

## The Early Days of the Archives\*

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I have not prepared a paper, but I shall attempt to describe the early days of the Archives as best I can.

I was director of the Archives of Traditional Music for 22 years and I have been retired from that position for 22 years. The Archives was founded in 1936 at Columbia University by George Herzog and came to Indiana University in 1948 when Herzog was employed. I took over the Archives in 1954 in September while Herzog was on leave undergoing psychiatric care. I was given two assistants and told to copy as many of the recordings as I could on tape. I guess the university was afraid that Columbia University would ask for the archives to be returned. I was immediately faced with a host of problems. In the years following the Second World War, universities were short on space and used temporary buildings. Part of the Archives was stored in a quonset hut in the parking lot next to Maxwell Hall and the other part in a frame building near the old fieldhouse. The main heat pipe came up in the room where the cylinders were stored and the temperature was close to ninety degrees. I got a thermometer and kept a daily record of the temperature. I went to see Dean John Ashton about it and managed to get the Archives transferred elsewhere—into one setting. We went either to a frame building to the east just called “A” where we had two rooms, or to the basement of an old frat house which no longer exists. I don’t remember which came first.

Finding which recording was which was a problem. There was a catalog of collections, but it was incomplete in that no locations were given. In some cases the name of the collector was also omitted. As we worked through the catalog and the recordings, we found that the catalog was in error in many cases. It apparently had been copied over and over again from a card index that Herzog had in his office and had never been proofread. When Herzog returned to campus he resented the fact that the university had taken the archives from him and was uncooperative in every respect. He would not identify any of the key collector’s names that were missing and would not allow access to the sheet catalogs made by the collectors which he kept in his office. His reason for not providing them was that his own research was written on the catalogs. After a good deal of negotiations we finally arranged to copy one of his notebooks of the catalog at a time and give him a chance to remove his research. In all of our copying, we found only two small transcriptions in the

entire set of catalogs. The catalogs were copied by the thermo-fax method which produced very thin sheets. These had to be stapled on the back of thicker paper so they would not tear.

Upon investigation, I found that Herzog had treated the archives as his own personal research tool and had not allowed anybody else to use it except the occasional graduate student. I was determined to make it a public archive. My first step was to develop a contract to be sent to the collectors. I wrote to various museums to get copies of their contracts and worked out one in which there were three options for the collector. Option one gave the complete use of the collection to the university. For the second option, the collector kept all rights except those for commercial use, in which case he was to negotiate for payment. Option three kept all rights for the collector. In all cases, however, the university had the right to use the material on campus and in any university application. I sent these out to all the collectors I could locate and a firestorm was produced. It seems that Herzog had received many of the collections with a promise to study them and publish the results. This he did not do and when the collector asked to have the collection returned, he refused to answer. I managed to retain the greater part of the collections by promising to send the collector free copies on tape.

The greatest problem was with the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. Herzog had received all their cylinders with the promise that he would catalog them. This he never did and never returned them. My dean took to the responsibility of negotiating with the American Museum of Natural History when he was in New York and managed to have us retain the recordings again with the promise of making copies available to them. After a year or two, I was given more assistants and a half-time secretary so I could carry on the work. In the meantime, I faced another problem. At the time I was required to submit all orders for our equipment to the head of the electronics division for approval. He would not allow us to buy anything but Pentron which at that time was a very inferior piece of equipment, mainly for amateurs. Among other things, it would not erase properly. So I complained to the dean about my problem. The head of the electronics division said that I was not trained in electronics and couldn’t tell a good recording from a bad recording and that all the copies should be made in his department instead of in the Archives. When asked about the Pentron tape recorders, he said that they erased completely. This gave me my opportunity. We had one piece of equipment which had come with the archives, a



tape recorder called, I believe Ecotape. I got a disc of a Wagner opera and recorded a passage which went from very soft up to a terrific climax and recorded it on the Ecotape. Then with my assistant to help me, I carried the Ecotape and a Pentron into the dean's office. We patched the Ecotape into the Pentron and recorded onto the Pentron the recording of Wagner. We then erased the recording on the Pentron, rewound and replayed it. The recording was still there, just slightly muffled. The dean was impressed with the demonstration and asked me what sort of equipment I wanted. I asked for Ampexes, which were the top quality machines at the time. He said I could have them and I did not need to go through the electronics division in the future. The next time I met the head of electronics, I told him to never accuse a musician of having a tin ear.

After three or four years, the archives was given permanent quarters in the basement of Maxwell Hall and I was allowed to plan the entire set-up including a recording laboratory. This included two matched Ampexes, a patch panel and patch cords with which we could patch any of the recordings, any of the equipment to the Ampexes, or one Ampex to the other. There was a turntable with a large diamond stylus which could play aluminum discs without hurting them. We also had two electrified players for cylinders; these were from the Dictaphone type and they took short cylinders and long cylinders. We also had a Webster wire recorder. The only piece of equipment we didn't have was a Pierce wire recorder and we never received any Pierce wire in so it didn't matter.

In order to augment our collections, we began to publicize the Archives. I founded a little journal called *The Folklore and Folk Music Archivist* and we sent out a free copy to about a thousand people for the first three or four years. Then the university decided we should charge for it, so we changed the format and charged two dollars. We had about two hundred and fifty subscriptions. As I remember, every year we got two dollar bills from the Bodleian Library at Oxford University in England.

We also had a limited supply of equipment to loan including a Nagra tape recorder. I prepared a short article on collecting which we published and distributed to those people who wanted to collect. Herzog had called the Archives, The Archives of Folk and Primitive Music. The Asia Society asked me to try to prepare an album of Oriental music for high school use. I wrote to Ravi Shankar, the Indian musician and asked if I could use some of his recordings. He wrote back that he was neither folk nor primitive and refused. I took the hint and changed the name of the archives to the Archives of Traditional

Music. I was glad to see that later the International Folk Music Council got the same idea.

I divided the recordings into three classes: the originals, the earliest copies, which we called EC, and the Archives Tape Library—ATL. The archives tape library consisted entirely of copies that were available to anybody to listen to in the Archives, though they couldn't be taken out. We had special tape players, which would not erase when people listened to the ATLs. In making the ATLs, a student assistant announced strip numbers on the tape for each recording. They announced a number in sequence. These numbers were written on the original catalogs along with the number of the ATL and copies of the catalogs were made to use with the ATLs. The original catalog and any documentation that accompanied it was filed separately in different files. Each collection was given a number. The number consisted of the year and then the number of the collection as it was received during that year and then a capital letter; F for field, C for commercial, and R for radio. In addition, I developed shelflists for the location of the recordings. These were coordinated with the number of the collection. Since I could not listen to all the ATLs, I appointed the best student as sort of a controller and they checked, at least partially, what the other students did. By the end of my tenth year, I was in desperate need of professional assistance. So I secured a Fulbright fellowship and left the campus for a year and the administration had to employ somebody to take my place. Since the new man, Frank Gillis, knew little about the archives, one of my previous controlling students, Judy McCulloh, was employed for the year to assist him. Later the African Studies Association received a grant from the Ford Foundation to establish an oral data archive. They decided to use the Archives of Traditional Music as the depository and with the funds thus secured I was able to employ a librarian, Louise Spear. When the Ford funds ran out I was able to talk the university into employing Louise Spear as a permanent librarian. By this time we had received much more space in Maxwell Hall, upstairs and down. The greater part of the downstairs space was air-conditioned. At the time I retired, our staff consisted of a director, the associate director, a librarian, a full-time secretary and four graduate assistants.