

FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

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American Folklife Center • The Library of Congress



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 the Archive of Folk Culture, 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.

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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.

TELEPHONE AND ONLINE INFORMATION RESOURCES

American Folklife Center publications (including *Folklife Center News*), a calendar of events, collection guides, general information, and connections to a selection of other Internet services related to folklife are available on the Internet.

LC Web is available through the World Wide Web service (<http://lcweb.loc.gov/>). The Center's home page can be accessed from the Library's main menu. The direct URL for the Center's home page is: <http://lcweb.loc.gov/folklife/>

Folklife, an information service providing timely information on the field of folklore and folklife, including training and professional opportunities and news items of national interest, is available through the above Internet server. For telephone service, call the Folklife Reading Room: 202 707-5510.

EDITOR'S NOTES

Documentation and Preservation

The double implication of the word *preserve* in the Folklife Center's mandate to "preserve and present American folklife" is clearly evident in this issue of *Folklife Center News*: preservation means the documentation of traditional heritage for the pleasure and instruction of present and future generations (as illustrated in the photograph on the cover) and the care and safekeeping of the documentary materials that carry that heritage.

Articles describe the documentary work of the American Folklife Center and its Coal River Folklife Project in West Virginia, and that of a private agency, the Center for
(Continued on page 19)

Cover: Basque farm wife Delfina Zatica, with her granddaughter, listens to the playback of an interview she recorded for folklorist Linda Gastañaga, Paradise Valley Folklife Project, Paradise Valley, Nevada, 1978. Photo by Carl Fleischhauer

No Time to Dawdle: Folk Heritage Collections in Crisis



Jeff Fields, National Endowment for the Humanities (standing), facilitates a discussion of preservation issues during one of three break-out sessions on the second day of the Folk Heritage Collections in Crisis Symposium. Photo by David A. Taylor

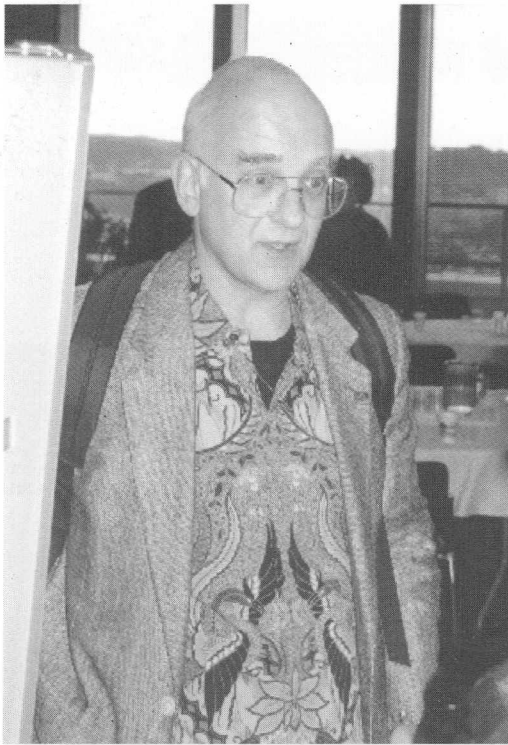
By James Hardin

"One hundred years of sound recording has left us with a legacy of the equivalent of five petabytes of professionally recorded audio," said Elizabeth Cohen, one of three keynote speakers at the Folk Heritage Collections in Crisis symposium, sponsored by the American Folklife Center (AFC) and the American Folklore Society (AFS) and held at the Library of Congress, December 1 and 2, 2000. The event was funded by the National Endowment for the

Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Council on Library and Information Resources, the Recording Industry Association of America, and the GRAMMY Foundation. The purpose of the symposium, said Peggy Bulger, director of the American Folklife Center, was to "identify and define common problems, encourage the sharing of best management practices, suggest responses to critical issues, and develop plans to preserve folk heritage recorded sound resources for future generations."

The Documentary Century

In 1890, the first field documentary recordings were made by Jesse Walter Fewkes, who recognized that the recently invented Edison wax cylinder recording machine (1878) would allow anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, folklorists, and others to bring the songs and stories of the people they interviewed back to the laboratory for study. His recordings of Passamaquoddy Indians in Maine began a century of documentary activity that has resulted in both a bonanza of



Intellectual property rights keynote speaker Tony Seeger, University of California, Los Angeles. Photo by James Hardin

recorded sound heritage and the challenge that we have before us today: how to keep that documentation safe, audible, and available for many years to come.

Over one hundred invited experts and observers assembled in the Mumford Room of the Madison Building to discuss what they are individually and collectively doing, or hoping to do, to meet that challenge. The symposium organizers invited them to address three major topics: preserving recorded sound (in various recorded-sound formats); providing access to collections regulated by complex terminology and differing restrictions; and negotiating the tricky landscape of copyright law and intellectual property rights.

There were librarians, archivists, audio engineers, computer scientists, preservation specialists, folklorists, ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, entertainment lawyers, and recording company executives. There were representatives from the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences, the

Smithsonian Institution, the National Council for the Traditional Arts, the National Society of Audio Engineers, the Association of Recorded Sound Collections, the International Association of Sound Archives, the Society for Ethnomusicology, the Society of Archivists, and others.

The title of the symposium derives from a growing perception among folklorists, archivists, and others that the various media used for field documentation are in serious danger of deterioration. Even tape recordings made as recently as ten years ago are at risk.

According to a recent national survey conducted by the American Folklife Center, hundreds of thousands of historic ethnographic audio recordings are in danger. Of the three hundred respondents to the survey, more than three-quarters reported that 25 to 50 percent of their collections are "seriously deteriorated." Problems associated with the audio collections include inadequate storage conditions, cracked wax cylinders, decomposing acetate coatings of discs that "exude" a white powder, "sticky-shed" syndrome on audio tape manufactured in the late 1970s and early 1980s, "drop outs" on DAT tapes, and delaminating CDs.

Welcoming the symposium participants, Associate Librarian of Congress Winston Tabb noted that "the word *crisis* is not exaggerated" when applied to folk heritage sound recordings, as demonstrated by the enthusiastic response of the assembled specialists when the symposium was announced.

"We can't afford to dawdle," said Elizabeth Cohen, head of Cohen Acoustical, Inc., Los Angeles, California, who proposed that digitization

and data migration were the best solutions that the current technology has to offer to the problem of preservation. To raise money for the task, she emphasized, you must make the case in compelling language for "why what you are doing is important."

Importance of Folklore Archives

The two largest folklore archives in the United States are the Archive of Folk Culture at the Library of Congress and the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University. There are smaller archives at UCLA, the University of Washington, the University of Illinois, and Harvard University, among other institutions. In addition, there are innumerable private collections, held by individuals, museums, or local organizations, of material stored in conditions that range from good to deplorable, in climate-controlled areas, but also in basements and attics, some of personal, family, and local interest only, others of rare and important material.



Collections access keynote speaker Virginia Danielson, Archive of World Music, Harvard University. Photo by James Hardin



Rayna Green, Smithsonian Institution, flanked by Mark Roosa, Library of Congress, and Robin Dale, Research Libraries Group (left), and John Suter, New York Heritage Documentation Project (right), speaks about the concerns of American Indian communities in protecting their sacred music. Photo by James Hardin

Unfortunately, according to John Suter, New York Heritage Documentation Project, "ethnographic archives are often given low priority within the academy, and low budgets." Folklorists, inside and outside the academy, often have a difficult time making the case for the importance of their work and their ethnographic collections. It is the chief goal of their respective professions "to make the stuff of folklore and ethnomusicology a universally recognized part of the foundation of our cultural heritage," said Suter.

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Sound recording has been "crucial to the profession of folklore" and has contributed greatly to "the development of concepts in the field," said Jo Radner, president of the American Folklore Society, which cosponsored the symposium. It is "the engine at the heart of folklore."

Access, Preservation, and Property Rights

Three areas of overlapping concern faced by all folk heritage collection archives (and the three issues addressed by the symposium participants) are access, preservation, and ownership.

"Audio and visual materials are both by us and about us in important ways," said access keynote speaker Virginia Danielson, director of the Archive of World Music, Harvard University. "Families and local communities demand access to materials that they often, with justification, consider their

own." But access is often complicated by the fact that the materials are fragile, require processing and cataloging, and are sensitive or restricted in nature. There is also disagreement about terms and standards for cataloging. In addition, "the expense of audio reformatting [transferring the sound from a fragile or at-risk medium to a safer one] is phenomenal."

Art Silverman, a producer for National Public Radio who has worked on the series "Lost and Found Sound," spoke of the claim the media have on folk archives, and the way in which an organization like NPR can bring attention to our national heritage of sound recordings. He spoke of the great "potential for regret" if we fail to save the sound recordings that matter to people. Yet the question is, how to decide which recordings are of value. "My nightmare," he said, "is universal preservation. . . . What to save is a tougher question than how to save it."

Preservation keynote speaker Elizabeth Cohen struck a provocative note when she argued for the digitization of collection material (which allows for universal sharing online) and said that "preservation is dissemination." She outlined what she regards as simple truths: "The machinery will not be around in twenty years; the software will not be around in twenty years. . . . You must accept data migration."

"Families and local communities demand access to materials that they often, with justification, consider their own."

Mark Roosa, Library of Congress Director of Preservation, responded to Cohen by saying that the task is more complex for large institutions. The process of digital conversion is complicated, requires trained specialists, and is very expensive. In addition, Roosa said, "The Library must maintain all previous technologies for the next fifty years." Sometimes the originals prove to be better than the copies, and the newer technologies might extract more sound from the originals in the future.

The three central topics of the symposium—access, preservation, and intellectual property rights—are interlocking. Ownership and access are two sides of the same coin, and preservation through digitization has implications for both. Most archives simply do not have the legal right to put their collections online for universal access.

"Just because the collector or archivist has [sound recordings] doesn't mean they can use them however they wish," said intellectual property rights keynote speaker Tony Seeger, University of California, Los Angeles. "The Internet's potential to disseminate information rapidly and widely raises intellectual property issues with an urgency they have not had before."

Seeger played devil's advocate by suggesting that we keep our heritage alive by paying musicians to play their traditional music in traditional venues rather than by using that money to archive a small number of performances. Then we could "burn the archives," which are "webs of rights and obligations." The people who have the largest stake in the ethnographic material housed in archives and those who care most about it are the people recorded, Seeger said. And "many societies have extremely elaborate concepts of ownership and control of knowledge." Archival collections are the historical and cultural legacies of particular communities and provide the tools for their "self-determination."

Conclusions and Products

Symposium coordinator Kelly Feltault said that most of the participants agreed on the "need for education and training for future field workers and archivists," who should learn about the best practices and latest technologies to protect sound recordings.

One of the initial hopes of the symposium planners was to produce a list of guidelines and recommendations for dealing with each of the major issues of access, preservation, and intellectual property. But participants found that that assignment was not easily accomplished. Nonetheless, a number of products from the symposium are planned. There will be (1) a "white paper," with the keynote addresses, a synopsis of responses and open-floor discussion, and the results of the breakout sessions on the second day of the symposium; (2) a "Folk Heritage Collections in Crisis" Web site, with the "white paper" and audio selections; links to other sites such as the American Folk-

lore Society, the Society for Ethnomusicology, and other societies and organizations; and a list of participants; and (3) a listserv for participants, so that they can continue to communicate with one another by email.

Abby Smith, director of programs, Council on Library and Information Resources, invited the participants to "forge new working relationships and alliances." She compared the symposium to "a great dinner party," where folklorists, lawyers, preservation specialists, librarians, archivists, and funders have an opportunity to meet and exchange ideas. She asked everyone to take responsibility for keeping up the conversations after the symposium.

"We have not solved the many complex problems of folk heritage collection preservation and management, but we have made a start," said Peggy Bulger. "We are in this together, and together we can find solutions to our common problems."



Preservation keynote speaker Elizabeth Cohen, head, Cohen Acoustical, Inc., Los Angeles. Photo by James Hardin

Smithsonian and Library of Congress Awarded "Save America's Treasures" Grant



Frances Densmore with Mountain Chief of the Blackfoot tribe, in Washington, D.C., about 1916.
Photo courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives

By James Hardin

A joint proposal from the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage and the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress has been awarded a grant for

\$750,000 to preserve the historic sound recordings housed at the two institutions. The White House Millennium Council's preservation program "Save America's Treasures," in partnership with the National Park Service and the National Trust

for Historic Preservation, made the grant. "This award gives recognition to the important intellectual and cultural significance of the recorded voices and music of the American people," said Peggy Bulger, director of the American Folklife Center. "It

will help to preserve our irreplaceable aural history."

On July 7, 2000, at Anderson Cottage, on the grounds of the Soldiers' and Airmen's Home in Washington, D.C., President Bill Clinton announced the year 2000 "Save America's Treasures" grants. The summer residence for President and Mrs. Lincoln, Anderson Cottage is typical of the historic sites that have received the preservation grants. But along with the "bricks-and-mortar" projects on the list were a number of projects from archives containing historic records, photographs, and sound recordings, including those at the Smithsonian Institution and the Library of Congress.

Together the two institutions hold unparalleled collections of audio recordings documenting the American experience dating from the 1890s—some 140,000 noncommercial recordings of American stories, songs, poems, speech, and music. There are original recordings of Woody Guthrie, Jelly Roll Morton, and Leadbelly; the very first field recording of Native American music; the voices of cowboys, farmers, fishermen, factory workers, and quilt-makers; African American spirituals and stories from Jewish immigrants.

"These are the diverse and distinctive voices of the nation," said Librarian of Congress James H. Billington. "They provide splendid evidence of the remarkable creativity of Americans from many different communities and from all parts of our country."

In urgent need of preservation are thousands of original audio recordings made over the twentieth century by folklorists, ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, and other ethnographers, on wax cylinder, wire, aluminum disc, acetate, and audio and video tape. Many, including those from the past several decades, require immediate conservation treatment and copying to other formats. Also in need of preservation are scores of photographs, drawings, diagrams, maps, and field-

notes that complement and provide interpretive information on the recordings.

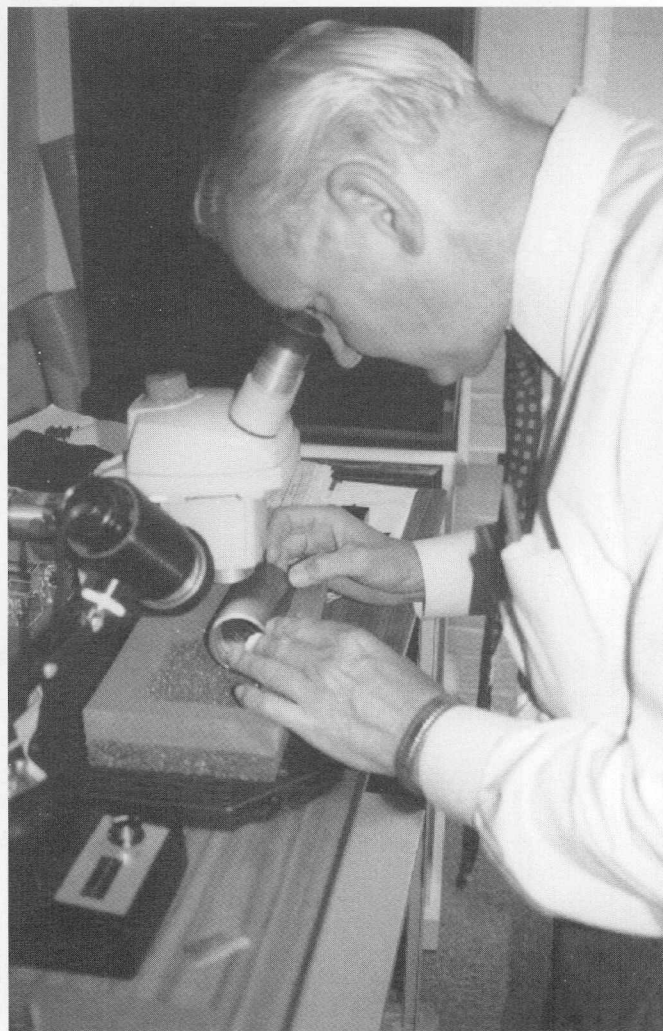
Preservation is an ongoing and expensive process, and this grant provides resources and incentives for carrying on that important work and for facilitating additional fund-raising efforts. As a condition of the grant, the Smithsonian and the Library must now raise \$750,000 in private matching funds.

It is central to the mission of the Library of Congress "to preserve, secure, and sustain for the present and future use of the Congress and the nation a comprehensive record of American history and creativity." The White House Millennium Council's "Save America's Treasures" program calls attention to the remarkable examples of American creativity captured on the ethnographic sound recordings at the American Folklife Center and the Smithsonian Institution, and helps to ensure that they will be available to future generations.

To save these historic recordings the Smithsonian and the Library of Congress must raise almost one million dollars for the most endangered recordings and millions more for the remainder. A leadership committee for the project includes Mickey Hart (chairman), Ry Cooder, David Grisman, Bruce Hornsby, Ella

Jenkins, Jon Kertzer, Yo-Yo Ma, Steve Miller, Bonnie Raitt, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Hilary Rosen, Poncho Sanchez, Carlos Santana, Pete Seeger, Isaac Stern, Michael Tilson Thomas, Bob Weir, and Paul Winter.

For further information, contact Josh Silver, Director of Development, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, 750 9th Street, NW, Suite 4100, Washington, D.C. 20560-0953, Tel: 202 275-1154, Email: josh@folklife.si.edu; or Jan Lauridsen, Development Office, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540-1400, Tel: 202 707-2780, Email: jlaurids@loc.gov. You may also wish to visit the Center's Web site, and select Save Our Sounds Project.



John Howell, supervisor of the Jefferson Technical Complex, Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, examines a wax cylinder recording in the Library's Special Formats Facility. Photo by James Hardin

Center to Collect Veterans' Oral Histories

By Peter Bartis

Hardly had the last of the 46,000 items from the Library's Local Legacies project found its way into an acid-free folder and archival box (see "Local Legacies Come to the Library of Congress," *Folklife Center News*, spring 2000), when the U.S. Congress directed the American Folklife Center to conduct another nationwide documentation project.

On October 27, 2000, President Clinton signed Public Law 106-380, the Veterans' Oral History Project. The legislation was sponsored by Rep. Ron Kind and Rep. Amo Houghton, in the U.S. House of Representatives, and Sen. Max Cleland and Sen. Charles Hagel, in the U.S. Senate, and was passed unanimously in both chambers.

The law calls upon the Center to collect and preserve audio- and video-taped oral histories of America's war veterans. It also allows for the selective acquisition of related documentary materials such as diaries, photographs, and letters. It calls upon the Center and the Library's National Digital Library Program to develop online presentations of the collections as an accessible resource for the American people. Further, it directs the Center to partner with a wide range of institutions, organizations, schools, and individuals to accomplish the objective.

More than 19 million war veterans are living in the United States today (including thirty-five hundred from World War I and six million from World War II), but almost fifteen hundred die each day. "Collecting the oral histories of American veterans is a critical task in preserving our history and an urgent need as we enter the twenty-first century. These histories will be an invaluable resource for future generations and will become part of the nation's vast historical record that the Library of Congress has preserved for two hundred years," said Librarian of Congress James H. Billington.

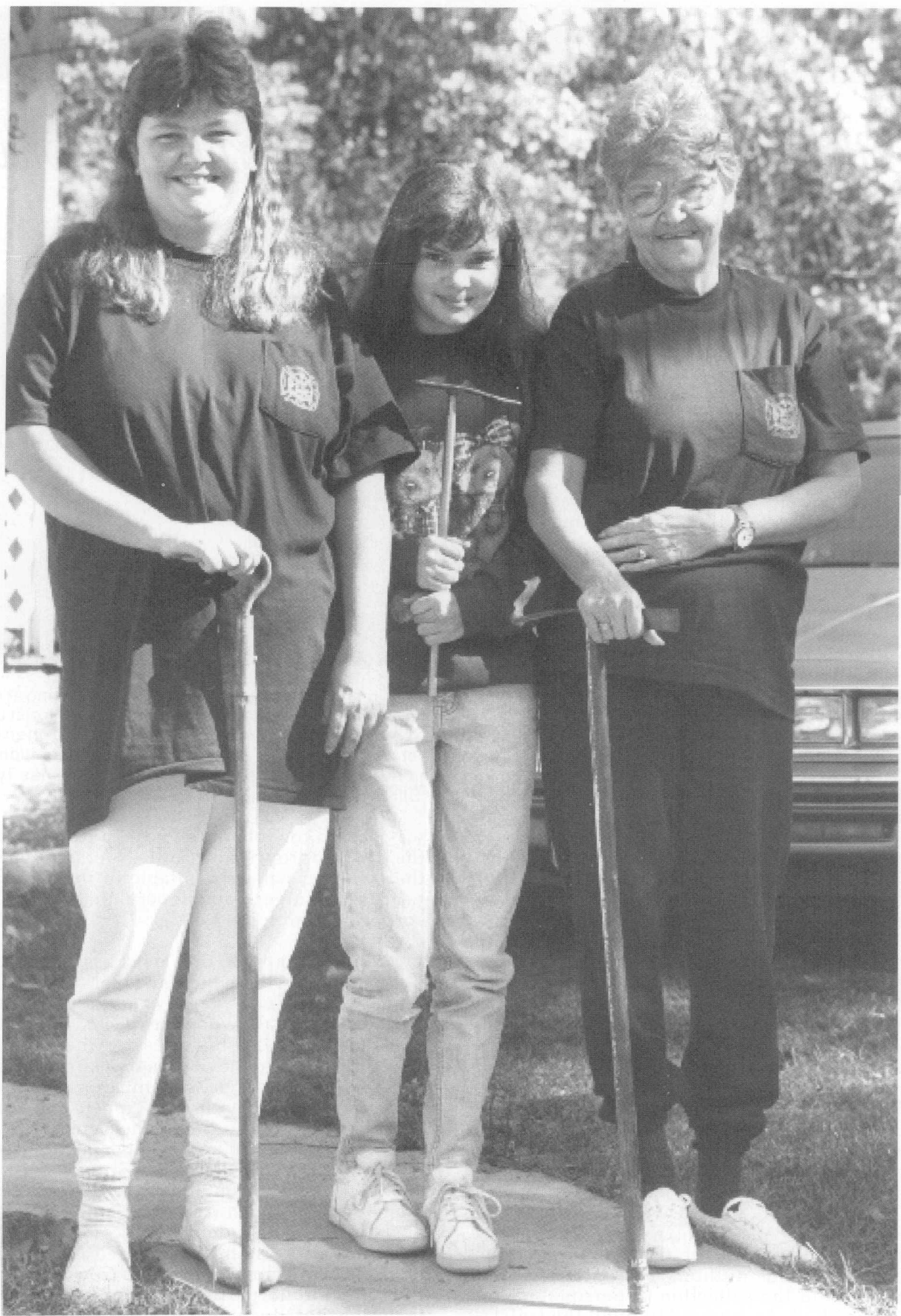
"The project is an immense undertaking" said Center director Peggy Bulger, "but it will carry the name and mission of the Center and the Library to tens of millions of Americans and greatly expand the collection of personal narratives in our Folk Archive." Although the legislation authorized \$250,000 for the first year and funds "as needed" in successive years, the bill



Bill Ellis, infantryman, First Cavalry, U.S. Army, performing at a forward firebase in Vietnam, about 1968. According to folklorist Lydia Fish, songs (both made-up and brought from home) are often used in wartime for "entertainment, as a means of unit definition and bonding, and as a strategy for survival." Photo by Thomas Tynes, courtesy of Bill Ellis

was passed too late in the year to be included in the 2001 appropriations bill. "We are confident that funding will be available in the next fiscal year," said Bulger, "and hopeful that we can raise corporate funding as well."

To accomplish this new assignment, the Center will identify and work cooperatively with a wide variety of organizations and individuals, who are expected to volunteer to help create oral histories for the collection. Among those who have already expressed interest are veterans' service organizations such as the American Legion (with 15,000 posts and a membership of 3.8 million) and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (with 9,500 posts and a membership of 2.75 million). These organizations will disseminate information about the project to their members. The general public, families of veterans, high school students, and community organizations will also be encouraged to participate as field collectors and interviewers. Guidelines for public participation and other useful materials for documentarians are available on the Center's Web site. You can visit the site at www.loc.gov/folklife/vets/.



Three generations of women who gather ginseng, Horse Creek, West Virginia: Carla Pettry with her daughter Natalie and her mother, Shelby Estep, holding their seng hoes. Photo by Lyntha Eiler

Tending the Commons: West Virginia Folklife Project Goes Online

By Mary Hufford

Tending the Commons: Folklife and Landscape in Southern West Virginia, a National Digital Library Program Web site, is the Center's latest online offering. Based on the Center's Coal River Folklife Project (1992-99), the presentation includes historical maps, interpretive essays, and multiple options for navigating the core collection of field photographs and sound recordings.

Long functioning as a de facto commons, the mountains of the region support a way of life that for many generations has entailed hunting, gathering, and subsistence gardening, as well as coal mining, timbering and a host of other activities. This commons, conceived and articulated through stories, place-names, artifacts, and seasonal practices, powerfully evokes collective memory and anchors community life. The site features excerpts from interviews

on the region's history (including early settlement, farming, industrialization, labor lore, out-migration, mountaintop removal, and protest movements) and ecology (including interviews on a wide variety of species found in rivers, streams, coves, slopes, and ridges), as well as documentation of community events (including storytelling, quilting, baptism in the river, cemetery tending, protest rallies, mining symposia, scientific conferences, and ramp suppers).



Aerial view of the Coal River Valley, where Route 3 follows the tributary of Marsh Fork. Pond Knob juts into the horizon at the center of the photo. Occupying the deep loop in the foreground is Mountview School, just south of Rock Creek. Photo by Lyntha Eiler.



Members of the Delbert Baptist Church, cooking for the annual Pine Knob ramp supper on Drew's Creek. Ramps (*Allium tricoccum*) are the first of the wild foods to appear in the mountains each spring, and this appearance is celebrated throughout the region with ramp suppers and festivals. Photo by Terry Eiler

Building the Web site occasioned regular consultation with project participants on Coal River, which in addition to phone conversations involved electronically transmitting photos for identification and commentary. The aerial photo of the Coal River Valley, shown here, depicts a landscape of hollows, ridges, gaps, knobs, and strips, and, paralleling Route 3, the Marsh Fork itself, densely differentiated into fishing holes. Names for such features index the continuing history of the community. Of Pond Knob, which juts into the horizon at the center of the photo, Rock Creek resident Joe Aliff wrote in an e-mail: "Sitting at the head of both Horse Creek and Dry Creek . . . is

Pond Knob. The site of an ancient Native American campground, it is still visited by thirsty travelers and the many wild animals of the area. Just to the left of center is Sulphur Spring Knob, which sits at the head of the Lefthand Fork of Rock Creek. Both of these knobs have long been used as orientation landmarks by the hunters and gatherers who travel these mountains." Such comments have been included in the notes fields for a number of records in the data base.

Tending the Commons includes 679 excerpts from original sound recordings and 1,256 photographs. Interpretive texts outline the social, historical, economic, environmental, and cultural contexts of community

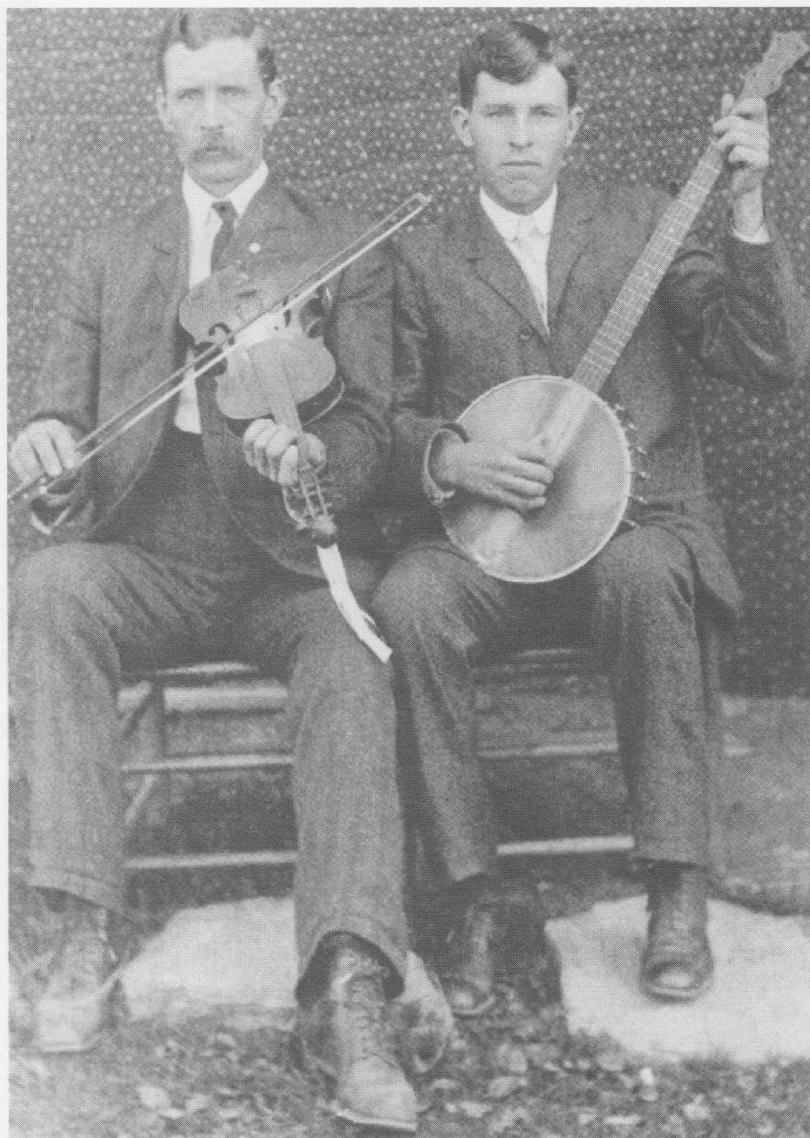
life. Contemporary maps showing names for tributaries of the Marsh Fork and Clear Fork, and for the fishing holes on Marsh Fork, a seasonal round graphic, and a historical time-line (under construction) provide special access to collection materials. Several essays explore the connection between the common pool resource of ramp patches found high in the mountains and spaces that support the commons of community life. To visit the online collection, go the American Folklife Center's home page at <http://lcweb.loc.gov/folklife/>, select collections available online, and then "Tending the Commons."

Henry Reed Fund Established at the Library of Congress

The Library of Congress Trust Fund Board has accepted the Henry Reed Fund for Folk Artists as an official trust fund of the American Folklife Center. An end-of-the-year donation from folk music aficionado Ed Littlefield Jr. helped the fund qualify as an endowment by bringing its assets to more than \$25,000. With other donations, the principal has now risen above \$30,000. A long-time friend of former American Folklife Center director Alan Jabbour, Littlefield has a sound studio and record label, Sagearts, in Arlington, Washington, and plays with the band "Marley's Ghost."

Terry Reed, a grandson of Henry Reed, wrote, "Many thanks from the Reed family to everyone who contributed to the fund."

Launched with an initial contribution from Alan Jabbour that was matched by Liz Claiborne and Art Ortenberg, the fund honors Jabbour's mentor, the now-legendary West Virginia fiddler Henry Reed (1884-1968). Jabbour's recordings of Reed's music are included in an online



Henry Reed (right, with banjo) and his brother Josh, about 1903. Photo courtesy of the Reed family.

presentation "Fiddle Tunes of the Old Frontier," which is available through the Center's Web site. Kicking off the fund-raising effort was a December 1, 1999, concert at the State Theater in Virginia, featuring Pete Seeger and his grandson, Tao Rodri-

guez; Christine Balfa, Dirk Powell, and Geno Delafosse; the gospel group Prophecy; Hazel Dickens and Dudley Connell; and Stephen Wade.

The Henry Reed Fund will enable the American Folklife Center to provide support in the form of awards, stipends, or honoraria to folk artists of all sorts, and the Center will give particular consideration to those artists who are featured in its programs and collections. Projects and activities might include concerts, workshops, and exhibitions; research by folk artists using the Archive of Folk Culture; and the documentation of performances.

Persons who would like to contribute to the fund should make checks payable to the American Folklife Center (or the Library of Congress Trust Fund Board), and write Henry Reed Fund on the comment line. Send checks to the Library of Congress, American Folklife Center, Washington, D.C. 20540-4600. Contributions are tax deductible.



Tom Rankin hosted the American Folklife Center's Board of Trustees for its fall 2000 meeting at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University. The group, pictured here on the Chapel Hill campus, also visited the Southern Folklore Archives at the University of North Carolina. Front row, from left: Tom Rankin, Peggy Bulger, and Barbara Lau. Photo by James Hardin

The Documentary Impulse: An Interview with Tom Rankin

By James Hardin

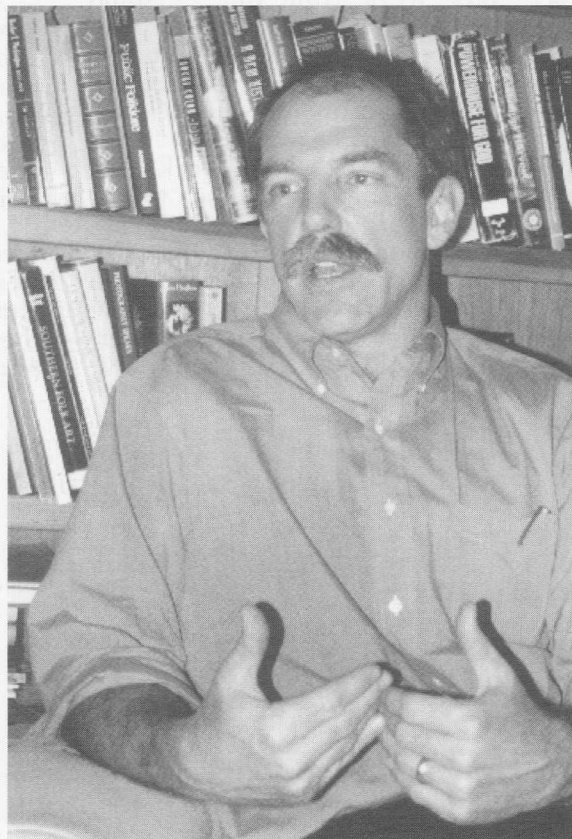
The Center for Documentary Studies (CDS), an interdisciplinary educational organization affiliated with Duke University, is dedicated to advancing documentary work that combines experience and creativity with education and community life. Founded in 1989, CDS connects the arts and humanities to fieldwork, drawing upon photography, filmmaking, oral history, folklore, and writing as catalysts for education and change.

CDS supports the active examination of contemporary society, the recognition of collaboration as central to documentary work, and the presentation of experiences that heighten our historical and cultural awareness. CDS achieves this work through academic courses, research, oral history and other fieldwork, gallery and traveling exhibitions, annual awards, book publishing, community-based projects, and public events. To learn more about CDS, visit their Web site at <http://cds.aas.duke.edu>.

American Folklife Center Board Trustee Tom Rankin became director of the Center for Documentary Studies in 1998. He invited the Board to hold its fall meeting at CDS on October 19 and 20. David Taylor and I met Rankin in his office, located on the third-floor of the Lyndhurst House home of CDS, beside the Duke University Campus.

Tom Rankin's easy-going manner belies the devotion to cause that is evident when he talks about his career, and his work at the

Center for Documentary Studies (CDS), where he has been director since 1998. This and other dualities, along with attempts to



Tom Rankin at the Center for Documentary Studies. Photo by David A. Taylor

reconcile competing interests, have manifested themselves at many points in his career.

Rankin began taking pictures when he was five or six years old. He grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, in "a self-consciously Southern family," descended from Scotch-Irish and German immigrants who migrated to the region in the 1850s. Great uncles on his mother's side were very old-fashioned people, "of an-

other time," and one great aunt on his father's side was a teller of jack tales. The family gathered for the holidays, and Rankin took many pictures. He loved to listen to the stories, and once, when he was eleven, he hid a tape recorder in a Poinsettia to record his aunt's stories. Clearly, the documentary impulse began early for him.

After high school, Rankin went to Tufts University in Boston, in part to get away from home. Ironically, he ended up studying Southern history and returning to the South to pursue his career. In a course in folklore he took with Jeff Todd Titon, he found that several of his interests coalesced: He discovered, as he said, that he could "get credit for what I was already doing." For him, photography and folklore "spring from the same root. Both come from my interest in cultural history and memory."

"It took me a while to figure out that I wanted to teach," said Rankin, who has been a teacher since 1980 (at Tufts; Georgia State University in Atlanta; Delta

State in Cleveland, Mississippi; the University of Mississippi in Oxford; and now at Duke). Administrative work does not bring enough contact with young people, he finds, and students' questioning of assumptions is stimulating. But academic divisions in some universities are often arbitrary, and Rankin has frequently felt the need to cross lines. Aesthetics and documentary photogra-

phy complement one another, he said, and both can be employed in the study of cultural history. Work at the Center for Documentary Studies allows Rankin to straddle two worlds, with one leg (or hand, or eye) on campus, and one in the outside in the larger community.

While CDS allows Rankin to pursue and integrate his multiple interests, he acknowledges that on occasion he likes to focus on one. For example, he joined the project-team for the American Folklife Center's Lowell Folklife Project (1987-88) as a photographer "rather than a folklorist." "I was there to take pictures," he said, "and I loved it." The team studied the ethnic diversity and in- and out-migration that characterizes Lowell, Massachusetts, and in particular a section of the city known as "the acre." Rankin was especially absorbed by the religious observances and festivals he photographed. "I love to photograph religion," he said. "I want to know what causes a

space to be sacred—what marks the space, and gives it a heightened cultural meaning."

Rankin says that the definition of documentary photography is complex, and he believes it is closely connected with a sense of place. "All documentary work is local," he says. It is connected with the local community's interpretation of place, and likewise the photographer's understanding and vision of place.

"We all approach documentary work from our personal experience," says Rankin. "Our own experience as it relates to the subject is important for the understanding it brings." Parenthetically he warns that "some documentary-styled work may emphasize the personal to the point of being narcissistic." Clearly there is more to the work than imposition of the personal. The intention of the documentary photographer is to understand. He must make an invest-

ment in time; he must work in collaboration with the people and places he photographs.

In fact, Rankin goes on to say, "We often ask community members to participate in documentation. Give them cameras and tape recorders and ask them to take control of the documentary process. Documenting life is a human impulse. We all have experiences as documentarians, in our families and communities. There is a human urge to record, to tell. We need to recognize that, and enable others to participate."

Appropriately enough, Rankin's favorite subject of study was Maggie Lee Sayre, herself a photographer. Maggie Sayre was born deaf in 1920, on a houseboat built by her father, and she spent fifty-one years on a river houseboat with her family, who made a living primarily through commercial fishing in Kentucky and Tennessee. Sayre chronicled her family's life on the river by taking photographs, and Rankin writes of the several

ways in which photography served her: "First, she was able to engage in a kind of dialogue with family members and visitors by taking their pictures. Second, she was able to define and represent her world as she saw it (or wanted to see it), thus helping her to find her own place in it. . . . Her pictures act simultaneously as autobiography, regional representation, cultural document, and story" ["The Photographs of Maggie Lee Sayre: A Personal Vision of Houseboat Life," *Folklife Annual 90* (Washington: Library of Congress 1991), p. 121].

"Maggie Lee Sayre represents all the things that brought me to the profession," says Tom Rankin. "Her work, and what it says about both personal and cultural life, represents what I do."



Procession for the feast of Our Lady of Loreto, conducted by St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church in the Back Central Neighborhood of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1988. Lowell Folklife Project Collection. Photograph by Tom Rankin

American Folklife Centers Marks 25th Anniversary

By James Hardin

On January 2, 1976, President Gerald Ford signed the American Folklife Preservation Act, creating the American Folklife Center in the Library of Congress. The president expressed reservations about the legislation, however, in the assignment of a mission to "preserve and present American folklife" to the legislative rather than the executive branch of government:

"I have serious reservations about the constitutional propriety of placing the functions to be performed by the Center outside the executive branch and the assignment of executive duties to officers appointed by Congress. However, given historical practice and custom in the area of cultural and educational affairs and the potential of HR 6673 to enrich the cultural life of the Nation, I am granting my approval to the measure" (From "Administration of Gerald R. Ford, Presidential Documents, Week Ending Friday, January 9, 1976").

In fact, when the legislation that eventually resulted in the American Folklife Center was first drafted, an "American Folklife Foundation," comparable to the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, was envisioned. Negotiations for the foundation led to the creation of



American Folklife Center staff, in the Great Hall of the Library's Thomas Jefferson Building, pose for an anniversary portrait, January 2, 2001. In front of column, Peggy Bulger; first vertical row, top to bottom, Niki Herbert, Ann Hoog, Peter Bartis, Jennifer Cutting; second row, Christa Maher, Rachel Howard, Doris Craig; third row, Tom Bramel, Robin Fanslow, Judith Gray, Stephanie Hall, Tandra Johnson; fourth row, James Hardin, David Taylor, Catherine Kerst. Absent when the photograph was taken: Thea Austen, Mary Hufford, Nora Yeh. Photo by Carl Fleischhauer

a folk arts program in the National Endowment for the

Arts, and instructions that the National Endowment for the Humanities develop programming in support of traditional culture. The Arts Endowment has been enormously effective in creating folk arts programs at the state and local level, and, currently, under the leadership of folklorist Bill Ferris, the Humanities Endowment has placed a greater emphasis on traditional culture and local programming.

The American Folklife Center, as it was created in 1976, differs from the proposed Folklife Foundation, as well as from the two endowments, in that it does not have the authority to make grants. As a consequence, its budget and staff have remained small. But the hundred or so pages of testimony on behalf of a federal folklife agency, generated before congressional committees May 18, 1970, and May 8, 9, and 10, 1974, provide a history lesson in national cultural policy and insight into the temper of the times.

It was neither location nor constitutional authority that concerned folklorist and labor historian Archie Green when he walked the halls of Congress to lobby on behalf of a folklife agency. The passion of Professor Green was informed by history and philosophy and the very idea of America:

Now, it is absolutely imperative that Congress accept its responsibility to folk culture. Mr. Chairman, it does not really matter where the agency is housed or how the agency is staffed or how modest its budget is. We want a commitment on the part of Congress to the folk in 435 districts and 50 states. . . . we must tune our ears to the understated voice. We must begin to reach out to very ordinary people doing ordinary things at a quiet level—the Tarheel banjo picker, the rodeo rider in your State. You know these people cannot be stranded. Without their strength, our country will not live. (“Hearing Before the Subcommittee on the Library of the Committee on Rules and Administration, United States Senate,” May 8, 1974, p. 62)

Many who testified railed against the idea of American culture as a “melting pot,” an idea that has been around at least since Michel-Guillaume St. Jean de Crèvecoeur (1735–1813) wrote in “What Is an American?": “Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men . . .” (*Letter III of Letters from an American Farmer*, 1782). For example, actor and folksinger Theodore Bikel described the sameness of mass-produced cookie-cutter housing, and quoted from a popular song of the day:

I would hate to face a future in which, because of our lack of action at this time [creation of the American Folklife Foundation], we find that we are living in those “little boxes” that the song speaks of, where one could wander by mistake into his neighbor’s house not knowing the difference because the architecture and the furniture are so much the same, pouring himself his neighbor’s drink without knowing the difference, making love to his neighbor’s wife without either of them knowing the difference. . . . I don’t believe that anybody who does not acknowledge roots or heritage knows properly where he stands today or that he is morally equipped to face a tomorrow (“Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Education of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, United States Senate,” May 18, 1970, p. 51).

The song “Little Boxes,” 1963, by Malvina Reynolds, ends:

And the boys go into business
And marry and raise a family

In boxes made of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same.

The cultural revolution of the 1960s was different things to different people. As Judy Collins famously remarked, for example, “if you remember the sixties, you weren’t there.” The decade saw revolts against corporate America (and the manufacture and distribution of mass culture), the Civil Rights movement, student protests on campus, and the Viet Nam War. These events and movements, the outcomes and consequences of which are still with us today, radically changed America. In part, they can be credited with having set the stage for the congressional hearings on behalf of the American Folklife Preservation Bill: a new understanding of and appreciation for multicultural society, a new emphasis on the rights and dignity of all peoples, a revulsion against the proliferation of corporate culture, and a passionate belief in the values represented by folk music and folk culture (popularized by the folk music revival of the 1950s and 1960s).

As Sen. Mark Hatfield said at the Senate hearings:

The United States has spent the last decade torn apart by internal and external problems. I do not need to enumerate the many crises that have plagued us, as we are all too aware of them, and of the polarization they have created in our society. Folklife speaks to the common wellspring in American society—to the traditions, past and present, that bind us together (*The Honorable Mark O. Hatfield, “Hearings Before the Subcommittee on the Library of the Committee on Rules and Administration, United States Senate,” May 8, 1974, p. 40*).

Many other speakers noted similar conditions in their testimony, and the salutary effects of folklore. Here is a sampling from “Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Library and Memorials, Committee on House Administration, House of Representatives,” May 9 and 10, 1974. These statements represent the hopes and expectations we carry with us still:

Folklore is on the lips of people of all colors, races, and creeds. It is in their minds and in their hearts. In its rich folklife, America has given expression to the creative urge through its songs and its dances, its arts and its crafts, and through the handiwork of all that man himself has fashioned (**Wayland Hand**, director, Center for Folklore and Mythology, UCLA, p. 50).

The preservation of these traditions of ours [Mexican-Americans] in an American Folklife Center is extremely important to our sense of identity and to the recognition of that identity by other Americans as one strand of the varied heritage of this country. I envision the function of an American Folklife Center as going far beyond the collection or preservation of American folklore materials. The study of such materials would be the study of the people that produced them. That to my mind would be a way of leading toward the understanding not only of other Americans, but of ourselves as well (**Americo Paredes**, Center for Intercultural Studies in Folklore and Oral History, University of Texas, p. 59).

The passage of this bill will have an enormously positive effect upon the fledgling academic discipline of Afro-American studies and the growing cultural pride of all Afro-Americans, because central to all research and appreciation of Afro-American culture is black America’s deeply rich and diverse oral tradition (**Rev. William Wiggins Jr.**, Folklife Institute, Indiana University; currently member, American Folklife Center Board of Trustees, p. 64).

It is the communication between generations, the old and the young, that should be emphasized [in the essential work of preserving cultural traditions]. With change proceeding as quickly as it does, our younger generation finds itself cut off from its past and deeply in need of continuity, a sense of roots, and the chance to participate in and share with others the cultural heritage that is their birthright (**Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett**, professor of folklore and folklife, University of Pennsylvania, pp. 76–77).

*Perpetuation, preservation, and education are the three essential aspects of the proposed American Folklife Center in the Library of Congress. I can think of no more deserving a recipient than our Nation's heritage for such an esteemed recognition (The Honorable **Lindy Boggs**, former member, American Folklife Center Board of Trustees, p. 90).*

I see it imperative that we make available to ourselves and our decedents a true and accurate record of the significant contributions by the many different cultural, racial, and ethnic groups which comprise our multi-faceted society. Too often, accomplishments of minority peoples have been neglected, over-looked, downgraded, or crudely suppressed. Establishment of such a center, which is then properly and



Current Center director Peggy Bulger and founding director Alan Jabbour cut the first piece of birthday cake. Photo by Carl Fleischhauer

*fairly administered, will do much to eliminate these difficulties by providing tools to understand and appreciate one another. Through increased understanding and awareness perhaps much fear, suspicion, and prejudice which plagues us today can be ameliorated and, hopefully, one day completely eliminated (The Honorable **Ronald V. Dellums**, p. 92).*

*Let us not cause the future generations of this nation to look back a hundred years from now and say that they wish someone had had the foresight to preserve our folklife. We must start now in preserving a legacy for these Americans of the future so they will be able to say they know where they came from and they know the past (The Honorable **Henry B. Gonzales**, p. 94).*

EDITOR'S NOTES from page 2

Documentary Studies in Durham, North Carolina. Mary Hufford tells how the idea of a landscape "commons" creates community, and Tom Rankin tells the way the idea of community figures in his practice of photographic documentation.

The enthusiastic response to the announcement of a symposium to discuss the problems of preservation, access, and intellectual property rights demonstrated the currency (and urgency) of these issues for many folk heritage archives and private collections, as well as for the many persons involved in recorded-sound production, distribution, and preservation. Over a hundred participants attended the December 1 and 2 gathering at the Library of Congress. The timing couldn't have

been better for the Folklife Center, which is in the process, in cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution, of raising funds to qualify for a grant from the National Park Service as part of the "Save America's Treasures" program of the White House Millennium Council. The money will be used for the preservation of recorded-sound heritage.

Departing Board Members

President Clinton wasn't the only one to leave office on January 20. Many thanks for their service to the members of the Center's Board of Trustees appointed by what must now be referred to as the previous administration: Kevin Gover, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior; William Kennard, Chairman, Federal Communications

Commission; Mario Moreno, Assistant Secretary for Intergovernmental and Interagency Affairs, Department of Education; and Ellen McCulloch-Lovell, Deputy Assistant to the President and Advisor to the First Lady on the Millennium. We are especially grateful to Mario Moreno for arranging a grant of \$5,000 from his department for the design of a poster urging school children to explore their local communities through heritage documentation projects. The Center will join with the Rural School and Community Trust to print and distribute the poster. Special thanks as well to Ellen McCulloch-Lovell, who encouraged the Smithsonian and the Library of Congress to submit a joint proposal for a "Save America's Treasures" grant.



At a reception in the Montpelier Room for participants in the American Folklife Center's "Folk Heritage Collections in Crisis Symposium," Cheryl Mollicone, senior projects director, GRAMMY Foundation; Bill Ferris, chair, National Endowment for the Humanities; Peggy Bulger, director, American Folklife Center; Barry Bergey, folk arts program director, National Endowment for the Arts; Darryl Friedman, executive director, National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences; Robert Aubrey Davis, board member, GRAMMY Foundation. Story begins on page 3. Photo by James Hardin

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