

The Sonneck Society

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BULLETIN STAFF

- Book Review Editor.....Jean Bonin
- Record Review Editor.....Carolyn Bryant
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FROM THE PRESIDENT

The annual meeting of the Sonneck Society at Baton Rouge in February, the earliest we've ever met, is now several weeks past, but remains more than the pleasant memory of the blooming Japanese magnolias and spring flowers. (See the report on the conference, pages 13-15 and 17-20 in this issue of the *Bulletin*.) Several members who attended commented to me on their favorable impression of the state of scholarship in American music. The sessions presented a great variety of disciplines and perspectives, doing just what I always hope for in a conference—introducing me to music, musicians, scholars, research perspectives, techniques, and findings I don't encounter in the rest of the year when I see so few musical Americanists.

Despite my best intentions for the annual conference, I haven't yet been able to create a forum for members to speak up about the Society's activities, a sort of societal "town meeting." The business meeting, usually held the last afternoon of the conference, might serve this function, but the work of the Society's committees and interest groups must needs be reported, and has grown to such an extent that it dominates the agenda. The hour set aside this year became an hour and twenty minutes before we adjourned, and still omitted significant items (for some of which you'll have to read the reports on the Board meetings, pages 17, 20).

But we did succeed in discussing one aspect of our work through the Society. At the luncheon on Saturday, four members led a discussion of the topic "Politics, Race, and American Music." Paul Machlin reviewed the controversy that had erupted last year over state politics in Louisiana, which had led some members to suggest a boycott of the meeting site. Scott DeVeaux and Dwight Andrews offered practical suggestions for more open-minded and effective support for minorities of all kinds, particularly in academe, and challenged the Sonneck Society and its members to show leadership by increasing the participation of African Americans in its activities. Rae Linda Brown, who introduced the two principal speakers, gave immediacy to the philosophical statements by relating both positive and negative experiences within the Society. Many members responded, requesting guidance on implementing the recommendations on their own campuses, discussing how to "mentor" minority students, bemoaning the lack of participation by traditionally black colleges in the Society's annual conferences, and suggesting the Society appoint more minorities to its committees. One issue attracted more attention than any other: how to draw more minority students to American-music

studies, and how best to assure they receive the requisite instruction and advice that would insure their success in the field.

Members of the Board and its committees have been addressing precisely those suggestions made during the luncheon that concern the Society's formal activities. But we have a long way to go before we can claim a leadership role among scholarly or cultural societies in this regard. We welcome not only the comments made during the Baton Rouge meeting, but any others you can offer during the course of the year. It is not enough merely to affirm the equality of all peoples, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, income level, religion, political persuasion, physical disability, or any other category. It is not enough to urge each other to reaffirm our individual commitments to the principles of freedom, equality, and justice. But each reader of this *Bulletin* has experiences, insights, successes, failures, models, and advice to offer in helping us pursue the goal of an open, diversified organization that encourages the best in each and every aspect of American music and music in America. We cannot benefit from your wisdom unless you share it. Please send your comments to me, or to any member of the Board.

Deane L. Root

* Planning to move? Please notify the Society at P.O. Box 476; Canton, MA 02021.

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* Send all contributions for the *Bulletin* to editor Susan L. Porter at the address above. Articles may be submitted on floppy disk if your machine is IBM-PC compatible; send in Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, Wordstar, or as a text file. Your disc will be returned after the issue is complete. Articles which are typed, double-spaced are also welcome.

* Deadlines for submitting materials are February 1, June 1, and October 1.

* A subscription is included with membership in the Society (\$40 annually). Send dues or write for further information about the Society at P.O. Box 476; Canton, MA 02021.

THE SONGS COME HOME: THE FEDERAL CYLINDER PROJECT

Judith Gray

In 1976 the President signed the American Folklife Preservation Act, for the establishment of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. The Center was charged with helping to preserve and present American folklife, defined as the "traditional, expressive, shared culture" of various groups in the United States. In the words of Public Law 94-201, "it is in the interest of the general welfare of the Nation to preserve, support, revitalize, and disseminate American folklife traditions and arts."

In its first few years, the Center began carrying out documentation projects in several locations: Chicago, south-central Georgia, Paradise Valley in Nevada, the Blue Ridge Parkway, Rhode Island, and Montana. At the same time, the staff conceived a project to work with materials already in the Library's Archive of Folk Culture,¹ namely the one-of-a-kind wax cylinder recordings placed in the Library of Congress over the years since the mid-1930s. The Federal Cylinder Project was inaugurated in 1979 to preserve, document, catalog, and disseminate the information contained in these early field records.

The core of the cylinder collections was the material assembled by employees of the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology,² plus the cylinders and disc copies donated by pioneer ethnomusicologist Helen Heffron Roberts. To these were added cylinders acquired by the Library in 1970, or discovered in the 1980s as a result of a survey of Federal agencies and general publicity about the Cylinder Project. The Archive of Folk Culture now includes approximately 10,000 cylinder recordings from private individuals and institutional sources as well as from other agencies of the U.S. Government. Of these, 7,500 to 8,000 document the sung and spoken traditions of American Indian communities. Among them are the earliest known field recordings: Passamaquoddy songs and narratives by Noel Josephs and Peter Selmore recorded by Jesse Walter Fewkes in Calais, Maine, in March 1890. They were transferred to the Library from the Peabody Museum at Harvard University.

After an initial concentrated effort to copy all the cylinder programs on preservation tape, the Cylinder Project focused on cataloging the individual collections. This task was not at all straightforward given the number of institutional and individual hands through which some of the cylinders had passed. In many cases, documentation had been separated from the records; in others, misleading labels were attached. The sorting and cataloging

continues, even as the staff carries out the project's final phase: making these recordings available directly to the communities of origin.³ In 1985 the Cylinder Project received a grant from The Ford Foundation to facilitate the dissemination work. Since that time, staff members have contacted or visited over 100 Indian communities and have been contacted by many others in search of relevant materials that might be at the Library.

Before the dissemination process began, Cylinder Project staff met with a panel of Native American scholars, museum professionals, and cultural specialists to discuss methods and to contact people as well as to anticipate problems. Some of the latter emerge from the very nature of cylinder recordings. In the first decades that the cylinder machine was available, ethnologists, linguists, and early ethnomusicologists saw it as the ideal tool to help preserve traditions and languages they feared would otherwise disappear. Many recordists focused on the ceremonial lives of the people they visited. Thus many of the cylinders contain sacred songs; these are often genres that would not normally be heard out of context or by the uninitiated. In most cases, the early recordings were made openly with apparent community consent, but some were gathered under what would now be considered questionable circumstances. Paul Radin, for example, approached converts to the peyote religion in order to collect songs belonging to traditional societies—songs that adherents would not record for him. Francis LaFlesche brought consultants from Oklahoma to Washington, D.C., in order to remove them from the influence of neighbors who objected to his recording of ceremonial songs. By today's standards, many of the songs now preserved on cylinders would, or should, never have been recorded. Moreover, disparate song genres are often found side by side on the tapes: peyote songs, medicine bundle songs, social dance songs, lullabies, and sun dance songs. The mixture is problematic in some communities where, for example, bundle owners would not want outsiders to hear bundle songs. But here they all are—part of the heritage of many communities, requiring respect and responsible handling.

Other potential dissemination problems stem from institutional realities. As the advisory panel and project staff recognized, the fact that the American Folklife Center is a Federal agency means that initial contacts for dissemination purposes must be at the level of the federally recognized Indian governments. As would be the case in any community, however, the local government is not necessarily the entity that has an interest in, or is the logical recipient of, historical materials belonging to a religious society or a particular family. In some situations, Cylinder Project staff have made efforts to reach not only the most visible cultural agencies but

also the smaller or more traditional settlements on a reservation, to let more individuals know that copies of early recordings might be available as the result of a dissemination visit.

The panel and project staff decided to make cassettes rather than reel-to-reel copies for dissemination. Archivists prefer open-reel recordings, but, in this case, accessibility was the primary consideration. We were aware that many locations had no open-reel machines for playback or for duplication purposes. We also knew that we could not make available an unlimited number of copies, given our resources and the need to be consistent; we could only give copies to the specific communities on the specific reservations from which the records have come. We could, however, let other interested persons know the location of the official dissemination copies, so that they might request copies from those in whose custody the tapes had been placed.

Another topic of the initial advisory panel meeting was community control over dissemination events and publicity. We decided that in initial letters and phone calls, a Cylinder Project staff member would ask a community to designate one or more contact persons; we would then consult with those persons to determine if it would be helpful to make a visit and, if so, what services or activities were desirable. We received a wide range of requests. Consequently, on dissemination visits we have found ourselves making formal or informal presentations before audiences large and small—at powwows, at school assemblies, at tribal council meetings, at private homes. Also on the dissemination visits we have consulted with tribal leaders or persons interested in cultural conservation activities with regard to current programs, archiving requirements, potential funding sources, and networks of people with similar concerns; and we have met with elders to review the early recordings and update the cataloging information.

If asked, we drafted sample press releases concerning the recordings being given to a specific community for use in tribal or other local media. But each community had the option to choose whether dissemination events were public or private, publicized or not. This policy sometimes ran slightly counter to the overall desire of the Folklife Center to spread word of its activities and thus to reach others who might use Center and Library resources. It also meant that we could not approach potential funding agencies with a specific list of events their dollars would facilitate, a fact that worked against a grant application in at least one case. Further, our wish to be guided by the community has occasionally given us the appearance of bypassing networks of regional, state, or local cultural specialists, thus causing temporary tensions.

But the dissemination phase of the Cylinder Project has proceeded. This is clearly one of those ideas whose time has come. Even as we began working with the Federal collections, The Lowie Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, began trying out several dissemination strategies with cylinder collections in that institution. More recently, the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University has been assisting Indian people to identify and reclaim copies of recordings there. Meanwhile, the Smithsonian Institution is carrying out parallel projects with some of its photograph collections, and various museums have facilitated repatriation of significant ceremonial items.

How has the dissemination of Cylinder Project materials turned out? What happens to the collections once they are back in their communities? Not surprisingly, the answers to these questions contain some minuses along with the pluses. Almost everyone we have contacted has been enthusiastic at first about the potential benefits of having the early recordings back in their communities. However, sometimes community members suspect hidden costs or strings. Also, sometimes the enthusiasm wanes once people hear the actual recordings. This is due, in part, to the medium itself. Audiences today are not prepared for the differences between cylinder recordings and modern recordings. Cylinder recordings do not gain charm and patina over time like old photographs do. People are often put off by the surface noises or other technical problems that obscure some of the sound, making song texts difficult to decipher. Further, some persons have cherished hopes that certain specific songs and narratives were recorded, only to be disappointed that such recordings do not exist.

If disappointment is great enough, if we have not reached those most interested in trying to work with cylinder recordings, or if there is some controversy attached to the recordings themselves or to the fact that they are coming back, the cassettes may simply remain on a shelf untouched after being presented to the community—or they may disappear altogether. Whether cylinder recordings still have a role to play in contemporary Indian lives is a matter for Indian people and communities alone to decide. Such matters cannot be settled from without; neither can the impact of dissemination efforts be measured in the short run.

What we have found is that those who are willing to listen repeatedly through whatever noise level may be present are often able to make use of the materials. Many anticipate that the recordings will help them reclaim something that has been lost. Occasionally this is the case. More often those who are knowledgeable in the traditions of their communities find it possible to sing along with the record-

ings, and thus receive verification that, despite all the acculturation pressures over the years, the traditions, the songs, have survived. And this is a source of considerable pride. Though some are hesitant about having their ancestors' recordings made public, relatives and descendants of singers are usually pleased and excited to be able to hear family members. The past is uniquely brought to life when they can hear the actual voices.

Several communities such as the Kiowa have used the early recordings as part of oral history projects with elders, stimulating their memories of song or narrative contexts. On a broader scale, the return of early Omaha recordings assembled by Alice Fletcher and Francis LaFlesche, Jr., has fed into the tribe's ongoing efforts to reclaim cultural material that has been separated from the Nebraska community. The existence of these ninety-year-old recordings of Hethu'shka songs helped facilitate a refocusing and revitalizing of the Hethu'shka Society (a group of honored veterans) as a recognized conservator of traditional values. The Omaha tribal council and tribal historian cooperated with American Folklife Center staff members on an LP and cassette release (AFC L71, "Omaha Indian Music") of selected early songs, some copies of which were given to graduating Omaha high school students as a reminder of their living traditions. Hethu'shka Society members also traveled to Washington, D.C., to sing some of those same songs in a noontime performance on the Library's Neptune Plaza.

The early recordings can thus provide the stimulus for a short-term individual project or become part of a much larger ongoing tribal program. They have also been used as a focal point for applications to agencies that fund cultural retention or archival projects and thus may contribute to the process of building projects into programs.

But the cylinders are important regardless of how much information listeners can actually extract from them. For communities that have passed their traditions from generation to generation orally, the very existence of recordings now a century old is powerful proof, an emblem, of the persistence of their culture. In the words of one tribal council member at a dissemination presentation:

The songs are very much alive today in our hearts. And these songs are going to grow with us, with our little children. These are beautiful songs that have come home . . . and maybe this is the time, the way the Creator worked it out, that these songs are returning home, so that we can draw strength from it, so that we can think back, for the love of this reservation and our people. . . This is what being [an Indian people] is all about.

Thus the sounds of the past come alive in the present and nourish the future.

Judith Gray, a folklife specialist in the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, has been with the Federal Cylinder Project since 1983. Trained as an ethnomusicologist at Wesleyan University, she is part of the team currently assembling a reference guide to the American Indian materials in the Library's collections.

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¹Originally called the Archive of American Folk-Song when it was established in 1928, it became part of the Folklife Center in 1978 and was renamed to reflect the increasing breadth of its collection and concerns.

²In the early 1940s the cylinders had been transferred to the National Archives, then in 1948 to the Library where the cylinder programs were copied on discs, the preferred preservation medium of the day.

³Over the years, other individuals and organizations have been able to purchase copies of many of these collections by means of the custom phonoduplication services provided by the Library's Recording Laboratory. Current fees are \$70 per hour. Depending on the circumstances, permissions may be required before an order can be filled.

A GOTTSCHALK LETTER AT VASSAR COLLEGE

Brian Mann

During researches carried out in preparation for an article on the Teresa Carreño Collection at Vassar College,¹ I came across a remarkable autograph letter from Louis Moreau Gottschalk to Sheldon Stephens, a shadowy Canadian friend of the composer. There are no other Gottschalk materials at Vassar (beyond the fragment of a second letter described in my article, and some early prints of his piano music), and so the present *Bulletin* seems an appropriate place to publish this letter, the contents of which have previously only been glossed. How or when this letter, written in 1863, found its way to Vassar is unclear. Though formerly part of the Music Library's collection of rare materials, the letter is now housed in the Main Library, Special Collections. It may have been acquired by George Sherman Dickinson, Vassar's music librarian from 1927 to 1953; over the years he purchased for the Music Department a large number of autograph letters by various composers. Written on a single sheet of Gottschalk's stationery (with its distinctive monogram in which the letters L, M, and G are superimposed), the letter is accompanied by an envelope that offers scant information concerning the addressee. Its uncommon interest arises both from its literary elegance and its subject matter, which touches variously on political as well as personal issues. A complete edition of Gottschalk's letters is far off; in the meantime, readers may be intrigued by this singular example of the composer's epistolary