

Volume 31  
Nos. 1-2  
Folklife Center News

# Robert Burns at 250

Archie  
Green

Henrietta  
Yurchenco

Nimrod  
Workman



Winter/Spring 2009

American Folklife Center  
The Library of Congress



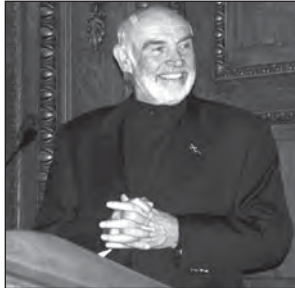


# FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

AMERICAN FOLKLIFE CENTER

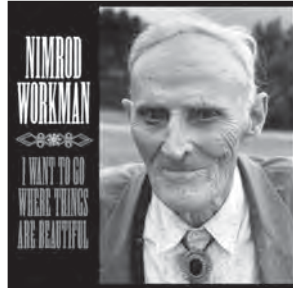


## ROBERT BURNS AT 250: AFC SYMPOSIUM



**3** Read about AFC's symposium celebrating the poetry and folklore collecting of Robert Burns, Scotland's national poet.

## NIMROD WORKMAN GOES DIGITAL



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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 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.

*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

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Cover: "Portrait of Robert Burns, Ayr, Scotland" from the LC Prints and Photographs Division Photochrom Print Collection. Reproduction Number LC-DIG-ppmsc-07528

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# Robert Burns at 250: Poetry, Politics, and Performance

By Nancy Groce

Every year on January 25, devotees across the globe gather to mark the birthday of the beloved Scottish poet Robert Burns. They hold formal dinners and celebrations that include recitations, songs, and toasts. No other artist is so consistently or widely feted on his birthday. In addition to his work as a poet, Burns was a pioneering collector and preserver of folksongs. It seemed only right, therefore, that for the 250th birthday of the “lad born in Kyle,” the American Folklife Center (AFC) should organize a major public event to explore Burns and his contributions as a poet, songwriter, and folklorist.

With this in mind, on February 24 and 25, 2009, AFC presented the free public symposium *Robert Burns at 250: Poetry, Politics, and Performance*. The well-attended symposium explored Burns’s life and work, as well as his lasting impact on America and American culture. Leading scholars, politicians, poets, and musicians from Scotland and the United States joined experts from the Library of Congress, including the U.S. Poet Laureate. The event was produced in cooperation with the Library’s Center for the Book and the Library’s Poetry and Literature Center, and was made possible with generous support from the Scottish Government, as part of Homecoming Scotland 2009.

## Scotland’s National Poet

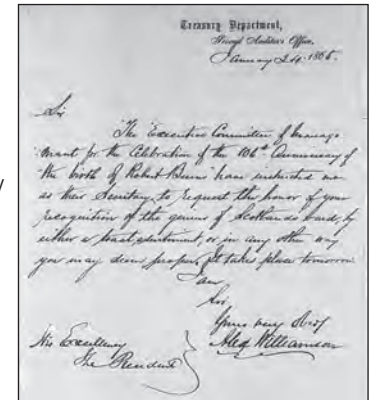
Robert Burns is more than a poet; he has served as an icon and inspiration for generations of artists, performers, politicians, social activists, and cultural reformers throughout the world. Burns was born in Alloway, near Ayr, in southwestern Scotland, on January 25, 1759. He was the eldest of the seven children of William Burnes, a tenant farmer, and his wife Agnes Broun. Growing up in poverty with little formal schooling, the poet nevertheless received a solid education from his father and several local tutors in subjects that included French, Latin, and mathematics. He began writing poetry and song lyrics at the age of fifteen. By twenty, following his family’s move to a farm near Tarbolton, he became active in a country dance society and joined several local clubs and lodges.

In 1786, at the urging of his brother Gilbert and some of his friends, Burns published his first volume of poetry, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, in Kilmarnock. The volume was an immediate critical success, and a second edition, printed in Edinburgh soon thereafter, proved a financial success as well. Burns’s talent was

quickly recognized, and he was soon being hailed and celebrated as a literary lion throughout Scotland. In the decade that followed, his works were published widely in books and periodicals in Britain and North America. His career as a farmer proved less successful, and, in 1788, he accepted an appointment with the Customs and Excise service and moved first to Ellisland, and then to the southwestern Scottish market town of Dumfries in 1791.

Few poets have moved as easily between the worlds of rural folk poetry, folksong,

and urban literary circles as Robert Burns. A talented poet in both the Scots and English languages, Burns was also a



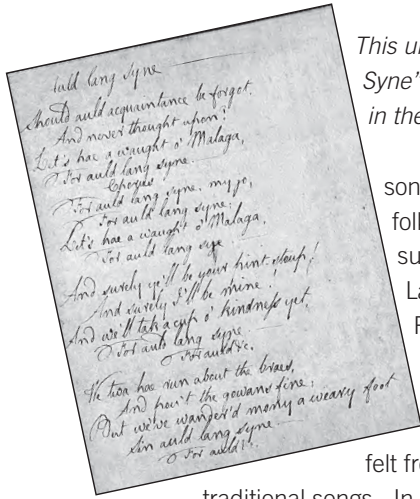
An 1865 Letter inviting President Abraham Lincoln to make a toast to Robert Burns, now preserved in the LC Manuscript Division.

He responded, “Thinking of what [Burns] has said, I cannot say anything worth saying.”



“Robert Burns and his Highland Mary,” a lithograph published in 1846 by N. Currier. LC Prints & Photographs Division, reproduction number LC-USZC2-2962.

dedicated collector of folksongs and tunes, an able musician, and a gifted lyricist. In addition to his poems, folklorists admire Burns for the significant contributions he made to seminal published anthologies of Scottish songs and ballads, such as George Thompson’s *A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs for the Voice* (1793), and James Johnson’s *The Scots Musical Museum* (1787-1797). For these books, and others like them, Burns sometimes submitted original poems set to traditional tunes, which allowed the tunes to be published and preserved. He also wrote and edited verses based on traditional



This unusual copy of "Auld Lang Syne" in Burns's own hand resides in the Library's Manuscript Division.

songs and poems collected from folk performers, among them such well-known songs as "Auld Lang Syne," "My Luve's Like a Red, Red Rose," "Scots Wha Hae," and "Flow Gently Sweet Afton." Like many early folksong collectors, Burns felt free to adapt and "improve"

traditional songs. In this manner, he is credited with preserving more than three hundred Scottish songs.

Burns wrote poetry in both Scots and English, and many of his most memorable works are a careful blend of the two. This made the poems widely accessible to Scottish as well as English-speaking audiences, while retaining a character that was distinctly Scottish. The subject matter of his poems was remarkably broad, and addressed topics as varied as politics, class inequality, Scottish nationalism, romance, religion, social life, nature, and social justice. His lyricism, his ability to appeal to varied audiences, and his short but colorful life served as an inspiration for Romantic poets and writers that followed in the next generation. The causes and concerns addressed by his poetry influenced — and continue to influence — artists, politicians, and activists in Scotland, America, and numerous other countries throughout the world.

Burns died at Dumfries in 1796 at the tragically young age of thirty-seven. His birthday, January 25, is still celebrated annually throughout the world with "Burns Suppers," at which his life is remembered, his memory immortalized, his poems recited, and his lyrics enthusiastically sung.

## The Symposium

In order to ensure that the most prominent scholars and performers of Burns's work were free to participate, AFC held its symposium one month after Burns's birthday, on February 24 and 25. The event began on Tuesday afternoon in the Mumford Room, on the sixth floor of the Library's James Madison Memorial Building. Welcoming remarks were presented by the Librarian of Congress, James H. Billington, by the American Folklife Center's Director Peggy Bulger, and by Cate Newton, Director of Collections and Research at the National Library of Scotland. The speakers noted the longstanding relationship between the Library of Congress and the National Library of Scotland, and expressed hopes that these ties would be strengthened by future exchanges and cooperative projects.

Dr. Billington introduced the symposium's keynote speaker, the Rt. Hon. Alex Salmond, MP, MSP, First Minister of Scotland and Head of the Government of Scotland. Before an overflow audience—which included famed Scottish actor Sir Sean Connery and other celebrities—the First Minister spoke eloquently about Burns's life, work, and enduring influence.

Mr. Salmond began by pointing out how the bard's egalitarian politics and humanitarian leanings influenced his poetry, noting that "Burns was an artist who...rose to the station of national bard, whilst still retaining his status as a common man. For all his paradoxes, Burns lived by a consistent set of values which he gives voice to from the earliest satires through to his late political songs."

The First Minister traced Burns's "zigzag course through life," and discussed the impact that the poet's works have had on the cultural and political landscapes of both Scotland and America. He quoted from the works of several influential Americans — including Henry David Thoreau, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, and Maya Angelou — who credited Burns as an important influence. He emphasized that Burns remains more

than an historic figure, citing the continued importance of his works on public discourse in contemporary Scotland. In particular, he noted the iconic role played by the Bard's songs and poems during Scotland's recent devolution movement, and cited the moment, now famous throughout Scotland, when folksinger Sheena Wellington sang Burns's anthem "For a' that and a' that" in 1999, at the reopening of the Scottish Parliament after 292 years. He concluded: "Without a doubt, Burns has left an indelible thumbprint on the world. His influence on the hearts and minds of millions is beyond question and beyond quantification. For many Scots—myself included—Burns is still the voice which dignifies Scotland's quest for freedom."

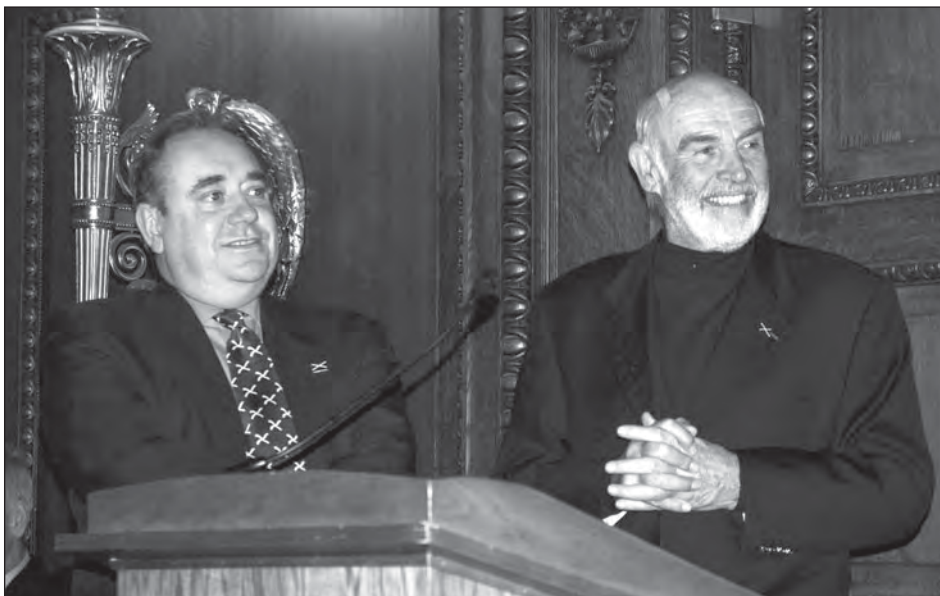


Photo by Megan Halkeband

Scotland's First Minister, Alex Salmond (l.), and actor Sean Connery, at the reception held in the Library's Members Room on February 24, 2009.





Photo by Megan Heisbrand

*Professor Robert Crawford spoke about Burns's significance as "America's Bard."*

The keynote panel ended with an exchange of gifts: First Minister Salmond presented the Library with a beautifully framed holographic copy of Burns's best known song, "Auld Lang Syne," based on an original in the collection of the National Library of Scotland. In return, Dr. Billington presented the First Minister with two books about the Library: James Conway's *America's Library: The Story of the Library of Congress 1800-2000*,

(2000), and John Y. Cole's *On These Walls: Inscriptions and Quotations in the Library of Congress* (2008).

Following the keynote address, Michael Taft, Head of the American Folklife Center Archive, introduced the symposium's first speaker, Robert Crawford, Professor of Modern Scottish Literature at the University of St. Andrews. Dr. Crawford, who is an award-winning poet in his own right as well as a distinguished scholar of Scottish and British literature, spoke on Burns's significance as "America's Bard."

Drawing on research from his recently published biography of Burns, *The Bard* (2009), Crawford considered what America meant to Burns, touched on Burns's artistic responses to the historical events and politics of his day, and noted how Burns subsequently influenced and inspired such major American poets as Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, and Maya Angelou. He also discussed Burns's continued presence in contemporary American popular culture, including the frequent use of his songs in key scenes of American movies. "Though Burns is rightly regarded as the national bard of Scotland," he argued, "thanks to his democratic voice, his admiration for the American Revolution, and his impact on American writers, he can also be called "America's Bard."

The first day of the symposium ended with an outstanding round-robin presentation of Burns's songs and poetry by Margaret Bennett, Valentina Bold, Billy Kay, and Ed Miller. Dr. Miller, a Scottish folklorist and musician based in Austin, Texas, began the session with a rousing version of Burns's song "For a' that and a' that," and later followed it with performances of several classic Burns songs, including "A Red, Red Rose," and "Auld Lang Syne." Professor Bold read "The Rights of Women" and "To a Mouse," Dr. Bennett sang "Ae Fond Kiss," and award-winning Scottish journalist and broadcaster Billy Kay gave a memorable recitation of the poem "Tam o' Shanter" in its original Scots.

Following the close of the first day's proceedings, the Scottish Government, under the auspices of House of Representatives member Mike McIntyre from North Carolina, presented a memorable VIP reception in the ornate Members' Room of the Library's Jefferson Building. Hosted by Rep. McIntyre and First Minister Alex Salmond, the event drew Senators Lamar Alexander, Lindsey Graham, Kay Hagan, Orrin Hatch, Claire McCaskill, Harry Reid, Mark Warner, Jim Webb, and Roger Wicker, and Representatives Neil Abercrombie, Robert Aderholt, Henry Brown, Steve Cohen, John Duncan, Bob Etheridge, Bob Goodlatte, Mike McIntyre, Cathy McMorris-Rodgers, Jim Matheson, Brad Miller, Candice Miller, Jeff Miller, Jerry Moran, and Fred Upton. Other special guests included Sir Sean Connery, U.S. Poet Laureate Kay Ryan, and Librarian of Congress James H. Billington.

During the reception, a framed copy of Congressional Resolution 169 was presented to First Minister Salmond by its author, Representative McIntyre. The Resolution under consideration by the House "expresses the sense of the House of Representatives that the poet Robert Burns was a true friend of the United States, that his work inspired the citizens of this nation, as well as his native Scotland, and that the annual celebration of his birth is a tradition that transcends national boundaries, and as a result, should be observed."

The text of the Resolution also notes that one of the reasons for its introduction and passage is that "the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress is also celebrating this anniversary with a free public symposium on Burns's life and work entitled *Robert Burns at 250: Poetry, Politics and Performance*, from February 24 through February 25, 2009, in Washington, D.C."

Festivities continued even after members of Congress returned to the Capitol to hear a joint address by President Obama.

### **The Symposium, Day Two**

Wednesday, February 25, the second day of the symposium, began with a gracious welcome by Deanna Marcum, the Library's Associate Librarian for Library Services. In her speech, Marcum recognized the warm relationship between the Library of Congress and the National



Photo by Megan Heisbrand

*Ed Miller (left) and Margaret Bennett, who are academic folklorists as well as folksingers, spoke about Burns's significance and sang Burns's songs.*

Library of Scotland, and expressed her hope that this event would forge even closer ties. AFC's Head of Research and Programs, David Taylor, then introduced the day's first panel, "Burns and His World," and the opening speaker, Nat Edwards.

Edwards, who is the Education and Interpretative Services Manager at the National Library of Scotland, is a leading authority on the life of Burns. As a curator and educator, he is particularly interested in how the poet's story has been presented to the public. Prior to joining the National Library, Edwards served as Director of Burns National Heritage Park, the poet's birthplace, in Alloway, Ayrshire. As Chairman of the National Burns Collection, he had recently organized the traveling exhibition "Zig-Zag: the Paths of Robert Burns." Edwards's illustrated presentation, "Robert Burns: The Usual Suspects," provided the audience with an engaging and informative overview of Burns's life, and explored the challenges involved in "decoding" well-entrenched myths about the bard, in order to ascertain more about the real man and the nuances of his complex life.

Edwards's talk was followed by an informative and effervescent presentation by the eminent historian Ted Cowan, Professor of Scottish History, and Director of the University of Glasgow's Crichton Campus in Dumfries. Cowan's presentation, "Eighteenth-Century Scotland and Eighteenth-Century America," compared cultures on either side of the Atlantic during the 1790s, and explored Burns's awareness of, and reaction to, specific historical events. In particular, Cowan drew the audience's attention to the American and French Revolutions, their impact on eighteenth-century Scotland, and Burns's reactions to them. He provided insights into how political and social conditions in both America and France influenced Burns and shaped his poetry.

The morning session closed with "Robert Burns and the Scots Language," a presentation by award-winning writer and BBC broadcaster Billy Kay. Like Burns, Kay grew up in the Scots-speaking southwestern counties of Ayrshire and Dumfriesshire. He is the author of the influential work on the history of the Scots language, *Scots: The Mither Tongue*, and he has devoted his life to making Scottish people, at home and abroad, aware of their rich cultural heritage.

Quoting an old Scots saying he had heard as a child, "Thaim wi a guid Scots tongue in their heid are fit tae gang ower the world," Kay discussed issues surrounding linguistic and national identity in contemporary Scotland. Kay illustrated his talk with audio recordings from his own fieldwork, which gave the primarily American audience a chance to hear how the language spoken by Burns – and in which he wrote his greatest poetry – still thrives as a living language in today's Scotland. He also examined the ongoing political struggle faced by those speaking, teaching, and advocating for the Scots language in contemporary Scotland. He finished by expressing hope that Scots would still be spoken in Scotland when Burns's 500th birthday is celebrated.

Following lunch, AFC folklorist Maggie Kruesi introduced the panel "Burns and Traditional Culture," and the afternoon's first speaker, folklorist Valentina Bold, Head of Scottish Studies at the University of Glasgow's Dumfries campus. Robert Burns spent his final years in Dumfries, where Dr. Bold, (and her colleague Ted Cowan), are active members of the local Burns Appreciation and Research in Dumfries (BARD) team.

Bold spoke on Burns's important contributions as a proto-folklorist. He was, she noted, an excellent fieldworker and song collector whose familiarity with, and championship of, traditional tunes and lyrics preserved hundreds of what are



(L-r): Panelists Margaret Bennett, Ed Miller, Valentina Bold, John Y. Cole, Cate Newton, Marc Lambert, and Stephen Winick joined hands in the traditional manner to sing Burns's "Auld Lang Syne" at the close of the symposium.



Photo by Megan Halstead

Nat Edwards of the National Library of Scotland (r.) listens attentively while award-winning writer and BBC broadcaster Billy Kay discusses “Robert Burns and the Scots Language.”

by renowned folklorist, singer, and storyteller Margaret Bennett, from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow, who was assisted by Scottish singer, guitarist and folklorist Ed Miller. During her presentation, entitled “The Spontaneous Language of My Heart: The Life and Songs of Robert Burns,” she and Miller performed excerpts from Burns’s songs – some well known and others obscure – to trace the poet’s life and experiences.

For a change of pace, the next panel assembled three distinguished poets for a panel discussion of “Poetry, Celebrity, and the Public.” Moderated by Patricia Gray, Head of the Library’s Poetry and Literature Center, the panel featured Kay Ryan, Poet Laureate of the United States, Robert Crawford, poet and literary scholar from Scotland’s St. Andrews University, and Myra Sklarew, former president of the Yaddo artists’ community and professor emerita of literature at



Photo by Megan Halstead

Marc Lambert, Chief executive of the Scottish Book Trust, talked about the Trust’s efforts to advance literacy and promote reading and writing in Scotland.

now classic Scottish songs for later generations. She also touched on how contemporary traditional Scottish musicians continue to use Burns’s works as a reference source to enrich and expand their repertoires. She argued that the poet’s approach to collecting – which often involved “polishing a song of lesser quality” -- if not strictly in accord with modern documentation practices, was nevertheless a laudable and noteworthy achievement. She also recounted Burns’s contributions as a collector and author of bawdy songs and erotic poems, and spoke about her experiences as the editor of a recently completed edition of Burns’s collection of bawdy songs, *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*.



Photo by Megan Halstead

Kay Ryan, Poet Laureate of the United States, spoke about “Poetry, Celebrity, and the Public.”

Dr. Bold’s presentation was followed by a lecture/demonstration

American University. The panel was asked to reflect on Burns’s experiences as a celebrity poet and compare it with their own experiences as well-known contemporary poets.

Robert Crawford began by discussing the Bard’s relationship to his patrons, which involved patronage “in both the good and bad sense.” Burns, he noted, was heavily influenced by an earlier Scottish poet, Robert Fergusson, whose poverty and tragically early death served as a cautionary example of the shortfalls of patronage and dependency. He pointed out that Burns was the first poet to become a celebrity in his own lifetime, and that his career paved the way for later celebrity poets, such as Lord Byron. Crawford contended that, at the height of his fame, Burns carefully managed his image as a rustic poet through dress and carefully considered “performative” actions. Even while he was being lionized by the Edinburgh literati, Crawford explained, Burns strove to maintain his independence and “treasured marginality” – often humorously referring to himself as a mere “bardy” (small bard). Finally, noting that the panelists had mutually agreed to “clumsily interpose something of our own to prove that [we] are poets,” the speaker closed his remarks with a reading of his own poem, “Same, Difference,” from his recent collection *Full Volume*.

United States Poet Laureate Kay Ryan followed Crawford at the podium. Claiming she was at a “massive disadvantage” because she lacked a charming Scottish accent, she reflected on her own brushes with celebrity since being appointed to her position. She amused the audience by recounting how she had learned of her appointment, the immediate aftermath of learning about it, and the impact it has since had on her life and writing. In a wonderfully self-deprecating manner, she claimed that, even now, with all her celebrity and “the attendant fuss” that came with it, she was still able to travel around her small California town practically unnoticed. Although she off-handedly remarked that “the main job of the Poet Laureate is to explain the job of the Poet Laureate,” she also thoughtfully reflected on



the humble social background she shared with Robert Burns, and noted her admiration for Burns's ability to write poems that combined "superficial" simplicity with profound insights.

Myra Sklarew brought the panel to a close with a removing testimony to how Burns's poetry had influenced her own life. Initially, when asked to take part in the panel, she told the audience, she thought of speaking on her experiences as a poet and at Yaddo, but while preparing for the symposium she began to recall how important Burns's work had been during her own childhood. She didn't know how her Rumanian immigrant parents became familiar with Burns's poetry, but expressed her belief that it was the Scotsman's special gift to write poetry that spoke to peoples of very different backgrounds and assured his celebrity status as an international icon.

Following a break for coffee and refreshments, Stephen Winick, folklorist and American Folklife Center staff member, began the symposium's final panel, "The Contemporary Bard," with an informative overview of the Library of Congress's Burns-related materials. He showcased everything from very valuable manuscripts, such as a copy of "Auld Lang Syne" in Burns's own hand, to amusing advertisements for products



*This surreal advertisement for Robert Burns cigars is in the LC Prints and Photographs Division with the caption "Woman, with wings on back, holding box of Robert Burns cigars and offering one to pipe-smoking owl." (Removing testimony LC-USZ62-58871)*

such as Robert Burns Cigars, held in the Library's Prints and Photographs Division. The panel continued with a discussion entitled "Tomorrow's Bard: Promoting Reading and Literacy in Scotland and the United States." Panelists Cate Newton, Director of Collections and Research at the National Library of Scotland, Marc Lambert, Chief Executive of the Scottish Books Trust, and John Y. Cole, Director of the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress, spoke about their programs, and about the challenges of promoting reading and cultural literacy in the contemporary world.

Following the closing panel, participants and audience members gathered in the Mumford Room's foyer for a reception featuring Scottish delicacies, hosted by the Scottish Government and coordinated by the Office of Scottish Affairs at the British Embassy. Robin Naysmith, Scottish Government Counsellor for North America at the Embassy, offered a few closing remarks.

Throughout the event, members of the audience and participating scholars had the opportunity to view an original Burns manuscript of the "Ballad of Sheriffmuir," which the National Library of Scotland had recently purchased in Washington and graciously loaned the Library for the symposium. A glass case containing this new acquisition was placed in the foyer of the Mumford Room. It was displayed alongside a second Burns manuscript, a letter, which was generously loaned by local manuscript dealer Gavin Adams and his firm, Adams Hamilton.

More than two hundred people attended the symposium, some coming from as far away as North Carolina and New York. All were impressed with the uniformly high quality of presentations and the amount of innovative research and informed discussion that took place over two very busy days. The American Folklife Center thanks colleagues throughout the Library for their help and support, and especially the Library's Center for the Book and Poetry and Literature Center, for their cooperation in planning and organizing the event. AFC is also deeply indebted to the National Library of Scotland for its suggestions and

contributions. Finally, we owe thanks to the Scottish Government, and especially the staff of its Office of Scottish Affairs at the British Embassy, without whose guidance and generous support this memorable international event would not have been possible.

As with most of the Library's public events, the Burns symposium was captured on video for future researchers. This documentary record of the symposium enriches the Library's holdings on both Robert Burns and Scottish culture. The video has been made available as an online webcast, and can be accessed via the American Folklife Center's website, which also contains other information about the symposium, including the schedule, biographies of the participants, and a list of Burns-related resources. To access the video, please visit the symposium website: <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/Symposia/Burns/program.html>

*Editor's Note: AFC Folklife Specialist Nancy Groce was the coordinator of the symposium. ○*



*(L.-r.): Robin Naysmith, Scottish Government Counsellor for North America at the British Embassy, Peggy Bulger, Director of the American Folklife Center, Cate Newton, Director of Collections and Research at the National Library of Scotland, and Kurt Dewhurst, chairman of the AFC's Board of Trustees.*

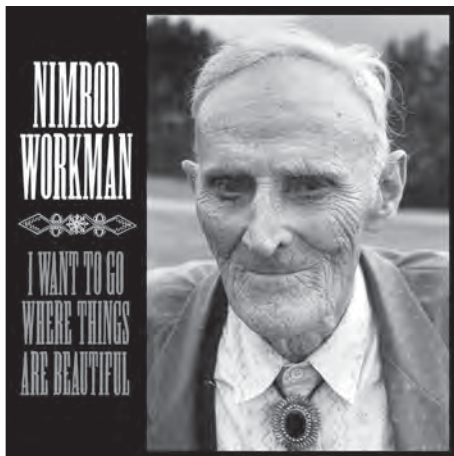


# “A Measure of Rascality”: AFC’s Nimrod Workman Recordings Go Digital.

By Stephen Winick

AFC’s collections include recordings of many legendary names in rural Appalachian folk music: Frank Proffitt, Flatt & Scruggs, Hazel Dickens, Uncle Dave Macon, Bascom Lamar Lunsford, and many, many others. Among these greats, one of the most outstanding is Nimrod Workman, whose unique recordings showcase soulful singing, an unusual repertoire, and interesting recollections of rural life. The AFC Archive contains dozens of recordings of Workman, most of them made by Mike Seeger in the 1980s. The majority of these recordings have recently been digitized. Some have become commercially available on CD, while many others can be heard only by visiting AFC.

Workman, winner of a 1986 National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, was named for his grandfather, a Cherokee Indian and Civil War veteran. The name was appropriate; the younger Nimrod was, first and foremost, a workman. He was a coal miner for over forty years, and a



Workman’s CD, *I Want to Go Where Things Are Beautiful*, contains twenty-three songs and four snippets of conversation from AFC 1988/029, the Mike Seeger Recordings 1988 Collection.

union activist who successfully lobbied for benefits to go to victims of black lung disease. He was also a seeker-out of songs both mundane and fantastic, and his exotic, biblical first name, Nimrod, gives a hint of his aptitude at song hunting. (In the Bible, Nimrod is described as “a mighty hunter before the Lord,” and for this reason, “Nimrod” was once a common English colloquialism for “hunter”; it is in this sense that it became an American name.)

By 1982, Workman was long retired from coal mining, and had become a well known figure in old-time music. He had released two LPs and several singles, and had even appeared in a number of films, including Michael Apted’s 1980 feature *Coal Miner’s Daughter*. But the majority of his repertoire was still undocumented, so Mike Seeger sought and received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, to record Workman’s songs and stories for posterity.

Recording Workman was particularly important, in Seeger’s view, because in many cases Workman’s versions of folksongs were unique. Seeger explained this in his grant report, citing Workman’s headstrong personality, lack of reliance on the written word, and what he called “a measure of rascality” as reasons why the singer made changes to his songs. “Nimrod takes songs and personalizes them, puts them into his own style,” Seeger wrote. “There is no doubt that most of his songs are living things.” Seeger recorded eighteen seven-inch reels of Workman, comprising somewhat more than ten hours of song and speech; he later donated them, along with hundreds of other tapes, to the American Folklife Center.



Nimrod Workman and his daughter Phyllis Boyens, mid-1970s. From the film *Nimrod Workman: To Fit My Own Category* by Scott Faulkner and Anthony Sloane. AFC Nimrod Workman CS file.

Of course, the general public can come to the Center’s reading room to hear many of these recordings. But in this case, they can also take some of them home. A selection of the recordings has been released to the public by a third-party producer, Nathan Salsburg. Salsburg, an employee of the Alan Lomax Archive, first came across Workman on a 45 rpm single in Lomax’s collection. He later said of the two songs on that record:

“I had never heard anything as starkly intimate and honest, bearing not a trace of romanticism, born as they were of decades of personal experience and hardship. I’m not indulging in hyperbole when I say that they scared me, and made me chilly and uncomfortable. But though they might have slightly repelled me, they were deeply moving.”

Salsburg, who is also a musician, a writer, and the host of the internet radio show *Root Hog or Die*, later heard about AFC’s recordings of Workman, and decided to use them on the debut CD of his record label, “2s and Fews.” Entitled *I Want to Go Where Things Are Beautiful*, the CD contains twenty-three songs and four snippets of conversation.

On the CD, you can hear the spry, sinewy, eighty-seven-year-old retired miner tell about his uncle Pete, who came over to the U.S. from England. You can hear him

describe his grandfather as a soldier “in the Rebel-Yankee war.” Most importantly, you can hear him sing classic old ballads mingled with love songs, spirituals, and his own compositions. His voice is a typical mountain voice, sharp and craggy. It’s a powerful voice from a singer who was still strong despite his advanced age; in fact, AFC staff member Jennifer Cutting remembers seeing Workman two years after these recordings were made, backstage at a folk festival, break-dancing with teenagers.



Mike Seeger, photographed in the Library’s Coolidge Auditorium in 2007 by Robert Corwin as part of the Robert Corwin Collection, AFC2007/023.

As Seeger noted, Workman often changed the words to his songs, so most listeners have never heard verses quite like his. His ballad “Lord Daniel” is a version of “Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard,” a song which dates at least to the time of Shakespeare, and probably earlier. Workman’s lyrics blend matter-of-fact English with romantic metaphor, creating such surprising lines as “another man’s in the bed with your wife, and both of their hearts is one.” Another of the CD’s highlights, “In the Spring of ’65,” is an American ballad about a party so raucous that the narrator and his friends are embarrassed

afterwards. Workman’s lines express both the horror and the humor of such public humiliation in a town where everyone knows one another’s business:

*“Come all you nosy women who  
scatters news about  
Don’t tell no tales upon us, we’re bad  
enough without.  
Don’t tell no tales upon us, to try to  
make a fuss  
You’ve been guilty of the same thing,  
pre-haps a whole lot worse.”*

Workman’s spirituals can both exalt and terrify. “Gabriel’s Trumpet” features the album’s title, “I want to go where things are beautiful,” as a prominent line; it paints a dazzling portrait of heaven. “Oh, Death,” on the other hand, is a chilling conversation between a sinner and Death himself, in which Death’s icy grip cannot be bargained, threatened, or begged away.

Some of Workman’s songs were written from scratch. The most famous of these is his heartbreaking autobiographical lyric, “42 Years,” in which he describes his own battles with black lung disease:

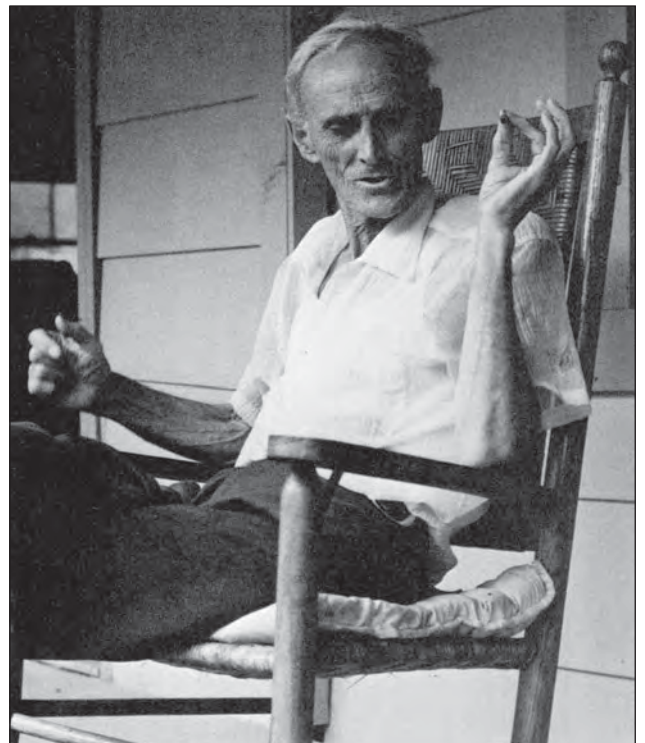
*My bones they did ache  
me, my kneecaps  
got bad  
Down on a hard rock, on  
a set of knee pads  
The motors were shifting,  
got sand in my hair  
Both lungs were broke  
down, from breathing  
bad air.*

Beyond what is on the CD release, the tapes in the Center contain many more hours of Workman’s song and speech, most of which were transferred to digital format at the same time as the material on the CD. That means you can hear Workman sing more iconic songs, such as “John Henry,” “Amazing Grace,” “Hog-Eyed Man,” and “Go Down, Moses”—but only

by visiting the American Folklife Center’s reading room.

While it was true that Workman suffered from black lung disease (to say nothing of the effects of his smoking and drinking), he still lived another twelve years after these recordings were made. He died in 1994, at the age of 99, with Seeger’s recordings still standing as the most extensive documentation of his repertoire. Workman was also documented on film by Alan Lomax, and AFC has much of that material as well.

As for the rest of Mike Seeger’s tapes, the four hundred or so hours of recordings he donated to the Archive feature such luminaries as Maybelle Carter, Bill Monroe, and Roscoe Holcomb, as well as Merle Travis, the Stanley Brothers, and Cousin Emmy...not to mention Seeger’s own band, The New Lost City Ramblers. Not all of this material has been transferred to reference tapes for researchers to hear, so the Center recommends that you send an email to [folklife@loc.gov](mailto:folklife@loc.gov), a few days before you plan to visit; a reference librarian will provide information about what can be made available. ○



Nimrod Workman ca. 1975. From the film *Nimrod Workman: To Fit My Own Category* by Scott Faulkner and Anthony Sloane. AFC Nimrod Workman CS file.



# Archie Green

(1917-2009)

With great sorrow, the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress (AFC) reports the death of Archie Green on March 22, 2009. Dr. Green, North America's most prominent scholar of labor-related folklore, has been an essential guiding force in the history of AFC. It was largely through his efforts that the Center was created. From 1969 to 1976, Green put his academic career on hold, to live in Washington, D.C. and lobby Congress for the passage of the American Folklife Preservation Act. This act, which created the AFC, was passed unanimously by Congress and signed by

President Ford in 1976. Green combined his sensitivity for working people with an abiding concern for democratic processes and a willingness to lobby for reforms. He was pragmatic and workmanlike, able to size up a job, break it into steps, roll up his sleeves, and get it done. All of these qualities, combined in one energetic advocate, made the American Folklife Center possible.

During his lobbying years, Green kept a brass plaque over the door of his office, marked "Citizens' Committee for an American Folklife Center." In February, 2009, he donated the plaque to the AFC,



Photo by Derek Green, August, 2007

*Archie Green wearing the Living Legend Award bestowed upon him by the Librarian of Congress.*

and it is now proudly displayed in the Center's main office. "Archie's key role in the establishment of the American Folklife Center makes him a cherished hero to all of us," said the Center's director, Peggy Bulger.

Born Aaron Green, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1917, Archie moved with his parents to Los Angeles, California, in 1922. He grew up in southern California, began college at UCLA, and transferred to the University of California at Berkeley, where he received a bachelor's degree in political science in 1939. He signed up for the Civilian Conservation Corps, and spent a year in a camp on the Klamath River, where he was a road builder and a firefighter. When his term of service was up, he returned to work in the San Francisco shipyards as a shipwright, and then served in the U.S. Navy during World War II. Returning once again to San Francisco after the war, he learned the carpentry trade and became a member of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, to which he belonged for over sixty-seven years; he was also a Journeyman Shipwright.

Green enrolled in graduate school in 1958, earning a Master of Library Science degree from the University of Illinois in 1960, and a Ph.D. in folklore from the University of Pennsylvania in 1968. He went on to a distinguished teaching career, during which he influenced many future



Photo by Carl Frieschauer

*Archie Green speaking in the Library's Great Hall, at a reception to mark the founding of the American Folklife Center, February 19, 1976.*

leaders of the discipline of folklore and folklife. He taught at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, (1960-1972), and at the University of Texas at Austin, (1975-1982). He earned teaching fellowships at several other institutions, including the Bingham Humanities Professorship at the University of Louisville in 1977, and a Woodrow Wilson Center fellowship in Washington, D.C., in 1978.

As a scholar, Green was best known for his work on occupational folklore and on early hillbilly music recordings. He combined his support for labor and his love of country music in the research that became his first book, *Only a Miner* (1972). He went on to write many other books: a collection of essays on laborlore (*Wobblies, Pile Butts, and Other Heroes*, 1993); a work on the stories of laborers (*Calf's Head & Union Tale*, 1996); a collection of essays on folklore (*Torching the Fink Books" and other Essays on Vernacular Culture*, 2001);

a description and analysis of tinsmiths' art, using examples from around the country (*Tin Men*, 2002); a monograph on millwrights in northern California over the twentieth century (*Millwrights in Northern California 1901-2002*, 2003); and a collection of essays on the traditional lore of the Sailor's Union of the Pacific (*Harry Lundeborg's Stetson and Other Nautical Treasures*, 2006). In addition to these books, Green published articles in *Appalachian Journal*, the *Journal of American Folklore*, *Labor's Heritage*, *Musical Quarterly*, and other periodicals and anthologies.

Green's most recent publication is *The Big Red Songbook* (2007), featuring the lyrics to the 190 songs included in the various editions of the Industrial Workers of the World's (IWW) Little Red Songbooks from 1909 to 1973. Green inherited this project from John Neuhaus, a machinist and IWW member who devoted years to collecting a nearly complete set of the

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 songbooks, sheet  
 als to Green, who  
 vowed to carry on  
 Neuhaus's vision of  
 a complete edition  
 of IWW songs.  
 and seminal figure  
 s public folklore.  
 ate at the AFL-CIO  
 the early 1970s,  
 resenting workers'  
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 supported folklife  
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 ublic folklore by the  
 Society.

ed as secretary  
 of the nonprofit Fund for Labor Culture  
 & History. Founded in July 2000, the  
 Fund has spearheaded several initiatives



Photo by David A. Taylor

Archie Green at the San Francisco waterfront, with his wife, Louanne, May 2000.

related to laborlore. For example, it has worked with the National Trust for Historic Preservation to identify labor landmarks in San Francisco and install commemorative plaques; supported the publication of books on roots music, labor songs and historic labor landmarks; prepared guides to films on skilled union craftsmen; and helped the United Mine Workers restore the Ludlow Monument in Colorado.

The Fund also sponsored a series of small conferences called "Laborlore Conversations," which brought together activists, trade unionists, scholars, and artists to discuss their various perspectives on workers' culture. The fourth of these conferences was sponsored by AFC and held at the Library of Congress on August 15-16, 2007. Green was unable to attend, but as part of the proceedings, he was awarded a Living Legend Award by the Librarian of Congress, and honored in a special statement by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi.

Green established an archive for his collected materials in the Southern Folklife Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he also deposited Neuhaus's original materials relating to the IWW. Green has also made contributions to AFC collections, including several reels of labor songs, recordings of his appearances at colloquia and symposia, and a series of interviews about his life and work conducted by AFC folklorist David Taylor.

Green is survived by his wife of 64 years, Louanne; three children, Derek, David, and Debra; several grandchildren; and countless students, friends, and admirers. ○

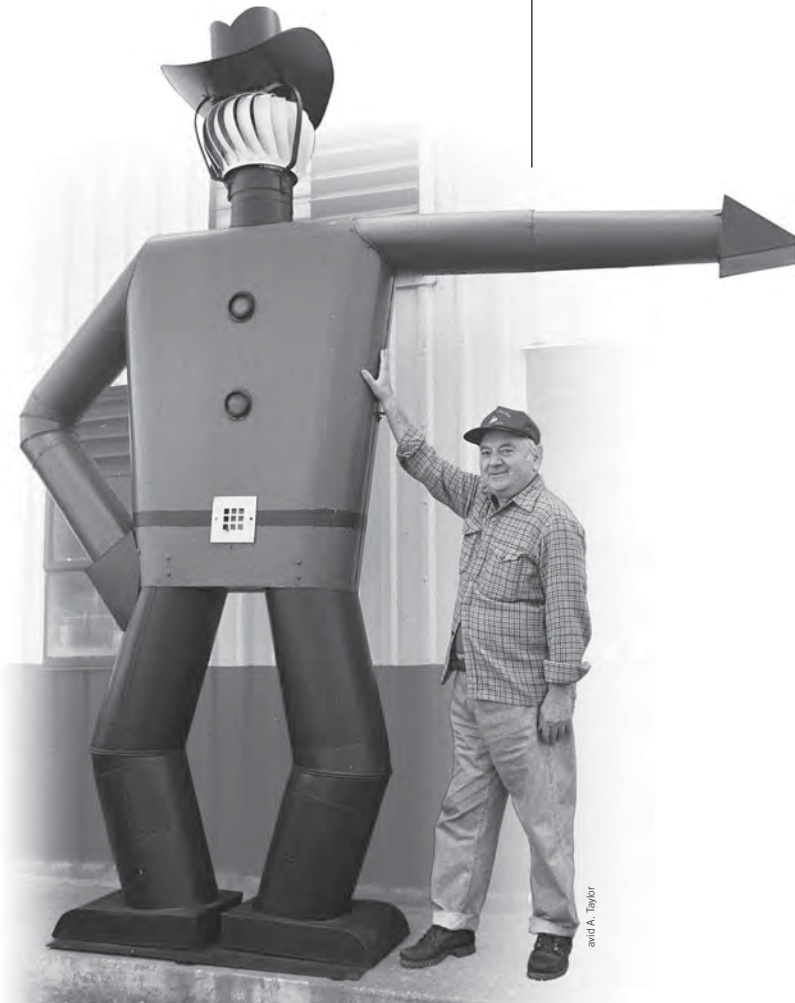


Photo by David A. Taylor

Archie Green with "Mr. Dixie", an 11-foot-tall tin man, at Dixie Sheet Metal Works, Falls Church, Virginia, in November 1995.



# Getting Inspired:

## The James Madison Carpenter Team Visits the Library of Congress

By Robert Walser

From Aberdeen (Scotland), Manchester, Sheffield, and London (England), and Minneapolis (U.S.), the transatlantic collaborators of the James Madison Carpenter project gathered in April 2008 at the American Folklife Center for a week of hands-on work with one of the most comprehensive collections of British folklore ever assembled by a single collector. Carpenter, an American folklorist and collector who visited England in 1928 and then again from 1929 to 1935, gathered an enormous legacy of folklife materials, including approximately one thousand ballad texts and eight hundred tunes of the Francis Child canon; five hundred sea songs and shanties; one thousand other ballads and songs from Britain and America; two hundred children's singing games, riddles, and nursery rhymes; three hundred British folk plays; miscellaneous examples of folktales, Cornish carols, and other genres; five hundred related photographic images; and forty drawings.

Carpenter realized the scope and importance of his collection. He transcribed and edited many of the songs, and attempted throughout his career to secure research grants to support their publication in book form. He was, however, unsuccessful in publishing the collection. In 1972, he sold it to the American Folklife Center. The chase at the time,

AFC staff also appreciated the scope and value of the collection, but did not have the resources to catalog such a large and varied collection at the item level. The present team was therefore formed, to complete the work Carpenter himself envisioned by cataloging, editing and finally publishing much of this outstanding collection.

The project began in 2002, when the Carpenter Project team began using a contemporary archival descriptive standard (Encoded Archival Description or EAD) to catalog the collection. For this work, members of the team used digital copies of collection materials. The resulting catalog, recently updated, is hosted by the Humanities Research Institute at the University of Sheffield and may be viewed at <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/carpenter>.

The Carpenter team is now directing its efforts toward preparing Carpenter's collection for publication. As with the



*The Carpenter Project team at work in the Folklife Reading Room*



*Sea shanty expert Robert Walser began*

*his part of the Carpenter presentation by singing a shanty from the collection*

cataloging work, team members initially used digital copies of Carpenter's cylinders, discs and paper-based materials to gather all the information about a particular singer and song and to render it in a clear and useful manner.

While images of pages and copies of sound recordings proved an excellent basis for most of the team's work, there were inevitably questions that each scholar could only answer by consulting the origi-



*The James Madison Carpenter Project team met with AFC staff in the Folklife Reading Room. (L.-r.): Eddie Cass, Thomas McKean, Jennifer Cutting (AFC), David Atkinson, Peggy Bulger (AFC), Robert Walser, Elaine Bradtke, and Julia Bishop.*

Photo by Stephen Winick.



*This photo of "Sam Bennett's Morris Dancers" has a list of names on the back, which will enable the team's dance specialist, Elaine Bradtke, to identify individual dancers.*

smudge, an inkblot or other stray mark.

Information penciled on the back of drawings and photographs furnished



*Thomas B. McKean is the team's specialist on Scotland and the Scottish ballad.*



*Folklorist Julia Bishop is the team's leader and project coordinator.*

some of the most exciting new information for the team. For example, Eddie Cass, whose specialty is folk drama, was thrilled to discover the address of artist George Baker, whose colorful drawings of characters from mummers' plays enliven the collection. This discovery will enable further research on this important contributor. Similarly, Elaine Bradtke's discovery of a list of names on the back of a photo

of "Sam Bennett's Morris

Dancers" identifies, for the first time, the fifteen dancers in this 1933 image, and again opens a door to further research.

Textual sleuth and ballad scholar David Atkinson valued seeing with his own eyes the different layers of corrections in the manuscript pages. Carpenter made multiple changes and editorial marks, often going over



*David Atkinson, an expert on English songs and ballads, is also the team's overall editor.*

the same song several times using several different pens. Seeing the originals made it possible for Atkinson to distinguish among Carpenter's writing instruments, which clarified the order and significance of Carpenter's revisions. Ultimately, this allows the team to distinguish what Carpenter believed to be the song's final form.

Looking ahead, members of the Carpenter team met with representatives of the Library's Performing Arts Encyclopedia project. They were delighted to learn that the standards-based work they did on the Carpenter catalog is superbly adaptable

to the uses the Library will have for the data. Not only will this work continue to serve users through the Sheffield site, but the data will be adapted for use in conjunction with the Library's efforts to put the entire collection online in the near future.

The trip was, for the Carpenter team, an extraordinary opportunity to delve into and deepen our understanding of the whole of the collection. Equally valuable was the time spent with transatlantic collaborators without whose help this work could never be done.

For all the conservation, cataloging, administration, hospitality and culinary assistance, the entire UK-based Carpenter Project team give hearty thanks to our colleagues at the Library of Congress, and especially the crew at the American Folklife Center.



*Eddie Cass is the team's specialist in folk drama.*

*Robert Walser is an independent scholar living in Minnesota. He is a member of the Carpenter Collection Team, based at the Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, Scotland. ○*



# Henrietta Yurchenco

(1916-2007)

By Nancy Groce

It is appropriate that folklorists, who often specialize in the study of legends, have some of their own. Henrietta Yurchenco, the pioneering folklorist and ethnomusicologist, who passed away at the age of 91 on December 10, 2007, was one of ours. An indomitable fieldworker, scholar, educator, broadcaster, reviewer, and producer, Yurchenco inspired and influenced generations of researchers. Through her broadcasts, albums, and recordings, she introduced folk and world music to millions of Americans. Furthermore, she greatly enriched the collections of the American Folklife Center through the donation of her valuable field recordings.

Born Henrietta Weiss, she was known as Yentl to what she called her “nonconformist” immigrant family in New Haven, Connecticut. She studied music at both Yale and The New School’s Mannes Conservatory, and developed into a gifted pianist. In 1936, she married the Argentine-born painter Basil Yurchenco and moved to New York



Henrietta Yurchenco with University of Maryland graduate student Sergio Navarrete Pellicer, at the Library in 1993.



Henrietta Yurchenco recording interviews in Loiza Aldea, Puerto Rico, 1969.

City, where she was soon immersed in a heady mix of arts and left-leaning politics that characterized the Depression-era metropolis. That same year, she was hired as a staff member by municipal radio station WYNC, and quickly initiated some of the first regularly scheduled broadcasts of folk and ethnic music. During the ensuing years, her shows on WYNC and WBAI featured leading folk performers such as Woody Guthrie, Aunt Molly Jackson, Lead Belly, Pete Seeger, and a very young Bob Dylan, as well as scores of talented ethnic singers and musicians that she discovered in urban clubs, restaurants, community houses, and union halls.

In 1941, Yurchenco and her husband traveled to Mexico, where an initial interest in hearing some local music developed into a lifelong dedication to fieldwork. The diminutive Yurchenco spent the next five years traveling on muleback, carrying

hundreds of pounds of recording equipment, to document the pre-Hispanic music and traditions of fourteen mountain and desert tribes in remote areas of Mexico and Guatemala. Her subsequent fieldwork trips, some of which were supported by the Library of Congress, took her to Spain, Puerto Rico, Columbia, Ecuador, Morocco, and Ireland.

Among her many books and articles is the classic study, *In Their Own Voices: Women In Judeo-Hispanic Song and Story*, and *A Mighty Hard Road: The Woody Guthrie Story* (1970), which she wrote with assistance from Guthrie’s widow Marjorie. Her recordings resulted in more than fifteen releases for numerous prestigious labels, including the Library of Congress, Smithsonian Folkways, Nonesuch, Global Village, and Rounder. In 2003,



Henrietta Yurchenco in Mexican native dress, in Oaxaca, Mexico, in 1942.

Yurchenco recounted her eventful life and experiences in her engaging book *Around the World in 80 Years*.

In addition to her career as a fieldworker and broadcaster, in 1966, Yurchenco joined the faculty of The City College of New York, where she taught courses on world music and ethnomusicology. Near her 90th birthday, Professor Emerita Yurchenco began a new partnership with broadcaster Eli Smith, many years her junior, to launch *Down Home Radio*, an innovative Internet world music program.

Until shortly before her death, Yurchenco was an active member of New York’s academic and music scene. When I last visited with her at her Chelsea apartment in June, 2007, to record a segment for *Down Home Radio*, she looked a bit frail, but nevertheless was busy planning her next field trip. As always, she was full of fun, insight, and inspiration.

Henrietta Yurchenco is survived by her son, Peter, and two grandchildren. ○



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Photo by Megan Halstead

*Actor Sean Connery, Associate Librarian for Library Services Deanna Marcum, Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond, and AFC Director Peggy Bulger took a tour of some of the Library's facilities during AFC's Robert Burns symposium. See the story on page 3 for more information about the symposium.*