THE FOLKLORE AND FOLK MUSIC Archivist

folktales ballads legends dances proverbs superstitions chant riddle
children's games marriage songs myths rhymes folk instruments instr
play party lullabies festivals tall tales folk lyrics cures jests teasing songs drea

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PROBLEMS OF ARCHIVES

Thelma G. James

Problems of archiving texts collected in American folklore are complicated by a number of factors. Chief among these is a lack of central registry for the many kinds of collecting activity and archiving programs currently being carried on. The American Folklore Society has taken an important first step in listing the state and regional societies, but communication between them on the above problems is limited to rather casual knowledge of work being done by individuals.

The Committee on Archiving was established to determine the number and kind of archives and their systems of classification. Also, it was hoped that there might be developed some principles of archiving that would be of national usefulness. Two years ago letters asking for specific information were sent to all the collectors and institutions known to be engaged in archiving their materials. The replies showed an almost complete absence of agreement on principles and practices. Subsequently, we developed a decimal division system at Wayne State University and sent copies of it to our former correspondents. Reactions ranged from reserved admiration to horror. The extreme detail was designed to serve a purpose of rather clear identification in areas where specific numbering is lacking. For the folktale, the Thompson Tale and Motif numbers are always standard. But what standards can be as widely accepted for proverb, riddle, superstition, charm, folk medicine, children's games, weather lore—to name but a few of the areas? When Professor Wayland Hand's projected Dictionary of American Popular Beliefs and Superstitions is completed, there will be a definitive identification system established. Meantime, his edition of the Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore, Volume V, Superstitions, has to serve. Ray B. Browne's Popular Beliefs and Practices from Alabama (University of California Press, 1958) is a valuable extension of the Frank C. Brown items.

Although Archer Taylor's Proverbial Comparisons and Similes from California (University of California Press, 1954) is proving, by virtue of its early publication, to be extremely helpful, we may have to await the publication of Professor Margaret Bryant's nation-wide study of the proverb under the sponsorship of the American Dialect Society.

The riddle, in English, is superbly classified by use of Archer Taylor's English Riddles from Oral Tradition (University of California Press, 1951). The riddles of other peoples are well collected as is indicated in the Preface to Hull and Taylor's A Collection of Irish Riddles (University of California Press, 1955).

For the English ballad, the Child numbers and additions thereto will suffice. A recent valuable help is G. Malcolm Laws' American Balladry from British Broadsides (American Folklore Society, 1957). For the ballad tunes, as for all folk music, we have a great need of more specific identification systems. For folk dance acceptable choreographic notation seems to be developing, and Gertrude Prokosch Kurath's excellent article "Dance: Folk and Primitive" (Standard Dictionary of Folklore, I, pp. 276-296) will continue to be a basis for structural and functional classification.

In short, we may have been fortunate in being late in developing a series of national archive classifications in the United States. It seems increasingly correct that the archive systems should evolve from the recognized standard studies in each field, rather than to have archival problems determine the trend of the practices. This brief discussion points up the necessity for authoritative study in all of the folklore fields recognized in this country, and ultimately to a need for a far clearer definition of folklore itself. If we are to continue to move in the direction of broader interpretations of the term to include much of folk culture and craft, we may need to copy the practices of the Swedish and Irish Archives which, up to now, cannot be adopted without almost destructive adaptations. Furthermore, if we are to be concerned with aspects of description of function, of analysis of the informant's role, of regional and family environmental and historical factors, we face problems hitherto unmentioned in American archiving.

Ultimately, the function of the archiving process

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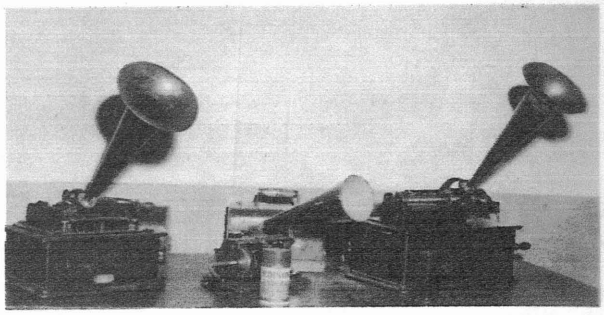
A SHORT HISTORY OF THE CYLINDER PHONOGRAPH

George List

As originally developed by Thomas Edison in 1877 the phonograph was a very crude apparatus indeed. A sheet of tinfoil was wrapped around a drum which was rotated by hand. The tinfoil was acted upon by rigidly fixed cutting and playback styli attached to a diaphram. Although this machine stirred up considerable interest it had little practical value since the reproduction was extremely poor and the speed inconstant. After several years of experimentation Chicester A. Bell and Charles Sumner Tainter applied in 1885 for a patent on the graphaphone, an improved version of Edison's phonograph, in which the tinfoil was replaced by wax coated cardboard cylinders. The loosely mounted styli, in later development called the "floating" styli, permitted a higher degree of fidelity in reproduction. As commercial exploitation of the graphaphone began Edison devised an improved phonograph following the lead of Bell and Tainter. His principal improvement was the solid wax cylinder which could be shaved and re-used.

The new industry thus established, the manufacture and distribution of cylinder recorder-players and cylinder records, developed very rapidly. The first models were operated by a foot treadle but the equipment was soon provided with electric motors powered by storage batteries. However, the apparatus was bulky, awkward and expensive. Neither the graphaphone nor phonograph received much acceptance as office dictating machines but were enormously successful as coin-operated "juke boxes" of their day and a wide variety of commercial cylinders of popular music were manufactured for use in this fashion.

Ethnologists were quick to seize upon the advantages offered by the phonograph. J. Walter Fewkes was apparently the first ethnologist to use the newly developed equipment in field recording of the Pasamaquoddy Indians on the Bay of Fundy in 1889. ("Contributions to Pasamaquoddy Folk-lore," Journal of American Folklore, October-December, 1890). In succeeding years he recorded the Zunis and the Hopis at Walpi. Benjamin I. Gilman, who published studies of the recordings collected by Fewkes, informs us ("Hopi Songs," A Journal of American Ethnology and Archeology, Vol. V, pp. 28-29, 1908) that Fewkes' first recordings were made with a phonograph operated by a treadle and that he later used a machine operated by a battery-powered electric motor. The use of the phonograph in collecting spread very rapidly. Comparative musicologists of the Berlin school, Carl Stumpf, E. M. von Hornbostel and O. Abraham of the Psychologisches Institut at the University of Berlin, were publishing articles based on folk and primitive music recorded on phonograph cylinders by the turn of the century.



Spring-driven cylinder phonographs in the collection of the Archives of Folk and Primitive Music. From left to right: Edison Standard Phonograph, 1898; Columbia Graphaphone, 1897; and Edison Home Phonograph, 1903.

In 1894 the American Graphaphone Company introduced spring-driven machines suitable for home use. Two years later Edison began manufacture of a similarly operated phonograph. The spring-driven equipment was lighter, more portable and inexpensive. These phonographs soon came into tremendous vogue. In addition to mass production in the United States large scale production was developed in France by the Pathé brothers. Manufacture also spread to England and Germany. The new machines were a boon to ethnologists. They were very light and, requiring no electric supply, could be carried almost anywhere as long as care was exercised to protect the wax cylinders from extreme temperatures.

(To be continued in the next issue)

PROBLEMS OF ARCHIVES (cont.)

is to make clear the contents of any archive so that the holder, knowing his own resources, may develop them, exchange items with collectors and scholars, and thus fill in the details of the national holdings. Thus, there emerges the necessity for establishment and acceptance of a nation-wide system, known and used by archives, large and small, and into which new materials will fit easily, and in the use of which students may be trained.

Experimentally, the various systems sent in response to inquiry are being tested in the Archives of Wayne State University.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The response to the first issue of THE FOLKLORE AND FOLK MUSIC ARCHIVIST has been very gratifying. We offer our sincere thanks to the many readers who were kind enough to write to us. Your good wishes and interesting comments are much appreciated. Further comments, suggestions or contributions will be most welcome.

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