand, academic interest in the musical aspects of folksong is scattered through departments of music, literature, English, etc., and the number of private collectors and interested persons is very large, many of them being difficult to reach or even locate.

Indeed Herzog planted his study of primitive music firmly in the realm of anthropology, stating, “many of the problems upon which it concentrates are in line with similar problems that anthropology has set for itself.” In a nod to his training with Boas, Herzog noted that music, “like other phases of culture, is affected by cultural change, stimulation, and lag,” adding that “primitive music may serve as an index of primitive history and of fluctuation in culture.” He conceded, however, that “changes in music do not follow slavishly the vicissitudes of political and social history, and because music “often aligns itself with the most conservative forms of culture, it can also serve the student in reconstructing older trends and movements, social or musical.”

26 Ibid., i.
27 Ibid., iii.
28 Ibid., 5.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
Herzog’s mode of inquiry, even with its culturally aware, anthropological foundation, was still centered in his Western mode of thinking, as evidenced in the question he posed: “Is the primitive’s musical experience the same as ours—which is another way of saying, is music for the primitive what music is for us?”31 Herzog’s answer was seemingly “no,” as he discussed the shortcomings and lack of sophistication of the musical systems that he deemed primitive (generally those of the Native American tribes in the United States), which he characterized as, “the primitive’s interest in musical theory, in the analysis of musical form, in the esthetic experience of music, is about as meager and devoid of terminology and concepts as is that of the musically unsophisticated person in our own culture.”32

In Herzog’s discussion of the musical characteristics of most primitive musics, such as vocal technique, and the relationship of melody to text, he underscored his comparative, Western-centric approach through a series of questions aimed at understanding how this music was composed: “What are the standards raised toward performance and composition? Why are some would-be composers and performers accepted and others not; why are certain compositions and performances rejected and not others?” Herzog admits, however that the posing of such queries indicates the limitations in the Western system of musical understanding: “Here, again, our methods and concepts are not directly applicable to primitive ‘material.’”33 Herzog did discuss the crucial correlation of music and dance in Native American

31 Ibid., 6.
32 Ibid., 7.
33 Ibid., 8.
musics, and lamented the lack of study in this area, concluding that “the study of music, when it is part of a closely knit larger complex is bound to suffer if it is studied apart from that larger whole.”

Herzog’s second half of his survey, the section devoted to U.S. folk music, reflects his relatively recent foray into the field, though his insights are acute and prescient. Unlike primitive music, Herzog had not researched or published on subjects related to folk music, though at the time he was writing the survey he was working on transcriptions for the Lomaxes’ forthcoming book on the music of Lead Belly, and Herzog had also been working alongside Charles Seeger in the American Society for Comparative Musicology, and folk song collectors and ballad scholars through his association with the Modern Language Association.

Herzog knew enough through his brief time working with the literary ballad scholars of the MLA that he would do well by leaving the textual studies to them, and instead focus on collections that were musically based, though such an approach created its own set of problems:

In many regions the collecting of melodies is done solely through noting down by ear, and in a rather haphazard fashion. The number of private ballad or folksong hunters working quietly on their own, often jealously guarding their treasures, is large. There are, in addition, collectors whose interest is semi-commercial. The material thus gathered varies greatly in value. All of it might become scientifically useful, if assembled and subjected to critical sifting and checking. Much of it, however, will never be submitted to such a process, or published, so that its actual value will not be disclosed. To evaluate this material is at present a practical impossibility.\(^{35}\)

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 10.
\(^{35}\) Ibid, 45.
Herzog was aware of the useful work that literary ballad scholars had done in the curation of folksongs in the United States. In particular, he pointed out “those types of our folksong which have the most immediate appeal to the American survivals of those British ballads which were gathered into an authoritative collection by Professor [Francis J.] Child… the achievements [of] which … cannot and should not be underestimated.”

But Herzog asserted that “the overemphasis on the textual side, whether resulting from specialized interest or necessitated by lack of cooperation from trained musicians—not to mention musicologists—has for a long time prevented certain aspects of … folk music… from receiving due attention.”

Herzog offered a solution to the lack of musical balance in folk song studies: “The cooperation of the musician is more and more felt to be necessary, both for an adequate transcription of melodies, from objective records by ear, and for the study of musical problems.”

Herzog admitted, however, that that “to overemphasize the musical study would be as detrimental as the overemphasis on the textual and literary side has been.”

Herzog was part of the first generation of folk music scholars to examine folk music as *music* and not merely as a vessel for textual studies. In the mid-1930s disciplinary boundaries were firm and debates were vigorous about the place of musicians in ballad scholarship. These debates played out in the meetings of the newly formed Committee on Folk Song of the Modern Language Association.”

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37 Ibid., 46.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., iii.
Popular Literature Section, in 1934 in Philadelphia (1934), Cincinnati (1935), and Richmond (1936). Ralph S. Boggs, the head of the Popular Literature Section, appointed the committee for the “broad and indeterminate” purpose of surveying the field of ballad and folk song collecting in the United States, and creating reports and recommendations on a potential path forward that would “coordinate the various activities [of folk collectors] and improve the efficiency of the results of the collecting agencies.”

The membership was comprised of Reed Smith (committee chairman, University of South Carolina); Phillips Barry (Cambridge, MA); Martha W. Beckwith (Folklore Foundation, Vassar College); Arthur Kyle Davis, Jr. (University of Virginia); George Herzog (Columbia University); John A. Lomax (AAFS); and Archer Taylor (University of Chicago). University of Florida English professor Alton C. Morris published the “Report of the Committee on Folksong” in the June 1937 issue of his journal the Southern Folklore Quarterly.

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40 “Appointment and Function of the Committee,” in “Committee on Folk Song of the Popular Literature Section of the Modern Language Association of America” issue of Southern Folklore Quarterly 1, no. 2 (1937): 2.
41 Ibid. The list of advisers to the committee included H. M. Belden (University of Missouri); Ruth Benedict (Columbia University); Frank C. Brown (Duke University) Robert W. Gordon (Washington D.C.); Mellinger E. Henry (New Jersey); Sigurd B. Hustvedt (UCLA); Arthur Palmer Hudson (University of North Carolina); George Lyman Kittredge (Harvard University); Alton C. Morris (University of Florida); Louise Pound (University of Nebraska); and Stith Thompson (Indiana University), among others.
42 Ibid., 2–3. The brand-new Committee on Folk Song had few, if any, resources at its disposal and they were forced to work on a shoestring budget. According to their first report, “to cover such a field as this [adequately] would require a permanent organization.” Therefore, Alton Morris, the editor of the recently launched Southern Folklore Quarterly, operated out of the University of Florida, stepped up to publish the committee’s first report and series of articles stemming from their meetings, devoting the entire second issue of the SFQ’s inaugural volume to the Committee on Folk Song. The resulting collection of essays covered a wide range of topics related to folk song by many of the members of the committee. Reed Smith, Arthur Kyle Davis, Jr., and Phillips Barry all contributed general essays on the state of ballad and folk music research in the United States. George Herzog published two articles: a
Reed Smith began the issue by acknowledging “a special debt of gratitude to … musicians… who have done much by both precept and practice to emphasize the importance of music as an essential element in collecting and recording ballads and folksongs,” noting that “it would seem that the time has come to emphasize the song equally with the folk.” But, Smith asserted, “This does not mean, of course that we should turn over our hard won heritage of ballads and folksongs entirely to the musicians. But we do need their help—as they need ours. … ‘There are scholars and musicians in this association, but the scholars are not musicians, and the musicians are not scholars.’”

Arthur Kyle Davis, Jr., noted, “Folk song is an amphibian form. Long enough has the purely textual study of folk song engaged the mind. It is high time for the musician to contribute his emphasis upon the tunes,” but in the very next paragraph he changed his own tune:

It would, however, be a mistake to ignore the fact that the sudden flocking of musicians to a field previously little known to them is attended by certain dangers. Many musicians have burst into the field without a proper humility or willingness to familiarize themselves with the background of a subject of distinguished scholarly tradition and one so subtle as to offer innumerable pitfalls to the uninitiated worker. Without preparation, without reverence for the scholarly past of the subject, many musicians have rushed in agog with enthusiasm for their newly discovered land. It is not surprising that their contribution has not always been an acceptable one, or that some scholars have been unable to work with them on peaceful or profitable terms.

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43 Reed Smith, “A Glance at the Ballad and Folksong Field, with a Table of Traditional Ballad Survivals in America, 1937,” *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1937): 13–14.
Davis acknowledged the role of the musicologist “that rare and delicate amphibian,” but he noted, “Unhappily, very few of the species are now extant or available for folk song research.”

Two years earlier, in a review of Cecil Sharp and Olive Dame Campbell’s *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*, Davis argued, “The essential antagonism, in this country at any rate, seems to be between music and scholarship. Our scholars have seldom been musicians, and still less have our musicians been scholars. … The day has passed when scholars could afford to ignore or subordinate the music of folk songs; the day has not yet arrived when folk song scholarship can with safety be turned over to the musicians.”

For his part, Herzog concurred with the textual scholars’ general assessment. In his study *Research in Primitive and Folk Music of the United States*, he noted, “Interest in the literary and textual side of folk music continues, especially in the textual study of traditional ballads, which is supported by a well-established tradition.” But Herzog understood that there was a grand opportunity for music scholars to make a meaningful contribution to the study of folk music. He noted that a “strictly musical study of American folksong has hardly taken a real start” and argued, “The cooperation of the musician is more and more felt to be necessary, both

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46 Davis, Jr., “Some Recent Trends in the Field of Folksong,” 21. Part of the problem, Davis believed, was the lack of adequate conservatories or universities in the United States that could produce competent musicologists, stating that the people pushing for an educational system that focused on American music were guilty of promoting “rather grandiose theories.”


48 Herzog, *Research in Primitive and Folk Music in the United States*, 48 [608]. (Page number in parentheses refers to the page range of the entire ACLS volume.)
for an adequate transcription of melodies, from objective records or by ear, and for
the study of musical problems. [The music scholar] is thus placed in a strategic
position, but the musician’s singlehanded efforts would result in a one-sidedness
hardly equaled by that of the literary student.\footnote{Herzog, \textit{Research in Primitive and Folk Music in the United States}, 48 [608].} Training, for Herzog, had been the
major stumbling block for the musical study of folksongs, and he noted, “The
cooperation of enthusiastic musicians has accomplished very much, but there is a
need for scientifically trained investigators who can devote themselves to tasks
concerned with systematic work and analysis, quite different from those undertaken
for the sake of esthetic interest.”\footnote{Herzog, \textit{Research in Primitive and Folk Music in the United States}, 94 [654].}

Moreover, Herzog was concerned with a general lack of cultural context
within folksong study by both the textualists and the musicians, arguing that, “it
cannot be said that even the literary study has led far toward a comprehensive view of
the material against the cultural background.”\footnote{Ibid., 50.} Although literary scholars had
concerned themselves with studies of textual variants, they generally used the
discussions of textual differences to compare newly discovered ballad versions to
Child’s original “ur-texts.” Herzog noted, “It was early recognized that even the
traditional ballads do not represent historical documents of bygone ages in the
technical sense,” and that “the folksong is in a more indirect sense a significant
document of cultural-historical processes.”
For Herzog, the fundamental difficulty of creating such monuments for individual songs centered on the fact that the United States was vast, it had a mixed national background, and its population was mobile, all of which pointed to the importance of studying regional traits and variants rather than folk music as a single organism. Hence, Herzog focused on variations in folksongs as important markers of individual and regional identity, noting that “the study of musical variants, paralleling the older study of text variants, is one of the most fruitful directions in which investigations may move. It is of value not only for the light it will throw in the life-history of single melodies, and for its own psychological significance, but also as it will show processes of the growth and ramification of musical form on a comparatively small scale.”

Moreover, Herzog noted the importance of studying individual musicians to ascertain variation from performance to performance, or within the same song. “The form of variation which is of most immediate interest,” Herzog asserted, “is that observed between different forms of the melody as sung to the successive stanzas of a song. It is here that the essential fluidity of musical form in the folksong shows most clearly.”

A well-informed and careful approach to musical transcription was, for Herzog, critical. “The standard procedure of study,” Herzog noted, “has been, and still is, to transcribe the record by ear into musical notation, to analyze this transcript with the record, and to publish it, often giving merely one representative version of
the melody.”\textsuperscript{54} Herzog’s ideal situation, he asserted, would be the publication of “a melody in its entirety, with all the variations between different stanzas noted down,” because, he noted, “Not only do these variations and their study reveal the essential “Gestalt” of a song … they also give valuable leads to its history.”\textsuperscript{55} Although Herzog himself is guilty of Gestalt essentialism, his position was novel at the time, as few folk music collectors had even considered such an approach. With the exception of the Lomaxes and Sidney Robertson, it was rare for a collector to visit the same performer on more than one occasion, and variations within a particular song were generally “smoothed out” in collections in order to display a regular and fundamental melody for the sake of publication.

In terms of variations, Herzog himself was quite concerned, in both the folk and primitive sections, about the problems of notating the music accurately as it was performed. In surveying the collections, Herzog observed the lack of consistency and quality of the transcriptions to date, particularly those that had been handwritten in the field at the moment they were being performed:

The actual value of melodies written down by ear, very many still in manuscript, varies greatly and can be established in detail only be careful sifting and critical comparison, such as some individuals and groups have been carrying on. Not a very large part of the written material has been written down by competent musicians, and what constitutes competence for this study will have to be redefined. It seems very necessary, nevertheless, to salvage for scientific purposes all such material.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 55–56.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 64.
One of the main problems that Herzog noticed in the transcription of folk and primitive melodies was the overall inadequacy of Western musical notation for the task at hand, noting that “any kind of notation or symbolic representation is merely an intricate shorthand, closely adapted to the needs of a particular type of material. … Much that is ‘taken for granted’ in musical practice … is not indicated, or at any rate not with exactness.” As a partial solution to the problem, Herzog suggested a descriptive manner of notation, which would be “extended by a number of signs and modifications” (a technique Herzog used in his transcriptions of Lead Belly’s music, discussed below), though he was careful to admit that his suggestion was only a stopgap measure: “No musical notation, however cluttered with extra signs, can convey to our reader the desired impression.”

Herzog also called for a more robust and substantive approach to the codification of primitive and folk song melodies through the use of the types of classification systems that had been en vogue in Europe for some decades, mainly through the work of folk music scholars such as Béla Bartók, Ilmari Krohn, and Oswald Koller. He noted, “No satisfactory system of classifying and grouping

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57 Ibid., 16.
melodies has been employed in work published in the United States so far.

Classification, not an inspiring task to start out with, is essential for establishing a musical typology, for presenting musical material in an ordered form, and for making comparative studies.”60 Herzog’s general assessment of both folk and primitive musics was that each was “rapidly disappearing” due to “the impact of industrial civilization and its products, such as the radio” and “commercialized ‘popular’ music,” which Herzog admitted would “in turn will one day serve as matter for theoretical discussion and serious studies.”61

**George Herzog’s and the Lomaxes’ Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly**

Herzog was able to put into practice many of the theories he was pondering in his survey with regard to musical transcriptions through his work with John and Alan Lomax on their book about Lead Belly and his music. In May 1934, while Herzog was working on the folk music section of his survey, he contacted John A. Lomax by way of the Archive of American Folk Song, asking for his expertise regarding folk music collecting in the United States, and in particular regarding Lomax’s own collections.62 This initial contact placed Herzog’s name on the Lomaxes’ lips, and Halpert’s name soon followed. In September 1935, Alan Lomax wrote Francis

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60 Ibid., 61.

61 Ibid., 43, 94.

62 George Herzog to John A. Lomax, 8 May 1934, John A. Lomax Family Papers, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Box 3D157, Folder 5 (John A. Lomax, Sr.; Personal: Friends and Colleagues, Correspondence and Other Materials: George Herzog [sic], 1934–1936, and undated.)
McFarland, former chair of the Music Advisory Committee of the Temporary Emergency Relief Association (TERA), and current Director of Music Projects for the WPA, stating,

The possibility of the Works Progress Administration approving a project in American folk music has been this week suggested to me by Mr. Herbert Halpert. On the basis of your interest in American culture, I should like to submit a project that will be an important contribution to the scientific study of American folk songs and to American culture. I have discussed this project with many musicians and students of folk song, and it has generally been agreed that it is vital to the study, preservation, and proper presentation of American folk music.63

Lomax also suggested that “to make use of this material in furthering either the scientific study of folk songs or the composition of an American music which should be based on our extensive and beautiful folk traditions” there needed to be adequate training in the understanding of this music, so the people assigned to transcribing and analyzing the music could accurately and faithfully represent the music on paper: “There are few musicians capable for this highly technical and precise work. … The project I suggest is the establishment of a course … in the transcription of folk music. This class should work under the supervision of some expert in the field of primitive music, most preferably Dr. Herzog of Yale University.”64

In February 1935, John Lomax approached Herzog with the proposition that the Yale professor provide transcriptions for an upcoming book Lomax and his son were completing about Lead Belly, provisionally titled *Negro Sinful Songs* (later

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64 Ibid., 12.
Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly, published by Macmillan in 1936).\footnote{Published as John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly, “King of the Twelve-String Guitar Players of the World,” Long-Time Convict in the Penitentiaries of Texas and Louisiana (New York: Macmillan, 1936).} Herzog was not the Lomaxes first choice, however: John Lomax first asked the eminent folk song scholar Phillips Barry to provide the transcriptions, but Barry refused overwhelming workload. Barry suggested Herzog because of his “wide experience in recording native music in Africa.”\footnote{Phillips Barry to John A. Lomax, 17 February 1935, John A. Lomax Family Papers, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Box 3D157, Folder 5 (John A. Lomax, Sr.; Personal: Friends and Colleagues, Correspondence and Other Materials: George Hertzog [sic], 1934–1936, and undated.} “There is no one better equipped to transcribe the records for you,” Barry explained, “and to catch any elusive Africanisms that might escape the attention of a person, who, however well trained, has not the advantages of his work in the African field.”\footnote{Ibid.}

The Lomaxes’ book, Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly, “King of the Twelve-String Guitar Players of the World,” Long-Time Convict in the Penitentiaries of Texas and Louisiana, was published on 24 November 1936, but it received an underwhelming response from both critics and the book-buying public. R. Emmet Kennedy of the New York Times wrote, “As a contribution to lovers of Negro folk music, the book offers little that can be regarded as strikingly original.”\footnote{R. Emmet Kennedy, “The ‘King of the Twelve-String Guitar Players’; review of Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly,” New York Times, 27 December 1936, BR7.} Herzog’s transcriptions, though meticulously researched and executed, were part of the critic’s major targets. Kennedy decried Herzog’s contribution, stating, “The musical notation used in the volume and explained by Dr. Herzog is puzzling and unsatisfactory,
especially to the layman.” Herzog attempted to explain his notation in a lengthy introduction he penned for the book, noting,

Our system of writing music, or for that matter any system, is at best a kind of shorthand. As such it suggests, rather than reproduces, a musical idiom. In order to express another idiom, it must be modified. In any case, unless one has some acquaintance with the idiom it is difficult to interpret even the most adequate system. Sufficient acquaintance may even compensate for gross inadequacies. Those who are familiar with Southern Negro singing would not require the sort of representation here attempted. But those unversed in it may find that the signs employed enable them to experiment and eventually get the swing. Even those who know the sound and feel of Negro rhythm may be interested in this effort to discover and analyze just wherein it is different from the sort for which our customary notation is adequate. By forcing, it would have been possible to put a few more of these melodies into the strait-jacket of consistent measures, 3/4, 4/4, or the like. But this cannot be done to most of the folk-blues without destroying the melody.69

One of the biggest problems with Herzog’s approach was his attempt to use descriptive notation (as opposed to traditional “prescriptive” Western notation)—what Charles Seeger referred to as “what happens between the notes”—in a book that was to be mass marketed to the general public.70 His compromise with the constraints of music publishing was to devise a system of easily typeset symbols that could get at some of the musical subtleties in Lead Belly’s recorded performances. An “X” over a note indicated that the pitch was “somewhat higher” than notated, whereas an “en dash (–) over a note indicated a slightly lower pitch. A fermata denoted a duration

69 See George Herzog, “The Musical Notation Used in This Volume; An Explanation, by George Herzog, Ph.D., Columbia University,” in Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly, 67–68. (John Lomax’s handwritten notes for the title page indicated that Herzog was still at Yale, though he had moved to Columbia by the time the book went to press. Briscoe Center for American History, Lomax Family Papers Box 3D187, Folder 7: “John A. Lomax, Sr., Folk poetry and folksongs: Literary productions; Books: Negro Folk Songs as sung by Lead Belly, ca. 1936.”)
that was “somewhat longer, but not more than half again as long; otherwise the note is written out with its full value,” and an upside-down fermata signified a duration that was somewhat shorter than that which was written. Herzog revised other traditional notational symbols for the sake of describing glissandos, portamenti, incomplete vs. complete ties, uncertain pitches (sung or half-spoken), short rests that made no real break in time, and incomplete bar lines.  

He also altered metronome indications and rhythmic designations in his attempts to get at Lead Belly’s unorthodox and free delivery: “The metronome indications show that the speed increases as the melody is repeated over and over. The notation of speed and of rhythmic values becomes merely approximate in the songs marked ‘free’ or ‘somewhat free.’ In some of these songs the rhythm approaches the freedom of prose speech.” In Szwed’s opinion, the “problem was that Herzog took the task too much to heart, became deadly serious about making the Lead Belly book a model of anthropological musicology, and critiqued the project as the Lomaxes conceived it.”

**Publishing the NSB Folk Music Studies**

Halpert came up with the idea of creating the NSB publications after he read Herzog’s *Research in Primitive and Folk Music in the United States*. He realized that “some of the unpublished folksong collections had great potential for publication because they were virtually inaccessible” and that there were “also many important

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71 Herzog’s notational system is given in *Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly*, 67–68.
72 Herzog, *Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly*, 68.
articles on folksong, published years before, that I thought merited republication.”

The NSB, Halpert believed, was a logical venue for such a project because it had all of the necessary resources such as printing equipment, typists, and music transcribers.

Herzog and Halpert’s goal for the series was to create “a medium for inexpensive and unpretentious publication of folksong and folklore materials which otherwise might remain unavailable or even be lost” with “introductory essays to stimulate discussion or problems.” They contacted folksong collectors throughout the country to see whether they would be willing to let them make copies of their unpublished material. Many of the collectors were more than happy to oblige. Halpert wrote of the publications in his “Federal Theatre and Folksong” article,

We secured permission to copy several M.A. theses on folksong, and copies of these were sent to several libraries as well as to the Archive of Folk Song in Washington. It was found that in many cases collectors had gathered materials but for some reason had found it impossible to publish them. The high cost of printing and the unwillingness of publishers to undertake the expense of publication had kept many collections in files. In other cases the collection was too small for a full-sized book; in others still, the collector did not have time or did not feel thoroughly qualified to edit his material. Some collectors who were still working in a particular area expressed a willingness to give a “preview” of sections of their material before publishing it in definite form.

After sifting through the most worthy candidates, Herzog and Halpert ended up collaborating on five NSB publications: 1) *Folk Tunes from Mississippi*, by Arthur Palmer Hudson (1937); 2) *Folk-Songs of America*, by Robert Winslow Gordon (1938); 3) *Traditional Ballads Mainly from West Virginia*, by John Harrington Cox (1939); 4) *Folk Music in America*, by Phillips Barry (1939); and 5), Cox’s *Folk Songs*.

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74 Halpert, “Coming Into Folklore,” 444.
75 Quoted in Halpert, “Federal Theatre and Folksong,” 85.
76 Ibid., 83–84.
Mainly from West Virginia (1939). Halpert edited the texts and wrote prefatory material, and Herzog acted as musical supervisor. To ensure that the publications could be made cheaply and distributed widely, they charged the NSB with the task of mimeographing copies, which would be sold for twenty-five cents—the cost of materials—with the cost of NSB labor absorbed as part of its work-relief program.

Copies were sent to “all folk-lore, and historical societies, important college libraries, and the libraries of all tax-exempt institutions interested in the subject of folk-song” and the rest were made available to the general public. Herzog, in his editor’s statement to the 1939 publications, outlined the goals of the project, which included providing collections for use in FTP plays as well as wider contributions to the preservation of U.S. folk culture:

The Federal Theatre Project produces plays based on various aspects of American folk culture, history, and rural life, in which there is need for authentic and easily available folk-song material. This series is devoted to satisfy that need. The editors feel, however, that this mode of publication may be of service in other ways. Its circulation is not limited to the Federal Projects; the volumes are available to the public at large. The aim of the series is to present in popular form folk-song materials which otherwise would be


greatly restricted in use. Two types of collections are envisaged: (1) Songs which for various reasons are not accessible through regular channels of publication. (2) Contributions to the study and appreciation of folk-song, which are out of print or difficult to obtain. It is planned, however, to go beyond mere assembling, and to stimulate discussion through the introductory essays. As far as feasible, the musical side of folk-song will be stressed. The melodies will be given in the form which they have in their native setting—without harmonizations. It is intended to touch gradually upon as many geographic sections of the country as possible.\footnote{George Herzog, in Barry, \textit{Folk Music in America}, iii. This editor’s statement was included in the publications issued in 1939, and reflects not only Herzog and Halpert’s own views on the project, but also mirrors the stated aims of Botkin’s vision for the Joint Committee on Folk Arts. Also included in these later publications was a list of sponsors, which they had obtained through the JCFA. The list of sponsors as given in the 1939 NSB publications is as follows: chairman, George Herzog, Columbia University; Samuel P. Bayard, Harvard University; Ruth Benedict, Columbia University, editor of the \textit{Journal of American Folklore}; Benjamin A. Botkin, University of Oklahoma, editor of the \textit{Folk-Say} series; Arthur K. Davis, University of Virginia, archivist, Archive of Virginia Folk-Lore Society; J. Frank Dobie, University of Texas, editor, publications of the Texas Folk-Lore Society; Helen H. Flanders, archivist, Archive of Vermont Folk-Songs; Alton C. Morris, University of Florida, editor, \textit{Southern Folklore Quarterly}; Edwin F. Piper, University of Iowa; Louise Pound, University of Nebraska; Charles Seeger, Washington, D.C.; Reed Smith, University of South Carolina; Harold Spivacke, chief, Music Division, Library of Congress; Harold W. Thompson, New York State Teachers’ College.}

Although their first publication, \textit{Folk Tunes from Mississippi}, went somewhat against their criteria for publication—it was a republication of Arthur Palmer Hudson’s monograph \textit{Folksongs of Mississippi and Their Background}, published the previous year, in 1936—their reasons for publishing it were clear, and in keeping with Davis’s statements: Hudson’s book in its original form had omitted music entirely due to the expense of typesetting, but the new FTP reprint included the melodies Hudson had been forced to omit.\footnote{Arthur Palmer Hudson, \textit{Folk Songs of Mississippi and Their Background} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936); republished by Herzog, Halpert and the NSB as \textit{Hudson, Folk Tunes from Mississippi}. Arthur Palmer Hudson (1892–1978) taught in the English Department of the University of North Carolina from 1930–53 and was executive secretary of the curriculum of folklore at UNC from 1950–63. In addition to his publications on Mississippi folksongs, Hudson also wrote about folk tales and legends and British and U.S. literature. Hudson also edited the Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore with Henry Belden.} In his 1938 review, Alan Lomax...
criticized this very fact: “Although Professor Hudson’s volume, one of the most recent in the series of regional studies of the Anglo-American ballad tradition, points the way toward a fruitful method for the student of folksong, it scarcely answers the demands of this suggested method.” Lomax was also critical of other aspects of Hudson’s study, stating that whereas “the editor seems to share the widespread belief that a collection of folksongs must be something more than a group or texts with a bit of pretty writing as an introduction,” Hudson’s apparent “lack of field experience,” his “chauvinistic tendency,” and his seeming lack of class and race consciousness—the entire book was devoted to white informants—were largely unforgivable sins.\(^\text{(81)}\)

To a certain degree, Lomax’s criticisms were unfounded, for reasons that were beyond Hudson’s control. In his acknowledgments section Hudson noted that the publication of the book was delayed by six years due to the Depression (he completed the manuscript in 1930), and he also stated that his original version was 20 percent longer than what was eventually issued. Moreover, Hudson at least attempted to put his study into an historical and cultural context, devoting the first fifty pages to the

\(^{81}\) Alan Lomax, “Review of Folk Songs of Mississippi and Their Background by Arthur Palmer Hudson,” *Journal of American Folklore* 51, no. 2 (1938): 211–13. One of Lomax’s major complaints on the volume was that, although Hudson posited his book as a sociological and contextual study into the music of Mississippi, he hearkened back to a type of ballad collector that was interested in only exotic objects, without regard to the plight of the people from whence the music came. Lomax notes on more than one occasion issues of “class difference” and asserted, “Perhaps, then, the ballad, like so many other institutions of the South was in effect a class weapon; perhaps it has aided, along with the conservative educational policies, and the proscription of the rights of the Negro, in the successful exploitation of the South by its wealthy four thousand” (211–12). Lomax took particular aim at Hudson’s total disregard for African American music in his collection, and Hudson’s use of the terms “red necks” and “poor white trash” to describe his informants: “I suppose that it was largely for reasons of simplification that he admitted no Negro songs in a book titled *Mississippi Folk Songs,*” Lomax stated, but continued, “[Hudson] vitiates the promise of his sociological approach by his failure to discuss the Negro and his influence on flaxen-haired Anglo-American folksongs. For it is precisely at this point—the inter-influence of white and Negro folksongs—that American folk-music as a whole has exhibited and is exhibiting its greatest fertility” (213).
discussion of “The Geographical and National Provenance of the Songs,” “The General Social Background [of Mississippi], “Traits of Mississippi Life Sketched by Travelers before the Civil War,” and “Ballad Singing Communities and Ballad Singers.” Most importantly, Hudson acknowledged his original plans to publish tunes for twenty-seven of the ballads in the book, though the cost of doing so turned out to be prohibitive. In his review of Hudson’s book, George Pullen Jackson wrote, “The book’s sole weakness—one recognized by the author—is its complete lack of tunes. His reason for omitting them—the high cost of printing music and the coincident economic depression—is quite understandable. But it is nevertheless a great pity.”

Sensing an opportunity to reintegrate the missing melodies, Halpert and Herzog approached Hudson in early 1937 and proposed that they issue the texts and tunes as Hudson had originally intended. Hudson responded enthusiastically in a letter to Halpert dated 7 March 1937: “It would be a pleasure and an honor to have Dr. Herzog associated with me in the publication as editor of the music. … about which I know nothing scientifically.” Originally slated to be a collection of thirty-nine songs, the NSB publication was subsequently expanded to include forty-seven texts and tunes, including some songs that were from older Hudson publications that

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82 Hudson’s monograph was also supported by grants from the Institute for Research in Social Science, the UNC Smith Fund, and the American Council of Learned Societies, with which both Halpert and Herzog had associations.


had been long out of print.\textsuperscript{85} Hudson noted in his introduction to the NSB publication that the melodies of the songs had been “made by sundry obliging friends and acquaintances, some of whom were trained musicians, but most of whom knew only the elements of musical notation.”\textsuperscript{86} Herzog acknowledged that, given the provenance and the method by which they were collected, he had to make certain allowances: “In some cases, due to the exigencies of the collecting, the texts had to be fitted to the music; in others the tunes seemed to require some editing; in still others there are discrepancies between the published version of the text and that which accompanies the tune. Due mention is made of all this from case to case, in the Notes appended to the melodies.”\textsuperscript{87}

Herzog used the foreword to the volume as a platform for his views on the importance of the music of folksongs, a discussion that generally had been absent from other folksong collections: “American folksongs are almost never recited; they are sung, and meant to be sung; they are songs as well as poems, and they are songs first. The folksong collector is coming to realize this more and more, and is eager not to perpetuate the sins of past workers who have rescued the words of precious songs but not their melodies.”\textsuperscript{88}

Herzog took his role as musical editor a step further than merely arranging the melodies into consistent, readable forms. He followed up on his own call for U.S. folk music scholars to engage in the types of melodic classification that European

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\textsuperscript{85} Arthur Palmer Hudson, “Notes By the Collector,” in Hudson, \textit{Folk Tunes from Mississippi}, v.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} George Herzog, “Foreword,” in ibid., vii.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
scholars, such as Bartók, Krohn, and Koller had been making since the turn of the
century, and which Sigurd Hustvedt at UCLA had been doing recently in this
country. Halpert acknowledged in his introduction to the Hudson collection that
Herzog had made “what is probably the first attempt in this country at a musical
rather than a literary classification of folksongs. Herzog had been working with a
classification model of his own for some time, publishing his research in a June 1937
*Southern Folklore Quarterly* article titled, “Musical Typology in Folksong.”

The system is briefly as follows: Melodies are first grouped according to
broad stylistic or to literary and functional classes, providing this does not run
counter to musical requirements. Next is considered the constitution of the
text, of the musical rhythm, the melody, and the musical structure. Melodic
characterization is given by a consideration of the type of scale construction,
the melodic range, and the closing tones at the end of each line or phrase of
the song—the so-called finals. Numbers and letters are employed to compress
most of these data into a formula. In publications the material is usually

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89 Sigurd B. Hustvedt, *A Melodic Index of Child’s Ballad Tunes*, Publications of the University of
Southern California in Languages and Literature, 1, no. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press,
1936), 51–78. Hustvedt (1882–1954) was a professor in the English department at UCLA and was part
of the founding of the California Folklore Society in 1942. Hustvedt’s study sparked an interest in the
topic of melodic classification and folksong indexing in the United States, and many publications
followed. Sirvart Poladian, an employee of Sidney Robertson’s California Folk Music Project, created
a large-scale melodic classification study while working for Robertson, and published an article on her
research in 1942. See William J. Entwistle, “A Melodic Index of Child's Ballad Tunes by Sigurd
Bernhard Hustvedt,” *Modern Language Review* 33, no. 2 (1938): 295–97; Gustave Arlt,
American Folklife* 55, no. 218 (1942): 248–54; Sirvart Poladian, “The Problem of Melodic Variation
in Folk Song,” *Journal of American Folklife* 55, no. 218 (1942): 204–11; Samuel P. Bayard,
“Prolegomena to a Study of the Principal Melodic Families of British-American Folk Song,” *Journal of
American Folklife* 63, no. 247 (1950): 1–44; Sirvart Poladian, “Melodic Contour in Traditional

Helen Myers called Bronson the “dean of ballad-tune study” with his four-volume study of the
melodies of 256 of the 305 Child ballads. Helen H. Myers, *Ethnomusicology: Historical and Regional
Studies* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), 440–43. See especially, Bertrand H. Bronson,
*The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads with Their Texts, According to the Extant Records of Great

90 Halpert, “Federal Theatre and Folksong,” 84.
grouped, within the larger classes, according to musical relationship instead of employing an order dictated by literary content, or no order at all; a procedure quite divergent from Western European and American habits. The advantage of the system is that it gives a brief and not over-explicit formula defining a number of salient features of the song and that it can be used for purposes of publication as well as for typology and indexing.\(^9\)

Herzog was well aware that such a study in melodic classification would limit the audience for the publication, so he relegated these theoretical aspects to his foreword and the appendix. Recognizing this point, Halpert stated that “despite exhaustive scholarship, [Herzog] did not forget that folksongs are for the people.”\(^9\)

The success of *Folk Tunes from Mississippi* came as “a complete surprise” to Halpert and Herzog.\(^9\) In a review for the *Journal of American Folklore* that paired the NSB reprint with J. W. Hendren’s *A Study of Ballad Rhythm, with Special Reference to Ballad Music*, Sigurd Hustvedt lauded the recent trend toward the musical study of folksongs: “Had Percy, Motherwell, Child added to their other merits the skill of the musical scholar, their beneficiaries would have been now by so much the richer.”\(^9\) Hustvedt noted the difficulties of attending to both the text and the music of a ballad collection in a compact and readable study, stating, “As the accumulated data reach large proportions and it becomes inconvenient to present the entire musical matter in full notation, technical vehicles for recording and classification, like Mr. Herzog’s will be found imperative.”\(^9\) A reviewer for the

\(^9\) George Herzog, “Musical Typology in Folksong,” *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 1/2 (June 1937): 54
\(^9\) Halpert, “Federal Theatre and Folksong,” 84.
\(^9\) Ibid., 84.
\(^9\) Ibid., 325.
English Folk Dance and Song Society—identified only by the initials “F. H.”—called the publication a “welcome appendix” to Hudson’s original publication, though he did note that “the tunes themselves are not of outstanding quality and most of those in six-eight time are given in a notation of three-four.” 96 F. H., however, conceded that, “one must be glad that so glaring a defect as the omission of all tunes from a collection of 150 songs has at any rate been partially made good.” 97

Halpert and Herzog quickly produced a second edition, which corrected some errors and omissions in the first printing. Division of Women’s and Professional Projects for the WPA director, Ellen Woodward, contributed a preface to this later edition, calling it a “real contribution to knowledge” that “exemplifies in a major form the underlying philosophy of all Works Progress Administration projects.” She concluded with a statement that re-inscribed the notion of the simplicity of “the folk” and urged readers to think of the people who sang these songs and the troubles that they were going through: “It is my hope that those who sing or play these simple melodies of the South will bear in mind their origin; that into their interpretation they will put some of the hopes and longings and courage of the people who produced them.” 98

Herzog and Halpert’s second volume, Folk-Songs of America (published in 1938), was a republication of Robert W. Gordon’s series of fifteen essays on folk music titled “The Folk Songs of America,” originally published by the New York

97 Ibid., 217.
98 Ellen S. Woodward, preface to Hudson, Folk Tunes from Mississippi, iii.
Times Magazine between January 1927 and January 1928.\textsuperscript{99} Halpert’s reasons were as much personal as academic—as a teenager he had read these articles when they were first published, as well as Gordon’s folk music articles for the pulp magazine Adventure, and Gordon’s fantastical portraits of a hidden American life had left an indelible mark on Halpert, who later said, “In many ways, Gordon put folksong collecting on its feet in America, and he did it through popular magazines.”\textsuperscript{100} Joseph W. Hendren, who reviewed the NSB publication for the Journal of American Folklore, stated that the original series “was first published with the manifest object of acquainting an unsuspecting public with the culturally important fact that we in this country possess a rich heritage of folk literature and music.”\textsuperscript{101}

The Gordon publication of 1938 met with wide acclaim, and an FTP press release heralded the edition as “an event of great importance to anthropologists, devotees of Americana, and the whole American people” and as “a must on the reading list of every intelligent citizen who is interested in the folk ways of his country.”\textsuperscript{102} But not all reviews were favorable. Joseph Hendren, for instance, criticized the volume’s “journalistic approach,” which, although highly readable, 

\textsuperscript{99} In his New York Times Magazine series, Gordon covered topics such as African American work songs, shouts, and spirituals, folksongs of the North Carolina mountains, outlaw and jail ballads, lumberjack songs, pioneer and cowboy songs, banjo and fiddle tunes, and traditional and nursery ballads. Hudson also wrote a number of articles for Adventure magazine, which Halpert referred to as “the equivalent of a Wild West magazine.” Herbert Halpert, “Some Underdeveloped Areas in American Folklore,” Journal of American Folklore 70/278 (October–December 1957), 300.

\textsuperscript{100} Halpert, “Some Underdeveloped Areas in American Folklore,” 300.


leaves “scant opportunity for fine critical discussions.” Moreover, the NSB’s verbatim republication of Gordon’s articles meant that it was somewhat anachronistic twelve years later, which Hendren noted was “hardly an ideal arrangement, for research has been anything but idle in the meantime.” Hendren’s most damning criticism, however, was one that was close to Herzog and Halpert’s hearts, the issue of scholarly rigor and the inclusion of music. Hendren wrote,

Some readers will doubtless be disappointed in finding no bibliography. A great many readers are going to be disappointed over a much worse deficiency. Here is a publication whose *raison d’être* is the familiarizing of the public with the reality and character of American folk song. Illustrations are abundantly supplied—but of word texts alone. There is not a tune in the book. And what, after all, is a folk song without a tune?

Gordon himself was not pleased with the publication, but his criticisms centered on the fact that he was not consulted on the title page imprint, which listed the Joint Committee as a co-sponsor of the volume. Despite Benjamin Botkin and Charles Seeger’s direct attempts to try to smooth the matter over, Gordon insisted that the volume would have to be changed or withdrawn. Although correspondence regarding the final outcome of the conflict is not extant, the Gordon volume, unlike the Hudson publication, was not republished.

103 Hendren, “Review of *Folk-Songs of America*,” 201.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid., 202.
106 Botkin and Seeger met with Gordon at his house on 6 January 1939 to discuss the matter, and Gordon indicated that the imprint, used without his knowledge and consent, was unsanctioned, and potentially would have to be withdrawn. Letter Botkin to Halpert, 9 January 1939, National Archives, College Park, MD, RG 69, Records of the Work Projects Administration, Records of the Federal Writers’ Project, Records of the Central Office, Box 2, PI–57, Entry 2, “Correspondence Relating to Folklore Studies, 1936–40, Missouri–Vermont,” Folder “New York City Folklore.” Copyright was not an issue that had come up in the case of the other authors, and Halpert and Herzog, perhaps naively, did not take the matter into consideration in the first place, though in a 1938 article for the *Southern
Herzog and Halpert chose as their next musical project John Harrington Cox’s (1863–1945) collection *Folk-Songs of the South*, published by Harvard University Press, in 1925, which Halpert referred to as “a standard reference work.” Collected over the course of a decade by Cox and his West Virginia Folklore Society, Cox’s nearly 550-page *Folk-Songs of the South* contained 185 ballads and folksongs with 446 variations, many of which were published in full. Arthur Palmer Hudson, in his obituary for Cox in 1946 called, “one of the first and best scientifically edited regional collections,” which “served admirably the need for identification and comparison,” and “afforded a model for editing.” Writing in 1963, Arthur Kyle Davis, Jr. noted, “It is hard to realize today how genuinely pioneering a publication *Folk-Songs of the South* was in 1925. … Not a single major publication from American sources had at that time appeared, except perhaps Campbell and Sharp’s slight one-volume edition of *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* [1917].”

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*Folklore Quarterly*, Halpert addressed some of these issues with regard to their plans for future publications: “There is an excellent chance that through outside assistance succeeding volumes may be issued in improved format. Materials will be copyrighted by the author in his own name. Federal Theatre, since it supplies the labor cost, will have the right to use the songs in its productions, giving due credit to the collector.” Halpert, “Federal Theatre and Folksong,” 85.

107 Herbert Halpert, preface to Cox, *Folk Songs Mainly from West Virginia*, vii; John Harrington Cox, *Folk-Songs of the South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925). After studying medieval literature and old and middle English at Brown, John Harrington Cox (1863–1945) joined the faculty of the English Department of West Virginia University in 1903, where the bulk of his folksong collecting took place. He later helped found, and was first president of, the West Virginia Folklore Society. Cox used his nearly decade-long folksong research for his dissertation at Harvard, subsequently published as *Folk-Songs of the South* in 1925.


Cox’s book, however, was lacking in musical transcriptions. Folk music historian D. K. Wilgus observed, “The 446 texts have but twenty-nine tunes, and these, rather like poor relations, find a place at the close of the volume. Concerning their accuracy we are left in doubt, for they are [notated] by amateurs—even informants.”\(^{110}\) Wilgus’s complaint about the competency and adequacy of the transcriptions was well founded. Lydia I. Hinkel, Cox’s colleague and the head of the Department of Public School Music at West Virginia University, edited the tunes for publication. In her introduction to the musical portion of the book, she all but apologizes for the material with which she was forced to work: “Many of the tunes were sent in without any indication of time, with queer and incorrect note values, and without any key signature. Most of them were sung in a very low pitch, and, in all cases where they have not been too low for the average singer, I have adhered to the original key.”\(^{111}\) Arthur Kyle Davis, Jr., in his foreword to the 1963 reprint of Cox’s book, echoed Hinkel’s concerns, but did not absolve her of the blame, “The tunes, given in an Appendix, are disappointingly few in number; no variants are recorded for successive stanzas; and some tunes fail to inspire confidence in the accuracy of their notation. But of course Cox … had to depend upon others, namely Lydia I. Hinkel

\(^{110}\) Wilgus was careful to place his criticism in the proper context, however. He continued, “We must keep in mind that tunes were printed when available. Though appearing in the back, as in The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, the tunes are not so much musical records as they are the full record of all that the collectors could salvage. We may regret the deficiencies of collectors; we may regret the textual emphasis of academic collectors; we may feel that they could have made greater effort to obtain accurate record of the tunes. But musical critics must answer the question: where were the competent musicians when the collecting was taking place? Had the academics waited for the musicians, the songs might never have been collected. And the collections by the musicians contain faults of their own.” Wilgus, Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898, 192–94.

\(^{111}\) Cox, Folk-Songs of the South (1925), 519–20.
[sic] of his University, for the melodies, and it is certainly better to have these, the best notations obtainable, than to have none.”

The scope and reputation of Cox’s collection, combined with the criticism of the musical matter included therein, made Folk-Songs of the South an attractive candidate for Herzog and Halpert’s NSB publications. It was so large, however, that they were only able to scratch the surface with regard to providing tunes for the texts, and in fixing errors in the earlier version. In fact, they decided to break up the work across two volumes, which would become the third and fifth NSB publications, titled Traditional Ballads Mainly from West Virginia, and Folk Songs Mainly from West Virginia, respectively (both published in 1939). In his preface to the second volume of Cox’s songs, Halpert attempted to explain the reasoning behind publishing more than one volume: “Like the first section Traditional Ballads Mainly from West Virginia (American Folk-Song Publication #3), it contains only part of the songs he has assembled since the publication of Folk-Songs in the South by the Harvard University Press in 1925.” Halpert also noted that the “The forty-six folk tunes (including two fiddle tunes) and the fifty-two texts (fragments and variants included) in the volume, make another important addition to Folk-Songs of the South, where only a handful of tunes accompanied the large number of texts,” In an attempt to avoid any further question as to the provenance of the songs or the aptness of the title, Halpert explained that “Thirty-six of the fifty-four items in this collection came from West Virginia. Other states are represented as follows: ten from California, five from

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112 Davis, Jr., foreword to Cox, Folk Songs of the South (1963), v–vi.
113 Halpert, preface to Cox, Folk Songs Mainly from West Virginia, viii.
Kentucky, and one each from Missouri, Pennsylvania, and New York.” Halpert and Herzog also included seventeen songs (texts and melodies) in their second edition that had not appeared previously, twelve melodies for texts that had appeared in Cox’s original book, and a half-dozen tune variants for the songs that Cox had included.

While working on their second set of John Harrington Cox folksongs in 1939, Herzog and Halpert began compiling their fourth publication, another collection of essays by a single folk music scholar, Phillips Barry (1880–1937), who had died two years earlier, at the age of fifty-seven. If the Gordon collection of essays was Halpert’s homage to his first experiences with the romance of folk music collecting, then the Barry volume, titled Folk Music in America, was Herzog’s monument to his late friend and former colleague. Herzog had provided transcriptions for British Ballads from Maine (1929), which Barry authored with Fanny Hardy Eckstorm and Mary Winslow Smyth. He also penned Barry’s obituary in the Journal of American Folklore.

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114 Ibid., viii.
115 Ibid., viii. Arthur Kyle Davis, Jr., who had previously been critical of musicians’ involvement in folksong collecting, said of the NSB edition that “Herzog was responsible for the editing of the melodies, which are numerous and, in view of their editorship, very likely more dependable than their predecessors of 1925. … With these two valuable supplements [published by the NSB], Folk-Songs of the South continues to be the basic West Virginia text” Writing for the Journal of American Folklore shortly after the publication of the second NSB publication, L. L. McDowell praised Herzog’s work, though he clearly was not aware of the underlying philosophies behind his approach: “The tunes have been written and reproduced in the simplest possible form, Dr. Herzog wisely refraining from adding harmony or making any changes to conform to accepted musical conventions. He even refuses to complete a signature, placing on the staff only those sharps or flats which occur in the melody. While this is somewhat confusing to the casual reader who attempts to sing the tunes at sight, it offers no real difficulty when it is understood and has the positive advantage of leaving each reader free to determine the tonality and modal classification for himself.” Davis, Jr., foreword to Cox, Folk Songs of the South, viii; L. L. McDowell, “Review of Folk Songs Mainly from West Virginia by John Harrington Cox,” Journal of American Folklore 54 nos. 211–12 (1941): 94.
Folklore, noting, “With his passing a richly productive life came to a much-regretted end, and the field of balladry in America lost its foremost student.”

Herzog was well aware of the fact that, despite their importance to the field in general, Barry’s publications were overlooked in an era in which folk music collecting had reached a national scale. He had intimated as much in his obituary for Barry, written in 1938: “It is much to be regretted that he never found the opportunity to write a general book on American folksong; his preferred technic was working in miniature.” Herzog’s decision to compile a selection Barry’s articles, and to pair it with a complete bibliography of Barry’s writings, which Barry and Herzog’s

the bulk of the actual song collecting. For more on Barry’s contribution to British Ballads from Maine, and its place alongside the research of Eckstorm and Smyth, see Nancy-Jean Ballard Siegel, “Ballad Collectors in the Northeast,” in The Ballad Collectors of North America: How Gathering Folksongs Transformed Academic Thought and American Identity, ed., Scott B, Spencer, American Folk Music and Musicians, No. 15 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 105–6. Siegel states that Barry has been given most of the credit for the book not only because of the lack of respect given women folksong collectors at the time, but also due to the alphabetical listing of the names on the cover, a seemingly trivial detail, but one that speaks volumes when it comes to library and bookstore cataloging schemes.

117 Herzog, “Phillips Barry,” 440. The JAF was Barry’s journal of choice until he founded the Bulletin of the Folk-Song Society of the Northeast in 1930. Herzog reiterated his remorse at Barry’s passing in his introduction to his NSB collection: “Mr. Phillip Barry’s work in American folksong may safely be ranked as the most important we have.” Linda Morley, in her entry for Barry in American Folklore: An Encyclopedia called Barry the “most important of the post-Child generation of American ballad scholar-collectors.” Sidney Robertson also coveted Barry’s scholarship, and she made his articles required reading for the workers on her California Folk Music Project. Of the approximately two-dozen readings on her list, Phillips Barry authored three-quarters of them. Robertson stated, “The Barry articles are brief but are by far the most important.” George Herzog, “Introduction” Phillips Barry, Folk Music in America, eds., George Herzog and Herbert Halpert, American Folk-Song Publications #4 (New York: WPA Federal Theatre Project, National Service Bureau [Publication no. 80–S], 1939), ix; Linda Morley, “Barry, Phillips (1880–1937),” in American Folklore: An Encyclopedia, (Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, vol. 1551), ed. Jan Harold Brunvand (New York: Garland, 1996), 129; Sidney Robertson, “Bibliography,” Administrative Materials, Web site, “California Gold: Northern California Folk Music from the Thirties,” Library of Congress, American Folklife Center, WPA Sidney Robertson Cowell Collection, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/cowell:@FIELD%28SOURCE+@band%28afccc+@1%28afccc+@1%28admin%29%29%29:@

colleague Samuel Bayard put together, seemed a natural response. Herzog echoed his statement from Barry’s obituary in his introduction to the NSB publication *Folk Music in America*, though this time he had a definite purpose:

Mr. Barry’s writings on folksong have been scattered to an extent hardly congruous with the unity of his thought, or with the effect it is still to have. It is unfortunate that a premature death [at the age of 57] made it impossible for him to assemble them himself, if not to write a book on American folksong. The present collection of reprints may serve as a practical substitute.\(^{119}\)

Herzog and Halpert worked alongside the original publishers of Barry’s articles, as well as with Barry’s wife, to make the publication possible. They took a cross-section of his writings from 1909 until his death in 1937, and published them chronologically, to provide the arc of his scholarship.\(^{120}\) Herzog noted, “A selection had to be made from a large number of articles, and those were chosen in which the

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\(^{119}\) George Herzog, introduction to *Folk Music in America*, eds., George Herzog and Herbert Halpert, American Folk-Song Publications #4 (New York: WPA Federal Theatre Project, National Service Bureau (Publication no. 80–S), 1939), ix.

exposition of ideas and theoretical points was most explicit, and which for that reason may be deemed most representative.” He added, “it is a pleasantly symbolic accident that the first and last papers are concerned with American folk music in general.” Herzog took the title for the NSB publication from this first article, Barry’s “Folk-Music in America,” written in 1909.

The final article in the NSB collection, Barry’s “American Folk Music,” published in the Southern Folklore Quarterly in 1937, the year he died, was his longest and most complete writing on folk music in the United States. He summarized and placed into the context of the 1930s the theories about folk music in the United States that he had first posited thirty years earlier, noting that “the field of research is vastly larger; the problems to be attacked and solved are more numerous and fundamental.” Barry declared, “Since we cannot find that anyone anticipated us, we shall assume that the ‘first shot’ fired in the ‘thirty years’ war for the rights of ballad music,’ was our statement in the Journal of American Folklore, 1905, that ‘the words constitute but one-half of a folksong; the air is no less an essential part.’ No one today would dispute this universally admitted test.” In this his final article, Barry humbly noted the role of “the folk” in the equation: “We went to the folk singers, sat at their feet to learn from them, and have been learning from them ever since.”

121 Herzog, introduction to Folk Music of America, ix.
122 Ibid.
124 Ibid., 38.
125 Ibid., 30.
Herzog concluded his introductory essay on Barry’s oeuvre with a general assessment of the scholar’s legacy, and his place within the folk music revival of the 1930s:

Much of what Mr. Barry stood for in his writings and activity has gradually come to be accepted as standard. There are still examples of making composites of different song texts, a practice which he condemned in his critical writings as unwarranted, unscientific, and patronizing. The romantic and unrealistic view of “folk,” disproved as scientific theory, is still with us a popular view; and the two streams feed each other as mutually as do the printed and the oral sources of folksong. However, the study of folksong in this country has lastingly benefited from the work of Phillips Barry, for whom American folksong did not mean only ballads, or only songs derived from England, Scotland, or Ireland, but songs of any type, and of any national origin, as long as they formed part of tradition in America.

Herzog and Halpert’s second volume of Cox’s songs, *Folk Songs Mainly from West Virginia*—(NSB publication #5, published June 1939)—was their fifth and last. The end of their project could not have come as a surprise, however, as Halpert seemed to intimate in his preface to the volume: “Together these [two Cox publications] are only a small part of an extensive folklore collection which will be published in more complete form at some later time.”126 Aside from the additional volumes of Cox songs they had planned, Herzog and Halpert had been working on other volumes for their series, including a collection of folksongs from Iowa by Edwin Ford Piper, a set of Illinois folksongs from David S. McIntosh, and a New York City collection of children’s game songs, presumably by Halpert himself.127

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126 Halpert, preface to Cox, *Folk Songs Mainly from West Virginia*, viii.
127 Letter Irwin A. Rubinstein to Botkin, 28 December 1938, National Archives, College Park, MD, RG 69 Records of the Federal Theatre Project, Alphabetical Correspondence File (NSB), G–J, Box 177, Folder “Halpert, Herbert–Folklore.”
(Due to the shutdown of the FTP in the summer of 1939, those publications never made it past the planning stages.) In June 1939, at the time the second Cox publication was issued, Halpert had just returned to New York after his three-month Southern States Recording Expedition for the Joint Committee on Folk Arts of the WPA. For some months the future Federal Theatre Project and the National Service Bureau were in limbo, but by the time Halpert returned, that future, or lack thereof, was certain. In a letter to Halpert dated 17 July 1939, Alan Lomax expressed his disappointment that the project would not continue:

I have read with genuine regret that the Federal Theatre series on American folksongs is being discontinued. Your issues have set precedents in the field for inexpensiveness combined with extremely useful and fertile publications in the study of American folksong. I certainly hope that this interruption will be temporary only and that the work of your division may be carried on at some other point within the WPA.  

Unfortunately, this interruption proved to be permanent, as the shutdown of the Federal Theatre Project that summer made any future work impossible. Halpert and Herzog’s in-progress volumes were shelved. Yet, the work that Herzog and Halpert did under the NSB was important for a number of reasons. Halpert was able to gain an intimate working knowledge of folk music and folksong research techniques, which informed his fieldwork for the Joint Committee and thereafter. Herzog was able to refine his ideas on comparative musicological approaches and ultimately open a larger dialogue among ballad scholars and musicians regarding a path forward for

128 Letter from Alan Lomax to Herbert Halpert, 17 July 1939, American Folklife Center, Herbert Halpert 1939 Southern States Recording Expedition, AFC 1939/005, Correspondence.
folksong research. And the NSB publications served as models for future folksong collection as regards the relationship of text and tune.
CHAPTER 8.

“The Folk” by Committee: The WPA Joint Committee on Folk Arts and Herbert Halpert’s Southern States Recording Expedition

The most likely beginnings of the WPA Joint Committee on Folk Arts, as detailed at the outset of this study, was Sarah Gertrude Knott’s 1938 National Folk Festival in Washington, D.C., and specifically the Saturday morning folklore panel, chaired by Botkin, in which many of the WPA administrators participated. But central to the story are the actions of Donald S. Daugherty, executive director of the American Council of Learned Societies, who, in June 1938, a month after Knott’s festival ended, set up a meeting with Seeger, Botkin, Nicholas Ray (WPA Recreation Division), Spivacke, and Herzog inquiring about the state of the WPA projects’ folklore materials, and specifically whether there might be a way to develop a central clearinghouse that researchers might use.1 Botkin noted the meeting in a letter to his wife back in Oklahoma: “I have been invited by the [ACLS] to discuss a plan of

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1 Donald Hayes Daugherty (1900–1972, worked for ACLS from 1935 to 1966) “Donald H. Daugherty, 71, With Learned Societies,” Washington Post. Times Herald, 6 January 1972, B10. The ACLS had been associated with folk music and folklore research for some years before Daughtery began working there in 1935. The ACLS supplied Robert W. Gordon, the founder of the AAFS, with an $800 grant to support his work through 1932. The society also funded other folksong collectors, including John A. Lomax, Harold Courlander, and Herbert Halpert. The ACLS was also responsible for numerous publications that focused on musicology and folk music, including the ACLS’s April 1936 bulletin George Herzog’s landmark survey “Research in Primitive and Folk Music in the United States”; Oliver Strunk’s State and Resources of Musicology in the United States (1932); Daugherty’s A Report On Publication and Research in Musicology and Allied Fields in the United States, 1932–1938 (1938); and others. Daugherty also helped found the ACLS Committee on Negro Studies, which included Melville J. Herskovits (Chairman); Sterling Brown (Howard University); Otto Klineberg (Columbia University); Richard Pattee (U.S. State Department); Lawrence D. Reddick (Schomburg Collection); Lorenzo D. Turner (Fisk University); Donald Young (SSRC); and D. H. Daugherty ACLS Secretary for the Committee.” See Robert L. Harris, Jr., “Segregation and Scholarship: The American Council of Learned Societies’ Committee on Negro Studies, 1941–1950,” Journal of Black Studies 12, no. 3 (1982): 321; and McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, 718–19.
cooperation in research in the folk arts. This may lead to something.”¹¹ Botkin noted in a memorandum distributed to the assembled and interested parties the details of the meeting:

All are agreed on the immediate need of coordinating folklore research within the Works Progress Administration and of integrating it with the work of other government and private research agencies in the field. Such co-operation would minimize wasted or misdirected effort and loss or neglect of valuable materials resulting from ignorance of sources, improper handling, termination of projects, and inadequate facilities for preservation and distribution.”³

By the end of November 1938 the group, which had the tentative and unwieldy name of the “Coordinating Committee on Living Folklore, Folk Music, and Folk Art,” had drafted a proposal outlining their goals to be submitted to Ellen S. Woodward, assistant administrator of the WPA, which included avoiding the “needless duplication and overlapping, and to insure complete coverage of the field of folklore, folk music, and folk art in contemporary American society and culture.” Their function, then, was “to coordinate all technical and cultural activities of the professional projects in folklore, folk music, and folk art, to prepare materials for utilization by the separate projects and to correlate this work with similar activities conducted or sponsored by other government and private agencies.”⁴

² Benjamin A. Botkin to Gertrude Botkin, 29 May 1938, quoted in Hirsch, Portrait of America, 231, (280n3).
⁴ “Coordinating Committee on Living Folklore, Folk Music, and Folk Art, Federal Project Number One, Works Progress Administration,” draft manuscript, 23 November 1938 American Folklife Center, Folder “W.P.A. Coordinating Committee on Living Folklore.”
The Coordinating Committee would “conform in general to the plan of the folklore studies already set up by the Federal Writers’ Project,” under Botkin’s watch, by undertaking the following:

a.) Listing of all ascertainable studies: (1) planned (2) in progress (3) completed, and description of the nature, quality and location of all materials available.

b.) Listing and locating all intermediaries and informants: One person in each state will be designated to coordinate the work of locating and listing of intermediaries and informants in that state and to clear assignments and interviews and the routine of recording machines, together with the types and titles of the informant’s materials.

c.) Compiling life histories: Workers will be assigned according to their interviewing abilities and their location.

d.) Sound recording: The equipment available at present comprises: the sound truck of the Federal Theater Project operated by Herbert Halpert, the equipment held on loan from the Technical Services Laboratory by Charles Seeger and operated by him or someone designated by him, and the equipment of the Archive of American Folksong of the Music Division of the Library of Congress, operated by Alan Lomax.

e.) Graphic recording and photographing: Personnel and equipment available includes artists and photographers of the Federal Art Project. Conferences have been held with Mr. Roy D. Stryker of the Farm Security Administration.5

The Coordinating Committee would also be responsible for four other larger goals: “editing, publication, preservation, and development,” each of which would be divided among the participating Federal One projects.6 But the members of the

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5 “Coordinating Committee on Living Folklore, Folk Music, and Folk Art, Federal Project Number One, Works Progress Administration—Draft, 21 November 1938,” 1, MDAH.
6 Editing: The work of editing will be apportioned among the several projects according to the materials involved and the ability to deal with them including music, games, dances, folk takes, linguistic material, folk arts, and social and historical backgrounds. Publication: “The Committee will safeguard for each project the rights of publication and development of material contributed by it, and will pass upon all joint publications and special releases.” Preservation: “This requires duplication, classification and indexing of materials—disks, microfilm and manuscripts—in national and state
committee noted in their proposal that they would not put forward any “activities, responsibilities, or expenditures, not contemplated or covered by the present programs of the individual projects.”

The Coordinating Committee held its first official meeting on 7 December 1938 and on 26 December Ellen Woodward put out a press release announcing the formation of the JCFA, describing it as “a concerted effort to explore the folkways of America.” By the time that Botkin gave his paper titled “WPA and Folklore Research: ‘Bread and Song’” to the Modern Language Association’s Popular Literature Section at its annual meeting on 30 December, the Coordinating Committee had officially changed its name to the Joint Committee on Folk Arts. Botkin noted in his paper that the committee was comprised of “technical (not administrative) representatives” of the Federal One projects, and listed the “particular folklore activities covered by these branches, together with their supervisors”:


Ibid., 3.

The date of the minutes of the first meeting is given as 23 December in McDonald Federal Relief Administration and the Arts (719), though other sources state that the first meeting was on 7 December. Letter from Botkin to Halpert, 9 January 1939, National Archives, College Park, MD, RG 69, Records of the Work Projects Administration, Records of the Federal Writers’ Project, Records of the Central Office, Box 2, PI–57, Entry 2, “Correspondence Relating to Folklore Studies, 1936–40, Missouri–Vermont,” Folder “New York City Folklore.” See also Charles Perdue’s introduction to the “1939 Field Trip to the Southern United States” interview with Halpert in the 1988 issue of Folklore and Folklife in Virginia. Aside from listing the details of the formation of the JCFA, its sponsors and consultants, the press release also states that, in addition to support from the AAFS, institutions such as Columbia University, the University of Pittsburgh, and the Chicago Art Institute offered themselves as repositories for any drawings or photographs to be made by the Federal Art Project. “Committee on Folk Arts Appointed,” WPA press release, 26 December 1938, National Archives, College Park, MD, RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Federal Music Project, Box 34, Entry 820, “Records Relating to Folk Music, 1936–40”; published as “Move to Explore Folkways of U.S.: Joint Committee Formed for Preservation of Legends and Folk Arts,” New York Times, 26 December 1938.
The Folklore Studies of the Federal Writers’ Project, under B. A. Botkin; the Index of American Design of the Federal Art Project, under C. Adolph Glassgold; the folk music recording and social music of the Federal Music Project, under Charles Seeger; the Folksong and Folklore Department of the National Service Bureau of the Federal Theatre Project, under Herbert Halpert; the inventories of the Historical Records Survey, under S. B. Child; the adult and workers’ education program of the Education Division, under Ernestine L. Friedman; the leisure-time program of the Recreation Division, under Nicholas Ray; the art project of the NYA [National Youth Administration], under Grace Falke; and the special skills of the Technical Services Laboratory, under Grete M. Franke.9

Botkin also noted in this paper, “Throughout the work [of the JCFA] the Federal Writers’ Project will serve as a clearing-house and central depository, a link between the various projects and between the national and regional committees.”10

Botkin and Seeger also put together a list of potential consultants for the JFCA, including Ralph S. Boggs, (Folklore Council of the University of North Carolina); Donald S. Daugherty (ACLS); Alan Lomax; Alton C. Morris, (editor of the Southern Folklore Quarterly, from the University of Florida); Louise Pound, (former president of the American Folklore Society and professor at the University of Nebraska); Lester Raines, (professor of English at the New Mexico Normal University); Reed Smith, (president of the Southeastern Folklore Society, and University of South Carolina professor); and Stith Thompson, (professor at Indiana University). Also on the list was Harold Spivacke, who Botkin noted (quoting at time Spivacke himself) was “cooperating ‘in every way consistent with the Library’s policy and within the limits of the Library’s facilities,’ specifically through the

9 Botkin, “WPA and Folklore Research: ‘Bread and Song,’” 11.
10 Ibid., 13
Archive of American Folk Song, which is “ready to receive, shelve, and make available recorded material’ and ‘aid in the actual recording by supplying discs and lending recording machinery.””

Garnering support from academic and professional folklore society members was no easy task, however. As mentioned previously, the American Folklore Society in particular had been critical of the folklore research of the Federal One projects, and the work of John A. Lomax, national folklore editor of the FWP, in particular. But with Botkin as the recently appointed national folklore editor, the members were much more willing to take seriously the work of the WPA. Ranking members of the AFS drafted a statement of intent of support, which they read at their 1938 national meeting: “The Council of the American Folklore Society notes with interest the organization of a Joint Committee on Folk Arts of the Federal Writers’ Project under the direction of a trained folklorist, Dr. Botkin, and wishes to express its willingness to co-operate in the activities of the Joint Committee.”

The JCFA planned to use as its model the Botkin’s newly revamped FWP folklore studies program—mainly because the FWP was the one project that had a structure in place for collecting folklore, including folklore manuals and questionnaires, on which the Joint Committee based its own materials. (See Appendix 5 for the JCFA manual and questionnaire.) The JCFA tasked itself with listing of all

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11 Ibid., 12.
12 Emphasis mine. Gene Weltfish, secretary, “Fiftieth Annual Meeting of the American Folklore Society,” Journal of American Folklore 52, no. 204 (1938): 209. The resolution also recommended that the AFS president appoint a committee of members of the society to coordinate with the Joint Committee.
ascertainable studies and collections, both in progress and completed; listing and
locating all intermediaries and informants (which would be conducted on a state-by-
state basis; compiling life histories; sound recording (using the equipment held by the
various committee projects and the AAFS); graphic recording and photographing (by
artists and photographers of the Federal Art Project; and editing, publishing,
preservation and development of all of the materials, musical or otherwise, to be
undertaken by members of the various Federal One projects.13

In December 1938, the members of the JCFA began discussing potential
projects that would put to use their collected resources. Chief on the docket was a
proposed recording trip throughout the South, which would make use of not only the
informants and connections that had been made by the various WPA agencies up to
that time, but also the contacts that they had gained through the support of academics
and folklore societies. The twenty-eight-year-old Herbert Halpert was chosen as the
person to lead the trip, a decision that Halpert later recalled was because of “the
combination of my previous recording experience, my work with Herzog, and the
convenient fact that my department had a recording machine made me eligible for the
project.”14 Halpert modestly added that his status within the WPA had something to
do with the decision: “Also, as a very minor figure on the Federal Theatre Project,

13 Botkin sent the Committee’s newly drafted Manual for Folklore Studies to a number of scholars
such as George Herzog, Louise Pound, Reed Smith, and Stith Thompson for their comments. Soon
thereafter the Committee got endorsements from other folklore societies, including the Southeastern
Folklore Society and the Folklore Council of the University of South Carolina. McDonald, Federal
Relief Administration and the Arts, 717–18.
14 Halpert, “Coming Into Folklore,” 448.
receiving a very modest salary, I could be spared for such a trip more easily than
more important members of the committee."15

Halpert’s Southern States Recording Expedition (discussed below) was by far
the largest project undertaken by the JFCA, but there were other smaller projects that
fell under the committee’s aegis as well. In early March 1939, Seeger visited the
Brevard Plantation near Columbia, South Carolina on 8–9 March, where he recorded
seven-discs-worth of folksongs, ballads, spirituals, and other religious songs by Dr.
Chapman J. Milling, Louise Du Bose, Sally Adams, Israel Alston, Belton Reese, and
Thaddeus Goodson.16 That same month, Elon College professor of English, Fletcher
Collins, Jr., recorded twenty-one discs of folksongs and ballads in North Carolina
under the auspices of the JCFA. And Nicholas Ray, in October 1939, recorded eleven
discs of “folk songs, miner’s songs, cowboy songs, army songs, fiddle tunes, spoken
stories of Deadwood, and stories and poems about sheep herding” in Mitchell, South
Dakota.17 Some of Elon College professor of English Fletcher Collins’s recordings
made in the state were deposited under the JFCA imprimatur.18

Unbeknownst to the members of the committee, however, they were under a
strict timetable to achieve their goals. By the time Halpert returned from his summer

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15 Ibid.
16 The American Folklife Center lists the collection as “AFC 1940/010: Charles Seeger South Carolina
WPA Recordings, 1939. Seven 12-inch discs of songs and spirituals, including several accompanied on
banjo and bones. Recorded on Brevard Plantation, Adams Mill, near Columbia, South Carolina, by
Charles Seeger, March 1939. Deposited by the Joint Committee on Folk Arts, WPA. (includes AFS
3789-3795) (tape copy on LWO 4872 reel 247).”
17 See the American Folklife Center’s list of South Dakota recordings: AFC 1939/019: Nicholas Ray
18 See the Fletcher Collins Jr. Collection at the American Folklife Center,
1939 recording trip, the Federal One arts projects were in a state of flux due to the federal-to-state reorganization of all WPA projects. Most WPA projects were simply abandoned. In December 1939 Seeger, Botkin, and Ray drafted a memorandum to C. E. Triggs, Director of Community Service Projects for the WPA and administrator of the Library of Congress Project, describing what he considered the work that the JCFA might undertake going forward. The Library of Congress project would fulfill the goals of the JCFA, while keeping WPA employees on the government rolls:

The problem is to make available to all these Programs and to scholars throughout the country the materials in the Washington and State WPA offices; to supplement these with materials from other government agencies and from private individuals and institutions; and to secure the best available technical skills in their preparation for use in the field. The task is one of cooperation and integration, both administrative and technical, in order to bridge the gap between collection and utilization without undue delay or undue waste.¹⁹

But Seeger and Botkin wanted to continue working on new folklore projects as well. In fact, in the face of the problems of the WPA reorganization they redoubled their efforts. Botkin moved in with the Seegers in August 1939 while he waited to see whether he would still have a job, and Seeger and Botkin worked around the clock on new projects for the JCFA. Botkin told his wife in a letter that he was “staying at the Seegers because it is less lonely, cooler, and generally agreeable, and because I can

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¹⁹ Memorandum to C. E. Triggs from B. A. Botkin, Nicholas Ray, and Charles Seeger; Subject: Reorganization of Joint Committee on Folk Arts WPA, 6 December 1939, American Folklife Center, Folder “W.P.A. Coordinating Committee on Living Folklore.”
keep working on our folklore project with Charles. We practically do nothing else—talk and eat and sleep it.”

Botkin described Seeger and his plans for the JCFA going forward in the December 1939 memorandum to Triggs. Future projects included the Mississippi FWP and FMP’s proposed collection of Mississippi folksongs; a publication of Writers’ Project materials in collaboration with the State Department of Education; a Florida Joint Committee of Folk Arts under the Writers’ and Music Projects; a Florida Collection Project with sponsorship from the AAFS, Alton Morris consultant (an extension of the folksong collections previously made by the Florida FWP); a “check” on WPA recording activities in New York City and in California (Sidney Robertson’s collection); an outline of indexing projects such as the Index of American Folk Song and Index of American Folklore; and editorial cooperation on a joint publication of children’s songs by the New Mexico Music, Writers’ and Art Projects. Although some of these projects saw the light of day, many did not, and the momentum of the JCFA, and the WPA arts projects more broadly, gradually lost momentum. About a year later Seeger left to take a position with the Pan American Union. Botkin stayed on with the FWP until 1941, when he became the Library of Congress Fellow in Folklore, and the next year he was named the replacement of

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21 Memorandum to C. E. Triggs from B. A. Botkin, Nicholas Ray, and Charles Seeger; Subject: Reorganization of Joint Committee on Folk Arts WPA, 6 December 1939, American Folklife Center, Folder “W.P.A. Coordinating Committee on Living Folklore.”
Alan Lomax as the head of the AAFS after Lomax left for the Office of War Information.²²

Herbert Halpert and Folk Music Research

Herbert Halpert’s path to becoming a folklorist was circuitous, though it was also marked by good fortune and fortuitous encounters. After graduating from New York University in 1934, Halpert, like so many other recent college graduates, sought employment through the WPA, eventually landing a job with the Recreation Department in New York City. It was during this time that Halpert began doing informal, amateur research into the children’s games and songs that he heard on the city’s streets. “I became fascinated by children’s play rhymes and songs heard at a settlement house,” Halpert recalled over fifty years later. “Mostly in my off-duty time, I made a large collection of them over much of the borough of Manhattan, writing down the texts as I heard them. I had no recording equipment.”²³

By chance, Halpert ran into one of his former English professors, Mary Elizabeth Barnicle, on the street in Greenwich Village, a meeting that forever changed Halpert’s life. Barnicle took Halpert to meet Alan Lomax to listen to some of the recordings she and Lomax had made in the summer of 1935 in Florida, with Zora Neale Hurston, and the Bahamas. The occasion was Halpert’s first experience

²³ Herbert Halpert, “Coming into Folklore,” 442–43. Much of Halpert’s early biography comes from this source.
listening to actual field recordings, which he found “tremendously exciting.”

Barnicle encouraged Halpert to continue his own fieldwork, and to look into the nearby area of southern New Jersey called the Pineys. During the next few years he amassed a substantial collection of songs through fieldwork in that area. His interest piqued by this encounter with Barnicle and Lomax, Halpert began spending many hours in the American history room at the New York Public Library, poring over folksong books. He also scoured second-hand stores and local booksellers for folksong books, the beginning of the massive folklore library he collected over the course of his life.

Halpert’s next move was to call upon Ruth Benedict at Columbia University to have her look at some of the folklore and folksong texts he had collected. Benedict was impressed enough to encourage Halpert to pursue graduate studies in Columbia’s anthropology department, and study with Herzog in particular. Although Halpert’s limited resources precluded him from attending Columbia full time, he was able to cobble together enough money for tuition through his Recreation Division paychecks and a small part-time tuition scholarship that Benedict arranged for him. He would attend Columbia in a part-time capacity for the next four years.

Benedict and Herzog encouraged Halpert to examine the larger social and cultural context of the tunes he collected. In response to this directive, Halpert made sure to collect brief life histories and he devised a questionnaire “to get singers to

24 Ibid., 443.
25 Herbert Halpert, “The Beginnings of the Hoosier Folklore Bulletin,” Folklore Forum, Bibliographic and Special Series, No. 10 (1973): i. In this recollection, Halpert referred to her as “then editor of the Journal of American Folklore” so it is possible he was also trying to pitch her a publication.
discuss various aspects of learning and performing songs.”

Halpert echoed the importance of social and cultural context of performances and of folksongs in his “Federal Theatre and Folksong” article for the *Southern Folklore Quarterly*: “[The] Federal Theatre’s interest in folksongs is both musical, and if I may so phrase it, sociological. We are interested in the way they sound, and we are interested in their relation to the life of the people.”

In July 1936, Halpert was transferred from the Recreation Division to the FTP’s National Service Bureau, where he helped set up the NSB’s Music Research Department. This transfer was fortuitous, as he was able to continue his fieldwork in the New Jersey Pines with sponsorship from both Columbia and the NSB. Herzog allowed him to use a recording machine he had recently purchased, which Halpert recalled, “was packed in two heavy trunks—one about 90 pounds and the other over 60—and a couple of smaller cases, plus a huge black cylindrical microphone some 16 inches long,” which ran on electrical power. Because many of the performers did not have electricity, and Halpert was held prisoner to the electrical outlet, he would occasionally need to move his performers to other locations, such as the nearest small hotel, to record. In retrospect, Halpert was amazed at his ability to “induce singers to perform in such a strange situation; but they did sing, and they sang well. Then they listened with astonished delight when I played back part of the record so that they could hear themselves.”

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27 Halpert, “Coming into Folklore,” 444–45.
28 Ibid., 445.
natural context, though against the above statements of Benedict and Herzog, continued during his work for the Joint Committee on Folk Arts in 1939, where suitable power and locations were a constant struggle.

Halpert also used his standing as a Columbia graduate student to make inroads into becoming an academic folklorist. In December 1937 Halpert was invited, at Herzog’s behest, to give a paper at the American Folklore Society meeting held at Yale University, where Halpert met Franz Boas and Stith Thompson, both of whom gave addresses at the meeting.²⁹ (That Halpert met Herzog’s teacher, Franz Boas, and Halpert’s soon-to-be teacher Stith Thompson in the same moment was not lost on the young scholar, and it was a meeting that Halpert himself mentioned twenty years later, when he gave his presidential address at the 1957 AFS meeting.)³⁰ Halpert was on a panel titled “The Problems and Methods of Folklore Research” alongside Ruth Benedict, George Herzog, Alexander Lesser, and Katherine Luomala. His paper, titled “Observations on Modern and Traditional Ballads and the Folksingers’ Attitudes Toward Them,” was the only one on music in the United States. In addition, he was the only graduate student on the panel. Although Halpert attributed his placement on the panel as “proof to the academic world of folklore that the department of anthropology at Columbia University, where the Journal of American

²⁹ Halpert also met two professors from the English Department of Albany State Teacher’s College, who told him of the success that their students had had in collecting folklore from their home communities in New York. Halpert later reflected that this conversation convinced him that folklore didn’t have to be found in distant lands; rather it could be found in one’s own backyard. It was a lesson he would take with him throughout his career as a folklorist and teacher. See Halpert, “Coming into Folklore,” 445–46.
Folklore was edited, did not limit its interests to Samoa and the American Indians,” it is clear that Herzog and Benedict were comfortable enough with their young student’s scholarly aptitude to allow him to represent the university.31

Buoyed by his recent success at the Yale conference, Halpert returned to the field, armed with a small grant from the American Council of Learned Societies.32 In addition to revisiting the New Jersey Pines, Halpert traveled to the Ramapo mountain region on the border of New York and New Jersey, the western Catskill mountains, and eastern Pennsylvania. Over the course of eight weeks he recorded approximately 120 discs of material made on the NSB’s newly acquired Presto machine.33 He also documented the trip visually with photographs taken with his own Voigtlander camera.

In March 1938, Halpert published an article titled “American Folk Songs” in The American Music Lover, the “Record Connoisseur’s Magazine,” which he adapted from a radio program he presented on American folk music for the New York City FTP’s popular broadcast series “Exploring the Arts and Sciences.” His intended audience was the layperson or “music lover” and the definition of folk music he gave

31 Halpert, “Coming into Folklore,” 446.
32 Halpert later stated that the amount of the grant as $400, but in a letter to J. Howard Miller, deputy director of the FTP, Halpert stated that the ACLS grant was for $250. In this same letter he mentioned that the grant was not for recording purposes per se, but rather for sociological research on the folk singers themselves. Letter Halpert to J. Howard Miller, 16 November 1938, National Archives, College Park, MD, RG 69 Records of the Federal Theatre Project, Alphabetical Correspondence File (NSB), G–J, Box 177, Folder “Halpert, Herbert–Folklore.”
33 Another source lists the number at 135 discs and around 400 songs. Letter Irwin A. Rubinstein to Botkin, 28 December 1938, National Archives, College Park, MD, RG 69 Records of the Federal Theatre Project, Alphabetical Correspondence File (NSB), G–J, Box 177, Folder “Halpert, Herbert–Folklore.”
is important both from the standpoint of popularizing folk music and understanding the difficulties of explaining folk music to a lay audience:

In talking about American folk songs it is best first to answer the question of what are folk songs, than to concern ourselves with what is American. In what way do folk songs differ from popular or art songs? All types of songs have words and music; all are sung.

Most scholars now agree with Louise Pound that the only safe tests of folk songs are: first, that all sense of the authorship or origin of the songs has been lost by the singers; second, that the songs must have retained vitality over a fair period of time; and lastly, that the songs have no fixed form but are continually changing.

A song by Schubert, or Stephen Foster, or George Gershwin differs from a folk song because, by and large, although you may want to sing the song from memory, people who want to sing it correctly go back to the form the author wrote and study it. With folk songs you can’t go back to some printed original because as a rule you don’t know there is one and frequently there isn’t. You sing the song just as you learned it from someone, who in turn learned it from someone else, and so on. Generally by the time a song has been circulating orally for a couple of hundred years, what with the untrustworthiness of the human ear and imagination, it’s pretty heard to decide what the original was. Instead you find many different versions of a song and variants for each version.34

Halpert’s article, written for a general audience, perhaps paints a simplistic picture of the complexity that surrounded folksong. His definition of folksong is anchored upon the idea of oral tradition and relies heavily on the notions of the anonymous folk and an unknown original. Exactly one year later, as Halpert traveled through the southern United States in a converted U.S. army ambulance, he recorded numerous musicians and types of music that diverged considerably from the types of music he discussed over the airwaves.

34 Herbert Halpert, “American Folk Songs,” The American Music Lover (March 1938): 414–15. Halpert’s article was originally read as part of a weekly radio program (Fridays at 9:45 p.m. EST) named “Exploring the Arts and Sciences” broadcast by the Radio Division of the New York City FTP.
Herbert Halpert’s Southern States Recording Expedition, 12 March to 30 June 1939

Herbert Halpert’s Southern States Recording Expedition for the JCFA, which took him through (in order of his stops) Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina, was by far the largest WPA folksong collection ever made. Conducted between 12 March and 30 June, Halpert amassed 418-1/2 discs of music (419, though the final side was left blank), including Anglo-American folksongs and ballads, African American spirituals and work songs, fiddle tunes, and string band music, among other types. (See Appendix 6 for a catalog of Halpert’s recordings by state.)

Halpert’s trip was important for another reason as well: It was the musical equivalent of the types of Southern regionalist studies (as discussed in chapter 2) that had been prevalent throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The South and the Appalachians were without question the area of the country most coveted by folksong collectors. From at least as far back as the collecting trips of Olive Dame Campbell, Cecil Sharp, and Maud Karpeles between 1909 and 1917 to the time when Halpert was in the field, folklorists and music scholars canvassed the region continuously. In fact, as Halpert was making his collection trip through the South, John A. Lomax and his second wife Ruby Terrill Lomax were also making their own Southern states swing. In his article “The Study of Folksong in America,” George Herzog attempted to locate some reasons behind the South as a coveted region for collectors:

The South is an especially favored position, and could give us illumination and insight such as few sections of the United States could offer. It is
apparently in the South that we have territories the most solidly settled by people whose cultural identity of the near-past has been least affected by industrial civilization and its concomitant goods and evils. The material is at hand. In view especially of the intensive sociological studies of rural communities and problems fostered at various Southern universities, the South has excellent opportunities.  

Thus, the South, to a degree, had—seemingly in the mind of Herzog and other collectors—resisted the evils modernity and technology. This trope had been the reason that Sharp decided to collect in the Appalachians in the first place: He could not find unadulterated Child ballads in his native England, so he went somewhere where he felt that these songs were still in current usage, yet untainted. (Sharp, of course, went into the field with a very specific agenda, and paid little mind to folksongs that ran counter to the ballads for which he searched.) Thirty years later, when Halpert traversed the region, much had changed, though Halpert, it turned out, had decided to cast a much wider net.

Halpert’s mode of transportation for the trip was an old U.S. Army ambulance—a Ford carry-all with dual sets of rear wheels—that the New York FTP had been using to transport theater sets. Because truck had been discarded by the military, the FTP was able, as a governmental organization, get it for free, but it needed lots of work to get it ready for the field. In addition to rebuilding the entire motor, the Bureau had carpenters from the New York FTP build cabinets to house the

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36 When Halpert accepted the assignment, he had no way of making the trip, but, according to Halpert, his colleagues at the NSB were “so flattered that a Bureau worker had been selected for the trip that they told me to accept the invitation and they would see to the rest.” The NSB acquired the truck by mid-November 1938. Halpert, “Coming Into Folklore,” 448.
37 Columbia University assisted its resurrection financially, and the FTP provided labor.
recording equipment, discs, batteries, photography equipment, and a converter that would allow Halpert to make recordings without having to rely on outside sources of electricity, which in the rural South at that time were not always readily available. According to Halpert, “This combination of batteries and converter meant that this was the first expedition on which I was at least partly free of the necessity of finding and electrical outlet to do my recording.”

The FTP carpenters also constructed cabinets for his living arrangements, such as food and clothing, and they also installed a cot over the rear wheel well of the vehicle where he could sleep in the event that he was not able to find other lodging. These workers also constructed a makeshift bookshelf, so that Halpert could bring along a library of folk music sourcebooks to, as he recalled, remind him “of the types and titles of songs I might ask for.” He later admitted, “I didn’t know any of what I was going to be looking for.”

Halpert acquired the NSB’s Presto model 12E recording machine (the best twelve-inch model, according to Halpert), a Presto high fidelity cutting head, four six-volt batteries and a converter, and around 150 aluminum discs and 175 acetate discs that were on hand. Additionally, Spivacke and Lomax provided Halpert with

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38 Halpert, “Coming Into Folklore,” 448.
39 Ibid., 449. This library was critical to this trip because of the wide range of styles he would encounter, as well as the fact that his itinerary was to be revealed to him upon his arrival in any given area. In particular he brought along books by Mellinger Henry and Arthur Palmer Hudson, whose informants Halpert had gotten permission to record, and a few other published collections from the South.
40 Halpert, “1939 Field Trip to the Southern States,” 21.
41 Letter Halpert to J. Howard Miller, 16 November 1938, National Archives, College Park, MD, RG 69 Records of the Federal Theatre Project, Alphabetical Correspondence File (NSB), G–J, Box 177, Folder “Halpert, Herbert–Folklore.”
another 300 acetate discs, six sapphire cutting needles, 500 playback needles, forty rolls of film, and ten rolls of 16 mm. motion picture film.\textsuperscript{42} The number of discs Halpert had at his disposal was unprecedented—most collectors received fifty, or at most 100 discs at a time for a recording expedition, but given the length of time he was to spend in the field, and the strict schedule under which he was working, he did not have time to be waiting to be resupplied.

The reason that Halpert was able to be as efficient and productive as he had been had to do with the exhaustive itinerary that he had been given, as arranged by Botkin and Seeger in conjunction with various state and local FMP and FWP offices. The itinerary printed for Halpert detailed how he was to proceed throughout his trip:

\begin{quote}
It is understood that as far as possible Mr. Halpert will divide his time equally among (1) the various states visited (2) the various types of material available and (3) the needs and resources of the various projects, with a certain amount of time devoted to the exploration of new leads and to the checking of previous collections from oral dictation.

In each state Mr. Halpert will clear, as soon as possible, through the Director of the Professional and Service Projects and through the directors of the projects involved to verify and supplement information concerning informants and materials available.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

Each state director was charged with the task of lining up informants, providing Halpert with contact information, and, at times, arriving at the recording session to make introductions.

\textsuperscript{42} Letter Harold Spivacke to Librarian of Congress, 16 January 1939, Herbert Halpert Southern States Recording Expedition, American Folklife Center AFC 1938/005, Correspondence, Folder 1. Letter Spivacke to Botkin, 27 January 1939, Herbert Halpert Southern States Recording Expedition, American Folklife Center AFC 1938/005, Correspondence, Folder 1.

All Halpert had to do was show up. Halpert later recalled, “There were terrific advantages of going on this trip… and having someone take you to someone and introduce you and then… you’re already 50% of the way there.”

Halpert’s printed itinerary was arranged in a logical loop through the South, beginning in Virginia, continuing through the Carolinas, then to the Gulf Coast via Tennessee and back northwards at the end of June. (Halpert made some rearrangements to the schedule, however, due to time constraints and informant availability.) The schedule also included the names and locations of his contacts in each region, but was devised to allow for some flexibility in the dates, based on whether or not Halpert had luck finding material in a given area. In many cases, Halpert was merely recording singers from whom FMP and FWP workers had already transcribed songs. He also recorded musicians for authors who had, or who were planning to, publish folksong collections, including Mellinger Henry, Arthur Palmer Hudson, George Pullen Jackson, and Elihu J. Sutherland. Some states had very detailed plans for Halpert—such as the Federal Music and Writers’ Projects of Mississippi, which arranged for an entire month of recordings and provided him with

44 Halpert “1939 Field Trip to the Southern States,” 24.
45 The published itinerary gives the order of the states Halpert was to visit as follows: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and Georgia. Halpert’s actual trip roughly followed this order: Virginia (with side trips to Kentucky on 27 and 29 March), Tennessee, North Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina. Halpert did not follow the itinerary entirely to the letter, however. He omitted Georgia entirely, which was to be the final stop on his trip. He also added two daylong satellite trips to Kentucky while he was recording in Virginia. He also did not stick to the order of the states that he visited as it was given to him, due in part to time constraints, as well as to his desire to meet with certain liaisons at specific times during the trip. His expedition was to run from 12 March until 30 June (the Joint Committee had originally wanted him to begin at the beginning of February, but it was pushed back, perhaps due to logistical or weather concerns). Letter Botkin to Spivacke 14 December 1938, National Archives, College Park, MD, RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Federal Music Project, Box 34, Entry 820, “Records Relating to Folk Music, 1936–40.”
an assistant/liaison—whereas other states had only a few informants lined up, in which case Halpert would have to find his own performers. In those instances, Halpert noted, “I had to do a lot of improvising on my own. In other words, I might be sent to some person and that person had nothing for me, so I had to go out and do my own collecting.”

Although Halpert had music that he was required to record as per his itinerary, when he was collecting on his own he was rather open minded about the music he felt worthy of collecting. He later recalled,

As any active collector would, I found quite a number of singers, as well as a few storytellers, on my own. In my fieldwork I was not bound by the Child ballad canon, or by the need to record only “accepted” folksongs, although, of course I recorded many of them, some quite unusual. Inspired both by Robert Winslow Gordon’s New York Times series of articles and by the example of the Lomax book, American Ballads and Folk Songs, as well as by my New Jersey collecting, I asked for and recorded many locally composed songs, Black work songs, field calls and hollers of many kinds, groups of both Black and white religious singers, play-party songs, a very large and varied number of children’s singing games, as well as other kinds of rhymes and games, auctioneer chants, Black jail songs, and a goodly amount of instrumental music, including banjo pieces, many fiddle tunes, and some instrumental groups.”

Halpert did, however, collect a large number of Child ballads throughout the trip, though many of them were recorded in order to have audio examples for the authors whose books he was attempting to supplement, and many of these authors did lean toward collecting the Child ballad canon.

47 Halpert, “Coming Into Folklore,” 449.
There was one type of music that Halpert consciously avoided, however: popular music. Halpert later recalled, “I’m pretty sure that if it was a popular song that I recognized, I didn’t take it. I know I didn’t take all the boys with black [cowboy] hats and guitars, who were dying to have me record them, and there I was recording grandpa who never used a guitar or banjo.”

He also made mention in his recording log when he felt as if an item seemed as if it had been learned from a recording or book, or when he wondered about the “authenticity” of a certain song.

Halpert was also conscious of his performers comfort in these sessions, despite his tight schedule. Abbott L. Ferriss, Halpert’s assistant in Mississippi, said of his cohort, “Halpert was attentive to informant fatigue and sometimes broke off a session so that the performer could prepare supper or rest; we often returned the next day if we had met and exceptionally talented informant.”

Moreover, he consciously attempted to respect the rights of the performer:

Very often we’d say ‘we’d like to get you on record—you’re good.’ And the fellow loved it. And we’d always say in records, ‘… this is going to the Library of Congress or Columbia University, and if anybody wants to publish it, they’re going to have to go to you, and they’re going to have to pay you. I don’t own this thing—you own it.’ That’s always been important to me.”

Halpert was also aware of the power dynamic that existed between the government collectors and performers, and, unlike other collectors of the era, he did not attempt to exploit the relationship:

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49 Abbott L. Ferriss, liner notes, Great Big Yam Potatoes: Anglo-American Fiddle Music from Mississippi, (Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Southern Culture Records AH002, 1985), 5.
50 Herbert Halpert, recorded interview with Farber, et al, 17 November 1978.
For a great many people the idea of the Library of Congress… down there in Washington… and of course Alan [Lomax] did it much better because he was telling them ‘you can talk to the president’—I never tried that because it was very doubtful that Franklin Delano Roosevelt would really be interested, even if his wife made him listen, he wouldn’t listen very long. … But it would be heard back in Washington. Washington has all these people in the Library of Congress [by] all these experts.51

Halpert did, however, make some mistakes while in the field, particularly when it came to the technological aspects of his job. Because Halpert was forced to switch between batteries and electricity throughout his trip, and because electrical current was not always consistent from place to place, there was the danger that the pitch of the recordings might be compromised. Moreover, as his batteries would wear out they would affect the speed at which the machine recorded. Seeger, recognizing that this variance might be an issue during the trip, recommended that Halpert blow a pitch pipe (A440) for each recording. A separate problem arose in doing so, however: Seeger was not specific about when to blow the pitch pipe, and Halpert obliged him by sounding the pitch pipe before each recording. Although having such a reference could be useful in cases where there was an instrument with a fixed pitch, if often times served to affect the pitch or confuse the singer.52 Looking back on his trip years later, Halpert recalled his mistake:

51 Ibid.
52 Tom Rankin, who helped put together the Great Big Yam Potatoes collection of Halpert’s fiddle tunes from Mississippi, was thankful that he did blow the pipe before the tune, though he probably gave Halpert more credit than he deserves: “Keenly aware of the importance of tuning variation in the fiddle tradition, Halpert sounded an ‘A’ pitch pipe at the beginning of many of the recorded tunes. After blowing the pipe, he often plucked the strings of the fiddle to give later listeners the particular fiddle tuning. Because of such forethought, we are able to determine how a fiddler tuned his instrument for each piece. The pitch pipe, however, is important for another reason. Halpert was forced to use many different sources of electricity—car battery, house, school, and church outlets—and because of occasional variation of power, the disc rotated at a speed slower or faster than 78 rpm. Consequently,
These people read shape note music. … They [didn’t] know about pitch pipes that you blow, but they [knew] about tuning forks. And [Seeger] says he’s quite sure that in some cases they set the pitch by my A that I use. And the Library of Congress recorder said, “There goes that blast again. … Because I was such a bloody amateur, such a non-musician, and not realizing … I affected the key in which things were sung.”

**Halpert’s Collection**

Halpert used nearly all of the discs he had been allotted over the course of his two-and-a-half-month trip, and the resulting collection reflects a wide-ranging allotment of music. In Virginia Halpert worked with folklorist Richard Chase (then of the Virginia Recreation Department) and Raymond Sloan of the Virginia FWP. Among the performers he recorded in the state was John M. “Sailor Dad” Hunt of Marion, Virginia, who had recorded for the Lomaxes and Arthur Kyle Davis, and

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54 Once the records were deposited with the Archive of American Folk Song, they were cataloged and transcribed. In charge of the transcriptions was a young piano prodigy of Finnish descent named Reino Luoma, from Crystal Falls, Michigan. Luoma worked as a transcriber for the AAFS during 1940 and 1941, and later as a music cataloguer until his death in 1969. Luoma’s transcriptions, which are extremely clean and well presented, warrant a description that Halpert had used to describe a music copyist he had worked with for the NSB: “he had a copperplate hand.” (Herbert Halpert, recorded interview with Farber, et al, 17 November 1978.) Song texts and other field notes made by the state-based WPA projects were later transcribed and deposited with the AAFS. My thanks to Joanna Chopp, archivist at the Finnish American Heritage Center Archive at Finlandia University, where the Luoma family papers are held, for confirming his identity. Luoma was an active concert pianist throughout his life, first performing in and around Chicago, and then in the greater Washington D.C. area where he lived for the rest of his life. Obituary, “Reino Luoma, Pianist,” *Washington Times Herald*, 15 January 1969, n.p.
who had performed at the National Folk Festival in Washington in May 1938. In Alabama, he visited Skyline Farms, a Resettlement Administration camp in the Appalachian region of northern Alabama, and recorded Sacred Harp singers at Bethel Church in Franklin County with George Pullen Jackson as his liaison. In Meridian, Mississippi, Halpert recorded African American spirituals at the New Hope Baptist Church, and traveled to the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman Farms, where he missed John and Ruby Lomax by less than a week. He also recorded a number of fiddlers in Mississippi, including William Ernest Claunch, John Hatcher, Frank and Mollie Kittrell, and Charles Long, and Stephen B. Tucker, an eighty-year-old fiddler from Collinsville. In Louisiana, Halpert recorded Creole songs, children’s game songs, fishing calls and sugar cane cutting songs by Louisiana FWP worker Jeanne Arguedas. Halpert recorded Zora Neale Hurston and others at the Jacksonville FWP office; he then traveled to Ybor City where he recorded a group of Cuban musicians who played Cuban jazz and traditional music. (Halpert also recorded the drummer Bermudez’s demonstration of a number of Cuban rhythmic patterns, with Art Pages narrating, including the son [slow rumba]; rumba; bembe [“a typical African

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56 Halpert, “Coming Into Folklore,” 450. George Pullen Jackson (1874–1953) was the author of the highly influential collection of spirituals White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands (1933). Jackson, however, was criticized by some scholars about Jackson’s seemingly racist beliefs that African American spirituals were merely copied from their white counterparts. In a review published the year after Jackson’s book, Carter G. Woodson stated, “The best [Jackson] has done is merely to identify himself with those who from time immemorial have tried to prove that the Negro is not and has never been capable of originating anything worthwhile and must be branded as an inferior and treated accordingly.” Quoted in William Westcott, “African-American,” in Ethnomusicology: Historical and Regional Studies, ed. Helen Myers (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993), 55.
rhythm”]; conga; and mani [“probably the oldest rhythm known.”])

And in South Carolina, his final stop before returning to Washington, D.C., Halpert traveled to Edisto Island (a South Carolina Sea Island), where he recorded a number of African American Gullah-speaking musicians, who performed “counting rhymes and songs, street vendor cries [shrimp and fish calls and songs], religious ‘shouts,’ … several religious songs with ‘walking,’ clapping, and patting,” and some blues songs.

Halpert was disappointed with himself for not making even more recordings during his trip, so he was surprised to learn upon returning to Washington that his expectations for the trip far exceeded those of his superiors: “The members of the Joint Committee and Spivacke were delighted and impressed with what I had achieved. My frequent requests for new disks had been startling and unexpected. Only then did I realize that their expectations for the Southern Recording Expedition had been considerably lower than mine!”

He later recalled, “It turned out they thought I did a super job. I didn’t realize that the number of records I was making each day was considered quite extraordinary.” He did have some regrets later on, however, regarding the credit that had been given to the people with whom he worked in the field. Because this trip was under the auspices of the Joint Committee, Halpert was generally given top billing, even when he merely served as recording engineer.

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58 According to Halpert, he “had first learned of ‘shouts’ years before, in one of Gordon’s newspaper articles.” Halpert, “Coming Into Folklore,” 451.
(In his defense, however, he argued that he was under the impression that his collaborators would have given such details in their own reports.)

At the behest of Alan Lomax, Halpert contributed his assessment of the expedition for the 1939 Annual Report to the Librarian of Congress:

The trip accomplished several things. There is first the solid fact of well over a thousand items collected representing most sections of the South and a large number of the types of material found there. Secondly, a useful service was performed by recording many of the folk-song informants from whom texts without tunes had been published. In some cases, too, private collectors with unpublished collections have had some of their songs recorded, thus enabling more satisfactory publication should they achieve that state. Third, important efforts of the Federal Arts Projects of the WPA towards the scholarly investigation of American cultural materials is here concretely expressed. The success of the expedition indicates how profitable this widespread activity on the part of government agencies is.

Halpert’s trip, then, was the largest and most regionally focused of any of the WPA-related expeditions. Moreover, it represented a culminating moment for the overall vision of these collecting, research, and recording projects in that the work of FWP and FMP units dating years earlier was put to use under the Joint Committee.

Unfortunately, it came at a time when funding for the projects, which had been shifted from federal to state jurisdiction with the WPA reorganization of 1939, was scarce. Sidney Robertson Cowell in California was in the midst of her collecting project and members of the Florida FWP were also in the process of a statewide collecting project, but unfortunately Halpert’s Joint Committee expedition marked the

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beginning, and end, of an era of collaborative folk music research and collecting under the WPA projects.
CHAPTER 9.

“Interpreting Musical America”: Nikolai Sokoloff, Charles Seeger, and Folk Music under the Federal Music Project

In WPA Music Project director George Foster’s final report, written and published in 1943 at the end of the existence of the Federal Music Project (renamed the WPA Music Program in 1939), he offered the following assessment of the FMP’s folk music research and collecting efforts:

The only nationally directed research conducted by either the [WPA] Music Program or the [earlier] Federal Music Project was the collection and recording of folk music for deposit in the Library of Congress. This work done largely in Mississippi, Alabama, California, and Oklahoma contributed to the completion of the Archive of American Folk Song of the Music Division of the Library of Congress. It is regretted that more extensive research activities were not a regular part of the national program. However, after 1939 the administrative budget of the Washington office was insufficient to maintain a musicologist to direct such activities and without adequate technical supervision available, these activities were not encouraged.¹

Foster’s assessment is generally correct, except that the folk music projects were never in any real sense “nationally directed”; if such projects existed at all, they happened on the state level. Moreover, these FMP folk music collections were not simply deposited at the AAFS, but rather they formed an integral part of music education programs and local and regional performances. However, Foster’s statement of regret that “more extensive research activities were not a regular part of the national program” is apt, and this statement forms the basis for the standard historiography of the FMP’s involvement with folk music: that FMP director Nikolai

Sokoloff largely could not be bothered with any music that existed outside of his “professional” (i.e., classical) ensembles. Such statements can be found throughout the literature on the FMP, including in Kenneth Bindas’s 1995 book *All of This Music Belongs to the Nation*, in which the author notes:

> Given Sokoloff’s attitude toward vernacular music and musicians, it should come as no surprise that so little was done to preserve and promote the nation’s folk music. The project believed its responsibility was to give employment to professional musicians who had been trained at conservatories and who had the best chance of private employment off the FMP’s rolls. Therefore little value was placed on the family-trained folk artists, as they were not seen as professionals.²

Historian Peter Gough asserts that the “national director initially discouraged folk music activities in the FMP because [as Sokoloff noted] ‘much of it still remains parochial’ and ‘musicians and scholars are not entirely agreed’ as to ‘whether the folk music of America will furnish material for great and lasting works.’”³ In one of the earliest studies of the FMP, Cornelius Canon admits that although folk music “was collected and recorded only in a few states and never on any continuing, long-term basis,” there were a number of reasons for the omission of this music.⁴ Canon’s reasons range from lack of experience with, or interest in folk music or folk music collecting, to the fact that folk music thrived mainly in rural or isolated areas “where there were few relief musicians” (although Sidney Robertson’s project disproves this statement). Canon notes, however, that such impediments to folk music or folklore

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³ Gough, “The Varied Carols I Hear,” 11–12. (Gough’s research is from “Federal Music Project 3rd Report—1938,” Central Files, box 383.)
study did not seem to hamper either the Federal Art Project or Federal Writers’ Project in their creation of their Index of American Design and State Guide Series, respectively, and concludes that, “Sokoloff was undoubtedly less interested in this aspect of the Project than were the other directors, Holger Cahill and Henry Alsberg.”

Canon, whose dissertation predates the other studies, proffers the idea that Sokoloff and the FMP “in general, seemed less willing to undertake any activity that did not fit into a pattern of ‘professionalism.’”

The large-scale narrative that Foster, Canon, Bindas, and Gough discuss is correct: Sokoloff in large part focused on professional music ensembles during his tenure as head of the FMP. But the reasons he did so are complex, and had as much to do with an overarching philosophy on Sokoloff’s part as they did with the day-to-day, and year-to-year budgetary concerns that Sokoloff faced. Folk music had its place, and that place existed in a very finite and fleeting period of time during the first years of the FMP.

6 Taken together, these descriptions paint Sokoloff as a sort of anti-folk villain, who despite his best efforts had folk music research occurring under his nose. Additionally, many discussions of the FMP generally point to Sokoloff’s somewhat begrudging appointment of Charles Seeger in 1938 to lead the social and recreational aspects of the FMP, of which Sokoloff largely wanted no part. Seeger, then, becomes a protagonist in the narrative. There certainly is truth in all of these descriptions, which exist on the macro level of the overall history of the FMP. What falls away, however, are the specific events—such FDR’s WPA cuts in 1936, and the “Roosevelt Recession” of 1937–38 and the political climate in the run up to the 1938 midterm elections—that shaped this history, and that largely forced Sokoloff’s hand with regard to his budget and his programming decisions. To be sure, Sokoloff had his own agenda for the FMP and his goal of fostering and cultivating professional ensembles turned out to be much more expensive than perhaps he had anticipated upon taking the position, especially with the WPA-wide budget cuts beginning in 1937. Unbeknownst to him, the window in which he had to work was extremely small: two years at most. With regard to folk music research and collection, what began as a minor fascination or public relations boon in 1936 soon turned out to be an expense he could simply not afford. Aside from Sidney Robertson’s California Folk Music Project and Helen Chandler Ryan’s New Mexico FMP unit, the window in which state FMP units had to work with regard to folk
When Harry Hopkins and his assistant Jacob Baker tapped Nikolai Sokoloff (1886–1965) to be the head of the FMP, the Russian-born conductor had just finished a long and successful tenure as director of the Cleveland Orchestra (1918–1933). He thereafter conducted the short-lived New York Orchestra from January 1933 until the following year, when the ensemble’s financial woes left him once again unemployed. His hiring in fall 1935 as head of the music project of the WPA was widely heralded as a perfect choice, as evidenced by Washington Post columnist Marguerite Dennan’s September 1935 article titled “New Deal’s Huge Cultural Program Launched with $27,000,000 Fund”:

Dr. Sokoloff, prominent in the musical life of this country for 35 years, has not only won fame as a conductor of major symphony orchestras in appearances in 170 cities of the United States, but through his development of minor symphony orchestras into major, of choral societies to participate with them in great works, and through his introduction of a musical educational program into the curriculum of public schools, is known for his unusual combination of musical and executive talents.

It was exactly these “unusual” talents that made Sokoloff an ideal candidate for the position. He might not have had the name recognition of Walter Damrosch, Alfred Hertz, or Leopold Stokowski, but Sokoloff was available and more than up for the task. His ability to engage with the community in Cleveland proved critical for his music research and collecting was similarly small. Most of the project happened within the first year of the beginning of the FMP and were suspended soon thereafter.


Marguerite Dennan, “New Deal’s Huge Cultural Program Launched with $27,000,000 Fund,” Washington Post, 8 September 1935, B9.
new position, first and foremost because he needed to enhance the reputation of a number of fledgling WPA orchestras in a short period of time. He also was charged with employing musicians not skilled enough to perform in professional orchestras on the government payroll, and with fostering a music education program that not only served as a means by which to keep music educators employed, but also that acted as another avenue for musical outreach in the community.

The Federal Music Project had, from its inception, four major aims: “to establish high standards of musicianship, to rehabilitate musicians by assisting them to become self-supporting, to retrain musicians, and to educate the public in an appreciation of musical opportunities.” Sokoloff’s project was split into three major subsections, an administrative branch, a music education branch, and a public performance branch. The FMP employed more out-of-work Americans than any of

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10 McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, 607–8. The administrative branch worked with WPA offices both inside and outside of Washington, handled procedures, union relationships, set up budgets, and determined regulations and work standards. The music education branch encompassed research activities for educators, music therapy, training sessions, and a social music project that was aimed both at the curriculum of the school and at the community at large. The concert branch offered services of the performing units of the FMP for public performances in the communities and outlying areas. In his final report, Foster detailed the organizational structure of the FMP: The organization of the national office of the Federal Music Project included Dr. Nikolai Sokoloff, National Director; Assistants to the Director, William C. Mayfarth (later Deputy Director), Dorothy R. Fredenhagen, A. Sandra Munsell, Elizabeth Calhoun, and Ruth Haller Ottaway. Charles Seeger was later added [in spring 1938] as an Assistant to the Director. An Information Service unit was headed by Harry L. Hewes and included a staff of analysts, stenographers, and file clerks, totaling about ten employees. The Regional Staff was also attached to Washington although stationed in the field. Below the supervisory level of the Regional Directors were the State Directors of the FMP. These officers were charged to the music project payrolls of their states. The State Directors, although administratively responsible to the Division of Professional and Service Projects, actually were guided by the instructions of the National Director of the FMP. These instructions usually were transmitted through the Regional Directors, but at all times there was a free flow of correspondence between the national office and the states. Foster, Final Report, 115–16.
the other Federal One projects. In its first year alone there were well over 15,000 musicians on the project, a number that Sokoloff was able to sustain, at least for a time, despite budget cuts that began early on in the WPA’s existence. The FMP report detailing its progress over the first nine months of existence lists the following breakdown of employment duties:

On June 30 [1936] these 15,000 musicians were enrolled in the following units:

- 141 symphony and concert orchestras, absorbing 5,669.
- 77 symphonic, military and concert bands with 2,793.
- 15 chamber music ensembles.
- 81 dance, theater and novelty orchestras, (including Tipica, Gypsy, Hungarian, Hawaiian, and Cuban Marimba groups) employing 2,051.
- 38 choruses, quartets, and vocal ensembles.
- 141 teaching projects.
- 24 projects for copyists, arrangers, librarians and binders.
- 1 composers’ project.
- 2 vocal and instrumental soloists’ projects.
- 2 tuners and instrument repairers’ projects.
- 11 miscellaneous (coordinating, administrative, and clerical) projects.

Bindas gives the number as 15,832 (Bindas All of This Music Belongs to the Nation [book], 26). George Foster gives the following employment figures in his final report: June 1936 (15,435); December 1936 (15,142); June 1937 (13,627); November 1937 (10,067); June 1938 (10,395); December 1938 (11,647); June 1939 (10,004); December 1939 (10,072—first WPA Music Program Figure); June 1940 (9,304); December 1941 (10,603); June 1941 (8,622); December 1941 (7,800). Foster, “Record of Program Operation and Accomplishment,” 46. Sokoloff put the number at 17,000 in a February 1937 issue of The Baton. See Nikolai Sokoloff, “Dr. Sokoloff Speaks—Excerpts from an Address by Dr. Nikolai Sokoloff in Chicago, December 30, before the Music Teachers National Association and the National Association Of Schools Of Music,” The Baton, vol. 2, no. 2 (February 1937): 3.

As Kenneth Bindas notes, 1936 was the year that the Federal Music Project "blossomed throughout the United States." Indeed, this first year was a time of unprecedented optimism for all of the WPA Federal One projects, when the $27 billion allotted to the WPA’s cultural program seemed to ensure that any idea that project workers might have had, no matter how expensive or unrealistic, was put on the table. Another reason for the FMP’s success in that first year was due to Sokoloff’s aggressive promotion of his project through any means available to him.\(^\text{13}\)

To Sokoloff early on, any exposure was good exposure, so he put the FMP imprimatur on any event he could find. The report for the first nine months states that “approximately 20,000,000 persons have heard ‘in the flesh’ concerts or performances” by FMP units since October 1935, with nearly 30,000 performances in the 1936 calendar year alone.\(^\text{14}\)

Sokoloff also made use of the one medium that Americans, despite the Depression, refused to give up: radio. Over the course of the 1930s the number of households that had a receiver rose from approximately 46 percent (about 14 million receivers) to nearly 80 percent by the end of the decade.\(^\text{15}\)

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\(^{13}\) Bindas, *All of This Music Belongs to the Nation* (book), 9.


\(^{15}\) At the beginning of the 1930s there were more than 600 AM stations broadcasting throughout the country to about 14 million receivers, or about 46 percent of homes in the United States. The medium took off, however, in the previous decade. In just two years, from 1922 to 1924 sales of radios rose from $60 million to $358 million. In 1922 0.2 percent of households in the United States had radios; five years later that number was up to 25 percent. By 1930 the number was at 45.8 percent, and by the end of the decade more than 80 percent of households had radios. In terms of actual radios owned during the 1930s, at the beginning of the decade fewer than 15 million households had radios. By the end of the decade that number was nearly doubled (28 million). Many households owned more than one radio receiver, and the average listener tuned in for at least five hours a day. See William H.
his report of the FMP’s first nine months, the radio broadcasts were a means by which
“persons in the more remote areas of the country to whom concerts by the large units
were not accessible might [be able to] share in this music.”¹⁶ Over WNYC, “New
York City’s municipal radio station” alone there had been 1517 broadcasts, from
which 103 fifteen-minute 16” transcription discs were made and sent along to 460
smaller radio stations throughout the country for a total of 49,440 additional
broadcasts.¹⁷ Sokoloff himself conducted the performances of many of the recordings,
which in total numbered more than 400 selections of “movements from the great
symphonies, tone poems, marches, overtures, ballets, marches, waltzes and suites for
bands.” The FMP ensembles did not limit its recorded output to concert music,
however. They also set to lacquer spirituals as performed by the Juanita Hall Melody
Singers in New York, the Los Angeles Negro FMP Chorus, “roundelays and
madrigals” by the New York FMP’s madrigal singers, “and more than a score of
dance recordings.” The FMP report noted that the recordings proved beneficial on an
additional level: “While the Federal Music Project had not anticipated such [a] result
when the recordings were started in New York and California, it was gratified to learn

During Its First Nine Months,” 29.
¹⁷ Ibid., 12, 29.
that the excellence of the recorded performances brought inquiries leading to regular employment for musicians on radio programs.” Eventually, the report stated, the recordings were to be made available “for use in township and rural schools, for musical instruction and appreciation classes in districts which cannot meet the expense of concerts by the privately established symphony orchestras or bands, and for community groups assembled for musical study.” The recordings ultimately ended up with the Music Division of the Library of Congress.18

Sokoloff and his FMP units also participated in numerous musical events across the nation during its first year, including a number of folk, holiday, and popular music festivals. As early as June 1935 there had been discussions between Harry Hopkins and Sarah Gertrude Knott of the National Folk Festival about an official partnership between the WPA and Knott’s festival, and although there was no further movement, Knott retained close ties to the FDR Administration, naming Eleanor Roosevelt the festival’s honorary chair in 1938.19 The FMP national office put together an annotated list of fifteen folk festivals for the summer of 1936 in which the FMP might participate, including events in Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, New Mexico, New York City, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, West Virginia, and Virginia. According to the FMP’s report of the activities of its first nine months, the project participated, in varying degrees, in a number of these festivals. In April 1936, the FMP helped organize a chorus of 1,500 people “in songs

18 Ibid., 29.
19 McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts, 634; “Mrs. Roosevelt Is Honorary Chairman Folk Festival’s Sponsoring Committee,” Washington Post, 25 April 1938, FF11.
depicting Texas historically” at the stadium at Texas Christian University in Fort
Worth for the “Texas Under Six Flags” festival, which celebrated the Battle of San
Jacinto on April 21, 1836.20 WPA music units participated in Pennsylvania’s
“Festival of Nations,” which took place in May and June 1936 in forty counties in the
state, bringing “the music of forty-seven nationalities resident in that state before the
public.”21 WPA orchestras and bands performed at state festivals such as the North
Carolina State Festival in Asheville in early June, and the festival in Manchester,
New Hampshire later that month. Beginning in 1935, the Colorado FMP staged an
annual folk festival in Denver that, as Gough notes, boasted music by “Germans,
Greeks, English, French, Swedes, Czechs, Russians, Italians, Persians, Turks,
Rumanians, Mexicans, Spanish, Chinese, Portuguese, Japanese, Negroes, Finns,
Norwegians, Dutch, Irish, and others.”22 In Richmond, Virginia between 30 April and
2 May the FMP participated in the annual Virginia State Choral Festival, which,
according to the report “filled two entire programs with native compositions, the first
for string ensembles and the second for the symphony orchestra.” The third day of the
festival was reserved for “mountain songs and folk tunes” from the state. The
Richmond WPA Symphony Orchestra, with 500 singers trained by FMP workers,
presented Schubert’s Mass in A at the festival. The report noted that the following
week, in honor of the nationwide “National Music Week” festivities, held from 3–10

21 Ibid., 26–27.
May 1936, “the FMP participated in a number of festivals containing folk music.” Additionally, the FMP was involved in folk music research and performance at two festivals that summer, on 4 June in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in which WPA singing groups, in participation with the League Of United Latin-American Citizens, presented a program of Spanish American and Mexican folk tunes, including “Romances,” “Decimas,” “Quandos,” and “Corridos,” and in Ashland, Kentucky, the FMP participated in researching folk music at the sixth annual American Folk Song Festival (both the Kentucky and New Mexico festivals are discussed below). In addition to participation in music festivals, the FMP, at least within its first year, was involved with other folk music endeavors, including research and song collecting expeditions, as evidenced by a late-1936 report compiling the folk music activities of various FMP units from across the nation.

Federal Music Project Index of Folk Music Activities, 25 November 1936

In late November 1936, Harry Hewes, the head of the FMP’s Office of Information, compiled a list of folk music projects at the request of Senator Walter F. George (Democrat, Georgia, 1922–57). This report, titled “A Digest of Studies into Vernacular and Indigenous Folk Music made by Project Workers,” was to be sent to a Mrs. Paul Ellison of Georgia Southwestern College in Americus, Georgia, who had

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23 “The Federal Music Project: The Second Preliminary Report Covering Its Scope and Activities During Its First Nine Months,” The report also noted that “a festival of the music of historic interest at Monterey and Carmel” was in the works, which would feature “Spanish and Mexican airs of the Colonial days of California. … Efforts are being made to collect and arrange and an authority on Gregorian chants will teach the choruses to sing the ancient songs as they were heard in the Missions.”
inquired about such activities, perhaps in a bid to put together a folk festival or research project of her own. In addition to listing a number of folk festivals that had occurred in recent months, this “skeletonized review of folk songs” detailed recent folk music research trips and performances under the FMP. Divided into broad musical categories—“Indian Music”; “Spanish-Mexican Music”; “Creole Music”; “Negro”; and “Spirituals, Hymns (White), and American-English songs of the Southern Appalachian and Cumberland Mountains”—the report, though not exhaustive, reveals a surprisingly robust docket of folk music–related activities throughout the FMP. Although divisions among types of music along ethnic lines

24 “From the Federal Music Project; A Digest of Studies into Vernacular and Indigenous Folk Music made by Project Workers; Prepared for Mrs. Paul Ellison, Georgia Southwestern College, Americus, Georgia, November 25, 1936—“Creole Music,” 2; NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Georgia Folk Music.” See also the correspondence between Harry Hewes, a Mrs. Cole, and Mrs. Paul Ellison, in the same folder from the same date. Hewes suggests in his letter to Mrs. Paul Ellison that she contact Lauren C. Post at Louisiana State University, who was planning a folk festival in Louisiana in conjunction with the National Folk Festival; Arthur L. Campa at the University of New Mexico, who was putting together “a group of fiestas, culminating in a State fiesta” in Albuquerque; and George Korson at Bucknell University for “more particularized information.” Korson, Hewes noted, would be able to provide information about “occupational folk lore, i.e., miners, river raftsmen, canal boatmen, lumberjacks, oil well drillers, stage coach drivers, and Conestoga wagons.” George Korson was responsible for the Pennsylvania Folk Festival. The WPA worked alongside another Pennsylvania folk festival titled the “Americans All” or Dauphin County Folk Festival. See Simon Bronner, Popularizing Pennsylvania: Henry W. Shoemaker and the Progressive Uses of Folklore and History (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2010), 120.

25 The festivals listed were in Tahlequah, OK; Bucknell University in Lewisburg, PA; Wilkes-Barre, PA; Pittsburgh, PA; Rolla, MO; Asheville, NC; and Elkins, WV. Hewes also mentioned a festival in Columbia, South Carolina, that was to be part of the meeting of the Folklore Society of the South, with Maurice Mattison of the University of South Carolina as the primary contact.

26 The “Creole” subheading in this report is almost unnecessary. As such it is omitted from this study. The report devotes two sentences to the subject: “Some little progress has been made in gathering notations of the early Creole songs in Louisiana. It is also proposed to gather the songs of the Acadians in this state. Because of the pressure of other work on the Music Project forces, this rests largely in a preparatory stage.” Most likely the inclusion of the music was as a placeholder, or perhaps to add in representation from the South. Seemingly, the Louisiana FMP’s “attempts” to study the music was connected with Hewes’s suggestion that Ellison contact Lauren C. Post at Louisiana State University. A “cultural geographer” and soon-to-be-finished Ph.D. student at UC Berkeley, Post was a native of the state and researched Creole and Acadian cultures and music. Lauren C. Post, “Cultural Geography
prove to be problematic—not only because of the racial undertones implied by such distinctions, but also because of the overlapping of musical styles across racial and cultural boundaries (e.g., the spiritual)—the categories provide a useful entrée into discussing the types of music that the FMP workers themselves considered being of “the folk,” as well as other musics that seemingly did not make the list.

**Native American/“Indian” Music**

Although Native American music is the first broad musical category listed in the report, the Federal Music Project largely avoided Native American tribes themselves, with a few notable exceptions. In many cases, Native American music largely fell under the category of “primitive music,” as in the case of George Herzog’s designations outlined in his 1936 American Council on Learned Societies study *Research in Primitive and Folk Music of the United States*. Sidney Robertson stated unequivocally in her instructions to her California Folk Music Project workers: “Omit American Indian.” Native American music since the end of the nineteenth century had been an anthropological pursuit. Numerous cylinder recordings of Native American tribes had been recorded under the auspices of anthropology departments from various North American universities and the U.S. Bureau of American Ethnology/Bureau of Indian Affairs/Smithsonian Institution (discussed below).

If Native American music factored into the musical imagination of considered at all by the wider U.S. population, it was largely as a stereotyped fabrication along

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of the Prairies of Southwest Louisiana,” (University of California, Berkeley, 1937). “A Digest of Studies into Vernacular and Indigenous Folk Music made by Project Workers,” 2.
the lines of D. H. Lawrence’s statement from the 1920s about Native American music in New Mexico (where he lived for three years): “the Indian’s song sometimes sounds like a rather disagreeable howling around the drum.” The so-called “Indianist” strain of compositions—music by classically trained composers in the Western musical tradition who used “Native American themes,” such as Amy Cheney Beach, Charles Wakefield Cadman, Arthur Farwell, Victor Herbert, Edward MacDowell, and Thurlow Lieurance—had been in vogue since at least the latter half of the nineteenth century. Gilbert Chase noted that the Indianist movement, which “flourished from the 1880s to the 1920s,” “had its antecedents in nineteenth-century Romanticism, with its cult of “the noble savage” nourished by such writers as Chateaubriand, James Fenimore Cooper, and Longfellow, whose Hiawatha was like a magnet for many musicians.” Indeed, this approach to musical tourism was the first item on the list of “Indian Music” of the “Digest of Studies into Vernacular and Indigenous Folk Music made by Project Workers”: an index of works performed by WPA orchestras that used such themes.

Despite the FMP’s general avoidance of the music of Native American tribes attempts, there had been a few disparate attempts on the part of individual FMP units to enter into Native American tribal communities to collect music. These quick forays

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27 Federal Writers’ Project, New Mexico, *New Mexico: A Guide To The Colorful State* (New York: Hastings House, 1940), 141–43. Lawrence had been a resident of the state (Taos) from 1922 until around 1925.
into the field included the Mississippi FMP’s transcriptions of Choctaw tribal music during the harvest festivals of the fall of 1936 (discussed below); film and audio recordings of the Corn Planter Indians of the Seneca Tribe in Warren County, Pennsylvania; the Oklahoma FMP’s audio recording project of Native American tribes in the state (also discussed below), and a description of a performance of a “tribal chant… to the accompaniment of tom toms” by fifty Chippewa Indians at the Forth Worth festival.\(^{30}\) Native American groups performed at other music and folk music festivals throughout the country, many of which had support or participation from the FMP. Aside from these few research and collecting projects and concerts, however there was no other substantive engagement with Native American musics under the FMP. (Other WPA units engaged in Native American music collecting, as in the case of Margaret Valiant, who made some recordings of Native American tribes in California for the Farm Security Administration in February 1939, and Robert Cornwall and Carita Corse of the Florida Federal Writers’ Project, who recorded the Seminole Indian tribe at a reservation near Brighton, Florida in July 1940.)\(^ {31}\)

Not all of the interactions among Native American tribes and FMP workers were entirely respectful or of lasting value in the study of Native American music of the era. For example, South Carolina FMP music teacher Elizabeth Irene Brown

\(^{30}\) “From the Federal Music Project; A Digest of Studies into Vernacular and Indigenous Folk Music made by Project Workers; Prepared for Mrs. Paul Ellison, Georgia Southwestern College, Americus, Georgia, November 25, 1936—“Indian Music,” 1.

\(^{31}\) See the Margaret Valiant recordings of the Apache, Papago, Hopi, Pima, Yuma, and Mojave tribes in and around Phoenix, Arizona from February 1939 in the AFC’s finding aids for Arizona (Margaret Valiant Recordings, AFC 1939/017; and Florida Folklife from the WPA Collections, 1937-1942, Library of Congress American Memory Project,
submitted a perhaps well-intentioned but nevertheless highly patronizing report in the style of a semi-fictional third-person narrative of her visits to a school house on the Catawba Indian Reservation near Rock Hill, South Carolina, in which she described her interactions with the “richly copper-colored children who lived and dressed so little like their Indian ancestors … whose actions so often betrayed a wealth of Indian heritage.”

Brown’s report continued,

Presently she [Brown] looked up, and to her surprise saw that the room was full of little Indians! When and how had they come? With the proverbial stealthy silence of their ancestors they had stolen in unobserved. Twenty pair of shining black eyes, staring from their expressionless faces, were watching her every move.

Brown listened to a program of music “in native tongue” that the children had “practiced all week” and noted that two songs on the program “proved beyond doubt that Indians have extraordinary talent in singing.” “Their voices were high, fine, and resonant, resulting from a peculiar combination of ‘pure’ head tones and high nasal tones,” which Brown stated were “not piercing, but pleasing.”

The FMP missed a grand opportunity to further Native American music research in the United States early on in the project’s existence—despite Sokoloff’s initial interest—due to financial constraints. In January 1936, Jessie MacBride, administrative assistant in the national FMP office and former music critic for the Washington Times, approached Sokoloff about a preservation project that would

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32 “A Visit With Catawba Indians, Submitted by Elizabeth Irene Brown.” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “South Carolina.” A brief genealogical study from late in the eighteenth century suggests it might have been possible that Brown herself was part Catawba Indian.

33 Ibid. A brief genealogical study from late in the eighteenth century suggests it might have been possible that Brown herself was part Catawba Indian.

34 Ibid.
transfer the early cylinder recordings of Native American tribes to disc. As she was researching a piece on the “Music History of the City of Washington,” she found that an “amazing collection of records on Indian music,” some 3,000 cylinders representing sixty-six tribes, were entirely off-limits to the general public. The cylinders, which MacBride described as being “of such perishable stuff that if used slightly they will soon be effaced and lost,” resided in the archives of the Bureau of American Ethnology at the Smithsonian Institution under the watch of Dr. M. W. Sterling. Among the recordings were cylinders from the collections of Frances Densmore, Jesse Walter Fewkes, Alice C. Fletcher, John P. Harrington, Melville Jacobs, Francis La Flesche, Thurlow Lieurance, and Maurice G. Smith—essentially a who’s who of the foremost Native American ethnologists of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. MacBride noted that funds had never been available to reproduce the cylinders, and she pressed Sokoloff to “preserve the voice of our fast-

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35 Foster, Final Report, 132. The 1940 census lists Jessie MacBride as a fifty-eight-year-old clerical worker for the WPA. She was a former assistant secretary for the American Federation of Arts, a former director of publicity for the Junior Theatre of Washington, and music critic for the Washington Times between 1917 and 1922. MacBride also worked on the FMP’s “American Music Shrines” project. Kenneth Bindas notes that in 1936 “the FMP attempted to create a listing of Americas composer's homes, famous places, or memorials, and sent a letter and questionnaire throughout the country to discover where America's great composers were born, raised, and educated. Just as Salzburg, Austria, had its Mozart, and Bonn, Germany, its Beethoven and Wagner, the Project reasoned that Americans should associate Spillville, Iowa, to Dvorak, or Peterborough, New Hampshire, to MacDowell. Americans knew more about the birthplace of European composers than they did of their own countrymen, and the Shrines Department sought to rectify this.” Bindas, All of This Music Belongs to the Nation (dissertation), 103. MacBride also penned a note about the activities of the FMP for the New Republic, see “Correspondence,” New Republic 89 (11 November 1936): 48. According to Bindas, Harry Hewes, information czar for the FMP, would occasionally run pro-FMP articles in journals such as Current History and the New Republic. It is possible that this article fell under that designation. Bindas, All of This Music Belongs to the Nation, 11.
vanishing race,” concluding her letter “My request: Conserve the finely cataloged records of the music of the North American Indian!”

Sokoloff was seemingly intrigued, and requested more information on the subject. He had MacBride contact Sterling at the Smithsonian with questions about the potential for commercial releases of the recordings, with the proviso that additional copies be made available to the Smithsonian and other institutions free of charge. Fortunately for Sokoloff and MacBride, the recordings were not under copyright, but the cost of reproduction proved to be prohibitive. Sterling informed MacBride that the most recent estimate that they received to copy the discs, which had been given by “a German firm,” was for $75,000. The sum was simply too much for Sokoloff to approve, however, and the project never got off the ground as part of the FMP. Although some of the cylinders were transferred to disc in the late 1930s and 1940s, when the Library of Congress put together its Recording Laboratory, and others were transferred to tape beginning in the 1950s, most of the cylinders were left untouched until the American Folklife Center’s Federal Cylinder Project of 1979. Such cases of project workers believing that the federal funding

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36 Jessie MacBride to Nikolai Sokoloff, 29 January 1936; NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820.
37 Jessie MacBride to Nikolai Sokoloff, 29 January 1936; Memorandum, office of Sokoloff to Jessie MacBride, 5 February 1936; Jessie MacBride to M. W. Sterling, 16 March 1936; NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820.
was never ending were common, at least in the beginning stages of the Federal One projects.

“Spanish–Mexican Music”

The conflation of Spanish American and Mexican music in Hewes’s report is perhaps a bit misleading, as the two styles of music were radically different, at least in the items listed therein. Moreover, the report is relatively meager, given the important roles these two types of music played in the overall activities of the FMP, particularly in the Western and Southwestern states. In addition to detailing the New Mexico FMP’s activities (discussed below), the report mentions the “series of phonographic records” that John A. Lomax had made in January 1936 of the San Antonio FMP’s forty-five-member típica orchestra. (Lomax is not named in the report, but the reference to his recordings is clear.) The San Antonio ensemble was, directed by E. Lazcano, graduate of the National Conservatory of Mexico City. Lomax also recorded on this trip (part of a larger recording expedition that month in San Antonio and Houston) a group of “Mexican singing boys, who accompany

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themselves on guitars, mandolins and violins, singing guapañjos,” named Los Abajenos; and a dozen-member group called the “Hill Billies” in January 1936.40

Hewes’s report also describes a project in Monterey and Carmel, California that focused on Mission music. “Studies are now being made,” the report noted, “into the early Spanish songs that have survived and an authority on Gregorian music has recovered some of the liturgical music that formed part of the services at the missions.”41 Hewes’s summary largely echoes the national FMP’s second preliminary report of its first nine months, which states that this music would be used for “a festival of the music of historic interest at Monterey and Carmel,” that was being planned, which would feature “Spanish and Mexican airs of the Colonial days of California.” The “authority on Gregorian chants” in this report was to “teach the

40 Among the recordings were the Hill Billies, who performed “Nobody’s Business But My Own” and “Raggedy Ann”; Los Abajenos, which consisted of Andres Bernado, Bernardo San Roman, Augustine Zulaica, Estanislao Bensor, and Pedro Ellecas performed a “Huapango.” A 1936 national FMP report stated, “A series of other records, for the folk music collection of the Library of Congress, have been made by the sixty musicians of the Tipica Orchestra in San Antonio, preserving the early Mexican songs and dance tunes of the Texas border; and by a smaller unit, recording early Plains songs. Although WPA music units were used for these Texas records, the expense was met by other parties interested in the preservation of the early music of the North American continent.” “The Federal Music Project: The Second Preliminary Report Covering Its Scope and Activities During Its First Nine Months,” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Publications, 1936), 29–30. The Texas State Historical Association, in its entry for the FMP states, “San Antonio units recorded examples of Mexican, Spanish, and Cuban music and early Texas plains songs for the Library of Congress, thus saving a wealth of folk music.” See Texas State Historical Association website, “Federal Music Project,” http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/xmf01.
choruses to sing the ancient songs as they were heard in the Missions.”42 Although the “authority” on this music is not named, it is possible that it was Giulio Silva, choral director and temporary supervisor of the San Francisco FMP, who was an expert in early chant music.43 What is clear, however, is that pianist Dene Denny, supervisor of the Monterey County FMP (and later active in Henry Cowell’s New Music Society) put out a call in the August 1936 edition of The Baton, the California FMP’s newsletter, in which he asked if anyone knew of any “authentic airs of the ‘70s and the days of old Monterey when General Sherman rode so proudly up and down the town and the Legend of the “Sherman Rose” stirred the imaginations of a Peninsula when the Larkin House was the seat of matters of state,” which was to be used in a program of early Californian music.44 The article asserted that the Monterey Peninsula was “especially adapted to such a program, for descendants of the early settlers still live in old adobes, and Spaniards and Mexicans are a large part of the population.” Should the research yield “sufficient material,” Denny planned to arrange it for voice and orchestra of fiddles, guitars, mandolins, castanets, cimbonba, pandaret [panderetas], gourds, and such native instruments as can be found or made.”

African American (“Negro”) Music

Although Hewes’s report lists only a few instances of African American “folk music,” “Negro Units” of the FMP formed a critical part of the FMP’s identity, and existed in nearly every area in which there was an active music project. These units formed a critical part of the FMP’s identity. Ensembles such as Lillian Floyd’s Negro Jubilee Singers (San Diego); Carlyle Scott’s Negro Chorus (Los Angeles); the Chicago Negro Chorus; and Elmer Keeton’s Bay Area Negro Chorus, were wildly successful.\footnote{See, Leta Miller, “Elmer Keeton and His Bay Area Negro Chorus: Creating an Artistic Identity in Depression-Era San Francisco,” \textit{Black Music Research Journal} vol. 30, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 107–140; and Bindas, \textit{All of This Music Belongs to the Nation}, 71–86. Leta Miller notes that Keeton made his own arrangements of dozens of spirituals, recordings of broadcasts of these arrangements are held at the Music Division of the Library of Congress.} Due in no small part to the research of John Work III (and his grandfather and father, John Work I and II, respectively) and his work with the Fisk Jubilee Singers, spirituals became one of the most sought-after styles of African American music among folk music collectors, alongside work songs, prison songs, and blues.\footnote{For a discussion of the Works, see Wade, \textit{The Beautiful Music All Around Us}, 5–9, 129–35.} Thus, Hewes’s report is necessarily incomplete, and it admits as much, stating that it was “probable that little will be added to the known Negro literature except in the Bayou country of Mississippi.”\footnote{“From the Federal Music Project; A Digest of Studies into Vernacular and Indigenous Folk Music made by Project Workers; Prepared for Mrs. Paul Ellison, Georgia Southwestern College, Americus, Georgia, November 25, 1936—“Negro,” 3.} The report outlines the collection of Mississippi River–themed songs that the Mississippi FMP collected from African American levee workers; a “Negro spiritual pageant” put on by the Dillard University glee club in Jackson, Mississippi; “two very fine Negro choirs” from New York City, which had made recordings for RCA records and had appeared on numerous occasions over the radio on WNYC; and a 100-person choir in Los Angeles that had
recorded on discs for the WPA. The report also singled out the North Carolina FMP, which had a “Negro teacher on the project” who was “an extraordinarily able musician,” named Nell E. Hunter. Hunter, who had been on the music faculty of the North Carolina Central University in the mid-1920s and who directed a popular Negro choir, had been collecting, according to the report, “the old Negro songs” in the state.

**Anglo-American Music (“Spirituals, Hymns (White), and American-English songs of the Southern Appalachian and Cumberland Mountains”)**

Anglo-American folk music research was by far the largest type of music collected and researched by the Federal Music Project, though Hewes’s report’s only mentions the Kentucky FMP’s folk music collecting project, which it did in collaboration with Jean Thomas and her Folk Song Festival in Ashland, Kentucky, and the Mississippi FMP’s folk music project from the summer of 1936 (both of which are discussed below). The report also stated that, “hobo songs, plain songs, and cowboy songs … as well as the songs and ballads of the anthracite miners have not yet been assembled by the Music Project.”

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48 Ibid., 3. The report notes that the concert of the Dillard University glee club featured “the music of the Nago, Arida, Freda, and Congo tribes” and that that director then traced [the African music] to the complex vocal orchestration in which the spirituals are presented today.”
49 See “A History of the Music Department” North Carolina Central University, http://web.nccu.edu/shepardlibrary/pdfs/centennial/MusicI.pdf; and Bindas, *All of This Music Belongs to the Nation*, 84.
50 “From the Federal Music Project; A Digest of Studies into Vernacular and Indigenous Folk Music made by Project Workers; Prepared for Mrs. Paul Ellison, Georgia Southwestern College, Americus, Georgia, November 25, 1936—“Spirituals, Hymns (White); and American-English songs of the Southern Appalachian and Cumberland Mountains,” 4–5.
Although there were a few other folk music collection projects consisting of Anglo-American folk music under the auspices of the FMP, they were largely one-off projects on a very small scale. In California, an FMP unit compiled a small collection of Gold Rush-era music, which became “part of the music used in the public school activities when Project teachers first undertook their venture into this progressive education work.”\(^{51}\) The music was then to be incorporated into an “American Pageant,” to be produced by the California FMP’s Social Division. The collection included the texts and melodies for six songs—“The Banks of the Sacramento,” “California,” “The Days of ‘Forty-Nine,” “Going to the Mines,” “Jesse James,” and “Sweet Betsy from Pike.” Also included in the Gold Rush collection was the contents list from the 1932 publication *Songs of the Gold Miners: A Golden Collection of Songs as Sung by and about the Forty-Niners*, the songs of which “were gathered by a Californian in first-hand contact with the country and with many men whose fathers carved out California with pride.”\(^{52}\) These songs and the list of song titles were subsequently sent to the Research Library of the New York City FMP, which served

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\(^{51}\) “California Gold Rush Material on file with the Federal Music Project of New York City,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “New York.”

\(^{52}\) Sterling Sherwin and Louis Katzman, *Songs of the Gold Miners: A Golden Collection of Songs as Sung by and about the Forty-Niners* (New York: C. Fischer, 1932). A report at NARA discusses the 1932 collection “The material now on file in the Research Library on the California Gold Rush originated in the early days of the Music Project as part of the music used in the public school activities when Project teachers first undertook their venture into this progressive education work. It was somewhat developed thereafter, having in mind an American Pageant under contemplation by the Social Music Division. It contains also the list of contents of ‘A Golden Collection of Songs as sung by and about the Forty-Niners.’ These were gathered by a Californian in first-hand contact with the country and with many men whose fathers carved out California with a pick.” “California Gold Rush Material on file with the Federal Music Project of New York City,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “New York.” This report notes that the song “California” was taken from Carl Sandburg’s *American Songbag* (pub. 1927).
as the repository for FMP scores, other folksong collections including the 1,800 songs the Mississippi FMP collected, and the New York FMP’s own collection of “American songs,” used for music educational purposes.\(^53\)

In December 1939 and January 1940, a “folk unit,” of the North Carolina FMP, comprised of “four native mountain musicians,” recorded at the local Asheville radio station WWNC on two separate occasions nearly 100 folksongs “of the music of western North Carolina.”\(^54\) The person directing these recording sessions was Jan Philipp Schinhan, a composer, musicologist, and professor in the music department of the University of North Carolina, who would later help edit Frank C. Brown’s large collection of North Carolina folk music.\(^55\) (Sidney Robertson’s first folk music collecting experience came through working under Brown and John A. Lomax in 1936.) Also part of the North Carolina FMP was fiddler Ernest Helton, who had, with his brother Osey, recorded for Broadway and Okeh Records in the 1920s. The brothers, according to fiddle music scholar Drew Beisswenger, were “major performers in the Carolina–Tennessee fiddling tradition,” and historian Michael Ann Williams described them as being “among the most professionally active fiddlers of

\(^{53}\) McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts*, 641. As was the case with the FTP, New York was the de facto center for the FMP, and it had the largest FMP project (California was second largest). Harry Hewes remembered, “Sokoloff insisted that the music center, of the United States at least, was in New York, and he rented a room over on LaSalle Street and lived in New York most of the time.” Oral history interview with Harry Hewes and Jay Du Von, 1964 Oct, Smithsonian Archives of American Art, http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-harry-hewes-and-jay-du-von-12196.


their generation.”  

Helton, an FMP report noted, provided the NC FMP with the names of every fiddle tune he knew, which totaled more than 150 and took up three-and-a-half pages. The brothers would later record for Alan Lomax and Joseph Liss as part of the Archive of American Folk Song’s Radio Research Project.

**Sokoloff and the FMP Budget**

By the time Hewes’s 25 November 1936 report appeared, folk music activities under the FMP had all but ended. The reasons for this shift in the FMP’s focus are many, but chief among them was the first in a series of budget cuts to the WPA that would hamper the Federal One cultural projects until the end of their existence. The

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57 “List of Traditional and Semi-Traditional Fiddle Tunes Played by Earnest [sic] Helton of the Folk Music Unit of the Federal Music Project of the Works Progress Administration,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “North Carolina.” The report gives his name as “Earnest.”

58 Ernest and Osey Helton, according to fiddle scholar Drew Beisswenger, were “major performers in the Carolina–Tennessee fiddling tradition” who “recorded for Broadway Records in the 1920s and for the Library of Congress in the 1940s.” Of the brothers, Osey was the main fiddler. Michael Ann Williams states that the brothers were of half-Cherokee and half-Irish descent, and were raised in east Tennessee, but moved to western North Carolina (Asheville) when they became adults. They were, according to Williams, “among the most professionally active fiddlers of their generation” performing at “Bascom Lamar Lunsford’s Mountain Dance and Folk Festival and the Old-Time Fiddlers’ Convention in Knoxville,” and were regular performers on WWNC–Asheville. Ernest Helton recorded some banjo solo pieces for Okeh Records in late August 1925 and made cylinder recordings for Robert W. Gordon in November of that year. The brothers also recorded for Alan Lomax, Jerome Wiesner, and Joseph Liss in 1941, during the time of the AAFS’s Radio Research Project. See Beisswenger, *The Fiddle*, 165; Williams, *Great Smoky Mountains Folklife*, 49; Tony Russell and Bob Pinson, *Country Music Records: A Discography, 1921–1942* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 405; Bob Carlin, “Helton Brothers/J. D. Harris Discography,” *Old Time Herald* 10, no. 10, “Web exclusive,” http://www.oldtimeherald.org/archive/back_issues/volume-10/10-10/heltons-discography.html; Bob Carlin, “Whip the Devil ‘Round the Stump: More Stories from the Helton Brothers,” *Old-Time Herald* 10, no. 10 (April–May 2007): http://oldtimeherald.org/archive/back_issues/volume-10/10-10/heltons.html; and Charles Wolfe, *The Devil’s Box: Masters of Southern Fiddling* (Nashville, TN: Country Music Foundation and Vanderbilt Press, 1997), 10–11.
belief that the depth of the government’s coffers was inexhaustible had ended. In July 1936, Roosevelt, bowing to pressure from Congress, cut the WPA’s entire budget by a quarter, and the budget of the Federal One projects by a third. Another cut came during the so-called “Roosevelt Recession” of 1937–38, during which time unemployment jumped from 14.9 percent to 19 percent, though still shy of the 25 percent unemployment that existed when Roosevelt took office. Some FMP projects were allowed to wrap up work they had begun, as in the case of the Mississippi FMP’s folk music collecting project. New folk music projects, however, were not authorized, and the FMP’s overall focus shifted to the areas of the FMP that had been most successful: professional ensembles and music education. The latter, however, as Foster noted in his final report, was “treated … as a stepchild,” and music educators were routinely juggled among the FMP, Education, and Recreation Divisions in a sort of employment numbers shell game.

Sokoloff and other “orchestra-minded” FMP directors used these other divisions to their advantage, specifically to keep their

59 Bindas, All of This Music Belongs to the Nation (book), 25.
60 Foster’s full statement reads, “In one breath the Federal Music Project claimed jurisdiction over all music teaching activities and in the other it treated such activities as a step-child.” With respect to the music education program, the FMP had a symbiotic yet fraught relationship with other WPA divisions that taught music, specifically the Education and Recreation Divisions. Because of the varying Congressional quota-reduction calendar (the FMP had to cut its staff in January, whereas the Education and Recreation Divisions had to shift or cut workers in May or June), there was a lot of creative math done in the first half of the calendar year. Foster explained that, “orchestra-minded State Directors of the Federal Music Project would dismiss their music teachers to reach the new quota without throwing an orchestra out of balance. Consequently, the education and recreation projects, unaffected by the quota reduction, would employ these music teachers and continue them in their former capacity without technical supervision mid without regard for technical standards. As this state of affairs continued, the recreation and education projects gradually picked up considerable numbers of music teachers. … This situation had an unfortunate effect upon public relations which did real harm to the WPA Music Program.” Foster, Final Report, 285.
professional ensembles strong in the midst of yearly quota reductions, though there was fallout for Education and Recreation. Foster noted that

the public could not be expected to differentiate between the many segments of the WPA and assumed without question that the Music Program was responsible for all music activities. Therefore, when unsupervised music teachers on the adult education project taught badly and engaged in activities competitive with local private music teachers, invariably it was the Music Program which was blamed for these shortcomings.61

It would be incorrect, however, to suggest that these budget cuts forced Sokoloff to reassess his overall aims for the FMP. Sokoloff’s primary focus had always been on fostering and promoting professional ensembles that could provide high-quality music to nationwide audiences. Moreover, his privileging of performing ensembles over music education or other FMP endeavors existed from day one. As he told San Francisco News reporter Marjory Fisher in October 1935, “Ours is a work project, not a relief project.”62 Cornelius Canon notes that it was “made clear at the beginning that the emphasis in the FMP would be on the employment of needy professional musicians and the promotion of high standards of musicianship rather than on community service.”63

Sokoloff thus set a high bar for the performing musicians under his project. All musicians first had to pass an audition to be considered for a place in an ensemble. Sokoloff found it difficult, however, to staff his orchestras adequately, as there simply were not enough qualified musicians on certain key instruments to fill

63 Canon, “The Federal Music Project of the Works Progress Administration,” 43.
out the sections. Thus, in order to keep his ensembles staffed with the best players he could muster—many of whom did not qualify economically to be on WPA relief rolls, Sokoloff engaged in another employment shell game. Although he was allowed a 10 percent allotment of non-relief workers (up to 25 percent in areas in which there were few qualified musicians), he and his state-level directors would often hire professional, non-relief workers and charge them to other ensembles. In one extreme case, Gastone Usigli, the leader of the Oakland WPA orchestra, had a non-relief figure of nearly 50 percent.

Following the budget cuts of 1936 and 1937, folk music projects such as the ones that existed during the FMP’s first year all but disappeared, not only in the state-level FMP’s day-to-day activities, but also in Sokoloff’s reports and public speeches. With the realization that the FMP could not be all things to all people, Sokoloff redoubled his efforts to fulfill his primary aim for the FMP: to promote and foster professional ensembles. Indeed, it was a crusade in which he took personal pride. In April 1937, Sokoloff filed a report with Ellen S. Woodward, head of the Women’s and Professional Projects of the WPA, detailing the some 57 million people who had heard FMP concerts since October 1935. In his report, which was reprinted in the June 1937 issue of *The Baton*, Sokoloff noted that

since the Federal government intervened in the economic depression to employ, retrain, and rehabilitate the skills of jobless professional musicians, the whole American audience base has been tremendously enlarged. Great music is no longer the privilege of the more fortunate among the dwellers of the cities, but in fine manifestations it has been made available to our people in many parts of the country.\(^64\)

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\(^64\)“57,000,000 Hear Federal Music,” *The Baton*, vol. 2, no. 6 (June 1937): 3.
Sokoloff was vocal about his support for “good music” and his disdain for music he felt to be unworthy. He was quoted in the *New York Times* after a 12 September 1937 concert in Chattanooga, Tennessee saying that “‘clever dance arrangements’ of classical airs are as ‘ludicrous as your lovely grandmother made up to look like a chorus girl.’” Sokoloff continued his diatribe against musicians who would alter the canonical works: “Classical music needs no dressing up. Dance band arrangements of classical numbers will certainly not improve our consciousness of good music.”

Sokoloff’s single-minded devotion to “good music” caught up with him in June 1938 in Boston, where, somewhat ironically, he had launched his career as an eighteen-year-old performing musician in the United States, earning a seat in the first violin section of the Boston Symphony. Sokoloff played under Wilhelm Gericke and Karl Muck from 1904 to 1907. From 22–24 June 1938, Sokoloff attended the regional meeting of the northeastern FMP units, which was part of a larger Regional Conference of Federal Projects. The meeting was far from a homecoming, however, and was contentious from the beginning. Sokoloff was forced to address grievances about the present trajectory of the FMP on a variety of fronts: local music unions in relation to the practices of the FMP; the employment of music educators under the FMP (particularly in the performance-heavy region of the northeast); the prospect of appointing local advisory committees to oversee the activities of FMP units and

65 “Sees Big Gains by Music; Sokoloff Says Classical Works are Becoming More Popular,” *New York Times*, 13 September 1937, 16. Sokoloff, of course was not alone in his passion for “good music,” which was essentially a stand-in for “cultivated,” “fine art,” or classical music. See state director of the Oregon FMP Frederick Goodrich’s article, “What is Good Music,” *The Baton*, vol. 2, no. 6 (June 1937): 9.
provide recommendations and potentially alter the focus of the units; and the possibility of affording composers the same kinds of relief opportunities provided to out-of-work musicians.66

There was one criticism Sokoloff took personally, however, one that ultimately cut to the core of his “good music” crusade. Addressing his critics and fellow FMP directors, Sokoloff went on the defensive: “There is a very strong criticism toward our particular project. The government has felt that we have done many splendid things but we have failed somehow to make it more of a community participation. They feel we have not stressed enough what is known as ‘social music.’”67 Sokoloff had a distinctly different view than his critics of what constituted “social music,” however. “By social music they may mean one thing, thinking another,” Sokoloff asserted.

I believe social music in the true sense, is when qualified able musicians perform the works of art in such a way that it is made indispensable to every man, woman, or child. Furthermore, I also believe social music, so-called, can be developed by us, the professional people, in cooperation and in conjunction with the efforts of the non-professional, but I think we must demand from the

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66 Foster notes that the directors of the northeastern FMP units, who were in large part focused on performing ensembles, were concerned about the employment of music teachers. See Foster, Final Report, 201–2. For the debate about advisory committees, see Foster, Final Report, 79–81. At issue was the idea that these committees would push “social music” over “good music,” and given the focus on performance in these northeastern states, these FMP directors were having none of it. Foster also describes a proposal to give out-of-work composers employment under the FMP. “Composers, certified as in need, might be employed, after examination by a committee, to write musical works for performance by the various types of WPA performing units; to prepare educational materials and to do research work; and to write and arrange materials for the development of social music. The Procedure further stated that the products of project-employed composers should become the property of the United States Government and no royalties should be paid or charged for such compositions. Foster, Final Report, 348–49. See references to the meeting in Foster, Final Report, “Exhibit ‘4,’—Minutes of Regional Meeting, Federal Music Project, Boston June 22–24, 1938,” 374; and “Exhibit ‘21’—‘Agenda Boston Conference’ and ‘List of Personnel Attending Boston Conference,’” 381.

community that they have certain standards that are on the basis of the Federal Music Project.\textsuperscript{68}

Sokoloff then stood fast to his devotion to his “good music” campaign: “I do not think it is our business to participate with every Tom, Dick, or Harry who has no musical ability. It is our duty to clarify in our own mind and to classify our communities, and the efforts of the communities, by the professional and the non-professional.”\textsuperscript{69} Despite Sokoloff’s exhortations to the contrary, his hands had been tied, and he relented, stating, “I feel we have not done all we can towards uniting in some special way the facilities of the professional, [and the] educational, and the efforts of the community itself and to bring it about so that the whole town would participate and contribute a new light on the musical life of the entire community.”\textsuperscript{70}

He already had a candidate in place to take on the “social music” issue. That person was Charles Seeger.

\textbf{Charles Seeger and the Resettlement Administration, 1935–1937}

The Resettlement Administration (RA) was one of the first New Deal programs to use folk music as part of its mission. The RA, which Roosevelt established on 1 May 1935 via Executive Order 7027, was but one part of Roosevelt’s “campaign against chronic rural poverty in the United States.”\textsuperscript{71} It was designed to

\textsuperscript{68} “Report of Regional Conference,” in Foster Exhibit 4, quoted in Canon, “The Federal Music Project of the Works Progress Administration,” 249.

\textsuperscript{69} “Report of Regional Conference.”

\textsuperscript{70} “Report of Regional Conference.”

\textsuperscript{71} Executive Order 7027 transferred a number of programs from other branches of the New Deal, such as the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, and the Department of Agriculture, as well as six resettlement communities from Appalachia that were
help needy Americans in three ways: First, to create settlement communities for “destitute or low-income families from rural and urban areas.” Second, to work to rehabilitate devastated lands throughout the nation. And third, to provide loans to needy farmers, share croppers, tenant farmers, and farm laborers. It was under this first phase—the resettlement communities, which were spread throughout the South and eastern United States, that folk music came into play.

Charles Seeger was hired in early November 1935 to head the music program of the RA (he was appointed “technical adviser to the Special Skills Division,” under which the music program operated).\textsuperscript{72} Seeger had been living in New York City since 1921, working for a time as a professor at the Institute of Musical Art in New York (later the Juilliard School), and as an occasional teacher at the New School for Social Research alongside his colleague and former student Henry Cowell.\textsuperscript{73} It was during his time in New York that he met composer Ruth Crawford, whom he married in 1932. Between 1931 and 1935, Seeger was involved with the Composers’ Collective, instituted by earlier New Deal agencies. The RA stipulated three measures: “(a) To administer approved projects involving resettlement of destitute or low-income families from rural and urban areas, including the establishment, maintenance, and operation, in such connection, of communities in rural and suburban areas. (b) To initiate and administer a program of approved projects with respect to soil erosion, stream pollution, seacoast erosion, reforestation, forestation, and flood control. (c) To make loans as authorized under the said Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935, to finance, in whole or in part, the purchase of farm lands and necessary equipment by farmers, farm tenants, croppers or farm laborers.” Franklin D. Roosevelt: “Executive Order 7027 Establishing the Resettlement Administration,” May 1, 1935, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, the American Presidency Project, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15048.


a group of, at its peak, two-dozen composers including Marc Blitzstein Norman Cazden, Henry Leland Clarke, Herbert Haufrecht, Earl Robinson, and Elie Siegmeister.\textsuperscript{74} The left-leaning Composers Collective listed among its activities writing politically charged articles for the communist newspaper \textit{The Daily Worker} (Seeger wrote under the pseudonym “Carl Sands”).\textsuperscript{75} The group also composed modernist-tinged “folk music” for potential use by workers and labor movement organizers, to “inspire class struggle and uplift the musical tastes of American workers.”\textsuperscript{76} Seeger, for example, penned a song titled “Lenin, Who’s That Guy,” which used traditional guitar accompaniment adapted for the piano with an irregular, repetitive use of a stereotypical four-chord harmonic sequence.

By Seeger’s own admission, his acceptance of folk music took a number of years.\textsuperscript{77} He had expressed interest in folk music as a young child, but his father told him that the only real folk music in the United States was the African American spiritual. He intimated to his son that in his own youth he had danced to fiddle tunes, but that these tunes were “real music,” primarily Strauss waltzes. Seeger’s mother also eschewed non-cultivated music after she underwent schooling to become a

\textsuperscript{75} Among these articles were “Stirring Songs of Struggle in the International Collection” (February 1, 1934), “Proletarian Music is a Historic Necessity” (March 6, 1934), and “The Function of the Revolutionary Music Critic” (March 8, 1934).
\textsuperscript{77} Dunaway, “Charles Seeger and Carl Sands,” 166–67.
Seeger had been exposed to traditional music while living in Mexico City as a child, where he had learned guitar and a few Mexican folksongs, but again what he referred to as his “late-Victorian upbringing” precluded him from taking this music seriously. His interest in folk music did not manifest itself until well after he had completed his education in “real music.”

Ruth Crawford played an important role in fostering Seeger’s interest in folk music. In the early 1930s, Crawford introduced Seeger to *The American Songbag*, an anthology of folksongs collected by poet Carl Sandburg, whom Crawford had met in Chicago. Crawford was one of sixteen composers hired by Sandburg to provide piano accompaniments for the songs; she contributed four songs to the collection. She also lectured on folk music in Seeger’s music history classes at the IMA. In January 1931, Seeger attended a folksong evening at a dedication of Thomas Hart Benton’s murals at the New School, where Seeger played “folk” guitar with Benton’s “hillbilly” band. Benton (who also taught at the New School) and Seeger formed a friendship based on their similar pasts and viewpoints; they both shared a modernist upbringing as well as an interest in the social and political consequences of the Great Depression. Benton, who provided Seeger with folk music recordings and songbooks, later took credit for Seeger’s involvement with folk music: “Charles Seeger is now

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81 Ibid., 54–55
one of the first authorities on American folk song but he found his first strong interest
in them at our house.”  

Seeger later said that gradually he “began to see the point: people make the
music they want to make.” Through the Collective, Seeger met folk singer Aunt
Molly Jackson who changed his view on the potential emotional power of folk music.
Her performance cemented his belief that the Collective was not on the right track
musically. Seeger later remarked that the Collective really consisted of “professionals
trying to write music for the people and not in the people’s idiom.” He also read
George Pullen Jackson’s *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands* (1933) and was
exposed to shape-note singing for the first time. He later recalled: “I never heard of
shaped-note hymns. And here I was an American musician not knowing anything
about the music that was going on in the United States except what was going on in
the big cities.” Seeger soon found himself at odds with his formal training and
musical vocabulary as it related to his new interest in folk music: “I was just a split

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84 Thomas Hart Benton, Liner notes, *Saturday Night at the Benton’s*, Decca A-311, 4; quoted in
Matilda Gaume, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: Memoirs, Memories, Music Composers of North America,*
87 George Pullen Jackson’s collection of spirituals received criticism for its underlying racist
implications. Jackson believed that African traits in African American spirituals were merely
borrowings from white spirituals. In a review in 1934, the year after Jackson’s book was published,
Carter G. Woodson leveled the following criticism at Jackson: “The best he has done is merely to
identify himself with those who from time immemorial have tried to prove that the Negro is not and
has never been capable of originating anything worthwhile and must be branded as an inferior and
treated accordingly.” Quoted in William Westcott, “African-American,” in *Ethnomusicology:*
*Historical and Regional Studies,* edited by Helen Myers (New York: W.W. Norton and Company,
1993), 55.
personality. I still talked the old lingo when I wrote, but I was already studying folk music.”

Also at this time Seeger was introduced to the work of John and Alan Lomax. Macmillan Publishing contacted Cowell and Seeger for their critical opinion of the book that would become the Lomaxes’ *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (1934). Both men were enthusiastic and encouraged the book’s publication, pending some corrections to the music. Seeger later stated, “Although the music notations [by Mary Gresham] were simply god-awful, the stuff put together with the music and the words were absolutely marvelous, and both Henry and I thought it was first-rate for publication.” (The Lomaxes would hire George Herzog to provide the musical transcriptions for their next book *Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly*, published in 1936.)

The RA position could not have come at a better time for Charles and Ruth Seeger. The overall effects of the Depression, a decreased teaching load, and two small children (Mike, born 15 August 1933; and Peggy, born 17 June 1935), made life in New York particularly difficult. The family settled in Silver Spring, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, where they were to enjoy a period of financial stability that

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89 Quoted in Dunaway, “Charles Seeger and Carl Sands,” 166.
91 Quoted in Pescatello, 135
had been largely absent during their years in New York. Additionally the change of scenery and vocation allowed Seeger to rethink the work that he had been doing in New York for the previous few years. He had grown disenchanted with the aims and accomplishments of the Composers’ Collective and was eager to put some of the ideas about social music into practice in an environment in which they could actually make a difference. The Resettlement Administration was the perfect opportunity for experimentation. Seeger recalled later in life;

By the time I had worked through the Collective, I had my program all ready in my mind for the Resettlement Administration. Then the invitation came in November 1935. I went down to Washington and was perfectly sure that what we should do would be to work in the vernacular: folk, popular, or mixed, whatever it was…. Not what I could superimpose upon people, but what they already had and which just needed to be encouraged and put to social use.  

Seeger was charged with the placement of three hundred trained musicians in thirty-three resettlement communities of up to three hundred families each, many of whom had been displaced from urban areas. However, he initially only managed to place about ten workers in resettlement communities throughout the South, Midwest, and Northeast, including two previous contacts, Margaret Valiant (a family friend from New York), and Herbert Haufrecht (Composers’ Collective). Seeger found it

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93 Gaume, Ruth Crawford Seeger, 104.
94 Quoted in Dunaway, “Charles Seeger and Carl Sands,” 167.
95 Pescatello, Charles Seeger, 139.
96 The list of field representatives and their respective community is as follows: Margaret Valiant, an opera student from Mississippi who had trained at the Cincinnati Conservatory and had studied in Paris and Milan, (Cherry Lake Farms, FL), Herbert Haufrecht from the Composers’ Collective (Red House Farms, WV), Rene Van Rhyn, a Dutchman who had worked in a music recreation program in New Hampshire Tygart Valley Homesteads, PA), Leonard Kirk, a local musician who had been hired by the homesteaders at Cumberland Homesteads to lead singing school (Cumberland Homesteads, TN), W. Jefferson Simmons, an unemployed musician who had worked for a radio station (Westmoreland Homesteads, WV), and Robert S. Wallace, a singer who had trained in Cincinnati but whose career
difficult to find workers who had both the musical background and the personal charisma necessary to work effectively within the communities (or who were willing to move away from home to the resettlement communities), and he wrote an impassioned letter to Dornbush regarding this matter:

I want it put on record that better men must be put in [the homesteads] if any approximation of our program is to be carried out in music. Where we are to find them I cannot say. Perhaps we will have to train them. Unquestionably, however, the items are: first personality. Secondly, musical ability. For me to have to make this concession is a contradiction of a lifetime of holding the opposite. But in RA communities there is not escape from it.  

As the program progressed, however, Seeger was able to hire a few additional folksong collectors to assist in the communities, including Bascom Lamar Lunsford, Rupert Wade Hampton, Lawrence Powell, and Sidney Robertson. Seeger himself occasionally went into the field, but generally only for reconnaissance, and left the actual fieldwork to his representatives.

These RA field representatives were instructed to act as “musical evaluators” in order to remove those aspects of music that were deemed “commercial” because

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97 Seeger’s statement about finding “better men” for the resettlement communities may reflect gender biases typical of the time. However, Seeger was well aware that some of his best workers were women, particularly Sidney Robertson and Margaret Valiant. Seeger to Dornbush, March 29, 1936, 2 pp. FSA/MDLC, Quoted in Warren-Findley, “Journal of a Field Representative,” 175.

98 Seeger also attempted to hire Marc Blitzstein for the project, but failed, perhaps due to Blitzstein’s marital and other personal difficulties at the time. Although Blitzstein’s political views were in line with Seeger’s and with those of the RA project, his personal life was troubled at the time of the appointments. In 1936 his wife Eva died of anorexia, and he was coming to terms with his own homosexuality. David Z. Kushner, “Blitzstein, Marc,” in Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online.

99 Pescatello, Charles Seeger, 148.
Seeger felt that music had the power to convey messages of deeper social meaning.\textsuperscript{100} In his \textit{Music Manual}, Seeger instructed his workers them on how to evaluate music appropriate for the project:

\begin{quote}
The main question… should not be “is it good music?” but “what is the music good for?” And if it bids fair to weld the community into more resourceful and democratic action for a better life for themselves, their neighbors, and the human race, then it must be conceded to be “good for” that. The chances that it will be found good in technical and stylistic terms will probably be more than fair.\textsuperscript{101}
\end{quote}

Seeger told David K. Dunaway many years later the difference in his approach to “good music” between his time with the Composers’ Collective and his time with the RA:

\begin{quote}
You must use the music that the people have in them already. There’s no use pumping foreign music into something that’s a perfectly going concern and you can make use of… The musicians I put in a community were to keep a low profile. I kept a low profile. I begged the Special Skills division and everybody I came in contact with, don’t be a publicity spreader of good ideas and good doing and all that sort of thing. Work from below, work from within. Bore from within. It’s the only way you’ll last. That was all from the Collective: I learned it there. It’s partly common sense, but we learned it bitterly. I took the Collective terribly seriously.\textsuperscript{102}
\end{quote}

Seeger wanted his field representatives to integrate themselves into their respective settlements in order to become a part of the community, and to distance themselves from their ties to the government. Seeger’s aim for his workers to adopt an insider—what was later termed an “emic”—approach to their fieldwork echoes philosophies of fieldworkers in disciplines such as ethnomusicology and anthropology.

\textsuperscript{100} Warren-Findley, “Passports to Change,” 205.
\textsuperscript{101} Reuss, “Folk Music and Social Conscience,” 233.
\textsuperscript{102} Charles Seeger, quoted in Dunaway, “Charles Seeger and Carl Sands,” 168.
Workers should avoid bias about being a “musician from Washington,” something which they could not help. “From there on you’re a human being. You’ve got to make them trust you or else you’ll never get anywhere with them. The first thing for you to do is to find out what music the people can make. Then put that to the uses for which you’re sent to the community—to make the people in that community get along with each other, instead of fighting.”

Seeger structured the RA music program around three major goals: music education for children, instruction and recreational activities for the homesteaders, and performances in the camps that were open to local residents from around the resettlement communities. Music education for children was not originally part of the program, but the field representatives soon discovered that children’s participation in musical activities also encouraged the parents’ interaction with the rest of the community. Seeger’s desire to use music that was popular with the people extended to his views on music and children as well. He told the field workers that when they worked with music in the school that, “for God’s sake, don’t give them a songbook, don’t teach [the children] songs you like, but find out what songs they like to sing, and get them to sing them. Find out what their singing games are and encourage them to sing and play them.”

In addition to these three aspects of the residential program, the RA also created documents stemming from their work in the resettlement communities. For example, the RA published a journal that Margaret Valiant kept during her six months of work, between January and June of 1936, in the Cherry Lake Farms homestead.

103 Ibid., 167.
near Madison, Florida. Valiant was one of Seeger’s best workers, and one of the few field representatives who was successful in her attempt to integrate herself into the community. Her journal, which was made up of her weekly reports to Seeger, evidenced the skill with which she interacted with the community, as well as the extent to which the individuals within the community expressed differing views of their preferred musical style: One faction, led by a homesteader who played the violin in what was called an “unexciting” way, cared only for “classical” music, whereas another homesteader held out for “jazz.” Seeger published Valiant’s journal with minor alterations to preserve confidentiality—for example, changing her name to “Margaret Doe” and Cherry Lake Farms to “Community,” and excising internal communications.  

Seeger used his introduction to her journal as a platform for his personal philosophical interpretation of the aims of the project:

1. Music, as any art, is not an end in itself, but is a means for achieving larger social and economic ends;
2. To make music is the essential thing—to listen to it is only accessory;
3. Music as a group activity is vastly more important than music as an individual accomplishment;
4. Every normal person is musical, and music can be associated with any normal human activity, to the advantage of both parties to the association;
5. The musical culture of the nation is, then, to be estimated upon the extent of participation of the whole population rather than upon the extent of the virtuosity of a fraction of it;
6. The basis for musical culture is the musical vernacular of the broad mass of the people—its traditional (often called “folk”) idiom; popular music (jazz) and professional (high art) music are elaborate superstructures built upon the common base;
7. There is no ground for the quarrel between the various idioms or styles, provided proper relationship between them is maintained—jazz need not

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be scorned, nor professional music artificially stimulated, nor folk music stamped out or sentimentalized;

8. The point of departure for any worker new to a community should be the tastes and capacities actually existent in the group; and the direction the activities introduced should take should be more toward the development of local leadership than toward dependence upon outside help;

9. The main question, then, should not be “is it good music?” but “what is the music good for”; and if it bids fair to aid in the welding of the people into more independent, capable and democratic action, it must be approved;

10. With these larger ends ever in view, the musician will frequently find himself engaged in many other kinds of activity, among them the other arts; this, however, promotes a well-rounded social function for him and ensures plenty of opportunity to make music serve a well-rounded function in the community.\(^{107}\)

Seeger also instituted a Resettlement Administration “song sheet” program, which were intended to represent contemporary traditional music—folk music that was pertinent to the times—as opposed to the many extant songsters that contained older folk tunes that were topically less relevant to Seeger’s perception of the RA’s goals. (These ideas of using “current songs” returns in Sidney Robertson’s fieldwork both with the RA and in her own California project.) The idea for the program came from a trip that Seeger made to the community at Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. He noticed that there was not a songbook of sufficient quality for the adult chorus, and proposed to Special Skills Division Chief Adrian Dornbush that they produce one for all of the resettlement communities. Upon Dornbush’s approval, Seeger selected and transcribed sixty songs for the project that he felt would address the program’s goals.\(^{108}\) The decision to produce these songs as pamphlets, rather than


as a book, arose from both practical and financial concerns.\textsuperscript{109} The individual sheets could be mass-produced and distributed not only throughout communities that did not have proper songbooks, but also to a number that did not even have musical representatives from the RA.\textsuperscript{110} Seeger’s RA workers distributed nine of these song sheets, and prepared a tenth, but ran out of money and were forced to shelve the project.

Resettlement Administration workers, including Sidney Robertson and Charles Seeger, made folk music field recordings as well. Seeger recorded four 8” discs of songs and instrumental pieces by Rebecca and Penelope Tarwater of Rockwood, Tennessee in June 1936. Robertson recorded by far the most music of anyone with the RA. For example, between 22 and 28 May 1937, she attended the Fourth Annual National Folk Festival, held in Orchestra Hall in Chicago, and recorded music from folk music groups and individuals from across the nation. She also made a number of recordings in the upper Midwest while she was based out of the RA office in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in the summer of 1937. (Robertson’s recordings are discussed at length later in the dissertation.)

The Resettlement Administration was gradually phased out during the spring and summer of 1937, due in part to internal conflicts between the RA and Harry Hopkins’s WPA, which was formed to replace FERA. Many of the resettlement

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\textsuperscript{109} Pescatello, \textit{Charles Seeger}, 148. \\
\textsuperscript{110} The song sheets, 6 ¾ by 8 ¼ inches in size, contained twelve to sixteen bars of music, sometimes in the style of shape-note notation. Underlain beneath the melody was the initial verse, with subsequent stanzas provided in block text below the music. The reverse side of the sheet featured an artist’s drawing, generally by Charles Pollock, often depicting a fantastic, nostalgic, or idealized rural scene.
\end{flushright}
communities were transferred out of RA control, and WPA workers replaced the RA field representatives. In September 1937, after the July passage of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act, the RA became the Farm Security Administration of the Department of Agriculture, and by November all RA programs were absorbed into the FSA.  

Although Seeger and Robertson left the RA (or were terminated), Margaret Valiant continued her association with the FSA and made a number of field recordings in the Southwest and California. In February and March 1939, she recorded Apache, Hopi, Mojave, Pima, Papago, and Yuma tribes in Coolidge and Phoenix, Arizona, and migrant worker songs in the Brawley, Calipatria, Indio, Shafter, and Visalia camps in California. These California FSA camps were also the location for another recording expedition, although this time by non-governmental employees. Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin recorded, over the course of two summers, music sung by migrant workers from Oklahoma and Mexico (though the glass-based instantaneous discs on which the Mexican music was recorded broke during transit).

**Charles Seeger, Deputy Director of the FMP**

Cornelius Canon suggests that “the context of Sokoloff’s speech makes it clear that Seeger was hired by the Federal Music Project specifically to expedite a rapprochement between the project and the ‘social music’ emphasis which was being sparked by the New Deal’s relief programs.”
pressed to the fore by the administration.”\textsuperscript{113} Even if Sokoloff’s decision to hire Seeger as his deputy director in charge of social and recreational music was simply a conciliatory action to appease his critics, the FMP director could not have found a better candidate for the position.\textsuperscript{114} Seeger, whom Sokoloff hired in June 1938, had ample previous experience with governmental bureaucracy through his twenty-two months with the Resettlement Administration. Moreover, Seeger had also directed social music and music education programs while RA music chief, and had taught music, albeit at the university level, at the University of California some two decades earlier. He was a classically trained composer who knew and understood “good music.” He was a respected and active musicologist who had helped found the American Society for Comparative Musicology and the American Musicological Society. He had a thorough knowledge of folk music and had spent some time collecting in the field himself. He knew all of the right people in New York and Washington, and had strong connections with the Lomaxes and Spivacke at the Library of Congress, as well as Benjamin Botkin of the Federal Writers’ Project. Moreover, he was available and lived just outside of Washington, D.C. Seeger’s job with the Resettlement Administration had ended around November 1937, when the RA was being gutted and reorganized as the Farm Security Administration. Seeger

\textsuperscript{113} Canon, “The Federal Music Project of the Works Progress Administration,” 250.
\textsuperscript{114} The June 1938 date given in Judith Tick, \textit{Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer’s Search for American Music} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 250. Pescatello gives the date of Seeger’s hiring as November 1937, though that seems to be around the time at which Seeger was placed on furlough from the Resettlement Administration while it was being overhauled and reorganized into the Farm Security Administration. Pescatello, \textit{Charles} Seeger, 154.
had spent the first six months of 1938 on furlough, creating financial tension for his family.\textsuperscript{115} Sokoloff’s proposal was too attractive to pass up, and Seeger took the job.

Moreover, Sokoloff saw the appointment of Seeger as the perfect way to have someone else deal with the aspects of his project for which he simply did not have the time or desire: recreation, education, and folk music. Seeger’s immediate task was to attempt to bridge some of the divides that had opened over the course of the previous eighteen months between the FMP, the Recreation and Education Divisions. He was also tasked with creating circulars and manuals (another job Sokoloff had little interest in) to facilitate this new rapprochement among the various WPA divisions. And there was much to fix in the summer of 1938, after more than a year’s worth of neglect. Seeger, however, was well aware of the state of the FMP upon his arrival, and later noted, “I was brought into it with the information that [Sokoloff] was not interested any more; all he wanted to do was to conduct the orchestras, and he was not in the office very often.”\textsuperscript{116} Seeger would also assume another role within the FMP—that of the public face of non-professional musics—for which he gave the sorts of speeches that Sokoloff had little interest in to FMP music education units and other WPA divisions.

A case in point is Sokoloff’s appearance at the annual meeting of the Music Teacher’s National Association and the National Association of Schools of Music in Chicago on 30 December 1936. The FMP director had been called on the carpet to

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[115]{Judith Tick notes the difficulties that Charles and Ruth Crawford Seeger in trying to support a family of five on little-to-no income for a half a year. Tick, \textit{Ruth Crawford Seeger}, 250.}
\end{footnotes}
respond to criticism that his music education units had taken jobs away from professional music educators. Sokoloff bristled at the prospect of justifying his program to a group of music teachers. Speaking “frankly,” as he put it, he noted that although there had generally “been approval of the aims and activities” of the FMP, and that there existed “a large body of opinion which holds that music should have a publicly assisted permanent habitation in our country,” among the “bitterest and most vocal” critics were music teachers. Sokoloff then noted that he thought “the teachers who have voiced unfriendliness towards these [FMP] activities have been a little shortsighted” and likened the critics to “the boy in primary school who wrote in a composition ‘Pins have saved a great many lives on account of so few people swallowing them.’” He insisted that the FMP teachers had been “rigidly prohibited from competing with teachers who were self-sustaining,” and noted that many of the former FMP music teachers had returned to open studios of their own, and that there was “a vast new source of pupils for all of you.”

Seeger would not exhibit any of Sokoloff’s heavy-handedness in his own dealings, though he would have his own agenda to push.

**Charles Seeger, Folk Music, and the end of the Sokoloff Era**

Seeger’s tenure with the FMP—at least for the first eighteen months—must be viewed through the lens of a rekindled interest in folk music research, collecting, and redistribution. He used his official role to assist Sidney Robertson in launching her

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118 Sokoloff, “Dr. Sokoloff Speaks,” 14.
California Folk Music Project, and obtaining FMP sponsorship. (Her project officially began in October 1938, though she had been collecting songs for some six months at that point.) Seeger also went on visits to FMP offices around the country to check in on the health of the projects, and to meet with FMP directors and staff. For example Seeger visited the offices of the Texas FMP in San Antonio to see director Lucile Lyons, and to the offices of the Oklahoma FMP in Oklahoma City to visit with Dean Richardson. In late October 1938, Seeger traveled to the Mississippi Federal Music Project’s office in Jackson to inquire about their music education program, a visit that doubled as a scouting and organizational trip as well as a way to reignite their then-stalled folk music research project.

Within six months of Seeger’s appointment, however, the ground began to shift. If 1936 had been the year that the FMP “blossomed,” 1939 was the year it withered. In January, Florence S. Kerr took over as head of the Division of Women’s and Professional Projects of the WPA, which oversaw Federal One, and the name of the Division changed to the Division of Professional and Services Projects. With the appointment of Kerr, according to George Foster, “an immediate drive was made to

119 Both of these units had formerly been involved with folk music research or performance activities. See Gough, “The Varied Carols I Hear,” 366, 406.
120 Jane Thomson Browne, head of the folk music research projects of the Mississippi FMP, noted in a letter to a Mississippi folk music researcher that, “we have with us in Jackson now, for a short visit, Mr. Charles Seeger, who is an authority on folk music, and who has collected extensively along this line. He is in addition rather a well-known musician and musicologist. He has an article in the July issue of *Magazine of Art*, ‘Music in America,’ which is excellent. I hope you will read it. Like Lomax and other people who have gone into the field, he thinks we have a gold-mine right here in Mississippi, in the way of real folk music. Jane Thomson Browne to Mrs. G. B. Woodward, 31 October 1938, MDAH.
improve the standards of many [Professional and Services] projects.” Kerr believed the best way to accomplish this goal was to place the power of the projects in the hands of the states rather than the national offices. Thus began a yearlong reorganization of the Federal One projects, culminating with the July 1939 passage of the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act for the fiscal year ending 30 June 1940, which stipulated this federal-to-state-level reorganization. Whereas such a shift in power might have made some WPA projects more efficient, the effect on the arts projects was devastating. Concomitant with the changeover, the ERA Act instituted two rules that severely hampered Sokoloff’s vision: the 25 percent rule, which stipulated that a quarter of the funding for any Federal One project must come from the already cash-strapped states, and the eighteen-month rule, which required any WPA worker who had been continuously employed for a period of eighteen months to be removed from the government rolls.

This reorganization was the last straw for Sokoloff. In March 1939, the same month Halpert began his Southern states trip, Sokoloff resigned. Shortly thereafter, his assistant William C. Mayfarth followed suit. According to Kenneth Bindas, “musical forces lobbied for a less symphonic and more folk/popular-oriented Music Project, and Sokoloff, feeling the pressure, tendered his resignation,” agreeing to stay on through 19 May “in order to assure a smooth transition of authority.” For his years of service, the embattled former FMP director received a medal. On 16 April 1939, the Washington Post announced that Sokoloff would be awarded the 1939

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121 Foster, Final Report, 135.
122 Bindas, “All of This Music Belongs to the Nation” (dissertation), 254.
Henry Hadley medal for “the individual making the greatest contribution to the cause of American music,” which was presented to him on 12 May by Sigmund Spaeth, chairman of the National Association for American Composers and Conductors.\(^{123}\)

Shortly thereafter, Sokoloff took a position with the Seattle Symphony, which he had conducted the previous winter season, perhaps in an attempt to test other waters.\(^{124}\)

The FMP was renamed the WPA Music Program, with George Foster, taking over temporarily the operations of the national office in Washington, D.C, Dorothy Fredenhagen working as Assistant Director, and Harry Hewes continuing in his role as Director of Information Services. Earl V. Moore replaced Foster as director of the WPA Music Program in August 1939, and held the position until June of the following year, when he resigned and Foster once again took the mantle until the project’s liquidation in 1943.

Seeger was apparently not heartbroken by Sokoloff’s resignation. Years later he recalled his time with Sokoloff with a considerable degree of resentment:

> Instead of getting a director of the music the way they’d gotten the director of the music for the Resettlement Administration, they engaged Nikolai [Sokoloff], a very competent Russian musician who had emigrated to this country, who thought American music was beneath notice and was rather


\(^{124}\) Sokoloff had recently completed an eight-concert series conducting the Seattle Symphony Orchestra for the November 1938–February 1939 concert season, opening the door for a job he would hold for the next three years, until he quit in January 1941. On 26 May 1938, the *New York Times* reported that Sokoloff had been granted “a leave of absence by Mrs. Ellen S. Woodward … to enable him to accept a recently extended invitation to conduct the Seattle Symphony Orchestra during part of the 1938–39 concert season.” “Dr. Sokoloff Gets Leave; Director of Federal Project to Lead Seattle Orchestra,” *New York Times*, 26 May 1938, 12. Sokoloff was to conduct a series of eight concerts in Seattle between 14 November 1938 and 17 February 1939. “With the Orchestras,” *New York Times*, 29 May 1938, 116; “Sokoloff Quits Seattle Orchestra,” *New York Times*, 15 January 1941, 19.
contemptuous of American musicians. It’s a question whether he’d ever even heard of the existence of the American folk song at that time. He probably thought American popular music was pretty bad, too. So the whole orientation of the Music Project was from the Europeophile music viewpoint looking down upon these poor, benighted Americans who needed to be spoon-fed with “good” music, very much the point of view that I had when I departed in the trailer in 1921 to give good music to the backward peoples of the United States.  

Buoyed by the restructuring of the FMP and by the removal of the person whom Seeger seemingly perceived as his greatest impediment, Seeger redoubled his efforts to push his own vision for the FMP, which more closely resembled the work he had done with the Resettlement Administration. Nearly every one of Seeger’s articles and lectures over the next year focused on the functionalist role that folk music might play in the work of music educators, composers, historians, musicologists, and diplomats.

On 21 March 1939, the same month Sokoloff resigned, Seeger spoke to the music teachers of District One of the Florida FMP in Jacksonville (only a few months before Halpert would arrive in the state to record Zora Neale Hurston and others under the supervision of FWP director Carita Doggett Corse). Seeger assessed the state of the FMP generally, and proposed what he viewed as the true purpose of music education: to teach people to sing and play the songs they wanted to perform.  

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125 Seeger, Reminiscences of an American Musicologist, 261. Seeger added later in the interview, “I found the regional officers of the WPA heavily bureaucratized, and the “cultural programs,” so called, in the charge of women politicos who were quite charming people, rather masculine and domineering, and not too difficult to get around to a viewpoint that, after all, this Sokoloverian highbrow music, while it was very respectable and all that, was a good deal of a bore. Most of them really liked hillbilly music better than the symphonic and chamber music that the Music Project was trying to back, and were quite frank in saying so, once you could assure them it would be safe for them to say so. So I made several warm friends among them, and things began to go rather well. Seeger, Reminiscences of an American Musicologist, 266.

126 Charles Seeger, address to teachers of District 1, Florida Music Project, Jacksonville, 21, March 1939. Seeger’s address is quoted in Pescatello, Charles Seeger, 156–58, 300n40.
really great problem of the [Federal Music] Project,” he stated, “is to catch up with the other Arts Projects.”127 “Why,” he asked, was “the Music Project behind the others?” His answer was that the other projects had embraced folk materials in a way that Seeger felt the FMP had not. “We have up to now been merely recreative not creative. Why not interpret the musical America? This problem faces instructors in public school music also. The music for public schools and bands is written by academic gentlemen who imitate Europeans.” Seeger noted that, “composers, critics, historians, in fact, all but teachers, have come to recognize American music,” and that “American music education is based on the classics and on the folk songs of European nations.”128 The solution, as Seeger saw it, was the integration of the “many truly American folk songs” at their disposal. He pointed to the “150,000 recordings” at the Archive of American Folk Song as proof that “America has folk music that is more alive than [in] any other country with the exception of Spain, Hungary, and Russia.”129

Seeger also published an article touting the functionality of folk music. Titled “Grass Roots for American Composers,” the article appeared in the March/April 1939

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127 Seeger, address to teachers of District 1, Pescatello, 156.
128 Seeger, address to teachers of District 1, Pescatello, Charles Seeger, 156–57. Seeger ended his speech with a nationalist screed about the place of folk music throughout the rest of the Western world shortly before the outbreak of World War II: “European music is killed in Europe by Fascist domination. Only in Russia is music still free. The real folk music is now centered in Russia and America.” Seeger’s conclusion, no doubt, had much to do with the current political climate on the other side of the Atlantic, as well as to the feelings amongst the Left in the United States that Russian-style communism had something to offer. Those feelings would quickly change, as Seeger noted in the 1960s. See Seeger’s discussion of his own communist leanings, as filtered through the lens of the 1960s, the Cold War, and his own age, in Seeger, Reminiscences of an American Musicologist, 209 ff., and 289–93.
129 Charles Seeger, address to teachers of District 1, ibid., 156.
issue of Minna Lederman’s *Modern Music* journal. Here Seeger made a pitch to composers very similar to his arguments to educators. Seeger noted that

(1) American folk music is probably as alive as that of any ‘advanced’ country… (2) our popular art [jazz] is universally recognized as the most brilliant of its kind in the world today; (3) both of these have come to be what they are in spite of the hundred years’ bitter antagonism of professional musicians; (4) serious composition is still, after considerable patronage and some promising beginnings, little more than a beginning.130

Seeger again pointed to the thousands of folksongs on hand at the Library of Congress, and to the multitudes of melodies that a composer might discover by merely asking a folk singer to perform. “Plainly, if we are to compose for more than an infinitesimal fraction of the American people,” Seeger noted, “we must write in an idiom not too remote from the one most of them already possess—their own musical vernacular.”131

Seeger tailored this message again and again for different audiences. In October 1939, he appeared at the State Department’s Conference on Inter-American Relations in the Field of Music, the government’s attempt to shore up relations among its neighbors to the south in the event that a world conflict would end up in the Americas. Seeger delivered a paper titled “The Importance to Cultural Understanding of Folk and Popular Music,” in which he channeled anthropologists such as Melville Herskovits and members of the Social Science Research Council to put forth a

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130 Charles Seeger, “Grass Roots for American Composers,” *Modern Music*, vol. 16, no. 3 (March–April 1939): 145. Seeger’s statements of course highlight not only his feelings about what he believed to be an unfortunate overemphasis on “good music,” but also his political sentiments about Spain and Russia in the midst of the political climate in Europe in early 1939. Alan Lomax later noted in a discussion with Jerre Mangione that perhaps Roosevelt’s biggest mistake was not getting involved in the Spanish Civil War.

“general theory of acculturation,” which he applied to the field of music in the new world.”  He noted that “when the history of music in the new world is written, it will be found that the main concern has been with folk and popular music” and asserted that of the four types of music—“primitive, fine art, folk, and popular”—as nations they would “do well” if their “major emphasis” was placed “upon folk and popular musics, with fine art and primitive musics playing respectively the roles of dominant and recessive minorities.”  Seeger employed Sokoloff’s own figures to drive home his point that citizens of the Americas should focus on music that they actually enjoyed rather than on music imposed upon them from Europe: “As to interest (that is, to deliberate and continuous application of attention), a former director of the Federal Music Project of the Works Progress Administration [Sokoloff] has estimated “that not more than two percent of our people is ‘seriously interested’ in fine art music.”

Seeger implored those in attendance at the conference to “commence laying the groundwork for serious study of music in the new world”—what Seeger referred to as a “comprehensive program” of music study—in the form of commencing surveys of available materials and creating indices. From there, Seeger asserted, “the collection of new data should be encouraged,” by way of recording any music that is “dying out or becoming transformed under the strong acculturative and contra-

133 Ibid., 1.
134 Ibid., 6.
acculturative impacts of modern life."\(^{135}\) Seeger proposed a student and researcher exchange among the Americas, with fellowships and stipends to be made available to facilitate new research and continuing studies. “Such projects … are eminently practical and are well within the resources and interest of several large, private institutions and government agencies in the United States,” he noted, and he invited countries of Latin America to follow suit, where he believed they would “find enthusiastic cooperation.”\(^{136}\)

Two months after this State Department address, Seeger was back on the lecture trail, stumping for folk music research. In December 1939, he gave an address to the American Historical Association in Washington D.C., titled “Some Neglected Sources of Social History,” which he subsequently revised and republished as “Folk Music as a Source of Social History” in historian and social activist Caroline F. Ware’s influential 1940 collection, *The Cultural Approach to History*.\(^{137}\) (Seeger’s essay appeared directly after Benjamin Botkin’s similarly titled essay “Folklore as a Neglected Source of Social History.”)\(^{138}\) Seeger used the platform to discuss the areas of common ground among historians and musicologists in order to get to what he saw as the crux of the problem: “why has the study of music-culture relationships been neglected?” and “how shall we go about remedying the situation in which we are at

\(^{135}\) Ibid., 9.
\(^{136}\) Ibid., 9.
Seeger’s questions are important, and his sidling up next to social and cultural historians presages much of the work he would do in the Pan American Union and his establishment of the Society for Ethnomusicology in coming years. Seeger asserted,

In this approach very valuable work has been done and much remains to be done. Music tends to appear here as an element in culture which bears out or illustrates conclusions arrived at by general study. But in common with other widespread cultural activities, music must not only be fitted into the picture made by general study but must be examined as a possible contributor of additions to the general picture—expressions of cultural characteristics and values which, at least in part, may not be susceptible to treatment by the methods traditionally used in the building of the general picture. Such an examination requires consideration of the inner, technical operation of the various musics and the types of music idiom which crosscut them. And this clearly does not fall within the traditional domain of historical study.\textsuperscript{140}

Seeger noted the important balance between textual sources (written documents and musical scores) and “direct sound and sight-recording, unwritten and nonverbal sources.” The former he believed formed the “main skeleton of the corpus” of social histories of folk cultures, though he acknowledged the important “checks upon these traditional media” that sound and visual documentation would provide.\textsuperscript{141} (Seeger’s imploration to Robertson to record everything she found and to document her fieldwork with drawings, field notes, and photographs echoes his statements to the AHA.) Folk idioms provided a wealth of opportunities for the social historian and musicologist alike for a variety of reasons, Seeger claimed, not the least of which was “the anonymity of the folk idiom,” which provides the researcher “the feeling that one

\textsuperscript{139} Seeger, “Folk Music as a Source of Social History,” 316.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 317.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 319; and Seeger, “Some Neglected Sources of Social History,” 5.
is dealing directly with a socially molded thing”; the relative stability of folklore, which is to say that it is not beholden to current fashion; the fact that these idioms arise largely from oral tradition, which, Seeger noted, “means that the content of the folk idiom comes straight to us without the intervening censor of sophisticated handling”; and perhaps most importantly, the relative familiarity of folk idioms to most people, researchers, and the public alike, which will “break down barriers set up by the theory of the ‘other-worldliness’ of music.”¹⁴² Seeger’s underlying point was that musicologists had much to learn from social historians, and that music should be taken as seriously as any other scientific or cultural object of inquiry:

The same humility before the object of study which has distinguished the great sciences can and should be invoked in the handling of music, all the more because language is the dominating art in world culture. This holds, I would say, as well for the musicologist who looks outward from his own domain into the vastly larger one of social and cultural studies, as for the social historian who looks inward upon a “dark spot” which may be larger and more important than traditional practice has believed it to be. In closing, please let me state the hope that the same breadth of view which includes this topic in a discussion of materials for historians will some day be shown by musicologists.¹⁴³

Between his hiring in 1938 and the end of 1939, Seeger published, lectured, and toured extensively. His interactions with musicologists, folklorists, and cultural historians excited him to no end. Seeger later recalled, “It was like a stretto in a fugue, all of these different strands began to draw together in 1939,” though he admitted he often felt like a “black sheep” even among his colleagues, the historical

¹⁴³ Ibid., 323.
musicologists.\textsuperscript{144} Aside from the publications already mentioned, Seeger published a number of other articles in his first year as FMP director, including “Music in America” (\textit{Magazine of Art}, 1938); “Music and Government: Field for Applied Musicology” (MENC/AMS conference, September 1939); and “Systematic and Historical Orientations in Musicology” (\textit{Acta Musicologica}, 1939), in which he worked through his theories about the commonalities among historical and comparative musicologists, and the role of folk music as a focus for these seemingly disparate disciplines. Additionally, he supervised from Washington Herbert Halpert’s Southern States Recording Expedition, and helped to coordinate the D.C. WPA Library of Congress Project.

But all of the time spent on these endeavors meant that Seeger had neglected some of his official FMP duties. In his final report, George Foster noted that Seeger’s “immediate function,” upon the project’s reorganization in early 1939 was “to develop a series of technical circulars necessitated by the termination of direct relationships between the Washington office of the Music Program and the state music projects.”\textsuperscript{145} “The development of such guides,” Foster stated, “was particularly essential at that time since, with the broadened scope of project activities and the removal of appointment responsibility from the National Director, cases would occur in which a supervisor might embark upon new activities without the slightest contact from the national office.”\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{144} Seeger, \textit{Reminiscences of an American Musicologist}, 279, 278, 273.
\textsuperscript{145} Foster, Final Report, 123–24.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 229.
The “first step,” Foster noted, was the development of a technical circular for use by both the Music and Recreation Divisions, to be titled “Music as Recreation,” a job that Seeger and Virgil Dahl of the Recreation Division were assigned in the summer of 1939. It was not released until 29 May 1940.\textsuperscript{147} Foster noted, “The date of release reveals the fact that almost a year elapsed between the first conference on the subject and the date on which the Circular arrived in the States. Needless to say not all of this time was consumed in writing the circular. It was this time factor that eventually defeated the usefulness of technical circulars.”\textsuperscript{148} The circular, Foster continued, “was not well received by the State Music Supervisors,” and was of little value to State staffs of the Music Program.” The Recreation Division accepted the manual “as it was essentially a recreation handbook,” but it was “eventually disowned by the Music Program to the extent that it was not given a number in the Technical Series and was never circulated or referred to after its initial release.”\textsuperscript{149}

What, then—beyond the tardiness of the publication—made the twenty-six-page “Music as Recreation” so inflammatory? Neal Canon notes that the circular “attempted to reconcile some of the differences between professionalism and community service.”\textsuperscript{150} Read in the context of Seeger’s contemporaneous writings and keeping in mind his sentiments about folk music, “good music,” and Sokoloff, however, it is understandable why the publication might have been less than

\textsuperscript{148} Foster, Final Report, 229.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 229.
acceptable. “Music as Recreation” opens with the two differing viewpoints of the Music Division and the Recreation Division: “The function of music in recreation is generally well agreed upon. … A recreation offers music primarily … as one of a number of socially related arts, crafts, sports, hobbies, and other leisure-time pursuits.” Seeger asserted that the “relationships of recreation and music”—meaning the ways that recreational music was perceived by professional musicians—“are not well agreed upon by musicians. … The first and ultimate question the musician asks is: Is it ‘good’ music?—i.e., does it represent a high standard of accomplishment in the fine art of music?”151 Seeger then spent the rest of the circular fleshing out this thinly veiled attack on the professionalism standards of Sokoloff’s FMP. Seeger cast as his foil the professional musician, whose tastes precluded him from enjoying anything but the most highbrow of music:

The expert can discourage the musical efforts of the average person equally well by talking impressively of high professional standards, cosmopolitan music events, or even of his own taste [and] reactions. In this connection it is well for any one of us to remember, that there is nowhere in the world today very much agreement upon critical standards. We cannot be too sure that what is “good” to the professional must for that very reason be the only “good” to the amateur.152

Seeger’s response to the professional musician was to turn the “good music” debate on its head: “Instead of ‘Is it good music?’ We come to ask ‘What is this music good for?’ If it bids fair to weld the community into more resourceful and democratic action for a better life for itself and its neighbors, then it must be conceded to be

151 Seeger, “Music as Recreation,” 2–3.
152 Ibid., 13.
‘good for’ that. The chances that it may sometime be found good in technical and stylistic terms will probably be fair.\textsuperscript{153}

Seeger laid out a list of “guiding principles” for recreational music leaders that echo not only his Resettlement Administration–era leadership ideals, but also his more recent ideas about oral vs. written traditions, functionalism and folk music, and music as a socially bounded art form:

a) The essential thing in music is the making of it.
b) Take people as they are—begin with the capacities and tastes actually resident in an individual or a community, and feel out the potentialities for development they contain.
c) Let people make for themselves as much as possible of the music they need.
d) Develop local leadership.
e) Quantity should be the immediate, quality and ultimate, objective.
f) Group activity should be the focus of attention—individual accomplishment should be valued primarily as contributing to it.
g) Consolidate the existing musical background—encourage respect and love for native music idioms, skills and taste.
h) The basis of a music recreation program is in oral rather than written tradition.
i) There is no valid ground for conflict between oral and written techniques, nor between folk, popular and fine art idioms—each has its place end use; music is, to an extent only slightly less than language, a means of communication between people; it is of primary importance that group work—especially work with a new group—utilize the idiom familiar to the majority of the members of the group, for this is the idiom they can understand.
j) Music should be cultivated not so much as an end in itself as a means of achieving large social ends.
k) Music serves a number of functions simultaneously—it is profitable to observe the effects of music, whether it serves as discipline or dissipation, as anodyne, sedative, tonic or stimulant.
l) He who would teach the people must first learn from them—then he can the more effectively act with them.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 11–12.
Seeger’s koan-like conclusion to his list reflects something that he had to learn firsthand during his time from the Resettlement Administration: directors should not attempt to dictate the types of music the community should learn. Seeger’s plan to turn all of the resettlement residents into folk singers largely backfired, just as had his attempts to bring “good music” to the “backward peoples of the United States” in his coast-to-coast trailer trip with his family in 1921. “The aim is not without reach in this generation: ‘Everyone singing or playing an instrument, and many good at both.’”

The publication of “Music as Recreation” on 29 December 1940 was essentially Seeger’s final act for the WPA Music Program. He had mistakenly thought that he might be next in line for the position of director of the WPA Music Project, but he was passed over when Earl Moore left in June 1940. George Foster, who took over, was probably better suited for the position. Behind the scenes, and unbeknownst to Seeger, there had been discussions among Earl Moore, Dorothy Fredenhagen, and C. E. Triggs about transferring Seeger to the D.C./Library of Congress Project permanently, and keeping him in an advisory role for the WPA Music Project.155 Seeger had a fallback plan, however, and one that in the long-term turned out to be a much better opportunity. In February 1941, he accepted the position of director of the Inter-American Music Center and chief of the Music and Visual Arts Division for the Pan American Union, a door that had been opened to him through his speech at the Conference on Inter-American Relations in the Field of

155 See Gough, “The Varied Carols I Hear,” 387–89. The transfer would also entail a pay cut from $3,800 to $3,600 per annum.
Music in October 1939.\textsuperscript{156} The new position increased his salary from $3,800 to $4,600 annually (approximately $73,000 in 2015 currency).\textsuperscript{157} He would hold this job until his resignation in 1953. Looking back on his time with the FMP in the mid-1960s, Seeger admitted that he thought it had been “ill conceived from the beginning.” Moreover, he felt the FMP “didn’t have any of the joy of the Resettlement Administration.”\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{156} The PAU was designed with the objectives, according to Seeger, of the “furtherance of cultural cooperation with and better understanding of our neighbors to the south.” Seeger stated in a 1941 article he wrote as chief of the PAU’s Music Division, that with the “aid of the American Council of Learned Societies, the Library of Congress, the Council of National Defense, and the Carnegie Corporation, the Organizing Committee of this Conference brought about the establishment of a music division in the Pan American Union.” Charles Seeger, “Inter-American Relations in the Field of Music,” \textit{Music Educator’s Journal}, vol. 27, no. 5 (March–April 1941): 17.


CHAPTER 10.

“Hinterland Masses” and “Overnight Transformations”: State-Level Folk Music Collecting under the Federal Music Project

Although there was no national edict in place regarding folk music research and folksong collecting, many state-level FMP units worked in this arena to varying degrees.\(^1\) Some projects were as simple as assigning a single worker to assist in the collection of folksongs, as in the case of Vermont FMP worker Jane Hutchins, who had recently graduated from Bennington College and had enlisted as a non-relief worker with the express purpose of assisting Vermont folk music collector Helen Hartness Flanders in the field. As an October 1936 national FMP report noted “Miss Hutchins is so interested in the work that she is defraying her own expenses for

\(^1\) According to Jerry Bruce Thomas, “toward the end of the decade, the [West Virginia] music project did undertake an important effort by sending out workers with recorders into remote regions of the state to record the songs, voices, and music of the people in the remotest sections of the state.” FMP director Verna Blackburn, however, as Thomas notes, “thought only in terms of brass bands and orchestras and did little to encourage local traditional music.” When approached about by the “colored people of Wheeling” about a possible folk ensemble, she stated, “I have not given it much thought as their instrumentation consisted of guitar, banjo, etc.” Jerry Bruce Thomas, *An Appalachian New Deal: West Virginia in the Great Depression* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 149. Blackburn penned an article for *The Baton* in July 1937, in which she stated that her audiences’ “tastes do not, as a rule, run toward concert music and so, if they should happen to tune in a concert or symphonic group on the air, they usually shun it and turn to ‘hillbilly’ or jazz programs exclusively,” but through her programs, the audience “is thus enabled to understand something of what the music is about, and is exposed, by degrees, to better and better music. People who would have scorned anything more serious than ‘Comin’ Round the Mountain’ now listen to and like Herbert, Friml, and even Haydn, Schubert and Mendelssohn.” Verna Blackburn, “Music for the Underprivileged,” *The Baton*, vol. 2, no. 6 (June 1937), 7. I have not found evidence that there were any recordings made by FMP members, however. Charles Seeger recorded in the state during his time with the Resettlement Administration, at Arthurdale (and possibly Tygart) Farms in August 1936. John and Bess Lomax also recorded in the state in July 1937. Herbert Halpert included West Virginia in his Southern States Recording Expedition for the WPA Joint Committee on Folk Arts in April 1939. Other West Virginia musicians performed at the National Folk Festival and for the Recording Laboratory at the AAFS. See also Gough, “The Varied Carols I Hear” (dissertation), 71; and Travis Stimeling, “Preserving Art Music in the Mountain State: A Study of the West Virginia Federal Music Project Orchestras, 1935-1939,” M.M. Thesis, West Virginia University, 2003.
transportation which amount to a considerable sum each month.” Other states had more substantial folk music projects, as in the case of the four projects examined in this chapter: Kentucky, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Oklahoma. Each of these state FMP projects had its own musical focus and lifespan—some lasted a few months, some were reborn after a stagnant few years, and another survived the entire life of the FMP/WPA Music Program. They all, however, began within the first nine months of the FMP, and were thus largely subject to the same budgetary and philosophical forces.

**Kentucky**

The Kentucky Federal Music Project’s folk music collection, although small and short lived, is important to consider as much for the circumstances surrounding the collection and the people involved with it, as it is for the music that these project workers actually gathered. It was the first collection of its kind under the Federal Music Project, and a 1936 press release attributed to Nikolai Sokoloff praised the project as one “of significant importance. … These ancient, living songs and the rollicking, bounding tunes are to be preserved in reproducing records and manuscripts as a part of the nation’s cultural treasure house in the Congressional Library in Washington. They are to be permanent documents.” In June 1936, with a grant from

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2 Narrative report, October 1936, “Folk Music Throughout State,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Vermont.”

3 Press release, “From the Federal Music Project: Dr. Nikolai Sokoloff of the Federal Music Project, in a prepared statement preceding the Ashland Folk Festival,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Kentucky.”
the Rockefeller Foundation, the project collected nearly 150 folksongs and fiddle and banjo tunes from musicians in the rural areas of the state.\textsuperscript{4} Many of these songs were initially transcribed by hand in the field by FMP workers and later arranged and notated for publication in a two-volume set titled *Folk Songs from East Kentucky.*\textsuperscript{5}

At the center of the Kentucky FMP’s collection was folk music impresaria and raconteuse, the so-called “Traipsin’ Woman,” Jean Thomas (1881–1982), founder of the American Folk Song Festival near Ashland, Kentucky. Although the story of Thomas’s personal history and her involvement with the Federal One arts projects pales in comparison to the myths she created about herself and her informants, her legacy of popularizing Appalachian folk music culture in the 1930s and beyond is in itself the stuff of legend. Thomas, was born Jeanette Mary Francis de Assisi Aloysius Narcissus Garfield Bell on 14 November 1881 in Ashland, Kentucky. She earned her nickname “Traipsin’ Woman” in her early teens when she “defied convention to attend business school, learn stenography, and become a court reporter, traveling by jolt wagon [a farm wagon] to courts in the mountains of eastern Kentucky.”\textsuperscript{6} Using the money she managed to save from her wages at the court, Thomas moved to New York City, where she enrolled in writing classes at Hunter College and the Pulitzer School of Journalism, married an accountant named Albert Thomas, and moved to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item These areas included Boyd, Floyd, and Rowan counties in the eastern part of the state near the border of Ohio and West Virginia in the Appalachian Hill Country.
\item Federal Music Project (Kentucky), *Folk Songs from East Kentucky*, handwritten, n.p., ca. 1939.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Logan, West Virginia. Her marriage lasted less than a year. Over the course of the next decade Thomas held a series of jobs, including as a script girl on the 1923 film *The Ten Commandments* by Cecil B. DeMille (filmed on location in Egypt, Mount Sinai, and the Sinai Peninsula); as a secretary to the owner of the Columbus Senators baseball team (Columbus, Ohio); and as a press agent for Mary Louise Cecilia “Texas” Guinan, a former chorus girl turned actress who became the first female Western star, dubbed the “Queen of the West.” (Guinan was also a notorious bootlegger and speakeasy operator in New York City). 7 Soon after her stint with DeMille, Thomas returned to the relative normalcy of Ashland, where she went back to work as a court stenographer.

Restless, Thomas looked for ways to re-acquire some of the excitement, fame, and fortune she had experienced in her twenties. Her chance came in 1926, when she met a fiddler and folk singer named J. W. Day, from Rowan County, Kentucky. After hearing him perform, she recognized his talent and charisma and convinced Day to let her represent him as booking agent and manager. According to Robert Cantwell, Thomas’s experiences in New York and Hollywood “had taught her the commercial potential of bringing regional stereotypes to life, not only in her own gingham-clad Dogpatch persona, but also in a commercial icon of her own making named J. W. (James William “Blind Bill”) Day, a man whom she presented to the world … as a blind Kentucky fiddler called ‘Jilson Setters.” 8 Creating personas and attaching

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7 Ibid., 67.
pseudonyms to them was not out of the ordinary in the late 1920s, particularly in Hollywood.9

With Jilson Setters in tow, Thomas set to work creating an elaborate persona for her folk musician, replete with rustic clothing and, according to Charles Wolfe, “a ladderback hickory chair and a handmade egg basket.”10 Thomas arranged a number of high-profile concerts for Day/Setters, including a short tour of New York City in February 1928 that included a radio broadcast, an appearance at Loew’s Theater, and a recording session at the Victor Phonograph Company, where he recorded ten sides of music.11 Many other high-profile concerts followed. They performed for the wife of the governor of Kentucky in 1930; put on a concert for the English Folk Song and Dance Society at the Royal Albert Hall, at the invitation of Maud Karpeles in 1931 (some sources place the King and Queen in the audience); appeared at Sarah Gertrude Knott’s First National Folk Festival in St. Louis on 29 April 1934; and recorded for the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress in 1937.12

The creation of Jilson Setters was merely Thomas’s opening salvo in her quest to become a folk music cultural icon. Thomas began a prolific career as a writer of Kentucky folklore beginning in the late 1920s, about Setters, for example: “Blind

Jilson: The Singing Fiddler From Lost Hope Hollow”—subtitled “A True Story That

10 Wolfe, Kentucky Country, 67.
11 Ibid., 67.
is Stranger Than Fiction,”—which was published in the February 1930 issue of
_American Magazine_; and the 1938 “biography” of Setters, _The Singin’ Fiddler of Lost
Hope Hollow_.13 Between 1931 and 1942 she published a total of nine books,
beginning with the collection of music and folk tales titled _Devil’s Ditties: Being
Stories of the Kentucky Mountain People_ (1931), which became wildly popular and
was chosen as an alternate selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club.14 She also
published two semi-autobiographical works (_The Traipsin’ Woman_ [1933], and _The
Sun Shines Bright_ [1940]); a collection of songs that included “folk festival or play in
nineteen episodes” _The Singin’ Gatherin’ Tunes from the Southern Appalachians_,
which she co-wrote with Joseph A. Leeder (1939); a book on Kentucky folk music,
co-written with Walter Kob titled _Ballad Makin’ in the Mountains of Kentucky_
(1939); a book on eastern Kentucky titled _Big Sandy_ (1940); and another regional
study titled _Blue Ridge Country_, co-written with Erskine Caldwell (1942).15

Thomas’s lasting legacy—and the reason for her involvement with the FMP—
was the annual folk music festival she held at her cabin less than twenty miles from
Ashland. The festival began inauspiciously as an informal backyard gathering at

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14 Wolfe, _Kentucky Country_, 68.
15 Jean Thomas, _Devil’s Ditties: Being Stories of the Kentucky Mountain People_, (Chicago: W. W. Hatfield, 1931); Jean Thomas, _The Traipsin’ Woman_ (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1933); Jean Thomas and Joseph A. Leeder, _The Singin’ Gatherin’ Tunes from the Southern Appalachians_ (New York: Silver, Burdett, 1939); Jean Thomas and Walter Kob, _Ballad Makin’ in the Mountains of Kentucky_ (New York: Henry Holt, 1939); Jean Thomas, _The Sun Shines Bright_ (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1940); Jean Thomas, _Big Sandy_ (New York: Henry Holt, 1940); Jean Thomas and Erskine Caldwell, _Blue Ridge Country_ (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1942).
Thomas’s home in the style of the “singin’ gatherin’s” that the mountain folks held to perform for one another, which Thomas put on to entertain NBC Radio personality Dorothy Gordon and Susan Steele Sampson, who was the wife of the governor of Kentucky.\textsuperscript{16} The success of this first gathering prompted Thomas to pursue a festival on a larger scale, with an associated folksong society similar to the English Folk Song and Dance Society. She pulled in Sampson to co-sponsor the American Folk Song Society and formed a board of advisers that included Stephen Vincent Benet, Erskine Caldwell, Carl Sandburg, Dorothy Scarborough, and a number of other luminaries.\textsuperscript{17} Beginning in 1932, Thomas’s American Folk Song Festival was held annually on the second Sunday in June at a cabin on the Mayo Trail in the foothills of the Cumberland Mountains, what the Kentucky FWP’s American Guide described as “a picturesque hollow of the foothills of Kentucky,” eighteen miles south of Ashland.\textsuperscript{18}

Thomas’s American Folk Song Festival grew quickly in both attendance and performances, assisted in no small part to Thomas’s indefatigable penchant for self-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Thomas had been a local consultant on Gordon’s show.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Wolfe, Kentucky Country, 68–70.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Federal Writers’ Project of the Work Projects Administration for the State of Kentucky, Kentucky: A Guide to the Bluegrass State; Compiled and Written by the Federal Writers’ Project of the Work Projects Administration for the State of Kentucky (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1939), 93. Jean Thomas, “American Folk Song Festival, Which Grew from the Singin’ Gatherin’ of the Kentucky Mountains,” (liner notes) Jean Thomas, The Traipsin’ Woman: American Folk Song Festival, Folkways Records FA 2358 (LP), 1960, n.p. The cabin had been paid for by a Mrs. and Mr. B. Franklin Cross of Staten Island, New York, who were in attendance at the 1936 festival. According to a New York Times article detailing a trip Thomas took to New York in July 1936, the “Staten Island man read the book and wrote to Miss Thomas offering to help her in any way he could.” After requesting that she wanted a cabin, he agreed to pay for it. See “3-Year-Old Musician Is Star Of Festival: Audience Of Thousands Sees Lad Play Cornstalk Fiddle In Mountain Celebration,” New York Times, 15 June 1936, 21; and “Kentucky Troupe Brings Folk Music: Group From The Hills Sings Elizabethan Ballads To Music Of Coonskin ‘Banjer.’ Rides Far To See Ocean ‘Hymn Tune’ Composer And His Flock Of 8 Plan A ‘Singin’ Gatherin’ In Garden Here,” New York Times, 14 July 1936, 21.
\end{itemize}
promotion and to write-ups in the *New York Times, Time* magazine, and other national publications. An article in the 20 June 1938 issue of *Time* noted that

Local roads were choked by the unaccustomed burden of some 6,000 tourists who had come to see the fun. Present were such upland musical celebrities as bristle-bearded Fiddler Jilson Setters and Brother Dawson of Rowan County, who leads his Gregorian Chanters through old liturgical chants. Also present, in full plaid regalia, were ballad-singing Director Lyda Messer Caudill, direct hillbilly descendant of Mary Queen of Scots, and Author Jean Thomas, “traipsin’ woman” who founded the festival after “traipsin” all over the neighboring mountains collecting the songs of the mountaineers.

In her liner notes for a 1960 Folkways Records LP of the festival, Thomas put the number a little higher: “In a few short years at a single Festival 20,000 people came from all over the U.S.A. and from the far corners of the earth.” With the exception of a break between the years 1943–47, the festival ran continuously until her health forced her to suspend it in 1972.

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21 Thomas, “American Folk Song Festival, Which Grew from the Singin’ Gatherin’ of the Kentucky Mountains.”

22 FWP Kentucky, *Kentucky: A Guide to the Bluegrass State*, 93. According to the University of Louisville’s Jean Thomas Collection website, “With the exception of the years 1943–1947, the American Folk Song Festival was held annually until failing health forced Thomas to retire in 1972.
The sixth annual American Folk Song Festival, held on 14 June 1936, sponsored by the Kentucky FMP, was the first, and only, festival in which the FMP participated. The director of the Kentucky FMP at that time was Fanny Brandeis, “a major driving force through much of the twentieth century” in the musical life of Kentucky, and the niece of Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis. Brandeis and Thomas were able to secure a Rockefeller Grant to fund their folk music project, which allowed her thirty-one-person staff to travel throughout the rural counties of the eastern part of the state in search of musicians and to act as sponsors of the 1936 festival. An inventory report of the WPA folk music projects from 1936 stated that

From 1934-1949, thanks to a benefactor's gift of land and a windowless log cabin, the festival took place at a site eighteen miles south of Ashland. Beginning in 1950, the festival was held in Thomas’s yard in Ashland, moving to a state park in Prestonsburg in 1964, and to the Carter Caves State Park in 1966.” “Jean Thomas The Traipsin’ Woman,” http://digital.library.louisville.edu/cdm/biography/collection/jthom/. Charles K. Wolfe notes, “From 1935 to 1939, the festival took place on the Mayo Trail, about eighteen miles south of Ashland, and remained primarily a Kentucky festival, although participants from Ohio and West Virginia also took part.” Wolfe, Kentucky Country, 71.

23 Fanny Brandeis (1892–1971), the director of the Kentucky KMP had for many years written program notes for the Louisville Orchestra and other local ensembles. The Encyclopedia of Kentucky gives the following information: “A major driving force [in musical activity in Louisville] through much of the twentieth century was Fanny Brandeis, a niece of Justice Louis Brandeis. A violinist she performed in the ensemble Con Brio; wrote program notes for various groups, including the Louisville Orchestra; and helped found the Louisville Chamber Music Society (1938), a group that sponsors touring chamber groups.” Jack Ashworth, Robert B. French, and Gary Falk, “Music,” The Encyclopedia of Louisville, ed. John E. Kleber (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 639. She ran the Louisville Chamber Music Society from 1946–52 alongside Mrs. Macauley Smith. “Louisville Chamber Music Society,” The Encyclopedia of Louisville, ed. John E. Kleber (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 540. See also Carole C. Birkhead, “The History of the Orchestra in Louisville,” M.A. Thesis, University of Louisville, 1977, 32–33, 50–51. Fanny Brandeis and Louis Brandeis corresponded frequently and discussed music on a number of occasions. Justice Louis D. Brandeis was also an amateur musician, and played in the Louisville Amateur Orchestra. He also gave the funding for the music library at the University of Louisville, as well as the law school, which bears his name. See Birkhead, “The History of the Orchestra in Louisville,” 15–16.

24 “The Federal Music Project: The Second Preliminary Report Covering Its Scope and Activities During Its First Nine Months,” 26–27. Thomas may have had some connection with the Rockefeller Foundation. There is correspondence with the organization in her archives at the Dwight Anderson
“several of these mountain minstrels were removed from the relief rolls and provided the music which was notated by trained musicians in both text and notes. These records when they are completed will be in the permanent possession of the music section of the Congressional Library.”

By the time of the festival, members of the folk music project had already amassed more than a hundred folksongs, ballads, and instrumental works for fiddle, banjo, and dulcimer. The transcriptions, another report stated, were the responsibility of the Kentucky FMP’s copyist project, which was headed by “a composer of proved taste and talent.”

That composer was Ludwig M. Sedlaczek, an Austrian émigré and professor of music at the University of Louisville. Sedlaczek was the grandson of “The Paganini of the flute,” Silesian-born flutist Johann Sedlatzek, who had served as the principal flute player in the premiere of his friend Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. Sedlaczek also arranged a number of these

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25 “From the Federal Music Project; A Digest of Studies into Vernacular and Indigenous Folk Music made by Project Workers,” 4.

26 “Kentucky Workers Will Take Part in Sixth Annual American Folk Song Festival at Ashland, June 14, 1936,” statement “for release in afternoon papers, Saturday June 6, 1936,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Kentucky.”

27 Ludwig Maria Sedlaczek (1875–1965) was the grandson of Johann Sedlatzek (1789–1866), a Silesian flautist who was an accomplished flautist, who was referred to as “The Paganini of Flute.” Johann knew and performed with Beethoven’s orchestra, and served as the principal flautist for the premiere of the Ninth Symphony. Ludwig Sedlaczek was the son of cellist Georg Sedlaczek, one of Johann’s five children. Ludwig Sedlaczek was a multi-instrumentalist, who had studied cello with his father, studied organ at the Vienna-Cecilie Verein, and studied violin under Jakob Dont, a student of Josef Böhm (Sedlaczek began violin studies at age 6). At the age of seventeen he became a violinist for the court theatre of Vienna. After working as a performer and conductor in Austria and Germany, he moved to the United States in August 1928. For the next year he was the director of the music department of the Jasper Academy in Jasper, Indiana, some eighty miles from Louisville. (The Jasper Academy was formerly Jasper College, and subsequently transferred to Aurora, Illinois, where it changed names to the Marmion Academy.) He later he took a position as a professor of music at the University of Louisville. See “Noted Musician Heads Academy Music Department,” Jasper Herald,
folksongs into two suites, one of which was titled *Fanhasie No. 1 on Kentucky Mountain Songs*, which the national FMP office copied made available for other units to borrow.\(^{28}\)

In an article Brandeis penned for the *Kentucky Progress Magazine* in advance of the 1936 festival, she outlined the work that the FMP staff had completed to date, noting that the folk music collection project was “the only one of its kind in the entire set-up of the Federal Music Project.” At the same time, Brandeis was careful to give credit to Sokoloff and assistant FMP director Guy Maier for recognizing “the importance of Folk Music in America,” and noted that they were “keenly interested in establishing this project.”\(^{29}\) Indeed, the Kentucky FMP’s folk music project caused a great deal of excitement among the FMP and WPA officials on the national level. Maier and FMP assistant Thaddeus Rich, the former concert master and assistant conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra, had recently visited Brandeis and Thomas in Ashland to listen to “hear the mountain singers and to examine the transcriptions of their native music.”\(^{30}\) At the request of Harry Hewes, the assistant project supervisor of the WPA, Maier sent along Brandeis’s article upon its publication, stating, “I am

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31 August 1928, 1. Sedlaczk’s obituary appears in the 15 October 1965 edition of *The Kansas City Times*, p. 19; and the *Jasper Dubois County Daily Herald*, 15 October 1965, 1.
28 “Nation-Wide Activities: Kentucky,” *The Baton*, vol. 2, no. 2 (February 1937): 10. *The Baton* noted, “Folk Songs collected by the Folk Song Project of the Kentucky Mountains are now being distributed to other projects. Two Fantasies for full orchestra on Kentucky mountain songs have been arranged by the supervisor of the Kentucky Project and can be borrowed by WPA orchestras throughout the country. There are two sets of scores available of each.”
29 Fanny Brandeis, “Another Singin’ Day Drawing Near.” *Kentucky Progress Magazine*, 7 no. 3 (Spring 1936): 120.
30 “Kentucky Workers Will Take Part in Sixth Annual American Folk Song Festival at Ashland, June 14, 1936,” statement “for release in afternoon papers, Saturday June 6, 1936,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Kentucky.”
enclosing the rather extraordinary group picture of Kentucky Mountain Minstrels on our project there. I think this is good stuff for national publicity and it certainly ought to appear in rotogravure sections all over the country.\textsuperscript{31}

In the same article Brandeis also notes that she had been able to find workers for her project who were “already on relief doing ordinary labor,” but who happened to be “expert singers or fiddlers” as well, whom she transferred to her Folk Song Project. She also noted the overall goal for the collection project, which echoed the familiar dual purpose of many of the WPA folk music collecting projects: preservation and popularization: “[The project’s] purpose is to record the words and music of ballads, songs, hymns, tunes of the mountain folk to prevent their disappearance,” but added that “beyond the actual writing down of words and noting of music, there is also the purpose of teaching the younger generation to sing the songs and play the fiddle, the banjo, the dulcimer, as their elders have done.”\textsuperscript{32}

The national FMP office followed suit with a press release preceding the festival dated 6 June that is attributed to Sokoloff. “When the full and vital story of the American people comes to be written,” the release began, “the cultural historian must absorb deeply from the records and manuscripts of the songs and the tunes that we are to hear in Ashland on this June day. Both in history and as legend the vernacular music of these people of the Kentucky hills in whom the Anglo-Saxon strain has retained its purest line, resides the record of a culture that is indigenous and

\textsuperscript{31} Guy Maier to Harry Hewes, 24 April 1936, NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Kentucky.”
\textsuperscript{32} Brandeis, “Another Singin’ Day Drawing Near,” 120.
eloquent.”33 This release would not be the FMP’s only statement about the purity of the Anglo-Saxon bloodline, however. An internal report on the FMP’s folk music collecting project echoed the language in this June 1936 release:

It has often been said that in the veins of these mountain people courses the purest Anglo-Saxon blood to be found today and that their songs, dances, and even their speech have been handed down to them almost intact from their English-descended ancestors, uncontaminated by outside influences. The retention of these characteristics has been largely due to their isolation but this condition will be and is already beginning to be changed, with the building of hard-surfaced roads and the ever-increasing amount of tourist travel. It is therefore a matter of considerable historic interest to the entire nation these quaint and beautiful old ballads and dances and the interesting games of a bygone period to be recorded for posterity.34

To be fair, however, there is little evidence that this type of language pointed to a systemic racist and exclusionary attitude on the part of the WPA. Rather, the language in both Sokoloff’s June 1936 press release and this April 1937 report, seems to point to a number of tropes that the FMP and other WPA organizations perpetuated both within the organizations and publicly.

Sokoloff continued his press release with a statement on the importance of collecting the folk music traditions within the United States, as a source of national pride and history. “This “Singin’ Gatherin’” does more than bring these native musicians together for the joy and the solace and the pride that rests within their own music. … The day will come when these lyrics and these melodies will find themselves in the libraries of the world beside the folk-lore of the French, the

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33 Press release, “From the Federal Music Project: Dr. Nikolai Sokoloff of the Federal Music Project, in a prepared statement preceding the Ashland Folk Festival,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Kentucky.”
34 “Information on Federal Music Project to Compile American folk music,” 2 April 1937, NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820.
Germans, the Scandinavians, and the Russian peoples.” The national office’s release concluded with a tribute to Jean Thomas, who had brought some much-needed national attention to the Federal Music Project, albeit it for a type of music that was not particularly on Sokoloff’s radar: “To Jean Thomas, founder of this festival, who knows these people, their aspirations and dreams, their sorrows and their folkways, who through the years has made a chronicle of their music, we may well today express and abiding debt of gratitude.”

Thomas’s magic as a promoter had indeed worked for this festival as it had for her previous festivals and her books and tours throughout the nation. The New York Times wrote two articles on the event, which foregrounded the notion that the Kentucky FMP’s folk music survey was “the only one of its kind in the entire Federal Music Project set-up”—the exact language from Brandeis’s Kentucky Progress article earlier in the year. The articles, which reported that “several thousand” attendees had been on hand, played up the “rustic” and “colorful” pageantry of the event as well as the “quaint authentic costumes worn by the mountain minstrels,” noting that there would be “warning and wassail songs, ‘frolic’ and ‘lonesome’ tunes, sea chanties, and

35 “From the Federal Music Project: Dr. Nikolai Sokoloff of the Federal Music Project, in a prepared statement preceding the Ashland Folk Festival,” The release continued, “Many of these songs, perhaps most of them, are the heritage from the sturdy, courageous, restless men and women, “the horizon seekers,” who captured and tamed the wilderness of the Cumberlands, the Blue and the Pine Mountains, and the great Smokies. They took with them over the Wilderness Trail tunes and ballads that once had been heard in the taverns and on the greens of Old England from which they or their forebearers came.”
36 Press release, “From the Federal Music Project: Dr. Nikolai Sokoloff of the Federal Music Project, in a prepared statement preceding the Ashland Folk Festival,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Kentucky.”
ditties to the strains of fiddle and dulcimer, or harp and flute.” Among the guests invited to the fête were Nikolai Sokoloff, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Governor and Mrs. Albert Benjamin “Happy” Chandler, although there is no evidence that any of them attended.

Jilson Setters was also mentioned in the article that preceded the festival, but in the post-festival wrap-up, the New York Times heralded Chad Caldwell “a little mountain boy, three years old, who played a cornstalk fiddle,” as “the hit of the day.” Caldwell was a member of a performing family whose members spanned three generations of Caldwells, Gulletts, and Williamses. Caldwell’s four-year-old brother, who “sang and played his own accompaniment on a home-made gourd banjo,” had been featured as the subject of one of the festival’s press photographs, which appeared in both the Kentucky Progress issue and the New York Times’s article that preceded the festival. Indeed, the Caldwell/Gullett/Williams family was Thomas’s next big thing, and a month after the festival she paraded them through New York City on a concert and radio tour as she had with Jilson Setters some years before. An article in the New York Times referenced the American Folk Song

40 While in New York City, Thomas arranged for the Caldwell/Williams/Gullett family to head to New York for a series of concerts and give a NBC radio network broadcast and perform a number of concerts. The New York Times covered the proceedings, and described the eight family members that spanned three generations: Mrs. Williams, “singer of lonesome songs”; Eula Gullett, Williams’s daughter, “player of the dulcimer with goose quill and ‘noter’ and the guitar”; Clark Gullett, Eula’s husband, “maker and player of the ‘banjer’”; Little Emalin, Clark and Eula’s daughter, “who is ‘past six,’”; their son, “Little Chad, ‘past three’”; Little Babe Caldwell, also “past six”; Vincent Caldwell, uncle of the children and a nephew of Mrs. Williams. “The youngest, May Gullett, one-and-one-half years old, who, according to Mrs. Williams, can hum and keep the rhythm of the ‘play-game tunes.”’
Festival from the previous month, although this time the Times reporters placed the attendance at 15,000, which was most likely a figure Thomas herself provided.\textsuperscript{41}

The Kentucky FMP workers sent the music they had collected to their staff music copyist, who, prior to this appointment, had been tasked with creating instruction booklets for music programs in the state’s public schools.\textsuperscript{42} The copyist project culled, prepared, and later published, a collection of “the best of the songs” with “simple and artistic [piano] accompaniments,” which had been handwritten by “an expert composer on staff.”\textsuperscript{43} The resulting publication was a collection of 131 folksongs, ballads, and hymns, as well as some fiddle tunes titled \textit{Folk Songs from Thomas made sure that they dressed and acted the part, acting as intermediary between the family and the New York media and general public. The NYT noted that, “the songs go back to the days of Elizabethan England,” and described the family in some detail: “the children were in overalls and were barefoot,” Mrs. Williams was “a sturdy, bronzed woman,” wore “traditional ‘calicer’ and a ‘slat bonnet’ made with ribs of cane to take the place of starching, and “Mrs. Gullett had on a salmon colored lindsey woolsey dress, homespun in the style of ancient Lincolnshire.” Thomas exhibited a “banjer” that Mr. Gullett had made, the NYT reported: “He had caught a coon, skinned it and had fastened it to a frame fashioned out of white oak.” Thomas also noted that Vincent Gullett was “a gifted creator” of hymn tunes, but hastened to add that he knew no music theory and “could not, in fact, recognize a quarter note if he saw one.” The \textit{NYT} also described the family’s trip to Coney Island and the fact that the family had to keep their children reigned in while in the big city because they had grown up being used to playing in large pastures without a care. “Kentucky Troupe Brings Folk Music: Group From The Hills Sings Elizabethan Ballads To Music Of Coonskin ‘Banjer.’ Rides Far To See Ocean ‘Hymn Tune’ Composer And His Flock Of 8 Plan A ‘Singin’ Gatherin” In Garden Here,” \textit{New York Times}, 14 July 1936, 21.

\textsuperscript{41} “Kentucky Troupe Brings Folk Music,” 21.
\textsuperscript{42} A 1936 photo by George Goodman, (1876–1961) of the music copyist project staff is available through the Kentucky Digital Library of the University of Kentucky (from box 33, item 5325). The caption reads “Project #2489-1 The Federal Music Project. Musicians employed on the Federal Music Project at Louisville, KY, shown copying and arranging public school and folk-song music. The musician in the foreground on the left is working on his own arrangement of a folk-song.” See http://dp.la/item/f72cf0ac4ee9390db152b6b7a8c7d402; http://kdl.kyvl.org/catalog/xt7nux05xv47_444_40.
\textsuperscript{43} Press release, “From the Federal Music Project: Dr. Nikolai Sokoloff of the Federal Music Project, in a prepared statement preceding the Ashland Folk Festival,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Kentucky.” The release also states, “Recently a composition for strings based on “Fine Kentucky Fiddle Tunes” has been performed by a WPA symphony orchestra in Washington.”
East Kentucky. The festival was recorded the following year, as it had been in 1934, although there is no convincing evidence that the FMP was able to secure a recording machine while these FMP workers were active.

Not long after the festival, in July 1936, the folk music project of Kentucky FMP was suspended. Kenneth Bindas notes,

The FMP organized in Kentucky, but after five months the unit disbanded for lack of work and direction. With few professional musicians in rural counties, those employed recorded some 200 folk songs and fiddle tunes by the hillfolk. However, due to the fact that the FMP was designed to rehabilitate and employ musicians, Sokoloff and the national office found it difficult to fund such an operation. By July 1936 the Kentucky FMP unit collecting these songs lost its funding.

There are no extant documents describing the reasons the project was suspended, but it is possible that once the Rockefeller grant had run out the Kentucky FMP was unable to find adequate funding to keep the project going. The Kentucky FMP largely...

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45 Setters and the Caldwell/Gullett/Williams family were among the people recorded in 1934 and 1937. It is entirely possible that the recordings listed as 1937 were actually from the 1936 festival, given that the performers were the same, and that Jean Thomas was in New York performing with the FTP in the Living Newspaper production *Power* from February to August 1937. Moreover, there is no press surrounding a 1937 festival whatsoever. See the “Jean Thomas American Folk Song Festival Collection,” American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, AFC 1935/003. The catalog record for this collection states, “Twenty-two 12-inch discs of songs and instrumentals primarily of Kentucky performers, recorded at the American Folk Song Festival in Ashland, Kentucky, by Jean Thomas, June 1934. Includes performances by Walter Caldwell, Curtis Darkey, Volney Fraley, Edith Fitzpatrick James, Ed Morrison, and Jilson Setters.” See also catalog number AFS 1010–1025, the record of which states, “Sixteen discs containing songs and fiddle tunes primarily of Kentucky performers, recorded in Ashland, Kentucky, June 1937. Includes performances by Jilson Setters and songs sung by Little Babe Caldwell, Walter Caldwell, and Alice Williams.”

46 Bindas, “All of This Music Belongs to the Nation,” (dissertation), 42.
turned its focus to music education projects under the next state supervisor, Grace F. Whitney. Brandeis returned to her work as a concert reviewer and staunch advocate for musical organizations in Louisville.

Jean Thomas, however, did not miss a beat. She continued her work with the festival and the folk musicians she had taken under her wing. Moreover, she became involved with the Federal Theatre Project of New York City. From February to August 1937, Thomas performed the role of a farmer’s wife in the FTP’s Living Newspaper production *Power*, by Arthur Arent (1937), a production about the electrification of rural America and the Tennessee Valley Authority. Thomas provided the production with “The T.V.A. Song” which she claimed she had discovered while collecting in the mountains of Kentucky. The song served as the musical and dramatic apotheosis of the play, and is reprised at the end of the production while movies of the T.V.A. project were projected on a scrim as a narrator over a loudspeaker discusses the pending Supreme Court decisions about the constitutionality of the T.V.A.

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48 From the play: “(The lights dim down to one-fourth. The scrim comes in, and movies of TVA activity are shown.) LOUDSPEAKER: Again the question marches toward ultimate decision by the Supreme Court... (Rear traveler curtains open and lights come up on Supreme Court) ... of the United
Mississippi, Summer of 1936

The largest and best-coordinated statewide folk music collecting project was that of the Mississippi Federal Music Project, as developed by state FMP director Jerome Sage and University of Mississippi professor Jane T. Browne. Over the course of only a few months, beginning in late July 1936, Sage and Browne put more than a hundred FMP workers from the music education and copyist programs into the field, providing them with a list of informants and important folk music resources to guide their work. The collection project resulted in the gathering of more than 1,800 tunes from ninety towns across six WPA districts.49

That the project happened at all—or at least on the scale in which it did—was essentially accidental. An outbreak of infantile paralysis (poliomyelitis) that had been ravaging the South in the early 1930s reached epidemic proportions in Mississippi in the summer of 1936, forcing the State Department of Health to impose a quarantine...
and cancel all classes for students under sixteen years of age. This quarantine meant that the FMP music educators, who were responsible for teaching music classes to underprivileged residents in the state, were essentially left with nothing to do. Classes were discontinued for the entire month of August. Despite “a deluge of letters of protest against the procedure from communities where there were no cases of the disease,” the quarantine stood, and “except for classes of adults, the teaching project was discontinued during the month of August.”\textsuperscript{50} To keep the temporarily displaced music teachers on the WPA payroll, Sage shifted the bulk of her personnel to the music copyist project, which was supervised by Browne, who, Sage noted, had “for a long time been interested in the folk music of the state.”\textsuperscript{51} On 24 July, Sage issued a department-wide memorandum that launched the folk-song collecting project asking her workers to “begin work on the copying project which we had planned to start in August,” noting that “probably after a short vacation we shall be able to resume [regular teaching] work.”\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{50} “Report of WPA Federal Music Project for Mississippi, Month of August 1936, Jerome Sage, State Director,” NARA RG 69, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi,” 2; Jerome Sage, Narrative report, Mississippi FMP, November 1936, 2, MDAH.

\textsuperscript{51} According to Sage’s November 1936 narrative report, four teachers were transferred to other WPA projects, and four others entered private employment. Sage also noted in this report that “Mrs. Hugh Z. Browne” was a graduate of Western College in Oxford, Ohio, with a major in English and Music. It is entirely possible that Browne was associated with Mississippi folk music collector Arthur Palmer Hudson (1892–1978), who earned his B.A. and M.A. degrees at the University of Mississippi (1913, 1920, respectively), and who also had taught courses there. Browne’s husband was Dr. Hugh Zollicoffer Browne (from Kosciusko, MS), who died in the First World War while serving as a U.S. Army medical officer. Wedding announcement: “Perkins-Browne,” \textit{The Daily Herald} (Gulfport and Biloxi, Mississippi) 22 July 1937, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{52} (It seems possible that Sage had planned to partner with Browne on folk music research prior to the cancellation of classes, but the quarantine merely accelerated the process.) Jerome Sage, “Subject: Copying Project,” Memorandum SR–4181, 24 July 1936, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, RG 60, No. 667, Mississippi Federal Music Project Records.
Sage acknowledged that it was “difficult to transform overnight music teachers into research workers,” but noted that her workers, who had been teaching “piano, violin, rhythm, bands, chorus, music appreciation, and harmony” to underprivileged residents, made the transition “with surprising success.”

Although folksong collecting might have seemed outside of the scope of Sage’s workers’ purview, they at least had some prior experience with the music. A narrative report from March 1936 states that Sage and her workers were engaged in the collection of “river songs” that were “peculiar to the state,” which they were planning to publish in a mimeographed volume and deposit at the State Department of Archives and History. Sage wrote, “the custom prevails among the Negroes in the Delta region of the state, to assemble on the levee when the Mississippi [River] threatens to go on a rampage in the spring. These songs have a peculiar plaintiveness and spring partly from superstition and partly from the Negro’s implicit faith that ‘God will roll all ob de troubles away.’ No record, written or otherwise, of these songs has ever been made.”

The FMP workers also engaged in a music appreciation and outreach project that focused on traditional music within the state. In June 1936, two months before they were transferred to the collection project, the workers made headlines in a local paper for their instruction of African American youth in the singing of spirituals, or

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53 Excerpt from Mississippi Narrative Report, November 1936 (p. 30); NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi.”

54 Ibid.

55 “Mississippi: Narrative report for March, Miss Jerome Sage,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi.”
the “true ragtime,” as the paper referred to the music.\textsuperscript{56} The article, which was titled “Hinterland Masses Educated in Music by Federal Tutors; Farm Children Taught True Ragtime,” decried modern popular musical styles (e.g., Tin Pan Alley songs and ragtime) as possessing “cheap and stilted” “surface sophistication,” and lauded the tradition of African American spirituals—“the same tunes now acclaimed joyfully by New York critics”—as being “the heritage of [the African American] race.”\textsuperscript{57} The article noted the difficulty that the FMP workers faced in impressing upon these residents “the value of the spiritual to their race”: “The youthful Negro snubs the spiritual as a thing too homely for his consideration. He, according to WPA teachers, must be taught that the spiritual is the heritage of his race, that the Negro singing the spiritual imparts a mark of distinction and becomes known for it.”\textsuperscript{58} The article concluded that the responsibility for the preservation of the African American spiritual fell to “the poor and underprivileged,” for “clearly the wealthy classes cannot be charged with the duty. It is not their heritage.”\textsuperscript{59}

The project that Sage and Browne had in mind during the quarantine was much larger in scale than the earlier river song project. They wanted to collect melodies for song texts that had already appeared in published collections, because, according to Sage, “so far as could be found no one [has] made any serious attempt to

\textsuperscript{56} Press release, “Hinterland Masses Educated in Music by Federal Tutors; Farm Children Taught True Ragtime,” June 1936 (no publisher), NARA RG 69, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi.”
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
record or preserve the tunes.” Sage added that the collection of melodies “will be a very important part of our project, and as most of you know some of these old songs, or know someone in your community who does, we believe that we can save much of this hitherto unknown music.” Browne echoed Sage’s statement in her report on the work of the folk music project of the Mississippi FMP, stating that “some months ago it became increasingly apparent that although extensive work had been done in collecting the texts of folk-songs and ballads, very little, comparatively, had been accomplished in recording the tunes and melodies.” Browne acknowledged that the privileging of text over tune was not confined to her state, but rather endemic of ballad collection as a whole: “The idea that ‘the text is the thing’ had perhaps made collectors overlook the importance of saving the melody at the same time.”

Adding to the urgency of the collection was what Browne described as “the time element,” or the familiar “salvage ethnography” notion. The fear was that music that had been sung for at least a hundred years was rapidly disappearing due to the infiltration into these remote areas of the radio and records. Browne stated, “many of the older people who have sung and played this music as they learned it from their fathers and mothers are growing more vague in memory, more inaccurate and more unable to communicate it satisfactorily.” Moreover, Browne noted that “the younger

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63 Ibid., 1.
64 Ibid., 1.
people do not know it at all,” because many of them regard the music as “too ‘back-woodsly’” for their taste. She singled out African American youth in particular, who only recently had begun “to realize the commercial attraction and worth of the spirituals,” but who “can not always convey the real character and poetry as do the older Negroes.” Browne concluded, “Here, then, lies our opportunity. We are convinced that there is work of enduring value to be done, and that in saving traditional music all too quickly fading from memory, we can add a notable achievement to the list of excellent work already accomplished.”

To prepare themselves and their workers for the task ahead, Sage and Browne put together a collection of folk music sources from the state. Chief among these sources were Arthur Palmer Hudson’s publications of Mississippi folk tunes *A Patch of Mississippi Balladry* (1927); *Specimens of Mississippi Folk-Lore* (1928); “A Patch of Mississippi Balladry”; and *Folksongs of Mississippi and Their Background* (1936). Hudson, a leading expert on folk music in the state, had been a University of Mississippi student and later a professor in the English department there, although he had been teaching at the University of North Carolina since 1930. Sage and Browne also gathered from the University of Mississippi library a number of recent theses on local folksongs. These studies, which were most likely written under the supervision

65 Ibid., 1.
66 Ibid., 2.
of Hudson, included Thomas Alton Bickerstaff’s “Mississippi Folk-Songs,” (1927); Elizabeth Burdette’s “Hand-Me-Down: A Collection of Mississippi Folk-Lore,” (1927); G. E. Bynum’s “Folk-Lore from Lee County,” (1927); Stella Weathersby Newsom, “A Collection of Folk-Lore, Complied from the Counties of Newton, Neshoba, Jasper, Lauderdale, Scott, Marion, and Lawrence, Mississippi,” (1927); and Lois Womble’s “Mississippi Folk-Lore” (1927). One of the benefits of using recent folk music collections from the state was the possibility that the informants were still alive and in the area.

All of these Mississippi folk music studies focused exclusively on the Anglo-American folk music tradition. For sources about African American music, Sage and Browne would have to look elsewhere. Fortunately for them, there were numerous recently published sources from which to choose, including those of Hudson’s colleagues from the University of North Carolina, sociologists Howard W. Odum and Guy B. Johnson (The Negro and His Songs: A Study of Typical Negro Songs in the South, 1925; and Negro Workaday Songs, 1926). Also included in their list were James Weldon Johnson’s book of American Negro Spirituals; Newman White’s

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69 Browne wrote, “This collectanea furnishes a splendid foundation and guide. On the assumption that those who communicated the texts of the songs, some four hundred in number, would probably be able to give us the tunes, or could tell us where the tunes might be found, our workers have been following up the clues and locating these contributors as rapidly as they could in the time at their disposal. Browne, “Research Work of the Federal Music Project,” 3.
Sage and Browne also placed on their list the oldest collection of African American spirituals and plantation songs on record: *Slave Songs of the United States* (1867) by William Francis Allen, Lucy McKim Garrison, and Charles Pickard Ware. The book was the result of a collaborative effort among these three northern abolitionists who had, according to Eileen Southern, “worked among the ex-slaves in the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia in the 1860s.” These abolitionists had compiled the songs in the collection from both their own discoveries as well as from

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70 James Weldon Johnson, J. Rosamond Johnson, and Lawrence Brown, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (New York: Viking Press, 1925); Howard W. Odum and Guy B. Johnson, *The Negro and His Songs: A Study of Typical Negro Songs in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1925); Odum and Johnson, *Negro Workaday Songs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926); Dorothy Scarborough, *On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925); Newman Ivey White, *American Negro Folk-Songs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928). Project worker Louise Wallace quoted Scarborough’s book in her report (“I should say ‘folk-songs are shy elusive things,’” and noted that she enjoyed the book “so much” and that “the more you read it, the more you appreciate it, especially if you have had any experience.” “Federal Music Project #3256, Tate County, Monthly Narrative Report, Mrs. Louise Wallace,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi.” The paraphrased quotation comes from Scarborough’s introduction, in which she writes, “Folk-songs are shy, elusive things. If you wish to capture them, you have to steal up behind them, unbeknownst, and sprinkle salt on their tails. Even so, as often as not they fly off saucily from under your nose. You have to speak them gently, and with magic words, else they will vanish before your ears. You must know how to mask your trembling eagerness in their presence, to pretend, if need be, that you are deaf and indifferent, to act as if vocal music were the last thing in life you ever gave a thought to. Folk-songs have to be wooed and coaxed and wheedled with all manner of blandishments and flatteries.” Scarborough, *On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs*, 3. See also Karl Hagstrom Miller’s discussion of Scarborough in *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

71 Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 152. Southern called the book an “important, historical anthology” that she used as “the primary source of information” for her discussion of slave songs. See also Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War; and Paul Allen Anderson, Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought.*
private collections that their friends owned. Although Lucy McKim Garrison, who was responsible for notating much of the music, confessed that it was “difficult to express the entire character of these Negro ballads by mere musical notes and signs,” Richard Crawford noted that the book—which was “compiled before folklore and ethnomusicology were academic disciplines”—showed respect for the music, and “for the songs’ unlettered, untrained, creators.”

With their initial research completed, Sage and Browne were ready to send their workers into the field. They provided these song collectors with a list of titles and texts of the songs from the folksong collections that they were to find, and contact information for potential informants. Because the project was largely a stopgap measure while the teachers were out of the classroom, Sage was unable to secure a recording machine for fieldwork. Rather, the teachers would have to rely on their ear-training skills and their ability to notate melodies quickly, no small feat for these workers, who were thrust into strange surroundings and asked to transcribe unfamiliar music. Sage offered her workers some words of encouragement in her late-July memorandum: “Some of you may be somewhat out of practice in the matter of writing melodies and notes from dictation, but this will offer you an excellent

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opportunity to regain your skill in this matter.”

Sage noted, however, that if a worker did not feel comfortable taking down a tune, the worker should memorize it: “If you feel that you cannot write down the tunes satisfactorily, by all means learn them and we will help you get them down on paper. Perhaps you will find it easier to play the tune by ear, then write the notes from that.”

Sage also gave explicit instructions to give credit to the workers’ informants. “In reporting any music you find,” Sage told her workers, “complete and explicit credit must be given to those who have assisted you, either by singing and playing for you, or by giving you information in regard to the sources of the composition.” The workers were asked to gather any information they could about the performer and the music, including general contact information, general location, the length of time the song had been current in the region, and, if the song had come from a “ballet book” or collection, the name of the source and its current and previous owners. Sage added,

If you are not able to secure a complete version, send in all you can find of both words and music. There is always the possibility that someone else may be able to supply that very “missing link,” so please jot down every bit you can get. An apparently trivial detail may finish out a complete record, or may be that colorful bit needed to give life to the composition.

Jerome Sage followed up with another department-wide memorandum on 1 September 1936. “Many of you are doing excellent work in your search for tunes, and

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75 Sage, “Subject: Copying Project.”
76 Sage, “Subject: Copying Folk Tunes.” (Such an added level of mediation would ultimately be a hindrance for the music copyists who were charged with editing the melodies for publication, but Sage’s advice, of course, would mean that the music that the workers brought back to the office would essentially be tainted by another level of mediation. Moreover, in the case of the workers’ experiences with the African American musics they encountered in the state (discussed below), such a request was an impossibility.)
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
some beautiful manuscripts have been submitted,” Sage told her workers, but advised them not to duplicate tunes. To alleviate this seemingly unavoidable problem, Sage provided her workers with a running list of songs that had previously been gathered. She also scolded some of the workers for songs that could “hardly be classed as folk music,” or that were “really not old enough to be of value to us in the research work that we are doing.” Some of the offending tunes included “songs of the ‘gay nineties,’ such as ‘The Bird in the Gilded Cage,’ and ‘After the Ball.’”

There were “three distinct types of folk music” Sage and Browne wanted their workers to collect: “the White Ballad, Negro Spirituals and Work and Play Songs and Native Indian Music.” White ballad tunes were the easiest of the songs to collect, due in large part to the detailed notes Arthur Palmer Hudson had provided about his informants. Sage told her workers that by providing the tunes for the already-collected texts, they had “a splendid opportunity to contribute something of lasting value by preserving the tunes of these songs.”

Fiddle music was also on Sage and Browne’s radar, and Sage told her workers that she was “very anxious to secure every possible old fiddler’s tune that is native to Mississippi.” She acknowledged, however, the difficulty in ascertaining provenance with instrumental music: “It is a little difficult always to know definitely whether the tune originated in Mississippi or whether it was brought here from some neighboring

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79 Jerome Sage, memorandum, 1 September 1936, MDAH RG 60, No. 667, Folder “Halpert Tour—List of Titles of Records, Arranged Alphabetically.”
80 Ibid.
81 Narrative report, Mississippi FMP, November 1936, 3; NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder, “Mississippi.”
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
state, Sage told her workers, but added that they should collect them regardless because “some special workers of the Federal Writers Project will determine the authenticity of them.”

Not many fiddle tunes showed up at the FMP office however, although Jane Browne hoped that the local fiddlers’ contests, which were scheduled for the fall, would bring “some genuine, hitherto unpublished old tunes.”

Collecting Native American music proved to be a more difficult task than perhaps Sage or Browne initially anticipated. Chief among the problems was the issue of transcribing music with which these collectors had little familiarity. “If you cannot get this written down satisfactorily,” Sage told her workers, “please send in all clues and information as to where this can be secured, and another worker will come a little later and help with this.”

Although the workers’ reports only discuss some individuals’ disappointment at not being able to procure any such music, Jane Browne’s report noted that “one very gifted worker is on the trail of some Indian music,” and that “within the next few weeks she will visit some of the Indian communities and through her efforts we hope something truly beautiful will be produced.”

For Sage and Browne, however, the music they really wanted to collect was that of African Americans in the state. Upon listing the state’s “three distinct types of

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84 Sage, “Subject: Copying Project.”
86 Sage, memorandum, 1 September 1936.
87 Browne, “Research Work of the Federal Music Project,” 5. A project memorandum dated 25 November 1936 states that workers had made “efforts to record the music of the Choctaw Tribe on the seven reservations in Mississippi … during the recent harvest festivals.” “From the Federal Music Project: A Digest of Studies into Vernacular and Indigenous Folk Music made by Project Workers. Prepared for Mrs. Paul Ellison, Georgia Southwestern College, Americus, Georgia, November 25, 1936.”
folk music,” Sage noted “of these three types, the Negro music is undoubtedly the most interesting.” She indicated to her workers that there was “a wealth of Negro spiritual material in Mississippi which we are anxious to get recorded” particularly “in the Delta and certain hill sections” of the state. Sage was also fairly certain of these songs’ origins in the state, although her reasoning was based on assumptions about stability within oral tradition: “As you know, negroes have always sung at their work and at their play. Many of the tunes that have been sung as a result of this habit are distinctly Mississippi tunes.” Sage notified her workers that she wanted to be able to “submit to Washington a number of Mississippi spirituals, work songs, and play songs,” but cautioned them to get “the dialect as exactly as you can, and be sure that it is real Negro music and not hymns [sic] to popular songs that have been learned from the white folks.”

Browne echoed Sage’s call to collect African American music within the state, noting in her report, that “our greatest concentration … will be on Negro music, and on saving all we can of this priceless form of folk-music.” Browne was particularly fascinated with the African American spiritual, which she described as “noble, high, and pure in motive,” and, quoting James Weldon Johnson, claimed that the spirituals “may well be ‘the finest distinctive contribution we have to offer the

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88 Narrative report, Mississippi FMP, November 1936, 3; NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder, “Mississippi.”
89 In all cases, Sage spelled the word “Negro” without capitalization. It has been capitalized throughout this study. Jerome Sage, “Subject: Copying Folk Tunes,” Memorandum SR–4181, 24 July 1936, MDAH, RG 60, No. 667, Mississippi Federal Music Project Records.
90 Sage, “Subject: Copying Folk Tunes.”
91 Sage, memorandum, 1 September 1936.
world.” Browne drew a clear line between “the value of the Negro spiritual,” which she deemed to be a pure form of African American folk expression, and “Negro religious songs, which may have been learned from the white man.” Given the debates that had been raging in the early to mid-1930s over race, authenticity, and ownership of spirituals and other African American musics, Browne’s assertions are somewhat surprising, although for all of the Mississippi FMP workers, African American spirituals were prized commodities.

Sage and Browne were disappointed, however, at the lack of African American songs that were coming in to their offices, and Sage urged her workers in September 1936 to “please put every effort you possibly can on Negro music.” In case the workers did not know where to look for potential informants, Sage offered a few leads that had come in to her office. She had been contacted by a number of area engineers who had work gangs of African American men who had expressed their “willingness to take the [FMP] workers with them out to construction projects where Negroes are actually singing while they work.”

But collecting this music proved to be difficult, especially because the majority of the FMP workers were white women. The very act of entering into the homes and churches of black Mississippians was a dangerous proposition, not because of any danger that might befall the collectors, but because of problems that these collectors and informants would face if they were discovered by people who were

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93 Ibid., 1.
94 Ibid., 4–5.
95 Sage, memorandum, 1 September 1936.
unaware of the proceedings. While traveling through the South in 1935, Zora Neale Hurston painted up her colleagues Alan Lomax and Mary Elizabeth Barnicle in blackface so that they would not be questioned by white police (they still were arrested on at least one occasion).96

The workers’ narrative reports for the months of August and September provide an illuminating view into their observations of their fieldwork and their interactions with their informants. Although the reports reveal an entrenched prejudice on the part of the workers, they also show a willingness to step beyond such boundaries as well as an overall excitement, from both the song collectors and the performers, for the work at hand. A Mrs. J. C. Green, area supervisor for the Lee County district, noted the enthusiasm of her workers: “Neither heat, wars, pestilence, nor politics have even slowed up the pace of the workers in my area. If there’s a melody lurking in any of the eleven counties which I supervise it will not be for long, because the Federal Music Project workers do not have ears for the word ‘No.’”97 She acknowledged that the “old people at first seem rather confused and self-conscious when approached for a tune,” but that once the workers explained what they were after “everyone is entirely sympathetic with the idea and willing to do his share.”98 In one instance she noted that her singer feared that she and her workers were the police:

“We approached the house which was surrounded by hound dogs and pickaninnies

97 “District One, Lee County, [Mississippi]; August Monthly Narrative; Mrs. J. C. Green, Area Supervisor,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820.
98 “District One, Lee County, [Mississippi]; August Monthly Narrative; Mrs. J. C. Green, Area Supervisor,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi,” 1.
and [this old colored “Auntie”] was reluctant to talk to us; five strangers more than her family had seen in many moons. We persuaded her that we were not ‘the law.’”

Lily Hobbs, the area supervisor for Leflore County, reported that she had difficulty in finding the types of songs she was charged with finding (i.e., spirituals and plantation songs), particularly from “the young generation of Negroes” who, she noted, seemed to have become “intrigued with the hollowest type of our so-called sacred songs.” Generally she would have to “continue to insist for something old and almost forgotten,” although speaking to them “in their [own] phraseology,” but she also noted that “after a while their eyes begin to brighten with smiles and they hum a tune which becomes gradually more audible as they sing.” In a statement that echoed the “true ragtime” newspaper article, Hobbs lamented the effects of popular music on African American musical traditions, and noted what she felt her contribution to the salvaging of this music might be:

What a shame to realize that we are giving our musical rubbish to the Negroes, while they are forgetting many, many beautiful old melodies. I believe we white folks must encourage much singing of spirituals and plantation songs by groups of colored folks so that the rising generation will learn the music that is their rightful heritage. Then too we must raise and then maintain a good musical standard ourselves for it is our pattern they are imitating.

In some instances the performers were opposed to singing the types of songs that the workers wanted on religious or moral grounds. The Mississippi WPA newsletter

99 Ibid., 1.
100 “August Narrative Report; Mrs. Lily Hobbs, Area Supervisor; Leflore County, Greenwood, MS,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi,” 1.
101 Ibid., 1.
102 Ibid., 1–2.
“Music Workers Have Many Unique Experiences When Gathering Old Songs,” *Magnolia Progress* (Mississippi WPA newsletter), November 1936, 14, NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi.”

“District One, Lee County, [Mississippi]; August Monthly Narrative; Mrs. J. C. Green, Area Supervisor,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi,” 1.

it is these gradations that make the music distinctive and beautiful.”

Despite the warnings, the collectors still had difficulties with the work. Martha Simpson reported that the “Negro spirituals are truly interesting and truly difficult to write just as they are sung, particularly as darkies seem never to sing them exactly the same way twice.” Lily Hobbs echoed Simpson’s complaint about not getting consistent performances: “The funny part of it is that they rarely sing certain phrases exactly the same. So that I content myself by securing the main melody which usually keeps in the minor key or the pentatonic major. The negro ‘does something’ to a tune when he gives it voice and this something I find impossible to put on paper.”

Rhythm was also a problem, according to Mrs. C. J. Langston, who found that “the writing of spirituals [is] very much more difficult than any other type of song, due to the syncopated rhythm they use, and the effect of the song being governed by the emotion of the leader.” Some project workers welcomed the challenge, however, as in the case of Mrs. W. F. Townsend,” who wrote that the work had been “helpful,”

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107 Federal Music Project #3256, Tate County, Monthly Narrative Report, Mrs. Martha Simpson,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi.”
108 Federal Music Project #3256, Tate County, Monthly Narrative Report, Mrs. Martha Simpson,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi”; “August Narrative Report; Mrs. Lily Hobbs, Area Supervisor; Leflore County, Greenwood, MS,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi.”
109 “Federal Music Project #3256, DeSoto County, Monthly Narrative Report, Mrs. C. J. Langston,” (ca. September/October 1936), NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi.”
because “it has reviewed my ear-training work and made me ‘think’ time more quickly.”\textsuperscript{110}

At times, workers merely guessed at the best way to transcribe the songs, particularly if the performers themselves had disagreements on how a song was supposed to be sung. Lily Hobbs also noted “Sometimes one was positive the tune went one way while another was equally positive her way was right. So we chose what we thought the better end kept a dignified but smiling aloofness during the important argument.”\textsuperscript{111} (This cherry picking of versions of tunes would be compounded when the Mississippi FMP and FWP workers decided to publish the music in 1939, as described below.)

Some of the workers attempted to compensate the performers for their songs, either through small tokens or minor remuneration. There was no official policy on compensating performers. In fact, the prospect was quite rare, and the Mississippi FMP workers represent only a few instances in which it happened. The \textit{Magnolia Progress} stated that the FMP workers often find “in approaching the colored people” that “a little gift of perfume and soap” to be “a compelling introduction, which makes the songs flow faster.”\textsuperscript{112} Other collectors felt indebted to the performers, not simply for the songs they sung, but rather for the hospitality they provided while the FMP

\textsuperscript{110} “Federal Music Project #3256, DeSoto County, Monthly Narrative Report, Mrs. W. F. Townsend,” (September? 1936), NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi.”

\textsuperscript{111} “August Narrative Report; Mrs. Lily Hobbs, Area Supervisor; Leflore County, Greenwood, MS,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi.”

\textsuperscript{112} Untitled article, \textit{Magnolia Progress} (Mississippi WPA newsletter), 19 September 1936, NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi.”
workers were in their presence. Mrs. W. F. Townsend lamented in her report that she could not have done more for her performers:

However, it has left me under many obligations for while I have given a little money here or a small present there to show my appreciation, there have been some sacrifices made that I can’t repay. Mothers have left their work to help me; plantation managers and owners have been kind and many have tried to help. Two white girls have on a number of occasions picked cotton all day, then bathed and dressed and with their guitar and mandolin under their arms, have trudged a mile and a half to my home and sung and played and written words for me for hours.

Colored people have worked hard all day and than dressed neatly and walked across a large plantation to the boss’s house to meet me and sing their beloved sacred songs. And because of just such acts as those, I have felt proud that I was in a work that everybody loved and wanted to help along.\(^\text{113}\)

Townsend was not alone in her gratitude for the experience, nor were such feelings limited to the collectors. Lily Hobbs wrote about a similar experience:

Only today two of my workers almost accidentally found an old lady right in our midst who has known and sung many delightful songs and spirituals for almost twenty-five years. I wrote [down] four today and was urged to come back whenever I can to take them all and when I apologized for taking up her time she smiled and said she had never felt so important in all her young life.\(^\text{114}\)

Elizabeth Gordon’s report encapsulates a general feeling on the part of the workers

The past four weeks have been [an] unusual experience. Going into the homes of the colored people here, sitting on the porch on a box, or on the stool of the plane in the church next door, or even on a board on the ground as one elderly woman stirred her pot of boiling clothes and the worker patted the ground with her foot and sang over and over again “More precious to-my (like that—one word) soul” until her colored teacher was satisfied, and then trying to

\(^{113}\) “Federal Music Project #3256, DeSoto County, Monthly Narrative Report, Mrs. W. F. Townsend,” (September? 1936), NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi.”

\(^{114}\) “September Narrative Report; Mrs. Lily Hobbs, Area Supervisor; Leflore County, Greenwood, MS,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi.”
catch that elusive rhythm and put it down on paper so that others would be sure to get it right—what fun and what work!  

Jerome Sage, for her part, viewed the project as an overwhelming success. In her August narrative report she lauded her workers for their display of “not only ability, but [also] adaptability at the new task,” and noted that the workers “have really just discovered Mississippi, their native state.” The performers, Sage asserted, “have taken on a new interest in life” upon finding that “people are really interested in these old songs which they love but which they haven’t had the courage to sing for years because their children considered them ‘tacky.’”

Over the course of the month more than a thousand songs had been collected and passed on to the copyist project for editing. The workers’ goal was to put together a publication of all of the best songs, which would be mimeographed and passed along to the State Department of Archives and History in Jackson, as well as sent to county libraries, state colleges, and other schools. Sage believed that many of the songs in their collection would “have little value when measured by the standard test of good folk music,” (a rubric Sage did not explain) although she noted that at least 150 or 200 of the melodies would be worth “recording permanently,” by way of a

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115 “Narrative Report for September 1936, Jackson, County, Mississippi, Elizabeth Gordon,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi.”
117 “Narrative Report State of Mississippi Month of September 1936, Miss Jerome Sage, Music Research,” MDAH, RG 60, No. 667, Mississippi Federal Music Project Records; and excerpt from Mississippi Narrative Report, November 1936 (p. 30); NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi.”
“good recording machine,” which she believed was the only way to “faithfully reproduce the fascinating melodies and harmonies.”\(^{118}\)

At the end of September the quarantine was lifted and classes resumed, both for the FMP and the local schools.\(^{119}\) The FMP workers continued their song collecting, albeit it on a smaller scale. In November 1936, Sage had nine people working on the collection of manuscripts, four of whom were “exceptionally well-trained musicians,” and her collection of songs had increased to approximately 1,800 songs, “500 of which,” Sage noted, “were deemed acceptable for publication or future research.”\(^{120}\) Unfortunately for Sage, the national FMP office ordered her to shelve her folksong collecting project by the end of the month, and to forward her manuscripts to the Research Library of the New York FMP.\(^{121}\) Chalmers Clifton, the director of the New York FMP was born and raised in Jackson, Mississippi, and had a personal stake in receiving the manuscripts.\(^{122}\)

**Mississippi, 1938–1939**

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\(^{118}\) "Report of WPA Federal Music Project for Mississippi, Month of August 1936, Jerome Sage, State Director," 3.

\(^{119}\) Lily Hobbs noted in her September narrative report that, “Monday morning September 29 will see us all doing regular teaching even if schedules will be tentative for the first week. Schools have reopened and will cause many of our teachers to put hours in after 3:00 p.m. and on Saturdays but in some instances some pupils are willing to take a period before school.” “September Narrative Report; Mrs. Lily Hobbs, Area Supervisor; Leflore County, Greenwood, MS,” NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Mississippi.”

\(^{120}\) Jerome Sage, Narrative report, Mississippi FMP, November 1936.


The project remained in that unfinished and neglected state for nearly two years, until the fall of 1938, once Seeger was firmly in place as Sokoloff’s assistant.

In October 1938, soon after his initial meetings with the fledgling Joint Committee on Folk Arts (then called the Coordinating Committee on Living Folklore Folk Music and Folk Art), Seeger visited the Mississippi FMP office in Jackson. He was searching for suitable places for a Joint Committee–sponsored folksong expedition in the South. (This expedition eventually became Herbert Halpert’s Southern States Recording Expedition.) What Seeger found was a goldmine of potential folk music sources, not only through the previous work of the Mississippi FMP, but also through the work of the FWP, whose staff had been collecting their own set of folksongs texts for their contribution to the American Guide Series, titled *Mississippi: A Guide to the Magnolia State*. Mississippi became a prime target for the Joint Committee.

Seeger returned in early February 1939 to make final arrangements with the Mississippi Federal Music and Writers’ Projects about making Halpert’s limited time in the state as efficient as possible. In a 13 February memorandum to Botkin and the rest of the Joint Committee, Seeger wrote that he had met with Jerome Sage, the state director of the FMP; Eri Douglass, the state director of the FWP; Sibyl MacDonald, the state’s FMP field supervisor; and Jane Thomson Browne, the former supervisor of the Mississippi Folk Song Research Project regarding the coordination of efforts in advance of Halpert’s trip to Mississippi. The memo also reveals that the FMP and

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123 Memorandum, Charles Seeger to B. A. Botkin and the Joint Committee on Folk Arts, 13 February 1939, 1; MDAH, folder “Folklore Music—General and Miscellaneous Correspondence.” See also Wade, *The Beautiful Music All Around Us*, 105–7.
FWP were planning to cull their collective resources and combine them with the results of Halpert’s trip to produce a collection of Mississippi folksongs, to be jointly published by the two units, which they expected to produce in the fall of 1939.

As soon as Seeger left, Sage and Douglass got to work. In addition to reviewing all of the previous work of the units, they created a new folk music checklist for the workers and a questionnaire, which was “compiled by the Folk-Lore Editor in conjunction with the Supervisor of assignments and files, the Chief Editor [Gene Holcomb], and Director, to be assigned those field workers who had proved competent to handle material of this nature.” The FMP and FWP units also put together a list of the “types of songs desired” for both “white” and “Negro” musics.

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124 Untitled description of planned Mississippi Folk-Songs publication, n.d. (summer 1939), MDAH.
125 The directors noted that as far as white folksongs were concerned, “the kind of songs we are interested in locating are ‘sure ’nough old timey’ songs; [the] kind not heard over radio or on phonograph records, not learned from a book or notes; ones that are generally heard from older members of family—e.g. a grandfather, an uncle.” The memorandum included eight types of songs the workers should try to identify: “old love songs [i.e., Child ballads] like ‘Barbara Allen,’ ‘The Brown Girl,’ or ‘The House Carpenter’”; “songs, even newer ones, made up about something that really happened somewhere; an accident, a murder, or any local songs made up about some person or event”; “old play party songs: the kind that were sung in the old days by young folks at parties —like dances, only without instrumental music”; “singing games that children play and sing—not those taught by teachers in school”; “fiddle tunes: especially from players who tune the fiddle in different ways for different songs; also any of the ‘little old foolish songs’ that are sometimes sung to, or with, fiddle tunes; “old banjo tunes: songs that are sung and played on the old five-string banjo”; “square dance calls: especially the kind that are called in rhyme like: ‘Horses to their traces, ladies to their places’; and “vendor’s Calls: fruit and vegetables; old clothes; shrimp, oysters, fish, etc.” “Types of Songs Desired—White,” n.d., MDAH, folder, “correspondence concerning the music project.” The list stated, however, “We are not much interested in string bands.” In terms of desired “Negro Songs,” the directors noted from the outset, perhaps at the urging of the Joint Committee, that they did not need “any spirituals, or any religious songs sung by quartets or trained groups.” Workers were to be on the hunt for “old work and play ‘reels.’ The kind of game songs that children call ‘ring plays’; the songs that the Negroes sing at work. One type we are especially anxious to get are those sung by groups of men working together. Examples: at cotton chopping, laying track on the railroad, or any other gang work”; “Bad man” songs, ‘lonesome’ songs, ‘hollers’ that field hands use, or field calls of one to another”; “any original or ‘jumped-up’ songs.” The songs do not have to be very long or serious — ‘little foolish songs,’ including lullabies, would be just fine”; “Tunes played on ‘quills,’ and quill songs”; “chants—the following example was used by an old Negro ‘rouster’ in a levee camp to wake
In the weeks leading up to the trip they also began locating informants and scheduling appointments, “through three mediums”: informants who had worked with Arthur Palmer Hudson on his *Folk-Songs of Mississippi and their Background*; informants who had already contributed to the efforts of the state’s FMP and FWP units; and “informants discovered through members of the Federal Writers’ Project in response to an assignment which stipulated the type [of] song desired for recording.” The units also submitted news releases to a number of newspapers that had statewide distribution with the hopes that additional informants might arise.

When Halpert arrived in the state on 8 May, his entire itinerary had been meticulously planned. All he needed to do was arrive on time for his recording sessions. He remained in Mississippi until 11 June—by far the longest he spent in any one state during his trip—and over the course of these five weeks, he collected 168 records in Mississippi alone, which amounted to 40 percent of his 418½ discs. The efficiency with which he was able to work was nearly entirely the result of the superb coordination of these WPA units, and especially to his assistant while in the state, FWP editor Abbott Ferriss. Sibyl MacDonald was responsible for staying one step ahead of the sound truck to make sure that all arrangements were in order upon their arrival. Ferriss acted not only as Halpert’s liaison to the informants, but also as the primary non-audio documentarian of the fieldwork. Ferriss “was instructed to write up the ‘hands’ each morning: ‘He didn’ call one / He didn’ call two / Cap’n called de boss / An de whole damn crew’”; and “vendor’s calls: fruit and vegetables; old clothes; shrimp, oysters, fish, etc.”

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126 Untitled description of planned *Mississippi Folk-Songs* publication, n.d. (summer 1939), MDAH.
down verbatim, preserving original phonetics, the texts of songs recorded as well as those not recorded, and to photograph … informants and informants’ dwellings. In this manner over one thousand [texts of] songs, … together with the tunes, were collected.”^127 Not long after the completion of the trip, Ferriss submitted to Eri Douglass a complete recording itinerary, a map of the tour, a list of photographs and informants, a list of newspaper releases, manuscripts on the informants and their songs, case histories of the songs and informants, circumstances of the interviews, and a description of “Aesthetic and Psychological factors,” which was a holdover from the FWP’s series of questionnaires for its social and ethnic studies units.

Ferris went above and beyond simply penning voluminous field notes and taking copious photographs of the informants and their surroundings, however. He was an indispensable part of the trip. Halpert and Ferriss traveled together throughout the entire Mississippi trip, in ninety-degree heat and across bumpy roads. Ferriss recalled that often times Halpert would sleep on the cot in the sound truck, whereas Ferriss would try to find a spare bed at one of the performer’s houses, if such accommodations were available. Halpert’s biggest concerns while he was in Mississippi was keeping an adequate supply of blank discs in tow to catch all of the music that was available to him, keeping the sound truck operational (frequent breakdowns were a constant source of lateness), and, to a lesser extent, watching his diet. Halpert later recalled, “Mississippi was quite marvelous. We got to this place way in the backwoods of Mississippi—dirt roads and all the rest of it—and they

^127 Untitled description of planned *Mississippi Folk-Songs* publication, n.d. (summer 1939), MDAH.
treated us very, very well. And for supper we had fried eggs soaked in grease, with fried potatoes soaked in grease, and ham soaked in grease. So I ate it very happily. And the next morning for breakfast we had fried eggs soaked in grease, and ham soaked in grease and it looked exactly like the stuff we had eaten the night before.”

Once Halpert was out of the state, the FMP and FWP unit got to work preparing a volume of Mississippi folk music for publication, to be titled *Mississippi Folk-Songs*. According to the outline for the volume, work proceeded in six phases: 1) “transcriptions of the tunes to sheet music” by a musician from the Mississippi FMP; 2) “continuation of the work of classifying and arranging the texts of songs already gathered, by the Folk-Lore Editor and the member of the [FMP] who is cooperating with the [FWP]”; 3) “compilation and synthesis of material … for the purposes of writing the introductory essays”; 4) “a technical study of the texts of Old English ballads with emphasis upon comparisons with those of published volumes and other authorities”; 5) “final assembly by the Chief Editor”; and 6) review of the publication “by experts in the field of folk-songs” prior to its publication.

Charles Seeger provided the Mississippi FMP with a document that painstakingly detailed the proper method for approaching the transcriptions. He also described the process of calibrating playback machines with the pitch of the original recordings, noting that because of the idiosyncrasies of Halpert’s machine,

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129 Seeger’s memorandum from 13 February has the title *Mississippi Folk-Songs* crossed out and has *Music of Mississippi Folk* handwritten in the original title’s place, although later documents show that they seem to have returned to their original idea.
130 Untitled description of planned *Mississippi Folk-Songs* publication, n.d. (summer 1939), MDAH.
and the problem of finding reliable power sources, “in some cases, especially when working with batteries, the recorder did not run at either [78 or 33 r.p.m.].”

Seeger listed the types of musical idiosyncrasies the workers should keep in mind: the proper metronome marking, with any speeding up or slowing down or other metrical irregularities indicated, given in as simple a meter as required—“you should not hesitate to use 1/2 rather than 2/4, should the necessity arise”; the key signature closest to the actual performance “even if it is six flats”; any melodic deviations, “which make the music sound differently from ordinary professional music”; and special notation for when “the melody ‘disappears’ into speech sounds,” “especially,” Seeger noted, in the case of “Negro singing.” He instructed them to “watch for third degrees of scales which are intoned between major and minor (the so-called neutral thirds, which are very common)” as well as for seventh scale degrees, “which sometimes show similar variation”; and to “watch especially for appearance of triplets in duple metres and doublets and quadruplets in triple metres” as well as for any syncopations, and “especially anticipation of beats.” Seeger also asked that the transcribers solicit second opinions on their work—“It is surprising what large differences of opinion there can be in notating a ‘simple’ folk song”—which is perhaps a reflection of his experiences with his wife Ruth Crawford Seeger’s transcription work for the Lomaxes’ *Our Singing Country*, on which she painstakingly worked throughout 1939.

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132 Ibid., 1.
The book was to be divided into two parts: “Music of the Anglo-Saxon” and “Music of the Negro.” Each section of the book commenced with an overview of the background of the music and musicians discussed, which contained “an explanation of the daily lives, attitudes, historical backgrounds, and other elements, considering folk singers as a unit if the Mississippi population,” which was based in part on the “White Folk-Ways” and “Negro Folk-Ways” essays from the FWP state guide. They also penned an essay for each section regarding “the significance of folk-songs,” which covered “an appraisal and interpretation of the folk-song in relation to folk singers and the music of the state,” which in the case of Anglo-Saxon songs, described “the reason a Mississippi folk-singer appreciates the values of the ballad ‘Barbara Allen’ in his daily life.”\footnote{Untitled description of planned *Mississippi Folk-Songs* publication, n.d. (summer 1939), MDAH.} The musical component for the Anglo-Saxon section contained subsections for old English (Child) ballads, other ballads, play-party songs and singing games, fiddle and banjo tunes, and “miscellaneous” (“chants, hollas, calls, and various other items collected”). The “Music of the Negro section focused on work songs (“the tunes and texts to cotton-chopping songs, railroad section gangs, ‘public works’ songs, levee songs, ‘jumped-up’ songs, and other work songs); singing games (“of a wide collection of native, original game songs played by Negro children of the ages seven to eighteen”); old-time religious songs (including spirituals, “jubilee” songs, and original religious songs); and “miscellaneous,” which comprised “chants, hollas, lullabies, vendor’s calls, and prison songs.” The book was also to have an extensive bibliography, index, and an appendix, titled “Notes on Old
English Ballads,” which discussed variations on texts and tunes, with cross-references to other publications, which “is designed to be of especial value to the student of the ballad.”

The volume never seems to have been actually published in its proposed form, likely due to the huge WPA shakeup that occurred shortly after Halpert returned from his trip, which forced state-level units to fend for themselves on extremely limited budgets. There are, however, a number of draft versions of sections of the book that the FMP and FWP directors hoped would “not only be highly readable and interesting, but truly valuable.” The section describing “the folk” gives a glimpse into the combination of state guide–type writing and the kinds of ideals held by folklorists of the day:

Ultimately, we are all folk. In a more restricted sense, the great majority of the population, comprising most of the poor and the middle class; or the great middle bulk, the “average man,” the “common folk” or “masses” constitutes a rather satisfactory “folk” for the folklorist, because most of these folks are concerned primarily with making their living and therefore have little time to tamper with the cultural heritage of their ancestors; rather they tend to accept this heritage as it has been handed down, to preserve it and to modify it but slowly.

Thus the folklorist seeks as most suitable for study a folk which is average and typical, namely, the great middle bulk of common folk, which preserves its cultural heritage, and which has lived long enough in one spot together to have developed local character. This is the folk for folklore.

Additionally, there is a separate publication titled “Source Material for Mississippi History—Folklore,” which was compiled by the “WPA State-Wide

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135 Ibid.
137 “Folk,” Exhibit “D” of untitled description of planned Mississippi Folk-Songs publication, n.d. (summer 1939), MDAH.
Historical Research Project,” supervised by a Susie V. Powell. In the volume’s preface, historian Ruth Bass, notes that the material for this 400-plus-page illustrated “collection of Mississippi Folklore and Folk Customs has been compiled by WPA workers from the different counties in the state for the Historical Research project.” She lists the various sources for the book as coming from “old books, letters, records, and newspapers; from county officials, preachers, teachers, students, planters, farmers, triflers, whittlers, fisherman, hunters, and wage-hands; from grandmothers, mammies, midwives, cooks, and washer-women; from Choctaw basket-makers, negroes, and white folks.” The volume includes subsections for “Indian Tribes” (Choctaw, Chicksaw, and “smaller tribes”), and “Mississippi River Folks,” as well as a “Story and Song” section, which included both white and African American musics. Although the writing in this publication is different than any of the draft versions of the FMP and FWP materials, some of the informants and collectors listed in the back matter seem to be the same people who helped with the initial collecting trips, and it is possible that this publication came about as a collaborative effort among the various WPA units in the state.

New Mexico

When New Mexico FMP director Helen Chandler Ryan sent her final report to the Washington office in 1943, George Foster, the acting director of the WPA Music

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138 See “Source Material for Mississippi History—Folklore; Compiled by WPA State-Wide Historical Research Project, Susie V. Powell, Supervisor, 1936–39,” MDAH, microfilm #1740.
139 Ruth Bass, preface to “Source Material for Mississippi History—Folklore,” vii.
Project who had been tasked with summarizing all of the state-level reports, wrote a single, simple paragraph: “This report is of no use. A book could be written on the New Mexico Music Project, which was the most colorful of the smaller State music projects. Helen Chandler Ryan, State Supervisor, was one of the most able, resourceful supervisors in the Music Program.”

Foster’s approbation of Ryan, who served as the head of the New Mexico FMP from its inception on 1 January 1936 until the program ended in 1943, was hardly misplaced. Historian Charles R. Cutter, in his article on the FMP in New Mexico, called her “one of the most imaginative and dynamic FMP directors,” whose “tireless efforts won praise from colleagues both in and out of state.”

Ryan was singled out among her peers because she understood, more than other directors in her region, the limitations she faced, and how best to make do with the resources she had. Given that the federal disbursements of funds for the WPA projects were contingent on the number of musicians and music projects in a state, Ryan was forced to make some difficult decisions on a relatively limited budget. Unlike other FMP units in her region, such as Utah and Colorado, which supported large-scale orchestras and other performing ensembles, Ryan’s project had no professional ensembles whatsoever. Moreover, instead of putting musicians on the WPA payroll, Ryan hired “teacher-directors” to lead smaller ensembles of musicians,

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which allowed her to manage her budget more closely. In so doing, Ryan could charge admission for her concerts and pay the musicians (who were not FMP employees) through the proceeds, with the stipulation that the time of the “instructor-director” was “donated.”

Additionally, Ryan, who was trained as a music educator, made musical instruction and outreach a priority for her project, and she tailored the music she taught and programmed to the interests of the community and the strengths of the musicians in her unit, which meant that her project focused heavily on traditional music from within the state. In an early narrative report Ryan noted, “I am particularly anxious to take music instruction into the underprivileged districts in New Mexico, as I feel this is one of the greatest needs and would be one of the finest achievements possible under the Federal Music Project.” Working with local schools, she set up numerous after-school music education units in twenty-three of the thirty-one counties in the state, many of them in areas where music education (instrumental and vocal teaching and music theory) had never before been offered. The program also allowed for some areas’ first organized school bands.

In the beginning, however, Ryan faced an uphill battle. The national FMP report for the first nine months of the project noted that in New Mexico there had been “little musical instruction in the counties, twenty-two WPA teachers are

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reaching regularly 2,000 persons. A woman in the Albuquerque region is teaching
sight singing, chorus work and elements of music in the rural schools and has more
than 800 children in her classes. One of the men teaching band and orchestra has 207
pupils.144 Contrary to the report’s claim that there had been “little musical
instruction,” Ryan’s FMP had, by October 1936, some 3,250 students enrolled in her
classes, with little in the way of resources or personnel to support that number.145
Over the course of her eight-year tenure with the WPA, Ryan was able to secure the
necessary employees and instruments for her classes, but soon she had another
problem: Private instructors, after a while, became quite worried about losing all of
their students to the WPA classes, so Ryan decided to make it mandatory that
students provide a proof of their parents’ incomes to be considered for classes. (This
tension is similar to some of the problems FMP units had in supporting orchestras that
had been accused of stealing audiences away from professional orchestras in the
area.) Ryan’s FMP coordinated with other government agencies in the state, to
provide locations for the FMP classes including the local CCC camps, the Boys’ and
Girls’ Camps of the National Youth Administration, and the Welfare Home in
Albuquerque.

The New Mexico FMP also provided musical education to adults. Charles
Cutter notes, “as part of the folklore project, teacher-directors trekked from
community to community organizing vocal groups and giving instruction in the use of

144 “The Federal Music Project; The Second Preliminary Report Covering Its Scope and Activities
traditional instruments of New Mexico such as the guitar and violin.”\textsuperscript{146} Ryan’s FMP also coordinated training in African American spirituals with local churches by bringing in two instructors, Carrie Daniels and Arthur Walker, from nearby Southern California.\textsuperscript{147} The New Mexico FMP also had a presence in the New Mexico State Penitentiary, where the project established an orchestra in which the inmates could participate.\textsuperscript{148} In September 1939, FMP director Earl V. Moore held up Ryan’s approach to education, particularly among rural or underprivileged citizens of the state, as a model, stating that it “should be extended to … nearby states which have similar rural problems.”\textsuperscript{149} Ryan also put on a three-day seminar for her project’s music teachers in March 1939. This Work Conference of Federal Music Teachers took place at the University of New Mexico.

Despite the numerous musical performances and education outreach activities, FMP historian Peter Gough notes that the “primary mission of the music projects in that state,” was “the collection, teaching and presentation of folksong.”\textsuperscript{150} Ryan, who had long been fascinated by the Hispanic traditional music in her state, asserted that New Mexico possessed “the richest field of indigenous folk music” in

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\textsuperscript{147} Gough, “The Varied Carols I Hear,” 406.
\textsuperscript{148} The penitentiary itself was a relatively progressive The New Mexico FWP state guide noted that, “the institution has been thoroughly modernized, with new quarters for women prisoners, a prison farm and orchard under irrigation, and institutional facilities within the walls. Most of the bricks and hollow tiles used in the city have been manufactured in the penitentiary,” which were subsequently used by WPA workers to build local infrastructure. Federal Writers’ Project, New Mexico, \textit{New Mexico: A Guide To The Colorful State} (New York: Hastings House, 1940), 210.
\textsuperscript{149} Ryan to Earl V. Moore, 12 September 1939, quoted in Cutter, “The WPA Federal Music Project in New Mexico,” 210.
\textsuperscript{150} Gough, “The Varied Carols I Hear,” 406.
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the nation.\textsuperscript{151} Indeed, the richness of the music, that could be found in the state, which differed greatly from the normal WPA fare of Child ballads and spirituals, was a definite selling point for Ryan and her unit. A digest of the “vernacular and indigenous folk music” research projects of the WPA from November 1936 stated that this music had been “brought to Mexico by Cortez in 1519, and that some of the religious music was “a direct outgrowth of the Gregorian chant, sung by the Penitentas.”\textsuperscript{152} A 1937 press release stated that, aside from Native American music, the New Mexico traditional music was “the oldest folk music in America,” and it could be traced directly to early-sixteenth-century Spain.\textsuperscript{153} Ryan also played up this claim in the section on music in the New Mexico Federal Writers’ Project state guide: “Spanish music was first introduced when Cortes came to the American continent in 1519, bringing with him the folk songs of the mother country, where for centuries \textit{trovadores} and \textit{juglares} had been composing and singing romances and ballads built around the lives of their heroes, or dealing with subjects of love, religion, or war.”\textsuperscript{154}

If Ryan’s claims about direct lineage to sixteenth-century Spain were a bit hyperbolic, she could fall back on the argument that, given the age of many of the performers who were involved in the New Mexico FMP’s collection project, the music that the

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\textsuperscript{152} “From the Federal Music Project; A Digest of Studies into Vernacular and Indigenous Folk Music made by Project Workers,” 4.
\textsuperscript{153} Press release quoted in Bindas, “All of This Music Belongs to the Nation,” (dissertation), 236.
\textsuperscript{154} FWP, New Mexico, \textit{New Mexico: A Guide To The Colorful State}, 141.
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FMP workers collected dated back far before New Mexico was officially recognized as a state in 1912.155

Ryan noted that “the fact that New Mexico has such a rich heritage of Hispanic-American folklore, which for lack of recording is being lost to present and future generations, has prompted the setting up of folklore collecting and singing projects under WPA Federal Music to help preserve almost forgotten tunes and verses for posterity.”156 To this end, Ryan and her FMP unit partnered with the New Mexico Federal Writers’ Project—which like many of the FWP units had been working on a state guide that included sections on music and folklore in the state—and with the League of United Latin-Spanish American Citizens (LULAC) and professors and students from the Department of Hispanic Studies at the University of New Mexico, including folklorists Arthur L. Campa, Rubén Cobos, and Aurora Lucero-White Lea.157

Ryan’s folk music unit employed approximately fifty workers who were in charge of the collection, transcription, and analysis, of folk music within the state.158 Ryan wrote in an early narrative report that because many of the districts were

155 Before 1912 the New Mexico Territory, which contained the state of Arizona and part of Colorado, was a contested space that the U.S. government and states wrangled over after the Mexican-American War of 1846–48. The U.S. government established the territory in 1850, and New Mexico put in a bid to attain statehood in 1911.
157 Aurora Lucero-White, who was daughter of the former Secretary of State of New Mexico, White was a teacher at the time of her work with the FMP. She would later become a preeminent folklorist of the Southwest region.
158 “All of This Music Belongs to the Nation” (dissertation), 236.
“overwhelmingly Spanish-American,” it would be “much more advisable to put into these districts a Spanish-speaking person.” Over the course of their collecting trips these collectors gathered a number of canciones, coplas, corridos, décimas, quandos, romances, and versos, as well as religious music such as the alabando and the Los Pastores play. Ryan noted in a narrative report that, “only a small percentage of these songs have ever been written down and it has seemed quite fitting that Federal Music with available Government funds should be used to record them.” Once the songs had been gathered, the workers associated with Ryan’s folklore unit analyzed the tunes and created a number of scholarly studies, including Lou Sage Batchen’s “La Orquesta Antigua/Las Placitas”; Lorin W. Brown’s “Los Pastores—Agua Fria Version”; Genevieve Chapin’s “Indians of North America—Corn Grinding Songs”;

159 Ryan narrative report, Helen Chandler Ryan Collection, MSS 721, box 1, folder 4, quoted in Bellmore and Jackson, “The New Mexico Federal Music Project,” 32. (The New Mexico Writers’ Project, on the other hand, had few Spanish-speaking workers, and many people have criticized their interviews, narratives, and oral histories on the basis of this fact.)
160 The description Ryan and her workers gave of these forms in the New Mexico state guide is as follows: “One form of Spanish-American folk song prevalent at that time, and still heard today, is the alabado, a religious ballad, an outgrowth of Gregorian Chant. This form has little melodic interest, is primitive and monotonous, but very moving when sung by a large number of voices. The Penitentes still use this form of song in their services, often to the accompaniment of a crude flute. It is used also at wakes. Other song forms which have developed within New Mexico are the indita, cuando, corrido, and lastly the canción popular. The indita dates approximately from the time of Maximilian and is a combination of song and dance. The words tell a story, the refrain is lyric and amorous. It is composed of eight-syllable rhymed verses. The corrido always heroic in its subject matter, is a modern development of the ballad. Its music pattern is a definite one in four-quarter rhythm, usually with guitar accompaniment, and is never danced. It is often a melodramatic narrative almost always naming the day and date of the episode with which the poem deals. The cuando has no definite pattern and is practically obsolete now; formerly it told of adventures and always ended each stanza with the word cuando (when). Out of these earlier forms, since the first quarter of the nineteenth century, has developed the canciones populares, literally, popular songs, very singable in melody and rhythm. These date from the first quarter of the nineteenth century and are common to every locality. In all of this Spanish-American folk music very little Indian influence is felt, with the exception of the indita.”
Kenneth Fordyce’s “Cowboy Music” from 1937; and Reyes Martinez’s “Native Spanish-American Customs”; and Aurora Lucero-White’s 1937 “The Corrido and Other Poetic Compositions of New Mexico.”

In contrast to its efforts in the area of Spanish-American music, Ryan’s FMP largely ignored Native American music. In this regard, New Mexico was not unusual. State FMP folk music projects (with the notable exception of Oklahoma) rarely focused on Native American music. FMP workers to record Native American music, as in the case of the large-scale recording of tribes in Oklahoma in 1936, but it was certainly rare. In a 2012 article about Ryan and the New Mexico FMP, Audra Bellmore and Amy Jackson give three possible reasons for the exclusion of Native American music: 1) there were U.S. government policies in place that forced

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162 Lou Sage Batchen, “La Orquesta Antigua/Las Placitas,” n.d., (ca. 1940), WPA 5-5-49 #47, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico; Helen Chandler Ryan New Mexico Digital Collections; Lorin W. Brown, “Los Pastores – Agua Fria Version” n.d. (ca. 1940), Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Helen Chandler Ryan New Mexico Federal Music Project Collection, 1936–1943, WPA 5-5-42 #1, New Mexico Digital Collections; Genevieve Chapin, “Indians of North America—Corn Grinding Songs,” 1936, WPA 5-4-9 #31, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Helen Chandler Ryan New Mexico Federal Music Project Collection, 1936–1943, New Mexico Digital Collections; Children’s Games and Music, n.d. (ca. 1940), Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico; Helen Chandler Ryan New Mexico Federal Music Project Collection, 1936–1943, New Mexico Digital Collections; Kenneth Fordyce, “Cowboy Music,” 1937, WPA 5-4-3 #3, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Helen Chandler Ryan New Mexico Federal Music Project Collection, 1936–1943, New Mexico Digital Collections; Reyes Martinez, “Native Spanish-American Customs,” 1937, WPA 5-5-2 #22, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, New Mexico Digital Collections; “New Mexico Spanish Folk Dances,” n.d. (ca. 1940), Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Helen Chandler Ryan New Mexico Federal Music Project Collection, 1936–1943, New Mexico Digital Collections; Versos Infantiles (Nursery Rhymes), n.d. (ca. 1940), Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Helen Chandler Ryan New Mexico Federal Music Project Collection, 1936–1943, New Mexico Digital Collections; Aurora Lucero-White, “The Corrido and Other Poetic Compositions of New Mexico,” 1937, WPA 5-5-35 #1, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Helen Chandler Ryan New Mexico Federal Music Project Collection, 1936–1943, New Mexico Digital Collections.
assimilation upon Native Americans, (including a law that required Native American children to attend white schools); 2) there was a distinct “disadvantage that Anglos faced” when studying non-Western musical traditions, and the FMP workers, in particular, who “did not have scholarly training in musicology … would have had a very difficult time” with the music; and 3) there was a general “lack of cultural familiarity with the music,” above and beyond whatever cultural hurdles the FMP workers might have had with the Spanish-American music, which was still in “the Western tradition.”

Bellmore and Jackson provide an example of the typical assimilationist ideals of the period: “Ryan wrote movingly of one pueblo where ‘the supervisor watched with astonishment while children from Indian families … were singing “Bronze Lullaby” and “The Little Dustman” in two parts, and the boys played enthusiastically in a harmonica band and the girls joined them in a rhythm band.’”

There were other reasons, however, that Ryan and the FMP focused on Spanish American and Mexican music in particular. Ryan believed that the music that they collected should be distributed widely among the all of the state’s citizens, and to this end the FMP published a number of volumes for wide distribution (discussed below). As Bellmore and Jackson note, “the Hispanic melodies … were primarily being documented for use in the classroom and needed to be easy to teach and sing for teachers and students with little music education. Native American music … would have been much more difficult to relate to and teach in a classroom setting.”

164 Ibid., 32.
165 Ibid., 34.
Additionally, Ryan’s association with the Department of Hispanic Studies at the University of New Mexico meant that the Spanish-speaking experts she had on staff were best suited to working on the Spanish-American music in the state. Moreover, from the earliest days of the project, Ryan had been preparing for the yearlong, statewide Coronado Cuarto Centennial Celebration of 1940, commemorating the four-hundredth anniversary of Francisco Vázquez de Coronado y Luján’s expedition to the New World in search of gold, and the study of the music of the era was an integral part of her plans.

On the other hand, the New Mexico Federal Writers’ Project state guide’s section on music in the state, which Ryan and her workers put together, began with an overview of Native American music in the state, which was, in fact, longer than the discussions of either “Spanish Music” or “Anglo-American Music.” Although the discussion was not particularly sophisticated—“Since Indian music is not characterized by Western concepts of harmony, no comparison with European music is possible. To ordinary white ears, says D. H. Lawrence, the Indian’s song sometimes sounds like a rather disagreeable howling around the drum”—the section did manage to discuss broad musical characteristics of various tribes in the state, and did provide a brief history of, among others, the recording efforts of the Bureau of American Ethnology at the turn of the twentieth century. The section also noted that, “composers like Thurlow Lieurance, Charles Wakefield Cadman, Jean Jeancon,

166 See FWP, New Mexico, New Mexico: A Guide To The Colorful State, 141–46.
167 FWP, New Mexico, New Mexico: A Guide To The Colorful State, 141–43. Lawrence had been a resident of the state (Taos) from 1922 until around 1925.
and others have recorded some melodies, transposing them to fit our musical scale, but in the process losing much of the Indian characteristics.”

New Mexico Federal Music Project Publications

To fulfill Ryan’s aim of giving the music the FMP collected back to the community, the New Mexico FMP also produced five stenciled and mimeographed publications that were intended for wide distribution. In a November 1937 letter to U.S. Senator Dionisio (Dennis) Chávez (D-NM)—the first full-term Hispanic senator in the nation’s history—Ryan promoted the collections of songs they had recently completed:

We now have three units of songs which have been collected, transcribed and arranged in simple folk manner and mimeographed with the Spanish words, English translations and annotations as to where the various songs were found and their classifications. Two of the three units are melodic singable songs, which can be enjoyed by mature groups, and one unit is made up of children’s songs and singing games, which have had great demand from schools of the State where the Spanish element is predominant.

The first two volumes of folk music—for “mature groups”—were collections of traditional songs and ballads from the state, both titled *Spanish-American Folk Songs of New Mexico.*

Arthur L. Campa, the Director of Research in Folklore and

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170 *Spanish-American Folk Songs of New Mexico*, Federal Music Project Unit No. 1, 1936–37, WPA 5-5-42 #1, Center for Southwest Research, Universities Libraries, University of New Mexico, Helen Chandler Ryan New Mexico Federal Music Project Collection, 1936–1943, New Mexico Digital Collections; *Spanish-American Folk Songs of New Mexico*, Federal Music Project Unit No. 2, Center for Southwest Research, Universities Libraries, University of New Mexico, Helen Chandler Ryan New Mexico Federal Music Project Collection, 1936–1943, New Mexico Digital Collections.
professor of Modern Languages at the University of New Mexico helped compile and edit the two volumes, the direct result of the FMP workers’ many collection trips in the state. In his introduction to the volume, Campa stated that, “no other form of folk production is so revealing of temperament and subjectivism as the folk song,” through which could be found “an individual interpretation and uninhibited expression that other forms of folklore do not possess.” He lauded the FMP’s efforts of “making a contribution for which we will be thankful in years to come,” and, in keeping with Ryan’s overall aims of both preserving and re-popularizing the New Mexican folksong, asserted that they were “not dealing with a revival of obsolete material, but rather with a preservation of something that is alive today,” the saving of which, “because of its genuineness and its beauty we cannot afford to neglect.”\(^\text{171}\)

For the first of these volumes, Ryan penned a detailed introduction that outlined the process of collecting the songs from elderly citizens. She noted that once the melodies were collected, the songs were then arranged “in a simple Mexican folk manner for voice and piano or guitar,” but was careful to point out that “no attempt at change or elaboration of these melodies is permitted since it is an unalterable rule that the songs must remain in the original form in which they were sung.”\(^\text{172}\) (This fidelity to the melody was uncommon among folksong collections made for wide publication, but the addition of the accompaniment would have certainly altered the “original


forms” of the melodies.)\textsuperscript{173} Ryan noted that there were “often interesting differences” to be found “in the same song as it is sung in different sections of the state,” which she asserted proved “the rule that songs change by use and are influenced by environment.”\textsuperscript{174}

Ryan’s essay also presaged the other volumes in the series, and pointed to her overall vision:

In order to keep alive these folk songs among our people, singing groups have been organized under competent teacher-directors and these old songs are taught together with many more familiar ones. Programs are given by these groups frequently and are greatly enjoyed not only by the Hispanic-Americans but by a rapidly increasing American public as well, to whom these songs are a new experience. Many of the folk songs are intended to be used in dancing and these lend an interesting variety to the programs. Effort is being made now to have large community singing groups meet fortnightly where these songs will be sung and thus reach a larger number of people who actually will learn to sing them.\textsuperscript{175}

Ryan also discussed her folk music education program, which taught traditional instruments to “those otherwise unable to receive this instruction,” as well as to the younger generation, thus ensuring the music would remain vital in the community.

“Thus Típica Orchestra groups are organized to play the folk songs,” Ryan noted, “and many children are taught the guitar which is the most popular accompanying instrument for folk singing.”\textsuperscript{176}

\textsuperscript{173} In surveying the collections, however, it is clear that the melodies had been standardized to fit traditional notation and for the sake of easy reading.
\textsuperscript{174} Ryan, “The Functioning of Folklore Projects.”
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid.
To ensure that there was a reliable and consistent method for teaching the guitar to young students, the New Mexico FMP put together a publication titled *Guitar Method with Guitar Arrangements of Spanish-American Folk Songs of New Mexico*. (Although the author of the volume is not named, it might have been local FMP worker and guitar instructor Stanton R. Lewis.)\(^\text{177}\) Ryan noted the importance of the instrument to the community, stating that because “the guitar is the most commonly found instrument among native [Hispanic] families … an effort is being made to revive the true Spanish technique in the playing of this instrument.”\(^\text{178}\)

The instruction method book emphasized traditional Spanish (“classical”) and flamenco techniques, and was intended as a sort of corrective to the many “popular and inexpensive ‘Guitar Methods’ now on the market,” which the author accused of providing erroneous information on proper technique—if the methods addressed it at all: “Because of this lack of dependable methods, a simple, correct system of presenting guitar instruction is in the following pages, which all music project teachers are urged to follow.” In addition to providing basic chord shapes and simple chordal accompaniments for the songs they already had published in *Spanish*

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\(^{177}\) Bellmore and Jackson, “The New Mexico Federal Music Project,” 27. The method might have been written by Stanton R. Lewis, of Clovis, who taught lessons in Spanish and Hawaiian guitar, voice, and piano for the New Mexico FMP. A newspaper article from November 1936 stated, “Guitar lessons to beginners, voice lessons to beginners, or advanced pupils were announced today by Stanton R. Lewis, of Clovis, under a Federal Music Project to those unable to pay for them. Lewis holds a New Mexico public music certificate. In rural districts Lewis will arrange meetings for lessons where eight or more pupils are obtained in one slate. Write Stanton R. Lewis, Box 1082, Clovis, or inquire at 516 Pile, North Apartment.” “Voice and Guitar Lessons Free Under Federal Plan,” *Clovis News-Journal* (Clovis, New Mexico), 27 November 1936, 4. Other advertisements in this newspaper list Lewis as offering lessons in voice, piano, and Spanish and Hawaiian guitar.

\(^{178}\) Helen Chandler Ryan, “Narrative Report, New Mexico, October,” 8 November 1939, 2; NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “New Mexico.”
*American Folk Songs of New Mexico*, the method gave detailed instructions on twenty basic strokes, including the “almost-forgotten ‘rasgueado’ technique,” popular in flamenco guitar styles. The author also insisted that the “true Spanish guitar is always played with the fingers, never with a pick; instead of wire strings, it should be strung with three gut strings in the treble and metal-wound silk ones in the bass.”

The unnamed author (who may have been local FMP worker Stanton Lewis, see footnote 177 above) began his preface with a quotation from Manuel de Falla’s preface to Emilio Pujol’s guitar method, and in so doing, attempted to draw a direct line from Spain to New Mexico by way of Spain’s former colony to the south:

“Instrumento admirable, tan sobrio como rico, que áspera o dulcemente se adueña del espíritu y en el que andando el tiempo se concentran los valores esenciales de nobles instrumentos caducados cuya herencia, recoge sin pérdida de su propio carácter, de aquél que debe al pueblo por su origen.”

The author continued,

This Spanish guitar, which the great Spanish composer praises so unreservedly, is an instrument that is particularly and uniquely New Mexico’s own. Here the “tradition of Spain” is a living force, one that is manifested most clearly, perhaps, through its pure folk music—sung to the accompaniment of the guitar. The Federal Music Project of New Mexico emphasizes the importance of this instrument not only for its ancient origin, its double aspect of popular and artistic utility and its vital influence on the evolution of instrumental music—but also because it typifies the artistic voice of the state; it is the voice of New Mexico, in music.

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179 “An admirable instrument, as sober as it is rich, sometimes roughly yet sometimes sweetly masters the soul. Through the centuries it has taken up unto itself the values of noble instruments which have passed away, has taken those values into itself without losing its own character which it owes, in its origins, to the people itself.” Originally from a letter from Falla to Pujol, December 1932, published in the prologue to Emilio Pujol, *Escuela razonada de la guitarra* (Buenos Aires: José B. Romero, 1935).

180 *Guitar Method with Guitar Arrangements of Spanish-American Folk Songs of New Mexico*, FMP Unit No. 3, 1939, Center for Southwest Research, Universities Libraries, University of New Mexico, Helen Chandler Ryan New Mexico Federal Music Project Collection, 1936–1943, New Mexico Digital Collections, n.p., [7].
The FMP guitar method thus was a practical extension of Ryan’s overall goal to reintroduce the traditional music of the state to its citizens, or, as the author noted, “one aim of the project is the revival of a true Spanish guitar technique, since, in recent years, outside influences have caused foreign manners to predominate in popular playing.” These “outside influences” included the popular, folk, and cowboy traditions that had transformed the guitar in the public eye from an instrument of Spanish descent to one that was distinctly “American.” “In shape, the authentic instrument maintains a beautiful proportion, with a wider fingerboard than other types,” the author rhapsodized, and noted that “it is hoped to bring back into use, as far as feasible, the true type of instrument to replace our present mixture of Hawaiian, American-factory, and other hybrid shapes.”

Although the FMP’s guitar method was a somewhat retrograde publication that fixed onto its pages a guitar technique that had largely fallen into oral tradition, one that was passed along from teacher to student, it also was forward thinking, predating the Spanish guitar revival in the United States by at least a decade.

The New Mexico FMP’s fourth publication was a book of children’s songs intended for use in the classroom, titled *Spanish-American Singing Games of New Mexico* (1940), which was republished in 1942 in collaboration with the New Mexico

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181 *Guitar Method with Guitar Arrangements of Spanish-American Folk Songs of New Mexico*, n.p., [7].

182 Andres Segovia is traditionally linked to the resurgence of the instrument in the United States. Although he had been touring the country regularly since 1928—although with a break during the Spanish Civil War and WWII—it wasn’t until after the Second World War that his recordings became popular across the nation.
FWP under the title *The Spanish-American Song and Game Book*.\(^{183}\) William McDonald described the book as “thoroughly of a co-operative nature, since material gathered was compiled by workers on the Writers’ Project, Music Project, and Art Project under the sponsorship of the University of New Mexico and the state superintendent of public instruction.”\(^{184}\) State supervisor of the New Mexico Federal Writers’ Project, Charles Ethridge Minton, noted that the songs, which had been sung for generations, had been translated “freely” from their original Spanish “so that the English would be singable even though the translations were not literal.”\(^{185}\) The authors of the book hoped that the dual translation would encourage interaction among Spanish- and English-speaking students. Minton also noted that although piano accompaniments had been given in the volume, “for those who cannot dispense with either the piano or an accompaniment,” the preferred instrument for accompanying the songs was “the village fiddle or guitar,” because of the “folk quality of the songs.”\(^{186}\)

The final volume that the FMP produced, a collection of dance music titled *Spanish-American Dances of New Mexico* (1942), was a near-verbatim republication of a study compiled two years earlier titled “New Mexico Spanish Folk Dances.”\(^{187}\) The collection, which was arranged by Pedro Valles, the director of the Children’s

\(^{183}\) *Spanish-American Singing Games of New Mexico*, WPA Music Project, unit no. 3, rev. 1940, Center for Southwest Research, Universities Libraries, University of New Mexico, Helen Chandler Ryan New Mexico Federal Music Project Collection, 1936–1943, New Mexico Digital Collections.

\(^{184}\) McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts*, 638.

\(^{185}\) Charles Ethridge Minton, foreword to *Spanish-American Singing Games of New Mexico*, n.p.

\(^{186}\) Charles Ethridge Minton, foreword to *Spanish-American Singing Games of New Mexico*, n.p.

\(^{187}\) Bellmore and Jackson seem to indicate that this volume was never actually published. See Bellmore and Jackson, “The New Mexico Federal Music Project,” 40.
Típica Orchestra of Albuquerque, highlighted “a large number of traditional dances that figure in the village festivities throughout the year,” including the regional polka, *La Varsoviana, La Camelia (Camila), El Rechumbe, La Cuna, La Vaquerita (El Vaquero),* and *Blanco Y Negro (Portuguese Fado).* The original study’s introduction notes that, “with the exception of the Polka variations, they are all formation dances that incorporate Schottish, Waltz, and Polka steps. The principal quality of these dances is their clear-cut rhythmic patterns, and the graceful figures described by groups of four and by couples.” The original volume also gave detailed notes on each of the dances, as in the case of the description for “El Rechumbe”:

*El Rechumbe* mostly resembles the New England “Play-Party Games,” except that in Spanish folk dances, all figure changes are indicated by changes in the melody. There is no caller to keep up the noisy chatter during the dance. With both hands firmly clasped, the couples on the dance floor sidestep and stop at the end of each measure, breaking into a graceful swinging skip around and around in fast, lively steps. A few rounds of this dance are enough for any visitor who dances it in a mountain village 7,000 feet above sea level.

The reason that the New Mexico FMP workers decided against providing these notes on the dances in their mimeographed publication may have simply been an attempt to keep the publication simple, but the decision to republish material that had come from these initial scholarly studies was not uncommon; the New Mexico FMP workers had reused material before in each of the previous mimeographed publications. What this decision does reveal is that Ryan was committed to preserving and publicizing music

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188 See Pedro Valles, arr. “New Mexico Spanish Folk Dances,” n.d. (ca. 1940), Center for Southwest Research, Universities Libraries, University of New Mexico, Helen Chandler Ryan New Mexico Federal Music Project Collection, 1936–1943, New Mexico Digital Collections.
that helped to build community, through partner dancing, and Ryan herself acknowledged that “many of the folk songs are intended to be used in dancing and these lend an interesting variety to the [folk music] programs” that the FMP had been hosting for some years.  

**Folk Music Performances**

Folk music performances were a critical piece of Ryan’s overall vision as a seamless hybrid of preservation and popularization. She noted in her final report that these efforts “renewed a pride in the hearts of New Mexicans in their folk heritage so that folk-singing, dancing, and playing are now more popular with the young generation.” In addition to the numerous concerts the New Mexico FMP put on that charged admission to help remunerate the participating musicians, Ryan’s units produced a staggering 736 free public concerts in the project’s first two years alone. Among the concerts, free or otherwise, that the FMP sponsored were Pedro Valles’s Children’s Típica Orchestra of Albuquerque, a children’s típica orchestra led by Pablo Mares out of Las Vegas, New Mexico, and the Hernández Brothers guitar ensemble from Bernalillo. The New Mexico FMP also performed the traditional nativity play *Los Pastores* at the adobe-constructed seat of power for the Spanish in the seventeenth century, the Santa Fe “Palace of the Governors” in on Christmas Day

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190 Ryan, “The Functioning of Folklore Projects.”  
in 1938. Ryan and her FMP also sponsored numerous concerts throughout the state featuring community concert bands, choral ensembles, African American spiritual groups, and folk and jazz ensembles, which they held at public buildings, such as schools, hospitals, churches, and parks. Among the groups the FMP programmed were Albuquerque’s Junior Community Band, the Española Community Band, and the San Isidro Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) jazz band.

Eleanor Roosevelt happened to attend one of the New Mexico FMP’s concerts while she toured the Southwest in March 1938. Writing in her “My Day” column of 12 March 1938, she noted that upon entering a National Youth Administration community center in Los Lunas, New Mexico, “an orchestra, consisting mainly of mouth-organs with a guitar and another stringed instrument, was playing American and Spanish songs. These Spanish-American people preserve their folk songs and also learn songs in English.” Roosevelt met personally with Helen Chandler Ryan later that day, and Peter Gough noted that Ryan gave the First Lady copies of some “translations of old Spanish folk songs.”

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194 References to specific ensembles in this section come from Cutter, “The WPA Federal Music Project in New Mexico,” 208–9.


The New Mexico FMP also regularly sponsored and performed in folk music festivals throughout the state and region. In 1936, as a part of National Music Week, a nation-wide festival held from 3 to 10 May, approximately a hundred FMP workers performed the music they had been researching to an audience of around 1,500 attendees who were gathered in a local gymnasium. The performance included the Rancho Grande and La Golondrina choruses, Nato Hernandez’s Típica Orchestra, a group of dancers and singers directed by project worker Lucia Sanchez de Rael, Pedro Valles’s ten-member Spanish string band.197 On 4 June of the same year in Albuquerque, singing groups of the FMP, in conjunction with the League of United Latin-American Citizens (LULAC) presented the *corridos, décimas, quandos,* and *romances* they had been collecting throughout the state. The FMP’s report on “Studies into Vernacular and Indigenous Folk Music made by Project Workers” noted that on 4 June in Albuquerque, “WPA singing groups, sponsored by the League of United Latin-American Citizens, presented another type of folk song—the “Romances” “Decimas,” “Quandos,” and “Corridos,” which had their origin in Spain and Mexico, and which are being preserved as a part of the Hispanic culture of the Southwest.”198

In 1940, Ryan and the FMP sponsored numerous folk music concerts and folk pageants associated with the yearlong, statewide Coronado Cuarto Centennial,

197 Bindas, “All of This Music Belongs to the Nation” (dissertation), 237; and “From the Federal Music Project; A Digest of Studies into Vernacular and Indigenous Folk Music made by Project Workers,” 26–27.
198 “From the Federal Music Project; A Digest of Studies into Vernacular and Indigenous Folk Music made by Project Workers,” 26–27.
celebrating Coronado’s expedition to the region in 1540–1542. Partly in preparation for the Centennial, the New Mexico FMP put together their first publication, titled *Spanish American Folk Songs of New Mexico*, which was published in 1937. In her introductory essay for the volume, Ryan stated that “it is expected that the attention of the nation and the world will be focused here at that time.” She also noted that the FMP publications would be particularly useful because the celebration was to be presented “in the form of authentic, historical pageants,” and the folklore work of her FMP would help “both in the way of research for the authentic music which was sung at that time and in teaching these songs to the hundreds of thousands of people who will participate.”

Sarah Gertrude Knott, who had been the director and driving force behind the National Folk Festival since its inception in April 1934, came in to advise and assist Ryan and her associates in the planning and implementation of the centennial’s activities. Knott had known of the work of Ryan and the New Mexico FMP through her longtime association with Arthur Campa. Campa had been associated with Knott dating back to her first National Folk Festival in St. Louis in 1934, where he presented “Spanish folk songs and a religious mystery play.” Knott scholar Michael Ann Williams notes that “Campa became not only the festival’s leading

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199 Ryan, “The Functioning of Folklore Projects Under [the] Works Progress Administration Federal Music Project in New Mexico,” in *Spanish-American Folk Songs of New Mexico*, n.p. Peter Gough notes that Ryan was correct in her assertions: “By the time of the [centennial] the [FMP’s] collections constituted virtually the only printed Hispanic folksongs [of the state] available; through the sponsorship of the Centennial Commission this music was widely distributed for use in Centennial Fiestas.” Gough, “The Varied Carols I Hear,” 416.

authority on southwestern culture, but he also became one of Knott’s closest academic advisors,” whose “presence for almost forty years assured representation of the Southwest.”

Knott was more than willing to lend support to the Centennial, and noted in her June 1940 article titled “North of the Border,” that ever since Campa had first brought his “group of Spanish Americans to the first National Folk Festival … I had wanted to know more about the distinctive folk expressions of the Southwest.” In September 1939, Knott met with Clinton P. Anderson, the managing director of the Centennial “to arrange for a series of folk festivals from May [1940] throughout the year,” for which Knott would be responsible for “the supervision of folk festivals to be held almost everywhere throughout the state.” In her October 1939 narrative report, Ryan described Knott’s work of stimulating interest in the Centennial celebrations and of helping to organize “native folk festivals in every community within the state.” According to Ryan, Knott had found “a finer integration of music project activities with the everyday life of the people here in New Mexico than in any part of the United States which she has visited.”

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201 Williams, Staging Tradition, 21. Throughout her career Knott credited Campa, alongside Benjamin Botkin and Paul Green, “as her most influential advisors.” Williams, Staging Tradition, 23.
204 Ryan, “Narrative Report, New Mexico, October,” 1.

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Knott moved temporarily to Albuquerque, taking up residence in the Centennial offices in the city for a period of three months. She remembered that she “felt like the foreigner she was” for the “Anglos, the term for all those neither Spanish-American or Indian, were lost in the crowd.”205 She did not, however, feel unwelcomed by the “gracious, hospitable people,” for she noted that the “Natives, as the Spanish-Americans are called, and Indians,” shared “a common bond of love in the folk traditions.”206 At the end of her three-month residency “more than 200 festivals were set in Indian, Spanish-American, and Anglo communities throughout the state.” Knott left the state with the knowledge that “there was a vast difference between the traditional expressions of New Mexico and any other I had known. There are three distinct racial groups, three different philosophies of life, three sets of folk traditions—confusing, yet challenging.”207 Of the Spanish-Americans, Knott noted, “no other race in the United States, unless it is the American Negro, sings as much as he does.” Although Knott had comparatively less to say about the Native American traditions in the state, she did recognize that “many people in New Mexico, as elsewhere, feel that we should either stand in awe of this great primitive culture, or leave it alone as barbaric. … Some day in the future … men will try to … understand this great mystic race. But the spirit will be lost. Now, while the traditions endure, is our opportunity.”208

206 Ibid., 2.
207 Ibid., 5.
208 Ibid., 8.
Oklahoma

“As in every other phase—industrial, educational, cultural—Oklahoma’s development in the field of music is still in its youth. But it has a rich background of folk music upon which to create an indigenous motif.”  So began the music section of the Oklahoma Federal Writers’ Project contribution to the FWP’s “American Guide Series,” *Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State*. The sentiment of the statement is a near-perfect encapsulation of the work of the Oklahoma Federal Music Project unit, both in its self-consciousness, and in its tacit acceptance of its musical traditions. At the time of the Great Depression Oklahoma had within its borders a century and a half’s worth of displaced Native American tribes—the so-called “Five Civilized Tribes” of the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chicksaw, Creek, and Seminole nations, nearly all of whom were from the mid-Atlantic and Southeastern United States—as well as three to four decades worth of white residents from other areas of the country.

The organization of the Oklahoma Federal Music Project reflects this somewhat fractured state identity. If Helen Chandler Ryan and the New Mexico FMP

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210 Like New Mexico, Oklahoma had attained statehood status relatively late. The history of Oklahoma is bound up in a series of legislative acts that fundamentally altered the original makeup of the state’s population, including the Indian Removal Act, passed under Andrew Jackson’s presidency in the early 1830s. For much of the nineteenth century Oklahoma had been part of the vast Native American territories in the middle of the nation, including the Indian Territory and the Oklahoma Territory, which combined a number of tribes from various parts of the country into a single area. In 1890 the state was opened up to white settlement, which resulted in a rush of settlers looking for cheap, plentiful land, known as the “Sooners.” On 16 November 1907, after the passage of the Enabling Act of 1906, the U.S. government combined the Oklahoma and Indian Territories and created the single state of Oklahoma.
represent a model of working within one’s means, then Dean Richardson’s Oklahoma FMP represents the opposite: an overall effort to bring a relatively new state up to speed culturally. For the most part, Richardson’s project was relatively typical FMP program, consisting of a number of distinct units, including the Oklahoma Federal Symphony Orchestra, the Federal Music Production Unit, and the Federal Music Educational Unit, and various music research and copying units.211

Richardson placed his focus squarely on the 150-member Oklahoma Federal Symphony Orchestra, and for good reason.212 Formed in September 1937, it was the first professional symphony in the state. Although there had been a previous attempt at creating an orchestra within the state—the Ladies Music Club of Oklahoma City created the mixed amateur/professional Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra in 1924—both lack of interest in orchestral music and lack of finances due to the Depression forced the disbandment of the orchestra in 1931. Richardson, too, found

211 According to Merrill Leroy Ellis, in his 1940 M.A. thesis on the Oklahoma FMP, the Music Production Unit, which began in July of 1938, served three purposes, “1) to act as a feeder and training ground for the orchestra; 2) to retrain people in the art of correct, clear, music copying; 3) to offer an opportunity for composers and arrangers to get practice in their professions.” Ellis added that the unit was tasked with building “a good library of standard orchestral material for the FMP orchestra”; assisting the Music Education Unit by transcribing music for it as needed; and to “turn out as many pages of clear, clean, and correct music copying as possible.” Merrill Leroy Ellis, “An Evaluation of the Oklahoma Federal Music Project,” M.A. Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1940, 39. On average this unit employed around sixteen people. A January 1940 draft outline of the aims of the Oklahoma FMP describes four main areas on which the project focused: “1) To establish high standards of musicianship; to rehabilitate musicians by assisting them to become self-supporting; to retrain musicians; and to educate the public in an appreciation of musical opportunities. 2) To create a larger intelligent musical public by developing high standards of musical taste and knowledge, thereby creating a demand for professional employment. 3) To provide musical training and opportunities for all to whom it is not otherwise available. 4) To plan all Federal Music Project activities in such a manner that each shall leave a definite permanent effect.” Ellis, “An Evaluation of the Oklahoma Federal Music Project,” 8.

he had difficulty in cultivating a climate for orchestral music in the state, and he
discovered early on that they needed to diversify the aims of the orchestra to make it
as enticing to the general public as possible.\textsuperscript{213} Richardson’s FMP also supported
regional orchestras including the Ardmore WPA Orchestra and the Shawnee WPA
Orchestra, and smaller, niche ensembles such as the WPA Colored Dance Orchestra,
which existed from 10 January 1936 until 15 October 1937, and a WPA Hillbilly
Band, which ran from 5 February 1936 until 31 October 1937.\textsuperscript{214}

If the orchestra was Richardson’s primary concern, music education was a
not-too-distant second. From there, Richardson focused on music copying and
building a score library for the orchestra. Where, then, in such a climate, did folk
music research fit, if it fit at all?

As was the case with the FMP on a national scale, most of the ambitious, “out-of-the-
box” programs—including folk music collecting—happened within the first year and
a half of the launch of the Federal One arts projects, between approximately the first
of April 1936 until around November 1937, when Congress reigned in the spending

\textsuperscript{213} 1) A concert series designed to develop and maintain higher standards and broader participation in
music available to every state community at actual cost. 2) Symphony concerts especially designed for
school children. 3) Young artists’ concerts for public appearances of exceptionally talented young
musicians. 4) Composers’ forum laboratories for the development of composers and conductors. 5) A
program to develop junior musical organizations. Ellis, “An Evaluation of the Oklahoma Federal
Music Project,” 23. Merrill Leroy Ellis (1916–1981) is but one of the fascinating figures on the margin
of this study. Ellis studied music at the University of Oklahoma (B.F.A., 1939, M.M., 1941) and
studied composition privately with Spencer Norton (1940–41), Roy Harris (1950–60), and Darius
Milhaud (1957). In 1963, Ellis founded the Computer Music Center at the University of North Texas,
and became director of the university’s Electronic Music Center that same year. Throughout the 1960s,
Ellis worked closely with Robert Moog on the development of synthesizers. See “Merrill Ellis,”
University of North Texas Libraries webpage, http://www.library.unt.edu/collections/music/merrill-
eli; and “Ellis, Merrill,” Texas State Historical Association webpage,

\textsuperscript{214} Schrems, “New Deal Culture in Oklahoma,” 7; Ellis, “An Evaluation of the Oklahoma Federal
Music Project,” 42.
of the WPA after the “Roosevelt Recession” of 1937. It was during this brief window that the Oklahoma FMP made its collections of folk and Native American music, which represent some of the richest collections made under any WPA unit. These collections came as part of the short-lived Music Research Unit of the Oklahoma FMP, which conducted four major surveys between April 1937 and November 1937: 1) Survey of Music Facilities in Rural Schools of Oklahoma; 2) Survey of Music Facilities in Separate Schools of Oklahoma; 3) Indian Music; 4) Folk Music Native to Oklahoma, the latter two Ellis listed as “incomplete.”

The Oklahoma FMP’s recordings of Native American tribes in the state represent some of the only such recordings made by any of the WPA projects. Generally such recording expeditions were relegated to the U.S. government’s Bureau for Indian Affairs, with trained anthropologists manning the recording machines. There had been a few small-scale recording expeditions of Native American musics, including the Florida Federal Writers’ Project recordings of Seminole Indians, the Mississippi unit’s recordings of Choctaw Indians, the Pennsylvania FMP’s film and audio recordings of the Corn Planter ceremony, Margaret Valiant’s recordings of Pima Indians in California, and Sidney Robertson’s recordings of Californian Native Americans at the Pala Mission.

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216 A project memorandum outlining the research into Native American musics as of the end of November 1936 stated that, “motion pictures of the Corn Planter Indians of the Seneca Tribe in Pennsylvania were made in Warren County, Pennsylvania during the planting festival in May,” and that “fifty Indians sang the tribal chant of the Chippewa in the Indian tongue to the accompaniment of tom-toms at the folk festival at Fort Worth as part of the Centennial Celebration.” The report also mentioned that the Analyses Unit of the FMP had compiled a list of “twenty-five compositions which derive from Indian material which have been played by WPA bands or orchestras since October 1935.”
The Music Research Unit of the Oklahoma FMP partnered with the Oklahoma Federation of Music Clubs, which the Oklahoma state guide called the “most far-reaching and prominent” of the musical organizations in the state, to record some 200 “songs of war, ceremonials, medicine, animals, love, lullabies, dances, and games.” The FMP workers recorded music, dances, and ceremonies of the Cheyenne, Kiowa, Sac and Fox, Apache, Pawnee, Ottawa, and Osage tribes, using a with a portable recording machine that had been specially built for the purpose of recording “without modern facilities (i.e., at the reservations and “in the remote homes of full bloods”), thus keeping the music in its “natural setting.”

The person in charge of the Native American recording project was Bee Mayes Barry (1881–1945), a woman of Chippewa (Ojibwe) descent from Norman, Oklahoma, who occasionally went by her tribal name Pe-ahm-e-squeet (“Floating Cloud”). Barry’s broad-based background as a classically trained harpist, a

“From the Federal Music Project: A Digest of Studies into Vernacular and Indigenous Folk Music made by Project Workers. Prepared for Mrs. Paul Ellison, Georgia Southwestern College, Americus, Georgia, November 25, 1936,” 1. NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820.

217 Oklahoma FWP, Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State, 105; Ellis, “An Evaluation of the Oklahoma Federal Music Project,” 42. Bindas cites the number of recordings as “over 300.” Bindas, “All This Music Belongs to the Nation” (dissertation), 250. The Oklahoma state guide called the Oklahoma Federation of Music Clubs had a total membership of more than 4,000 people across “212 senior, student, and junior affiliated clubs” across the state’s nine districts. See, Oklahoma FWP, Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State, 108–9.

218 Canon, “The Federal Music Project,” 149. Canon spells her name as “Pe-ahm-e-squeett,” although a preponderance of sources spell her name as “Pe-ahm-e-squeet,” or some variation thereof. She is listed as “Miss Bee Mayes, (Pe-ahm-ees-squeet), Ojibwa, educated in Boston; musician” in Warren King Moorehead, The American Indian in the United States, Period 1850-1914 (Andover, MA: Andover Press, 1914), 203. Some of Barry’s correspondence is in the Jerry Whistler Snow Collection of the Western History Collections of the University of Oklahoma. Also part of this collection are letters from Don Whistler, who hosted the long-running radio program “Indians for Indians Hour” on WNAD in Norman, Oklahoma from at least 1943 until 1950. See http://www.loc.gov/folklife/guides/Oklahoma.html.
member of the American Folklore Society (1912–1918), and a lecturer on Native American music and customs and her an ideal candidate to lead the expedition.\textsuperscript{219}

Born Bee Mayes in 1881, she had grown up among an Ojibwe tribe in Michigan before moving with her family to the Oklahoma Territory. She enrolled at the Haskell Institute for Native Americans in Lawrence, Kansas and upon graduating in 1904 moved to Chicago to study harp. Around 1908 she relocated to Boston to take on a “twenty-week engagement” of studying harp with Harriet Shaw, the successful harp pedagogue and occasional harpist for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. While in Boston, Barry was affiliated with the New England Conservatory, although it is unclear whether she was a student or a harp instructor.\textsuperscript{220} She also toured the northeast extensively between 1910 and 1914, giving lecture recitals in which she donned Native American dress—one newspaper article described it as a “native costume of buckskin, with fringe and bead decorations and beaded head-band”—told tales of her upbringing in the Great Lakes Ojibwe community, and performed both Native American and classical music on the harp, with occasional piano or violin

\textsuperscript{219} She is listed as a member of the American Folklore Society from 1912–1918, as “Miss Bee Mayes,” from Boston, Massachusetts. See, for example, “Front Matter,” \textit{Journal of American Folklore} 29, no. 114 (1 October 1916): 568.

\textsuperscript{220} The information about her affiliation with the New England Conservatory comes, in part, from here: “An Evening of Pleasure,” \textit{Cambridge Chronicle}, 26 February 1910, 7, which states “In a recent article which appeared in one of the Boston newspapers, it was stated that Miss Bee Mayes, or ‘Floating Cloud,’ the Indian maiden who is to tell a little of the life, the customs, and music of the tribes, was a student of the New England Conservatory. This is not so, as she was a pupil of Miss Harriet Shaw, the well-known harpist, who has filled many engagements with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. … Miss Mayes is teaching at the [New England] Conservatory has filled many engagements in the past few months, and is now completing her lecture preparatory to entering upon the Lyceum platform.” Although an article in the \textit{Vermont Phoenix} stated, “Miss Mayes is completing her musical studies In the New England Conservatory of Music, after graduating from the government school at Lawrence, Kansas.” \textit{The Vermont Phoenix} (Brattleboro), 20 December 1912, n.p.
accompaniment. 221 These “costume recitals,” which seem to be in line with the primitivist fetish of the early twentieth century, were widely praised in a variety of newspapers, including the New York Times. One article stated, “Miss Mayes, or Floating Cloud, wore Indian costume, her long black, glossy hair hanging in two braids interwoven with bright red ribbons, and her costume was covered with bright colored beads.” 222 Around 1919 she returned to Oklahoma to live with her father, where she took on clerical work at the University of Oklahoma and taught occasional classes in “Indian culture” and harp. 223

221 The Vermont Phoenix (Brattleboro), 20 December 1912, n.p. In 1913, she was listed under the “official register of classified lecturers” as a lecturer in Indian Dances in Boston. Helen M. Winslow, ed., Official Register and Directory of Women’s Clubs in America, vol. 15 (Shirley, MA: Helen M. Winslow, 1913), 258.
223 The 1920 census for Cleveland County, Oklahoma lists her as “Bee M. Barry,” aged 40, widowed, who living with her father Eben C. Mayes, in Norman. It lists her occupation as a clerical worker at the University of Oklahoma, although a catalog for the University of Oklahoma, Barry received a diploma from the Haskell Institute in 1904, and is listed as an instructor in harp at the University of Oklahoma for the year 1920. University of Oklahoma Catalog (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1922), 16. The 1940 census lists her as “white,” aged 59 and her occupation as an antique dealer at an antique shop in Norman, Oklahoma.
Barry and her fellow FMP workers recorded in an era in which Native American tribal culture in the state was in a period of decline, despite the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934—sometimes referred to as the “Indian New Deal”—which attempted to reverse a series of regulations that had crippled Native American autonomy for decades.\textsuperscript{224} Cornelius Canon noted, “The fact that a full-blooded Indian population was fast disappearing in Oklahoma made this a particularly valuable collection,” especially because “the music of many of these tribes had never been recorded.”\textsuperscript{225} Although some researchers had made recordings of Native American tribes in Oklahoma before the FMP collection project—including Truman Michelson, Frank Speck, and Omer C. Stewart—there had been no exhaustive recording trips to the region prior to the FMP’s effort.\textsuperscript{226} But despite Barry’s familiarity with the music and her classical training, mere transcription of the music would only form a part of the effort to preserve tribal heritage. The Oklahoma Writers’ Project, in their section on Native American music, described the stakes of recording this music, which had only existed in oral tradition, and was thus in danger of being lost forever:

> The ceremonial and historical songs in particular were patiently transmitted as a sacred duty to each new generation. Since these simple people recorded melodies only in their minds, much of their music is lost to the world forever;

\textsuperscript{224} See, for example, Jon S. Blackman, \textit{Oklahoma’s Indian New Deal} (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013).
and the disintegration of their pure race has introduced blood strains foreign to their peculiar, melodic spontaneity. No diatonic scale can catch or interpret the fullness or the beauty of the themes, and proper rendition of Indian music requires congeniality of mind and a mystical union with nature.  

What the recordings lacked, however, was the context in which the recordings were made. “Recording of Indian music is the only real means of preserving it,” the writers of the guide asserted, “but even that lacks the fullness which would be immediately apparent if one could see the supple body movements attending it.” The recordings were to be placed at the Library of Congress, at the University of Oklahoma, and at the central office of the Oklahoma Music Project when the project was finished along with the final transcriptions of the music. However, the whereabouts of the recordings is presently unknown.

The Oklahoma Federal Music project also collected Anglo-American folk music as part of its Folk Music Research Unit, which existed from 1 April 1936 until 31 November 1937. Unlike the Native American music collecting project, the folk music was not recorded onto discs, but rather was collected and transcribed by hand in the field. The Oklahoma state guide reported that “the folk music division of the Oklahoma Music Program has transcribed and classified some four hundred of these popular folk songs of early Oklahoma, including 125 fiddle tunes,” with plans “being

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228 Ibid., 105.
229 Ibid., 105; and “Information on Federal Music Project to Compile American folk music,” 2 April 1937, NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820. Information about the Oklahoma FMP’s folk and Native American music research activities is scant, disparate, and sometimes contradictory. Moreover, employees at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, the State Archives in Oklahoma, and at various universities in Oklahoma have no record of the recordings in their holdings.
made for their publication.”

The workers of the Oklahoma FMP had run into resistance early on when decided to pursue a folk music project. Peter Gough notes that Dean Richardson mentioned to Sokoloff in July 1937 that he had been “so thoroughly discouraged” with his collection project that he decided to abandon it altogether, which he did later that November. But Richardson’s project received “a great deal of favorable publicity,” he later noted, adding that, “it pleased me greatly to be able to complete a work that was practically finished at the time we discontinued it.”

In charge of this folk music collecting project, and in particular the collection of fiddle music throughout the state, was a little-known violin instructor named Marion Buchanan. Born in 1904, Buchanan had studied violin at the University of Oklahoma and had, beginning in 1928, worked as a violin instructor in the tiny Oklahoma town of Amorita, whose population between 1920 and 1930 averaged around 200 residents.

During this time, Buchanan developed a lifelong interest in

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230 Oklahoma FWP, *Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State*, 107. The report continued, “Among those which have been fairly generally established as originating in Oklahoma are “Verdigris Bottom,” a dance tune; “Oklahoma Run,” (also known as “Old Purcell”); “Red Bird”; the “Oklahoma Waltz”; and the “Tulsey Waltz,” the last two drippingly sentimental. Two popular tunes originated with their performers at Indian Territory dances—one, “Uncle Paul,” was composed on the spot by Paul Toupin, a favorite territorial fiddler; and the other, “Slaton's Waltz,” was the brain child of Tom Slaton, playing for a dance near Mangum.”

231 Quoted in Peter Gough, “The Varied Carols I Hear,” 406. Gough cites the following for his quotations: Dean Richardson to Nikolai Sokoloff, 28 July 1937, NARA, Central Files, State: Oklahoma, box 2334; “Federal Music Project Activities in Folk Music,” NARA, entry 815, box 30; Richardson to Sokoloff, 21 November 1938, and 23 November 1938, NARA, Central Files, State: Oklahoma, box 2335.

232 According to fiddle historian Rodger Harris, of the Oklahoma Folklife Council of the Oklahoma Historical Society, “Marion Thede had begun her teaching career in 1928 in Amorita, Oklahoma. She had been trained to play violin at the University of Oklahoma. Soon after her arrival at Amorita she encountered a local old-time fiddler. Her association with this fiddler and others began a lifelong effort to study and record fiddling. Although her interest in the fiddle carried her to many other places in
collecting fiddle tunes. She later stated in an article in the journal *Ethnomusicology* that she “was born in Oklahoma when it was still the Chicksaw Indian Nation or Indian Territory. … Since 1928 the author has recorded melodies, techniques, and special tunings in a study of traditional fiddling of the West.” Buchanan joined the FMP sometime in 1936 and served as a violin instructor, although other sources note that she was also the assistant supervisor to the state FMP teaching project and director of the Oklahoma FMP for Pottawatomie County. In October 1937, with assistance from Dean Richardson, Buchanan helped to organize a statewide fiddle America her focus was always on Oklahoma fiddlers. Her work, *The Fiddle Book*, published by Oak Publications in 1967, became a classic reference for fiddle players all over America. For years it was the best selling book on the subject. It served as a primer for new fiddlers and as a documentation of Thede’s understanding of fiddlers. With one or two exceptions all the tunes and references are from or about Oklahoma.” For information on Amorita, see Dianna Everett, “Amorita,” *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, Oklahoma Historical Society, http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/A/AM017.html.


234 The 1940 census for Oklahoma City lists Marion Buchanan as thirty-six years old, divorced, a musician, and a WPA employee. The handwriting is unclear, but seems to indicate that she was a member of the Oklahoma FMP symphony orchestra. A footnote in Barbara LaPan Rahm’s “Earl Collins: Hoedown Fiddler Takes The Lead,” lists Buchanan as “Old lady Buchanan, Marion Buchanan Thede, Director, Music Project, WPA, Potowatamie [sic] County, Oklahoma. Barbara LaPan Rahm interview with Earl Collins, published as “Earl Collins: Hoedown Fiddler Takes The Lead,” Program Book of the 1975 Smithsonian Institution Festival of American Folklife, reproduced in “The Films of Bess Lomax Hawes,” 33n5, see http://www.media-generation.com/DVD%20PAGES/Bess/master.pdf. See also Gough, “The Varied Carols I Hear,” 404–5.
concert in October 1937, in which she performed with her “fiddle band” and served as a judge for the proceedings.235

As a violin instructor, Buchanan was charged with the task of teaching the instrument and musicianship skills, particularly music reading, to underprivileged students and old-time fiddlers in the state. She also used her classes as a de facto field recording setup, where she notated the music of some of the fine fiddlers she taught. One of these fiddlers was W. S. Collins, a resident of Shawnee Oklahoma, the county seat of Pottawatomie County, where Buchanan taught.236 Collins’s son, Earl, who himself was a fine fiddler, remembered Buchanan’s style of teaching and her interactions with his father:

Miss Buchanan couldn’t even write [my father’s fiddle playing] he’d make so many notes that she couldn’t get them in there and she’d write it just the best she could. He had quit playing for about 25 or 30 years till that WPA project came along and he needed the money. You know, they paid those fellas, they got a check regular. [President] Roosevelt give them a check. They just played, dances or anything that come up. And Miss Buchanan taught them every day, this whole class of about 50 or 60 of them. Each of them, she’d tell them what it was going to be and she had her little motions, you know. And each one of them would turn to that page and she’d give—like Spade Cooley—one, two three, and everybody’d start. And they’d all play the same thing. Over and over. She taught them to read music, see. My father was the lead of the whole bunch. I’ll put him up at the top of the world. Not prejudiced because he was my father, but Clayton McMichen or Tanner or Eck Robertson, Georgia Slim—they couldn’t none of them beat him. In fact, I think he had them all topped.237

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235 Francis Flood to Dean Richardson, 25 October 1937, NARA RG 69 Records of the Work Projects Administration, Box 34, Entry 820, Folder “Oklahoma Folk Music.”
236 For more information on Earl Collins and his family line of fiddlers, see Drew Beisswenger and Gordon McCann, Ozarks Fiddle Music (New York: Mel Bay, 2011), 177.
Buchanan’s collection of fiddle tunes was rare among the WPA collection projects, and she herself recognized this fact, as evidenced by the opening of an article she wrote titled “‘Swing’ Time is Folk Time!” which she published in the July 1936 issue of the California FMP’s newsletter *The Baton*. Buchanan lauded Richardson’s courage and conviction for following through on a project that had been maligned at its outset: “When the Oklahoma Federal Music Project decided to make a record of the white folk-music of its state, it swept aside existing ideas about the field of folk-music with the same forthright spirit that its pioneers employed in overcoming odds and settling the state.” The “existing ideas” to which Buchanan referred were most certainly the notions about the types of folk music that were generally acceptable in the time period, namely the Anglo-American ballad tradition. But Buchanan was right in her assertion that the research was pioneering. Peter Gough noted that her collection, which in a contemporaneous report had been deemed “the only research of its kind ever made.” Herbert Halpert would record some fiddle tunes during his time in Mississippi, but otherwise few collectors deigned—or had the patience or musical transcription skills necessary—to notate the music.

Buchanan’s work piqued the interest of the president of the University of Oklahoma, and before long, the university’s press approached her about putting together a book based on her research. Gough states that, more than “four hundred copies of Oklahoma folk songs were prepared for publication,” including a set of

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238 Marian M. Buchanan, “‘Swing’ Time is Folk Time! As Revealed by Oklahoma’s Folk Music Research,” *The Baton* 1, no. 1 (July 1936), 4.
“125 fiddle tunes with historical notes and directions for the proper tunings of instruments.”240 (Her notoriety most certainly only grew with the radio show she hosted on the Norman, Oklahoma station WNAD, which she called “Hunting with Bow and Fiddle.”)241 Although there is no record that this University of Oklahoma Press publication was ever completed or issued, Buchanan’s article for The Baton encapsulates her sophisticated thinking about fiddle technique and tuning over the course of her years of fiddle music research. In addition to detailed discussions of tunings, phrasing, ornaments, drones, breaks, and a fiddler’s “swing,” Buchanan provided context to the fiddle tunes she encountered.242 She noted that, “all of the music was written down directly from the playing of the fiddler, with the exception of one group of tunes taken from recordings made in the mountains,” and that “studied as pure research, the great worth of the Oklahoma [FMP] collection of folk music lies in the fact that the music possesses very strong characteristics, due in part to the odd placing of embellishments, unusual phrasing, and a certain haunting tone-quality as a result of the particular tunings.”243 Buchanan concluded her article by doubling down on her assertion that fiddle music was as worthy of study as was ballads or other songs traditionally favored by collectors: “This collection is unique in that it concerns

240 Ibid., 405.
241 Ibid.
242 Buchanan compared a fiddler’s swing with swing music in the following manner: “It was found that, for the many ballads and songs which have been recorded over and over by other collectors, there is accompanying instrumental folk music—commonly known as fiddle music—and that every fiddler has his own version. In other words, that every fiddler has his own ‘swing’ to each ballad-tune. The only difference in this and our current ‘swing’ music being that while a dance musician might make a different ‘swing’ every time he plays a piece over, the fiddler usually confines himself to one or two set swings that he has evolved around the tune in the process of endless repetitions.” Buchanan, “‘Swing’ Time is Folk Time!” 4.
243 Ibid., 20.
itself with instrumental folk music rather than with folk singing and ballads, thus
opening up a vast new field in folk research.”

Although the Folk Music Research Project of the Oklahoma FMP ended on 31
November 1937, Buchanan continued her fiddle music collecting, and this article she
had written for The Baton seemingly lingered in her mind, for many of the statements
that she made in the article were reproduced nearly verbatim in a fiddle method she
put together over the next few decades titled The Fiddle Book: The Comprehensive
Book on American Folk Music, Fiddling, and Fiddle Styles Including More Than 150
Traditional Fiddle Tunes Compiled from Country Fiddlers, published by Oak
Publications in 1967.244 By this time she had changed her name to Marion Unger
Thede, and this fiddle method, which was one of the first of its kind ever published,
would become a classic in the field. Generations of fiddlers learned, and still learn,
from Thede’s book, much of which was collected during her brief time with the
Oklahoma FMP, although she never once mentions her involvement with the
project.245

244 Marion Unger Thede, The Fiddle Book: The Comprehensive Book on American Folk Music,
Fiddling, and Fiddle Styles Including More Than 150 Traditional Fiddle Tunes Compiled from
245 Thede lists her mother as Lena E. Draughon (1879–1985) in her dedication of The Fiddle Book. The
1920 census for Lena Draughon lists Marion as her daughter, aged sixteen, which would place her date
of birth in 1904. (The 1910 census lists Draughon as twenty-nine, widowed, and Marion as her six-
year-old daughter.) Buchanan’s Baton article and The Fiddle Book use almost identical language, e.g.,
her discussion of the classic tune “Dry and Dusty.” In The Baton she writes, “One of the most
interesting examples is called ‘Dry and Dusty,’ a weird folk fantasy, one part as wild and as freakish as
a western whirlwind, the other part both mournful and ludicrous in its swirl and drone” (4). In The
Fiddle Book she writes that “Dry and Dusty is a weird folk fantasy, one section as wild and freakish as
a whirlwind, and the other part both mournful and ludicrous in its skirl and drone” (48). There are
many other such instances to be found upon comparing the two sources.
CHAPTER 11.

The “Lady on Wheels”: Sidney Robertson’s California Folk Music Project, 1938–1940

Sidney Robertson’s California Folk Music Project, which ran from the spring of 1938 until the fall of 1940, was by far the most diverse of any of the Federal Music Project folk music research and collecting projects.\(^1\) In fact, it stands out among all of the folk music projects of the era, government sponsored or otherwise, as a concrete representation of the types of culturally pluralistic theories and metaphors of the New Deal era. She collected on 237 discs nearly thirty-five hours of music from more than 150 performers in a dozen different languages in communities throughout the Bay Area and the Central Valley. Additionally, Robertson and her twenty-person staff documented folk music and musicians in the state in myriad other ways, including taking 168 photographs of performers, instruments, and locations; preparing nearly fifty technical drawings and sketches of instruments; compiling a checklist of songs from within the state; producing a musicological study of melodic variants; and overseeing a Photostat copying project of California Mission music. The only WPA-sponsored folksong collecting project that was larger than Robertson’s was Herbert Halpert’s Southern States Recording Expedition for the WPA Joint Committee on Folk Arts in the summer of 1939, which yielded 418 1/2 discs, though Halpert’s trip

\(^1\) I refer to Sidney Robertson Cowell as Sidney Robertson throughout this study, despite her lifelong insistence that she be referred to by the Cowell surname. They did not marry until the fall of 1941 (27 September) and her U.S. government-related folksong projects all occurred before their marriage. See Joel Sachs, *Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 367–76.
had been painstakingly set up in advance.\(^2\) Robertson largely discovered all of her own informants during her two-and-a-half-year project.

At the time Robertson began her project, in the spring of 1938, there were few, if any, FMP projects devoted specifically to folk music research and collecting. Helen Chandler Ryan utilized folk music throughout the entirety of the New Mexico FMP’s existence, but she did so because traditional music turned out to be the only way she could sustain music education and performance programs in a state with little in the way of infrastructure for the types of “good” music the FMP generally promoted. Jerome Sage and her Mississippi FMP units resuscitated their folk music research project during the time of Robertson’s California project, but only because of their collaboration with the Mississippi FWP and because of Herbert Halpert’s trip to the state in the summer of 1939. One of the main reasons Robertson was able to sustain such a project was because she did not rely solely on sponsorship from the California FMP. She also enlisted support from the University of California, the Archive of American Folk Song, and various local sponsors. In so doing she was able to justify the cost of her project to the FMP, which at that time was on the verge of going through its major jurisdictional reorganization from federal to state sponsorship. This spreading out of sponsorship and resources also allowed Robertson to continue her project for some time after most Federal One projects foundered due to lack of federal funding.

\(^2\) This statement does not take into account the 300 discs recorded by Bee M. Barry for the Oklahoma FMP, which are unaccounted for at present.
If Robertson has been largely relegated in history books to the role of “Mrs. Henry Cowell” (which was, in part, her own doing, due to her insistence after her marriage to Cowell of devoting much of her life to his legacy), then her own musical education and knowledge (discussed below) is another glaringly overlooked area. Despite not being a performer or composer, few other folk music researchers and collectors of the era (with, perhaps, the exception of George Herzog and Charles Seeger) could boast as rich and distinguished musical education as could Robertson.

Sidney Robertson’s Early Years and Some Formative Musical Experiences

Sidney Robertson Cowell (1903–1992) was born Sidney William Hawkins in San Francisco on 2 June 1903, to a well-to-do family. Although her parents relocated to Dayton, Ohio, she remained in California, attending the Castilleja, a private boarding school in Palo Alto, for a year as an upper-school student from 1916–1917, then enrolling at the San Francisco Polytechnic High School, where she recalled she did well in theoretical courses, but did “poorly in shop classes.” She met Henry

3 Robertson’s parents were Charles Albert Hawkins and Mabel “Muz” Morrison. She was one of five children. Catherine Kerst notes that “her family appears to have been quite well off. As a child, Sidney was bright, articulate, and inquisitive. Her upbringing reflected an independent and rather unstructured, but open-minded educational philosophy, progressive in character, but definitely high-cultural in texture. She was given piano, violin, dancing, and elocution lessons from an early age. She had French tutors, riding and polo lessons, children’s cooking classes and more. From the ages of 10 to 14, Sidney accompanied her piano teacher each summer on “Cook’s Tours” of Europe. Sidney seems to have been present at many memorable early 20th century high cultural events and to have run into or met royalty and famous artists, authors, and musicians frequently. She claims to have attended the premiere of Stravinsky’s Sacre du Printemps in Paris. She was in Rome at the outbreak of World War I and in Paris when German troops moved into Belgium. And she wrote and spoke about her experiences with flair and in detail.” Catherine Hiebert Kerst, “A ‘Government Song Lady’ in Pursuit of Folksong: Sidney Robertson’s New Deal Field Documentation for the Resettlement Administration,” paper presented at the American Folklife Society meeting, Quebec City, Quebec, 18 October 2007, quoted in Deirdre Ni Chonghaile, “‘ag teacht le cuan’: Irish traditional music and the Aran Islands,” Ph.D. dissertation, National University of Ireland, Cork School of Music, 2010, 182.
Cowell for the first time in 1917 while a student at Castilleja, where Cowell gave a lecture.⁴ Her piano class supervisor, Elizabeth Bates, had Robertson play for Cowell around this time, in the hopes that Robertson might convince her parents to contribute to the support of Cowell’s career. Robertson also saw Cowell perform around this time (1916 or 1917). She recalled,

I probably found the intensity with which he dashed at the keyboard comic; but I would never have laughed aloud, as I was probably so absorbed with the effort to keep a straight face that I failed to remember much about the music. I had great respect for him, by contagion from college professors like the Sowards and the Termans; but like many people I seem to have found it impossible to listen to the music itself.⁵

In 1920, Robertson entered Stanford University, where she studied romance languages, and French in particular.⁶ During her sophomore year (1922–1923) she went as an exchange student to a girls’ lycée in Tours, France. She graduated from Stanford in 1924 with a B.A. in “Romanic” Languages and Philology. On 19 June 1924 she married Kenneth Robertson, and they moved that summer to Paris. While in France, the Robertsons frequented Sylvia Beach’s Shakespeare and Co. bookstore, which served as an important hub for American expatriates in the 1920s. There they met James Joyce, Gertrude Stein (who was a family friend of Sidney Robertson’s mother), Alice B. Toklas, and Henri Matisse, whom Robertson noted did not “treat her as merely a housewife.” In 1925, Kenneth Robertson went to study analytic

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⁴ Robertson and Cowell had also both been part of Louis Terman’s “gifted children” (though Cowell was six years her senior). Henry Cowell was one of Terman’s first students. Terman is perhaps best known for inventing the Stanford –Binet IQ Test. For more on Terman and Cowell, see Joel Sachs, Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 37–44.

⁵ Sidney Robertson Cowell, quoted in ibid., 367.

⁶ She noted in her autobiographical sketches that she was admitted “almost accidentally”—which may be due to Stanford’s quota for women at the time period. Ibid., 367.
psychology and psychiatry with Carl Jung in London and Zurich, and Sidney Robertson enrolled in the courses as well to act as interpreter for her husband. While in Paris, Sidney Robertson took classes at the École Normale de Musique, where she studied piano with Alfred Cortot and musicianship with composer Charles Koechlin. (Joel Sachs notes that Robertson was among the singers in the choir at Gabriel Fauré’s funeral for the performance of his Requiem.)

In 1926, Kenneth and Sidney Robertson ran into financial problems and were forced to return to California. Kenneth managed to receive a fellowship in psychology at Stanford, and Sidney worked for a time as a secretary in Stanford’s Geology Department. Not long thereafter Sidney took a job as the head of the music department of the Peninsula School in Menlo Park, which had been founded in 1925 by Josephine and Frank Duveneck and other wealthy local parents as a cooperative nonprofit school. It still exists to this day. Although the salary was half that of her job at Stanford, she enjoyed the work, staying at the position until 1932, when the effects of the Depression seriously hampered the school’s ability to operate with a full staff. For his part, Kenneth worked at a gas station to help make ends meet.

Robertson continued her musical education while back in California. In 1927, she began taking lessons in music theory and counterpoint with Ernest Bloch at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and she served as his assistant for the next three years. Bloch introduced her to music of the Netherlands, and to music in oral

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7 Ibid., 368.
8 Frank Duveneck also started the Loma Prieta Chapter of the Sierra Club in 1933, and the couple also founded “Friends Outside,” a support group for family members of incarcerated prisoners.
tradition, which spurred on her interest in folk music. She also studied with composer Charles Koechlin in Berkeley in 1929, while he was in residence at the University of California. Additionally, Robertson continued to see Henry Cowell lecture and perform during this period. On one occasion he performed at the Peninsula School in exchange for a bathtub that the school was planning to discard. She also heard him perform on numerous other occasions in Palo Alto, including an August 1930 performance of *The Building of Bamba*, as well as at a house concert, which was the first conversation she recalls having with him.  

She attended Cowell’s world music lectures in Carmel on two occasions.

Soon after she lost her job at the Peninsula School, Kenneth and Sidney Robertson divorced. She tried to stay afloat financially in California (her parents, too, were devastated by the Depression), taking a number of odd jobs in the area. After a couple of years of feeling that she was “living too ‘self-indulgent’ a life” among “the stifling world of wealthy California art lovers,” she decided to write to the Henry Street Settlement (HSS) in New York to see if they had any positions available.  

She was told that they had an opening for an organizer of “social music,” particularly for the elderly Jewish immigrants from Central Europe who lived in the community. Robertson jumped at the opportunity, and while in New York she once again attended

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11 Kerst, “The Ethnographic Experience.” The Henry Street Settlement, located in New York’s Lower East Side, was one of the first and most famous settlement homes in the United States, established to provide assistance and health care to immigrants and the less fortunate. Lillian Wald, a suffragist and pacifist, founded the settlement in 1893. The Henry Street Settlement was not affiliated directly with the Resettlement Administration of Roosevelt’s New Deal: [http://www.henrystreet.org/](http://www.henrystreet.org/).
Henry Cowell’s world music classes, this time at the New School for Social Research, where she also met John Cage.12

Sidney Robertson, Folk Music, and the Resettlement Administration (1936–1937)

Robertson’s first experiences with folk music in earnest came during her time working at the Peninsula School, when she made some of her first folksong transcriptions, from Mexican and white cowhands she met in the area. In an interview with Catherine Kerst (curator of the Sidney Robertson Cowell folk music collections at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress), Robertson recalled,

I had for some time been worrying [about] the question of folk song, like a dog with a bone, and particularly I was curious about American folk song: What was American about it? I knew only the Lomax ‘Cowboy Songs’ and a few tunes from my parents, but I had been so struck by the wild enthusiasm and persistence engendered among the youngsters at the Peninsula School by ‘Home on the Range’ that I was convinced there was some special affinity between the character of this song and the youngsters who went after it so hard.13

Early in 1936, while on vacation from her job at the Henry Street Settlement, Robertson went to Washington, D.C. to stay with friends. While there, she decided to visit the AAFS in order to inquire about the origins of some of the folksongs she had collected while working for the Peninsula School. She also met with Charles Seeger, who had recently accepted a position as music director of the Resettlement Administration’s Special Skills Division, directed by Adrian Dornbush. Although it is

13 Kerst, “The Ethnographic Experience.”
not clear whether Robertson and Seeger knew each other personally at this point, they
certainly had plenty of mutual acquaintances in California and New York. Seeger was
impressed with Robertson’s musical background and interest in folk music (and
certainly their mutual friends), and quickly offered her a position as his assistant. She
accepted and left her job at the Henry Street Settlement in New York to move to
Washington, D.C. Robertson later recalled,

I was the only person that he’d ever met who knew what a folksong was, and
understood what he wanted to do with it. I had been doing something like it at
the Henry Street Settlement House. … And when Charlie had such fascinating
things to suggest, going around with a machine and recording songs … I
couldn’t resist this.14

Without question, Robertson’s account leaves out the many people in Seeger’s life
who knew folk music intimately, including his wife Ruth Crawford and his many
friends and colleagues in New York and Washington, D.C. But her statement
underscores the excitement she felt, decades later, about the opportunity in front of
her to work for the government recording folksongs.

Seeger suggested that Robertson learn about recording songs in the field with
two collectors who had plenty of experience: John A. Lomax (1867–1948), and Frank
C. Brown (1870–1943), English professor at the University of North Carolina. Lomax
and Brown had been planning a two-week field-recording trip to western North
Carolina, and Robertson came aboard as Lomax’s “apprentice… to be of whatever
use to him I could bring during the two weeks.” In addition to driving, lugging

14 Sidney Robertson Cowell, interview with Peter Goldsmith, 3 January 1992 (Shady, New York),
Sidney Robertson Cowell Collection, Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections, Smithsonian
Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, quoted in Ni Chonghaile, “‘ag teacht le cuan,’” 187.
equipment, and helping set up recording sessions, Robertson took detailed field notes on the performers, the music, and the locations they visited. For his part, Lomax “made every effort to divorce himself from the machinery so I could have a shot at it.”

Robertson noted her two main objectives in the lengthy, confidential report she submitted (most likely to Dornbush, as Seeger is referred to in the third person):

a) To get training and experience in running the recording machine and in the rough-and-tumble of folksong collecting under the wing of a veteran in the field, John A. Lomax; and
b) To get training and experience in contacts with what I had been led to believe were difficult and strange folk: the mountain people.

Robertson’s secondary tasks included evaluating Brown’s collection of folklore and music and “the possibility of establishing such relations with him as would facilitate desirable exchange of material [with the RA’s Special Skills Division]” and finding material that would be useful to a proposed RA songbook to be used in the resettlement communities’ music programs.

The trio of folksong collectors must have been quite a spectacle. Robertson, who was half the age of these two luminaries (Robertson was 33; Lomax, 68; and Brown, 65), spent much of her time attempting to avoid the minefield of potentially wounded egos. “We must have trod on Dr. Brown’s toes many times without

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16 Ibid., 1.
knowing it,” Robertson stated in her report. “For instance Mrs. Brown said to me ‘It just tickles me ’most to death to hear Dr. Lomax call my husband Mr. Brown.” (Brown had a Ph.D. [University of Chicago, 1908]; Lomax did not.)

Placating opinionated sexagenarians was only part of Robertson’s sub-duties. She also had to establish herself quickly as a person worthy of their respect, and being a woman was initially a red flag, at least for Lomax. “Once Mr. Lomax recovered from the notion that a woman is a fragile thing, to be waited on hand and foot,” Robertson noted in her field report, “I was able to relieve him with the driving and the recording and lugging odds and ends about, recharging batteries, etc.” And their long working hours suited her fine: “As to the rough-and-tumble, I survived two days of fourteen hours each and one of seventeen [hours].” But convincing Lomax and Brown that she was up to the task was one matter, being accepted by the people whose music she collected was another. She wrote in her report that “I was several times glad I had left my cigarette case and lipstick at home!” and added that she was glad that she could “claim a parent from Louisiana and residence in Old Virginia.”

Robertson’s gender (and race) was also a concern when she and Lomax went to the all-black state prison camp in Boone, NC on 18 July. Brown stayed behind, at least for a time. According to Robertson, Brown, who “wasn’t really interested in Negro songs at all,” apparently “got to thinking it over … and arrived two hours late, unable to bear the thought that we might get something he did not have, no matter how irrelevant to his real interest.” Lomax asked the warden—a man named “Captain

17 Ibid., 1.
18 Ibid., 1.
Brown,” whom Robertson described as “a jovial-appearing man who made a point of going unarmed among the Negro convicts (though an armed guard was, of course, never very far away)”—in advance of their arrival whether it would be appropriate for Robertson, a white woman, to be in the company of African American male prison inmates. “If you’re going to bring a lady,” the warden replied, “don’t come until after three o’clock so I can make everybody take a bath.” 19 (Robertson noted in her report that she “heard later that this Boone camp has rated No. 1 for cleanliness in the state of North Carolina.”)

If there had been anxiety regarding Robertson’s presence in the prison, Lomax didn’t help matters much. Lomax introduced her, in a particularly disturbing manner, as “a ‘lady from up Nawth, where they think every man in the road-gangs is in chains and that we treat all nigras like dogs.” But otherwise, the overall the experience went smoothly for the song collectors. Robertson described the afternoon in her report:

So I had a lively afternoon, with Captain Brown constantly arranging small dramas in the hope of tinting my spectacles rose. There was also a young [male] teacher from the Appalachian State Teachers’ College who had come to hear the recording and who had the idea that any female who went inside a prison wall was after whatever sensation she could find. So he told me one lurid tale after another, cancelling out Captain Brown’s bits of information as fast as they were presented, with the best will in the world. Where the truth lay, exactly, between the two extremes, I could not venture to stay. 20

Age, gender, and upbringing aside, the three collectors each had considerably different opinions as to what music was worth collecting. Brown wanted old white ballads. Lomax wanted pure, unadulterated African American work songs and blues.

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19 Sidney Robertson, “Recording at the State Prison Camp at Boone, N.C.” Sidney Robertson Cowell Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Box 6, Folder 2 “Field Notes.”
Robertson described Brown as being “under a compulsion to seize upon everything in sight,” though she believed “this habit will of course make his collection far more valuable scientifically in the long run, than if he were more selective.” Lomax, however, was far more selective: “Mr. Lomax has seen one thing [that interested him], a lullaby, from [Brown’s collection], in all this time,” she wrote in her report. But despite Brown’s penchant for not weeding as he collected folk music, he did have a clear vision of the types of ballads he sought. Robertson noted, “Dr. Brown was preoccupied with the oldest members of the community.” Robertson, on the other hand, was not after “the remote or esoteric” ballads sung by the community’s elders. She wanted “current songs” that were “actively sung,” but she reported that her “interest in the younger generation’s singing and dancing was frowned on [by Brown and Lomax] as irrelevant and a waste of precious time.” “Only twice did I have the opportunity to inquire whether there were anyone making up songs in the neighborhood, and the answer was ‘no’ both times.”

Two points stand out from this portion of Robertson’s report. First, the idea of recording as much as possible without editing became a modus operandi for Robertson in her later collection trips, particularly in California. Although such an indiscriminate approach had the potential to yield recordings other folk music researchers might find undesirable, Robertson did not feel that it was her concern to make such judgment calls. Second, Robertson’s interest in “current” folksongs was another thread that ran through her other folksong collecting trips. Although recently

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21 Ibid., 2.
22 Ibid., 2.
written and “actively sung” folksongs—ones that did not have the canonical patina that made ballad scholars salivate—might have been considered unworthy specimens by the same folk music researchers. But Robertson’s definition of folksong did not have a time stamp attached to it. Rather, she was concerned with the process of folksong creation and dissemination more than with finding versions and variants of the Child ballad tunes.

On Wednesday 22 July, Lomax and Robertson headed to Asheville for Bascom Lamar Lunsford’s Mountain Dance Contest and Mountain Music Festival. “At five o’clock we parted with Dr. Brown,” Robertson wrote in her field report, “who was good enough to say he was sorry we were going—it was probably 80 percent true. Mr. Lomax and I started for Asheville, after a lengthy exchange of compliments.” Indeed, if Lomax had any reservations about Robertson’s qualifications as a folk music collector, they were gone by the end of the trip. Robertson noted,

Mr. Lomax offered to leave his recording machine for my use at Asheville, to be crated to him at Chattanooga later. But I thought it was unlikely that any circumstance would arise which would not allow us to use our regular AC current equipment, and refused. I was, however, pleased to find that Mr. Lomax considered I had graduated from my two-weeks’ course of instruction in handling the machine.23

Upon arriving in Asheville the next day, they met Lunsford and Lomax showed Robertson around some of the FWP folklore papers in the local office (he was serving at that time as national folklore editor for the FWP). Charles and Ruth Seeger arrived

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with their children in tow in preparation for the weekend’s festivities.²⁴ Pete Seeger would later describe this festival as the moment in which he had his first hands-on experiences with the five-string banjo. He purchased an instrument from Samantha Bumgarner while there, and Lunsford gave him some private lessons.²⁵

Robertson, it turned out, would not need either Lomax’s or her own machine during the festival. Walter Garwick, the inventor of the instantaneous disc recording machine that Robertson had been using with the RA, was there with his own machine, recording the festival for Columbia University. “Mr. Lunsford was reluctant to have the complication of two machines to bother with,” and Seeger “decided that more was to be gained by watching Mr. Garwick, who very amiably taught us what he could as he went along.”²⁶ Robertson described Garwick as “the most skillful collector I have observed, both with the machine, the ‘artists’ and the surrounding crowd.” She noted however, that Lunsford was concerned with potential “appearances of commercialism,” which she felt were justified given Garwick’s demeanor. Moreover, she reported that “most of the performers had to be told several times that [he] was not making records for commercial production. Even then I think most of them thought they were being tricked somehow.”²⁷

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²⁴ Pete Seeger told FMP historian Peter Gough that Robertson babysat the Seeger children during the festival. Email correspondence from Peter Gough, 18 March 2015. His information comes from phone conversations he had with Seeger, which are published in part in his book Sounds of the New Deal: The Federal Music Project in the West (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).


²⁷ Ibid., 2.
Robertson returned to Washington, D.C. that Sunday the 26th of July, and busied herself for the next few days making transcriptions of her field notes, checking the songs she found against published sources, and typing up her report for Dornbush. The trip had been a success, and she was eager to continue collecting folksongs under the auspices of the RA. Robertson would not have to wait long, as she was back in the field “with around 400 lbs. of recording machinery in four large cases” by November 1936.\(^{28}\) She traveled throughout the Ozarks and Appalachians, through Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, and Arkansas over the course of the next six weeks, recording musicians she found along the way.

One highlight of the trip came in late December 1936, when Robertson traveled to the small town of Mena, Arkansas, in the Ouachita Mountains of west central Arkansas to visit a blind septuagenarian folk singer named Emma Dusenbury (1862–1941). Although Dusenbury was largely unknown to outsiders, among folksong collectors she represented a veritable treasure trove of old ballads. (Dusenbury had received a slight bit of fame in the summer of 1936, when she sang at the state’s centennial celebration in Little Rock.)\(^{29}\) Renowned Arkansas poet John Gould Fletcher (1886–1950), who had won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1938, wrote rapturously about Dusenbury in his history of the state, titled simply *Arkansas*.\(^{30}\) Fletcher’s colleague, folksong collector Vance Randolph, collected ballad

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\(^{28}\) Letter from Sidney Robertson to Isabel Morse Jones, 29 March 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.


texts from her in the early 1930s, six of which he published in his collection *Ozark Folksongs*. And composer and former director of the Little Rock Symphony Orchestra, Laurence Powell (who would later be hired as a worker for the RA’s Special Skills Division and subsequently accept the position of state supervisor of the musical performance units of the Michigan FMP), transcribed a number of her ballads. In August 1936, with Powell as his liaison, John A. Lomax, recorded more than eighty songs from Dusenbury, whom he noted sang “almost continuously” over the course of his two days with her. Lomax wrote in his autobiography *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, that Dusenbury knew the greatest number of Child ballads “ever recorded by one person, so far as I know.” Robertson recorded nearly fifty more songs by Dusenbury, which she sent along to the AAFS.

The following summer, beginning in May 1937, Robertson was back on the road, this time in Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. She was transferred to the RA division in the upper Midwest and made her home there for the next six months (until late October). She collected folk music at every opportunity, including at the Fourth National Folk Festival in Chicago that May, in Ortonville, Iowa that July, and in Minnesota in August. While living in Wisconsin, she recorded a number of songs from local residents, including the Walker-Ford family,

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34 Robertson went to the Chicago festival under the auspices of Marjorie Edgar, a folksong collector in Minnesota with whom she had worked closely, and whose advice Robertson later asked while planning her own California folk music project. In Ortonville, Iowa, Robertson recorded dulcimer music by a performer named Thomas Mann, and in Minnesota she Finnish, Swedish, Serbian, Gaelic and Anglo-American folksongs.
whom she would later record as part of her California Folk Music Project (some of
the family members relocated to California to work on the Shasta Dam project). 35

The End of the Resettlement Administration and a Nationwide Folk Music
Survey

Robertson’s position with the Resettlement Administration ended in early
November 1937, because of a governmental reorganization of the program that
transferred most of the RA programs into the newly created Farm Security
Administration. 36 Although Robertson was not certain whether she would continue to
have a job or not—she had been told that the revocation of her termination had been
requested—she had been preparing for life after the RA. She had been staying with
her friends the Duvenecks (her employers at the Peninsula School) at their 1400-acre
cooperative farm named “Hidden Villa,” located near Los Altos in the Santa Cruz
Mountains. 37

On 9 November, Robertson wrote Harold Spivacke at the Library of Congress
a lengthy confidential letter telling him that she was addressing him “with

35 Robertson recorded Robert Walker in Crandon, Wisconsin in July of 1937 (AFC–SRC 1940/001). Members of this family later moved to California and were central to Robertson’s California folk music project. Some of the recordings that she made of their songs while she was at the RA were included in her California folk music project for the WPA, particularly those songs that referenced California in the lyrics, or were written there, as well as their performances of dulcimer music, which she was afraid would not be represented in her collection.

36 On 22 July 1937, Congress passed the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act, which allowed for the federal government to purchase lands throughout the nation that had been damaged by drought and neglect. The act also provided some government subsidies to farmers to purchase land. During the same period, Congress passed the Farm Security Act, which created the Farm Security Administration. The RA was absorbed into this new organization.

37 Frank and Josephine Duveneck founded the Hidden Villa Ranch, a 1400-acre organic farm, youth hostel, and wilderness preserve, in 1923. It still exists to this day. See www.hiddenvilla.org.
considerable trepidation of spirit because it is impossible for me to be sure whether I’ve done the A of A-F-S [Archive of American Folk Song] a good turn or a bad one.”

Her anxiety stemmed from a meeting she had just had with Ray L. Wilbur, Stanford University president and former Secretary of Interior. Robertson had gone to the Registrar’s Office of her alma mater to inquire about Guggenheim Fellowships for the following year. Although the 15 October deadline for the awards had already passed, she was eventually passed along to Wilbur’s secretary for further suggestions, and subsequently to Wilbur himself. (Wilbur was on the board for the Rockefeller Foundation, and had knowledge of grant-giving practices.)

After explaining to Wilbur the kinds of folksong collecting Robertson had done while with the RA, and the type of project she hoped to start—a nationwide folk music collecting project—she casually mentioned that “the only field in which recording had been consistently undertaken over a long period of time and really adequately handled was the Indian, under the Bureau of Ethnology and the Indian Bureau.” The Bureau of Indian Affairs was part of the Interior Department, and this fact piqued Wilbur’s interest. He told Robertson he had heard about a similar folk

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38 Sidney Robertson to Harold Spivaucke, 9 November 1937, AFC Folder “Alan Lomax Correspondence–1937, November,” 1.
39 Wilbur became Stanford University president in 1916, and continued in the position even while working as Secretary of Interior under Herbert Hoover from 1929 to 1933. (It was not the first time Wilbur held positions in addition to his Stanford job; he served as president of the American Medical Association from 1923 to 1924.) “Memorial Resolution: Ray Lyman Wilbur, (d. 1949),” Stanford Historical Society, http://historicalsociety.stanford.edu/pdfmem/WilburRL.pdf.
40 Robertson noted that “talking to Ray Lyman Wilbur is not my idea of an amusing or even pleasant way of spending 15 minutes” because the last time she spoke with him “12 or 14 years ago” soon after she graduated. She tried to clear up a check-forging scandal that happened while she was in France (apparently a “neurotic woman” had gotten a hold of her checkbook and had been writing bad checks on her account, and she had to approach Wilbur to help clear her name. This financial situation was part of the reason that she and Kenneth had to return to the United States).
music project at the University of North Carolina through his colleague Julius Rosenwald, although Wilbur paid the information little mind, as he had scant interest in folk music. What Wilbur knew about “the folk” was strictly through his capacity as Secretary of Interior. He had helped establish the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, and was struck with the quality of the people, apparent despite the squalor of their surroundings.” “Imagine my utter astonishment,” she told Spivacke, “when [Wilbur] said, ‘Well, I’m leaving Sunday for the annual meeting of trustees of all of the foundations’ (where the field for the following year is surveyed and divided up to avoid duplication…), ‘and if you can get a memorandum in here to me [the], day after tomorrow, I will be glad to present it.’”

Robertson raced to put together a proposal and passed it by Josephine Duveneck whom Robertson described as “luckily a person who has frequently in the past been in a position to give away a good deal of money.” In two days she had the proposal ready and gave it to Wilbur. She was not, however, able to notify Spivacke, whom she listed as her primary sponsor for the project. “I thought about telegraphing you,” Robertson told him, “or even telephoning you, but dispaired [sic] of making myself understood by wire, and I am too poor to telephone Washington lightly.” She told Spivacke that the figure that she and Duveneck had come up with for the project was $50,000 (approximately $833,500 in 2015). She justified the amount to Spivacke, noting,

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41 Sidney Robertson to Harold Spivacke, 9 November 1937, AFC Folder “Alan Lomax Correspondence–1937, November,” 2.
I suspect my figures are a little high, but if so, and any real interest is shown, that will put you in the pleasant position of being able to reduce them, which is all to the good. I was also advised against requesting a small fund to tackle my own interests alone. … Moreover, in order to justify a small request I was going to have to present just as complete a picture as to justify a larger, more general project. … I didn’t know whether $50,000 [was] going to seem so high as to be ridiculous in proportion to other requests, but all I could do was present my reasoning, which I still think is good.\footnote{Ibid., 3–4.}

She had tailored her proposal specifically with Rosenwald in mind, “with the idea that he would be likely to consult musicians among his friends.”\footnote{Ibid., 4.}

Robertson’s other reason for feeling “trepidation” about her proposal was because she essentially cut Charles Seeger out of the loop. Seeger, she told Spivacke, “had made a very similar overture to the foundations” about his “dream of an enormous [folksong collecting] undertaking with himself at the head of it” but had been “discouraged rather pointedly.” She told Spivacke that her first inclination was “to send [Seeger] a copy [of the proposal]; but he would have been mortally offended by my failure to mention him.” Moreover, she felt she was a better person to conduct such a nationwide survey because “what the situation [calls] for [is] an informal and picturesque presentation rather than the scholarly one which nobody can do better than Charlie.”

Robertson had for some time been distancing herself from Seeger. Although she appreciated his friendship and all that he had done for her, she felt that he was smothering her own work. Moreover, she accused him on numerous occasions of taking credit for work that she herself did. As of March 1937, Robertson noted she
had been “removed from under [Seeger’s] wing” so that she could “do a much
broader job not centered around music exclusively” in the resettlement communities.

By August of that year she was no longer on the Seeger’s Washington payroll, but
rather she was paid through the Milwaukee RA office. Separating herself from Seeger
during her time with the RA was liberating for Robertson, and she felt there was
“certainly no impropriety in my assuming I am free to have a mind of my own.”
She went into “indiscreet” (as she called it) detail about her feelings toward Seeger in this
letter to Spivacke:

I feel this the more clearly as the recording I have done, while applauded by
[Seeger] beforehand in principle, was never supported by his backing and assistance when it came to the point. He even avoided discussing the plan for
my first trip [with Lomax and Brown] and tried to stop it the day I was to
leave. When I went out to Region II [upper Midwest] he informed me it was
too bad that, since I was no longer working for the Music Unit, I couldn’t do
any more recording. Fortunately in both instances, Mr. Dornbush and Mr. Van
Hyning had a different idea. … I am endlessly in his [Seeger’s] debt in all
sorts of ways, for I learned much from him, and continue to do so, and am
besides very fond of all the Seegers. As long as I was in the office I was his
assistant, and no two ways about it. But in the field I was turned loose,
entirely on my own, because there were more considerations than musical
ones involved in the recording; and his recent assumption that I have been
“ghosting” for him is a quite mistaken one.

Robertson assured Spivacke that she already had many informants lined up
both in the upper Midwest and in California. In addition to the “lumberjacks” she still
had “very much at heart,” she told Spivacke of the contact that Henry Cowell had told
her about, including a

Tahitian group near San Francisco, a Korean group, lots of Icelanders; also a
member of the royal family of Hawaii who was taught some of the ceremonial

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44 Ibid., 2.
45 Ibid., 2.
chants known only to the royal family and which she will be glad to record. He had been nursing these people along and they were just ‘ripe’ [to record], he said, when he was interrupted. [Cowell had been in San Quentin on a morals charge since July 1936.]\(^{46}\)

Money, however, was Robertson’s primary concern. “I am endlessly in debt,” she confessed. She asked Spivacke “where am I to get blanks and a little travel allowance?” Her home state of California would be an easier leg of the nationwide trip because she could “either camp or stop with friends, but even so, needs must buy gas, etc., and shoes … tires I mean.”\(^{47}\)

**Sidney Robertson’s California Folk Music Project Materializes**

The Rosenwald Foundation grant never materialized, so Robertson approached another former Stanford colleague, Luther Evans, of Federal One’s Historical Records Survey. Evans suggested that she contact the WPA for possible funding and put her in contact with Dr. James B. Sharp, a former instructor in philosophy at Stanford and current Coordinator of Statistical Projects for the WPA in Northern California.\(^{48}\) It was Sharp who suggested that Robertson rein in her

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\(^{46}\) Cowell also instructed her to contact Gerald Strang in Los Angeles, who was keeping Cowell’s New Music Society afloat while Cowell was in prison, about Cowell’s disc recording machine, which was in Strang’s possession. Strang offered to give Robertson twenty blank discs for the purposes of recording Asian music. Robertson told Spivacke in this latter that once she had recorded some music and had made transcription of thei discs, that she planned to enlist the help of either Ernest Bloch (upon his probable arrival in California) or Henry Eichheim in checking any folksong transcriptions she made. Letter from Sidney Robertson to Harold Spivacke, 9 November 1937, 5. For more information about Cowell’s prison sentence, see Michael Hicks, “The Imprisonment of Henry Cowell,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 44/1 (1991): 92–119.

\(^{47}\) Sidney Robertson to Harold Spivacke, 9 November 1937, 5.

\(^{48}\) Kerst, “The WPA California Music Project,” AFC–SRC 1940/001. (See also Catherine Hiebert Kerst, “Sidney Robertson and the WPA Northern California Folk Music Project,” *Sonneck Society Bulletin* 20, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 5–9.) Sharp had encouraged other California music projects as well—
ambitions and focus on California. By limiting her project to California, Sharp could place it under the aegis of the California FMP, but to qualify as a WPA project, Robertson would need to keep a staff of at least twenty WPA relief workers busy. (At first, Robertson was at a loss about what these staff members would actually do for the project, but before long she found ample tasks for her staff.) Robertson agreed to Sharp’s offer and began a letter-writing campaign to get endorsements from people such as George Herzog, Charles Seeger, Adrian Dornbush, and others with whom she had worked.

In a letter to Seeger in early February 1938, Robertson outlined her vision for the “California” folk music project, though she acknowledged that because the WPA in California was divided into a northern and southern region, she would have to focus largely on Northern California:

The description of the project is still in a state of flux, but it reads thus at present:

1) To collect ballads and popular folk music and songs found in northern California with alternative versions and airs;
2) To prepare an annotated bibliographical reference index of this material; (I showed him the [AAFS] one);
3) To prepare historical notes relative to these collections. (I want to add “genealogical notes” to this; Phillips Barry’s book emphasizes the importance of this.)

We can include a reasonably good music copyist, I am told, among the 20. Unfortunately Northern and Southern [California] have administratively split into two separate states [that is, in terms of WPA administrative regions], so we have to omit southern Calif. But northern Calif. extends as far south as

particularly a history of music in San Francisco series spearheaded by Cornel Lengyel, a member of the Writers’ Project who had worked closely with the FMP. According to Lengyel, Sharp was in charge of approximately three hundred WPA research and cultural projects and was able to present new programs to Harry Hopkins and other officials in Washington for federal funding. Sharp personally suggested that Lengyel undertake this San Francisco history study. Cornel A. Lengyel, Selections from Memoirs: A Clockmaker’s Boy, Part One: 1915–1945, unpublished manuscript, San Francisco Public Library, 251.
Bakersfield and the Arvin Migratory Labor camp! and with Gerald Strang and Eleanor Hague in southern Calif. and interested, we can probably sneak anything across the arbitrary line that we particularly want to include.\(^49\)

But Sharp’s WPA support would cover only half of her project’s expenses. As a work-relief project, the WPA was not responsible for providing all of the other resources Robertson would need to launch her project, including recording equipment, supplies, and a space in which she and her staff could work. Robertson, with all of her signature persistence, approached a number of different parties to fulfill these needs. She pitched her new project to Spivacke at the Library of Congress, who was initially interested, but had little to give in terms of resources. He wanted to wait to make a decision until after Robertson had more sponsors in tow. On 21 February 1938, she wrote Albert Elkus, head of the music department of the University of California regarding UC sponsorship for her project, with the offer that any recordings she made would be used to build an archive of California folk music at the university. That same month she wrote her former RA boss Adrian Dornbush, now of the Farm Security Administration, inquiring about a number of items she needed: a disc-cutting machine for duplicating discs, blank discs, office furniture, and various other supplies. Robertson also enlisted the support of numerous smaller local organizations, including the Society of California Pioneers; the State Historical Society; the National Federation of Women’s Clubs (which had folksong collecting

\(^49\) Robertson to Seeger, 1 February 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
as one of its national projects for the year); the California Club; the Bohemian Club; and the National Broadcasting Company and Oakland Public Schools.\textsuperscript{50}

Spivacke was the first of the potential sponsors to say “yes” to Robertson’s project. On 5 April, he wrote her a letter confirming the Library of Congress’s support, which outlined what he and the AAFS were prepared to offer:

1. To guide the workers in indexing any material which they may accumulate.
2. To supply 200 acetate discs to be used in recording folk-songs. The finished records will become the property of the Library. (Should additional discs be required, they will have to be applied for separately)
3. To make these records available for duplication.
4. To supply blank catalog cards for indexes which then completed, will revert to the Library.\textsuperscript{51}

Robertson would have to wait for support from the University of California and the WPA, however, so she took her recently purchased “baby” Presto recording machine into the field soon after Spivacke gave his blessing.\textsuperscript{52} She recorded some Spanish hymns by the choristers of St. Anthony’s church in Santa Barbara on 3 March; some Icelandic songs from John Olafson, Sigurd Benonys, and Oddrun Sigurasson in San Francisco on 25 May; and the following day made her first recordings of Croatian musician John Botica in Mountain View, who played the lirica (or lijerica, a small three-stringed, pear-shaped fiddle) and misnice (or mišnjice, a “Dalmatian” goatskin bagpipe).

\textsuperscript{50} The National Federation of Women’s Clubs was featuring folk music collecting as one of its national projects for the year.
\textsuperscript{51} Letter from Harold Spivacke to Sidney Robertson, 5 April 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
\textsuperscript{52} This Presto machine apparently came from an insurance settlement that Robertson mentioned to Seeger in a letter dated 13 February 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
Elkus could not confirm support from the university until June 1938. He agreed to fund all non–WPA related expenses (including an office at 2108 Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley) with money he had requested from the State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA). Robertson outlined the extent of this funding in a letter to Herbert Halpert in August 1938: “Our sponsor's funds come from the State Relief Administration via the University of California—money turned over to the University for use on this project at the rate of $7.50 per man [per] month; ergo, $150 per month.”\(^{53}\) Robertson agreed to provide the university with copies of all of the recordings and to list the university as a joint publisher on any materials she produced.

Once the university was on board, Robertson submitted her proposal to the WPA, and waited the requisite thirty days for new-project approval. The WPA would provide a supervisor’s salary of up to $150 per month, provided Robertson kept twenty people employed. But the WPA funding agreement stipulated that only supervisors [Robertson] could use the money for travel, so it would be up to her to undertake any recording trips outside of the Bay Area.\(^{54}\) There still was the matter of figuring out adequate jobs for twenty people to sustain the support of the WPA. She was well aware that the WPA officials were “increasingly unwilling to allow its workers to be kept at ‘busy work,’” which, she said, seemed “attractive in itself at the

\(^{53}\) Robertson noted that the SERA funds were “about twice what I was requesting,” but stated, “SRA not unnaturally prefers this to paying $21 or so per man month on relief; but the joker is that none of this money can be used for travel by someone not on SRA staff. WPA is giving me a trifle of travel money by a comic process which consists of adding $11 to my salary and then subtracting $30 for a travel allowance so I'll have to hunt up a trifle more somewhere.” Letter from Sidney Robertson to Herbert Halpert, 1 August 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.

\(^{54}\) Letter from Sidney Robertson to Charles Seeger, 13 February 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
moment, [but] fails to meet established standards in its field.”

She reached out to a number of people, including Seeger, Alan Lomax, and Gerald Strang, for suggestions. Given the trajectory of her project, it seems that she followed Strang’s advice most closely:

Take your 20 WPA workers. Some can be used for research, some for collecting and comparing texts, some for dubbing, etc. You'll need an office assistant, at least a couple of stenographers, a couple of bibliographers, a technician or two, at least five researchers into the historical, racial, and musical backgrounds of the communities in which you work; and after you begin to get the records coming in, several analysts to extract and classify the texts, the tunes, the instruments. Then these will have to be compared with available published material, and if possible with other collected material by correspondence. If you can get yourself a good research director, he or she can keep the staff busy enough.  

Robertson began putting her staff together as soon as the WPA approved her project in July 1938. She hired Alice Lemos Avila, who, according to Robertson, “as a child learned many folk songs in the Azores at the suggestion of her father.” Avila performed and catalogued many of the Portuguese songs from the Azores included in the collection. Robertson also hired a Mr. Devere, who was able to find her a number of contacts in Contra Costa County through his dairy route (his other job). Rounding out her twenty-person staff were WPA photographers J. L. Hall and John Bateman, WPA draftsmen Joseph H. Handon, and a Mr. G. McCarthy, and a collection of unnamed clerical workers.

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55 Letter from Sidney Robertson to Alan Lomax, 14 February 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
56 Gerald Strang to Sidney Robertson, 21 February 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
59 The Photostat was an early projection copier made by the Photostat Corporation, an affiliate of Eastman-Kodak that utilized a large camera and developing machine to create prints on large rolls of
Robertson’s most prized employee, however, was Armenian-born musicologist Sirvart Poladian (1902–1970). Albert Elkus and Edward Lawton introduced Robertson and Poladian, who had recently graduated from the music department at the University of California (B.A., 1935; M.A. 1937). Poladian had also worked with George Herzog for a time in New York while researching her master’s thesis on Armenian folk music titled “The Folk Songs of Asia Minor” (later published as *Armenian Folk Songs* by the UC Press). Poladian was not only able to secure Armenian folk musicians for Robertson to record, but she also was perfectly suited for the type of melodic classification studies that Robertson had hoped to include in her project. Robertson described her to Spivacke in March 1938: “By a lucky accident I found a young woman who has just gone onto WPA here, who worked in New York under Herzog for a while doing an elaborate index of cowboy songs; she has had some training and experience as a librarian also, and I hope to use her as my assistant in charge of the project during my necessary absences in the field.”

**Defining a “California” Folksong**

One of Robertson’s biggest problems when devising her project and pitching it to sponsors was describing the types of folk music that were particularly “Californian.” When she wrote Seeger in early February seeking his letter of

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61 Sidney Robertson to Harold Spivacke, 5 March 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
recommendation, she admitted that she was not entirely certain what sorts of music that she might find, and told him to be vague when he described her project:

Please don’t use the term American traditional music because I am trying to keep the project description broad enough to include Henry’s Koreans, Icelanders, etc., and our Basques. Local clubs sponsoring are not crazy about “foreigners,” though, so I am leaving out the word “American” everywhere and hope not to get caught at it!  

Robertson had been similarly noncommittal about the types of music she planned to record when describing the project to WPA coordinator James Sharp, but Sharp had been encouraging about keeping the project broad:

Sharp was swell, when I said that of course it was difficult not to find an Iowan or an Oklahoman every time you scratch a California singer; and that there were a number of difficulties of definition you get into as soon as you start arguing as to what is “American” folk music. “What do we care?” he said. “All we're interested to know is that such and such a song was sung within the borders of northern California, Anno Domini 1938.”

She told Seeger that she knew that she would have to “play up” music that was typically seen as originating in the state—the music of the “pioneers” and “Forty-Niners”—but noted that that sort of research would “have to be done from books and contemporaneous diaries and letters for the most part.”

In September 1938, just as her project was gaining steam (it would open officially on 26 October), Robertson wrote an article for the San Francisco Chronicle, published in two installments on 4 and 11 September, titled “The Songs of a Nation Collect Forgotten Claim,” and “The Spirit of a Generation Reflected in Folk Songs.”

She situated California folk music within the broader interest in folk music that had

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63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
been growing in the United States throughout the decade. “Because our history in California is yet so young,” she wrote, “we are far more aware of our roads, our dams, our crops and our bridges than we are of those intangible accretions that have built up our modes of thought and of living.”65 She addressed the various traditions within California, the songs’ origins in other countries, and the migration of both the settlers and their songs to the western United States, all the while keeping any definition of a “California” folksong vague. Robertson may have intended these articles to act as a means by which to drum up interest in her project, or to draw potential performers out of the woodwork.66

**Robertson’s Goals for the California Folk Music Project**

Robertson had grand expectations for her project in the planning stages. In addition to soliciting endorsements from Seeger, Alan Lomax, George Herzog, and others, she also asked their advice on what to record and how to approach her fieldwork. She wanted to keep her project as wide ranging as possible, but she also wanted to avoid the kinds of surface-level collecting that she felt plagued her time with the RA. “I envy Alan [Lomax] so much the opportunity to dig in as deeply as he likes in one community,” Robertson told Spivacke in November 1937. “I got awfully tired of skimming the surface as I did. It was a priceless experience for a while, but

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65 Sidney Robertson, “The Songs of a Nation Collect Forgotten Claim,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 September 1938, This World section, 26.
66 Additionally, each article concluded with a stanza or two from various folksongs, such as the Child ballad, “Lord Thomas and Fair Annet.”
enough is enough already yet.” She was conflicted about these RA recording trips, and in particular, Seeger’s expectations of them. She wrote Cowell in San Quentin in September 1938 a detailed exegesis of her time recording under Seeger:

You know Charlie was never reconciled to the fact that when I was recording for Special Skills I was sampling, and always in a rush, partly because there was so much ground to cover but chiefly because if the collecting was too long drawn out so that the per-record cost hit the ceiling, the recording would be stopped. He was always distressed because I didn’t get the complete body of information about singers and instruments that would constitute solid research material, and as he never had any conception of the limitations of singers’ strength, nor the comparatively short span of their interest and their quick suspicion of too prompt and definite questioning, I don’t think he ever was convinced that I was anything but a very sloppy worker. If you can hang around for days or weeks you can gather a lot of information, much of which you want; and if you can hang around even longer, you can check that information. But you can never sit with pencil in hand gathering data after a long session of recording; and it is only people who you’ve made personal friends whom you can ask questions about family history, etc. I usually have no trouble getting information about the song the first shot; but you don’t even dare note down the approximate age of your singer until after leaving, since your notes are invariably observed. I was always in a state of data-indigestion: I always had more information than I had a chance to note down, and there was always a lot more information I wanted I had no chance to get.

Seeger, however, was still Robertson’s biggest source of fieldwork advice when she was developing her California project, offering her both general collection guidance as well as detailed instructions on making the recordings. (Despite Seeger’s relative lack of experience in the field—he had only recorded on a few occasions—he had strong opinions about best practices for fieldwork.) In an interview with Seeger biographer Anne Pescatello, Robertson recalled that Seeger instructed her to “Record

67 Sidney Robertson to Harold Spivacke, 9 November 1937, 5 AFC–SRC 1940/001.
EVERYthing!’ … ‘Don’t select, don’t omit, don’t concentrate on any single style. We know so little! Record *everything!*’”69 Robertson explained Seeger’s reasoning:

What he was trying to do was to inoculate me against contagion from the local collectors I was to meet, for each of them as a matter of course picked and chose items for his collection according to some personal standard of authenticity, or taste, or esthetic [*sic*] quality, or topical interest. Charlie knew it was important to disabuse me of any notion I might have that any particular part of the tradition was more important than any other. Nothing should be omitted!70

Alan Lomax offered similar advice to Robertson, noting “I think you will agree with me that when one is face to face with the wealth of material in the field, one tends to be over-critical. I always try to record more than I feel is important to compensate for this false perspective.”71

Seeger hoped Robertson could use this opportunity to make up for what he felt were missed opportunities in the RA recordings. He told her, “When a group of instruments plays get the whole thing as well as possible and then have a few verses or sections with the mike before each player in turn so that … each part could be notated in a general way in a transcription. This applies to singing with accompaniment also.”72 (Seeger’s advice in this case is more idealistic than practical, as it would require more discs than Robertson simply could spare.)

As in his instructions to Herbert Halpert, Seeger told Robertson to record the tunings of all instruments and to have the musicians describe the instrument and its

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70 Pescatello, *Charles Seeger*, 141.
71 Letter from Alan Lomax to Sidney Robertson, 18 February 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
72 Letter from Charles Seeger to Sidney Robertson, 19 February 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
tuning in his or her own words. He also asked her to take numerous photographs of all of the people and their instruments. “We have made an irreparable fault in not having more photos of all [Resettlement Administration] work,” he told her. Movies, he noted, would be “so much the better.” (Alan Lomax had just begun taking motion pictures of performers in Michigan, though Robertson had no such camera at her disposal.)

In June 1938, Seeger reiterated his instructions to her, and added some ideas he had left out including

- putting the mike close to each instrument or voice in turn in an ensemble,
- taking the tuning of instruments on the record just before or after recording, pictures, PICTURES, lots of documentation, including the pertinent folk-lore, more leisurely work, more talk by the performers on the disk—before and after, checking of words with the performer, the same performer singing interesting material at different times, different members of the family singing the same song, recordings of play-party games and square dances with particular reference to getting the calls, noise of action, etc. This is particularly important when foreign language minority groups are being worked with—their relation with their environment. Yes—stories, conversations, riddles, etc. You see I am getting more folk-conscious.73

**Robertson’s Instructions to Her Staff**

Many of Seeger’s suggestions appear (almost verbatim) in Robertson’s instructions to her field workers. In advance of her project, she compiled a detailed set of guidelines for her workers that included an overview of the project, a series of recommendations for approaching informants, a questionnaire, a primer on cataloging the songs (as well as a list of keywords for song categorization), and a bibliography of folksong sources that she felt her workers needed to know. Robertson’s overview of

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73 Letter from Charles Seeger to Sidney Robertson, 22 June 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
the project reflects not only her desire to keep the project “as broad as possible,” but also her multifaceted understanding of the different types of folksongs she hoped to encounter, including old and rare materials, current songs, and music outside of the Anglo-American tradition:

The purpose of this undertaking is to collect and preserve the old-time music now in circulation in California, particularly the songs which are fast disappearing and which, for the most part, have never been printed or even written down, but have been passed on from one performer to another by rote. “California” folk music is understood to mean any traditional music—song or dance tune—now current in California; items from other states which deal with California life or history may be included. The investigation is not of course to be limited to performers whose native language is English. The minority groups in California have much to add that is of great interest.

We want to preserve a song: 1) If it was widely current at the time, known to and sung by many people; 2) If it has been known to several generations in a family; 3) If it is an account of a true happening, with local details and place names, even if it was not known widely; or if it tells about the early days in general (lumber camps mining camps, the crossing of the plains; crimes, catastrophes; any local trade); 4) If it is a special favorite and particularly good fun to sing.

Robertson’s instructions that followed this project overview reflect not only what she had gleaned through working with Seeger and other folksong collectors and through poring over the folklore collecting materials of other WPA projects (particularly the FWP’s American Guide Manual series of questionnaires), but also a sensitivity and forward-thinking approach to performer–collector relations that was rare for the era. (See Appendix 7 for Robertson’s instruction manual and guidelines.) She was careful to disabuse her workers of any bias toward Anglo-American folksongs from the outset: “Local pride in the preservation of the cultural things that belong to the old days should be stimulated wherever possible,” Robertson noted.

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74 Sidney Robertson, “Instructions to Workers,” AFC–SRC 1940/001.
“particularly in the minority groups. Remember that the Anglo-Saxon music which we are inclined to think of as the only ‘American’ kind is a relatively recent importation on this continent, exactly as the Hungarian, Finnish and Armenian folk musics are. The Portuguese and Spanish have been in California three times as long as the ‘Americans.”’

Robertson planned to send her workers into the field as scouts in advance of her recording sessions. In approaching potential singers, however, she encouraged her workers to engage with these people as people, and not as assets.

It is a good idea to spend much time making friends among the older people who are likely to know songs or to have friends who know them. Don't feel that time spent in conversation about things apparently quite unconnected with songs is wasted, for it will make you seem less a stranger. A few minutes of general conversation (don't scorn the weather as a topic!) should always precede any explanation of the reason for your visit. A casual friendly, unhurried manner is disarming; a busy, efficient one creates suspicion.

Once her workers found someone who might be a potential source for music, she instructed them to mention that the University of California was interested in seeing that [their songs] aren’t lost.” (This approach differed significantly from statements other collectors made in which they used the imprimatur of the federal government as a tool to gain respect.) She also told her workers to transcribe their songs and offer to give them a “typewritten booklet of them” later. But she specifically instructed her workers not to mention the prospect of recording until she could review the songs, in part because discs were at a premium.

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75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
Robertson also attempted to warn her workers away from any other preconceived notions they might have about worthy subjects. In particular, she told her workers never to “judge a folk-singer by the tonal beauty of his singing. … Often the singing that sounds most curious to our ears is the oldest and most valuable to preserve.” She also told them to take down songs that might not on the surface seem “particularly interesting, simply because they are favorites of [the performer],” or songs that the workers knew had been previously published, even if the singer were unaware that they had been “because he, probably, learned it by rote.” “In every case, she noted, “we want the singer's own version of words and tune, so never correct him.”

These instructions might seem to imply that Robertson wanted to weed out uninteresting songs simply to curry favor with performers, but her advice to her fieldworkers also ensured that they were not omitting music that might have otherwise been worthwhile—more of a Frank Brown approach than a John Lomax one.

Robertson was especially concerned about her workers interacting with “foreign” Californians (i.e., residents from other nations and non-citizens of the United States) because she feared that these musicians might think that they were in trouble with the law. She encouraged her workers to bring along a liaison who would be familiar to the performers, or at least be fluent in the language of the informant. This person, Robertson explained, should be someone who understands the project “in its historical and social aspects” (i.e., as a preservation project), “so that if your

77 Ibid.
performer suspects you of attempting to exploit his music commercially, your sponsor for the contact will be able to reassure him effectively.” Moreover, she instructed her workers specifically not to ask when a performer came to the United States, as such a question might send up red flags: “Even when they are in this country legally they are often uncertain of their status and this query may ruin your contact. Usually the approximate date is easy to determine indirectly.”

Robertson concluded her fieldwork primer by reiterating the fact that she wanted her workers to be both professional and casual:

Your call should always have the aspect of a social visit; not a business one. Remember that “foreign” manners are usually more formal and in general more consistent than ours; so be on your best behavior! Don’t press people; treat them as collaborators. On the other hand, don’t allow a performer to feel that he is doing you a personal favor by allowing you to take down his songs. The undertaking requires hard and concentrated work from both of you, and the best attitude for you is to assume that he will be glad to make the effort to get a more complete record of the history of old-time things; just as you are.

In an article on Robertson’s collection in the Sonneck Society Bulletin in 1994, Catherine Kerst notes that Robertson was far ahead of her time in terms of fieldwork practices, and was cognizant of the power dynamics associated with her role as collector. Kerst quotes Robertson’s reflections on the matter in this article: “I never asked the singers to sing for me or for the government, except as a preservation project. And I was never demanding of them if they didn’t want to sing, we skipped it.

78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
for the present, and almost without exception they revived the subject later themselves. I was careful, just as a matter of good manners, not to say ‘I want.’”

Robertson also developed a detailed questionnaire, which she based in part on similar documents that FWP workers had used in the field under Botkin. In addition to basic information, such as the circumstances of the interview, the personal and musical history of the performer, and a description of the surroundings and people present, Robertson included more personalized questions such as “Why does this performer sing or play?”; “What kind of music does he like best?”; and “Where and when does he put his gifts to use?” (This last question might reflect the manner in which Robertson wanted her workers to interact with the musicians, but more likely it reflects Robertson’s own interest and excitement about the music she was collecting.)

Also included in her questionnaire were sections on the instruments themselves, including an instrument’s provenance and tuning, its social uses (at home, at parties, at weddings or other ceremonies) and its sentimental or symbolic meaning to the performer. Robertson’s interest in the instruments was also a divergence from other folksong collecting trips of the era. She told her workers that she wanted to know “what instruments are found in this region, and where any unusual ones may be examined,” and that she wanted the contact information for “performers on any folk instrument, particularly fiddlers who play for dances in the old fashion, and 5-string (not tenor) banjo players.” (Robertson did not limit herself to

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traditional Anglo folk instruments, however; she spent more time documenting instruments from non-Anglo musicians, as discussed below.)

Robertson provided her workers with a list of folksong sources that she felt they needed to know in advance of finding musicians, or to reference when they worked with the music she collected. At the top of her list was a series of sixteen articles spanning the career of Phillips Barry (1880–1937), and the 1929 book that Barry co-authored with Fanny Hardy Eckstorm and Mary Winslow Smyth titled *British Ballads from Maine.*

“The Barry articles are brief,” Robertson noted in the bibliography, “but are by far the most important.” She also included Cecil Sharp’s *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* (1932, edited by Robertson’s colleague and future folksong collecting partner, Maud Karpeles); Eckstorm and Smyth’s *Minstrelsy of Maine* (1927); and numerous sources by George Herzog, including his American Council of Learned Societies report *Research in Primitive and Folk Music of the United States* (1936), his article “The Study of Folk Song in America” (1938), and “Folk Tunes from Mississippi,” a collection of Arthur Palmer Hudson’s songs, which Herzog and Halpert edited for their FTP publication series.

Robertson also listed George Pullen Jackson’s *White Spirituals of the Southern Uplands* (1933), and *Spiritual Folk Songs of Early America* (1937), which were somewhat controversial in their day because of his theories of the racial origins of

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82 Sidney Robertson, “Instructions to Workers—Bibliography,” AFC–SRC 1940/001.
Robertson wrote that Jackson provided “much valuable information about the mutability of tunes.” She then described Jackson’s approach:

[Jackson] wrote to dispute the early idea that the Negro spirituals were a spontaneous creation of the Negro unaffected by white culture; he traces the spirituals to texts and tunes of white hymns in the shaped-note hymnals. His technique is important even where his subject is not entirely relevant to ballad study. No, one however, should escape from the study of American folk music without some contact with the work of Jackson, and some awareness of the existence of American folk hymns—which have preserved some ballad tunes, incidentally.

Robertson collected neither white nor African American spirituals during her California Folk Music Project, however. This bibliography was her attempt to immerse her workers in what she felt were the best sources available on folk music research in the United States. Moreover, she put the list together prior to making the bulk of her field recordings.

**The California Folk Music Project Recordings**

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83 George Pullen Jackson claimed mostly white origins for many African American spirituals. See George Pullen Jackson, *White and Negro Spirituals, Their Life Span and Kinship, Tracing 200 Years of Untrammeled Song Making and Singing among Our Country Folk, with 116 Songs as Sung by Both Races* (New York: J. J. Augustin, 1943); and George Pullen Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933). D. K. Wilgus notes of the debate, “At the heart of the Anglo-African contention has been the confusion of origin and essence. The antithesis of spontaneity and borrowing pervades the air. Early evidence is spotty and confused; the authority of print has been opposed to internal evidence; and both sources have been variously interpreted. In fact, the same evidence has nourished both sides. Etymologies have been constructed to support opposing views. Students have misunderstood or misstated opponents’ arguments. Folk authority has been advanced. But this major dispute has unfortunately involved sectional and racial friction, pride and prejudice. Like the problem of the “original form” of the English and Scottish Popular ballads, the origin of the Negro spiritual may be past determination; but opposing forces are not completely convinced.” Wilgus, *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898*, 345. See especially, Dena J. Epstein, “A White Origin for the Black Spiritual?: An Invalid Theory and How It Grew,” *American Music* 1, no. 2 (1983): 53–59.
Robertson’s goal for her California Folk Music Project was to create an “objective record” of folk music in her WPA region of Northern California. Although the phrase “objective record,” which appears in many similar projects from the time period, implies an unbiased scientific approach to collecting, Robertson relied in many cases on sheer happenstance when encountering performers. “How does one find songs?” Robertson wrote in her September 1938 San Francisco Chronicle article, “They are everywhere at hand.”

A man changing a tire on Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley last month sang an old ballad as he worked, and was startled by an urgent request to repeat it so it could be written down. A receipt for a bill paid to a Railway Express delivery man was signed with a Basque name; this led to a whole nest of songs. … And one man in Shasta County offered to “outsing the gas tank” if he might ride along to Fresno.84

Between 3 March 1938 and 11 September 1940, Robertson recorded more than eight hundred songs on 237 discs. (See Appendix 8 for a list of the performers and their locations that Robertson recorded during this time.) She divided her collection into two broad categories. Series E, which included songs in the English language or from the Anglo-Saxon tradition (i.e., unaccompanied ballad singing, fiddle tunes, string bands, and square dance calls), comprised over one-third of the recordings by thirty-one different performers. Series “M,” for “minority” encompassed the other “two-thirds” of the recordings and included music from seventy-five foreign language performers. The recordings in Series M included Armenian (Armeno-Turkish), Basque, Croatian, Dalmatian, Finnish, Gaelic

(Scottish), Hungarian, Icelandic, Italian (including Sicilian), Mexican, Native American, Norwegian, Portuguese (Azores), Puerto Rican, Russian Molokan, Scottish, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish (vernacular and liturgical), and Spanish-Californian music. (Robertson’s collection is summarized in Table X.1 at the end of the chapter, which lists chronologically the recordings included in her California folk music project.)

The reason that Robertson settled on the term “minority” to describe her foreign-language recordings is unknown. Given her constant use of quotation marks around the term “foreign” or “foreigners,” as well as her overall sensitivity toward the migration history of the state, the designation “minority” seems mostly a term of convenience, or a means by which to placate her sponsors at the AAFS, the university, and her other local sponsors, who, she noted to Seeger “were not crazy about foreigners.” Taken in this light, the term “minority” seems almost subversive (her sponsors at the AAFS, the university, and locally were largely white Americans). That she dedicated the majority of her recordings to these “minority” groups, then, was Robertson’s way of attempting to avoid anyone’s ire.

**Performers and Recordings Included in Series E**

Robertson made her first recordings for Series E on 12 October 1938 in San Jose, where she recorded George Vinton Graham, a Scots-Irishman who was over seventy years old. Robertson told Spivacke about Graham in October 1938, as she
was attempting to find performers to record in the area while waiting for her travel funds to materialize:

The American singers I know, however, with one exception, are all too far for me at present until travel funds are available. The one exception, however, is a fine old boy whose letter addressed to “Gov’t bueaua callecting songs” [sic] was forwarded to me from Washington. He turns out to be something of a find in terms of quantity and variety, though his singing voice leaves something to be desired. He knows ten or twelve Child ballads anyway, several songs sung by the 49ers, a lot of amusing songs with very British nonsense refrains, and a lot of songs about local events of 20–50 years ago. He sang for us for 5 solid hours, 30–40 songs anyway, and showed me a lot of [folksong manuscripts] he’d written out, in addition. His spelling is the most consistently original I’ve ever come across, incidentally—only by accident does he seem to get a word right. He is the only singer of this type that I know who has spent almost all his life in California—he came here at the age of five or six. He knows a few fiddle tunes also.85

Graham was born in Iowa and moved at the age of six to Oregon and subsequently California, where he learned most of his seventy-song repertory, which included not only Child ballads and Forty-Niner songs, but also Quaker and Mormon songs and a number of songs about local events in California dating from twenty to fifty years before the time of Robertson’s recordings.86 According to Robertson, “Mr. Graham felt that he knew a number of songs that the United States government would like to know about, so he wrote to Washington [in the summer of 1938] … inquiring about collectors who might be interested.”87 Her initial recording session with Graham lasted five hours and yielded thirty to forty songs, nine of which were sent to

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85 Letter from Sidney Robertson to Harold Spivacke, 12 October 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
87 Sidney Robertson, Comments on George Vinton Graham, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
the Library of Congress. She recorded him again on five subsequent dates between October 1938 and August 1939, which resulted in more than fifty additional songs.

Graham was a colorful character who carried his guitar with him wherever he went, including to the Golden Gate International Exposition at Treasure Island in 1939, where he planted himself in one of the courts of the exhibition and sang to passers-by. After he had recorded with Robertson, Graham flaunted his newfound status to the world by having business cards made, advertising: “George Vinton Graham—Singer of Old Songs to the University of California and the Library of Congress, Esq. Composer of Pioneer Poetry.” Robertson noted that in addition to his less-than-pleasant singing voice, he tuned his guitar “at random” and strummed in a percussive manner that did not correspond with the tonality of the melody: “Mr. G.’s guitar playing was as original as everything else about him. He spent a long time tuning the instrument to pitches never heard on land nor sea, and thereafter he strummed vigorously across the strings, occasionally even fingerling a string here or there. There was absolutely no relationship in key nor pitch (except a rhythmic one as from a drum) against (literally) his equally vigorous singing.” Following Seeger’s advice, Robertson took down the “tuning” of Graham’s instrument, noting “Mr. Graham’s guitar is strung with 4 double metal strings (8 in all) and similarly it is tuned (theoretically!) like a violin—his own idea, because he once played the violin

88 Letter from Sidney Robertson to Harold Spivacke, 12 October 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
90 Letter from Sidney Robertson to Harold Spivacke, 12 October 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
and knew the fingering. Normally he strums across it with a large bone pick; this
drowned out his voice so I asked him to use his fingers instead.\textsuperscript{92}

Robertson’s next performer for Series E was perhaps the most important
contributor to the project—Warde Ford, who made his first recordings for
Robertson’s California project in late December 1938. Robertson previously had
recorded Warde and other members of his family during her time in Crandon,
Wisconsin in the fall of 1937. She was disappointed that she had not been able to
record a number of the songs in the family’s repertory during her time with the RA,
however, and she had remained in contact with the Ford family afterwards; family
members also sent her song texts from their repertoire in the interim.\textsuperscript{93}

Warde Ford hitchhiked to California in 1939 to work at the Shasta Dam, and
to meet his brother Pat, who had been in the state for a number of years and worked
on dams in southern California. Warde Ford, who was about thirty-five-years old at
the time of the California recordings, had learned much of his repertory in Wisconsin
from various members of his family; he learned fifty songs from his mother and
father, a dozen or so of which Ford’s father had learned while at an Idaho labor camp
around 1900. He also learned a verse or two of another twenty-five songs from his
uncles Charles and Robert Walker.\textsuperscript{94} Warde Ford was popular as a musician in
California, and his songs were in demand at dances and other small gatherings
throughout Shasta County. Arthur Ford, another brother from the Ford family who

\textsuperscript{92} Sidney Robertson, “General Notes,” AFC–SRC 1940/001.
\textsuperscript{93} “WPA announcement and comments about the Ford family recording,” AFC–SRC 1940/001.
\textsuperscript{94} Robertson Cowell, “The Recording of Folk Music in California,” 14.
remained in Wisconsin, had more formal education and had transcribed the remaining verses of the uncle’s songs for the other brothers to use in the California recordings.

The Ford family’s repertory included more than a dozen Child ballads, as well as songs that were representative of Wisconsin logging camps of previous generations, including sea songs, Irish “come-all-ye’s,” vaudeville songs, and local lumber-camp ballads.\(^95\) Robertson admitted that these songs technically were more representative of Wisconsin and the Great Lakes region than they were of California folk music, but she justified their importance to the project because the songs were recorded at the musicians’ migration point to California.\(^96\)

Robertson recorded the Ford family in the Central Valley during two sessions, December 25–27 December 1938 and 3–4 September 1939. The first session yielded well over eighty songs, and the second produced another two-dozen songs. Warde Ford, who possessed the widest repertory of any of the Ford brothers, contributed nearly seventy of the recordings from these sessions in the form of unaccompanied vocal songs. Pat Ford contributed both vocal selections and harmonica pieces. Bogue Ford did not record any pieces for the first session, but added three unaccompanied vocal songs for their second meeting.

Robertson continued her relationship with the Ford family well after her California folk music project had ended. Between 1950 and 1954 she recorded their songs in California, Wisconsin, and Wyoming, many of which appear on the album

\(^95\) Ibid., 14.  
\(^96\) Ibid., 14.
*Wolf River Songs* that she compiled and released in 1956.\(^7\) In a letter dated 28 July 1952, Robertson wrote Duncan Emrich at the Archive of American Folk Song that she intended to re-record Warde Ford while she and Henry Cowell were visiting California that summer, and requested funding for recording expenses and informants. In this letter, Robertson articulated her long-held desire to reconnect with the Ford family and particularly to bring to light folksongs characteristic of logging camps:

> I have wanted for a long time to see a Ford Family collection appear: the variety is fantastic: fine Child ballad versions, loggers’ songs, local songs, a couple of shaped note hymns. It would have to be sung chiefly by Warde, but there are also a few records by his two brothers and his uncle Rob or Bob Walker. By extending it to Ford family friends, you could present a fine logging community cross-section with, I think, enough variety. I have hesitated to suggest this, as it seems a funny subject for editing by a woman, but after all it is something I know very well: I spent many weeks being shown around by the Fords in Wisconsin, visiting logging camps and mills, and later visited a Yosemite Valley Logging Company above the Yosemite Valley -- no connection with Fords but a couple of usable -- I think -- songs, and a fantastic contrast: put-up lunches with canned-fruit-salad, an idea given raucous cheers by the Wisconsin contingent when I told them. I camped with Ford brothers and their families awaiting construction jobs on the Shasta Dam.….\(^8\)

Another important contributor to Robertson’s Series E was John McCready, a nearly seventy-year old miner in Tuolumne County, who recorded for her on 31 July and 2 and 5 August 1939. McCready was the son of a Forty-niner who, according to Robertson, “made a little pile” of money and returned to Kansas to raise a family.\(^9\)


\(^8\) Letter from Sidney Robertson to Duncan Emrich, 25 July 1952, AFC–SRC 1940/001.

\(^9\) Letter from Sidney Robertson to Alan Lomax, 4 September 1939, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
McCready and his three brothers moved to California at an early age and lived and mined in Tuolumne County for thirty years. They became famous as musicians in Groveland and Second Garotte.\textsuperscript{100} John McCready was the only brother who was still making music at the time of Robertson’s project. Although his brother Spencer knew a number of fiddle tunes, he was too arthritic to play them. Spencer was present at the recording session, however, and sang one song for the collection.\textsuperscript{101} John McCready learned many of his songs from his father, and these songs constituted an important contribution to the Forty-niner songs in Robertson’s project. McCready, by Robertson’s description of him, was an interesting character, and although he was an older man, he still worked as a miner, though his income came primarily from a State pension.\textsuperscript{102} McCready insisted on walking a long, rocky trail from his cabin to the Arizona Bar in Groveland where Robertson made her recordings. McCready’s recording sessions produced more than twenty songs, all unaccompanied.

In addition to these three major contributors to the E Series, Robertson also recorded a number of other singers in shorter sessions throughout northern California. In Alameda in April 1939, she recorded Mr. and Mrs. Byron Coffin Sr. (piano and voice, respectively), for example, who had been popular Barbary Coast entertainers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (The Barbary Coast was San Francisco’s red-light district during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.) During their heyday, the Coffins called themselves “The Renos,” Byron and Pearl,

\textsuperscript{100} Robertson Cowell, “The Recording of Folk Music in California,” 13–14.
\textsuperscript{101} “Comments on John McCready,” AFC–SRC 1940/001.
\textsuperscript{102} Letter from Sidney Robertson to Alan Lomax, 4 September 1939, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
respectively, and were one of the first groups to sing “Casey Jones” in the Bay Area; Byron’s friends referred to him as “Casey.”

Robertson recorded a number of turn-of-the-century popular tunes, and interviewed the Coffins. In this interview, Mrs. Coffin, Sr. noted that they were “practically the first entertainers to come to Oakland … about 1906 and 7 or 8.”

In August 1939, in Columbia, in Tuolumne County, Robertson recorded twenty Anglo-American folksongs sung by John Stone, who was also known as “Old Put.” Stone had been a miner for much of his life, and had collected miners’ songs, some of which were compiled in a series of songsters published by the D. Appleton Company (Put’s Golden Songster; Containing the Largest and Most Popular Collection of California Songs Ever Published [1858], and Put’s Original California Songster; Giving in a Few Words What Would Occupy Volumes, Detailing the Hopes, Trials and Joys of a Miner’s Life [1868]). Stone’s name Stone had been a member of a musical group called the “Sierra Nevada Rangers,” who had toured mining camps in the nineteenth century, and his name first appeared in a publication in 1856. Some of the songs the group performed appeared in the Old Put songsters (the most famous of which was “Sweet Betsy from Pike”). The mine where Stone still worked at the time of Robertson’s recordings was a few miles outside of Columbia

103 Sidney Robertson, biographical and historical notes, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
104 “Comments on Byron Coffin’s Barbary Coast Performance Career,” recorded 6 April 1939 by Sidney Robertson, AFC–SRC 1940/001, http://www.loc.gov/item/afccc.a3823b2/
105 John A. Stone, Put’s Golden Songster; Containing the Largest and Most Popular Collection of California Songs Ever Published (San Francisco: D. E. Appleton and Co., 1858); and Stone, Put’s Original California Songster; Giving in a Few Words What Would Occupy Volumes, Detailing the Hopes, Trials and Joys of a Miner’s Life (San Francisco: D. E. Appleton and Co., 1868).
106 Letter from Hope Cahill to Mr. R.C. Shaw and J.C. Gregory, 17 October 1939, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
(the now-historic Gold Rush town at the foothills of the Sierra Nevada). According to Robertson, when Stone came to town to get supplies, he stayed in shacks left by the crew of Charlie Chaplin’s film *The Gold Rush*.

During Robertson’s session in the beginning of August 1939, she also recorded eleven unaccompanied vocal songs by Sam Bell, a woodcutter and handyman in Tuolumne. Bell had come to California from the Kansas City area in 1896 and had worked in the lumber camps near the Yosemite Valley. Robertson noted that Bell’s “pièce de resistance” was a song about Grover Cleveland’s candidacy for re-election, and that his style of singing was “so extremely personal as scarcely to be considered typical of any particular tradition.” Bell also performed “Root, Hog, or Die” at this session, a song that Robertson had recorded by two other performers as well and subsequently used to study textual variants.

Robertson also included fiddle tunes from the Anglo-American tradition in her E series. John Stone, mentioned above as a singer of English-language folksongs, recorded eight fiddle tunes. John Selleck, who was sixty-six years old at the time of the recording and lived in Camino, in El Dorato County near Placerville, also contributed fiddle tunes. He learned many of these tunes from famous dance fiddlers.

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108 Ibid., 11. See also, Sidney Robertson, “Biographical and historical notes,” AFC–SRC 1940/001.
110 Robertson also recorded a number of other performers for Series E, including Leighton Robinson, Alex Barr, Arthur Brodeur, and Leighton McKenzie, Judge Charles Rasmussen, Virginia Meade, Charles Fulton, Leonard W. Jones, Ben Pitts, Sam Blackburn, Anita Dormody, Flora Earnson, and Hubert Brady. These performers contributed far fewer songs to Robertson’s collection than her main informants. She used these additional songs to widen the scope of her Series E recordings, and often recorded any fragment of a song that these performers could recall.
of the Gold Rush period. He recorded more than a dozen of them for Robertson on 2
October 1939. His father was a well-known singer of traditional music, and had his
songs collected by the county supervisor as a representation of Forty-niner songs.\footnote{111}

Mrs. Ben Scott, of Turlock, in Stanislaus County in the San Joaquin Valley,
supplied eight fiddle tunes to the collection. Scott was born in Sacramento in 1863,
the daughter of a Forty-niner. According to Robertson, Scott had learned to play as a
child with an old violin that had belonged to the family and competed “successfully
with the men in fiddlers’ contests the length and breadth of the state.”\footnote{112} Robertson
explained in her fieldnotes,

There was an old violin in the family which her older brothers encouraged her
to play by equipping it gradually, one string at a time. When she could
manage the G string, they saved up enough to buy her a D. When she could
get around on those two strings, they added the A, and so on. She played on
that fiddle for several years before it had all four of its strings, and she hasn’t
yet forgotten what a great moment it was when at last her fiddle was as
complete as anybody’s.\footnote{113}

When Scott began playing, her bow did not have any hair, and so she pulled hair from
a horse’s tail to string it, and she used pine pitch for rosin.\footnote{114} Mrs. Ben Scott’s
repertory consisted of a number of American fiddle tunes, and English and Irish tunes
as well. In Turlock on 31 October 1939, Robertson collected eight fiddle tunes from
Scott, some of which contained tenor banjo accompaniment provided by Myrtle B.
Wilkinson.

\footnote{111} Robertson Cowell, “The Recording of Folk Music in California,” 15.
\footnote{112} Ibid., 14.
\footnote{113} Ibid., 14.
\footnote{114} “Comments by Mrs. Ben Scott about playing the fiddle,” AFC–SRC 1940/001.
Performers and Recordings Included in Series M

Robertson, in her “Series M” recordings, took a wholly pluralistic view of “folk music” in the 1930s, doing away with the Anglo American–centric notions of folk music that undergirded the American folk music collecting tradition, and replacing it with whatever music was “traditional” among the performers she recorded (including liturgical and sacred music). In keeping with California WPA coordinator James Sharp’s statement that all he was concerned with was that a song “was sung within the borders of northern California, Anno Domini 1938,” Robertson cast the widest net she could, recording any music that she was able to find, and that she found of some degree of merit.

Convincing Spivacke at the AAFS was another matter, however. Robertson feared that she might go too far afield with some of the contacts that she had planned to record. She wrote Spivacke on 12 October 1938, just as she was beginning to record in earnest, to get his advice:

If you have some policy about “foreign’ groups” music, I wish you would define it for me. I don't know just how to plan in recording for you before the project starts. From the point of view of the University of California, they seem to want material illustrative of everything to be found here as of the year 1938. … It seems to me that your records should include anything in the English language which can be shown to be related to traditional music; but that foreign material can only be recorded when it is of exceptional quality and would otherwise be lost; or when it is somehow related to America.115

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115 Letter from Sidney Robertson to Harold Spivacke, 12 October 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
Spivacke replied, “We have no objection to foreign language groups. In fact Alan Lomax has been doing some of this work in Michigan.”\textsuperscript{116} But he followed this statement by underscoring his desire to prioritize recordings in the English language: “Do not forget the American songs because we have no such material from this state.”\textsuperscript{117} Spivacke made a similar request in May of the following year: “Please do not over emphasize the sacred side of California music [i.e., Russian hymns, Spanish mission music] and get also some of the folk-songs brought from the East.”\textsuperscript{118} Spivacke’s requests were not jingoistic or necessarily racially based. Robertson had been sending Spivacke a large number of “Series M” discs, and he was concerned that they would not get the kind of California versions and variants that folk music researchers so coveted.

Alan Lomax, on the other hand, was much more appreciative of the variety of music that Robertson had collected. In a letter to Robertson in September 1939, Lomax applauded her efforts: “The fact that you seem to be making a musical cross-section of your community with everything from Icelandic religious songs to Barbary Coast ragtime shows the fertility of your approach. Some day the material will prove invaluable to historians and students of society. So far as I know, there is no other study of this nature being made.”\textsuperscript{119} Robertson had grown timid about her foreign-language recordings, however. She told Lomax, “The WPA here has asked me for a

\textsuperscript{117} Letter from Harold Spivacke to Sidney Robertson, 20 October 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
\textsuperscript{118} Letter from Harold Spivacke to Sidney Robertson, 15 May 1939, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
\textsuperscript{119} Letter from Alan Lomax to Sidney Robertson, 1 September 1939, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
statement as to the value of the records already sent in, and I had been hesitating about requesting that [statement] until I had sent in more English material… songs in English, that is to say.”

She had indeed made a number of recordings of English-language music earlier that summer, but had not yet sent them to the Library because her workers had been indexing and transcribing the materials.

Even before the WPA officially approved Robertson’s project she had been collecting music. Her first stop, on 7 March 1938, was to St. Anthony’s Seminary in Santa Barbara, where she recorded the choristers of the seminary, under the direction of Father Bertrand Hobrecht. Hobrecht’s group had been featured regularly on the Columbia Blue Radio Network, and Robertson recorded their performances of three unaccompanied Spanish chants that had been found in the manuscripts in the Santa Barbara Mission archives. According to Robertson, one of the chants she recorded had been “recovered several years ago from the singing of Fernandito, one of the Santa Ynez Mission Indians,” and had been sung “in the days of the Padres.”

Although these songs were not “folksongs,” they did fit in with her other recordings of sacred and liturgical music, and supplemented the Photostat copying work that she and her staff had been doing.

Robertson’s next session marked the beginning of her extensive recordings of Icelandic music in San Francisco. At the end of May 1938, she recorded thirty songs from three performers: Mrs. Sigridur Benonys, a local saleswoman born in Reykjavik,

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120 Letter from Sidney Robertson to Alan Lomax, 4 September 1939, AFC–SRC 1940/001.  
121 Letter from Sidney Robertson to Isabel Morse Jones, 29 March 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.  
122 Ibid.
whose brother was a composer in Iceland; Oddrun Sigurasson, also from Reykjavik; and John Olafson. Each performer contributed approximately ten unaccompanied vocal songs to the recording session. The performers referred to many of the songs as “rymur” (spelled “rímur”), a term with which Robertson was not familiar. In a letter to Henry Cowell, Robertson stated that one performer “sang ten or twelve songs of which perhaps half were supposed to be rymur. But I have my doubts about some of them, because the definitions they could give me of the rymur were so contradictory. One of them was a ‘contemporary’ song of 1902 or so.”

In fact, it would be a number of months before she knew exactly what rymur were. In a subsequent letter to Cowell in September 1938 she wrote,

I keep forgetting to tell you: I have finally discovered what “rymur” are. The name has nothing to do with use, nor with music: It defines a verse-form, a four-line or five-line stanza with intricate internals rhymes. There are innumerable patterns for such rhymes; and the rymur-composing contests have always been a frequent form of social entertainment. The standards seem impossibly hard to us, for such improvisation; but apparently the character of the language lends itself and even suggests this sort of thing. One of the most difficult verse-forms for improvisation is one in which each line reads alike, syllable for syllable, both backwards and forwards. In general it is considered a stunt, though almost anybody is able to do it—like charades; and this explains the curious inconsequence of ideas evident when these verses are translated. I don’t know yet how many of these patterns are included in the definition of rymur; but there are at least four I know of. Perhaps different varieties have other names. They are sung to known tunes, hence the association with dance.

Robertson collected Icelandic music on three other occasions over the course of her project. In November 1939 she met with Thodur Einarson, originally from Iceland; Oddrun Sigurasson, also from Reykjavik; and John Olafson. Each performer contributed approximately ten unaccompanied vocal songs to the recording session. The performers referred to many of the songs as “rymur” (spelled “rímur”), a term with which Robertson was not familiar. In a letter to Henry Cowell, Robertson stated that one performer “sang ten or twelve songs of which perhaps half were supposed to be rymur. But I have my doubts about some of them, because the definitions they could give me of the rymur were so contradictory. One of them was a ‘contemporary’ song of 1902 or so.”

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Robertson collected Icelandic music on three other occasions over the course of her project. In November 1939 she met with Thodur Einarson, originally from Iceland.

123 Letter from Sidney Robertson to Henry Cowell, 6 July 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
124 Ibid. In this May 1938 recording session Robertson also recorded Passiupsalmer, or passion psalms. The performers assured her these pieces dated back to the fifteenth century, though Robertson had her doubts: She assessed that the music was most likely from the sixteenth or seventeenth century because the pieces were similar to Bach’s chorale writing in their form, scale, and rhythm.
Arnessyslu, Iceland, who was currently working as a strong man at an American circus. Einarson performed six Lenten hymns taken from Hallgrímur Pétursson’s Passiupsalmer. Robertson wrote in her notes on the performance that “there are 50 or so of these hymns which form a sort of Passion Play, not staged but sung in church or one at a time at family prayers on farms, each evening during Lent. The words were written by Hallgrímur Pétursson, a hunchbacked mystic who lived not long after Luther wrote the texts to these hymns. Each hymn is a long detached narrative.”

In January of the following year Robertson traveled to Carmel where she recorded two Icelandic pieces sung by Otto Bardarson. Bardarson’s father, Sigurd, wrote the lyrics to one of the pieces that Otto performed. She subsequently recorded the elder Bardarson and another of his sons, Leo, in April of that year. Sigurd, who was born in Litla Hrauni, Iceland, lived in Seattle with Leo, and made the recordings while on a visit to Carmel. Sigurd himself performed ten pieces, three of which were rímur, and he and Leo recorded four more rímur together. Although many of the pieces were unaccompanied vocal songs in Icelandic, the rímur that they performed were in Old Norse.

Although Robertson made two shorter trips into the field after her Icelandic recordings, her next major expedition was to the Russian Molekan Church in Potrero Hill in San Francisco in the middle of September of that year. Robertson initially met a Mr. Agapoff, a young member of the congregation who was related to two of the

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125 Sidney Robertson, General Notes AFC–SRC 1940/001. Pétursson was one of Iceland’s most famous poets, and lived in the seventeenth century.
preachers at the church.¹²⁶ Agapoff served as an interpreter for Robertson, facilitated her recording session, and acted as a liaison between Robertson and the congregation, because they were largely suspicious of outsiders and technology. According to Robertson, the word “Molekani” translated as “milk drinker,” and the group did not drink, smoke, dance, or dress elaborately.¹²⁷ Catherine the Great exiled the Molekani, and they subsequently settled near Mount Ararat (by legend, the mountain on which Noah’s ark landed after the biblical flood), near the borders of Turkey and Armenia.

The Molekani congregation in San Francisco was approximately two-thirds men, who sat separately from the women during the service. The women wore a simple costume that reminded Robertson of the Quakers.¹²⁸ Robertson described the arrangement of the service in a detailed letter to Henry Cowell:

The chief singers among the men sit on two long benches facing each other. At the far end is a small table with a huge Bible on it, and the chief preacher and his two aides sit at that facing the room. Across the near end of the two men’s benches are two other benches on which two rows of women sit facing the men and the table, with their backs to the door. Those four benches hold the “singers;” the rest of the congregation around the walls, women to the right, men to the left, and they act as “helpers” singing with the others as they

¹²⁶ Letter from Sidney Robertson to Henry Cowell, 12 September 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
¹²⁸ Robertson described their clothing in a letter to Henry Cowell around the time of the recording session: “The women all wear a simple costume which in traditional, and was apparently designed much as the Quakers evolved theirs – for the sake of simplicity and avoidance of vanity. They seem to have achieved the simplicity; but vanity is rampant: I hardly ever knew a group of women, elderly as these are mostly, who were so fascinated by their own and others' clothes. They dress in white silk mostly for the morning service, and in soft colors, lavender, pink, pale blues and greens, and delicate flowered silks, for the evening one. They wear big lace scarves wrapped around their heads in a special way – the scarves made of lace, usually crocheted, but at any rate all made by hand, white or cream colored. Some of the younger women are beautiful, with straight brows and deep-set eyes. The older women can't be called pretty; but they are smiling and pleasant-looking. Most of the women of this group work in the Galland Laundry, day in, day out, and keep track of their enormous families too. Most of them have 8 to 14 children; and as they marry at 14, 15 and 16 years of age there were several grandmothers in their early thirties.” Letter from Sidney Robertson to Henry Cowell, 12 September 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
can. The “singers” are self-elected. You simply join the group on the singers’ benches if you feel you want to sing—and can. No one is likely to think he can sing unless he really can, I was told.129

The Molekani performed traditional Russian hymns at their service with a preacher’s sermon between the psalms. Robertson recorded both the sermon and the psalms, and subsequently, individual members of the congregation. Less than a month later, on 7 October 1938, Robertson recorded another twelve psalms that were performed by Mr. and Mrs. J. P. Susoeff and Mr. and Mrs. Popoff.

The Molekani psalms that Robertson recorded were written in four-part counterpoint. Men and women were divided into high and low octaves, except when the melodic range dictated otherwise—occasionally the women sang a fourth above while the men sang the fifth below, in order to reach the same note.130 One male member of the congregation would begin the psalm by chanting one of its lines, and another man would attach a hymn tune to the text. Gradually the entire congregation joined in. Robertson noted that the counterpoint was similar to folk hymns of the Reformation or Orthodox Russian choral music. “The counterpoint,” she noted, “however, is relatively free, and melodic lines weave in and out with no concern for harmony.”131 Women often sang at a seventh or ninth above the melody, and parallel sevenths were not unusual, though Robertson noticed that parallel fourths and fifths were less evident.132

Robertson also observed that the Molekani raised the pitch of the music on

129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
each successive verse. She asked a member of the congregation if there was a reason for the shift, and was told that the psalms were meant to be sung fairly high in order to evoke the proper religious emotion. As the length of the psalms made it difficult to sustain this heightened range, the members would begin at a lower pitch and gradually would work up to the higher pitch.\textsuperscript{133} Robertson noted the difficulty of this melodic shift: “One young leader who was unable to start the verse at the new pitch quickly enough—it must come in while the voices are singing the last two or three tones of the preceding verse—was smiled at by everybody present and helped out by some of the older men.”\textsuperscript{134} Robertson believed that with her in the room the service took on the atmosphere of a performance and rarely met the “heights of fervor” that the pieces would normally reach. Furthermore, although her discs could only contain up to five minutes of music, many of the psalms were nearly three times that length.

Robertson’s next contribution to her Series M was songs from Portugal’s Azores islands. Robertson noted that, in a sense, these Portuguese recordings took precedence in her collection because “the discoverer of California, Cabrillo, was a Portuguese citizen, although he took possession of California for Spain because he was in the employ of the Spanish monarch.”\textsuperscript{135} To aid her with this collection, Robertson enlisted one of her employees, Alice Lemos Avila. Avila was a performer from the Azores who also hosted music shows on the radio for the Portuguese

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\textsuperscript{133} Letter from Sidney Robertson to Henry Cowell, 19 September 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001. \\
\textsuperscript{134} Robertson Cowell, “The Recording of Folk Music in California,” 20–21. \\
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 17. 
\end{flushright}
community in Oakland.\textsuperscript{136} Avila gathered a number of performers for the session, including her son Albert Avila and a number of other performers from the Azores and mainland Portugal.\textsuperscript{137}

Robertson recorded Portuguese music on seven different occasions, beginning on 31 December 1938, and continuing through August of the following year. The sessions yielded more than seventy songs, and included several Portuguese folksongs called \textit{fados}; Christmas and other religious music; serenades; lullabies; and dance music. The recordings represented five of the nine islands of the Azores. Many of these songs had long since died out in mainland Portugal, but had been kept current on the islands, as well as in Brazil. Alice Avila, who was the largest contributor to this collection, learned many of the nearly three-dozen songs that she recorded from her father in Portugal. In general, the guitar, the English guitar, viola d’arame, triangle, and mandolin accompanied the songs. Robertson said of the music, “The Azores records are too swell for words, much more primitive than the mainland music—except possibly in remote regions in Portugal proper.”\textsuperscript{138}

At the time of the Portuguese sessions, Robertson also began her collection of Spanish-California songs in Contra Costa and Monterey counties. The approximately ninety songs in this collection would prove to be the largest group of recordings in


\textsuperscript{137} These performers included Joaquim Flores, from Costa Rica; Flores’s wife Olive, from the island of Sao Miguel in the Azores; Antonio Medeiros, a native of Faial in the Azores; Frank Cunha, who came to the United States at the age of five from Portugal; Mary Silveira and Louise Franco, from the island of Flores in the Azores, and Clifford Franco, who was Silveira’s nephew. Sidney Robertson, “Historical and biographical notes,” AFC–SRC 1940/001.

\textsuperscript{138} Letter from Sidney Robertson to Harold Spivacke, 6 April 1939, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
Series M. Her main informant in Contra Costa county was Jessie de Soto, who was from Concord, California. De Soto recorded three-dozen songs, either a cappella, or with guitar accompaniment. In Monterey in January 1939, Robertson recorded a restaurant proprietor, María García, who was born near Oviedo, the capital of the Asturias principality in Spain. García and her son Johnnie performed music from the Asturias, some of which sounded Arabic to Robertson. In May and August of 1939, Robertson recorded Lottie Espinosa, from Pacific Grove, who performed the largest group of songs (sixteen in all) from Monterey County. Hilda Duarte Brown, also of Monterey, contributed five songs to the collection in February 1939, with accompaniment by Walter Sebree on the Hawaiian guitar. Robertson also included music from a Mexican wedding in this collection, performed by Julio Gomez’s Orchestra from New Monterey. The groom, Ben Figueroa, also contributed a song to the collection.

Beginning in February 1939, Robertson made her initial recordings of the Gaelic-speaking community in Berkeley and Oakland, members of which were originally from the Hebrides Islands of Scotland. The performers of these songs included John MacPhee, from the isle of Harris; Mary MacPhee from the island of South Uist; Charlotte McInnes, from Dundee, Scotland; Donald McInnes, also from South Uist; and John Cunningham, from the isle of Harris. Robertson had five sessions with these musicians, the last of which was in June of 1940, and recorded three-dozen songs. Included in this collection were old love songs, sea songs,

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139 Letter from Sidney Robertson to Henry Cowell, 15–16 May 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
Hebridean work songs, some traditional Scottish songs that were not in Gaelic, as well as one song from Canada, where there was a large population of Hebrides Islanders near Vancouver.

During this same trip in February 1939, Robertson also investigated Italian music within the region beginning with Mario Olmeda, a cook from Concord who, as Robertson notes in her field reports, was “famous in the neighborhood for his singing.” Olmeda, who was originally from Bologna, contributed six Italian songs to the collection. She also collected Sicilian music in the area. In Martinez, she recorded one song by twenty-year-old Sal Lucido, whose parents were originally from Sicily, and three songs by a woman named Francisco Sanfilippo, who was originally from Palermo. Robertson had intended to record Sanfilippo’s husband as well, but after only a few songs he got up and left the session to go fishing. In Pittsburg, Robertson recorded three songs, one of which was in French by Louis Brangone, a quarry worker, and eight songs by Giuseppe Russo, from Isola della Femine near Palermo, who was known in Contra Costa County as “the singing barber.”

Between 16 and 24 April 1939, Robertson visited the large Armenian community in Fresno. On her first session she recorded fifteen unaccompanied vocal songs from Ruben Baboyan, an Armenian chef at the Hotel Fresno, who came to the United States in 1913 when he was about sixteen. Many of Baboyan’s songs were

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140 Sidney Robertson, “Field Notes,” AFC–SRC 1940/001.
dance songs from the mountains of Van, where, according to Robertson, the music had not been affected by Turkish influences.\textsuperscript{142} The next day Robertson recorded four songs performed by Mary and Hartop Goshtigan, a married couple who were originally from Constantinople. Mary Goshtigan, who was an accomplished oud player trained in Turkey, performed \textit{Taksim}, the Turkish genre of virtuosic, free form improvisational pieces and \textit{Sha’ki}, a piece in stricter form. The Goshtigans also recorded “Turkish-style Armenian city music,” and Armenian folksongs, sung either a cappella, or with oud and violin accompaniment.\textsuperscript{143}

The following weekend Robertson recorded Aslanian’s Armenian Orchestra, a popular ensemble that was in great demand at weddings and community dances.\textsuperscript{144} The group boasted that they were able to play in a number of different musical styles, or as they referred to them “five different languages,” including Armenian, Greek, Syrian, Turkish, and American jazz.\textsuperscript{145} Robertson commented on the group’s popularity in her field notes:

Aslanian’s orchestra… is often invited to other cities, for instance to San Jose and San Francisco, and Turlock and Modesto, and all up and down the San Joaquin Valley, where there are a great many Armenians of course, to play for weddings and funerals and dances generally.\textsuperscript{146}

The ensemble used the violin to represent the kemanche, and the clarinet to evoke the kirmnata, and also included percussion instruments such as the def

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\textsuperscript{142} Robertson Cowell, “The Recording of Folk Music in California,” 18.
\textsuperscript{143} Sidney Robertson, Field Notes, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
\textsuperscript{144} The members of Aslanian’s Armenian Orchestra included Jack Aslanian on vocals and violin; Bedros Haroutunian, a qanun and kemanche player from Varta in then Soviet Armenia; Mesrout Takakjian on clarinet; Archie Krotlian, an oud player who learned the instrument in America; Joe Bedrosian on the zurna; and T. Shatinian on the blul.
\textsuperscript{145} Sidney Robertson, field notes, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
(tambourine) and the dumbeg (an hourglass drum). Robertson documented the tunings of the instruments including the kemanche, the violin in its kemanche tuning, and the qanun, and J. L. Hall, a volunteer photographer for the California Folk Music Project took photographs of the qanun, the saz, the def, and the oud, as well as the various performers of the ensemble. Robertson also made note of some performance practice issues raised in the recording session: “It is interesting also to note than in recording these pieces in which the voice comes in occasionally, the feeling of the singer is much like that of the people who shout out in American Square Dance bands occasionally. They do not feel that the voice should be preeminent, but that it should be one of a whole group in instruments. Therefore, when I tried to bring out the voice in the interests of transcribing, that is always objected to.” The ensemble felt similarly about the role of the violin, which carried the melody; they protested when Robertson attempted to bring the violin out more in the recording.

Robertson made her final recordings of Armenian music at the end of October 1939, which included twelve a cappella Armenian and Armeno-Turkish folksongs performed by Vartan and Siranoosh Shapazian, a couple from Fowler. Vartan Shapazian was from Harput in Turkey, where he had attended the American missionary college. The couple had been in the United States since 1907, and Vartan had learned many of his songs from published song collections.

In May 1938 Robertson began her collection of Croatian music near the Santa Clara Valley, where a large Jugo-Slav population resided. Her first informant was John Botica, of Mountain View, who came to the United States in 1905 from an
island off Dubrovnik, Dalmatia (Croatia).\textsuperscript{147} Botica performed Dalmatian dance music on Croatian instruments and was known for his playing of the misnice, a Dalmatian goatskin bagpipe that he made himself with the help of Peter Boro, whom Robertson subsequently recorded the following year.\textsuperscript{148} Robertson commented that Botica did not vary his melodies very much and wrote in her dust jacket notes that the music “sounds as if the needle had stuck in a groove—but the repetitions are as Mr. B. played them.”\textsuperscript{149} Botica also performed on the lirica, a three-stringed Dalmatian bowed fiddle that he also made. In their January 1939 session, Botica performed a shepherd’s dance on the svirala, a Dalmatian shepherd’s pipe that, according to Robertson was criticized by some people as a “backward,” and “mountain country” instrument, but one which Botica enjoyed playing.\textsuperscript{150} Robertson took tunings and photographs of the instruments, which were subsequently made into technical drawings by Joseph H. Handon.

A year later, in May 1939, Robertson recorded two other Croatian musicians, and Tony Dedo and Peter Boro, in Woodside and San Mateo, respectively. Dedo, who came to the United States in 1904 from near Dubrovnik in Yugoslavia, performed two versions of a Croatian folksong on the lirica. Boro, who came to the United States in 1926 from Lublinye in Herzegovina, worked in lumber camps and as a gardener in California.\textsuperscript{151} Boro performed solo pieces on the misnice and the gusle.

\textsuperscript{147} Sidney Robertson, historical and biographical notes, AFC–SRC 1940/001.  
\textsuperscript{148} Robertson, “Statement of Accomplishment, Appendix A,” 19.  
\textsuperscript{149} Sidney Robertson, historical and biographical notes, dust jacket notes, AFC–SRC 1940/001.  
\textsuperscript{150} Sidney Robertson, historical and biographical notes, AFC–SRC 1940/001.  
\textsuperscript{151} Robertson, “Statement of Accomplishment, Appendix A,” 17.
a bowed, one-stringed instrument that he had made himself. He told Robertson that the string of the gusle was made of exactly thirty horsehairs, which had to be taken from a young horse, due to the strength of its hair.  

Robertson also recorded four more pieces in a subsequent session, including an epic song about the Serbian battle against the Turks in fourteenth-century Kosovo, which Boro sang to gusle accompaniment. She also took the tuning of the misnice, as well as photographs of the instruments, including one she did not record, the dvorgrle, a double flute recorder from the Balkans. 

Robertson also recorded Finnish songs in on two occasions: the first in September 1939 in the Central Valley, and the subsequent trip in Berkeley two months later. Her first session, which yielded four Finnish folksongs, was of three women from Vaasa Laani: Celia Koljonen, Fina Petersen, and Mary Salonen. In Berkeley, Robertson recorded ten unaccompanied vocal songs performed by John Soininen. 

Robertson attended a Hungarian New Year’s Eve party in Oakland at the end of 1939, where she recorded Mary Gaidos, Julia Reha, Elizabeth Jelenfy, Mary Drasky, Rosa Nimerfroh, Mr. Jelenfy, and Mr. Nimerfroh. The five songs that she recorded included contemporary songs, Magyar folksongs, and seasonal music. A few days later in Oakland, Robertson recorded Mary Gaidos, who was born in the United States but returned to Hungary at a young age to attend school. At the time of this

152 Ibid., 17.
recording Gaidos had been living in the United States for thirty years.\textsuperscript{153} This session yielded more than a dozen unaccompanied vocal folksongs, and included Magyar folksongs, traditional Hungarian folk dance tunes called czardas, and a bandit ballad.

Robertson’s final recording session took place on 11 September 1940 in Fresno, when she finally recorded the Basque musicians she had told Spivacke about back in November 1937. Robertson had trouble convincing the Spanish Basques of Pacific Grove, whom she referred to as “certainly the most reserved group of folk musicians,” to make any recordings whatsoever. (She had feared that they were going to request payment for their performance, though there is no documentation that she paid them.) They were willing to sing for her, but according to Robertson, they felt their music was “of, by, and for the Basques” and not to be commercialized.\textsuperscript{154} Robertson met Antoinette Erro, a teacher of Basque descent, who was able to persuade Mrs. Francisco Etcheverry and Etcheverry’s son Matias to record. Mrs. Etcheverry had come to the United States in 1905 at the age of seventeen from Misquiriz, Spain and was presently a cook in a small restaurant near the railroad station in Fresno. According to Robertson, once they had begun recording the Etcheverry’s “Basque reserve broke down… and they made many suggestions for further recording.”\textsuperscript{155} However, Robertson’s session yielded only six a cappella songs.

\textsuperscript{153} Sidney Robertson, historical and biographical notes, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
\textsuperscript{154} Robertson Cowell, “The Recording of Folk Music in California,” 21.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 21.
Native American Music

Robertson noted in her final report that Native American music had been “resolutely excluded… on the ground that this is a field requiring cooperation by trained anthropologists.” She also had written in her instructions to her field workers on indexing folksongs, the words “Omit American Indian” were placed next to the “Anthropology” and “Ethnology” headings. These instructions are curious for a number of reasons, beginning with the fact that she had Alfred Kroeber, one of the foremost experts in the country of Native American music, and California Indians in particular, as one of her advisers at the University of California, so finding a “trained anthropologist” would not have been an issue. There had been a general avoidance of Native American cultures on the part of the Federal One projects (with the exceptions of the recordings of the Mississippi and Oklahoma FMP units, and Margaret Valiant’s recordings of Native American tribes for the FSA). The FWP’s “Supplementary Instructions to the American Guide Manual for Folklore Studies,” for example, stated “Indian folklore falls outside the scope of the American Folklore Series, but material involving relations between Indians and Whites may be submitted.”

156 Sidney Robertson, “Statement of accomplishment for O.P. 65-1-08-62, unit A-25, area unit serial no. 0803-1659: A study of California folk music,” (Berkeley, CA: Works Project Administration, 1940), 5. Kroeber’s Handbook of the Indians of California, published in 1925 by the Bureau of American Ethnology, was a landmark study, and he certainly would have been one of the best people she could have found in approaching Native Americans in the state.

But the fact remains that despite what Robertson wrote in her final report and in her instructions, she did record Native Americans on two occasions. In June 1939, she recorded a group of Native American women who were residents at the Pala Mission (of the Pala Indian Reservation in Pala, California, in San Diego County), although this music was not Native American music, but rather California mission music. In November 1939 she wrote Alan Lomax about an opportunity that had arisen that would allow her to record Native Americans under the auspices of the University of California:

There is talk of a combination of three departments with the music department to provide our funds for another year; and Anthropology wants us to do Indians and has a field worker who is a member of the peyote cult and will take me 'round… imagine! I have kept away from Indians, partly because I know too little about them (though that has not deterred me with Finns and Albanians!) but chiefly because departments of anthropology have accustomed Indians to being paid by the hour for their efforts in behalf of science, and I had no money for this. She told Spivacke of these recordings late in 1939: “Recently I recorded 8 songs by an Indian from Tesuque Pueblo in New Mexico, and I suggested to the music department, for whom the recording was done, that the two discs be sent you with a request for a couple of good Negro records in exchange.” These recordings apparently were never officially placed into her AAFS collection.

158 Founded in 1816, the Mission San Antonia de Pala, as it is now known, was part of a long history of colonization and Native American assimilation attempts. By the twentieth century it had become a vital part of the Pala Indian Mission. See Steven M. Karr, “Water We Believed Could Never Belong to Anyone”: The San Luis Rey River and the Pala Indians of Southern California,” The American Indian Quarterly 24, no. 3 (2000): 381–99.
159 Letter from Sidney Robertson to Alan Lomax, 2 November 1939, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
160 Letter from Sidney Robertson to Harold Spivacke, 8 December 1939, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
Robertson’s attitude about remuneration of the musicians she recorded was philosophical as well as financial. As she told Spivacke in November 1937, “Paying for songs or singing goes much against my conscience.” “I have nailed down some Basques around Stockton but doubt if they will sing without being paid.” “I am informed they are sure to demand money. I take no responsibility for the Basque temperament and will cheerfully pay them, or at least tip them well—if I have some money!” One of the reasons that Robertson opposed paying informants was that it might create an undesirable power dynamic between collector and performer. In her instructions to her workers she wrote: “Don't press people; treat them as collaborators. On the other hand, don’t allow a performer to feel that he is doing you a personal favor by allowing you to take down his songs.” She wanted the interaction between performer and collector to be as transparent as possible, and in her mind, money tainted the experience. The one performer Robertson did pay was Emma Dusenbury. In this case, she provided an honorarium of $1 per day, both out of respect for Dusenbury as an artist and concern for her wellbeing. Dusenbury was blind, in her mid-seventies, and living in poverty when Lomax and Robertson visited her.

**Asian Music**

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161 Sidney Robertson to Harold Spivacke, 9 November 1937, AFC Folder “Alan Lomax Correspondence–1937, November,” 1.
162 Sidney Robertson, “Instructions to Workers,” AFC–SRC 1940/001.
Despite Robertson’s early discussions of recording “Henry’s Koreans,” and other groups in the region, she recorded no Asian music over the course of her project. Her colleagues had considerable interest in recording this music (particularly Henry Cowell). Moreover, Gerald Strang had agreed to send her twenty blank discs for the effort as she was planning her project (copies of which she would send back to him). Robertson mentioned in at least two letters to Spivacke her intentions to record this music, although there are no indications why she did not. On 12 October 1938, Robertson told Spivacke that she had been investigating Japanese music in San Francisco, but had come up with few, if any, viable leads. She had found a lot of “mediocre Japanese music,” which she noted, “can be better illustrated by records made in Japan and on sale here now.” But her main concern had to do with the “authenticity” of the music that she had been able to find:

Of course this is of interest, but this music is influenced by Occidental music without having much influence here in return, and it seems more likely to die out abruptly than to be amalgamated, so to speak, and kept alive in an attenuated form here. (handwritten: There is no interchange between [Japanese] and [American] folk music.)… There are plenty of Japanese commercial records showing the effect of jazz on folk and popular music in Japan, easily available in San Francisco. Also there are good records of very fine traditional Japanese music. So, except from the historical point of view in the state here, I do not see much point in recording this sort of thing, much as I enjoy doing it. What do you think?163

Robertson’s other mention of recording Asian music came in a 26 December 1939 letter to Spivacke, in which she lamented that her project had “done nothing with the Oriental groups (Japanese, Chinese, Hindu) this year,” but that she was “looking forward” to recording Asian groups the following year. By this time, however, her

163 Letter from Sidney Robertson to Harold Spivacke, 12 October 1938, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
project was in a state of flux, and between this letter and her final recording trip on 11 September, she made very few recordings (a few discs of Hungarian, Icelandic, Gaelic, and Basque songs). It seems that Robertson simply ran out of time, and it is clear that although she had worries that her project might not be extended, she held out hope until it was finally dissolved.

Photographs and Technical Drawings

Following Seeger’s advice, Robertson documented the performers, their instruments, and the settings visually, with photographs and technical drawings. J. L. Hall, the WPA photographer for the project, was responsible for all 168 photographs made for the project, and he set up a darkroom in the Shattuck Avenue office. Robertson described her photographer as “a Welsh-American of long professional experience in his field.”¹⁶⁴ Joseph H. Handon, an “unusually competent” worker, according to Robertson, provided many of the technical drawings of the instruments they photographed or brought into the office.¹⁶⁵ In total, there are forty-five sketches and technical drawings of twenty-eight instruments, including those from Robertson’s Croatian, Portuguese, and Armenian recording sessions, as well as some instruments that she did not record, including a Chinese temple drum and two Chinese lutes (which she may have had on hand, or was able to borrow). Robertson explained their inclusion in her status report for the WPA: “No consistent attempt to study Oriental

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 18. Handon left the project in September 1939, and a young female architect (unnamed) completed the final tracings of the drawings.
instruments was made this year. These three Chinese instruments are typical and not at all rare; they were undertaken at the start of the project because they were simple to draw and conveniently at hand.\textsuperscript{166} The technical drawings are elaborately detailed and contain information about physical measurements as well as views from all sides of the instrument. In theory, each drawing would undergo four preparation stages: a freehand, generally full-sized sketch made in the field with measurements taken from the instrument; a pencil-drawn reduction of the rough sketch to scale; a finished scale drawing in pencil with complete measurements and applicable labels; and a final tracing in ink of the former phase with importance placed on the drawing’s final presentation. Not all of the drawings went through all four phases before the project ended, though many of the Armenian and Croatian instruments were completed.

**Sirvart Poladian’s Study in Folksong Variants**

Robertson believed that her project would need a system that would enable the workers to catalogue folksongs easily for use by the AAFS and future researchers, and so she charged Sirvart Poladian with the task of developing a melodic classification study of the songs Robertson collected. Robertson told Seeger in 1939, “I think a system of melodic indexing ought to accompany the ‘factory method—anything esoteric, not more than the average music school grad could direct—and nothing that pretends to bring variants together, but something like a reduction of

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 11.
melodies to cards so they can be filed according to scale degrees or intervals.\textsuperscript{167} Poladian had already begun classifying folksongs on index cards for the project in an attempt to find a practical way to categorize folksongs on the basis of common traits. Robertson outlined the aims of the study in variants in her Statement of Accomplishment: “The broad problem which is uppermost in the minds of everyone working with folk songs is the difficulty of indexing melodies so that they may be located easily, and the related difficulty of bringing together scattered variants of a single tune family.”\textsuperscript{168} Poladian’s monograph, which she sent to George Herzog, Albert Elkus, and Edward Lawton for comments, is seventy-five pages long with ten tables and twenty-six pages of music.

Poladian supervised a team of employees in a study of variants of the Anglo-Saxon folksong tradition of the United States. They examined twelve text families through 108 tunes, twenty-one of which were taken from English collections, with a few from the California project, including some American versions.\textsuperscript{169} Poladian’s choice of repertoire was based on a preconceived thesis: namely, that she could find trans-Atlantic connections within the literature, even though she acknowledged that such geographical dispersion should be approached with caution.\textsuperscript{170}

\textsuperscript{167} Letter from Sidney Robertson to Charles Seeger, September 2, 1939, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
\textsuperscript{168} Robertson, “Statement of Accomplishment,” 15.
\textsuperscript{170} Poladian, “A Study in Variants,” 2.
Poladian’s research was based in part on previous work on variants made by scholars such as Helen Roberts, Eduardo Martinez Torner, Hans Mersmann, Sigurd Hustvedt, Ilmari Krohn, Gustav Arlt, and Oswald Koller, and she examined their methodologies throughout the course of her study in order to come up with her own system of classification. Of particular importance to her work was the musical typology of George Herzog, to whom she intended to send her study for comments. Herzog, who had recently edited a collection of folksongs for the Federal Theatre Project (1937), which were collected by Arthur Palmer Hudson, classified melodies according to type (e.g., traditional Child ballad, singing game song), final pitch, range, scale, structure, prosodic feet, and rhythm. He transposed all of the melodies to a common “tonic,” and ordered them according to their final.\textsuperscript{171}

Poladian aimed to create a large body of data that could be analyzed statistically in order to provide a method of filing and reference and also to serve as a basis for the work of future scholars. This sort of comparative, empirical study was necessary because, according to Poladian, without data, “no assumption can be made about elements of a tune which are constant and which are variable.”\textsuperscript{172} She defined a “variant” as a modified, secondary element of a tune that preserves its primary skeletal features, while disregarding elements such as passing tones, embellishments, and harmonic or modal changes. A medley of tunes, in which an unrelated melody was inserted into a particular song, was similarly disregarded. In order to be

\textsuperscript{171} George Herzog, back matter to A. P. Hudson, \textit{Folk Tunes from Mississippi} (New York: WPA Federal Theatre Project, National Service Bureau, publication no. 25, 1937), xx.

\textsuperscript{172} Poladian, “A Study in Variants,” 1.
considered a variant, each tune needed to bear a similar melodic structure within its first four measures. Each version of a song was transcribed onto a single sheet and then placed into a stack whereby the researcher could look at many variants simultaneously to note similarities and differences.

Poladian examined a number of criteria for tune classification in previous studies, such as phrase finals, accented tones, index of the first four intervals, skeletal tones that represented the foundation of the melody, and melodic contour. Although textual variants contributed to differences in melodic content, they were not considered as significant as musical considerations. Furthermore, she found that variations in intervallic content, such as the initial interval of a tune, could be reconciled as a matter of individual or regional preferences, and that certain interval skips might merely reflect aspects particular to a given mode.173 Her initial conclusion as to the fundamental structural feature of variants was that rhythmically accented tones tended to remain fixed throughout a series of melodic variations.174 In later studies she modified her stance and concluded that, above all other features, melodic contour, or the direction of movement of each tone of the melody, was the most outstanding, as well as constant, characteristic of Anglo-Saxon ballads.175 She later wrote that melodic contour “appears to leave a lasting impression upon the

human mind, surviving to a remarkable degree the uncertainties of oral transmission, the whims of editors, of periods and of styles.” 176

Poladian admitted that her study contained problems in its incipient form and was merely a starting point for future scholarship. She did not feel this study was as original as her thesis on Armenian music, largely because she was rushed. 177 Robertson was somewhat wary of Poladian’s findings as well, and acknowledged in her statement of accomplishment that more research needed to be undertaken. 178 In a letter to Charles Seeger, Robertson noted that if one classified melodies based on broad issues such as skeletal or accented tones, a certain number of variants became evident, but when one classified them through smaller structural elements, other aspects of variation appeared.179 Robertson did, however, acknowledge the usefulness of Poladian’s method in her “Statement of Accomplishment”:

Admittedly this will not serve to bring together all variants of a given tune since variants may be related through other elements than the one considered as primary here. But the large number of variants which can be grouped together in this way, coupled with the relative simplicity of the method, recommend it as a useful technique for melodic study…. Her conclusions as to the persistence of constant elements are suggestive but not final. It would seem possible to select certain elements as constant within family groups; but they differ widely from group to group. 180

In a 1974 article on previous methodological systems in ethnomusicological research, Norma McLeod enlarged and expanded criticism of Poladian’s system of typology

176 Ibid., 35.
179 Sidney Robertson to Charles Seeger, 2 September 1939, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
because it eliminated culturally specific factors and reduced melody to the alignment of accented tones and melodic contour. McLeod also called into question the application of the term “typology,” which is defined as a culturally specific, multidimensional classification system in which groups are sorted according to a simultaneous intersection of categories.

This work clearly demonstrated the difference in aims between a comparative system and a cultural description. The items Poladian extracted from her index were all context-sensitive, and in comparative studies they are the first to be thrown out. Again, no attempt is made to treat music as a system nor to place it in context; rather, bits of music are discarded until nothing is left but series of variant phrases. The end is pure classification, but without the refinements of typological analysis with which archaeologists are cognizant.181

Although Poladian did not come to a definite conclusion regarding the links between the Anglo-Saxon ballads and their counterparts in the United States, she did devote a chapter of her study to the general differences that were observable between English and American variants.

**Additional Work of Robertson’s California Folk Music Project**

Another endeavor undertaken by Robertson and her staff was the photographing of rare books of folksongs referred to as “songsters.” This part of the project arose because the Bancroft Library at the University of California would only allow Robertson access to its rare songbook collections if she first made photographs of them. Robertson subsequently used these songsters as reference materials for her folksong collection. As the project progressed Robertson decided to complete the file

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of prints of early songsters that the University owned. In all they photographed forty-five songsters from the Bancroft library and made a set of five-by-seven prints.

In addition to the University’s collection, Robertson arranged to photograph a number of other rare songbooks as well. She collected songsters from a number of libraries within the state, such as the Sutro Library in San Francisco and various California State Libraries. Among these materials were out-of-print collections of Armenian and Gaelic songs, eighteenth-century mission music, and a collection of songs from a library of a music teacher and fiddler from the 1860s. The most valuable and rarest collection that the project photographed was of mission music that had been recently discovered in the Stanford Museum by Carlton Sprague Smith. In total, 117 items were photographed, resulting in more than 9,200 pages of material. The film from the collection was distributed between the Sutro, State, and Bancroft libraries.¹⁸²

Robertson and her staff researched melodies that accompanied the texts found in the songsters that they had filmed and created a collated list of California songster texts with tunes from printed and oral sources. At the time of her status report for the WPA, only six melodies that had come from oral tradition had been matched with texts printed in songsters, with the exclusion of those melodies that were available in printed versions contemporary with the texts.¹⁸³ The list of melodies named in the songsters was nearly eight hundred, and Robertson’s staff was able to locate about half of these melodies in various songbooks. According to Robertson, she had only

¹⁸³ Ibid., 13.
anticipated to find around three hundred texts and tunes when the project began. Melodies of folksongs had been largely ignored in favor of their texts, and Robertson believed that this research would be valuable to the University, particularly as a basis for studies of pioneer music in California.¹⁸⁴

Robertson also made a checklist of California songs for her project. She and her staff compiled a two-volume index of folksongs for the WPA and the Library of Congress that included her field recordings and pieces found in the songsters they had researched. The first volume was dedicated to early printed materials and contained an index of titles with data on named tunes, and another index of first lines of songs. The index separated materials gathered from broadsides and songsters, and included forty-nine songsters and over five hundred broadsides. The second volume dealt with items recorded on disks from the oral tradition, most likely from her own fieldwork. At the time of her status report, the checklist was being published in mimeographed form and a dozen copies were to be sent to the WPA. Robertson’s index was later included in the Check-list of recorded songs in the English language in the Library of Congress Archive of American Folk Song to July, 1940, that was published in 1942 by the Archive of American Folk Song of the Library of Congress, with technical assistance provided by Alan Lomax.

Other aspects of Robertson’s California Folk Music Project included a collection of Portuguese music from the Azores. Robertson, with the assistance of Alice Lemos Avila, transcribed thirty-five songs from field recordings and translated

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 13.
the texts of the songs into English. In addition to this song collection, Robertson’s staff researched the history of Portuguese music and culture in California as material to accompany the songs. As of the time of Robertson’s status report in January 1940, the research had not yet been completed.

Another project that had not been completed at this time was a glossary of Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American song and dance forms. Robertson and her workers gathered their research from articles published in periodicals from Spain, Portugal, and Latin America, which numbered more than ninety sources, many of which had not yet been examined. Robertson anticipated that it would take another year to complete. In addition to this glossary, members of the staff made translations of folksong texts and German musicological articles that were relevant to the project.

The Demise of Robertson’s Project and Some Attempts at Resuscitation

In January 1940, Robertson submitted her Statement of Accomplishment to her superiors at the WPA. She confessed that much of her research had not been completed because much more material had come to light over the course of her project than she had anticipated. She added that she planned to finish these projects by the end of the current year, and also that she intended to record ethnic groups that she had not yet been able to cover. Chief among these groups were the various Asian communities located in and around San Francisco, whose populations represented the largest minority groups in northern California. Unfortunately for Robertson, her

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185 Ibid., 1.
project was not renewed, and she was unable either to record these groups or to finish the projects already underway.

In Robertson’s defense, none of the extant letters from the end of 1939 gives any sign that the WPA planned to discontinue her project; Robertson was worried, however, about getting funding from other sponsors. She expressed these fears in a letter to Charles Seeger in September 1939:

It seems unlikely we shall survive the new year…. I expect to close around January 1st as sponsor’s funds—i.e., non-labor funds for rent, paper, ink, typewriter rent, etc., will not be forthcoming so far as I can now see. If you have any ideas as to where a grant of $1000 could be obtained for us, do let me know—that is all it would take…. The University very much wants the project to continue, but it is against University policy to provide more than operating space and technical sponsorship—advice, etc. … I have no doubt of being able to get Federal funds from WPA for labor for another year; but do not see where the famous 5% or so for materials and rent can come from.\[186\]

In a letter to Spivacke dated 26 December 1939, Robertson detailed the Library’s contribution to her project up to that point, stating that she had received 150 disks from them, and had returned 110. She also informed Spivacke of her plans for the following year, should the project be extended:

I am in the process of rewriting the project for another year, and if you feel you would like more disks from California, I should like the project to undertake to make them for you under the same arrangement we have now. I had intended deferring this request until we had been able to send you photographs and catalog cards and the complete set of disks; but I was ill in November and December so am obliged to rewrite the project before certain parts of it are complete. If you are willing to send us up to 200 disks in the course of another 12 months, would you be good enough to wire me to that effect, as I am obliged to complete my “documentation” this week if there is not to be a hiatus between the old and new projects. (Such a hiatus means that trained workers are scattered and that we lose our quarters and are obliged to pack up and move.) We have done nothing with the Oriental groups

\[186\] Letter from Sidney Robertson to Charles Seeger, 27 September 1939, AFC–SRC 1940/001.
(Japanese, Chinese, Hindu) this year, and I am looking forward to that. One fine shanty singer recorded this year and has introduced me to two others; and the Indian Bureau has some singers on tap here which they will arrange for me to record. I have done almost nothing in the Farm Security Administration camps and hope to pursue this contact more consistently.\footnote{Letter from Sidney Robertson to Harold Spivacke, 26 December 1939, AFC–SRC 1940/001.}

Spivacke sent the request for the extra two hundred acetate disks to his superiors at the Library of Congress—a request that was ultimately approved. The WPA officials, however, were not as quick to act, and by the beginning of April, her funding had expired.\footnote{In a telegram dated 29 December 1939, Edward Waters, assistant chief of the Music Division of the Library of Congress, informed Robertson of the approval of the acetate disks. Waters contacted Robertson again on 18 January 1940, and told her that her request to continue the project was under consideration. Sometime between this letter and one from Robertson to Waters on 10 April 1940, however, her WPA funding expired. Letter from Sidney Robertson to Edward Waters, 10 April 1940, AFC–SRC 1940/001.} By this time Robertson had moved her office from its location at 2108 Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley to the Music Department at the University of California with the expectation that her WPA funding would be renewed within a matter of weeks. Although there were no longer any workers to assist her, she told Waters that she was “glad to have a chance to finish up a few things without the continual responsibility for a group of workers.”\footnote{Letter from Sidney Robertson to Edward Waters, 10 April 1940, AFC–SRC 1940/001.}

Several faculty members at the University of California, including Albert Elkus, Alfred Kroeber, and Archer Taylor, came to Robertson’s aid. They composed a strong letter, dated 14 February 1940, that underscored the importance of the project to the University as a whole: that the project was of interdisciplinary importance, that any time lost meant that valuable research would be lost as well, and that the University could benefit from using this folk music project to establish a California
Folklore Society. \(^{190}\) “Those who have signed this letter feel that their respective departments, diverse as they are, have all a vital stake in the continuance of this project.” \(^{191}\) Moreover the authors of the letter asserted that “no study of racial culture will voluntarily ignore the light thrown upon the characteristic patterns and preoccupations of the folk-mind by its songs.” \(^{192}\) Time was of the essence, the authors urged, noting it would not be possible to write the history of the West in its social aspects unless a concerted effort is made … to gather in permanent and tangible form the evidence of the popular cultures which [do] not create their own written memorials: they exist for the most part only in oral tradition; they are inevitably modified out of recognition in the course of time and are eventually forgotten, unless, by a foresight which in the past has been all too rare, investigators take the pains to make a permanent record of them while they are still current. \(^{193}\)

Moreover, the professors argued, Robertson’s project would serve as the nucleus for a California folklore society, which were proud features of other states such as Virginia and North Carolina. “No institution could be so fitting a sponsor as the State University,” the authors asserted. “If such a society were established, the University would desire to have an authoritative voice in its policies and activities. It would

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\(^{190}\) The complete list of signatories is as follows: Arthur G. Brodeur, professor of English; Bertrand H. Bronson, associate professor of English, George H. Guttridge, associate professor of English History; Albert I. Elkus professor of Music; Walter Morris Hart, professor of English; A.L. Kroeber, professor of Anthropology; Edward B. Lawton Jr., instructor in Music; Frederic L. Paxson, Margaret Byrne professor of United States History; Archer Taylor, professor of German; and Paul S. Taylor, professor of Economics.  


\(^{192}\) Ibid.  

\(^{193}\) Ibid.
surely be creditable, and a meritorious service to the state, for the University to provide the initial impulse in its formation.”

Alfred Frankenstein, music critic for the San Francisco Chronicle, also came to Robertson’s aid. In an article titled “Our Musical Resources Are Tapped by the WPA” (21 July 1940), Frankenstein lauded Robertson’s project as “a Californian ‘musical paleography’ of great rarity and interest; their files on the folk music of linguistic minorities make up what is probably the most alive and human document of ‘foreign’ cultures in California that has ever been put together.”

Despite mistakenly stating that Robertson had been head of the RA music unit, Frankenstein’s article glowingly described the richness of her project in uncovering heretofore-unknown musical traditions to the public-at-large, including profiles of some of the more colorful performers Robertson recorded. He also made sure to mention that the project was temporarily suspended, but that Robertson was fighting to begin it anew. Frankenstein ended his article on a lighter note regarding Robertson’s persistence as a song collector: “If you find yourself tempted to burst into song in a bar-room some

194 Ibid.
195 Alfred Frankenstein, “Our Musical Resources Are Tapped by the WPA,” San Francisco Chronicle 21 July 1940, “This World” section, 13. Alfred Frankenstein (1906–1981) was both an art and music critic and a performing musician who was raised and educated in Chicago. Frankenstein, who had come to the Chronicle in 1934 from Chicago—where he had been the New York correspondent for the Chicago Tribune, an instructor of music history at the University of Chicago [1932–34], and a clarinetist with the Chicago Civic Orchestra [1920–25]—was notably one of the few critics in California to embrace Henry Cowell’s New Music Society, having written glowing pre-concert reports for some of its concerts. He moved to California in 1932 and worked for a short time as a critic in Los Angeles, before he became the art and music critic for the San Francisco Chronicle in 1934. He was the program annotator for the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, guest instructor at Stanford University and Mills College, and wrote for many other important music journals and newspapers. Cornel Lengyel, ed. History of Music Project, 7 (San Francisco: Works Project Administration, 1940; reprint ed., New York: AMS Press, 1972), 467.
night, watch out for microphones. If there is one, Sidney Robertson is probably behind it, and your lyric cocktail effort will be embalmed forever in the stately archives of Bancroft and the Library of Congress.”

Robertson Post-California

After funding was discontinued and Robertson’s project came to an end, she received a letter from Seeger urging her to return to Washington to assist him in updating and continuing the catalog of songs at the AAFS. She was not aware that this job was under the auspices of the WPA (the so-called Library of Congress Project), and therefore intended for people who were local (that is, Washington D.C.)—therefore she was not actually eligible for the position. Robertson suspected that Seeger asked her to come to Washington as a sort of good-luck charm for saving his own position: “[Seeger] considered, with some reason, that I had saved his RA job for him at one time, and in his anxiety he seemed to have a superstitious belief that I could do it again.” Nonetheless, Robertson thought that this job might provide the opportunity for her to continue with her field research, though she learned when she arrived that Seeger’s position was due to be phased out. Ultimately, she never

196 Frankenstein, “Our Musical Resources Are Tapped by the WPA.” It is clear that Frankenstein knew Robertson personally, or had received help in writing his article, because many of his statements come from Robertson’s own experiences in the field, and are nearly verbatim transcripts of her statement of accomplishment.


198 In February 1941, Seeger was appointed director of the Pan American Union’s Inter-American Music Center and as chief of its Music and Visual Arts Division. The Pan-American Union (PAU) was dedicated to the promotion of cultural exchange between North and South America, and included among its members Leo Rowe (director-general), William Manger (assistant director), and Harold
ended up on the WPA’s payroll and lived largely without income during her brief
time in Washington, with the exception of some money she received from Alan
Lomax after she helped compile a bibliography of American folksongs.

In 1942 Robertson detailed her project in an article titled “The Recording of
Folk Music in California” published in the January issue of the California Folklore
Quarterly. After a brief history of the state of California and previous folk music
research therein, she spent much of the rest of her article outlining her system of
classification (Series E and M), describing the various groups of performers, and
providing insights into these various groups. Robertson concluded the article with the
statement that folk music research in California was still in its infancy, and that there
were many groups yet to be recorded, most notably Asians, South and Central
Americans, and Middle Easterners. The article reads both as a synopsis of her work
and a lament for what she had to leave behind.

The project never left Robertson’s mind, it seems, as a dozen years later she
returned to write about her California recordings while compiling a series of
autobiographical manuscripts. In one such document, dated July 1954, Robertson

Spivacke. Seeger also enlisted Margaret Valiant; Ruth Crawford; Vanett Lawlor, the associate
director of the Music Educators’ National Conference (MENC); and Gustavo Duran of the Rio de Janeiro
Music Conservatory. Henry Cowell also became involved with the PAU’s activities when Seeger
placed him on a committee of musicians who gathered as much Latin American music as they could
find. This music was subsequently sorted and eventually sold to music and textbook publishing
companies within the United States for use by music educators. Robertson worked for the PAU for a
short time: Seeger offered her a three-month contract as his office assistant, beginning in June 1941, a
task for which she was ill-suited: “At the Pan American Union I was a total loss at managing the
office—partly because I never did have any idea what the various secretaries were supposed to be
doing…” Her contract expired at the end of September, and on the twenty-seventh of that month she
and Henry Cowell married. See Kerst, ed., “Cataloging Folk Music,” 11; and Pescatello, Charles
Seeger, 175.
sketched out a nine-page outline for a book (which was never published) tentatively titled “Folksong in California.” She noted, “I am giving a picture of Calif. now (or as of 10–15 years ago) in a form that will encourage and make it seem natural for people interested in my Hebrides or Armenian or Portuguese songs to go to their neighbors to hear them sung and to find more of them.” 199 With chapters titled “Music from the California Missions”; “Music among California Miners”; “Music of Sea Islanders Who Settled around San Francisco Bay”; “Valley Farm People” (including Basques, Armenians, and Hungarians); and “Woodsmen and Others from the North,” Robertson envisioned a sub-regional study of Northern California that presages the current musicological trend toward studies of “space” and “place” as loci of identity formation. The sketches also reflect some of the current folk music studies that attempt to discover the identities of the musicians behind the songs that were recorded in the era—a focus that is decidedly less “collector-driven” and one that gives credit where it is due: on the musicians. She noted that

Each chapter would then begin by making the connection between the place the singers left behind, the life there, and their location here—enough of this to lead a reader to know what to expect. Then would come comment about a specific group and my relation to it and adventures in connection with it—followed by the songs that belong to that group, the singers comment on their songs if any, and/or further data on the song. Insofar as I can, “immigrants” from Wisconsin would be treated in much the same tone as “immigrants” from Iceland or Italy. 200

200 Ibid., 1. She held the (perhaps naïve) belief that many immigrants tended to settle in areas that are similar to those that they left: Hebrides Islanders tend to live near the ocean, Finns in Northern California, and Texans in Los Angeles.
This statement is perhaps the closest Robertson came to defining a “California” folksong. It represents the same “catch-as-catch-can” approach as she had when she went into the field for her California Folk Music Project, when she found performers on the side of the road, and recorded with the sounds of milk cooling on the pipes. Robertson’s study, it turns out, was not an “objective record” after all, but rather a highly subjective one—a story with her as a central character. At the heart of that story was migration, the thread that tied together not only the lives residents of California, but also the life of the “Lady on Wheels.”
CONCLUSION

On 4 December 1942 Franklin Roosevelt notified Major General Philip B. Fleming, the acting commissioner of the Work Projects of the Federal Works Agency, that the WPA was to be liquidated as soon as possible. By the end of June 1943, the WPA was no more. In an official letter to Fleming, which was reprinted in the WPA’s final report, Roosevelt expressed his pride in the accomplishments of his massive work relief program, while taking a parting shot at its detractors: “I am proud of the Work Projects Administration organization. It has displayed courage and determination in the face of uninformed criticism. The knowledge and experience of this organization will be of great assistance in the consideration of a well-rounded public works program for the postwar period.”¹ Using wartime rhetoric that encapsulated the his shift from “Dr. New Deal” to “Dr. Win the War,” Roosevelt concluded, “With the satisfaction of a good job well done and with a high sense of integrity, the Work Projects Administration has asked for and earned an honorable discharge.”²

Although the WPA officially ended in June 1943, to a large degree it had been withering for four years, beginning with the reorganization of June 1939, which transferred the funding for the projects from the federal government to the already cash-strapped states, thus severely limiting the WPA administrators’ abilities to run

² Ibid.
their programs. Moreover, by 1939, Roosevelt, hampered by an increasingly intransigent Congress, had little energy or political capital to keep his foundering work-relief programs operating at peak capacity. Additionally, Roosevelt was facing the looming possibility of U.S. involvement in the Second World War, and his June 1939 meeting with the King and Queen, as well as his numerous meetings with Winston Churchill between 1939 and the summer of 1941, were attempts to shore up relations with Great Britain. In August 1941, Churchill and Roosevelt signed the Atlantic Charter at a secret meeting in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, which outlined the pact between war-torn Britain and the isolationist United States. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 meant that Roosevelt’s work-relief programs were suddenly obsolete.

The fate of the Federal One arts projects—with the exception of Hallie Flanagan’s Federal Theatre Project, dissolved in June 1939—mirrored the trajectory of the other WPA programs. But without federal funding, many of the Federal One administrators were left to scramble to continue expensive programs, such as professional orchestras, or nationally based projects such as the Federal Art Project’s *Index of American Design*, which had been difficult enough to support during the good times. Moreover, the eighteen-month rule—instituted at the same time as the 1939 WPA reorganization, which stipulated that no WPA employee could be on the government rolls for more than eighteen months at a time—crippled Federal One projects, such as Sokoloff’s FMP, which relied on trained personnel for the success of the programs.
Folk music research and collecting, which had been a tangential part of these arts projects’ mission to begin with, became vestigial. Sidney Robertson’s California Folk Music Project lasted until the fall of 1940. The Florida Federal Writers’ Project’s statewide recording expedition had ended a few months earlier. The folk music cataloging activities of the Library of Congress Project, which had been set up as a stopgap measure for FWP and HRS workers in Washington, D.C. displaced by the WPA reorganization, was liquidated in July 1941. But perhaps the greatest fallout from the decline of the WPA was the fate of the WPA Joint Committee on Folk Arts, which Botkin and Seeger had established in the fall of 1938. Their goal to “coordinate all technical and cultural activities of the professional projects in folklore, folk music, and folk art, to prepare materials for utilization by the separate projects and to correlate this work with similar activities conducted or sponsored by other government and private agencies” hardly had time to get off the ground, and was left largely unrealized.³ By the summer of 1941, nearly all folk music–related activities under the WPA programs had ended.

One by one, the individuals involved in this briefly articulated network of folk music researchers and collectors began to peel off as well. Charles Seeger left the Federal Music Project in February 1941 to take two positions with the Pan American Union (PAU): director of the Inter-American Music Center, and chief of the Music and Visual Arts Division, which as Anne Dhu McLucas notes, “entailed promoting

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³ “Coordinating Committee on Living Folklore, Folk Music, and Folk Art, Federal Project Number One, Works Progress Administration,” draft manuscript, 23 November 1938 American Folklife Center, Folder “W.P.A. Coordinating Committee on Living Folklore.”
the interchange of music and musical activities between the Americas—a part of the Good Neighbor policy of Roosevelt during the war.” He founded the International Music Council for UNESCO in 1949, then later retired from the PAU in 1953.

Benjamin Botkin likewise left his position as national folklore editor for the FWP around the time he was appointed head of the Writers’ Program Unit of the Library of Congress Project in the summer of 1939. In 1941, he was appointed a “fellow-in-residence” at the Library of Congress, a position that had been funded by a Carnegie grant. The following year he accepted the position of assistant director of the AAFS, replacing Alan Lomax, who left to join the Office of War Information in October 1942 and to continue his work in radio broadcasting. He was appointed director of the AAFS in 1944 and remained in the position for a year, when he left to work on a series of U.S. folklore collections following unexpected and overwhelming bestseller success of his first collection, *A Treasury of American Folklore* (1944).

Music Division chief Harold Spivacke later claimed, in jest, that he kicked Botkin out for being too famous: “I said, ‘Get out of here, glamour boy! Don’t be silly. You can’t waste your time here, for the amount of money I’m paying you.’” For his part, Spivacke stayed on in his position until his retirement in 1972 at age sixty-seven.

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6 Spivacke, interview by Isabel S. Grossner, 47–48.
longtime assistant, Edward N. Waters then took over the position and held it until his retirement in 1976.  

Sidney Robertson, after working on a three-month contract (February–April 1941) as Seeger’s assistant at the PAU, continued her folk music collecting, recording Carrie Grover in Teaneck, New Jersey in April of that year. She and Henry Cowell married on 27 September 1941, and for a time she took over Henry’s lectures at the Mills School in New York while he taught at the New School, served as a consultant for the PAU, and worked for the Office of War Information. Robertson Cowell rededicated herself to her pluralistic approach to collecting traditional musics both from within and outside of the Anglo-American tradition in the 1950s. In September and October 1950, Robertson Cowell accompanied Maud Karpeles to revisit the southern Appalachian region where Karpeles had collected songs with Cecil Sharp nearly four decades earlier. Robertson Cowell also recorded in Bangladesh, Iran, and Pakistan; Canada (Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia); and Ireland (Aran Islands); as well as in California, Massachusetts, Montana, New York, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.  

Herbert Halpert also continued collecting folk music after his Southern States Recording Expedition ended in July 1939, using the sound truck to travel through New York and New Jersey under the auspices of the FTP’s National Service Bureau.  

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After the NSB dissolved at the end of that summer, Halpert worked for a time for the New York City FWP, supervising workers who were collecting urban lore, such as street vendors, and children’s rhymes, games, and songs. Halpert continued his regional collecting through the summer of 1940, when he left New York to enroll in a Ph.D. program in English and folklore at the University of Indiana, working closely with folklorist Stith Thompson. After serving three years in the military (1943–46), Halpert completed his dissertation in 1947, titled “Folktales and Legends in the New Jersey Pines: A Collection and a Study.” He later founded the folklore department at Memorial University of Newfoundland, and created the university’s Folklore and Language Archive in 1968. George Herzog remained at Columbia University until 1948, when he left to become a professor in folklore and comparative musicology at Indiana University. Using his own large collection of field recordings and the Berlin-Phonogramm Archiv wax cylinders he had brought with him to the United States in the early 1920s, Herzog founded the university’s Archive of Traditional Music (housed for a time in a Quonset hut left over from WWII), which is still one of the premiere folklore and ethnomusicology archives in the nation.

The Fate and Future of the WPA Folk Music Collections: An Institutional History

11 According to Halpert he was later let go by the FWP “mainly because the book I had proposed, on New York City children’s lore, was thought to be too large a project.” Halpert, “Coming Into Folklore,” 451.
Perhaps the more critical question, or set of questions, involves the fate and future of the thousands of folksongs these government workers collected, their field notes and questionnaires, and their melodic and textual transcriptions. Where did the materials end up after the projects ended? How did the resulting collections match up with the functionalist, musicological, and pluralistic concerns of the collectors and administrators? Were these individuals able to save the folk traditions they believed were at risk of extinction due to the corrupting influences of mass media and modernity? What life did these collections have after the WPA projects ended? Were they, in the end, merely exercises in salvage ethnography and archiving? Additionally, what can these collections tell us about folk culture and cultural pluralism in the 1930s? What do they mean for today?

As the Federal One arts projects gradually dissolved between 1939 and 1943, the massive amount of materials collected by these WPA fieldworkers ended up in numerous locations. General records pertaining to the WPA were sent to Roosevelt’s recently established National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C. (later transferred to the College Park, Maryland location). Many state-level WPA offices shipped their records to various state and local archives, as in the case of the California WPA records at the NARA branch in San Bruno. The Library of Congress also became a central repository for the Federal One arts projects documents. The manuscripts of the Federal Writers’ Project and Historical Records Survey, including voluminous song texts, interviews, and field notes, were placed in numerous locations at the LC (including the AAFS), before the Library transferred
the documents to the Manuscript Division in 1984. The Federal Music and Theatre Projects’ documents became part of the LC Music Division, where they remain to this day.

Yet with no central plan in place for the dismantling of the WPA during the Second World War, many records were simply thrown away or taken by project workers for safekeeping, as in the case of Florida FWP worker Stetson Kennedy. Kennedy, who continued throughout his life to write about Florida folklore and fight for social and civil rights issues, kept many boxes of the Florida FWP manuscripts slated for the trash bin at his Fruit Cove Florida home, which he named “Beluthahatchee”, until his death on 27 August 2011. With the assistance of folklorist and Kennedy friend and biographer Peggy Bulger, the archives at Kennedy’s alma mater, the University of Florida now has these materials in their possession.

As was the mission of Robert W. Gordon, Carl Engel, the Lomaxes, and Harold Spivacke, the Archive of American Folk Song served as a central repository for many of these New Deal–era folk music collections, government sponsored or otherwise. To be sure, numerous other archives held some of the WPA-related folk music materials as well, and the AAFS entered into partnerships with many other institutions across the nation. In the case of Sidney Robertson’s California Folk Music Project, the University of California and the AAFS shared materials, with the AAFS making duplicates of Robertson’s recordings to be placed on deposit in the university’s archives (these recordings are now at Stanford University, which has a more well-developed audio preservation program). Before he left the AAFS in 1942,
Alan Lomax sent copies of the Texas recordings that the Lomaxes had made in the state to the University of Texas, which are now held by UT’s Briscoe Center for American History.

Beginning in 1941, Spivacke, Botkin, and Lomax decided to release some of the folk music recordings in the Archive’s holdings using their recently established recording laboratory. In the liner notes to his curated selection of AAFS recordings, *A Treasury of Library of Congress Field Recordings* (Rounder, 1997), Stephen Wade explains, “As a way of sampling the Archive’s holdings, the Library began publication of recorded folk music with the issuance of two ten-inch 78-rpm records, sponsored by an organization called Friends of Music in the Library of Congress.”

The records were successful and in 1942, the AAFS began issuing a series of 78-rpm records titled “Folk Music in the United States,” highlighting the work of individual collectors and regions of the United States. Alan Lomax edited and wrote liner notes for the first five records in the series, and William Fenton and Benjamin Botkin compiled the next series of five records. The Archive, under Duncan Emrich (head of the AAFS 1945–55), continued to release these recordings. Numerous luminaries in the fields of music, folklore, and ethnomusicology edited and contributed liner notes to more than seventy recordings, including (in order of release) George Pullen Jackson, Melville and Frances Herskovits, Juan Liscano, Charles Seeger, George Korson, Richard Waterman, Henrietta Yurchenco, Frances Densmore, Willard Rhodes, Helene Stratman-Thomas, Bertrand H. Bronson, and Archie Green, Alan

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14 Wade, liner notes to *A Treasury of Library of Congress Field Recordings*, 3.
Jabbour, and Paul Bowles, among others.\textsuperscript{15} Over time, and numerous format changes, the Library issued eighty-six recordings as part of the series.\textsuperscript{16}

The Archive of American Folk Song continued as a branch of the Music Division of the Library of Congress for nearly four decades after Botkin left in 1945. There were a host of directors during that time, including Duncan Emrich (1945–1955), Rae Korson (1955–1969), Alan Jabbour (1969–1974), and Joseph Hickerson (1974–1978).\textsuperscript{17} Beginning in the 1960s the Archive expanded its holdings to include traditional music from outside the United States, including Paul Bowles’s collection of Moroccan music, Halim El-Dabh’s collection of music of Mali, Ethiopia and Senegal, and Laura Boulton’s recordings of music from Africa, Asia, Canada, Europe, Haiti, Latin American, Mexico, and the West Indies.\textsuperscript{18}

In 1966, while he was at the University of California, Los Angeles, Charles Seeger published a landmark LP in the AAFS recording series, titled \textit{Versions and Variants of “Barbara Allen”} (AFS L 54).\textsuperscript{19} As the title suggests, the LP was a collection of different versions of the song “Barbara Allen,” which Seeger found in the AAFS holdings (two of the versions—Warde Ford’s and George Vinton Graham’s—came from Sidney Robertson’s California recordings). Included with the

\textsuperscript{16} Wade, liner notes to \textit{A Treasury of Library of Congress Field Recordings}, 3.
LP was a forty-page booklet outlining Seeger’s exhaustive research of tune variants of the song, which he contrasted with the melodic studies of Bertrand H. Bronson and Samuel Bayard. Folklorist James R. Cowdery notes, “One important point about Seeger’s work is that he referred almost exclusively to recordings, rather than to extant printed sources. … Thus Seeger’s … study actually dealt more with living folk culture, rather than with printed sources which may have been subject to … tampering.”20 (Of course, recordings presented numerous limitations of their own, including an assumption that what made it onto the recording was a faithful version that reflected the way the singer would actually perform the song.)

A signal moment for the Archive came in 1975, with the passage of the American Folklife Preservation Act (Public Law 94-201), which established the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. This Act was a collaborative effort among a number of supportive members of congress, but it would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of one folklorist: Archie Green (1917–2009), who in 1969 left his positions in the Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations and the English Department of the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign) to move to Washington D.C. to lobby Congress for the establishment of a national center for the study of folklore in the United States.21 Over the course of the next six years Green met with every member of Congress, noting that it was “impossible to describe sequentially how our folklife legislation fared without dealing with anomie and

anomaly—the long months of dreary waiting and the last-minute surfacing of intrusions.” After one failed attempt to get the bill passed in 1974, H.R. 6673 passed unanimously, after much negotiation, in both houses of Congress at the end of the 1975 legislative session, and President Gerald Ford signed it into law on 2 January 1976. The Archive of Folk Song was subsequently renamed the Archive of Folk Culture and transferred from the Music Division to the Folklife Center in 1978.

The New Deal Government Folk Music Collections in the Digital Age

In the early 1990s, the Library of Congress began experimenting with using computer technology to provide access to its holdings. Between 1990 and 1994, Library staff digitized materials from the LC’s “unparalleled collections of historical documents, moving images, sound recordings, and print and photographic media” and created CD-ROMs for use in schools. From there, the Library began working with a then-fledgling Internet infrastructure to make access to the LC’s collections unfettered and worldwide. With $13 million in private-sector donations, the Library began a National Digital Library Program, which launched the landmark “American Memory” project, a “pioneering systematic effort to digitize some of the foremost historical treasures in the Library and other major research archives and make them

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readily available on the Web to Congress, scholars, educators, students, the general public, and the global Internet community.”

The collections at the American Folklife Center were perfect candidates for the new digital initiative. Through the 1990s, AFC and other LC staff digitized and put online a number of folk music-centric presentations including Sidney Robertson Cowell’s California Folk Music Project (“California Gold: Northern California Folk Music from the Thirties”); “Voices from the Dust Bowl: the Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection, 1940–1941”); “Southern Mosaic: The John and Ruby Lomax Southern States Collection, 1939”; and “Florida Folklife from the WPA Collections, 1937–1942,” which featured the recordings of the Florida FWP as well as Herbert Halpert’s during his time in the state. In the case of the Sidney Robertson Cowell project, with the exception of her final report, all recordings, correspondence, field notes, worker instructions, photographs, technical drawings, and other related materials are now available online to anyone with a computer and online access. (The Library and the AFC continue to add collections to the American Memory project and to migrate existing collections into new online presentations to keep the interfaces fresh and user-friendly.)

This leap into the “Information Age” means that the popularization efforts of individuals such as Botkin and Lomax can be realized in ways that they could never

24 Ibid.
have imagined. But it also means a new set of priorities and responsibilities for the institutions and individuals that act as the tradition bearers for this music. The new salvage-ethnography frontier is digital. Recorded media such as the lacquer instantaneous discs on which these New Deal–era collectors recorded, are one of the most at-risk mechanical carriers, subject to the ravages of palmitic and stearic acid and flaking, due to the differences between the cellulose nitrate substrate and the disc itself, either aluminum, steel, glass, or other materials. In many cases, these discs had been transferred to analog tape decades earlier, or more recently to digital formats (all of which have their own preservation needs). But the problem that occurs with these preservation and digitization efforts is one of “authenticity,” although not to some slavish notion of loyalty to the original recorded object. The problem, rather, is practical, and revolves around issues of fidelity, speed, and the consistency of copies from disc to disc, or digital object to digital object (a problem I have experienced firsthand in my work with the Lomax Family Texas recordings at the Briscoe Center).

Problems of preservation are merely one issue for archives and libraries. Presentation and access pose an entirely different set of social and cultural problems in the digital realm. Writing shortly after the American Folklife Act was passed in 1976, Archie Green noted,

I do not feel that a single law or agency absolves Americans of responsibility constantly to define and refine their expressive symbols—those which set us apart as well as those which bond us together. Whether or not an academic or professional folklorist recognizes the political dimensions of his work, the world of power, of class, and or moral choice continues to spin. Folkloric items alone do not constitute a magic elixir to remedy all of society’s wrongs. Nevertheless, every item—blues or doll, proverb or moccasin—holds exceedingly complicated layers of meaning and utility. There will never be
enough folklorists, either within the Library of Congress’s Folklife Center or the American Folklore Society, to complete the large tasks enumerated in the bill.  

Nearly forty years later, Green’s words still ring true. The responsibility of cultural heritage institutions to “define and refine expressive symbols” while not glossing over the “political dimensions” of the materials presented nor the “complicated layers of meaning and utility,” is a difficult task that involves presentation and interpretation. (See the recent debates about “heritage not hatred” and institutionalized racism in the public display of the Confederate flag in the South.)

But as Mary Douglas argues in How Institutions Think, “Public memory is the storage system for the social order,” while noting, “Institutions systematically direct individual memory and channel our perception into forms compatible with the relations they authorize. They fix processes that are essentially dynamic, they hide their influence, and they rouse our emotions to a standardized pitch on standardized issues.”

How, then, are these folksongs, which are quintessentially dynamic processes, presented and represented in these online projects? What do these recordings tell us about cultural pluralism in the 1930s, and how do they make us think about issues of race and class in the twenty-first century? The answers to these questions are complicated. Given the wide audience for these online presentations—any person of any age or social or cultural background with access to a computer and the Internet—the Library of Congress has had to take into account issues of acceptability for

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general audiences. In some cases, songs with questionable content have been left out of these presentations. In other cases, questionable content is displayed uncritically, or even unintentionally. The website for Alan Lomax’s Association for Cultural Equity, which provides many digitized audio versions of phone calls, includes a metadata synopsis for a conversation Lomax had with former FWP worker and historian Jerre Mangione, in which Lomax described his father’s love for collecting African American music in the South: “My father was a fucking genius at getting blacks to sing, he loved it more than life itself. It was so dangerous.”28 Taken out of context, Lomax’s statement paints his father as a big-game hunter replete with khaki jumpsuit and pith helmet. Lomax, however, in the actual transcript has a more nuanced description of the cultural and political context of the time:

[My father] was an old-time Southerner. But the funny thing is, I’ve just been through all the family recordings in the Library of Congress, and there’s no question about the fact that my father was a fucking genius at getting blacks to sing. [Mangione: “Oh, he certainly was.”] And he loved it, more than life. He cared about that more than anything else, except his family. Black singing, that was his thing. And of course [the performers] felt that and responded accordingly, when it was safe. It was so dangerous then, my God you have no idea, Jerre, how dangerous [collecting] was.29

At their worst, such presentations can be sites for online tourism, voyeuristic yet divorced, sites of fetishistic, yet out-of-context, museum culture. The “museum effect,” which Svetlana Alpers defines as “the tendency to isolate something from its world, to offer it up for attentive looking and thus to transform it into art like our own,” encourages such an approach to what was once a vibrant living tradition, albeit

29 Ibid.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett furthers the “museum effect,” idea, arguing,

> Once the seal of the quotidian is pierced [by the museum experience], life is experienced as if represented. … Like the picturesque, in which paintings set the standard for experience, museum exhibitions transform how people look at their own immediate environs. The museum effect works both ways. Not only do ordinary things become special when placed in museum settings, but the museum experience itself becomes a model for experiencing life outside its walls.\footnote{Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, \textit{Destination Culture: Tourism, Museum, and Heritage} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 54.}

> In many respects, these field recordings present a kind of museum experience, distanced, yet present in the moment of culture contact, distinct from the sound of commercial recordings from the same era. The cracks and pops of these nearly eighty-year-old field recordings offer a sense of “authenticity,” a sort of “phonographic effect,” in the sense of Mark Katz’s nomenclature, which he describes as “the distinctive qualities that make the phonographic experience unique.”\footnote{Mark Katz, \textit{Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 6.}

Stephen Wade notes that “all of the recordings made originally on disc-cutting machines have a common and characteristic sound. It’s not a bad sound—some collectors even profess to prefer it to the ultra-clean quality created by today’s analog and digital tape recorders,” though he admits, “Wild horses couldn’t drag me into that argument.”\footnote{Wade, liner notes to \textit{A Treasury of Library of Congress Field Recordings}, 5.}

> Added to the sound of the recordings are the patina of the black-and-white photographs, the yellowing of the field notes and correspondence. The
functionalist philosophy to which many of these collectors subscribed falls away as
the context of these recordings is fundamentally altered or altogether removed.

I am fortunate in many respects to have been able to think about these folk
music collecting projects in the context of the current social, political, economic, and
cultural contact. When I began researching and writing about this subject, beginning
in 2008 with my master’s report on Sidney Robertson’s California Folk Music
Project, and thereafter with the expansion of my topic to include other government-
sponsored folk music research, collecting, and recording endeavors, I found many
obvious, and some not-so-obvious connections between the period in which I was
writing and the period about which I was writing. There was a general reappraisal
among journalists, scholars, and the wider public of Roosevelt’s New Deal programs
in the face of the most catastrophic economic downturn since the Great Depression
(Paul Krugman’s *End This Depression Now!* springs to mind). Moreover, there was
a renewal of populist rhetoric both on the left (Obama’s “Hope and Change”
message) and the right (the Tea Party movement). Critical questions of identity have
been front and center as regards race, class, gender, marriage rights, and any number
of other hot-button issues.

Additionally, researching and writing in the shadow of Alan Lomax has
forced me to come face-to-face with the one question I was asked every time I
marked the centenary of Alan Lomax’s birth. Organizations including the American

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Folklife Center and Alan Lomax’s Association for Cultural Equity celebrated the event with numerous concerts, lectures, film sessions, and radio broadcasts. Prior to the centennial celebrations, John Szwed published the first full-length biography of Lomax, Don Fleming, head the Association for Cultural Equity was featured on an episode of the Colbert Report, performing alongside Stephen Colbert, Elvis Costello, and Emmylou Harris (8 March 2012). There have been numerous websites and books devoted to Lomax’s life and work since in the intervening time period, including a Lomax Family Texas recording project on which I have been with Tanya Clement and others at the University of Texas at Austin’s School of Information in collaboration with the Briscoe Center for American History at UT. Additionally, I am leading a roundtable panel of ethnomusicologists, folklorists, and cultural heritage institution workers that focuses on reassessing Alan Lomax in the twenty-first century at the 2015 Society for Ethnomusicology conference in Austin, Texas. As I have argued elsewhere, this branding of a single individual as a stand-in for an entire movement can be dangerous, and letting one figure, however important, “speak for the folk” through the winnowing of history has its serious drawbacks, not the least of which is the loss of “the folk” themselves.35

What, then, is the responsibility of contemporary scholars, archivists, and librarians toward these New Deal–era collections? How can we ensure they not only reflect the ideals to which these collectors and administrators had striven, and the

culturally pluralistic times in which they worked, but also the current social, political, and cultural climate? There is still much work to be done with these collections given that, in many cases, they were abandoned before these government workers were able to finish their work. There is room for ethnographic analyses and “fieldwork autopsies,” for investigating the musicological studies that emerged from these field recordings, and for reassessing the functionalist aspects of this music both in its own time and in the present. We can engage in the types of “repatriation efforts” with which the Association for Cultural Equity has been involved through bringing the music back to the communities from which it came, while at the same time being culturally aware and acknowledging the flaws of the collectors and their fieldwork practices.

The onus, then, is on the current crop of scholars, folk music enthusiasts, and cultural heritage workers to ensure that this music does not become a symbol of an ossified cultural expression frozen into the grooves of cellulose nitrate lacquer–on-aluminum discs. As Archie Green notes, “Directly stated, folklorists do plug pluralistic messages into political circuits. In the act of commenting upon many cultures, we reveal the capacity to slow down assimilative as well as technological progress. Imaginatively we reach under the melting pot to retard its flame.” With this sentiment in mind, instead of “speaking for the folk,” I conclude by letting one of “the folk” speak for me. As Eartha White, the head of the all-black Clara White

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Mission in Jacksonville, Florida stated before she recorded for Stetson Kennedy,
“Dear Lord, this is Eartha White talking to you again. I just want to thank you for
giving mankind the intelligence for creating such a marvelous machine, and for a
president like Franklin D. Roosevelt who cares about preserving the songs that people
sing.”

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### APPENDIX 1.

New Deal–Era Government-Sponsored Recordings at the Archive of American Folk Song, 1936–1941

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Collector</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th># of Discs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 1936</td>
<td>Charles Seeger</td>
<td>Resettlement Administration</td>
<td>Rockwood, Tennessee</td>
<td>4, 8” discs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938–1940</td>
<td>Sidney Robertson</td>
<td>WPA Music</td>
<td>Northern California</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February, March 1939</td>
<td>Margaret Valiant</td>
<td>Farm Security Administration</td>
<td>Coolidge and Phoenix, Arizona; Brawley, Calipatria, Indio, Shafter, and Visalia camps in California</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1939</td>
<td>Charles Seeger</td>
<td>WPA Music/Joint Committee on Folk Arts</td>
<td>Brevard Plantation, Adams Mill, near Columbia, South Carolina</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1939</td>
<td>Gordon Barnes</td>
<td>Farm Security Administration</td>
<td>Tygart Valley Homesteads, Elkins, West Virginia</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1939</td>
<td>Robert Cook and Stetson Kennedy</td>
<td>Florida Federal Writers’ Project</td>
<td>Cross City, Jacksonville, and Ybor City (Tampa), Florida</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1939</td>
<td>Nicholas Ray</td>
<td>WPA Recreation Department</td>
<td>Mitchell, South Dakota</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Margaret Valiant</td>
<td>National Youth Administration</td>
<td>Forsyth, McIntosh, Georgia</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939–1940</td>
<td>Alton Morris</td>
<td>(With assistance from Florida FWP)</td>
<td>Jacksonville, Masaryktown, St. Augustine, Slavia, and Tarpon Springs, Florida</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Herbert Halpert</td>
<td>Federal Theatre</td>
<td>New York (City), Ramapo, and</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Range</th>
<th>Name(s)</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1938–November 1939</td>
<td></td>
<td>Project</td>
<td>Sloatsburg, New York</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1939;</td>
<td>Fletcher Collins, Jr.</td>
<td>Under the auspices of the WPA Joint</td>
<td>Elon College, NC; Brown Summit, Burlington, Elon College, and Greensboro, North Carolina</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November–December</td>
<td></td>
<td>Committee on Folk Arts and Library of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td></td>
<td>Congress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March–June 1939</td>
<td>Herbert Halpert</td>
<td>WPA Joint Committee on Folk Arts</td>
<td>Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia</td>
<td>419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(418-1/2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 15–31, 1940</td>
<td>Stetson Kennedy</td>
<td>Florida Federal Writers’ Project</td>
<td>Key West, Riviera, and Ybor City, Florida</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March–July 1940</td>
<td>Carita Doggett Corse, Robert</td>
<td>Florida Federal Writers’ Project</td>
<td>Glades County, Jacksonville, Kenansville, Mayport, Sebring, and Tarpon Springs, Florida; also off Georgia coast</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cornwall, John Corse, and John Filareton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 1940,</td>
<td>Charles L. Todd and Robert</td>
<td>(Made at Farm Security Administration</td>
<td>Arvin, Shafter, Visalia, Firebaugh, Westley, Thornton, and Yuba, California</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 1941</td>
<td>Sonkin</td>
<td>camps)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 25–July 25, 1941</td>
<td>Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin</td>
<td>(FSA camps and elsewhere, made before 1941 California trip)</td>
<td>Bessmer, Camden, Gee’s Bend, Greensboro, Palmerdale, Rehoboth, and Selma, Alabama; and Port Norris and Shell Pile, New Jersey,</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 2.
Federal Writers’ Project Instruction Manuals, Questionnaires

APPENDIX 2.1.

“Supplementary Instructions #9 to the American Guide Manual, Folklore and Customs, and Music, 12 March 1936”

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
FEDERAL WRITERS’ PROJECT
1500 EYE ST. N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C.
SUPPLEMENTARY INSTRUCTIONS #9
TO
THE AMERICAN GUIDE MANUAL
A.
FOLKLORE AND CUSTOMS
B.
MUSIC
MARCH 12, 1936
Were the whole staffs of the Writers’ Projects put to work covering folk-lore and folk customs they could not complete the task in a year. It is therefore necessary at present for the workers assigned to the subjects to concentrate on such material as may be incorporated in the State Guides. An introductory essay will cover the field as a whole; in a state having large groups with different racial origins it may be necessary to subdivide the introductory essay to cover the topic for each large group. The bulk of the material will be used in connection with the sectional descriptions or place descriptions.

For the purposes of the State Guides folk customs are more important than folk-lore because they can be tied to one place, one section or one object. “Wishing-trees,” “washing-seats,” swamps or quicksands with sinister properties, wild animals with reputed immunity to attack—such as the “kings of the wolves”—or of reputed human intelligence, or the animal messengers, such as the coyote of the Pueblo Indians, belong to folk-lore but have the requisite geographical status that makes it possible to use them in connection with a guide.

It is very important for workers to survey their towns and districts with fresh eyes; very often a worker fails to recognize that lore and customs he has known all his life are novel and interesting to people from other parts of America. The Sales Mondays of the South Carolina county seats are as surprising to the Eastern
Pennsylvanian as are the costumes of the Pennsylvania Mennonites to South Carolinians. The Guides should point out what is unusual about a city, town or section, rather than what the city, town or section has in common with the majority of cities, towns or sections of the country.

There are two classes of collectors of folk-lore, folk customs and folk tales in America. The first values only what can be traced back to a past for which they have a nostalgia; a ballad, to interest them, must have an Elizabethan origin. They are akin to the antiquarians who reject buildings and furniture that do not follow classical patterns. The second class of collectors believes that creative activity is still functioning; they recognize the European origins of American culture but are interested in the mutations and developments wrought by transfer to a new and pioneer land. Their interest is in America, not in Europe, and they value a recital of the woes of Clementine and her forty-niner parent above those of the Lady Claire. The American Guide is being compiled primarily to introduce Americans to their own rich culture.

WORK INSTRUCTIONS

1. Workers should note with great care the exact source of information; they should give the names of persons interviewed, their addresses and the date of the interview. If possible they should interview more than one person. They should also give bibliographies on their material if such are available.
2. Workers should write down the information exactly as it is given by persons interviewed. They should not attempt to correct, embroider or interpret the report. If more than one version of the lore, or variation in the custom, exists, these points should be given. If a factual basis for the legend or lore exists it should be given in a separate note with the source of information noted separately. When the origin of a custom is known, it should be given. (The dress of the Pennsylvania Amish, for example, regarded as a religious custom has secular significance; at the time when the sectarians began to shave off mustaches while retaining luxuriant beards and began to use hooks instead of buttons on their clothes, they were opposing civil authority in Switzerland which was taxing mustaches and buttons.)

DIVISIONS OF FOLK CUSTOMS

1. Customs connected with particular days.

   Ex. Emancipation Proclamation Celebrations; local variations of Hallowe’en and Fourth of July celebrations; Christmas street plays among the Mexican villages of the southwest; the Mardi Gras in New Orleans.

2. Customs relating to human life, particularly birth, courtship, marriage and death.
Ex. The knife placed under a newborn child’s pillow by orthodox Jews from Eastern Galicia to protect the child from Lilith; the quilts mane in Tennessee for the newly engaged man by the girls whom he has courted in the past; serenades and charivaris for the newly married; “wakes” and “vigils” with the dead; the placing of doll-like figures on graves in a section of Eastern Maryland; weddings in the cemetery chapel at burial ground near Los Angeles.

3. Social customs.

Ex. The gatherings in which members of a community share the labor of the individual—such as quiltings, house-raisings, shuckings; gatherings in which the community, or part of the community, unites to share the troubles of the individual—such as “rent parties,” “burial parties,” “donation parties”; the blessing of the berries in Kentucky; fertility dances among the Indians to insure plentiful crops or good hunting.

4. Table customs

Ex. The serving of the male members of a household or party before the female; the serving of bread by the heads of the households who keep the bread-board and loaves by their plates.

5. Customs of dress

Ex. Shaker bonnets; Mennonite caps.
6. Religious customs

Ex. “Churching”—the public proclamation of delinquency or wrongdoing prevalent in rural Tennessee; the early Easter dawn services among the Moravians; the blessing of the waters at Tarpon Springs, Florida; sun-worshipping in Southern California; camp meetings.

7. Miscellaneous customs

Ex. Tilttings; rodeos; swappings; singing schools.

DIVISION OF FOLK TALES

1. Animal tales

Ex. Stories of Uncle Remus

2. Local Legends

Ex. Paul Bunyan; the little old woman hitch-hiker who is given a place in a rumble seat and disappears forever; the lost Dauphin.

3. Witch and ghost tales

Ex. The Bell witch legend of Tennessee.
MUSIC

It is quite impossible for Guide workers to survey the American musical field completely; it is possible, however, to make a general survey, indicating the highlights and trends. It is not intended that the enclosed questionnaire shall be filled out completely for every community; rather, it should be used merely as an indication of the approach desired. The objective is an account of the relationship of music to the cultural history and the life of the many sections of the United States.

For the last hundred years there has been a conflict between the “popular” and “folk” music, which branch from the 17th and 18th century folk music of Europe, and the highly commercialized importation of European “high art,” mostly of 19th century origin.

The popular and folk music brought to this continent by European colonists had taken on a distinctly American flavor by 1860. The popular (urban) type of music, from Hopkinson (1737–91) to Foster (1826–64), differed little from the folk (rural) type. With America’s rise to industrial power and cultural self-consciousness, there came patronage for the professional musicians of Europe who flocked to this country in large numbers. These musicians and their patrons set about deliberately to build up a taste for the European “high art” at the expense of the American popular and folk art. Symphony orchestras and opera companies were established in most
large cities and the urban concert stages were filled with singers and players of European education whose programs were almost entirely made up with music created abroad. Singers and other musical artists of long-time American lineage went so far as to adopt French, Italian and Polish names to give them prestige. By 1900 the old songs and musical traditions had died out except in places remote from the influence of the new “high art” standards.

The single powerful opponent of the imported music came from the new and commercially developed popular music—”coon-songs,” “rag-time,” “jazz”—which gained nation-wide audiences about the time of the Chicago World’s Fair (1893). The strength of the two musical developments, the “classical” and “popular,” lay in their variety, novelty and heavy commercial support. Their weakness lay in their too rapid development and lack of connection with the real life of the population.

After the World War a brake was put on the excesses of “modernism” in “high art,” but “jazz” went in for more and more radical experimentation until, at the present time, the two types of urban music, “high art” and “jazz,” are practically one—concert pieces written by jazz “kings” and entertainment pieces by concert composers being superficially indistinguishable. Factors entering into this situation were the spread of American “jazz” to Europe, with a consequent rise in American pride in its product, and the growing American release from dependence on the European culture.

This movement for American cultural independence brought out one great lack in both types of American urban music—its lack of roots in the life of the
American people. In a search for such roots musicians re-discovered the American musical tradition as brought to light by certain folk-loreists.

Thus we have jazz and concert composers turning to old songs and dances for their material inspiration. In spite of the hopes of folk-loreist antiquarians, the old-time music will not return to any section of the country in untouched form because the modern urban adaptations are penetrating into remote places through the radio and the phonograph.

Research workers need to be warned against one bias in making their evaluations; 19th century writers taught that music should be judged by its appeal to and play upon the “higher centers” and emotions of the individual, but emphasis has now shifted to the social nature of all art. Music serves a social function in communication, play, work, ritual, celebration, recreation, and use is its main purpose. It is in the light of its social usefulness that any musical material should be examined.

In connection with the conflict between old-time music and its modern successors it should be borne in mind that the turn of the century was the crucial point; at that time and for the next two decades music as a social factor had sunk to its lowest level. Formerly nearly every member of a community had a repertoire of songs
and could “do his turn” at social and community gatherings; ‘in the rapidly growing urban centers there was little stimulus to keep this form of social participation alive and there developed a growing dependence on entertainment by specialists and a contempt for untrained efforts.

For a time it was feared that the active musical life of the American people would wither and die with such music as existed coming only from the commercialized experts of the radio, phonograph and concert stage. The fear of the mechanized music has been groundless; the average man has tired of his passive role and has turned actively to creative activity.

Thus it has come about that the question to be asked by the music researcher is not “How much music do the people hear?” but “How much music do the people make?” The number of symphony concerts, recitals and radio broad-casts listened to is valuable as an index of popular interest in music; the matter of vital importance is the growing number of amateur choruses, amateur orchestras, singing societies, music festivals and the like.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What objects of historical interest does the state, district or town hold? (Instruments, music notation, monuments, pictures, records.) The slightness of a lead should not be considered unimportant. That it differs or departs from the ordinary is
not a criterion of wrongness or ignorance. Much can be learned from a study of newspapers and other sources not primarily musical.

2. Who are the past and present outstanding personalities in the state and district musical life? In folk music, popular music and high art music—performers, composers, critics, patrons? (Conventional estimates of a musician’s importance are often far wide of the mark. Theoretically speaking, technical and stylistic excellence are balanced against breadth and size of the audiences.)

3. What are the musical habits, customs and attitudes of the community, or district? (The genealogy of those is important; their involvement, for example, in the routing of “shape” or “buckwheat” notes of old tradition by the “round” notes of modern professional and popular music. What social elements sponsored the one or the other? What was the music of the pioneers, of their early churches, theaters, dance-halls, colleges, political campaigns? What is it now? What racial heritage governed the musical tradition?)

4. What commercial development of music has there been, and how much of the community or district does it involve? Is intensive effort needed to put across a concert or orchestra program and is much work needed to get support for them? What types of commercialized music get spontaneous support?

5. What group or collective music activity is there? What part of the population takes part in music-making of some sort—in bands, choruses, singing-schools, community “sings,” and the like? Is there any part of the population writing its own songs and other music? Is there appreciation of local ballad-makers and how
many such are active in the district? Does music play any vital part in the lives of the population and what is the type of music that has the strongest hold?

REFERENCES FOR THOSE ENGAGED IN MUSIC RESEARCH

1. Bibliographies of local musicians

2. Leading musical periodicals (current)
   a. *Musical Quarterly*
   b. *Modern Music*

3. Music magazines of the past
   (A practically complete list of suspended and current American musical publications can be found in J. T. Howard’s “Our American Music,” pp. 668–669.)

4. Music libraries
   Most large libraries have special music sections. The chief reference for all of these is the Music Division of the Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. Most large universities and many colleges, normal schools and high schools have music departments and libraries, from which information can be obtained.

5. Reference books


Birge, E. B.—*History of Public School Music in America*. Oliver Ditson Co., Boston


*Journal of American Folklore*, 1885 to present.

*Authorities on American Music*, etc.
(Note: Approaches to the men whose names are listed below should be made with discretion so as not to trespass unduly upon their time and patience.)

Howard, J. T., New York—History of American Music
- Stephen Foster

Jackson, G. P., Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tenn. -
- White Spirituals

- Ballads and Folk Songs
- Cowboy Songs

Roberts, Helen H., Institute of Human Relations, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.
- American Indian Music, Eskimo Music, Hawaiian Music, etc.
- Ethnological Material.

Hague, Eleanor, Pasadena, California
- Spanish American Music

Cowell, Henry, Menlo Park, California
- Modern Music
Moore, E. V., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan
- Music in Universities

Dykeman, P., Teachers’ College, Columbia University, N.Y. City
- Community Music

- Bibliography.

Gehrkens, Karl, Oberlin Conservatory of Music, Oberlin, Ohio
- Public School Music

Engel, Carl G. Schimer, Inc., 3 East 43rd Street, N.Y. City
- Libraries, Music Publishing business, etc.

Johnson, G. B., University of North Carolina
- Negro Music

APPENDIX 2.2.

“Supplementary Instructions #9–A to the American Guide Manual, Folklore and Folk Customs, 27 July 1936”

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Federal Writers’ Projects
FOLKLORE AND CUSTOMS

Field workers assigned to folklore and folk customs will concentrate first on such material as may be incorporated in the State Guides. Since the American Guide is being compiled primarily to introduce Americans to their own rich culture, State Guides must be discriminating and seek to point out what is unusual about a city, town or section, rather than what that city, town or section has in common with the majority of others.

Beyond the primary use of this material for the State Guide, lies further value and purpose. A project is under serious consideration to make a collection of national...
folklore. In any case items gathered now will be a serviceable mine for folklorists and students of American life.

In regard to immediate State Guide use, an introductory essay will cover the field as a whole. This will summarize all aspects of the subject, using as much illustrative material as possible. Much field material, not usable in detail for the main essay, will be used in connection with place descriptions.

For State Guides, folk customs are more important than folklore because the former can be connected with a particular place, section or object within the State. But where folklore items can be placed geographically, they also are usable in the Guides. Eg. “Wishing-trees,” like the wishing-tree of Harlem; “haunts” where ghosts reputedly abide; swamps or quicksands with alleged sinister properties; local wild animals believed by natives to be immune to bullets or traps, like the “kings of the wolves;” reputed human intelligence in animals; animal messengers, like the coyote of the Pueblo Indians.

Field workers must learn to survey their towns and districts with fresh eyes. Very often they fail to recognize that lore and customs known to them all their lives are novel and interesting to people from other parts of the country. The Sales Mondays of South Carolina, county seats are as strange to the eastern Pennsylvanians as are the costumes of the Pennsylvania Mennonites to South Carolinians.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FIELD WORKERS
1. Workers will record carefully exact sources of information, giving names of persons interviewed, their ages and addresses, and the dates of such interviews.

Source bibliographies, if any have been used, must also be recorded.

Obviously, lending; citizens of towns are not always the

best sources for lore. Rather an old cook, washerwoman, gardener or other retainer of some long-established family should be contacted. Oldest residents, close to the soil, who, because circumstances have cut them off from education and progressive enlightenment, are repositories for local lore, legend and superstition, would be ideal sources for the field worker. Of course, cultured citizens in various localities may be interested in the lore and customs of their regions and may have done local research for their own amusement or purposes. These, if ascertained and properly approached by the field worker, would cooperate and be valuable consultants.

2. For accuracy, it is always well to get more than one account from different sources of the same legend.

3. Workers must write down on the spot the information exactly as given by consultant or narrator. They must not attempt to correct, embroider or interpret according to their own conclusions. Under no circumstances must homely phrasing,
idiom or pronunciation be altered. Wherever possible the precise language of the narrator should be used.

4. If more than one version of the legend, lore or custom exists, each version should be recorded. If there is a factual basis for the legend or custom, it, and the source of information, should be noted. When the origin of a custom is known, it must be given. Eg: The dress of the Pennsylvania Amish. The Amish first began shaving their mustaches, retaining their luxuriant beards, using hooks instead of buttons on their clothes when they were opposing civil authority in Switzerland where buttons and mustaches were then being taxed. These customs yet prevail.

FOLK CUSTOMS

1. Customs connected with particular days.

   Eg. Emancipation Proclamation Celebrations; local variations of Hallowe’en and Fourth of July celebrations; Christmas or miracle plays among the Mexican villages of the Southwest; the Mardi Gras in New Orleans.

2. Customs relating to human life, particularly birth, courtship, marriage and death.

   Eg. The knife placed under a newborn child’s pillow by Orthodox Jews from Eastern Galicia to protect the child from Lilith; the quilts made in Tennessee for the newly engaged man by the girls whom he has courted in the past; serenades and charivaris for the newly
married; “wakes” and “vigils” with the dead; the placing of doll-like figures on graves in a section of Eastern Maryland; weddings in the cemetery chapel at burial ground near Los Angeles.

3. Social customs.

Eg. The gatherings in which members of a community share the labor of the individual - such as quiltings, house-raisings, shuckings; gatherings in which the community, or part of the community, unites to share the troubles of the individual - such as “rent parties,” “burial parties,” “donation parties”; the blessing of the berries in Kentucky; fertility dances among the Indians to insure plentiful crops or good hunting.

4. Songs.

Eg. Old English ballads; colonial ballads; native American songs, like Jesse James and Springfield Mountain; Negro spirituals and work songs; children’s songs.

5. Table customs.

Eg. The serving of the male members of a household or party before the female; the serving of bread by the heads of the households who keep the bread-board and loaves by their plates.
6. Customs of dress.

   Eg. Shaker bonnets; Mennonite dress.

7. Religious customs.

   Eg. “Churching” - the public expulsion of members for wrong-doing; the early Easter dawn services among the Moravians; the blessing of the waters at Tarpon Springs, Florida; sun-worshipping in Southern California; camp meetings.

8. Miscellaneous customs.

   Eg. Tiltings (tournaments); rodeos; swappings (bartering and exchanging of animals or articles); community songs; square dances and dance calls; play parties; singing and counting out games of all types; spelling matches; gander pullings; horse shoe pitching; pitching dollars; mock marriages to show intentions of individuals to the object of those intentions; riddles; fortune telling.

FOLK TALES

1. Animal tales, like the stories of Uncle Remus.

2. Local Legends, like the stories about Paul Bunyan.

3. Witch and ghost tales.
SUPERSTITIONS OF ANIMALS AND PLANTS

1. Animal and plant weather-lore.
   Eg. A cat washing her face is a sign of rain.

2. Rhymes or incantations addressed to animals.
   Eg. The familiar rhymes to the lady-bug.

3. Popular names of animals and of plants, especially those not mentioned in works on Zoology and Botany.
   Eg. “Snake-doctor” for “dragon-fly,” “groun-pup” or “ground-dog” for the common spotted salamander.

4. The uses of animals and plants in folk-medicine.
   Eg. Oil derived from angle-worms by exposing them to the sun, will cure rheumatism.

5. Omens (signs) from human beings, animals, or plants.
   Eg. It is unlucky to meet a cross-eyed person; a crowing hen is ill-omened, and in many places is killed to avert threatened disaster; if a rabbit crosses the road in front of you it will bring bad luck, unless the ill-omen is averted by making a cross in the dirt of the road with the foot and spitting in the cross.

6. Imaginary chemical and physical effects of animals and of vegetable substances.
Eg. Soap can only be made to “come” satisfactorily by stirring it with an ash stick.

7. Sacred animals and plants.

Eg. The ass is a sacred animal, because once ridden by Christ; lamb; dove.

8. Miscellaneous animal and plant lore.

Eg. Snakes will not crawl over ash-wood. If a snapping turtle bites you, he will not let you go until it thunders.

9. Superstitions regarding human hair, teeth, nails, excretia, etc.

Eg. The combings of the hair must be burned, not thrown away; you mustn’t cut your nails on Friday, or the Devil will get them and make a comb with which to comb your hair.

10. Saliva, charms and superstitions concerning saliva of men and of animals.

Eg. If wood will not split, spit on it, making the sign of the cross under the knee with the finger moistened with saliva will cure a foot that is “asleep.”
MISCELLANEOUS SUPERSTITIONS NOT INCLUDED IN ZOOLOGICAL OR BOTANICAL MYTHOLOGY

1. Weather-lore.


3. Cures by means of amulets and incantations.

4. Love charms, philters, conjure bags.

5. Omens and conclusions from human features, markings, or other peculiarities. Eg. Hair on chest, a sign of riches to come.


7. Children’s superstitions, superstitious customs, and sayings.

8. Accounts of any local outstanding person believed to possess supernatural powers.

Note:

Field workers will also record unusual dialect, slang, pronunciations, place names, local expressions. Eg. ‘culch,’ ‘finnicky,’ ‘kerhoot,’ ‘mosey,’ ‘faze,’ ‘caint,’ ‘axes,’ (for asked); Tombstone (Arizona): The Road to Ruin (name of a Texas saloon), dogie (motherless calf), etc. Peculiar epitaphs in old cemeteries should be recorded. Note with these name of person memorialized, dates, name of cemetery and place.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS
1. This questionnaire has been prepared for use in conjunction with: the Manual for Folklore Studies of the Federal Writers’ Project. (See especially Section 6, “Instructions to Field Workers,” for methods of locating sources and making contacts with informants, interviewing, and recording and submitting data.)

2. It has been suggested that the interviewer interview himself according to Part I, and that his life history be used as a means of evaluating his material.

3. The questions in Parts III and IV should be phrased in your own way. Be sure to submit the rephrased questions together with the answers. These will not only serve as a check on the answers but will make an interesting study in themselves. Additional questions are also welcome.

4. As far as possible, in Parts III and IV, take down the answers in the exact words of the informant. Do not, however, write down more than is absolutely necessary in the presence of the informant, unless you have first gained his confidence and consent. A remark like the following will often prove helpful in breaking down prejudice against note-taking: “What you say is so good that I want to get it down just as you say it.”

5. Folksong collectors should ask their informants for all kinds of musical and oral material, including game and dance songs and folk tales, to be recorded on discs, and have informants speak as much as possible of the accompanying information for recording. Group materials, such as sermons and conversations, should also be recorded.
6. The questions in Parts III and IV should be adapted for types of folklore material other than folksongs.

7. The questions in Part IV are optional but important for the study of the psychological and aesthetic factors of folk singing (mood, tone, style, taste, appreciation) and should be answered wherever possible.

8. Each sheet should bear the name and address of the collector.

APPENDIX 2.3.

“Supplementary Instructions to the American Guide Manual, Manual for Folklore Studies, 15 August 1936”

SUPPLEMENTARY INSTRUCTIONS

to

THE AMERICAN GUIDE MANUAL

MANUAL FOR FOLKLORE STUDIES
CONTENTS

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III. The Folklore Series

IV. Folklore: Its Nature and Study

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   B. Basic Principles of Collection
   C. Exploratory Information
   D. Collaboration with the Historical Records Survey
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VI. Instructions to Field Workers
   A. Method of Locating Sources and Making Contacts with Informants
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VII. Types of Folklore
A. Songs and Rhymes
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D. Groups, Gatherings, and Activities
E. Beliefs and Customs

VIII. Forms for Interviews
Form A: Circumstances of Interview
Form B: Personal History of Informant
Form C: Text of Interview (Unedited)
Form D: Extra Comment

As an important part of its immediate program the Federal Writers’ Project is planning two series of cultural studies—the folklore studies and the social-ethnic studies.

In both the folklore and the social-ethnic studies the approach is functional. The studies will be organized around nationality groups, regions, and communities.
The emphasis is on ways of living and cultural diversity with special reference to population distribution and change.

In correlating the work of the two series, the following connections and distinctions should be observed:

1. The social-ethnic studies deal with the whole life of a group or community, including cultural backgrounds and activities; the folklore studies deal with a body of lore in relation to the life of a group or community.

2. The social-ethnic studies involve special and separate treatments of nationality groups; the folklore studies fit native and imported traditions into the diversified American pattern.

3. Supervisors in the two series should familiarize themselves with the methods and materials of both the folklore and the social-ethnic studies, since in many cases the work will be carried on by the same staff.

4. The preparation of both series calls for:
   a. The gathering of field data, including selected interviews, personal histories, and documentary material:

   b. A staff of field workers drawn from the group or community being studied, having the advantage of familiarity with local conditions, inhabitants, and organizations:
c. Full cooperation with consultants drawn from the ranks of State writers, historians, folklorists, anthropologists, sociologists, economists, etc., and with historical and folklore societies, foreign-language organizations, etc.

5. All correspondence concerning folklore studies should be marked, Subject: Folklore. All correspondence concerning social-ethnic studies should be marked, Subject: Social-Ethnic Studies.

III. The Folklore Series

The folklore series will consist of three kinds of publications:

1. Collections of special types (e.g., tall tales, children’s rhymes)

2. Collections for regions, occupations, localities, and ethnic groups (e.g., The Folklore of the Berkshires, The Folklore of the Great Lakes)

3. The foregoing will lay a basis for possible national volumes (including American Folk Stuff, representing all states and types, and A Folklore Atlas of America, showing the distribution of folk groups and folklore types).

Apart from their use in the series, the field data, including texts and phonograph disks, will be deposited in a national archive of American folklore. Through the archive as well as through the publications the source materials will be made available to scholars, educators, and writers over the country. Publications will be designed to meet the needs of the general reader rather than the specialist, but a
high standard of accuracy as well as interest will be aimed at throughout. By means of large, cheaply printed editions, pamphlets, school readers, etc., the folklore studies are expected to reach a large audience and to find increasing use in education. By viewing the materials with a fresh eye, workers will uncover a new as well as an old America, and will have a part in awakening it to a new understanding and appreciation of its cultural heritage.

IV. Folklore: Its Nature and Study

Folklore is a body of traditional belief, custom, and expression, handed down largely by word of mouth and circulating chiefly outside of commercial and academic means of communication and instruction. Every group bound together by common interests and purposes, whether educated or uneducated, rural or urban, possesses a body of traditions which may be called its folklore. Into these traditions enter many elements, individual, popular, and even “literary,” but all are absorbed and assimilated through repetition and variation into a pattern which has value and continuity for the group as a whole.

Although in most cases it is impossible to establish the origin of a piece of folklore, we want to know as much as possible about its source, history, and use, in relation to the past and present experience of the people who keep it alive. This
information enables us to understand the function and meaning which folklore has for those who use it and so enhances its interest and significance for others. Just as a folk song or folk tale cannot be said to have a real existence apart from its singing or telling, so in all folklore collections the foreground, or lore, must constantly be related to the background, or life.

In helping supply this living background, the data compiled for the social-ethnic studies will be of great value. At the same time the personal histories and interviews compiled by folklore collectors can be of equal service in social-ethnic studies by showing how the songs people sing and the stories they tell grow out of or are adapted to the work they do and the things they know and believe in. Finally, in addition to the human interest of its everyday use, folklore possesses the poetic interest of idiom, imagery, and symbolism which provide forms and materials for the artist.

As part of this social and functional approach, the folklore studies are further interested in the process of making and remaking which, in the course of its adaptation to time and place, folklore is constantly undergoing. Not only do modern conditions (as in urban and industrial areas) give rise to new forms and materials, but every variant and variation has, above and beyond its intrinsic interest, value for the
student of the history of a particular item and the processes of oral and popular composition and transmission.

V. Instructions to Directors and Supervisors

A. Selection of Material. In each case the type of material and the group to be studied will be selected in accordance with local needs and resources. The aim should be to choose types and groups that have not yet been fully treated and to avoid duplication of material already in print. Emphasis should be placed on groups that are indigenous or rooted in the local life. Too much attention should not be paid to “cast-offs” and degenerate groups or to the exotic and eccentric.

B. Basic Principles of Collection. The present plans for folklore collection are based on the following principles:

1. All material is to be taken from oral sources exactly as heard.
2. Every collection should have a purpose and reason for existence. It should be tied up with the life of the community or group and of the individual informant as a part of the community or group.
3. The working unit is the full unedited field notes for each interview, together with the personal history of the informant, submitted on the regular forms, which are to be duplicated in the State office.

C. **Exploratory Information.** Before undertaking local studies, the State Director should submit information on the following points:

1. The number and distribution of workers capable of handling and interested in folklore material:

2. The available supervisors and consultants:

3. The types of material, the areas, and the folk groups that offer the richest possibilities in the State:

4. The number and distribution of prospective or possible informants:

5. The possibilities of sponsorship for each study.

D. **Collaboration with the Historical Records Survey.** Attention is called to the work of the Historical Records Survey in making inventories of unpublished Government documents and records, covering many phases of local history, past and present. In the inventories of State, county, town, and other local archives the records are conveniently arranged under subject headings. Some of the following records will be found useful in compiling exploratory information for folklore studies:

- Naturalization Records
- Census Reports (especially old records)
- Church Records
- Cemetery Records
• Vital Statistics (births, deaths, marriages, divorce, inheritance, wills)

• Tax Records

• Real Estate, Mortgages, and other Records Professional Registers

School Records

• Board of Social Welfare Records

Folklore 8

In the use of records survey workers will often have discovered the existence of ethnic islands, colonies, religious and folk groups, and experimental communities of the post. In some cases the Historical Records Survey is listing manuscripts, diaries, and journals and compiling personal histories and life sketches.

State Directors should apply to the State Director of the Historical Records Survey for the aid of local supervisors in a particular area. The Historical Records Survey will give reasonable assistance to folklore workers in using lists, in finding little-known records, and in seeking out pertinent data. Dr. Luther H. Evans, the National Director, has kindly offered his cooperation and is notifying his State Directors of these arrangements.

E. Assigning Workers. In assigning workers the following instructions should be observed.
1. Workers should be assigned to their own communities and groups on the strength of full familiarity with the materials, the people, and the problems involved. In the case of foreign-language groups the worker should, obviously, have a working knowledge of the language.

2. Workers unsuited for actual interviewing may be employed in obtaining exploratory information (such as charting out distribution of types, groups, and areas, locating sources and making contacts). The work of interviewing may be shared by two workers, one of whom is assigned to take notes. In some State offices it may be possible to assign stenographers for the latter purpose.

3. Interviewers should not be assigned until their qualifications for handling the work efficiently and tactfully have been thoroughly checked and tested. Field workers should be tried out on small assignments and wherever possible samples of their work should be submitted to the Regional Director or to the National Editor of Folklore Studies. These precautions are necessary for two reasons:

   (1) A good informant can be spoiled by bad handling:

   (2) A tactless worker may do considerable damage to the work by needlessly stirring up prejudice.
VI. Instructions to Field Workers

A. Method of Locating Sources and Making Contacts with Informants

1. Locate people over 60 with good and reliable memories.

2. Locate square-dance managers and callers.

3. Locate individuals who own or play folk or unusual instruments or who play instruments in a folk fashion (that is, without notation and in a traditional form).

4. If the instrument has been made locally, find out who made it and secure from him the names and addresses of musicians for whom he has made instruments.

5. Locate local and “homespun” poets (who rhyme local events and characters or make up ballads).

6. Locate the time and place of old-time dances and parties, country auctions and fairs, etc.

7. Locate the time and place of old-fashioned religious gatherings and meetings of modern cults.

8. Locate work gangs and camps and other occupational groups with a distinctive folklore.
9. If you are not personally acquainted with the informant, it is often a good idea to have some one who is accompany you.

10. If possible, do not wait until a list of leads and sources has been compiled before Interviewing but as soon as possible follow up each of them in turn.

11. It often takes two or three visits to break the ice and get the informant warmed up. Do not rush him.

12. In approaching the informant, stress the historical nature and value of the work. Often it will pave the way for a successful interview if the questioner leads with some statement such as, “The Works Progress Administration of the United States Government is endeavoring to preserve some of the local history and traditions of this region and you have been recommended to the project as a person with accurate knowledge and a good memory.”

B. Method of Interviewing

1. Do not draw upon your own memory for folklore material, except for supplementary purposes. Remember that you are to make a fresh collection of first-hand material taken down directly from an informant.

2. For successful results, establish a friendly and confidential relation with the informant. Do not cross-examine him, but use these
instructions as a guide to be kept in mind and adapted to the specific situation and person.

3. Your method should be to get the informant to talking freely about himself, and in the course of easy, natural conversation let him tell you what he knows. To do this successfully, you should be able to “talk the same language”; that is, converse on subjects and in terms familiar to him. Make him feel important as a collaborator and at the same time make the interview a social occasion and outlet for him. You will soon learn how much folklore material he has and how to get it from him.

4. Avoid skipping about from point to point. In drawing the informant out, also guide him skillfully along so that in progressing you exhaust each topic before leaving it.

5. The people who know folklore are sensitive and intelligent and respond to a sensitive and intelligent approach. Unless from the start your attitude is one of sympathy and respect, your chances of a successful interview are spoiled.

6. Rather than ask directly for certain types of folklore material, let the collection grow out of the interview, naturally and spontaneously.
7. Do not tire the informant. After an hour or so, it is often best to stop. Two or three visits are usually better than one. The rest gives the informant time to jog his memory and you a chance to think of questions to ask him.

8. Forget your own preferences or prejudices.

9. Do nothing to antagonize the informant. It is important not to contradict or argue with him.

10. Do not display or fill out forms in the presence of the informant. Fill them out later from your field notes.

11. In addition to oral material two kinds of records are important:

(a) The informant may have in his possession manuscript copies of songs or handwritten ledgers, diaries, cook books, and “ballet books” with songs in them. These are valuable not only for their texts but as documents in the history of folk song in America. Inquire after them and borrow them for the purpose of making typewritten or photostat copies. Where the permission of the owner may be obtained, arrange for the permanent deposit of the originals in the Archive of American Folklore 12
Folk Song in the Library of Congress (full credit, of course, being given to the donor).

(b) At the close of the interview (not before) ask for a snapshot or for permission to take one.

Folklore 13

C. Method of Recording and Submitting Data

1. Take down everything you hear, just as you hear it, without adding, taking away, or altering a word or syllable. Your business is to record, not to correct or improve.

2. Give each song and tale the title by which it is known to the informant.

3. Wherever possible, take down several versions of the same song or tale from the same or more than one informant, for the purpose of checking and comparing the texts.

4. In noting oral material, please observe the following linguistic instructions carefully:

   (a) Record all obscure and peculiar terms and phrases as heard, then try to determine their meaning and origin. Use as many sources of information as possible, giving the name and address of each informant.
(b) In noting dialect be faithful to grammar, idiom, typical vowel and consonant sounds, mutilations, and corruptions. (Special instructions for handling special dialects will be sent on request.)

5. Although the field notes are to be submitted without editing by the worker, supervisor, or director, marginal headings may be inserted to indicate the types of material included.

6. Only typewritten copy should be submitted. One carbon is required with each original.

VII. Types of Folklore

A. Songs and Rhymes

1. Square dance calls

2. Play-party songs of adults

3. Game songs and rhymes of children (including counting-out, rope-skipping, and ball-bouncing rhymes)

4. Nursery songs and rhymes

5. Riddles

6. Street cries

7. Religious songs
8. Work songs
9. Labor songs
10. Ballads of local characters and events
11. Love songs
12. Blues

B. Tales
1. Local anecdotes, jests, and hoaxes
2. Place-names and local legends
3. Tall tales and tales of American legendary heroes (especially little-known local heroes)
4. Animal and just-so stories
5. Witch tales and related lore
6. Devil tales and related lore
7. Ghost tales and related lore
8. Tales of lost mines, buried treasure, ghost towns, and outlaws

C. Linguistic “Floating” Material
1. Localisms and Idioms
2. Local, proverbial, and popular sayings
3. Folk and popular similes and metaphors
4. Wisecracks and humorous sayings
5. Nicknames
6. Coinages and new word formations
7. Curious street and shop signs
8. Mottoes and slogans (including inscriptions in memory books, etc.)
9. Trade jargon
10. Samples of speech
11. Conversations
12. Sermons and prayers

D. Groups, Gatherings, and Activities

1. Accounts of religious gatherings, cults, and sects
2. Accounts of work gangs and camps and occupational processes and customs
3. Accounts of dances, parties, sports, pastimes, celebrations, festivals, and other social practices and gatherings
4. Accounts of foreign enclaves, colonies, nationality and isolated groups, and other “islands” and pockets of culture
5. Interviews with fortune tellers, mind readers, witch doctors, herb doctors, and healers
6. Interviews with old-time and street musicians and singers, with lists and specimens of their repertoires

7. Interviews with local poets and story-tellers, with lists and specimens of their works or repertoires

E. Beliefs and Customs

1. Luck signs, omens, taboos, and miscellaneous superstitions

2. Weather lore

3. Crop lore

4. Cures and remedies

5. Love, courtship, and marriage lore

6. Birth lore

7. Death and burial lore

NOTE: Indian folklore falls outside the scope of The American Folklore Series, but material involving relations between Indians and Whites may be submitted.

VIII. Forms for Interviews

(Original and one carbon required)

FORM A
Circumstances of Interview

STATE

NAME OF WORKER

ADDRESS

DATE

SUBJECT

1. Name and address of informant

2. Date and time of interview

3. Place of interview

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

(Use as many additional sheets as necessary, each bearing the proper heading and the number to which the material refers.)

APPENDIX 2.4.

“Supplementary Instructions to the American Guide Manual, Social-Ethnic Studies, August 1938”
SUPPLEMENTARY INSTRUCTIONS TO THE AMERICAN GUIDE MANUAL—
MANUAL FOR SOCIAL-ETHNIC STUDIES

CONTENTS

I. Prefatory Note

II. Correlation with the Folklore Studies

III. The Social-Ethnic Studies
   A. Intensive studies of single groups
   B. Cross-sectional studies of whole communities
   C. Extensive studies of larger areas

IV. Nature and scope of the Materials
   A. Migration
   B. Earning a Living
   C. Living Conditions
   D. Social and Cultural Life

V. Instructions to Directors and Supervisors
   A. Compilation of Data
   B. Collaboration with the Historical Records Survey
   C. Specimen Outlines
D. Integration of Planning and Writing

I. Prefatory Note

This manual is designed to guide supervisors and field workers in the selection of material for the social-ethnic studies.

The manual is not intended to hamper the form or free treatment of individual studies or the style of individual workers. Supervisors should use it as a basis for drawing up outlines and instructions adapted to local conditions. These outlines and instructions, together with discussions of problems encountered, will be used to supplement the manual.

The National Editor of Social-Ethnic Studies will assist in instructing supervisors and field workers in the use of the manual and in planning, setting up, and directing local studies.

II. Correlation with the Folklore Studies
As a major part of its immediate program, the Federal Writers’ Project is planning two series of cultural studies - the social-ethnic studies and the folklore studies.

In both the social-ethnic and the folklore studies the approach is functional. The studies will be organized around nationality groups, communities, and regions. The emphasis is on ways of living and cultural diversity with special reference to population distribution and change.

In correlating the work of the two series, the following connections and distinctions should be observed:

1. The social-ethnic studies deal with the whole life of a group or community, including cultural backgrounds and activities; the folklore studies deal with a body of lore in relation to the life of a group or community.

2. The social-ethnic studies involve special and separate treatments of nationality groups; the folklore studies fit native and imported traditions into the diversified American pattern.

3. Supervisors in the two series should be encouraged to familiarize themselves with the methods and materials of both the social-ethnic and the folklore studies, since in many cases the work will be carried on by the same staff.

4. The preparation of both series calls for:
   a. The gathering of field data, including selected interviews, personal histories, and documentary material:
b. A staff of field workers drawn from the group or community being studied, having the advantage of familiarity with local conditions, inhabitants, and organizations.

c. Full cooperation with consultants drawn from the ranks of State writers, historians, folklorists, anthropologists, sociologists, economists, etc., and with historical and folklore societies, foreign-language organizations, etc.

5. All correspondence concerning social-ethnic studies should be marked, Subject: Social Ethnic Studies. All correspondence concerning folklore studies should be marked, Subject: Folklore.

III. The Social-Ethnic Studies

The social-ethnic studies will be both special and general. The special studies will consist of intensive studies of single groups, cross-sectional studies of whole communities, and extensive studies of larger areas. The materials and treatment under each head are as follows:

A. Intensive studies of single groups
a. **Materials**: Old World background; causes of emigration; occupational distribution; ways of living; folklore and folk arts; literature, press, etc.; religious and political organizations; relations with other elements of the community; second-generation problems.

b. **Treatment**: The ethnic group should be viewed as an element absorbing traits from all other elements in the community, while at the same time stamping the community with Old World markings. Studies should be functional, stressing cultural backgrounds and activities, not peculiarities and “contributions.”

c. **Examples**: The Italians of New York (New York, 1938); The Irish of Philadelphia; The Greeks of Chicago; The Albanians of Massachusetts.

B. Cross-section studies of whole communities

a. **Materials**: Description and history of the community; ethnic distribution; contemporary scene; industrial life; earning a
b. **Treatment**: In selecting a community for a social-ethnic study, three requirements should be observed:

1. A locality small enough for a small group of workers to complete the field work within 3 or 4 months, so that the study can be in final form within 6 months:
2. A mixed population (immigrant as well as native):
3. A locality fairly typical of some branch of industry or farming.

Here the emphasis is on the community as a whole, rather than on single groups - that is, on the relations of groups to each other and to the community. The community should be viewed in relation to its industrial life (or agricultural life in the case of rural communities). Again, studies should be functional, giving a clear picture of the people, where they came from, the work they do, how they live, and what they do for recreation.

c. **Examples**: Mineville (N.Y.), Iron Mine Community; Rome (N.Y.), Copper Town; Bishop Hill (Ill.), Swedish Farming
Community; Steelton (Pa.), Steel Town; Aroostook County (Maine), Potato Land; Barre (Vt.), Marble; Akron (Ohio), Rubber Town.

C. Extensive Studies of Larger Areas

a. Materials: Ethnic groupings or distribution; emigration and migrations in this country; occupational distribution; housing and home life; group activities; cultural survivals and adaptations (including religion, folklore, education, foreign-language press, and recreation).

b. Treatment: Here the emphasis is on the major aspects of immigrant life in the community. When a large city or region is selected, the treatment will have to be less intensive. In such cases studies may be restricted to one or more of the aspects listed above.


NOTE: Of the titles listed above only The Italians of New York has been published.
Sponsored by community organizations, boards of education, foreign-language associations, or historical societies, and in many cases designed for school and community use, these studies will be in following series:

1. American Communities and Towns (paper-bound)
   (This series concerns the studies of communities as explained in III, B.)

2. Ethnic Groups of America
   (This series concerns the studies of single groups, as explained in III, A.)

3. American Regional Studies
   (This series concerns the studies of large or multistate areas, as explained in III, C.)

Out of the special social-ethnic studies and the reserve data accumulated in the State files will grow the Nation-wide study, Composite America. In building up the file for Composite America, the broader aspects of settlement and expansion should be kept in mind, including such State-wide aspects as:

a. Waves of immigration into the State

b. Settlement and migrations within the State

c. Occupational distribution of ethnic groups

d. Cultural diversity and adaptation
IV. Nature and Scope of the Materials

The field of social-ethnic studies embraces the history and role of nationality groups in modern industrial society. The aim is to present a composite picture of America in terms of migrations, earning a living, ways of living, and social and cultural life.

A. Migration

The group under survey is traced back to the Old Country for the background and causes of migration, including, if possible, the particular locality and a description of local conditions. From the motives of immigration (political, religious, and particularly economic) and the methods of attracting and recruiting immigrants, the story passes to the conditions of the sea voyage and landing. Internal migration (in the United States) is then traced to the point of acquiring occupations and establishing a relatively permanent home - a process involving shifting “foreign quarters” and, in rural areas, the displacement of native stock. Attention is also paid to emigration
across our borders to Canada, to Latin America, or back to the Old Country.

Note: Some immigrants will have come as political or religious refugees, but the bulk will have come to escape poverty and in search of a livelihood in the New World.

B. Earning a Living

The immigrant groups in the area treated are studied for occupational distribution, craft innovations brought from the Old Country, and results of shifts from peasant to industrial life. The major industries are described as to products, methods and processes, craftsmanship, and sales distribution. Labor is studied under the head of wages, hours, conditions of work, employment of women and children, unemployment, and organizations.

Note: An ethnic group may be studied in two ways. 1. In a locality convenient for such a study; i.e., a small community in which the group is an important factor and in which there is a dominant industry. 2. Topically, by treating the group throughout the State under such topics as industry, commerce, institutions, and problems of adjustment. The topical approach is likely to make for repetition and lead into elaborate
abstractions. The locality study on the other hand is more fruitful and realistic, as social

and cultural conditions are here tied up with conditions of work. In connection with the locality study it should be observed that an important ethnic group will be found in both rural and industrial regions, calling, perhaps, for separate treatment.

C. Living Conditions

This phase of the study is closely tied up with work and wage. It includes such items as income, housing, food, health, and sanitation.

Note: Care should be taken not to interpret a low standard of living as necessarily a carry-over from the Old Country, instead of the product of existing conditions.

D. Social and Cultural Life

The groups are studied for their activities, interests and loyalties, including social, fraternal, and religious organizations, folk culture, press, and arts.
Note: Care should be taken not to overstress the separateness and peculiarities of a group. The aim should be to show how the group functions in the life of the community, through contact; to what extent it varies from the general pattern, through survival of Old World traits; and how it contributes to cultural diversity, through its effect on the community. Even in semi-segregated colonies in larger cities, immigrants (including the “old folks”) are in contact with the larger community life, at work, on the streets, in shops, at the movies, etc., changing the pattern as well as being changed.

V. Instructions to Directors and Supervisors

A. Compilation of Data. For working purposes each study should be divided into two parts: the digesting and compiling of printed matter and the gathering of field data.

1. Printed Matter

   a. Literature on immigration. Supervisors should consult the standard works, a list of which will be sent on request.

   b. Literature on individual ethnic groups. This material is scattered and largely buried in obscure foreign-language
publications, and should be collected in collaboration with foreign-language organizations, local historians, etc.

c. Bibliography. Each study should contain a selected descriptive bibliography, with comments on chapters or pages bearing on the study. Comment should also be made on omissions and on difficulties encountered in finding material (such as the lack of statistics on early immigration, etc.). These bibliographical sketches might later form the basis of a National Social-Ethnic Bibliography.

2. Field Data

The major part of the work will be devoted to the gathering of field data. A lack of personnel has at times forced State offices to center on library material, to the neglect of field data. It is essential that local people, familiar with local conditions and drawn from the group studies be assigned to field work. Trained personnel will rarely be found in local communities, but a supervisor familiar with the subject should be able to guide the field workers.

For methods of interviewing, recording, and submitting data by field workers, see the Manual for Folklore Studies. These instructions should be followed specifically in collecting folklore data, but should be generally
applied in all interviewing in connection with social-ethnic studies.

B. Collaboration with the Historical Records Survey. Attention is called to the work of the Historical Records Survey in making inventories of unpublished Government documents and records, covering many phases of local history, past and present. In the inventories of State, county, town, and other local archives the records are conveniently arranged under subject headings. Some of the following records will be found useful in compiling exploratory information for social-ethnic studies:

- Naturalization Records
- Census Reports (especially old records)
- Church Records
- Cemetery Records
- Vital Statistics (births, deaths, marriages, divorce, inheritance, wills)
- Tax Records
- Real Estate, Mortgages, and other Records
- Professional Registers
- School Records
- Board of Social Welfare Records
In the use of records survey workers will often have discovered the existence of ethnic islands, colonies, religious and folk groups, and experimental communities of the past. In some cases the Historical Records Survey is listing manuscripts, diaries, and journals and compiling personal histories and life sketches.

State Directors should apply to the State Director of the Historical Records Survey for the aid of local supervisors in a particular area. The Historical Records Survey will give reasonable assistance to social-ethnic workers in using lists, in finding little-known records, and in seeking out pertinent data. Dr. Luther H. Evans, the National Director, has kindly offered his cooperation and is notifying his State Directors of those arrangements.

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C. Specimen Outlines. Specimen outlines are not included in this manual for the following reasons: They tend to stereotype the form and treatment of the study and to strait-jacket the director and supervisor, resulting in excessive uniformity and duplication. The form as well as the content of each study should grow out of the local situation. For the purpose of comparison and perspective, however, outlines of studies in progress may be obtained from the Regional Director or from the National Editor of Social-Ethnic Studies.
“Forms for Interviews,” which are fairly simple and flexible, are included in the Manual for Folklore Studies and duplicate copies are available in the State Offices.

D. Integration of Planning and Writing. It is highly important that the study should be planned by the person who is to do the actual writing. While the research will be carried on by the staff, the writer should be in charge of the work from the start. Experience in many State Offices has demonstrated that only when planning, research, and writing are unified, in the hands of one person, can the aimless gathering of material be avoided, a real story be told, and the writer become an author rather than a rewriter and editor. Credit should be given to him as well as to the staff.
Appendix 3.

Selected List of Songs Given in the American Guide Series Volumes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Songs Named</th>
<th>Texts Given</th>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Associated Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1 Names associated with particular songs in the guides are given in parentheses after the title. Not all of the music listed herein is “folk music.” Rather, this table represents the types of music that was given alongside the folk music presented in the selected guides.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Jump, Isabel, slide water / Ho, my aunty, ho!” (1850s slave song); “Little Corn, UGH! / Yellow Gal, UGH!” (work song); “OH-HO-in the morning / OH-HO-in the evening” (sawmill work song); “When I left de state of old Virginia / I left in de winter time” (Turpentine work song); “Uncle Bud” (work song); “Love ain’t nothing but the easy-going heart disease” (work song); “Oh honey, I am going down the river in the morning”;</td>
<td>“Done bus’ dat rock, boys, f’om hyeh to Macon”;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seminole classics, Negro spirituals and secular tunes, shanties, rowing songs, hymns,</td>
<td>Hymns, mazurkas, polkas, waltzes, English and Scottish ballads,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J. Rosamond Johnson, James Weldon Johnson, Frederick Delius,</td>
<td>John Wesley, Charles Wesley, B. F. White, E. J. King, William</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Georgia Press, 1940.</td>
<td>Boy”; “Nearer My God to Thee”, “My Faith Looks up to Thee”, “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” (Lowell Mason and Bishop Heber); “Rock Me to Sleep, Mother”; “You are Going to the Wars, Willie Boy”; “Run, Little Chillun” (African-American folk opera by Hall Johnson); “A Trip to Coontown” (African-American musical comedy by Robert Cole and William Johnson)</td>
<td>game songs, shape note songs, Sacred Harp singing, folk melodies, hillbilly bands, African American spirituals, songs of supplication, jubilees, breakdowns, sorrow songs, work songs, corn-shucking and cotton-picking tunes, French songs, German songs, folk opera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Music (pages)</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>Charles Diven Campbell</td>
<td>&quot;The Little Brown Church in the Vale&quot; (William S. Pitts); &quot;Only a Pansy Blossom&quot;; &quot;Turkey in the Straw&quot;; &quot;Elisha Green’s Cake Walk&quot;; &quot;Ben Hur’s Chariot Race&quot;; &quot;The Iowa Corn Song&quot;; &quot;Have Thine Own Way, Lord&quot;; &quot;By the Waters of Minnetonka&quot; (Thurlow Lieurance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>Charles Diven Campbell, Van Denman Thompson, Charles F. Hansen</td>
<td>&quot;Queen Jane&quot;; &quot;Cherry Tree Carol&quot;; &quot;Lord Randal&quot;; &quot;The Maid and the Gallows Tree&quot;; &quot;Barbara Allen&quot;; &quot;Lord Thomas&quot;; &quot;Fair Annet&quot;; &quot;Sweet William&quot;; &quot;Lord Lovel&quot;; &quot;Way up on Clinch Mountain I wander along&quot;; &quot;Go away old man, and leave me alone&quot;; &quot;Jack, you selfish elf, / The very next girl I learn to love, / I’ll kiss her for myself&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Music,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nebraska:</td>
<td><em>A Guide to the Cornhusker State.</em> New York:</td>
<td>pp. 120–126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>Content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hastings House, 1939.</td>
<td></td>
<td>in Nebraska / Where the grass grows ten feet high”; “Whoopie, ti-yi-yo! Git along little dogies!”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- George James Webb, Herbert Halpert
- Johnny Bartley, Thomas S. Allen, Antoinette Sterling
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Contributions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Pages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>End of the Trail</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>124–27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>A Guide to the Keystone State</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>151–57</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>York: Hastings House, 1940.</td>
<td>pp. 92–98, 136–40.</td>
<td>Lament (Oh, Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie’); “The Hills of Home” (Oscar J. Fox); “Weaver John”; “Rattlesnake”; “Springfield Mountain”; “Jesus Rides a Milk White Hoss”; “I’m New Bawn”; “My Lawd’s a Battle Ax”; in the sky’; “La Paloma (The Dove)”; “Rancho Grande”; “Billy the Kid”; “Wouldn’t drive so hard but I needs de earn”; “Oh, for My Soul’s Happy”</td>
<td>American work songs and spirituals, Spanish and Mexican folk songs, ballads of the Vaqueros, love songs, troubadour songs, German and French music, cowboy ballads, white spirituals, Sacred Harp Music, Volkslieder (German folk songs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>New York: Oxford University Press, 1941.</td>
<td>Big Bend Tunnel on the C&amp;O Road;</td>
<td>soldiers’ ballads, camp-meeting hymns,</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“Jack Haggerty’s Flat River Girl”</td>
<td>French chansons, Mannerchore, German, Welsh, Scandinavian, Irish folk songs, Welsh hymns, Swiss melodies and yodels, Belgian songs of the Kermiss festival, lumberjack songs, a cappella choruses, Greek folk song choruses, Croatian choruses, Jewish choruses</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Ole Bull, Joseph P. Webster</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX 4.

Folk-Style Musical Works Featured in Selected FTP Productions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>FTP Unit/Year</th>
<th>Music</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Barnum Returns, or The New American Museum</em>&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Katharine Clugston, 1938</td>
<td>FTP, 1938</td>
<td>“Champagne Charlie” (Alfred Lee/George Leybourn, ca. 1866); “Death Song of the Cherokee Indian” (Anne Hunter, 1784); “Little Old Sod Shanty on the Claim,” (Oliver Edwin Murray, ca. 1880); “May I Sleep in Your Barn To-night Mister?” (trad.); “Rolling Home in the Morning Boys,” (T. W. Egerton, ca. 1868); “Sweet Betsy from Pike” (lyrics, John A. Stone, ca. 1858); “The Bronk that Wouldn’t Bust,” (trad., pub. 1931); “The Buffalo Skinners,” (trad. ca. 1873); “The Cowboy’s Dream,” (D. J. O’Malley, ca. 1880s); “The Last Longhorn” (trad., pub John A. Lomax, 1910); “The Tenderfoot,” (D. J. O’Malley/ R. J. Stovall, ca. 1894); “Weevily Wheat” (trad., ca. 1911)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Go Down Moses</em>&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Theodore R. Browne, 1938</td>
<td>Seattle Negro Unit, 1938</td>
<td>“Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel,” (pub. 1872); “Ezekiel Saw the Wheel,” “Git on Board, Little Chillun/The Gospel Train,” (pub. 1872); “Go Down Moses” (pub. 1872); “Hangman Johnny,” (trad. pub. 1867) “Heaven Bound Soldier,” “Juba,” “Many</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<sup>2</sup> Published in *The Arkansas Woodchopper’s World’s Greatest Collection of Cowboy Songs, With Yodel Arrangement* (Chicago: M. M. Cole, 1931).


<sup>5</sup> In *Jubilee Songs: As Sung by the Jubilee Singers of Fisk University* (Chicago: Biglow and Main, 1872). Also in this volume are “Go Down Moses,” “Many Thousand Gone,” “I’ll Hear the Trumpet Sound,” and many other famous spirituals.

|                     |         | FTP, 1937–38                                                                 | Thousand Gone,” (pub. 1872); “We’ll Fight for Liberty/My Father How Long”
|---------------------|---------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
| **How Long Brethren?** | Helen Tamiris, Federal Dance Project, May 1937 | Seven spirituals arranged by Genevieve Pitot for African American chorus from Lawrence Gellert’s collection Negro Songs of Protest &superscript;13 (1936, originally arranged by Elie Siegmeister) &superscript;14 |

&superscript;7 Published in Slave Songs of the United States (New York: A. Simpson and Company, 1867).


&superscript;10 Many of these songs were published in John A. Lomax Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads, 1910.


&superscript;12 Riggs enlisted his personal friend, the folksong collector Margaret Larkin to provide songs from her collection Singing Cowboy (Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), including “Sam Hall,” “Hello, Girls,” “I Wish I Was Single Again,” and “Home on the Range.” Riggs also programed the popular cowboy song “Goodbye Old Paint,” which was popularized in an arrangement made by Oscar J. Fox (Carl Fischer, 1927), and performed by a young Woodward “Tex” Ritter on Broadway; Everett Cheetham’s “Strawberry Roan,” and “Blood on the Saddle”; and the songs “Chisholm Trail,” and “Next Big River,” which his theater company provided. Riggs later published many of the songs in the play under the title Cowboy Songs, Folk Songs, and Ballads from Green Grow the Lilacs (Samuel French, 1932).


Published in Plantation Melodies: A Collection of Modern, Popular and Old-time Negro-Songs of the Southland (Chicago: Rodeheaver Company, 1918).


Published, among other places, in Newman Ivey White, American Negro Folk-Songs (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), 261.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song Title</th>
<th>Composer/Artist</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural Man</td>
<td>Theodore R. Browne, 1937</td>
<td>Seattle Negro Unit, 1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Arthur Arent, 1937</td>
<td>Living Newspaper Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The T.V.A. Song&quot; (Jean Thomas, Jilson Setters, B. P. Jones, 1936)</td>
<td>Arthur Arent, 1937</td>
<td>Living Newspaper Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run Little Chillun</td>
<td>Hall Johnson, 1933</td>
<td>Los Angeles Negro Unit, 1933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituals and hymns: &quot;Amazing Grace,&quot; &quot;Done Written Down a-My Name,&quot; &quot;Run Little Chillun,&quot; &quot;O</td>
<td>Hall Johnson, 1933</td>
<td>Los Angeles Negro Unit, 1933</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20 In *Jubilee Songs: As Sung by the Jubilee Singers of Fisk University* (Chicago: Biglow and Main, 1872), 15.
24 According to Jean Thomas, she learned the song, which was written by B. P. Jones, from a blind fiddler and folk singer from Rowan County, Kentucky named “Jilson Setters” (James William Day) on 7 December 1936. (“Finding Aid to the Jean Thomas Collection,” University of Louisville, Dwight Anderson Music Library, available online at http://louisville.edu/library/music/coll/pdf/thomasaid.pdf.). Jilson Setters was himself a folk “creation” of Jean Thomas. See, Stephen F. Davis, “Jilson Setters: The Man of Many Names.” *The Devil’s Box* (Journal of the Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddlers Association) 12, no. 1 (March 1978): 42–45.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Walk Together Chillun!</th>
<th>Frank H. Wilson, 1936</th>
<th>New York Negro Unit (Harlem), February 1936 dir. Orson Welles; prod. John Houseman</th>
<th>Spirituals and hymns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

For a Closer Walk with God” (written by William Cowper and published as part of the popular *Olney Hymns* in 1779)

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FOLKSONG QUESTIONNAIRE

Joint Committee on Folk Arts, W.P.A.

March 15, 1939

PART I

Case History of the Informant

1. Full name
2. Complete address (street or RFD, town, county, state)
3. Place and date of birth
4. Family history
   a. Father’s name, birthplace and ancestry
   b. Mother’s name, birthplace and ancestry
   (The family history should be carried back as far as possible.)
5. Places of residence and travel, with their approximate time
6. Education
7. Extent and nature of reading
8. Church membership and activity

9. Memberships and activities in other organizations

10. Other social and cultural contacts and general social and cultural standing

11. Occupational history, with place and approximate time of employment

12. Family (wife, children, grandchildren)

13. Names and addresses of close friends and acquaintances (to be used for additional
    information and as additional informants)

14. Population and geographic situation of community

15. Ethnic and industrial composition of community

16. Historical, antiquarian and folklore societies, library and educational facilities, in
    or near the community

17. Description and character sketch (and if possible, photographs) of informant,
    (Pictures of informants, in both working and “best” clothes, are valuable data
    for the history of American costume.)

PART II

Circumstances of Interview

1. Date and time of interview

2. Place of interview

3. Source of information (name and address of person leading to contact)

4. Intermediary (name and address of person arranging interview)
5. Name and address of person accompanying interviewer

6. Description (and, if possible, photographs) of room, house, surroundings, etc.

7. Description (and, if possible, photographs) of folk or unusual musical instruments played or owned by informant. (See Some Notes Upon the Recording of Folk Music.)

8. Comment (preferably in narrative form) on other circumstances of the interview, especially details which contribute to our understanding of the method of handling informants, the technique of questioning, the informant’s attitudes and reactions, etc.

PART III

Case History of the Song

1. How was the song collected—from dictation or singing or both? (If possible get the song from the singer first by dictation, after hearing it sung once; then, after the singer has approved the written text, get him to sing it again and indicate the variations made in the singing. Check every text by reading it back.)

2. By what title or name is the song known to the singer? Has he ever heard it by any other name?

3. When, where, and from whom did the singer learn it, and when, where and from whom did that person learn it?
4. How did he learn it? Actually taught? Heard at regular intervals, on such occasions as parties, work? Heard under unusual circumstances? At what age? How long did it take to learn?

5. Why did he learn it? What quality in the song (melody, interest of story, words, truthfulness to life) attracted him?

6. Has he changed it from the way he learned it? If so, how?

7. Did the singer ever see it written down or printed or hear it on a record? If so, where? Did he learn it from that source? Is the recorded version like his?

8. When and how frequently does the singer sing it?

9. How is the song sung? (Solo? Ever sung in a group and if so, how? What instrument used for accompaniment?)

10. What kind of song is it? (Try to get the singer’s own classification. Do not suggest classifications unless the singer fails to understand, and then preferably by indirection; e.g., If the song is a sad one, you might say, “You wouldn’t call this a comic song?”)

11. How good does he think the song is, and why? (This may be a comparative question; that is, after ten songs have been recorded you may ask: “Which do you like better, and why?”)

12. Does he know whether the song deals with an actual happening? If so, when and where did it take place? If not, what does he think about the truth of the song, and why?

13. Give the singer’s explanation of peculiar and obsolete words and phrases.
14. Is the song widely known in its present form, or is it known to comparatively few?

15. Does he know other tunes to the same or similar words or other words to the same tune?

16. If the singer has a manuscript of the song, ask permission to copy it. Copy it exactly, but do not use it as the collected text. (In singing, singers frequently vary a text.)

PART IV

Aesthetic and Psychological Factors

1. When did he first really like songs?

2. When did he first like to sing?

3. How did he feel when he first began to sing, especially publicly?

4. Did he ever sing in school?

5. Has the singer performed at festivals, in competitions, upon platforms, or for radio or sound recording?

6. Does he sing differently (e.g., more or less loudly) under different conditions or circumstances?

7. Does he drink when he sings?

8. What has his reputation as a singer been, and why?
9. What is his style of singing and repertoire (clarity, expression, loudness; completeness of memory; number of songs; kind of songs)?

10. What effect do his songs have on the rest of his life and on the lives of the people who listen to them?

11. Do women specialize in certain types of songs? When do they sing?

12. Where and when do people sing most? At night? At parties?

13. Why, when, and where does he like to sing?

14. Do certain songs go with certain moods? What are they?

15. What kind of songs does he like best?

16. What kind of songs does he like and dislike on phonograph or radio?

17. What kind of singing does he like and dislike on phonograph or radio?

18. Why did people like to sing in the old days?

19. What kind of songs did they like, and why?

20. What do people think of the old songs nowadays?

21. Why is it that most church people don’t sing old-fashioned songs?

22. Why do more men sing publicly?

23. What is the difference between old and new songs (especially ballads and sentimental songs, folk and popular songs)? How would he know an old song from a new one?

24. What is the difference between different kinds of old songs?
APPENDIX 6.
Herbert Halpert Southern States Trip Recording Log

### Virginia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Performer (Age)</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Discs</th>
<th>Source (if given)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 March</td>
<td>Richmond (Home of performer)</td>
<td>Anne Corbin Ball, 85</td>
<td>Play party song; Square dance song; White spiritual; African American work song; Child ballads; Various folksongs, conversations, etc.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Richard Chase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 March</td>
<td>Rockymount (Dance Hall)</td>
<td>Houston Bald Knot String Band</td>
<td>String band dance tunes; fiddle tunes</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Raymond Sloan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 March</td>
<td>Ferrum, Franklin Co. (Home of performer)</td>
<td>J. W. “Peg” Hatcher, 39</td>
<td>Fiddle tunes (Sloan accomp. guitar) conversations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 March</td>
<td>Ferrum, Franklin Co. (Home of performer)</td>
<td>H. L. Maxey, 56</td>
<td>Fiddle tunes (with tunings); Child ballads; Various folksongs</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–22 March</td>
<td>Hillsville, Carroll Co. (Home of performer)</td>
<td>Mrs. W. L. Martin, 48; Moir Martin, 18 (son); Edith Quesenberry, 17</td>
<td>Child ballads; Murder ballads; Popular folksongs; Sacred songs of Primitive Baptist Church; Sacred texts (spoken); Play party songs Banjo tunes; Tall tales</td>
<td>~13</td>
<td>Halpert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 March</td>
<td>Wise</td>
<td>Polly Johnson</td>
<td>Child ballads; Popular ballads and folksongs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>J. T. Adams, Emory Hamilton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 March</td>
<td>Wise</td>
<td>Barbara Davis, 46; Etta Kilgore, 27</td>
<td>Child ballads; Popular folksongs; Conversations</td>
<td>~3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 March</td>
<td>Wise (Gymnasium)</td>
<td>Ralph Addington, 19, violin, and</td>
<td>Fiddle and guitar tunes; Child ballads, Various</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>J. T. Adams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1659 The honorific “Mrs.” has been preserved throughout in cases where the woman’s first name has been replaced with her husband’s.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Performer (Age)</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Discs</th>
<th>Source (if given)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26 March</td>
<td>Laurel Grove, Wise Co. (Laurel Grove Primitive Baptist Church)</td>
<td>Rev. Carlos Williams, 27; George H. Dinsmore, 46; Congregation</td>
<td>Sermon; Sacred songs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 March</td>
<td>Norton (Firehouse)</td>
<td>Mary Glenn Jessee; Esco Kilgore; Mary and Norah Addington; Kate Peters; Mrs. J. T. Adams</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various folksongs and ballads</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 March</td>
<td>Hamilton Town, near Wise</td>
<td>Goldie Hamilton; Martha Shupe; May Stapleton</td>
<td>Child ballads; Children’s songs and lullabies; Popular folksongs and ballads; Conversations</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 April</td>
<td>Norton</td>
<td>Sarah Ison, 50</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various ballads</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Emory Hamilton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 April</td>
<td>Freeling, Dickinson Co. (Home of performer)</td>
<td>Hattie Swindell (née Austin), 51</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various ballads</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Elihu J. Sutherland (restricted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 April</td>
<td>Clintwood (Home of performer)</td>
<td>Mary Fuller (Mrs. M. Cain)</td>
<td>Play party songs; Child ballads; Various folksongs and ballads</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Elihu J. Sutherland (restricted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 April</td>
<td>Hamilton Town</td>
<td>Esco Kilgore; Joe Hubbard, 71; Goldie Hamilton;</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various folksongs and ballads;</td>
<td>~13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 April</td>
<td>Hamilton Town (Chilhowie? – not specified)</td>
<td>Horton Barker, 50</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various ballads; Conversations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 April</td>
<td>Marion</td>
<td>John M. “Sailor Dad” Hunt</td>
<td>Sea shanties</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Kentucky**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Performer (Age)</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Discs</th>
<th>Source (if given)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 March</td>
<td>Dunham</td>
<td>James Taylor Adams</td>
<td>“Comical” minstrel song</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 March</td>
<td>Dunham</td>
<td>Finley Adams, 44 (cousin of J. T. Adams); J. T. Adams</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various folksongs and ballads</td>
<td>~5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Performer (Age)</td>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>Discs</td>
<td>Source (if given)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 March</td>
<td>Dunham</td>
<td>Finley Adams; Arti-Gertrude Adams, 10 (daughter of Finley Adams); Ella Adams, 15 (daughter of Finley Adams); Polly Hughes; Artemus Phipps; Samuel Simpson Adams, 87 (father of Finley Adams);</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various folksongs and ballads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 April</td>
<td>Maryville (Home of Austin Harmon)</td>
<td>Samuel Patterson Harmon; Austin Harmon, 35</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various ballads</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mellinger E. Henry (restricted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 April</td>
<td>Gatlinburg</td>
<td>Mrs. A. J. Huff (née Mary E. King)</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various ballads</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Mellinger E. Henry (restricted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 April</td>
<td>Gatlinburg</td>
<td>Ray Bohannon, 35</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various ballads</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mellinger E. Henry (restricted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 April</td>
<td>Maryville (Home of Austin Harmon)</td>
<td>Austin Harmon; Samuel Harmon; Retta Harmon</td>
<td>Conversations; Child ballads; Various ballads; Banjo pieces (played by Austin Harmon)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mellinger E. Henry (restricted)</td>
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<tr>
<td>23 April</td>
<td>Maryville</td>
<td>Cleophas L. Franklin; Mrs. C. L. Franklin</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various folksongs and ballads; Conversations</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mellinger E. Henry (restricted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24–27 April</td>
<td>Maryville (Home of Austin Harmon)</td>
<td>Austin Harmon; Samuel Harmon; Edith Harmon; Retta Harmon; Ishmael L. Harmon, 4 (son of Edith Harmon); Ether Harmon; Alberta Harmon;</td>
<td>Banjo tunes; Child ballads; Various folksongs and ballads; Play party songs; Conversations;</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Performer (Age)</td>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>Discs</td>
<td>Source (if given)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>29 April</td>
<td>Luttrell, Union Co.</td>
<td>Marietta Harmon, Anna Carter, 26; Flora Mae de Vault, 16; Pauline Parsons, 65; Maggie Hundley; John Adkins, 72; Maude D. Clevenger; Vesta French; Edith and Katherine Collins</td>
<td>Child ballads; Play party songs; Various folksongs and ballads</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>WPA Recreation Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 May</td>
<td>Monteagle (Highlander Folk School)</td>
<td>Vera Kilgore, 40</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various ballads</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Zilphia Horton (restricted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 May</td>
<td>Laager, Grundy Co.</td>
<td>Callie Vaughan; Melinda and Rosalee Vaughan (daughters)</td>
<td>Ballads; Play party songs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**North Carolina**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Performer (Age)</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Discs</th>
<th>Source (if given)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 April</td>
<td>Elk Park (Elk Park Hotel)</td>
<td>Mrs. L. B. Turbyfill; Mrs. L. B. Hagie (sister of Mrs. L. B. Turbyfill); Ethel Bare; Ben S. Dugger, 62;</td>
<td>Child ballads; Banjo pieces; Play party songs; Various folksongs and ballads</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 April</td>
<td>Rominger</td>
<td>Nathan Hicks; Mrs. Nathan Hicks; Louis Hicks (son)</td>
<td>Child ballads; Popular/Traditional song</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 April</td>
<td>Heaton (Schoolroom)</td>
<td>Mrs. W. R. Heaton (teacher) and students, aged 8–13</td>
<td>Various folksongs and ballads; Children’s songs</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 April</td>
<td>Crossmore (Home of performer)</td>
<td>Mary Franklin Farmer (née Mary Franklin)</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various folksongs and ballads</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mellinger E. Henry (restricted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 April</td>
<td>Pensacola (Home of performer)</td>
<td>Ewart Wilson; Mrs. Ewart Wilson</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various folksongs and ballads; Conversations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mellinger E. Henry (restricted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Performer (Age)</td>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>Discs</td>
<td>Source (if given)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 April</td>
<td>Morganton</td>
<td>Sabra Bare Hampton, 46; Oscar Hampton, 20 (son of Sabra Bare Hampton)</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various ballads</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Alabama

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Performer (Age)</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Discs</th>
<th>Source (if given)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 May</td>
<td>Skyline (Skyline Farms resettlement camp)</td>
<td>Skyline Farms String Band (Chester Allen, guitar and violin; Joe Sharp, mandolin; Thomas Holt, guitar; Herbert Green, violin; Various children; Irene and Louise Holt (sisters, guitar and mandolin)</td>
<td>String band and dance tunes; Blues; Play party songs; Religious songs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 May</td>
<td>Tuscumbia</td>
<td>Henry Hankins, 36</td>
<td>African American work songs (Railroad songs)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 May</td>
<td>Franklin Co. (Bethel Church)</td>
<td>Sacred Harp singers (about eighteen members), led by Palmer Godsey of Addison, AL</td>
<td>Sacred Harp singing</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Mississippi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Performer (Age)</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Discs</th>
<th>Source (if given)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 May</td>
<td>Saltillo</td>
<td>Maude McShan; Theodosia Bennett Long, 82; Mrs. Birmah Hill Grissom</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various folksongs and ballads; Religious song; Play party song; Conversations</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>A. P. Hudson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 May</td>
<td>Tupelo (African American church)</td>
<td>Congregation, led by Deacon Guy Cherry; Various children</td>
<td>Various ballads; Spirituals; Children’s songs and games</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 May</td>
<td>Saltillo</td>
<td>Birmah H. Grissom; Mary Ila Long</td>
<td>Child ballads; Play party songs; Various ballads</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 May</td>
<td>Tupelo (Tupelo Homesteads, resettlement camp)</td>
<td>Laura Clifton, 72; Ruby Clifton, 25 (daughter)</td>
<td>Ring games; African American work songs; Children’s songs; Animal calling</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 May</td>
<td>Guntown (Home of W. E. Claunck)</td>
<td>W. E. Claunck, 46, violin; Christeen Haygood, guitar (daughter)</td>
<td>Fiddle tunes; Various folksongs and ballads; Conversations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 May</td>
<td>Amory (Monroe County Training School – African American)</td>
<td>Various children, aged 8–16</td>
<td>Ring games; Children’s songs and lullabies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 May</td>
<td>Tishomingo</td>
<td>Audrey Hellums; Lillian Bickerstaff Pennington; Mrs. J. R. Bickerstaff; Mrs. Vivian Skinner;</td>
<td>Various ballads; Play party songs; Lullabies; Animal calling</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 May</td>
<td>Tishomingo</td>
<td>Disia Puckett, 70</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various ballads; Conversations</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 May</td>
<td>Burnsville</td>
<td>Vivian Skinner; Ima Jones; Hollie Prewitt (sister of Ima Jones); Thelma, Beatrice, and Irene Scruggs (sisters)</td>
<td>Child ballads; Play party songs; Various folksongs and ballads</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 May</td>
<td>Iuka</td>
<td>John Hatcher, 53, fiddle; John A. Brown, 67, fiddle</td>
<td>Fiddle tunes; Conversations</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 May</td>
<td>Byhalia, Marshall Co. (African American church)</td>
<td>Mary Shipp, 48, and her children (Christeen, 20; Katherine, 18; Allison, 15; Isaac, 23)</td>
<td>Church hymns; Spirituals; Children’s game songs; Songs from Africa</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 May</td>
<td>Cockrum (St. Austin’s Church – African American)</td>
<td>Members of the congregation of St. Austin’s Church and St. Peter’s Chapel</td>
<td>Spirituals’ “Shoutin’” songs</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 May</td>
<td>Holly Springs (Rust College – African</td>
<td>Rust College chorus</td>
<td>Revival songs; Prayer meeting song</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 May</td>
<td>Oxford</td>
<td>Ada Mooney</td>
<td>Various ballads</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 May</td>
<td>Iuka</td>
<td>James D. Fairless; Mrs. O. Hanson; Mary Floyd, 19; Joe E. Johnston, 60; Will C. Thomas; Jewel Deaton; Joe Walker; Mildred Gravett, 80</td>
<td>Play party songs; Child ballads; Various folksongs and ballads; African American jubilee song; Blues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 May</td>
<td>Houlka</td>
<td>Mrs. G. V. Easley and daughters, Marjorie, 13, and Virginia, 12</td>
<td>Various ballads; Conversations</td>
<td>~5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–19 May</td>
<td>Banner, Calhoun Co.</td>
<td>Mrs. Ollie Womble; Charles Womble, 60; Marie Womble, 19</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various folksongs and ballads; Play party songs</td>
<td>~9.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 May</td>
<td>Meridian (Civic Center)</td>
<td>Frank T. Kittrell, 68, fiddle; Mrs. Frank T. Kittrell, straws; Harvey C. Sharp, fiddler; Douglas Williams, guitar; H. D. Kinard, banjo; W. A. Bledsoe, fiddle</td>
<td>Fiddle tunes; Banjo tunes; Various folksongs; Conversations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 May</td>
<td>Meridian (New Hope Baptist Church)</td>
<td>Sacred Harp singers (group of about 20), led by Ed Griffin</td>
<td>Sacred Harp singing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 May</td>
<td>Quitman</td>
<td>Charles L. Long, 69, fiddle; Sam Neal, 60, straws</td>
<td>Fiddle tunes</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 May</td>
<td>Meridian (Meridian Junior College)</td>
<td>Stephen B. Tucker, 80, fiddle; Ralph Bennett</td>
<td>Fiddle tunes; Various folksongs; Conversations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 May</td>
<td>Brandon (Recreation Center)</td>
<td>Various children</td>
<td>African American children’s game songs;</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 May</td>
<td>Magee</td>
<td>Sarah Jane Harvey, 74; Tim</td>
<td>Fiddle tunes; Dance songs; African American</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Performers</td>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>27 May</td>
<td>Magee</td>
<td>Carrie Walker, 65; Liza White (daughter of Carrie Walker); Eva May White, 18; Bernie May</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various ballads; Play party songs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 May</td>
<td>Edwards (Outdoors, at night)</td>
<td>Leora Anderson; Thelma Dixon; Eugene Dixon, 38; Jared Frazier, 30; various others</td>
<td>African American hymns; Ring game songs; Blues; Field hollers</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>28 May</td>
<td>Edwards (Southern Christian Institute)</td>
<td>Group of young African American students including Sarah Ann Reed, 18; Ann Lawrence, 17; Hertecene Turner, 19; James Reynolds; Thomas J. Marshall, 20; Samuel Brooks, 18</td>
<td>Ring plays; Field calls and hollers; African American work songs</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 May</td>
<td>Vicksburg</td>
<td>“Uncle” James Archer, 78–80</td>
<td>Sea shanty; Civil War song</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 May</td>
<td>Vicksburg (Vicksburg Baptist Academy)</td>
<td>Susie Miller, 12; Flora Woods, 13; Lila Stevens, 15; Laura Wilson, 10; Melinda</td>
<td>African American children’s games and songs</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Music Genres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>30 May</td>
<td>Vicksburg (Y.M.C.A. – African American)</td>
<td>Cooper, 10; John Floyd, 39; Morris “Shorty” Arnold, 59; various children</td>
<td>Various African American work songs (steamboat, railroad, levee camp, field songs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 May</td>
<td>Parchman (Women’s Camp, Mississippi State Penitentiary, sewing room)</td>
<td>Emmet Jackson, 46; John Floyd (“Negro roustabouts); John Cook, 37; Rhode Bailey, 74</td>
<td>Various Blues; Minstrel show song; Popular tunes; Ring plays; Work songs (railroad, levee camp); Original compositions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 June</td>
<td>Parchman (Camp #10 Mississippi State Penitentiary – African American)</td>
<td>Mary James; Elizabeth Moore; Mattie May Thomas; Josephine Douglas; Beatrice Tisdall; Mary Alice Vanderson; Lucille Walker, 25; Edna Taylor; Annabelle Abram; Hattie Goff, 44; Beatrice Perry; Eva White, 24; Bettie May Bowman, 28; Various African American inmates</td>
<td>African American work songs (field work, hollers, muleskinning, railroad); Blues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 June</td>
<td>Greenville (African American high school)</td>
<td>John Henry Jackson; Norman Smith; Alexander Williams; John Smith; Andy R. Gayton; Trickett Sam</td>
<td>African American work songs (railroad, dock worker); Street vendor’s cry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 June</td>
<td>Greenville (African American high school)</td>
<td>Joe Shores, 52; Sam Hazel, 86; Various children</td>
<td>African American work songs (steamboat/roustabouting); Child ballad; Children’s songs, games, and rhymes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Performer (Age)</td>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>Discs</td>
<td>Source (if given)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 June</td>
<td>Magee</td>
<td>Carrie Walker; Richard Walker, 69; Grover Bishop; Various others</td>
<td>Child ballads; Various folksongs and ballads; Sacred Harp–style hymn singing; Fiddle songs (sung)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 June</td>
<td>Gautier (New Era Baptist Church – African American)</td>
<td>Louise Edwards, 52; Edwina Andrews (director); Laura Hatcher; Washington Hatcher, 56; Julius C. Jacobs, 73; Frank Bilbo; Teresa Smith</td>
<td>African American jubilee songs; Ring play songs; African American work songs (railroad)</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 June</td>
<td>Vancleave (Vancleave Consolidated School)</td>
<td>Group of adults; Dr. C. L. Watkins, 65; Q. Carl Roberts, 49; Wula May O’Neal, 17; Carol Carter, 12; Katherine Wilson, 15; Group of high school children</td>
<td>Hymns; Play party songs; Child ballads;</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 June</td>
<td>(Woman’s Club)</td>
<td>Thaddeus C. Willingham, 55, banjo;</td>
<td>Various folksongs with banjo accomp.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Louisiana**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Performer (Age)</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Discs</th>
<th>Source (if given)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 June</td>
<td>New Orleans (FWP office)</td>
<td>Jeanne Wogan Arguedas, 52;</td>
<td>Creole songs and lullabies; Conversations</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Jeanne Arguedas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 June</td>
<td>New Orleans (Home of performer)</td>
<td>Albertine Hilaire Alexis, 74</td>
<td>Creole songs and lullabies;</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Jeanne Arguedas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 June</td>
<td>New Orleans (FWP office)</td>
<td>Jeanne Arguedas</td>
<td>Convict song; Stories; French singing games; Creole songs; Children’s songs and games; Conversations; Family history</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Performer (Age)</td>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>Discs</td>
<td>Source (if given)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 June</td>
<td>Jacksonville (FMP office)</td>
<td>Zora Neale Hurston, 35; Beatrice Long, 35; Evelyn Werner, 32; Reverend H. W. Stuckey, 43 (blind African American preacher); Irene Jackson, 39 (Stuckey’s student); Ellsbell Singleton, 33; Maggie Fulton, 43; Harold B. Hazelhurst, 29</td>
<td>African American work songs (railroad, road camps, farm songs, camp hollers); Stories; Gambling and bawdy songs; Blues; Jook songs; Bahamian songs; Street vendor’s cries; Children’s sermons; Ring play songs; Imitation of Geechee preacher; Conversations;</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 June</td>
<td>Tampa/Ybor City (Cuban Club)</td>
<td>Visiting Cuban vaudeville group (Gilberto Delfino, vocals, manager; Estela Echezabal, vocals; Adela Martinez, vocals; Carlos Pous, vocals; Art Pages, piano; Ramon Bermudez, drums)</td>
<td>Cuban songs, with English translations; Demonstration of Cuban rhythms</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### South Carolina

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Performer (Age)</th>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Discs</th>
<th>Source (if given)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23 June</td>
<td>Edisto Island (outdoors)</td>
<td>Peter Reed, 26; Lavinia Simmons, 40; Isabelle Fyell, 52; Various other singers</td>
<td>Children’s game songs and rhymes; Street vendor’s cries; Spirituals and shouts; Various blues and folksongs</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 7.

Sidney Robertson’s Instructions to Fieldworkers, Bibliography, 1938

CALIFORNIA FOLK MUSIC PROJECT

COLLECTION OF TRADITIONAL MUSIC IN CALIFORNIA

Instructions to Workers

The purpose of this undertaking is to collect and preserve the old-time music now in circulation in California, particularly the songs which are fast disappearing and which, for the most part, have never been printed or even written down, but have been passed on from one performer to another by rote. “California” folk music is understood to mean any traditional music,—song or dance tune,—now current in California; items from other states which deal with California life or history may be included. The investigation is not of course to be limited to performers whose native language is English. The minority groups in California have much to add that is of great interest.

We want to preserve a song:

1) If it was widely current at an time, known to and sung by many people;
2) If it has been known to several generations in a family;
3) If it is an account of a true happening, with local details and place names, even if it was not known widely; or if it tells about the early
days in general (lumber camps mining camps, the crossing of the plains; crimes, catastrophes; any local trade;)

4) If it is a special favorite [of the performer’s] and particularly good fun to sing.

We want to know what instruments are found in this region, and where any unusual ones may be examined; also names and addresses of performers on any folk instrument, particularly fiddlers who play for dances in the old fashion, and 5-string (not tenor) banjo players. Please note general type of instrument, and mention any odd feature about construction or performance which struck you particularly.

Local pride in the preservation of the cultural things that belong to the old days should be stimulated wherever possible, particularly in the minority groups. Remember that the Anglo-Saxon music which we are inclined to think of as the only “American” kind is a relatively recent importation on this continent, exactly as the Hungarian, Finnish and Armenian folk musics are. The Portuguese and Spanish have been in California three times as long as the “Americans”.

It is a good idea to spend much time making friends among the older people who are likely to know songs or to have friends who know them. Don’t feel that time spent in conversation about things apparently quite unconnected with songs is wasted, for it will make you seem less a stranger. A few minutes of general conversation (don’t scorn the weather as a topic!) should
always precede any explanation of the reason for your visit. A casual friendly, uninherited manner is disarming; a busy, efficient one creates suspicion.

When you find someone who knows a few songs, explain that the University of California is interested in seeing that they aren’t lost, and ask him if he’d feel like making out a list of the titles, just to see how many songs he can remember, and which ones. If he will dictate the words to you, tell him you’ll make up a typewritten booklet of them and give him a copy. Do not mention recording on disks until specifically told to do this by the Supervisor.

Never judge a folk-singer by the tonal beauty of his singing. If the tune is fairly definite and the words reasonably clear that is all that is necessary for our purposes. Often the singing that sounds most curious to our ears is the oldest and most valuable to preserve. It is important for the collector to realize that in the mind of a true folk-singer the song is of every importance, the singer of none at all. Never admire appearance, only the story of the song or the line of the melody.

Sometimes it is necessary, in order to keep your singer’s goodwill, to take down songs that aren’t particularly interesting, simply because they are favorites of his. Often, too, it is necessary to take down one that has been published, though the singer does not know this because he; probably, learned it by rote. Don’t scorn such
songs, their variation from the printed version is very interesting to students, and they should be noted down carefully. In every case we want the singer’s own version of words and tune, so never correct him.

In going to call on “foreign” Californians it is almost always necessary to go in company with someone known to your performer,—someone in whom he has confidence and whom you have interested in your project ahead of time. This should be a person able to understand your work in its historical and social aspects; so that if your performer suspects you of attempting to exploit his music commercially, your sponsor for the contact will be able to reassure him effectively. Never ask foreigners directly for the date of their arrival in the United States. Even when they are in this country legally they are often uncertain of their status and this query may ruin your contact. Usually the approximate date is easy to determine indirectly.

Your call should always have the aspect of a social visit; not a business one. Remember that ‘foreign’ manners are usually more formal and in general more consistent than ours; so be on your best behavior! Don’t press people; treat them as collaborators. On the other hands don’t allow a performer to feel that he is doing you a personal favor by allowing you to take down his songs. The undertaking requires hard and concentrated work from both of you, and the best attitude for you is to assume that he will be glad to make the effort to get a more complete record of the history of old-time things; just as you are.
The interview forms which follow should be studied carefully to clarify in your mind the various things we are interested to know. You are not expected to fill these out in full for every performer, but insofar as any of this information is obtainable in general conversation, without more than a few direct questions, it should be included on these forms. A performer’s interest should not be exhausted in answering questions since it is infinitely more important to record his music. Never fill out these forms in the presence of the performer.

CALIFORNIA FOLK MUSIC PROJECT

Form A

Circumstances of Interview

STATE

NAME OF WORKER

ADDRESS

DATE

SUBJECT

1. Name and address of performer.

2. Date and time of interview.
3. Place of Interview. (Street and number or careful directions for locating performer.)

4. Name and address of person who put you in touch with performer.

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you.


7. Who was present during the interview or during the recording? (Relatives? The performer’s boss? His Americanized children?)

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CALIFORNIA FOLK MUSIC PROJECT

Form B

Personal History of Performer

STATE NAME OF WORKER

ADDRESS

DATE

SUBJECT

NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERFORMER

1. Ancestry.

2. Native language.
3. Where born, and when? (If age of performer is not volunteered, guess it approximately and say “about 65” or “about 40”).

4. Date of arrival in the U.S. (Never ask this directly!).

5. How many generations in the U.S.? How many generations in California?

6. Places lived in, with dates.

7. Education; with dates.

8. How and from whom did performer learn to sing or play? Can he read musical notation?

9. Occupations, with dates.

10. Special skills, crafts and interests.

11. Community and religious activities, if any.

12. To what extent does the performer share in the activities of national groups, other than his own? Note racial affinities and antagonisms; if revealed. If he has a radio, determine if you can which programs he listens to.

13. Description of performer.

-13-

CALIFORNIA FOLK MUSIC PROJECT

Form C

Text of Interview

STATE
NAME OF WORKER
ADDRESS
DATE
SUBJECT
NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERFORMER

1. List of titles in repertoire of this performer, and his estimate of the number he knows.

2. Titles of texts dictated to interviewer.

3. Why does this performer sing or play! What kind of music does he like best? (If a singer, what kind of songs? Quote him verbatim if you can).


5. Note any evidence you have as to the community’s opinion of the performer.

6. Does he play or sing more, or less, than he used to do? How has his repertoires been affected by the new environment?

7. List of titles recorded on disks, with any comments or facts offered by performer about each. (On a separate sheet).
CALIFORNIA FOLK MUSIC PROJECT

Form D

Study of Folk and National Instruments

STATE

NAME OF WORKER

ADDRESS

DATE

NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERFORMER ON INSTRUMENT

NAME AND ADDRESS OF OWNER: IF DIFFERENT

REFER TO U. C.—W.P.A. DISK NO.

1. Native name of instrument

2. English name if known.

3. Where made, and when?

4. Name and address of maker, if known.

5. Where and when did owner [?] (or performer) learn to play it? How does he tune it? (If he can tell you)

6. How did it come into the hands of the present owner?

7. Musical use of instrument by this performer: (Underline) - Solo performance: To accompany
dancing: To accompany singing? With other instruments? If [?] or invariably, played in combination with some other instruments, [?] note name of the other instruments.

8. Social use of instrument by this performer. (Underline)At home only: Among a few friends? At large parties? At club meetings: At weddings, christenings, funerals? For traditional festivals or national holidays? In church or religious processions? For marching? For dancing? In contests? In dramatic productions? On the radio? (What stations and programs?) Is performer paid, and if so under what circumstances?

9. Interviewer’s brief description of instrument.
NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERFORMER ON INSTRUMENT

NAME AND ADDRESS OF OWNER, IF DIFFERENT.

1. Native name of instrument.
2. English name if known.
3. Where made, and when?
4. Name and address of maker, if known.
5. How and when did it come into the hands of the present owner?
6. Where and when did present owner (or performer) learn to play it?
7. Musical use of instrument: Underline - Solo performance? to accompany dancing?
   To accompany singing? With other instruments. If usually, or invariably,
   played in combination with some other instrument, note name of the other
   instrument.
8. Social use of instrument by this performer: At home only? Among a few friends?
   At large parties? At club meetings? At weddings, christenings, funerals? For
   traditional festivals or national holidays? In church or religious processions?
   For marching? For dancing? In contests? In dramatic productions? On the
   radio? (What stations and programs?) Is performer paid, and if so under what
   circumstances?
10. Interviewer’s brief description of instrument.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Articles on folk music which should be familiar to anyone studying the subject, whether from the textual or musical point of view.

Barry, Phillips

“American Ballads.” *Journal of American Folk Lore*, vol. XXV


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“The Collection of Folk-Song.” *JAFL*, Vol. XXVII.

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“Irish Come-All-Ye’s.” *JAFL*, vol XXIV.

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“What is Tradition?” *BPSSNE*, No. 1, 1930.

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Notes on the Ways of Folk-singers with folk-tunes. *BPSSNE*, No. 12, 1937.

Barry, Phillips; Eckstrom, Fannie Hardy; and Smyth, Mary Winslow,

*British Ballads from Maine*. 1929. Preface very important.
Campbell/Sharp, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*. Preface to vol. 1 by Cecil Sharp is very important.

Eckstrom, Fannie Hardy; and Smyth; Mary Winslow. *Minstrelsy of Maine*.

(Probably not available at [U.?] C.—it is out of print. I own a copy which anyone is welcome to use at the project. It offers valuable information about the ‘composers’ of apparently anonymous folk songs, chiefly from the textural point of view, [how?] var.)

Herzog, George. “The Study of Folk Song in America.” Given at the annual meeting of the Southeastern Folklore Association, April 1939, Chapel Hill. *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, June 1938. (Not in U. C. Library; may be obtained probably from a southern library on request.)


Hudson, Arthur Palmer. Edited by George Herzog. *Folk Tunes from Mississippi*; issued by the Music Research Department, National Play Bureau, Federal Theatre Project, Works Progress Administration, New York City, 1937. (Only copy I know of is at the project. Perhaps you have one.) Musicological study of melodies very important.

White spirituals from the Southern Uplands. 1935?. Much valuable information about the mutability of tunes. He wrote to dispute the early idea that the negro spirituals were a spontaneous creation of the negro unaffected by white culture; he traces the spirituals to texts and tunes of white hymns in the shaped-note hymnals. His technique is important even where his subject is not entirely relevant to ballad study. No, one however, should escape from the study of American folk music … without some contact with the work of Jackson, and some awareness of the existence of American folk hymns—which have preserved some ballad tunes, incidentally.

The Barry articles are brief but are by far the most important. I have reprints of most of them.

CALIFORNIA FOLK MUSIC PROJECT

Instructions to workers

collating California texts and tunes

Bibliographical Key Words

ANTHROPOLOGY: American (Omit American Indian).

BALLADS

BROADSIDES

CALIFORNIA (Diaries, histories—pioneer period and early Spanish and Mexican mining, lumbering, hides, fishing, etc.)
CHANTS (Mission chants; work chants)

CHANTEYS or SHANTIES

DANCES: Country, Square, Figure

ETHNOLOGY (Omit American Indian).

FESTIVALS: Folk, Music, Dance, Traditional, Seasonal (Christmas, Easter, Harvest, Midsummer, etc.)

FIDDLE (Fiddle tunes as accompaniment to square dances)

FOLK: Songs, Dances, Music Festivals, Lore.

GAMES: Singing, Play Party.

HYMNS: Folk, Traditional

HYMNALS: Shaped-note.

INSTRUMENTS: Guitar, Dulcimer, Banjo (5-stringed), Violin

MISSIONS: California, Music in, Spanish. (In this… information about Indians should be included, i.e., trained to sing or play at the Missions or by the Padres)

MUSIC: Folk, American, National, Traditional

PAMPHLETS: (Individual songs are frequently bound as pamphlets)

SINGING MASTERS (Itinerant singing teachers was held at singing schools about the country two weeks at a time, usually connection with the churches.)
SONGS: Folk, National, Traditional, Sailor, Pioneer, Cowboy, Lumberjack, Hobo, Miner, Railroad, River, Workers’, I.W.W., Fishing, Bandit, Prison, etc.

Note: Poems are often published under titles bearing the word ‘Songs’ but these are not relevant unless there is proof that they were actually sung.

SONGSTERS (Books of collected song texts)

WEST

FAR WEST

WORK SONGS (tie-tamping, pile-driving, etc.)
APPENDIX 8.

Chronological List of Recordings Included in Sidney Robertson’s California Folk Music Project for the Works Progress Administration, 1938–40

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Performer(s)</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Number of Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 March 1938</td>
<td>Choristers of St. Anthony</td>
<td>Santa Barbara</td>
<td>Spanish hymns</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 May 1938</td>
<td>John Olafson, Sigurd Benony, Oddrun Sigurasson</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Icelandic songs</td>
<td>11, 4, 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 May 1938</td>
<td>John Botica</td>
<td>Mountain View</td>
<td>Croatian music (misnice, lirica)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 May 1938</td>
<td>Lottie Espinosa</td>
<td>Pacific Grove</td>
<td>Spanish-California songs (vocals, guitar)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 September 1938</td>
<td>Russian Molekan Congregation</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>Russian hymns</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 October 1938</td>
<td>Mr. and Mrs. J.P. Susoeff</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>Russian hymns</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 October 1938</td>
<td>George Vinton Graham</td>
<td>San Jose</td>
<td>English songs (vocals, guitar)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 December 1938</td>
<td>George Vinton Graham</td>
<td>San Jose</td>
<td>English songs (vocals, guitar)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 December 1938</td>
<td>George Vinton Graham</td>
<td>San Jose</td>
<td>English songs (vocals, guitar)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–27 December 1938</td>
<td>Warde Ford, Pat Ford, Frenchy Orlet</td>
<td>Central Valley</td>
<td>Unaccompanied English songs, harmonica</td>
<td>45, 16, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 December 1938</td>
<td>Alice Lemos Avila, Joaquim and Olive Flores, Clifford Franco</td>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>Portuguese, Spanish-California songs (vocals, guitar)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 January 1939</td>
<td>John Botica</td>
<td>Mountain View</td>
<td>Croatian music (svirala)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 January 1939</td>
<td>Otto Bardarson</td>
<td>Carmel</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Icelandic songs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–19 January 1939</td>
<td>Maria and Johnnie Garcia, Jessie de Soto</td>
<td>Monterey</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Spanish-California songs</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23, 25, 28 January 1939</td>
<td>Alice Lemos Avila, Ed Pavon, Clifford Franco</td>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>Portuguese, Spanish-California songs (vocals, guitar)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 February 1939</td>
<td>Alice Lemos Avila</td>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>Portuguese songs (vocals, English guitar)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 February 1939</td>
<td>Jessie de Soto</td>
<td>Concord</td>
<td>Spanish-Californian songs (vocals, guitar)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 February 1939</td>
<td>Sal Lucido, Alberto Mendes, Francisco Sanfilippo, Mr. Franks</td>
<td>Martinez, Oakland, Richmond</td>
<td>Spanish-Californian, Portuguese, Italian songs</td>
<td>1, 6, 3, 1 (respectively)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Performers</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Songs details</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 February 1939</td>
<td>Mario Olmeda</td>
<td>Concord</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Italian songs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 February 1939</td>
<td>Donald and Charlotte MacInnes, John MacPhee,</td>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Scottish and Gaelic songs</td>
<td>7, 3, 3 (respectively)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hilda Duarte Brown, Walter Sebree – accomp.</td>
<td>Monterey</td>
<td>Spanish-Californian songs (vocals, Hawaiian guitar)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 February 1939</td>
<td>Alf Nilsson, Julio Gomez, Benjamin Figueroa, Mrs. Madariaga, unidentified musicians</td>
<td>Carmel</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Norwegian music (Nilsson), Mexican music (vocals, violin, guitar, mandolin)</td>
<td>6, 2, 1, 1, 5 (respectively)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 March 1939</td>
<td>Alberto Mendes, Manuel Lemos, Mr. Franks</td>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>Portuguese songs (vocals, viola da gama, English guitar)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 March 1939</td>
<td>Alice Lemos Avila, Antonio Medeiros, Elzira Silva, Antonio Medeiros</td>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>Portuguese songs (vocals, English guitar, piano)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 March 1939</td>
<td>Walter Harp, Charles Cook, Bennie Lindsay, Junior Lindsay</td>
<td>Brentwood</td>
<td>Square dance calling (voice, guitar, fiddle, harmonica)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 March 1939</td>
<td>Giuseppe Russo</td>
<td>Pittsburg</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Italian songs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 March 1939</td>
<td>William T. Day</td>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>Unaccompanied English songs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 March 1939</td>
<td>Giuseppe Russo</td>
<td>Pittsburg</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Italian songs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 April 1939</td>
<td>Mr. and Mrs. Byron Coffin, Sr.</td>
<td>Alameda</td>
<td>English songs (vocals, piano)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 April 1939</td>
<td>Cruz Losada, Elinor Rodriguez, Aurora Calderon</td>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Spanish-Californian songs</td>
<td>6, 1, 4 (respectively)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 April 1939</td>
<td>Mary A. McDonald</td>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Gaelic songs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 April 1939</td>
<td>Alice Lemos Avila, Joaquim and Olive Flores, Frank Cunha</td>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>Portuguese, Spanish-California songs (vocals, guitar, mandolin)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 April 1939</td>
<td>Ruben J. Baboyan,</td>
<td>Fresno</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Armenian songs</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 April 1939</td>
<td>Hartop and Mary Goshtigan</td>
<td>Fresno</td>
<td>Armenian songs (vocals, oud)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 April 1939</td>
<td>Bedros Hartuonian</td>
<td>Fresno</td>
<td>Armenian songs (kemanche, qanun)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Artists</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Genre Description</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>23 April 1939</td>
<td>Aslanian’s Armenian Orchestra (Jack Aslanian, Bedros Haroutunian, Archie Krotlian, Mesrou Takakjian)</td>
<td>Fresno</td>
<td>Armenian songs (vocals, violin, qanun, oud, clarinet)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 April 1939</td>
<td>Joe Bedrosian, T. Shatinian</td>
<td>Fresno</td>
<td>Armenian songs (zurna, blul)</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 May 1939</td>
<td>Louis Brangone, Tony Dedo</td>
<td>Woodside</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Italian and French songs, Croatian songs (lirica)</td>
<td>3, 2 (respectively)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 May 1939</td>
<td>Peter Boro</td>
<td>San Mateo</td>
<td>Croatian songs (gusle, misnice)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 May 1939</td>
<td>John Botica</td>
<td>Mountain View</td>
<td>Croatian songs (lirica)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 May 1939</td>
<td>Lottie Espinosa, Jessie de Soto</td>
<td>Pacific Grove</td>
<td>Spanish-California songs (vocals, guitar)</td>
<td>10, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 May 1939</td>
<td>Sam Blackburn</td>
<td>Concord</td>
<td>Unaccompanied English songs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 June 1939</td>
<td>Virginia Meade, Salvadora Valenzuela, E. de la Golsh</td>
<td>Hollywood</td>
<td>Unaccompanied English songs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 June 1939</td>
<td>Virginia Pico, Salvadora Valenzuela, E. de la Golsh</td>
<td>Pala</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Spanish-California songs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 9, 1939</td>
<td>George Vinton, Graham</td>
<td>San Jose</td>
<td>English songs (vocals, guitar)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 June 1939</td>
<td>Ozzie Waters, Sam Blackburn</td>
<td>Concord</td>
<td>Unaccompanied English songs</td>
<td>1, 1 (respectively)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 June 1939</td>
<td>Mary MacPhee, Donald MacInnes</td>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Gaelic songs</td>
<td>5, 4 (respectively)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17–18 June 1939</td>
<td>Aaron Morgan, Leon Ponce, John Selleck, Hubert Brady</td>
<td>Columbia, Tuolomne County</td>
<td>Harmonica, unaccompanied English songs, violin, unaccompanied English songs (respectively)</td>
<td>17, 10, 1, 2 (respectively)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 June 1939</td>
<td>John McCready, Leon Ponce, Hubert Brady</td>
<td>Groveland, Columbia</td>
<td>Unaccompanied English songs</td>
<td>10, 4, 1 (respectively)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–2 August 1939</td>
<td>Sam Bell</td>
<td>Tuolomne County</td>
<td>Unaccompanied English songs</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, 5 August 1939</td>
<td>John McCready, Pen McCreedy, Walter Ross Ralph</td>
<td>Groveland, Tuolomne County (Ralph)</td>
<td>Unaccompanied English songs</td>
<td>14, 1, 1 (respectively)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–6 August 1939</td>
<td>John Stone</td>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>Unaccompanied vocals, harmonica, violin</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 August 1939</td>
<td>Jessie de Soto</td>
<td>Concord</td>
<td>Spanish-Californian songs (vocals, guitar)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 August 1939</td>
<td>Mary Silveira, Clifford and Louise Franco</td>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>Portuguese songs (vocals, English guitar)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 August 1939</td>
<td>Charles Fulton, Herbert Hudson</td>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>English songs (unaccompanied vocals)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Performers</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
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<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 August 1939</td>
<td>George Vinton Graham</td>
<td>San Jose</td>
<td>English songs (vocals, guitar)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 August 1939</td>
<td>Lottie Espinosa</td>
<td>Pacific Grove</td>
<td>Spanish-Californian songs (vocals, guitar)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19 August 1939</td>
<td>Anita Dormody</td>
<td>Carmel</td>
<td>Unaccompanied English songs</td>
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<tr>
<td>3–4 September 1939</td>
<td>Warde, Bogue, and Pat Ford, Flora Earnson</td>
<td>Central Valley</td>
<td>Unaccompanied English songs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 September 1939</td>
<td>Celia Koljonen, Fina Petersen, and Mary Salonen</td>
<td>Central Valley</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Finnish songs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 October 1939</td>
<td>John Selleck</td>
<td>Camino</td>
<td>Fiddle tunes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2 October 1939</td>
<td>Judge Charles Rasmussen</td>
<td>Lotus</td>
<td>Unaccompanied English songs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3 October 1939</td>
<td>Ben Pitts, Leonard W. Jones</td>
<td>Pine Grove</td>
<td>English songs (vocals, guitar, harmonica)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>30 October 1939</td>
<td>Vartan S. and Siranoosh Shapazian</td>
<td>Fowler</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Armenian songs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 October 1939</td>
<td>Mrs. Ben Scott, Myrtle B. Wilkinson</td>
<td>Turlock</td>
<td>Fiddle tunes (violin, tenor banjo)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 November 1939</td>
<td>John Soininen</td>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Finnish songs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 November 1939</td>
<td>Thodur Einarson</td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Icelandic songs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 November 1939</td>
<td>Leighton Robinson, Alex Barr, Arthur Brodeur, and Leighton McKenzie,</td>
<td>Belvedere</td>
<td>Unaccompanied English songs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 December 1939</td>
<td>Peter Boro</td>
<td>San Mateo</td>
<td>Croatian music (mindsight, gusle)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 December 1939</td>
<td>Mary Gaidos, Julia Reha, Elizabeth Jelenfy, Mary Drasky, Rosa Nimerfroh, Mr. Jelenfy, and Mr. Nimerfroh,</td>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Hungarian songs</td>
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<tr>
<td>28–29 April 1939</td>
<td>Sigurd and Leo Bardarson</td>
<td>Carmel</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Icelandic songs</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 June 1940</td>
<td>John Cunningham</td>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Gaelic songs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 September 1940</td>
<td>Mrs. Francisco and Matias Etcheverry</td>
<td>Fresno</td>
<td>Unaccompanied Basque songs</td>
<td></td>
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