The Music Hunter's Quarry from a Trotting Horse

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In 1991 the Laura Boulton Foundation awarded a grant to the Archives of Traditional Music for the purpose of hiring a librarian to catalog the sound recordings from the Boulton Collection. The cataloging was to appear in the national online union catalog of the Online Computer Library Center, Inc. (OCLC), as well as in Indiana University's online catalog, IO. I began work on the Boulton Collection as cataloger in February of 1992.

The Laura Boulton Collection has been distributed among the following institutions: Columbia University, the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Mathers Museum of World Cultures and the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University. The part of the Laura Boulton Collection housed at the Archives consists of over 2,500 reels of audio tape, and about 95 cubic feet of notes, letters, manuscripts, photographs, and slides.

Manuscripts, notes, and letters comprise the bulk of the non-sound documents, and much of this serves to assist in identifying the material found on the recordings. When I joined the staff at the Archives, the written documents had been given a preliminary processing, and were organized according to subject matter. This lightened my task of searching for appropriate documentation to the sound recordings.

Laura Boulton's recordings exist in different institutions in several different generations and playback formats. Housed at the Archives of Traditional Music are Boulton's personal copies of her collection of recordings that she had originally recorded on cylinder, disc, or tape, and had sold or donated to other institutions. These tapes can be divided into two large categories: 1) tapes made for Boulton's personal use and study, including field recordings made by other collectors, radio broadcasts, lectures, and commercial recordings, and 2) copies of her own field recordings. My principal task is to identify and catalog the field recordings.

Essentially, cataloging the sound recordings of the Boulton Collection centers around providing a description of the contents of each subgrouping, or collection, of tapes. The tapes are generally grouped according to their association with a specific expedition, geographic location, culture group, or recording date. Although there is usually some written documentation that corresponds to a collection of tapes, it has been discovered on more than one occasion that some sections of the documentation conflict with the actual material on parts of the tapes. Therefore, some random listening to the tapes has been necessary to provide descriptions that will be of value to future users of the collection.

Although listening to a few tapes in each collection makes the cataloging process longer, the cataloging information should ultimately be more accurate and useful for the researcher. Listening has also provided me with a wonderful opportunity to become acquainted with Laura Boulton through the examination of her work. The title of her autobiography, *The Music Hunter: The Autobiography of a Career* (Doubleday, 1969), provides an apt description of her profession, since from 1929 to 1979 she was truly a hunter of music. She was among those who were ethnomusicologists long before that word came into use. Exposure to the tapes in the Boulton collection causes one to realize that Laura Boulton had seen a number of cultures before they became permanently changed by the technology of the modern world.

Because I am a cataloger and not a researcher, I do not have the luxury of exploring each collection in depth. Rather, I have the pleasure of surveying the entire collection "from a trotting horse." I examine a collection long enough to be able to describe and summarize what is there, and then I must move on to the next collection.

Just as the radio provides the listener the freedom to imagine what is being described, the Laura Boulton tapes have provided with me with dozens of imaginary voyages through time and space, allowing me to witness in part those events, people, and scenes that have gone by and will never be again. I have caught a very faint glimpse of Malawi in 1929 through a call-and-response song of the Ngoni as it appears through the surface noise of the copies of cylinder recordings. I found the rhythm of the four-part Zulu songs recorded in South Africa in 1947 and 1948 to be particularly infectious. I was able to hear recordings of a Cambodia and a Vietnam in 1950, countries that had yet to know what it meant to become victims of a bloody war. I was transported to Bulgaria and Romania in 1959 to hear songs with occasional dissonant harmonies, frenzied, delirious folk dances, and music in uneven meter. I felt the forlorn melancholy in the unaccompanied funeral song for a tribal chief, recorded in the Northwest coast in 1942.

Other parts of the world represented in the Laura Boulton Collection that I have "viewed" with my ears include India, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Ethiopia, Ghana, Tanzania, Angola, Greece, Yugoslavia, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Malaysia, Mozambique, and numerous locations in North and South America. As I continue to catalog additional collections, my list of "world travels" will lengthen to include places like Turkey, Spain, Portugal, Hungary, Micronesia, Tahiti, and Papua New Guinea. With the aid of the staff, bibliographic records of these collections will appear within the next year.