

Summer/Fall 2010

“Kumbaya”

Online
Sourcebook

Yiddish Radio

Ten Years
of WHP



American Folklife Center
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FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

AMERICAN FOLKLIFE CENTER



THE WORLD'S FIRST "KUMBAYA" MOMENT



3 "Kumbaya" has been a favorite of the folk revival, as well as a target of ridicule. Find out the real story of the song!

TEN YEARS OF VETERANS HISTORY



13 Ten years ago, AFC launched the Veterans History Project. Catch up on the history of this great program!

HEAR, O ISRAEL



17 AFC has acquired Henry Sapoznik's treasure-trove of recordings from the bygone days of Yiddish radio.

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The American Folklife Center was created in 1976 by the U.S. Congress to "preserve and present American folklife" through programs of research, documentation, archival preservation, reference service, live performance, exhibition, publication, and training. The Center incorporates an archive, which was established in the Music Division of the Library of Congress in 1928 and is now one of the largest collections of ethnographic material from the United States and around the world.

Folklife Center News publishes articles on the programs and activities of the American Folklife Center, as well as other articles on traditional expressive culture. It is available free of charge from the Library of Congress, American Folklife Center, 101 Independence Avenue, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20540-4610.

Folklife Center News does not publish announcements from other institutions or reviews of books from publishers other than the Library of Congress. Readers who would like to comment on Center activities or newsletter articles may address their remarks to the editor.

ONLINE INFORMATION RESOURCES: The American Folklife Center's Website provides full texts of many AFC publications, information about AFC projects, multimedia presentations of selected collections, links to Web resources on ethnography, and announcements of upcoming events. The address for the home page is <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/>. An index of the site's contents is available at <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/az-index.html>.

The website for the Veterans History Project provides an overview of the project, an online "kit" for participants recording oral histories of veterans, and a brief presentation of some examples of video- and audio-recordings of veterans' stories. The address is <http://www.loc.gov/vets>.

FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

Volume 32, Nos. 3-4, Summer/Fall 2010

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The World's First "Kumbaya" Moment: New Evidence about an Old Song

By Stephen Winick

"Kumbaya," once one of the most popular songs in the folk revival, has more recently fallen on hard times. In its heyday, from the 1950s through the 1990s, the song was recorded by dozens of artists, including Joan Baez, the Weavers, Odetta, Pete Seeger, Sweet Honey in the Rock, Nanci Griffith, and Raffi in the United States; Joan Orleans in Germany; Manda Djinn in France; the Seekers in Australia; and many others around the world. However, overlapping with that heyday, from the 1980s through the 2000s, the song experienced a backlash. Musically, it came to be thought of as a children's campfire song, too simple or too silly for adults to bother with. Politically, it became shorthand for weak consensus-seeking that fails to accomplish crucial goals. Socially, it came to stand for the touchy-feely, the wishy-washy, the nerdy, and the meek. These recent attitudes toward the song

are unfortunate, since the original is a beautiful example of traditional music, dialect, and creativity. However, the song's recent fall from grace has at least added some colorful metaphors to American political discourse, such phrases as "to join hands and sing 'Kumbaya,'" which means to ignore our differences and get along (albeit superficially), and "Kumbaya moment," an event at which such naïve bonding occurs [1].

Regardless of the song's fluctuating connotations, one question has long fascinated scholars: what was the first "Kumbaya moment?" In other words, where and when did the song originate? To answer this question, there's

to tell the story of the song [2]. However, the recent rediscovery of two versions at AFC—a manuscript taken down in 1926 and a cylinder recording made in the



The Seekers, of Melbourne, Australia, was one of the groups that first popularized "Kumbaya" outside the United States. Their version first appeared on their 1963 debut album, then on various compilations including this one from 1967.

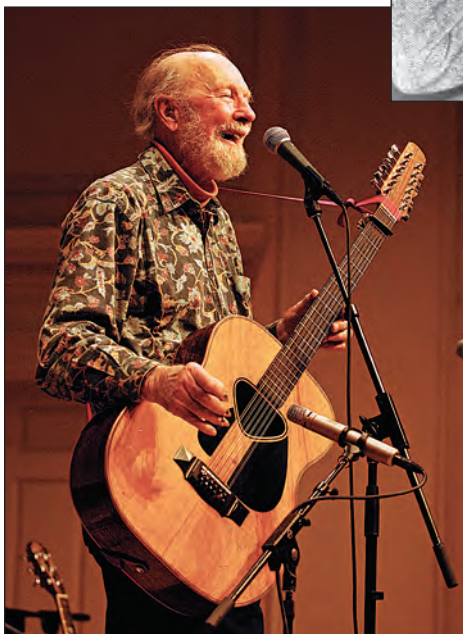


The Weavers (l-r: Pete Seeger, Lee Hays, Fred Hellerman, Ronnie Gilbert) rehearse for a concert in Philadelphia, 1951. LC P & P Division: reproduction number LC-USZ62-

same year—makes a more complete account possible, and helps dispel some common fallacies about the song. One of these common misconceptions was espoused and spread by the song's first

no better resource than the American Folklife Center Archive at the Library of Congress. The song's early history is very well documented in the Archive, which includes the first known sound recordings of the song, and probably the earliest manuscript copy as well. In addition, the Archive's subject file on the song (which gives it the title "Kum Ba Yah") contains rare documents pertaining to the song's history. Several researchers, most notably and recently Chee Hoo Lum, have used the Archive's resources

appearances in the folk revival. The first revival recording of the song, which called it "Kum Ba Yah," was released in 1958 by Ohio-based group the Folk-smiths. In the liner notes, they claimed that the song came from Africa, and presented as evidence a previous claim that the song had been collected from missionaries in Angola. On the other hand, some scholars have located the origin of "Kumbaya" in the work of an Anglo-American composer and evangelist named Marvin Frey. In 1939, Frey



Pete Seeger on March 16, 2007, in the Library's Coolidge Auditorium.

Credit: Robert Corwin/AFC Robert Corwin Collection.

Credit: Courtesy Mr. and Mrs. Bert Nye



Robert Winslow Gordon in a portrait taken in 1928, when he joined the staff of the Library of Congress as the first Head of the Archive of American Folk Song.

song’s origin (one ascribing it to black Africans and the other to a white American), and that both of these theories have persisted among some commentators to this day. As we shall see, in light of AFC’s two early documents, neither of these theories is likely.

The most common claim made today about the origins of “Kumbaya” is that it is from the Gullah-Geechee people of coastal Georgia and South Carolina. (The more outlandish versions of this theory, such as the one espoused on Wikipedia on April 2, 2010, claim that “Yah” is a remnant of Aramaic, and refers to God, despite the fact that “yah” means “here” in Gullah.) While a Gullah origin is certainly closer to the truth than either of the previous theories, AFC’s archival versions also call the Gullah claim into question.

The Boyd Manuscript

The earliest record of “Kumbaya” in the AFC archive (which may be the earliest anywhere) is in a manuscript sent to Robert Winslow Gordon, the Archive’s founder, in 1927. The collector was Julian Parks Boyd, at that time a high school principal in Alliance, North Carolina. This version, which Boyd collected from his student Minnie Lee in 1926, was given the title “Oh, Lord, Won’t You Come By Here,” which

published and copyrighted sheet music for one version of the song, which he called “Come by Here.” Once “Kumbaya” was established as a standard of the folk revival, he pointed to his 1939 publication and claimed to have written the song; many commentators—including such publications as the New York Times—have chosen to believe his claim [3]. This means that during the early years of the folk revival, there were two widely

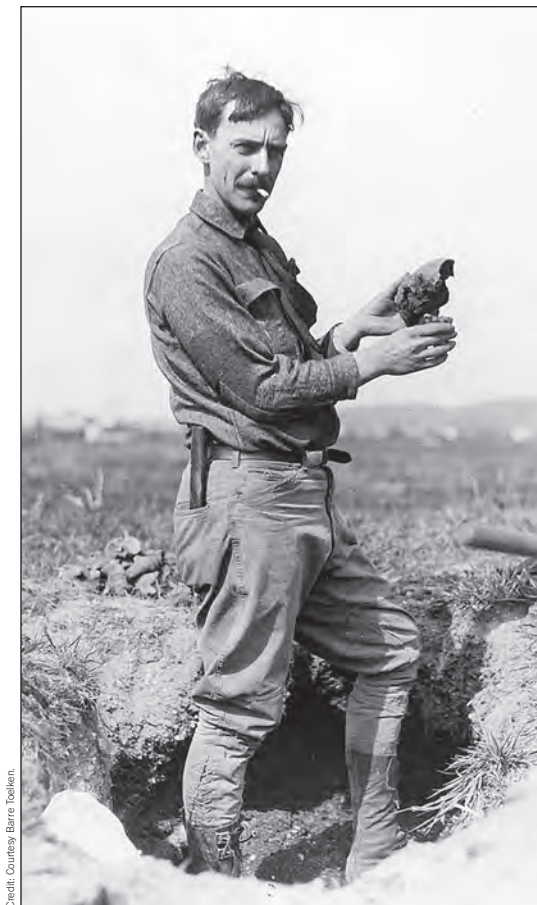
believed theories of the song’s origin (one ascribing it to black Africans and the other to a white American), and that both of these theories have persisted among some commentators to this day. As we shall see, in light of AFC’s two early documents, neither of these theories is likely.

Lee’s version of “Kumbaya” leads us to one of the many interesting stories hidden in the AFC archive: that of folklore collector Julian Parks Boyd. Boyd, who earned a master’s degree from Duke University in 1926, spent only one school year (1926-1927) at his job as a schoolteacher in Alliance. During that time, he showed a remarkable interest in folksong. From letters he sent to Gordon (now also in the AFC archive), we know that Boyd used a time-honored method among academic folklorists: he had his students collect traditional songs from their friends and families in the rural community around the school. Although he was apparently quite selective, keeping only those songs he deemed true folksongs and discarding the rest, he amassed a collection of over a hundred songs, from which he created a typed manuscript. Boyd knew of Gordon through his columns in *Adventure Magazine*, and sent the manuscript to him for his advice and comments in

February, 1927.

By March, Boyd’s program of collecting folksongs had encountered a serious obstacle, and that, among other things, convinced him to leave Alliance for graduate school. “The school board and the community in general seem to think that [collecting folksongs] is an obnoxious practice, for some uncertain reason. The seniors were righteously indignant—it was the one thing that had thoroughly aroused their interest,” he wrote to Gordon on March 30. “This particular [school board] fits Woodrow Wilson’s definition of a board: ‘long, wooden, and narrow,’” he continued. “And that explains why I am going to pursue my doctorate at Pennsylvania next year.”

Boyd’s departure for the University of Pennsylvania probably marked the end of his work as a folksong collector, but it was the beginning of a distinguished career as a historian and librarian. He eventually served as Head Librarian and Professor of History at Princeton University, as the founding treasurer of the Society



Credit: Courtesy Barre Toelken

Robert W. Gordon during an archaeological expedition in Marin County, California, ca. 1923.

of American Archivists, and as president of the American Historical Association (1964) and the American Philosophical Society (1973-1976). As an historian, he is best known as the editor of a definitive edition of the papers of Thomas Jefferson.

Before he left to take up the mantle of history, however, Boyd spent one more, brief period as a folklorist. In his March 30 letter to Gordon, Boyd alludes to plans for a summer field trip to collect folksongs in the Outer Banks. The trip was sponsored by Professor Frank C. Brown of Duke University, then president of the North Carolina Folklore Society. Although the correspondence from Boyd to Gordon terminates before the trip was to have started, we have no reason to think the trip was cancelled. Furthermore, the Society's collection, later published as the seven-volume *Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*, contains many items collected by Boyd, including the same version of "Kumbaya" that Boyd sent to Gordon. It has been overlooked by previous scholars of the history of the song, undoubtedly because its title, "Oh, Lord, Won't You Come By Here," bears little resemblance to the more familiar title, "Kumbaya."

Boyd sent his manuscript collection to Gordon in Georgia, before Gordon moved to Washington, D.C. and founded the Archive of American Folk-Song. Gordon brought the manuscript with him to Washington, where it was among the original materials deposited in the Archive in 1928. Thus, from the very inception of the Archive, it contained at least one version of this classic song.

Cylinder Recordings and Other Evidence

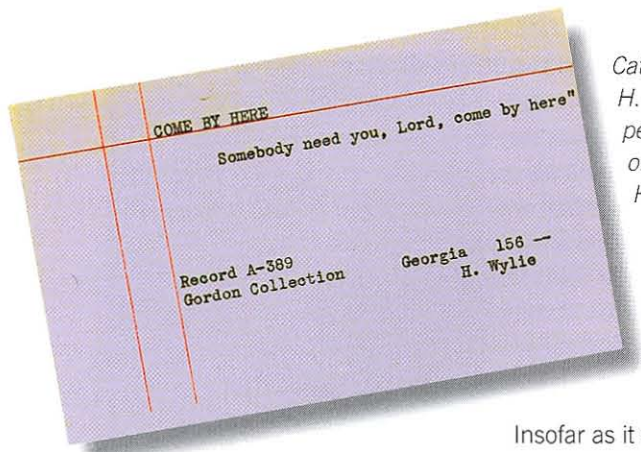
The Boyd papers make it clear that "Kumbaya" was represented in the Archive's very first collections. More surprisingly, a sound recording of the song was also among the archive's initial holdings, a fact that until now has been difficult to establish with certainty. Among the original materials in the AFC Archive were four cylinder recordings of spirituals with the refrain "come by here" or "come by yuh," collected by Gordon himself during his trips to Georgia from 1926 to 1928. Gordon was convinced all four songs were related, and cross-referenced them when he made a card catalog for his manuscripts and cylinders. Subsequently, one of the four cylinders was broken, and one was lost, so two remain in the Archive. However, without hearing the cylinders it would be impossible to state with certainty whether either were a version of "Kumbaya."

One of these cylinders, which clearly is not a version of "Kumbaya," was transcribed by AFC staff member Todd Harvey and published in Chee Hoo Lum's 2007 article. Entitled "Daniel in the Lion's Den," the song has six verses, each of which is just one line repeated six times:

- (1) Daniel in the lion's den
- (2) Daniel [went to?] God in prayer
- (3) The Angel locked the lion's jaw
- (4) Daniel [took a deep night's rest?]
- (5) Lord, I am worthy now
- (6) Lordy won't you come by here



Robert W. Gordon in the Library of Congress's Archive of American Folk Song (now the AFC Archive), ca. 1930.



Catalog Card for
H. Wylie's 1926
performance
of "Come by
Here."

Insofar as it suggests the interaction of the song "Come by Here" or "Kumbaya" with a narrative spiritual based on the biblical story of Daniel, this song is interesting to researchers of "Kumbaya." However, because it would not itself be considered a version of "Kumbaya" by most folklorists or musicologists, it cannot establish a definitive date in the history of "Kumbaya."

Lum included "Daniel in the Lion's Den" in his article because it was the earliest surviving recording that Gordon had cross-referenced with the phrase "Come by Here." Strangely, however, Lum did not analyze or publish the second surviving cylinder, instead including a transcription of the version recorded by John Lomax in 1936. This is a pity, for although a section in the middle of Gordon's second cylinder is inaudible, several verses at the beginning and the end are audible and are enough to identify it conclusively as "Kumbaya." As far as we know, it is the earliest sound recording of the song, and it is therefore among the most significant evidence on the song's early history.

As with many of Gordon's cylinders, there is not much contextual information accompanying the recording. The song is identified as "Come By Here." The singer is identified only as H. Wylie. The place is not identified at all, but during this period Gordon was living in Darien, Georgia, and rarely collected more than a few hours' drive from there. The cylinder is numbered A389. It is undated, but all the dated items in Gordon's numbering system from A290 to A434 are from April, 1926; the last precisely dated cylinder before "Come By Here" is dated April 15, and the first after it is dated May 3, so it is likely that the song was recorded within that two-week period. Sadly, it has remained unpublished until now.

The lyrics and music are as follows; the transcription of the words is mine, and represents my best attempt to understand what Wylie is singing. The music was transcribed by Jennifer Cutting, and similarly represents her best effort to accurately represent Wylie's tune:

...need you Lord, come by here,
Somebody need you, Lord, come by here,
Somebody need you, Lord, come by here,
Oh, Lord, come by here.

Now I need you, Lord, come by here
Sinners need you, Lord, come by here
Sinners need you, Lord, come by here
Oh, Lord, come by here.

Come by here, Lord, come by here
Come by here, my Lord, come by here
Come by here, my Lord, come by here
Oh, Lord, come by here.

In the morning see Lord, come by here
In the morning do Lord, come by here
In the morning see Lord, come by here
Oh, Lord, come by here.

[inaudible section]

Oh, Lord, come by here.

I'm gon' need you, Lord, come by here
I'm gon' need you, Lord, come by here
I'm gon' need you, Lord, come by here
Oh, Lord, come by here.

Oh, sinners need you, Lord, come by here
Sinners need you, Lord, come by here
Sinners need you, Lord, come by here
Oh, my Lord, won't you come by here

In the mornin' mornin', won't you come by here
Mornin' mornin', won't you come by here
In the mornin' mornin', won't you come by here
Oh, Lord, come by here.

Various publications from the same era suggest the song's range and its influence. In 1926, for example, a song entitled "Oh, Lordy Won't You Come By Here" was published by the songwriter Madelyn Sheppard, who was later half of a songwriting duo with Annelu Burns. (Sheppard and Burns were notable for being two white women from Selma, Alabama who composed blues songs and spirituals in African American dialect and sold them to African American publishers, including W.C. Handy.) Sheppard's song is not the same song as "Kumbaya," but its publication in the era during which the earliest versions of "Kumbaya" were emerging suggests that she was familiar with the traditional song.

In 1931, the Society for the Preservation of Spirituals published a song that they called "Come by Yuh," in a book entitled *The Carolina Low Country*. The exact date of the song's collection is not mentioned in the book, but all of the book's songs were collected between 1922 and 1931. (As a consequence, it

Come By Here

$\text{♩} = 52$

The musical score is written on ten staves of music. Each staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and a 4/8 time signature. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 52. The lyrics are written below the notes, with some words underlined. The score includes a section marked as '[inaudible section]' between measures 29 and 36.

8 Some-bo-dy need you, Lord, come by here; Some-bo-dy need you, Lord, come by here—

5 Some-bo-dy need you, Lord, come by— here— Oh, Lord, come by here— Now I need you, Lord, come by here—

11 Sin-ners need you, Lord, come by here— Sin-ners need you, Lord, come by here— Oh, Lord, come by— here—

17 Come by here, Lord, come by here— Come by here, my Lord, come by here— Come by here, my Lord, come by here—

23 Oh, Lord, come by here. In the mor-nin' see, Lord, come by here; in the mor-nin'do, Lord, come by here— in the

29 mor-nin' see, Lord, come by here— Oh, Lord, come by here— [inaudible section] Oh,— Lord,

36 come by here— I'm gon' need you, Lord, come by here— I'm gon' need you, Lord, come by here—

41 I'm gon' need you, Lord, come by here— Oh,— Lord, come by— here. Oh, sin-ners need you, Lord, come by here—

47 Sin-ners need you, Lord, come by here— Sin-ners need you, Lord, come by here— Oh, my Lord, won't you

52 come by here— In the mor-nin' mor-nin', won't you come by here— Mor-nin' mor-nin', won't you

56 come by here— In the mor-nin' mor-nin', won't you come by here— Oh,— Lord, come by here—

is impossible to know whether this version predates any or all of Gordon's materials, and it therefore may be impossible to identify with certainty the first verifiable reference to the song.) This song has the refrain "Come By Yuh, Lord, come by yuh," and a repeated verse "somebody need you lord, come by yuh." Gordon called one of his now-unplayable cylinders "Come by here, Lord, come by here," and the other "Somebody need you Lord, come by here," suggesting that these were the same song. It is also very similar to the song we know as "Kumbaya." By 1931, then, the song had likely been recorded or transcribed from at least five singers, and other songs bearing the stamp of its influence had been recorded and published as well.

In 1936, John Lomax, Gordon's successor as head of the Archive, recorded another version of "Come by Here" for the archive. The singer was Ethel Best of Raiford, Florida. Each verse was a single line repeated 3 times, followed by "oh, Lord, come by here."

- (1) Come by here, my lord, come by here
- (2) Well we [down in?] trouble, Lord, come by here
- (3) Well, it's somebody needs you lord, come by here
- (4) Come by here, my lord, come by here
- (5) Well it's somebody sick Lord come by here
- (6) Well, we need you Jesus Lord to come by here
- (7) Come by here, my lord, come by here
- (8) Somebody moanin', Lord, come by here

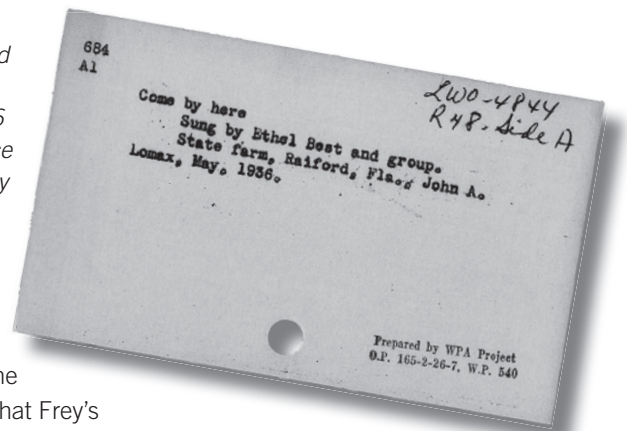
In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the archive recorded the song several more times in Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas.

How the New Evidence Affects Theories of the Song's Origin

Clearly, by the advent of the 1940s, "Come by Here" was a widely known spiritual among African Americans in the South. Yet, as noted above, the song has often been identified as a 1936 composition of New York City songwriter and evangelist Marvin V. Frey (1918-1992). As we have seen, this confusion stems from claims made by Frey himself; in 1939, Frey published a version entitled "Come By Here," on which he claimed copyright. Frey claimed to have written the words in 1936, based on a prayer he had heard from an evangelist in Oregon. Frey might have been basing his story on the truth; the evangelist he mentions could have been adapting the song, which, as we have seen, was already widely known by then. To what extent, then, was his "Come By Here" an original composition?

Chee-Hoo Lum attempted to answer this question in his article. Unfortunately, by skipping over the 1926 Georgia performance by H. Wylie (recorded by Gordon) to present the 1936 Florida performance by Ethel Best (recorded by Lomax), Lum missed the opportunity to compare Frey's song with Wylie's, or with popular versions of "Kumbaya." He seems to find the 1931 publication in *The Carolina Low Country* to be insufficiently close to Frey's later version to constitute clear evidence that Frey's composition was based on the traditional song.

Catalog card
for Ethel
Best's 1936
performance
of "Come by
Here."



Therefore, he concludes that Frey's authorship claim is "the first possible 'origin' theory" for the song. Wylie's version, however, preserved by AFC on a cylinder recording, is closer to Frey's, in both lyrics and music, and predates it by almost ten years. Given the existence of Wylie's version, then, Frey's claim to have composed the song based on a spoken prayer, rather than a song, becomes very unlikely.

Moreover, the plausibility of Frey's claim to have written the song also depended on another factor: Frey was obligated to explain how a song written by a white man and called "Come By Here," had become "Kum Ba Yah" or "Kumbaya" in the oral tradition. After all, a song written in Standard English, and originally disseminated in print as "Come By Here," would be more likely to enter oral tradition in Standard English, and to be collected with a pronunciation closer to that dialect. One of Frey's stories about the song had the effect of explaining this anomaly; he told it to Peter Blood-Patterson, who sent it the AFC archive in 1993. It is filed in the "Kum Ba Yah" subject file:

While [I was] leading children's meetings at a camp meeting in Centralia, Washington, a young boy named Robert Cunningham was converted. He sang this song at the top of his high, boyish voice all over the camp ground, for he was happy and irrepressible. His family were preparing to go as missionaries to the Belgian Congo (Zaire). Their particular burden was for Angola (to the south and west), which at the time was closed to Protestant missionaries.

Ten years later, while in Detroit, Michigan (1948)...the [Cunningham] family sang "Come by Here" with my second tune, the one I had taught in Centralia (1938), and thereafter the theme of my revival crusades. The song by now had become a standard in Pentecostal, Holiness, Evangelical, and Independent churches and Sunday schools. They first sang the song in English, then in an African dialect, with the words, KUM BA YAH, with some African drums and bongos, a slow beat—a very effective presentation.

Later I found out that the language was Luvale, which pervades throughout northeast Angola and southeast Zaire.

According to Frey, then, the pronunciation "Kum Ba Yah" originated when Luvale-speaking people in Angola and Zaire translated "Come by Here" into their language. That strains

credibility on several levels, primarily that “Come by Here” translated into Luvale would not be “Kum Ba Yah”; indeed, for “Come by Here” to translate to “Kum Ba Yah,” the target language would have to be a creole with English as one of its main components, and no such language was common in Angola (then still a Portuguese colony) or Zaire (a French-speaking country formerly colonized by Belgium) in the 1930s. Moreover, the AFC’s cylinder recording of H. Wylie shows that we have no need of such a story. In Wylie’s dialect, which is most likely a form of Gullah, the word “here” is pronounced as “yah,” rendering the song’s most repeated line “come by yah,” a phrase that can be phonetically rendered as either “Kum Ba Yah” or “Kumbaya.”

If Frey’s claim to have composed the song becomes more farfetched in light of this cylinder recording, so does the notion that the song originated in Africa. The idea of an African origin was based on the understanding of Lynn and Katherine Rohrbough, who published song books through the Cooperative Recreation Service of Delaware, Ohio. As the Folksmiths’ liner notes explain, the Rohrboughs heard the song from an Ohio professor, who claimed to have heard it from a missionary in Africa. No account that I have seen establishes a date for this occurrence, so the idea that the song was African in origin (rather than an American song that had traveled to Africa) seems to have been based on the fact that the words “Kum Ba Yah” sounded vaguely African, and the fact that the Rohrboughs were unaware of American versions that predated their own publications of the song. Indeed, according to Frey’s interview with Blood-Patterson, once the Rohrboughs learned of Frey’s previous claim, they conceded that the song was Frey’s, so they seem to have had little confidence in their own claim of an African origin for the song. Thus, AFC’s cylinder, with a pronunciation very close to “Kum Ba Yah,” would seem to eliminate the last piece of circumstantial evidence for an African origin.

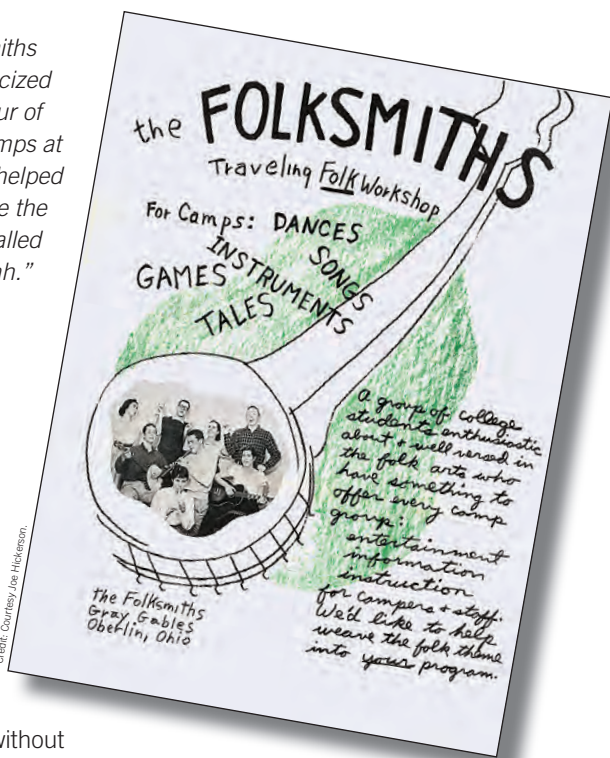
Finally, the third

This Folksmiths poster publicized the 1957 tour of summer camps at which they helped to popularize the song they called “Kum Ba Yah.”

theory about the song (that it originated in Gullah) is weakened by the Boyd manuscript. Even without

that version, it is clear from AFC recordings that “Come by Here” was known fairly early throughout the American south, including Texas, Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi. Before the rediscovery of the Boyd manuscript, however, the first known versions were Gordon’s cylinders, which were from Georgia, and the transcription published in *The Carolina*

Low Country, which was from South Carolina. These are all most likely Gullah versions. Their appearance so early in the song’s history suggested to most scholars that the song originated in the Gullah region and spread from there. The Boyd manuscript, however, is from Alliance, North Carolina, significantly north of Gullah territory. Therefore, from the time of the song’s earliest record, it seems to have been shared among both Gullah speakers and speakers of other



Credit: Courtesy, Joe Hickerson.



This photo was taken during the 1957 Folksmiths tour of summer camps. (L-r): David Sweet, Joe Hickerson, Chuck Crawford, Ruth Weiss, Sarah Newcomb.



Pete Seeger, arriving at Federal Court with his guitar over his shoulder, on April Fool's Day, 1961, three years after he helped popularize "Kumbaya." Seeger was facing a conviction for contempt of Congress based on his refusal to testify concerning the alleged communism of various fellow folksingers. The conviction was overturned on appeal. LC P & P Division: reproduction number LC-USZ62-130860.

African-American dialects. Given this, although a Gullah origin is certainly still possible, it would be dangerous to assume that the song originated in Gullah, rather than in African American English more generally.

In summary, then, the evidence from the American Folklife Center Archive does not fully support any of the common claims about the origin of "Kumbaya." Instead, it suggests that "Kumbaya" is an African American spiritual which originated somewhere in the American south, and then traveled all over the world: to Africa, where missionaries sang it for new converts; to the northwestern United States, where Marvin Frey heard it and adapted it as "Come By Here"; to coastal Georgia and South Carolina, where it was adapted into the Gullah dialect; to the Northeastern United States, where it entered the repertoires of such singers as Pete Seeger and Joan Baez; and eventually to Europe, South America, Australia, and other parts of the world, where revival recordings of the song abound. Although it is truly a global folksong, its earliest versions are preserved in only one place: the AFC Archive.



The back cover of Joan Baez's 1962 album featuring "Kumbaya."

Coda: "Kumbaya," the Archive, and the Revival

The adoption of the song "Kumbaya" into the folk revival also has connections with the American Folklife Center Archive. As we have already seen, the song became popular after it was published by Lynn and Katherine Rohrbough. In 1957, folksinger Tony Saletan learned the song from the Rohrboughs. He taught it to a group from Oberlin College known as The Folksmiths. The Folksmiths toured summer camps in the summer of 1957, and they taught "Kumbaya" (or, as they called it, "Kum Ba Yah") to thousands of American campers, helping to cement the song's association with both children and campfires. The Folksmiths also recorded the song in August, 1957, on an album called *We've Got Some Singing to Do*, which was released on the Folkways label in early 1958. This was the first published recording of the song. Later that same year, Folkways released a version by Pete Seeger, with the title "Kum Ba Ya." In 1959, Seeger's group The Weavers recorded the song, this time as "Kumbaya." The transformation of the song's title from "Come by Here/Come by Yah" to "Kumbaya" was complete.

Most later folk-revival versions of the song undoubtedly derive from these three influential recordings, all of which have connections to AFC's Archive. Seeger was an intern at the Archive in the 1930s, and has revisited AFC many times since then, most recently in 2007. In several recent interviews, he has made it clear that he once heard the extant Gordon cylinder recording of "Come by Here" at the Archive, although he is not sure when this visit to the Archive occurred. As for Hickerson, after his one year with the Folksmiths, he trained as a folklorist and archivist, and got a job at the AFC Archive; he eventually rose to be Head of the Archive, a position from which he retired in 1998. The moral of the story seems to be: while you can take "Kumbaya" out of the AFC Archive, you can't take the Archive out of "Kumbaya." ○

[1] Several articles have been published about the song's fall from grace, most notably Jeffrey Weiss's article "How did 'Kumbaya' Become a Mocking Metaphor?" Dallas Morning News, November 12, 2006: http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/religion/stories/DN-kumbaya_11rel.ART0.State.Edition1.3e6da2d.html

[2] Lum, Chee Hoo. 2007. "A Tale of 'Kum Ba Yah.'" Kodaly Envoy, 33(3): pp5-11

[3] See the New York Times obituary for Marvin Frey, published in December 1992: <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/12/02/obituaries/rev-marvin-frey-74-writer-of-faith-songs.html>

The Folklife Sourcebook Database

By Stephanie A. Hall

The *Folklife Sourcebook*, the Center's directory of folklife-related organizations in North America, is now available as a searchable database. The revised and up-to-date database is accessible online at the Center's website at <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/source>. The *Folklife Sourcebook* was first published as a printed directory in 1986 and first placed online in 1997. The 1997 online directory, like the printed editions that preceded it, was organized geographically. Now, the *Sourcebook* is searchable across many fields and thus freed from its geographic orientation. Moreover,

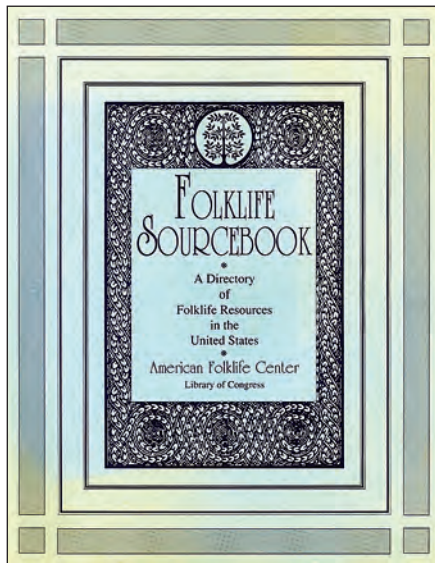
it is greatly expanded from the previous edition, offering a wider selection of resources in an easier-to-use format. Do you want to find a list of North American folklife organizations with an interest in foodways, vernacular architecture, or dance? Rather than paging through an index, you can now find that information through a quick search of the *Folklife Sourcebook* database.

The impetus for this update was provided by the changing nature of cultural organizations across the United States and around the world. The greater availability of electronic communications, and the advent of e-mail and the World Wide Web, allows smaller groups to keep in touch without maintaining an office or a

street address. Some organizations meet in more than one venue, across several states. Others change their mailing addresses frequently, as their leadership changes. On the other hand, as long as groups maintain the same website URL and/or email address, they can be contacted no matter where they move. Because of all this, precise geographic locations are far less critical to constructing a directory than they once were. All of this made a geographically oriented directory both unsuited to the field and difficult to maintain, and prompted the change to the current format.

Although the directory remains primarily North American in focus, organizations in many countries that

The *Folklife Sourcebook* Web page.



The cover of the 1994 edition.

provide information beneficial to international scholarship have been added, and continue to be added. Thus, the database now includes organizations from thirty countries. The directory has also been enlarged by adding resources from several ethnographic disciplines, including anthropology, ethnomusicology, and oral history. Freed from the constraints of paper publication, AFC added some additional organizations in these ethnographic fields to the first online edition, but many more have been added to the database version. These additions reflect a growing number of partnerships between folklore and other disciplines. They also stem from a growing interest in subjects that were once primarily the domain of folklorists on the part of scholars in other ethnographic disciplines.

Prior editions of the *Sourcebook*, both printed and online, have included a chapter on serials (journals and newsletters). Rather than creating separate entries for each serial, the database version places serials in database fields within the entries for the entities that produce them, such as publishers, societies, or research groups. By visiting their websites, the user can now look at all the titles of interest that a publisher or group may produce, and read about the organizations themselves.

The original *Folklife Sourcebook* provided its most comprehensive information on folklife archives, listing subject areas and major collections. Since many archives now have websites that provide finding aids, online exhibits, and detailed descriptions of their holdings, the *Sourcebook* now can provide a short description and a link to the organization's own informative website. Of course, some archives listed in previous versions of the directory no longer exist, particularly smaller ones. When possible, collections from such disappearing archives that have been deposited in university special collections, or other larger archives and libraries, were tracked down as part of the research on this edition. As a result, users can still locate these materials. We welcome information on any ethnographic and ethnomusicological archives whose location is not listed.

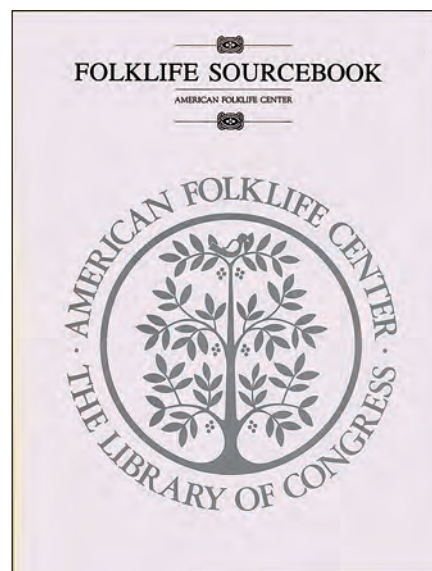
Some new general categories have been added to the database. Internet resources, which may reside on a server anywhere and provide a service to the whole world, did not fit into the geographic concept of the old directory, but are now included. Organizations that provide grants, fellowships, and apprenticeships can be retrieved with one mouse click. Museums and libraries with special collections related to ethnography and ethnomusicology, which previously made it into the directory only when they also included a folklore archive or published books in folklife-related studies, are now listed in their own right.

The broad headings that classify the organizations used to be individual chapters in the printed editions. They are now preserved in the database's

browse function, but they are only one way of accessing information. Organizations that focus on subjects as specialized as cowboy poetry or photographic collections can be retrieved by using keyword searches. Thus, a search on "cowboy poetry" will return societies, archives, research groups, public sector folklife organizations, and publishers with an interest in this area, saving the user from the need to page through several individual chapters.

A few tips can make such keyword searches easier. The database does not truncate search terms, but the user can truncate a search term with an asterisk,

so that "appalac*" will retrieve both Appalachia and Appalachian. Keywords added to the entries were most often included in standard subject-heading style, with nouns pluralized. Therefore, if a term in the singular does not bring up results, users should try the plural form. A term with a minus sign will remove



The cover of the 1986 edition.

entries with that term from the results. So "museum -archives" will generate a list of museums that do not include an archive.

The re-conceptualizing of the *Folklife Sourcebook* from printed directory to Internet database provides an interesting view of how the worlds of publishers, archives, and ethnographic disciplines have changed in the Internet age. In its new, more flexible, form, the directory will continue to adapt as the world changes.

Requests for additions to the *Folklife Sourcebook*, or further information about listed resources, may be sent to folklife@loc.gov. ○

Ten Years of Veterans' History: Veterans History Project Marks Milestone

By Lisa Taylor, Jeffrey Lofton and Monica Mohindra.

More than seventeen million war veterans live in the United States. On Veterans Day, 2000, the Library of Congress launched a congressionally mandated project to collect and preserve their stories, which are an invaluable resource for researchers, educators and generations to come.

This year, the Veterans History Project (VHP) of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress marks the tenth anniversary of its mission to collect, preserve and make accessible the oral histories of America's war veterans.

For a decade, the Veterans History Project has encouraged war veterans, their families, veterans' groups, communities, and students to record and donate veterans' interviews along with original photographs, diaries, letters, maps, and other wartime documents to the Library of Congress, where they are housed in the American Folklife Center in perpetuity.

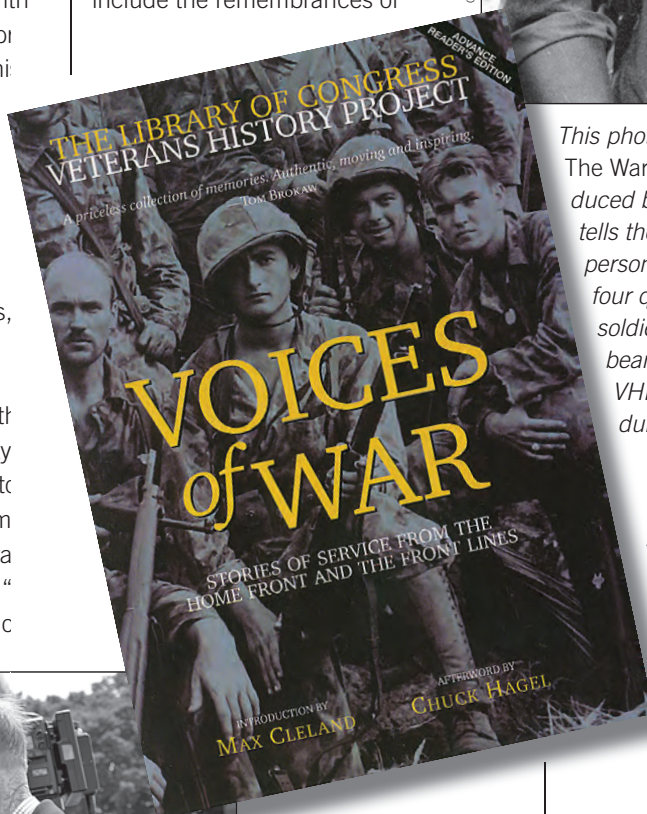
"The Library of Congress is proud to count the Veterans History Project among its most prized collections," said Librarian of Congress James H. Billington. "We celebrate the overwhelming success of

the project, and we recognize the sense of urgency to capture these unique stories of service and sacrifice."

To date, contributors have recorded and submitted more than seventy thousand personal recollections to VHP, making it the largest oral history collection in the United States. These include the remembrances of



Credit: National Archives (127-GR-113-82414)



This photo serves as the signature image of *The War*, a book and television series produced by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, which tells the story of World War II through the personal accounts of men and women from four quintessentially American towns. The soldier is part of a Marine detail in Saipan bearing a stretcher with a fallen comrade. VHP participated in an advisory capacity during the making of *The War*.

Voices of War was the first publication to showcase the extraordinary stories of courage told through the Veterans History Project.



Photo Credit: Michaela McNichol

Gene Dairhearp, right, thanks George Sakato, whose 442nd Regimental Combat Team fought fiercely to rescue Dairhearp's trapped battalion in northern France in October 1944. They had not met since.

in all fifty states and all U.S. territories. Those who served from World War I through Vietnam's conflicts, in all branches of the U.S. military. Approximately 8,700 stories have been digitized and are accessible on the project's website at www.loc.gov/vets/.

"The Veterans History Project depends upon a vast network of individual and organizational volunteers from across the nation to collect these priceless, firsthand accounts from the men and women who

served our nation during wartime,” said VHP director Bob Patrick. “Together, these stories paint a picture of war that history textbooks don’t always capture—the human perspective of everyone who served, from those on the front lines of the battlefields to those performing critical support roles,” he added.

A Decade of Achievement

In addition to amassing its large collection of stories, the Veterans History Project boasts many achievements in its first decade, including recognition as one of the “Top Fifty” most innovative, creative, forward-thinking, results-driven government programs, according to the Ash Institute of Harvard University.

The project has organized hundreds of community outreach programs with the United States Congress; colleges, universities and schools; the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; civic organizations; faith-based groups; veteran-service organizations; and libraries. The project has participated in the National Book Festival by presenting its materials and hosting guest speakers in the Library of Congress pavilion.

Through its Field Kit as well as in-person workshops, VHP has trained members of the public on how to conduct oral histories with veterans in their families and communities. Through a cooperative effort with the American Folklore Society, VHP



Photo Credit: Michaela McNeel

At the National Book Festival, Oregon-born Jimmie Kananya told stories of serving in the Italian and French campaigns, surviving two German POW camps and marching 380 miles from Oflag 64 in Poland to Germany.

has provided training for more than seven thousand volunteer participants through more than three hundred workshops in forty-one states since 2002. These workshops utilize the VHP process to bring principles of oral history and folklore research to local communities across the country.

As part of VHP’s ever-growing online series, *Experiencing War*, twenty-eight web presentations feature the stories of the diverse veterans who served the nation in wartime. Thematic presentations highlight the military achievements of women, African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, Jews, Asians and disabled veterans, among others. Presentations also feature specific conflicts such as the two World Wars and the Global War on Terror, and pivotal events like D-Day and December 7, 1941. The site even pays tribute to the important machinery of war such as helicopters and submarines.

Two books featuring items from the VHP collection have been published by the Library in conjunction with National Geographic: *Voices of War: Stories of Service from the Home Front and the Front Lines* (2004) and *Forever a Soldier: Unforgettable Stories of Wartime Service* (2005), both of which feature stories from the VHP collection. Companion websites are accessible for each publication at www.loc.gov/voicesofwar/ and www.loc.gov/foreverasoldier/.

Members of Congress gathered at the Library in November 2004 to celebrate the publication of *Voices of War*, edited by Tom Wiener, the first book to showcase the extraordinary tales of courage, friendship and sacrifice collected by VHP. Senator Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, co-sponsor of VHP’s founding legislation, attended the event. The Vietnam War veteran said, “War is not an abstraction. The suffering is real. This book represents so much humanity and service. It depicts so much that is right about this country and its people.”

Hagel brought greetings from former Senator Max Cleland of Georgia, another co-sponsor of the founding legislation. Also in attendance was Senator John Warner of Virginia, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who credited his success to the G.I. bill, which enabled him to graduate from college and obtain a law degree.

On Memorial Day weekend, May 27-30, 2004, the Veterans History Project partici-



Photo Credit: Gail Fineberg

Martin “Bud” Castle, 83, a gunner whose B-54 airplane was shot down on its way back to base, tells his story to VHP volunteers Alice Parrish and Mike Ashenfelder. Castle’s great-grandniece, Peg MacDougall, left, insisted her Uncle Bud make the trip to Washington from his home in Sun City, Arizona.

participated in the grand opening of the National World War II Memorial on the National Mall. VHP volunteers collected the stories of veterans who came to Washington, D.C., to renew acquaintances and share their memories of the war. VHP sponsored one of seven pavilions and two performance stages on the Mall during the National World War II Reunion, which was produced by the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage and the American Battle Monuments Commission.

D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams issued a proclamation naming May 2005 “Veterans History Project Month,” and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority donated public service advertising space on its bus and rail system to promote the Veterans History Project during the month. The mayor’s proclamation and the design for the advertising campaign were unveiled at a ceremony held at the Library on April 29.

VHP marked the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of Saigon (April 30, 1975) with a public symposium held on May 4, 2005. The event honored Vietnam War veterans in a public conference titled *In Country: The Vietnam War 30 Years After*. Representative Ron Kind of Wisconsin, co-sponsor of the legislation that created the Veterans History Project, spoke at the event.

On May 26, 2005, the Veterans History Project convened a symposium in the Library’s Coolidge Auditorium to explore various facets of the end of World War II. The symposium, co-sponsored by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, was timed to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the two dates that are commonly used to mark the formal end of hostilities, VE Day on May 8, 1945, and VJ Day on Aug. 15, 1945.

On Nov. 30, 2005, the Veterans History Project Information Center opened in room LM-109 of the Library’s James Madison Building. Open to the public between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., Mondays through Fridays, excluding federal holidays, the center provides information about the project and greets veterans of all wars, members of Congress and their staffs and constituents, and the general public.

On April 17, 2007, the Veterans History Project and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) announced their collaboration on an initiative to engage the broadest possible community in gathering firsthand recollections of veterans. The public outreach campaign was planned to capitalize on the PBS broadcast of Ken Burns’s film *The War* and

promote nationwide interest in collecting the stories of war veterans and contributing them to VHP for preservation at the Library. Over 128 local stations engaged in targeted efforts with community partners to collect interviews for submission to the project. PBS began airing the popular seven-part series on September 23, 2007.

To support the public outreach campaign, VHP produced new resources to help the public learn about and participate in the effort. These included a new page on the Veterans History Project website featuring stories of veterans from VHP’s collection related to themes explored in Burns’s film and details on how to participate (www.loc.gov/vets/stories/thewar/). In addition, a revised and updated Veterans History Project Field Kit was designed to provide step-by-step instructions on collecting and preserving veterans’ stories.

In 2008, VHP commemorated Memorial Day with a Moment of Remembrance, in support of the White House Commission on Remembrance. Established by

Pilot Miguel Encinias, a veteran of World War II, Korea and Vietnam, was shot down over northern Italy and was held as a POW.



Photo Credit: Michaela McNeel

Army Nurse Marion Sebring Elcano recalls her experiences nursing wounded soldiers during World War II.



Photo Credit: Michaela McNeel

Joseph Doria walks along the National Mall thanking every veteran he encounters for making “this great country” safe for his family, whom he brought from the Philippines for a “better life” in the United States. Here he expresses his gratitude to Air Force veteran James Dobson, who survived as a prisoner of war.



Photo Credit: Lisa Nipp

*Veterans History Project
Director Bob Patrick*

Congress in 2000, the White House Commission on Remembrance is an independent, non-partisan government agency that encourages Americans to honor the sacrifices of our fallen and their families. The Commission also sponsors the National Moment of Remembrance (Public Law 106-579), which invites everyone

to pause where they are at 3:00 p.m. on Memorial Day in an uplifting act of national unity.

In July 2008, VHP marked the sixtieth anniversary of the historic integration of the United States armed forces, with a public statement by VHP director Bob Patrick. "All served, all deserve our thanks, and the stories archived in the VHP collection represent the service of veterans from all races, all ethnicities," he said, in part.

A National Teach-in on Veterans History was held at the Library of Congress on October 21, 2009, and webcast live to more than two thousand schools. The program was hosted by VHP and the History cable network as part of the "Take a Veteran to School Day" initiative. The archived webcast may be viewed at www.veterans.com. Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Florida joined Librarian of Congress James H. Billington in greeting the students, including those watching from their classrooms in the congresswoman's district. The students were urged to find veterans in their families and communities and record their interviews for addition to the VHP archives at the Library. The Congresswoman told them, "You have a chance to accomplish something of historical importance so that our nation does not lose the strands of memory that bind us."

On November 3, 2009, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H. Res. 866, designating National Veterans History Project Week "to encourage public participation in a nationwide project that collects and preserves the stories of the men and women who served

our nation in times of war and conflict." Representative Kind and Representative Zach Wamp of Tennessee submitted the resolution, which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Similar resolutions were passed in 2005 and 2006.

In honor of Veterans Day 2009, VHP and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs created and launched a web campaign titled "Honor our Veterans. Record their Stories!" The site, which features veterans' oral histories from each U.S. state and territory, is accessible at www1.va.gov/opa/vhp/default.cfm.

Recently, VHP honored its founding partners and the volunteers and organizations that recorded stories of veterans. The newly launched VHP Contributor Program replaces the Partner Program and is designed to recognize both individuals and organizations involved in recording veteran interviews.

"VHP is not only a resource for researchers and the scholars who access these one-of-a-kind stories; it exists for everyone. I am most heartened when veterans and their families share how profoundly proud and honored they are to tell their stories," Patrick said. "Most consider it an act of patriotism to submit their personal account to the Library of Congress Veterans History Project."

For more information about the Veterans History Project, visit www.loc.gov/vets/, email vohp@loc.gov or call toll free 888-371-5848. ○

Editor's note: This article is reprinted, with minor editorial revisions, from the Library of Congress Information Bulletin, Vol. 69, Nos. 1-2, January/February 2010.



Photo Credit: Michaela McNichol

Maj. Sam Gibbons (Ret.), a member of the VHP's Five Star Council of advisors, describes his D-Day landing behind enemy lines. "War gets glamorized too damned much," he said. "It stinks."

Hear, O Israel: Yiddish-American Radio and the Henry Sapoznik Collection

By Henry Sapoznik

American broadcast histories—both popular and scholarly—have thoroughly covered the programs, personalities and contexts of major-network, mainstream radio of the 1930s and 1940s. But there is a shadowy, parallel broadcast history of that same era: that of the myriad low-power radio stations which appealed to linguistic, regional and cultural minorities. Little about that history has been written, because extant recordings from these small and scattered stations are difficult to come by when compared to the wide and deep distribution of coast-to-coast network programming. With low-power programs of that era hard to come by and analyze, any attempt at constructing a fuller, more representative narrative of American broadcast would be impossible.

Luckily, my discovery in 1985 of a small cache of 1930s Yiddish radio transcription discs opened my eyes to the importance of ethnic radio. That in turn led me to years of collecting and

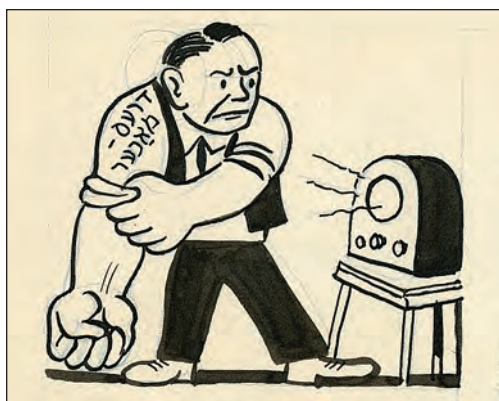
documenting Yiddish broadcasting. Ultimately, I amassed over a thousand disc recordings and two hundred file folders of related documentation, all pertaining to Yiddish American radio. This collection informs my own understanding of American broadcast history. More importantly, it has now found a permanent home in the American Folklife Center's archive, as The Henry Sapoznik Collection (AFC 2010/003). There, other scholars will have the opportunity to analyze the collection.

Background: Yiddish-American Radio, 1925-1955

When radio made its post-World-War-I transition from a wartime communications device to a peacetime pastime, governments worldwide continued their strict control of licensing and broadcast regulation. While some countries opted for government-controlled radio, the United States created a strongly commercial system. On the one hand,

this meant that those with the most money and power could—and did—grab the best and most powerful frequencies on which to operate. On the other hand, unlike in many countries with nationalized media, the door was also open for broadcasters who did not reflect the dominant culture to start their own, low-power stations. As long as they could muster enough resources, members of ethnic and racial minorities could gain access to a portion of the airwaves, giving airtime to their own preferred programming.

As Lizabeth Cohen has noted in *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*, radio was originally a grassroots medium,



The power of radio in the Yiddish-speaking community is clear in this undated and unsigned detail from a cartoon from the Yiddish Communist daily Der Morgn Freiheit (The Morning Freedom). The man represents the rank and file of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, becoming angry because of a radio address.



The Libby's Hotel in New York was the site of the first Radio Ballroom, and the birthplace of Yiddish Radio. Music and theatrical productions staged in the ballroom were broadcast on WFBH. The hotel also featured "the largest and best equipped Russian-Turkish baths in the world."

improvisational and intimate. As the earliest radio stations broadcast with very low wattage over no more than a fifteen-mile radius, audiences and sponsors tended to be local. Cohen writes:

From the start, nonprofit ethnic, religious, and labor groups put radio to their service. In 1925, almost a third of the 571 radio stations nationwide were owned by educational institutions and churches, less than four percent by commercial broadcasting companies. Even when newspapers, department stores, and radio shops sponsored stations, as they frequently did, they ran them as



A live broadcast featuring composer/conductor Joseph Rumshinsky, 1933.

public services, not as commercial operations [...] The local orientation of these sponsoring organizations coupled with the limitations of radio technology and an excessive demand for access to the airwaves gave radio broadcasting in the early years a strong local character, even in a major center of radio broadcasting like Chicago.

Through surveys starting in the middle 1930s, foreign-language advocacy group the Common Council for American Unity (CCAU) determined that American radio stations aired programs in more than forty-five different foreign

languages, from Albanian to Yiddish. The content of the programs themselves tended to strengthen ethnic identification. In a 1940 article in *Common Ground* magazine, entitled "Foreign Language Broadcasting in the United States," Jacques Ferrand of the CCAU noted:

Foreign language broadcasts have a special appeal also to many young Americans of foreign parentage who cannot read with ease, or at all, their parents' language, but who understand it when it is spoken. For these younger people, the foreign language programs help to bridge the gap between the generations. Hearing folksongs, music and stories of their parents' country of origin, these young people often gain a more sympathetic understanding of family attitudes and backgrounds.

Thus, in its way, the commercial programming policy helped stimulate a multi-cultural format long before the term was coined. So despite the flawed and inequitable commercial structure that has always characterized American broadcasting, at that time no other na-



Bella Meisel was an important actress, singer, and songwriter in Yiddish theater and radio.

tion on earth more accurately reflected its diverse and dynamic ethnic, linguistic, and racial communities on the air than did the United States.

Though not the foreign-language group most widely represented on the air (Spanish was and still is), Yiddish enjoyed a surprisingly lively dissemination on the stations that aired multi-lingual programming. Between 1922 and 1953, some 181 American stations offered Jewish programming, with the peak

years being the 1940s and 1950s. While major Jewish population centers such as Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York obviously had stations (Brooklyn alone had twenty-five!) the sheer diversity of locations (from Altoona, Pennsylvania, to Yankton, South Dakota) reveals a more intricate picture of Jewish geographic dispersion.

One question that inevitably arises is, "how did Yiddish become so well represented on the American airwaves, being only one of scores of foreign

languages and minority groups?" In all likelihood, it's because radio emerged as a potent force at a fortuitous time: Yiddish popular culture was then enjoying its most exciting and robust moment of self-expression. Literature, theater, film, journalism, and live and recorded music were all at their peak among Yiddish-speaking populations around the world, leading some scholars to speak of an inter-war Yiddish Renaissance. Radio, with its immediacy and omnipresence, emerged at the height of this movement, and thus was able to harness the power of the Jewish community's greatest moment of innovation and self-expression. This is all the more poignant, of course, given the imminent catastrophe facing the Jewish world.

Nahum Stutchkoff (center) was an authority on Yiddish and Hebrew language as well as a radio announcer and writer. Here, he poses with children from the Jewish Children's Hour.



Although Yiddish culture was strong worldwide, Yiddish radio seems to have been unique to the United States. This may have to do with institutionalized anti-Semitism in other countries, or with America's uniquely rich radio landscape. Whatever the case, Yiddish radio reflected and helped to define American Jewish immigrant culture by simultaneously borrowing from popular American entertainment and drawing on Jewish tradition. In particular, Jewish radio duplicated several important aspects of traditional Jewish society, mimicking their communal functions. These were the *yeshiva* (school), *besmedresh* (synagogue), *tsedoke* (alms), *rebbe* (Rabbi), *tsaytung* (newspaper), and storyteller. Radio translated these institutions into the quiz show, on-air synagogue service, charity appeal, advice show, news announcement, and literary reading. We'll take a closer look at three of these important radio genres.

Probably the most important of these genres to the success of Yiddish radio was the newspaper. Local Jewish papers took a leading role in financing and programming Yiddish radio. The first in New York City was the major daily *Der Tog* [The Day] which, with the radio show *Der Tog Programme*, invented and defined the format of high-end Yiddish entertainment, featuring theater orchestras, cantors, contraltos, poets and comedians, along with and up-to-the-minute news and editorials. *Der Tog Programme* ran from 1927 to 1933 on station WABC, which positioned it to be part of the original CBS radio network; in his search for a New York flagship station for his new fledgling network, CBS founder William Paley tapped the small neighborhood station WABC. He offered the nationwide network affiliates free programming taken directly from the WABC schedule, and every week for six years (until Paley replaced it with original programming), forty-seven stations from New York to California (and many in between) aired an hour of the brightest and best of New York Yiddish popular and art culture.



This WMCA publicity photo shows the following performers (l.-r.): Aaron Rosen, announcer; Leib Glantz, tenor; Harry Elstein, pianist; A. Spette, soprano; and Mark Silver, composer. Spette and Silver are enjoying a cup of the sponsor's product, Beech-Nut Coffee.

Another major newspaper to take an interest in radio was the socialist Yiddish paper *Der Forverts* [The Forward, commonly known as The Jewish Daily Forward]. When WEVD, the socialist New York City station which was started in 1927 and named for Eugene V. Debs, was about to fold in 1932, *Der Forverts* purchased it for \$350,000; they continued to run it until finally getting out of the radio business in 2001. During its heyday, the *Forverts* had the best circulation of any Yiddish paper in the world, so was able to draw tens of thousands of listeners to its programs through the coverage in its pages, and, by extension, to put together the finest on-air Yiddish programming in the world. With regional editions of the paper around the country—Chicago, Boston, etc.—the *Forverts* was also able to replicate its New York on-air format with local performers. The majority of the Henry Sapoznik Collection stems from WEVD programs.

The quiz show, also a popular genre on mainstream radio, was a particular favorite among Jewish listeners, who tended to idealize learning and intellectualism. Surviving examples from the 1940s include *What Do You Know?* (WHN, 1936-1945),

which was sponsored by the B. Manischewitz Company. In this show, contestants were asked questions about the Bible, separated by interludes when a live orchestra played such tunes as "Riffin' the freylakhs." *Sharfe Kepelakh* [Sharp Little Minds] (WARD, 1936?-1939?) was broadcast from within yeshivas in the New York area, and evoked the old-world tradition of once-a-week examination of schoolboys by their elders. On the secular side, there was *Frages Af der Luft* [Questions in the Air] (WLTH), broadcast live from neighborhood grocery stores, asking housewives softball questions like "Does a woman make a better friend than a man?" for prizes of salt or milk furnished by the show's sponsor. There was also a quiz show called *Fregt Kashes* [Ask Questions] (WEVD, c.1940), in which listeners



A live wedding broadcast on the air, WVFV.



Zvee Scooler was one of the foremost personalities in Yiddish radio. Known as “Der Grammeister” (“The Master of Rhyme”), he presented weekly news editorials written in verse. He also did straight news and acted in radio dramas.

sent in questions, which were answered in clever repartee by a panel of the top Yiddish actors, writers, directors and poets of the day—a sort of Yiddish *Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me*.

Advice programs, which took on the role a rabbi or *eytse gibber* (advisor) had in the old-world community, included *Der Yiddisher Filosof* [The Jewish Philosopher], which ran on WFAB from 1932 to 1936, and on WEVD from 1936 to 1954. This long-running show featured a tough-talking and combative host named C. Israel Lutsky, who lambasted, pleaded with, and cajoled his audience with his own brand of tough-love advice. There were clones of The Jewish Philosopher: WMCA had *Problemen Bilder* [Problem Scenes], whose star, actress Jennie Goldstein, capitalized on the fame she had won in the Yiddish theater as “the prima donna of weeping.” WARD had *Vus Zol Ikh Tin* [What Should I Do], hosted by poet Wolf Younin. WEVD’s version of the advice show was a dramatization of *Forverts’s* popular newspaper advice column, *A Bintl Briv* [A Bundle of Letters]. Episodes dramatized in 1932 included “A Husband Loses His Wages Playing Cards,” “A Victim of Prosperity,” “Love, Shmove,” and a “A Revolution Against Father.”

Radio Drama: Yiddish Radio and Yiddish Theater

In major American cities, especially New York, there was another important resource for Yiddish radio to draw on: the thriving Yiddish theater. Yiddish stages were often just blocks away from the stations. In the late 1920s, the Depression shuttered numerous theaters, leaving performers few outlets other than radio. With this new platform, actors, playwrights and performers were able to develop shows on the air that they could not afford to open in a theater. They could also offer on-air versions as teasers, to build audiences for the shows they could produce theatrically. Because of all this, from the beginnings of Yiddish radio, Yiddish theater contributed the vast majority of on-air personalities trained in stagecraft, pitch-perfect elocution, and other performance skills.

Dramas culled from everyday life were common on the Yiddish dial. One long running show, *Der Brownviller Zeyde* [The Brownsville Grandfather] (WBBC, 1933-1935), about a wise old-world resident of Brooklyn’s Brownsville community, featured Yiddish character actor Baruch Lumet and his ten-year-old son, Sidnelle, who was later known as film director Sidney Lumet.

Perhaps the most prolific of all Yiddish radio dramatists was Nahum Stutchkoff (1893-1965). During his busiest period, he wrote over a dozen concurrent half-hour Yiddish radio serials, several stage plays, and song lyrics. He also published a



Readers might recognize the bearded Zvee Scooler; after a long career in radio, he gained even greater fame playing the rabbi in the Hollywood film version of *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Yiddish rhyming dictionary, a thousand-page Yiddish thesaurus, a similarly sized Hebrew thesaurus,

and untold amounts of commercial copy, all in addition to his duties as on-air radio host and announcer. His dramas included *In a Yidisher Grocery Store* (about a kindly and wise grocery owner) and *Eni un Benny* (about the love between American-born Annie and European-born Benny). He also created shows like *Vi Di Mame Fleg Zogn*, a smart and lively fifteen-minute show about Yiddish etymology and folk sayings. His best known show, *Bay Tate Mame’s Tish* [Around the Family Table] (WEVD, 1938-c.1949), was a showcase drama with an ensemble cast, in which Stutchkoff’s brilliant ear for dialog and nuanced use of language made his characters believable and powerful.

Stutchkoff’s last show, *Tsuris Bay Layten* [People’s Problems] (WEVD 1952-1956), was sponsored by the Brooklyn Jewish Hospital for Chronic Diseases. Actress Rita Karin recalled:

Every script, of course, had to end with a stroke or some kind of misfortune. So when [Stutchkoff] invited me to audition he asked, “Kenst di shrayen?” (“Can you yell?”) Because I play a daughter or a wife or neighbor and misfortune befalls me. The first thing I shout is “AHHHHHH GEVALT!” If you couldn’t yell, you could not qualify to play in Stutchkoff’s show.

The powerful, dynamic bond between audience and actor can be seen in an anecdote from Yiddish actress Betty Perlov:

My father had a program which was called *Mentshn on Oygn* [Men Without Eyes]... It was the story of a young woman, Bettele, who was me, who was in a terrible fire and her face got horribly scarred and she was very disfigured and fell in love with someone who was blind.... Anyway, there was a scene where there was a wedding, and my father just took a hazardous guess and said [over the air] “Why don’t you come to the station and see the wedding scene?” He had no idea that hundreds of people would show up, which made him have to hire the Broadway Central [Hotel], which permitted three thousand people to come in at a quarter a head to see the wedding scene of Betty and her blind husband. And everyone seemed to bring a present! We had loads of chocolate cakes and tablecloths and sheets, some of them still unused, that were divided among the company, who in those perilous Depression times were able to use everything they were given.

Grappling with Important Issues: World War II, the Holocaust and Refugees.

Before America’s entry into World War II, Yiddish radio was faced with a number of conflicting issues. On the one hand,

The Jewish Philosopher, C. Israel Lutsky, was popular enough to start his own magazine, but not popular to succeed in the magazine business; this is the only known edition.

As this poster shows, The Jewish Philosopher had a decidedly non-Jewish sponsor: St. Joseph's aspirin.

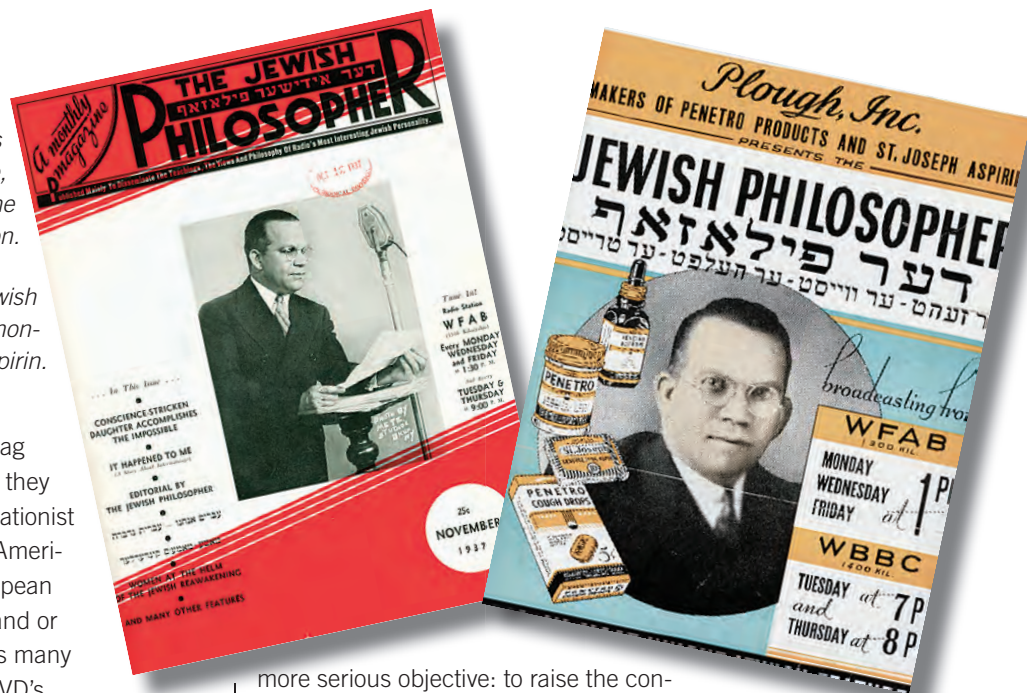
Jews were among the first to raise the red flag over the rise of fascism. On the other hand, they had to be careful; because of American isolationist policy, overt mention or encouragement of American intervention on behalf of besieged European communities might earn a station a reprimand or worse, the loss of its license. On some of his many broadcasts, newscaster Hillel Rogoff, of WEVD's 1930s and 1940s program *Nayes Fun Der Vokh* [News of the Week], framed current news - such as the invasion of Poland in 1939 - by referencing parallel events from the Jewish Biblical past, which required no further contextualizing for his literate listeners.

Other announcers steadfastly retained the semblance of broadcast order despite the chaotic situation facing their relatives and loved ones in Europe. Sholom Rubenstein talks about his father, the editor of *Der Tog*, on New York station WMCA:

The news in Yiddish was delivered by my father, Z.H. Rubenstein. Dad was born in Lemberg, Poland, and I remember the day he reported the fall of that city to the Nazis. His voice on the air was steady, but the tears rolled down his cheeks as he spoke of the fate of his hometown.

The plight of refugees from Hitler's Germany and, later, from Nazi-occupied Europe, provided a new focus for American Jews and Jewish broadcasters. Discussions on the air on stations such as WEVD and WLTH explored the merits of various schemes to rescue European Jewry. Aid organizations, such as the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), and philanthropic agencies, such as the newly formed United Jewish Appeal (UJA), used radio to drum up financial support for their work and to raise public consciousness about refugees. Refugee actors and actresses found a venue on *Refugee Theater of the Air*, a dramatic series broadcast in Yiddish over WMCA in 1938, in which the performers acted out what might have been scenes from their own lives.

After the war, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), United Service for New Americans (USNA), JDC, and other refugee-advocacy groups used radio programs to campaign for the admittance of increased numbers of what were now called "displaced persons" (or "DPs") into the U.S. These radio programs were produced by the organizations, sent out to radio stations, and broadcast in various cities. One of the most successful programs was *Reunion* (WOR, 1947-1951). The dramatic and upbeat weekly format (which featured someone reunited with a person from their past) concealed the show's



more serious objective: to raise the consciousness of Americans to the plight of refugees by featuring a reunion between two Holocaust survivors.

Despite a brief spike in Yiddish radio listenership after World War II with the influx of many Yiddish-speaking Jews (my parents among them), the post-war years saw the calamitous downturn of Yiddish radio in light of three factors: the effects of American acculturation in general, which reduced the use of Yiddish in this country; the rise of Hebrew as the national language of Israel, and, by extension, an attractive second language for American Jews; and the rise of television, which had a dampening effect on radio across the board. By the 1990s, there was only one Yiddish radio show left in New York, and soon that would also disappear.

Origins of the Collection

Despite having grown up with Yiddish radio shows playing continuously in my immigrant family home, I was largely unaware of its rich history, even while I devoted considerable research to related topics, such as Klezmer music and Yiddish recordings. From 1982 to 1995, I served as founding archivist of the Max and Frieda Weinstein Archives of Recorded Sound at New York's YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. In conceiving the archives, my primary focus was the collection, preservation and documentation of commercial Jewish recordings of the 78 rpm era (1895-1955), something that until then had never been done. Through the archives, I helped create the first works of Yiddish discography: a series of historic 78 rpm reissues, and primary research for the Jewish entry to Richard Spottswood's seminal seven-volume work *Ethnic Music in America: A Discography of Ethnic Recordings Produced in the United States 1893-1942* (University of Illinois Press, 1990).

Even after I began my work on Yiddish commercial recordings, I had little awareness of Yiddish radio materials. In 1984, however, local New York radio and television pioneer Joe Franklin was selling off his vast holdings of period radio programs. On a hunch, I went to the sale. To my amazement, I was able to purchase several dozen 16" aluminum-acetate discs of Yiddish programs for what I had in my pocket: just under forty dollars



Writer, director and actor Israel Rosenberg, at far left, with the cast of one of his many celebrated radio dramas.

in bills and change. With nothing on which to play them, I let them sit in the archives until the next year. At that time, NPR investigative reporter Andy Lanset came to the sound archives on a research assignment and I introduced him to the Yiddish radio materials. He was immediately struck by the rarity, importance, and meaning of the programs, and encouraged me to do further research and collecting of Yiddish radio materials. This research, like my documentation of Yiddish 78s, had previously never been done.

For the next few years, responding to ads Lanset and I placed in the Yiddish and Jewish American press looking for information on Yiddish radio, nearly sixty former Yiddish radio pioneers, as well their families and friends, contacted us with information. From them, we collected more sound recordings, in addition to scripts, correspondence, photographs, and other documents, all of which are part of what I called the Yiddish Radio Collection, and now of AFC's Henry Sapoznik Collection. We also found occasional recordings of Yiddish radio shows all around the country, at flea markets, record collectors' gatherings, libraries, and archives. (One famous institute had a large collection of Yiddish programs, which, due to a linguistic error by the cataloger, were listed as "German shows.")

In 1990, I was hired by station WEVD, at the time one of the last New York stations with Yiddish-language programs. For five years, I produced and hosted a weekly Yiddish culture and arts program at whose core were old recordings. When I began rebroadcasting old radio programs, many listeners contacted me with their own memories of Yiddish radio; this invariably led me to more period programs and information. Oddly, even while I was working at the station and enjoying the full support of WEVD management in my search for Yiddish radio materials, the station regularly jettisoned historic and irreplaceable artifacts, such as discs, file folders of information, and even the hand-chimes used to play the characteristic four-note sequence during station identifications, prompting me to retrieve them from the dumpster.

When I left WEVD, MacArthur-award-winning radio producer David Isay approached me about co-producing a series for NPR based on the Yiddish radio materials. Starting in 1995, we engaged in additional research, interviews and pre-production. It took seven years, culminating in the premiere of "The Yiddish Radio Project" on *All Things Considered* in the spring of 2002. The series reached thirteen million listeners a week, more than ever listened to all Yiddish radio shows ever aired. It garnered a new generation of enthusiasts and a Peabody Award. In addition,

it led to donations of even more sound and paper materials from listeners.

Description of the Collection

The Yiddish radio collection includes documentation of people's reactions to some of the most tumultuous moments in Jewish history, including early emigration to the United States, the Holocaust, and the founding of the state of Israel. Its broad span and scope make it, in essence, a vast oral history, allowing us to eavesdrop as historic events unfold and hear it in real time in the voices of the participants themselves.

The over 1,145 discs in the collection were recorded between 1929 and 1961, and span some 212 separate and distinct programs: news, drama, musical comedy, man-on-the-street interviews, quiz shows, mediation programs, advertising, poetry, religion, and many more. Together, they give a unique panoramic view of an ethnic community in full flower. In fact, every meaningful aspect of Jewish life in the United States during the interwar period is somehow addressed in the sweep of the collection. The broad diversity of programs is important in that it offers a singular insight into how low-power broadcasting was adapted and utilized by ethnic minorities to reach their communities. Unless someone discovers or amasses another non-English-language American radio collection of this sweep and scope, this may be virtually the only in-depth evidence we have of the vitality and expanse of early ethnic American radio.

As the source of NPR's "Yiddish Radio Project" (the first national network airing of Yiddish programs since 1933, when *Der Tog Programme* aired on CBS), these materials have demonstrated their power in reaching beyond their original ethnicity to attract some thirteen million listeners who faithfully followed the series on *All Things Considered*. The collection also provides a prime opportunity for serious scholarly study; with nearly 90% of the recorded collection digitally preserved and cataloged, and with some twenty linear feet of contextual paper materials, it is not difficult to imagine its importance to future historians, sociologists, linguists, folklorists, ethnographers and musicologists, among many other students and scholars.

Among the vital programs in the collection is a partial episode from *The U.S. Treasury Program* (c. 1942), which, in opposition to most media outlets of the time, presented troubling and realistic portrayals of what Jews faced under Nazi domination. The collection also includes other important historical programming: public service advertisements by Hollywood and stage lumina e such as Henry Fonda, Frank Sinatra, Tallulah 3a head, and Basil Rathbone, seeking public support to help incoming Holocaust survivors; live coverage from the floor of the U.N., reporting the vote to admit the state of Israel; several episodes of *Reuiv*o the post-War syndicated program mentioned a o on which Holocaust survivors were reunited with f members on the air; and a 1944 broadcast of a le emotional memorial service at New York's City H on the first anniversary of the uprising in the Wa sa



Ghetto, with Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, among others.

Despite the critical importance of the Yiddish theater in America, both for the Jewish community and for Broadway and Hollywood (both of which benefited from its many contributions), there are precious few recorded examples of Yiddish theater from this period. The Henry Sapoznik Collection significantly increases the number of live Yiddish theater shows recorded both in the radio studios and *in situ* on the stages of various Yiddish theaters, documentation which exists in no other place. Other programs are of equal importance. For example, thanks to a rabbi on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, who opened his synagogue to adjudicate the problems and disputes faced by members of the Jewish community, we have hundreds of examples of his radio show *Jewish-American Court of Peace and Justice*, the first known “court of the air.” The hundreds of episodes—all rescued from the street where they were dumped—offer a stunning example of how the time-honored Jewish tradition of rabbinic mediation was quickly and successfully applied to the new medium of radio.

The paper-based materials in the collection—in some two hundred file folders—greatly enhance what we know about of the workings of small low-power radio stations, as well as Yiddish radio. Some of the most interesting files include correspondence, photographs, fan mail, scripts, and personal files of pioneering Yiddish radio artists such as Victor Packer, Zvee Scooler, and Wolf Younin. Other treasures include advertising files and art; materials related to the Yiddish Radio Division of the WPA’s Federal Theater Project; Yiddish newspapers of the same era, which sponsored Yiddish radio shows and featured program listings, display advertising, program reviews and previews, and insights from letter-writers and other members of the public about Yiddish radio; and trade magazines, such as *Yiddish Theater and Radio World* (1935-36), which feature articles about radio and biographies of critically important, but otherwise undocumented, Jewish radio artists.

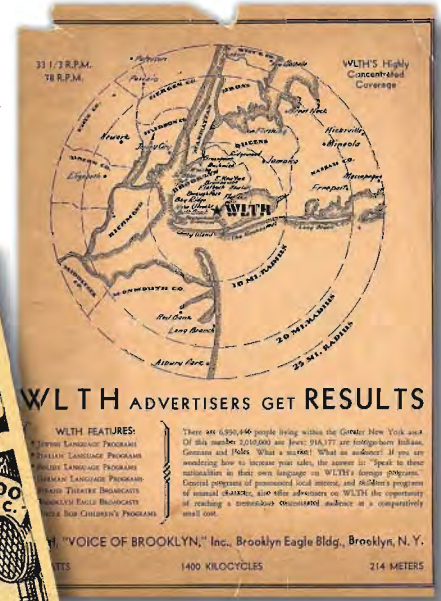
In addition to these primary materials, the collection also features other unique documentation, such as thirty-five transcriptions of interviews with Yiddish radio pioneers, including Hollywood director Sidney Lumet, who began his career as a child actor in Yiddish radio. Finally, it includes copies of files that exist elsewhere, which, while not unique, are nonetheless illuminating in the context of the collection: license-renewal files for two dozen Jewish stations, obtained through the FCC; the FBI files on station WEVD; and data from the 1930s through the 1950s on foreign-language radio in the United States, collected by the Common Council for American Unity.

These materials documenting Yiddish radio are among several AFC archival collections that straddle folk and popular culture.

Disc labels from the Henry Sapoznik Collection.



This WLTH ad mentions “Jewish Language Programs.” This is an acceptable formulation, since “Yiddish” is simply Yiddish for “Jewish.”



An ad for a leading Yiddish station, WEVD.

Other such collections include AFC’s Radio Research Project collection (AFC 1941/011), which was compiled by Alan Lomax and others in 1941; the University of Texas Radio House Recordings of Folk Music and Interviews (AFC1950/018), from the late 1940s; the National Public Radio Folk Music in America Interviews Collection (AFC 1975/047), from 1975; and, especially, the Ethnic Broadcasting in America Collection (AFC 1981/018), collected from 1977 to 1978. These collections complement the Sapoznik Collection in showing the way that local or ethnic traditions were transmitted, using twentieth-century technology, both inside and outside their communities of origin. In this respect, the Sapoznik Collection is of central concern to the AFC. As well, the collection adds a vital element to the Center’s documentation of Jewish culture, complementing AFC’s Aaron Ziegelman Foundation Collection (AFC 2003/002), which contains cultural materials from the Jewish shtetl of Luboml; the Abraham Pinto Recordings of Sephardic Jewish and Berber Music in Morocco (AFC 1970/038); the Ruth Rubin Collection of Yiddish Folksong and Folklore (AFC 13504-13553); and the Marcia Mint Danab Jewish Festivals Project Collection (AFC 1985/027).

Given the resonant success of NPR’s “Yiddish Radio Project” series, there is strong reason to hope that the acquisition of the Henry Sapoznik Collection by the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress will help spur not only a greater awareness of Yiddish radio, but also a new avenue for research in ethnic studies and mass-communications history, and a revised look at American multi-cultural awareness. ○

Henry Sapoznik is an award-winning record and radio producer, author and traditional musician. He is the director of the Mayrent Institute for Yiddish Culture at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.



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Photo by Stephen Winick, AFC

Freddie Palmer, a member of the McIntosh County Shouters, performs at the Library of Congress. The Shouters, who have preserved the old African American tradition known as "ring shout," performed as part of AFC's Homegrown Concert Series on December 2, 2010. McIntosh County, Georgia, includes the Gullah community of Darien, where Robert W. Gordon collected the first known version of "Kumbaya." (See the story on Page 3.)