DOCUMENTING RECORDINGS

George List

It is the exception rather than the rule for an archive to receive a collection of recordings of folklore or folk music that is completely and thoroughly documented. Although field recordings unaccompanied by proper documentation are often almost worthless for scholarly study, archives continue to receive such collections. Of course, the necessity of developing and maintaining proper informant-collector relationships must take precedence, and the exigencies of the situation often preclude either properly identifying the items recorded, or recording the documentation directly upon the tape itself. However, the collector will usually find it possible to fill in the information needed in later interviews. This can then be transferred to tape at the collector's leisure or preserved in the form of written notes.

When individuals collect recordings in the field under the sponsorship of the Indiana University Archives of Folk and Primitive Music, they are provided with a set of instructions which it is hoped will assist them in properly identifying and documenting such recordings. Of course, the necessity of developing and maintaining proper informant-collector relationships must take precedence, and the exigencies of the situation often preclude either properly identifying the items recorded, or recording the documentation directly upon the tape itself. However, the collector will usually find it possible to fill in the information needed in later interviews. This can then be transferred to tape at the collector's leisure or preserved in the form of written notes.

ARCHIVES OF FOLK AND PRIMITIVE MUSIC

Instructions to Collectors

General procedures:

1. Since the relation of the collector to the informant is a personal matter and subject to constant change, it will probably be impossible for the collector to organize all the documentation in writing during the collecting process.

2. This can be done later when the informant is not present. Should further documentation be needed, this information can be secured during further interviews and can be added as time permits.

3. In writing out notes, the collector should take care to correlate the written material with the recorded item to which it pertains, by use of the announced tape and item number.

4. It may be simpler, in many cases, to announce on the tape all the information secured, rather than to put it in writing. If this is done, all proper names or other words whose spelling may not be clear should be spelled out.

It will not always be possible to secure all the information asked for in these instructions, nor are all of the items listed pertinent in every circumstance. The collector should use his best judgment and make as comprehensive notes as he finds possible. However, he should remember that it is almost impossible to over-document a recorded item or a group of recordings.

Identifying items on the tape:

Each tape should be given a number. This number should be announced at the beginning of the tape and should be followed by an announcement giving the type of materials being collected, the place, date, and name of the collector.

Each item on the tape — whether a tale, riddle, proverb, song, instrumental piece, or a conversation not concerning a preceding or following item — should be given a separate announced number. For example, the first tape should begin with the announcement: "Tape number one, (announcement). . . . This should be followed by the announcement "one, point one," and then the first item should be recorded. The second item should then be preceded with the announcement "one, point two," and so on.

Recording speed of tape:

Speech may be recorded at 3 3/4 ips. However, music of any kind should be recorded at 7 1/2 ips. Do not move back and forth between the two speeds on the same tape or tape track. Should both music and speech be recorded, use 7 1/2 ips throughout.

It would be useful if the tape speed used were announced at the beginning of the tape. A pitch pipe "A" should be sounded at least once on each tape, and more frequently if there is some possibility of variation in the electrical supply. The pitch pipe should be sounded after a song, not before, so as not to influence the singer's pitch.

Information needed for general cataloging purposes:

a. Language and/or tribe
b. General geographical area (country or region)
c. More specific geographical area (state or province)
d. Name(s) of collector(s)
e. Date or dates when material was collected
f. Names of sponsoring institutions and/or expeditions.

Specific information needed for cataloging individual items:

a. Title and/or first text line in the original language, plus translation when necessary and if possible. Should the singer's title differ from that customarily given to the song, give both titles, identifying each.

b. Name(s) of informant(s)
c. Informant's age and sex
d. Exact place and date item was collected
e. Function and character of the item recorded (ballad, work song, skipping rope rhyme, etc.)
f. Instruments used, if any, and by whom played
g. Solo, ensemble, chorus, accompaniment, etc.
h. Should there be a defect in the recording, this should be indicated. Background noises should be identified.

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DOCUMENTING RECORDINGS (cont.)

1. Should the tape contain copies of commercial discs, the name of the recording company and the disc numbers should be given and all other material appearing on the label should be copied, i.e., title, performers' names, etc. Translations of this material when not in English should be secured it at all possible.

Background information:

It would be useful if as much of the following background material as possible were provided:

a. Family relationships, ethnic background, and history of informant. This might include his present address, other places of habitation past and present, place of birth, and occupation. Is he of a tribe, nationality, or language group other than that of the culture in which the material was collected? What are the names of his parents and grandparents and their places of birth?

b. Where did the informant learn the song or tale? At approximately what date, and from whom? Has the informant seen the item in print?

c. Descriptions of games, dances, customs, or ceremonies of which the item may be a part.

d. Description of the instruments used and the manner of their playing.

e. Any other anthropological, sociological, or technical information concerning the items collected.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

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