

Joe's Jottings #13: 40 Years Ago at LC/FOLK

By Joe "The Songfinder" Hickerson

I have been enjoying recent contributions to Local Lore concerning the beginnings of the Portland Folklore/FolkMusic Society some 40 years ago. This has moved me to reflect on my own activities during the Bicentennial Year of 1976, particularly at and related to the Library of Congress Archive of Folk Song (LC/FOLK). The following is based on memories, as well as files that I was able to locate in my basement.

1976 began auspiciously for folklore/folklife in Washington, D.C. On January 2, President Gerald Ford signed Public Law 94-201, the Folklife Preservation Act, establishing the American Folklife Center (AFC) at the Library of Congress (LC). One of the directives in the law was the creation of a national archive of folklife. This action was greatly facilitated by the fact that LC already served as the home of the Archive of Folk Song (originally called the Archive of American Folk Song), which was established on July 1, 1928, as a section of the Library's Music Division. By 1976 the Archive was



Photo by Art Thieme in 1964. Art described it as follows: "This is the door into the inner sanctum.... We can look at THIS, the doorway to all the sounds and wonders that inspired us, and we can know that it was good."

well known for its international holdings, as well as extensive non-musical genres. In 1978, the Archive was administratively transferred from the Music Division to the American Folklife Center.

I began employment at LC/FOLK in June 1963. At that time, the Archive had a staff of three (Head, Mrs. Rae Korson; Reference Librarian, myself; and Secretary, Patricia Markland). In May 1974 I became Head of the Archive, a position which I held until my retirement in July 1998. You math wizards may notice that I worked for LC/FOLK for 35 years (1963-1998), which was precisely half of its life at that time (1928-1998). This half-life phenomenon resonated with me, having been a Physics major at Oberlin College. Then in January 2016 I realized that I had been retired for half the period I had worked at LC/FOLK. Finally, I note that the AFC has existed for 40 years, which happens to be half my lifetime (80 years). However, as far as I know, I am not a radioactive isotope.

In 1976, LC/FOLK still had a staff of three (Head, yours truly; Reference Librarian, Gerald E. Parsons; and Secretary, Pat Markland). With the establishment of AFC in that year, the combined staff doubled in a short time, and has considerably increased over the years. (See www.loc.gov/folklife for current information on the Archive and Center.)

By 1976, LC/FOLK had experienced an expansion in its four basic activities: acquisitions, processing/cataloging, reference services, and publications. Our intern program was also on the rise. In addition to these activities which were under my supervision, we were completing a Bicentennial project of 15 LPs entitled Folk Music of America, for which I had hired Richard K. Spottswood as chief editor. We were also consulted in the planning of the Smithsonian Institution Festival of American Folklife, which in 1976 lasted 15 weeks.

I was also active in cooperative endeavors with other organizations. For example, I was the compiler of the "Current Bibliography" section (ca. 1,500 entries per year) of the journal, *Ethnomusicology*, an activity which fueled LC/FOLK's acquisitions program and provided training for a series of interns. I authored "The Archive of Folk Song: Library of Congress" and "An Inventory of Bibliographies and Other Reference Aids Prepared by the Archive of Folk Song, Library of Congress" which appeared in *The Folk Music Sourcebook*, edited by

Larry Sandberg and Dick Weissman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976, pp. 249-251). I contributed to the Journal of American Folklore Supplement and Modern Language Association International Bibliography, participated in a panel at the annual meeting of the Music Library Association in Seattle, and served several functions at the joint annual meeting of the American Folklore Society and Society for Ethnomusicology in Philadelphia.

In 1976, I was also a member of the Council, Executive Board, and Bibliography and Nominating Committees of the Society for Ethnomusicology, and served as Chair of the Archiving and Bibliographic Committees of the American Folklore Society. I was a member of the Executive Board of the Maryland Folklore Society, and served on Advisory Boards for Foxfire Fund and Maryland Arts Council.

I participated in a number of Bicentennial-funded events, including those at the Kennedy Center, St. Louis Community College at Meramec, and Valley City State College in North Dakota. I also lectured at Bowling Green State University, Elkins Summer Symposium, Fairhaven College at Western Washington University, George Washington University, Yale University, and the Universities of Missouri, Oregon, Virginia, and Washington.

In March 1976 I appeared on two programs: "The Buck Matthews Show" on WOTV, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and "The Morning Show" on Minnesota Public Radio, hosted by a young Garrison Keillor.

My guitar and I were active as well, with performances at The Ark Coffeehouse, Calvin College, Chelsea House, Connecticut Folk Arts Center, Dickinson College, Eisteddfod at Southeastern Massachusetts University, Family Sing Coffeehouse, Focal Point, Folk Song Society of Greater Boston, Folklore Society of Greater Washington, Fox Hollow Festival, Mine Street Coffeehouse, National Cathedral School, Oberlin College Alumni Association of Boston, Princeton Folk Music Society, Red Fox Inn, Sounding Board, University of Wisconsin at La Cross, and Washington Square Methodist Church.

The year ended with two auspicious events. In November Jimmy Carter was elected President, and my second and third solo LPs were issued as Drive Dull Care Away volumes I and II (Folk-Legacy FSI-58 & 59). Somewhere along the way

PFS founding member Dick Lewis picked up a copy of Volume I and started singing the title song around the Portland area. Now I get to sing harmony on the song!

I guess 1976 was a busy year for me. I don't think I even had time to take a nap. So I believe I'll go take one now.