

## THE ARCHIVE OF FOLK SONG IN THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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Archive of Folk Song*

*Mississippi John Hurt plays in a recording session at the Library of Congress, March 17, 1964. Present in the Recording Laboratory are Mrs. Rae Korson, former Head of the Archive of Folk Song, and Joseph C. Hickerson, Reference Librarian of the Archive of Folk Song. Photo by the Library of Congress.*



Field collections are the lifeblood of folklore studies. Since 1928 the Archive of Folk Song in the Library of Congress at Washington, D.C., has been the coordinating agency for the gathering and preservation of our country's folk heritage. At present it is not only the leading American institution, but one of the world's principal establishments in the fields of traditional music and lore. Originally established in the Library's music division to house collections of American folk songs, the Archive has expanded so that it now contains 200,000 manuscript pages and 20,000 unpublished field and interview recordings of every facet of folklore from every state and many foreign countries.

The Archive's holdings have resulted from and contributed to the researches of virtually every important American folklorist and ethnomusicologist in the last 42 years, including a succession of illustrious scholars who have headed the Archive: Robert W. Gordon, John A. Lomax, B. A. Botkin, Duncan Emrich, and Mrs. Rae Korson. Its collections have served as a source of inspiration for composers and have contributed authentic folk songs to numerous anthologies and school music books. Since 1942 it has brought to the public the authentic sounds of American folk music through



*The Bogtrotters, a string band from Galax, Virginia, were recorded by the Archive of Folk Song several times between 1937 and 1940. The musicians are, from left to right: Uncle Eck Dunford, fiddle; Fields Ward, Guitar; Wade Ward, banjo; Davy Crockett Ward, fiddle; Dr. W. P. Davis, autoharp.*  
*Photo by the Library of Congress.*



*Robert Winslow Gordon. Head, Archive of Folk Song, 1928-1932.*  
*Photo by the Library of Congress.*

its series of recordings issued for public sale, thereby supplying the postwar folksong revival with some of its standard repertoire.

The works of some of this century's most important folk musicians were documented by the Archive at the earliest stages of their public careers—Leadbelly and Woody Guthrie, to name but two. The Archive's interviews of jazz innovator Jelly Roll Morton pioneered the concept of recorded oral history. In the 1930s the success of the Archive's collecting procedures sparked a number of government-sponsored collecting ventures. The establishment in the early 1940s of the Library's recording laboratory advanced the processes of cylinder-to-disc and disc-to-tape copying, and the procedures for physical preservation of recordings

were established and refined. Since then other recorded collections have come to the Archive for preservation, including more than 3,500 cylinders of American Indian music gathered over the years for the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology by Frances Densmore and others.

Since the late 1940s the Archive has served as the focal point of a network of regional and university folklore archives, thus dispersing the increased collecting activities into useful channels and bringing folklore materials closer to their locales for study and enjoyment. With its experimentation in computer operations, the Archive is advancing toward comprehensive automated cataloging of its vast holdings. The Archive staff is active in bibliography work and has prepared to date more than 130 lists on various folklore topics. Scholars, students, educators, and performers come from all parts of the world to use the Archive's reading room and listen to its recordings. The reading room houses all the basic published works in the fields of American folk songs and folklore, and the Archive's files contain probably the largest institutional collection of folklore journals, magazines, and newsletters in the country.

The Archive is open to the public Monday through Friday from 8:30 A.M. to 5 P.M. Its offices and reading room are in the northeast corner on the ground floor of the Library's main building, at First Street and Independence Avenue, Southeast, in Washington. There one can obtain a list of the 61 LP recordings available for sale, (also available by mail from: The Archive of Folksong, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540) listen to age-old ballads and fiddle tunes, trace a folk song or tale through its myriad variations, take notes from an assortment of instruction books and tune collections, peruse the latest issue of one's local folklore society publication, or simply obtain a feeling for the breadth of American folk culture, as preserved at the Archive of Folk Song.