THE ARCHIVE OF FOLK SONG IN THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Rae Korson

The Archive of Folk Song in the Library of Congress (originally known as the Archive of American Folk Song) was established as a section within the Music Division in 1928 with gift funds from four distinguished Americans: Andrew Mellon, John Barton Payne, Mrs. Adolph C. Miller, and Mrs. Alvin A. Parker. Additional donations and grants from the Carnegie Corporation, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Rockefeller Foundation supported it until 1937, when Congress made an appropriation for one position. Since then the staff has been maintained by Congressional appropriations. The present staff consists of the Head of the Archive, Mrs. Rae Korson, and a Reference Assistant, Donald L. Leavitt.

Robert W. Gordon was the first Archivist and served from 1928 to 1932. He was succeeded by the late John A. Lomax, who was Honorary Consultant and Curator from 1928 until his death in 1948. In 1937, his son, Alan Lomax, was appointed Assistant-in-Charge. Alan Lomax resigned in 1942, and Dr. B. A. Botkin was appointed Chief. In 1945 he resigned and was succeeded by Dr. Duncan B. M. Emrich. Dr. Emrich resigned in 1955 and he, in turn, was succeeded by Mrs. Rae Korson, the present Head of the Archive. The work of the section was materially aided by the establishment in 1940 of a Recording Laboratory, which was made possible by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The Recording Laboratory has its own staff.

As its nucleus, the Archive had the private collection of Robert W. Gordon and 286 records collected by John and Alan Lomax. Recorded mostly in the 1930's under government auspices, the Lomaxes collected more than 3,000 records, the largest single unit in the Archives. Also in the 1930's, the Archive enriched and strengthened its collection by taking full advantage of an unprecedented opportunity to engage in large-scale recording expeditions with assistance from foundations and government agencies, including the Works Progress Administration and the Department of State. Since this time there have also been many other important recording expeditions by outstanding collectors.

The two largest individual repertoires of traditional folk songs were contributed by the late Mrs. Emma Dusenbury of Mena, Arkansas, who sang 125 songs, and Bascom Lamar Lunsford of Leicester, North Carolina, who has recorded 330 titles.

The Archive accessioned 4,233 field recordings in the first dozen years of its existence. The recordings were catalogued with the assistance of the WPA (together with the National Youth Administration). The song titles were published in three volumes of the Check-List of Recorded Songs in the English Language in the Archive of American Folk Song to July 1940 (now out of print).

The Archive's holdings include approximately 16,000 items in various forms—cylinders, 12-inch discs, 16-inch discs, spools of wire, and reels of tape. These contain 60,000 selections of folk song, folk music, folk tales, and other types of folklore.

In 1948, the Smithsonian Institution transferred to the Library of Congress the Frances Densmore collection of 3,591 cylinders of rare Indian music.

In addition to the material from almost every region of the United States, the Archive's recordings include specimens of traditional music recorded among many of the peoples of Latin America, Europe, Africa, and Asia.

The Archive houses 180,000 sheets of manuscript material which was transferred by the Federal Writers' Project, WPA, when it ceased its operations in the field of folklore.

Also available to the researcher is a collection of the standard volumes of folklore and folk music; books, journals, and periodicals.

(To be continued in the next issue)