

AFCCC-CORRE

Correspondence

Collection

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Sept 21

[Austin?]Dear Charlie:

Before I forget it: I did not copy all of the Lomax Dusenbury records, which will explain why you do not have a complete set. I got diverted first by the Lunsford copying emergency and then by a couple of demonstration crises, and didn't finish. They were excessively difficult to copy, some of them being very bad indeed. Lawrence used them to transcribe from but some of them were pretty good so I more than half suspect that somebody used a steel needle on at least four, by mistake.

The Lomax series was in interrupted -- but I forget how many he made in all -- 18 or 20.

I do not remember ever having heard the Garwick Paper of Pins record you mention. If it isn't there, I suppose I didn't copy it -- but am not clear really about this.

I ventured to Miss Densmore that the difficulty was the [trheading?] of the mandrel, in copying from cylinders, and she said no, that that was relatively simple because you could determine under a microscope the no. of whorls per inch and either you had the right one or you didn't. But where records are spoiled unbeknownst is where the distance of the point (taken at right angles to the surface of the cylinder) to less than during recording. Needle heads are heavy and always set for a certain distance, and if the reproducing one rides deeper than the cutting, you can see it would do damage. But she is probably thinking in terms of the machines of her day.

Thanks for the information about the Mississippi book of folk songs. My friend Herbert Halpert told me about this plan some time ago. Are they going to continue this? Should n't there be more song sheets for the training school of the Dept. of Agriculture? the features objected to are easily changed, it seems to me, and the idea certainly meets a need.

Referring to your "Records received from SR" list, dated Sept. 9th, item 4, the reord with 4B. Allens, not number, should have a KL series number.

Recent records at Duluth fill in some of the gaps in the SR series but in that way they are no longer chronological. However I suppose that doesn't matter so long as they are the same year at least.

Before you are sure that any given KL records are missing you better check with the hand-written cards I made to see whether a card is made out for a given record. I believe I never made KL 17, 18, 19 and 20 so that it would be easy to remember that numbers up to 20 contained the sets of general demonstration records. They seem to work out in groups of 4.

I hope to have time to make Margaret a copy of the set I gave Mr. Packard, substituting some of her Cherry Lake records for the sharecropper boy; and also to make a set for Adrian like the Packard one, with an additional one from Springfield, Mo. But don't tell 'em lest I have no time. Grace Falke should have a record or two too, it seems to me, and Grete. However, the minute we mention it we'll have 50 people demanding 'em, so let 's wait to see if we can.....

I don't have any really good Dusenbury copies of my own.

Of course I'd give anything in the world for a complete copy of Dusenbury, sometime; and they'd all be quite safe from use with me; but I asked Laurence whether we could use "Bounce the Cymbalins" in the play-party book Randolph and I still hope to do together, if we live long enough! If Randolph could, as he thought he might, get hold of a description of the playing of the game, which Mrs. Dusenbury "disremembered". But Laurence evaded answering -- he hates Randolph, yo7u remember, -- and it gave me a funny feeling about asking him for any more songs lest he think I'm going to pass them on to Randolph or something. (Randolph has about 30 so I don't see that it signifies; but.....

In the SR missing series, I have here Sr 31, 45-70, 73, 83-4-5. Sr116-19 ad 128-9 have not ever been made, but the records I made in Duluth will fill in those numbers and add a few in the 150's I think -- I made about 9 records. Got a good [kantele?], and such beautiful Gaelic things from" the Lewes, as they call the Isle of Lewis. I only got a few unpublished ones, but he knows many more, if only I could go back to him. And if Edgar would cease from troubling the waters so he could think.

KL 38-49 I probably never made -- I probably began again at 50 when I meant to begin at 40, one of the times when I tried to remember the next number and could n't.

KL 52 suggests nothing to me, it's a blank. It should be a record with Prety Polly on it, but it is n't here, it must be in Washington somewhere.

If the Library comes to while I am in California, I know a man who was a foundling in Ireland and brought up by an honest-to-goodness Irish bard who spoke nothing but the Gaelic and taught

Charles many songs. He earned his living and Charles', singing up and down the east coast of North Ireland. I don't suppose they'd ship a machine clear out there to me, but my Basques were in Nevada, not Montana; and I'd like to record some of my Irish friend's songs to compare with the Hebridean ones. He sings in Gaelic and while he has added a few songs in English to his repertoire to please his friends, he does not like to sing them and prefers the very old things. I will ask Henry if I may use his, but it's so [poor?].

We had snow and now it's hotter'n blazes again. This state is certainly lavish with its weather.

December 28, 1937

Mrs. Sidney Robertsonc/o Hidden Villa RanchLos Altos, CaliforniaDear Mrs. Robertson:

If your statement about the collecting of folk-songs had been shorter, you would have heard from me sooner. As it is, I had to wait until I lay in bed with a bad cold before I could read it. It was impossible to find the time to do so under "normal circumstances.

As you remark in your letter, you made the application to the Rockefeller Foundation without consulting us, so I think that we had better leave it that way. Any possible act on my part would only confuse matters. Although I understand why you did it and know that your motives were good, it might appear presumptuous to others. At any rate, after deliberating for a long time, I decided to avoid any attempt to explain it to the various authorities. If the proposition strikes their fancy, the Foundation will approach us in the matter.

The statement, by the way, was an excellent one and almost wholly accurate. Unfortunately, we receive no records by copyright, etc. Since you state that you did not consult us, I do not foresee any official complications. I wish you luck!

I am very sorry that we are still unable to offer you any material help. It would be impossible to attempt to explain the situation here to you in such a short letter. On the whole, the folk-song project looks very promising but we shall need a lot of luck during the next few months.

When you next write to Cowell, tell him that as he knows, there are many works on rhythm. Bücher's "Arbeit and Rhythmus" is, of course, a classic on the subject. But of course, this may not be what Cowell has in mind. If you can get more detailed information about the proposed book, I shall gladly investigate the matter.



With kindest regards and best wishes for a merry Christmas and Happy New Year, Sincerely, Acting-Chief, Division of MusicHS/r

49 Fourth St., San Francisco, Calif. Thank you, very much! Please forgive this scrambled letter -- a real one soon. Warmest regards to your mother and yourself. To Marjorie Edgar collector in Minnesota

Hello, Marjorie Edgar! How are you? Thank you so very much for your good kaffe-klatch letter written just after Christmas. I enjoyed it, and have thought of you often, but have been much slower than I had the least idea I should, getting over my bump on the head, and have only begun to circulate again the last few days. The long period of uselessness has used up the money I expected to last while I got some articles finished, etc., etc., in an irritating way, and I have been trying to focus and organize the scattered but very real interest in collecting on [?] in California..... Some money for disks turned up, but not enough for a salary, so I proposed a project to a very [??] [ill cargo?] of research on the WPA. We talked vigorously and belligerently for a few minutes -- I don't scare easily [?] Wednesdays, [?] I often do on Tuesdays and Fridays!! -- and then settled down to three hours of hard work, analysing a possible project which has to provide work for 20 WPA-ers in order to justify a supervisor's salary and travel. I don't know what will happen to the scheme, but working it out is as much fun as a game of chess.

It so happens that, with the exception of John Lomax, to whom I dislike to appeal, you're the only person who has ever worked closely with me in the field, under varying conditions. As I walked in on Dr. Sharp, my grumpy (I really like him very much anyway) friend, out of a clear sky, and as he proposes, among other things, to clear the way for me to record songs among the [?] laborers, who are extremely difficult to contact, touchy, etc., I would like him to have some assurance that possible sing for me without much trouble..... or at least, since your previous acquaintance and friendly and understanding, relationship was of course an active factor too, that I don't make singers self-conscious..... or something... Would you mind writing him? Also, since the WPA needs assurance that a proposed project will be of service to the general field it is engaged in would you remark the records of Finnish and Hebridean songs from California, if any (there are lots of Finns) would be of great value to the study you are undertaking in Minn. and that you would be glad to pay for the blank disks if copies could be made available to you... if, as I assume, you would like to know what circulates out here. It may be that you have to be some sort of public agency because you can get this service from the WPA! in which case you, your mother and the maid might organize a Marine on St Croix Folklore Society see you could write in their name. But I think not -- at any rate I hope to be able to set up such a copying service for collectors.....

This letter is [?] in the most extraordinary English -- but it is 1 a.m., and this is my seventh letter tonight, and I get weary if I use my poor head, so sometimes, as in this instance, I just write without using it!

The gentleman to address, if you feel you can do it, is Dr. James B. Sharp, Coordinator of Statistical Projects, Works Progress Administration. 2 This must have been addressed to [???

I would particularly like to work out some way in which my little project can be of use to you, because such service extended to other Federal agencies is one of the best arguments, it seems, for such WPA projects. The WPA is increasingly unwilling to allow its workers to be kept at "busy work" which, however, attractive in itself at the moment, fails to meet established standards in its field.

[????]

In addition, I have always felt very strongly that no effort should be spared to establish a [?] national collection of records at [?], and my pleasure in making the records will be much diminished unless I can feel that, however indirectly, I am contributing to that aim.

If you want to select what you want, we could undertake to send you the recods to be copied in whole or in part returned to us. If I can train a technician to make good dubs, as I have every reason to expect, and you can supply the blanks, we could make your copies here, selecting the material for you on whatever basis you care to lay down.

I'd like, also, to know what the Archives of American Folk Song considers sound practice on this point, which has always bothered me. When making records of traditional music, is it legitimate to record traditional songs sung by other than traditional singers? When I was wording for Special Skills this problem frequently arose. Since we wanted material for our Song Sheets as well as examples of the various styles of singing, I sometimes recorded good songs for their own sake -- as in the case of Dr. McIntosh of Carbondale, Ill. The last I heard of your activities, you were on your way to record the singing of a riverman somewhere near LaCrosse. I hope you found him and that he knew lots of songs. That is wonderful country for song collectors. I'll never forget the excitement of hearing my first lumberjack conclude his song in a rapid mumble, spoken instead of sung, as an indication he had come to the end. The Irish bards did this centuries ago, I'm told; and I'd read of it among sailors singing ballads in the forecandle and among the lumberjacks -- but never hoped to record it. Providentially, relatives of my best lumberjack singers are working in lumber mills in Trinity Co., California, and I can hardly wait to get there. (This is the family of the uncle of the hired man of the undertaker..... Ask Charlie Seeger to tell you the story of my all-night ride in the hearse in pursuit of child ballads!)With kindest regards to your father and yourself, I amCordially yours,

2850 - 19th Avenue San Francisco, Calif. February 12, 1937

Dr. George Herzog Department of Anthropology Columbia University New York, N.. Dear Dr. Herzog:

You will probably have forgotten the brief interview we had a year ago, at the time that I was Charles Seeger's assistant in the Special Skills Division of the Resettlement Administration; but I remember it particularly because some of the things you said were so stimulating to my thinking. Herbert Halpert brought me in to see you, and we had a brief conversation about typology..... Since then I've spent six months in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota -- not, alas, free to devote all my time to collecting. I was, however, able to make around 75 records and found the field far more interesting than I had been led to expect. The lumber industry seems to have carried songs straight west across the northern United States from the New England coast; and in addition there has been an influx of Kentuckians within the last 50 years, so that one learns quickly not to be surprised at anything that turns up. Relatives of some of my Wisconsin lumberjacks are now living in northern California and Washington, and I hope to be able to run them down eventually.

Now I am in California and have trying to evolve some method of focussing the interest of various groups in collecting here. I have a small Presto recorder of my own, and it does very good work. With almost no opportunity to search, I've unearthed some excellent songs among the migratory workers in the San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys, at least one good chantey singer, an old lady who sings ballads learned from her Scotch mother, (The Four Maries, for example,) and I have good introductions to descendants of pioneers in Siskiyou County, which is as remote and primitive as anything in the Ozarks and the Appalachians. I do not personally get much excited about pioneers, but musicians (New Music Society people) tell me they have maintained the singing and playing tradition actively; and in California, the historical fetish is "pioneers" or "Forty-Niners," so they must be kept in mind. In addition, withi a day's drive of San Francisco there are Basque shepherders, Icelanders, Finns, Koreans, Tahitans, and a member of the Hawaiian royal family who assured Henry Cowell she was willing to make records of some songs known only to her family, which are traditional Polynesian music. I am told it is almost impossible to find examples of this "original" Hawaiian music in Hawaii today.

At present my most hopeful prospect is the establishment of a small project under the Coordinator of Statistical Projects for northern California, sponsored by various groups who have indicated their willingness to give some slight material support. With any luck, this is going to make recording possible in the field and it now looks as if the project would have to be set up with provision for supplying copies of disks upon request, which is a pleasant surprise!

The expense of blanks would of course have to be met by the organization requesting copies, but I really think we can work the thing out, in a small way. Somewhere in California are Charles Lummis' wax cylinders of Spanish-Californian material, and I have hopes of getting those run off onto disks. The description of the project is not yet definitely established, but it includes: a) Collection of ballads and popular folk music and songs found in northern California, with alternative versions and airs; b) Preparation of an annotated bibliographical reference index of this material; c) Preparation of historical notes relative to these collections. Publications are to be by the sponsor and they will be distributed to public agencies. This work could not be done without this assistance and will displace no one regularly employed. It is a new undertaking in California.

This is the Coordinator's summary of our conversation and needs revision, particularly with reference to a) and b). We do not mention disks specifically lest we thereby be limited to collection on disks only. Since a project of this kind has to keep 20 WPA workers busy, we have to work from contemporary records, -- books and newspapers, etc., to retrieve early California folk music insofar as that is possible. I don't know how dependable an annotated bibliographical reference index" of material collected on disks can be made, by WPA workers, either. I would rather call it modestly a "check-list". With the foreign-language material all we can hope of course is to get the title, name of performer, place and date, as a rule. With the American material, we should be able to transcribe texts and add first lines of verse and chorus to our index.

I am afraid you have brought this lengthy exposition of our tentative plans down on your head through your own efforts to push this type of enterprise! I would really like [?] to ask you to act as adviser to our small undertaking, if New York were not so far away. However, I wonder whether you would be willing to offer some comment, particularly as to the type of index and notes you would like to see made, and which you think WPA workers might manage adequately? It would be extremely valuable to me. Keeping 20 people effectively occupied seems a great responsibility, when I want to spend considerable time in the field too.

Would you, further, be willing either to preface your comments with an expression of your opinion as to the value of this work? I would not venture to ask this, as an almost complete stranger, except that as you know such opinions provide the only guide the WPA has as to the ultimate value of the project, and it seems to me that disks provide an objective record which cannot help be of value. [?] As to the research possible to be based on the records [?] Something of the sort is necessary to justify the expense of making the records, from the point of view of the WPA, and we shall have here a chance, in a small way, to demonstrate what legitimate indexing, etc., can be [?] accomplished under the circumstances. I have no illusions as to my own limitations in originating

research problems to work upon, and hope to be able to fall back upon yourself and one or two other people for help, now and then. Have I your permission to do this?

I am sending Mr. Halpert a copy of this letter and [?] hope you will discuss it with him. He, I believe, heard Mr. Seeger play some of the records I made, and we have been in correspondence for some time. I've been enthusiastic about what he has been able to accomplish; and hope we may work out further cooperation. As a statistical and research project, we may be able to do some things he can't, and vice versa. Cordially yours,

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We can therefore go ahead, now, as soon as co-sponsors can be found willing to contribute a total of \$400, to be distributed over a period of six months. This is to be spent chiefly for the necessary supply of blank records. When completed, duplicate sets of these records are to be placed at the University of California and in the Archives of American Folk Song of the Library of Congress, so that California may be represented adequately there. The remaining funds will go toward that part of my travel expense that the WPA cannot meet.

May I come in and discuss this with you? I really feel there is an opportunity to do a fascinating piece of work here which will be a source of great satisfaction to all of us. Cordially yours, (Mrs.) Sidney H. Robertson
Telephone: Overland 6622

2850 - 19th Avenue, S.F. February 13th, 1938

Dear Charlie:

First: Dr. Adrelia Henry Rinehart, President of Mills College, has just gone to [France?] and will be returning through the east in a few weeks -- I understand she is not to be gone long. If you will write her at Mills College, Oakland, Calif. and ask to be informed when she will be passing through New York and Washington, I am sure she will be interested to talk to you, as she is honestly interested in music. I am sure you could sell her the idea of musicological courses for the summer quarter, -- and I certainly would try to do it as a year 'round thing. Their plans are all made and announcements out for this coming summer, so I'd aim at the fall or at next summer....

Second: Eliot Mears, Director of the Summer Quarter at Stanford University, will be coming through the east on his way home from Europe and South America sometime late this summer. I would write him, c/o the School of Business, Stanford University, California, and arrange to see him in the same way. Everyone says there is no chance for anybody else as head of the Stanford Dept. as

long as [Warren?] Allen wants that job, as he is deeply entrenched and Dr. Wilbur knows nothing about music and cares less. Several people have, however, suggested Mills -- and through Eliot means it might be possible to get a summer quarter job at Stanford. Those seem to be the obvious possibilities. Stanford summer quarter jobs pay practically nothing, however, and since the future outlook there is so bad, I would certainly see what could be done about staging a regular campaign at Mills.

Now: Some S.O.S.'s of my own: I have been going the rounds of the women's clubs, etc., as I think I wrote you, to see about support I could get for a collecting project in Calif. A number of people are interested but in talking amounts possible to collect as a backing I realized that if I took salary and expenses for myself out of the various small donations the result, in terms of disks made, was going to seem small in proportion. So -- with considerable difficulty -- I got in to talk to a belligerent gentleman in charge of research projects, or something, for northern California. When I phoned him for an appointment he said folksong collecting by the WPA had been tried and had failed, and I said yes, but that was because no attempt had been made to work beyond the record collecting and devise chores for the lower paid WPA people to do, hence the projects hitherto had been topheavy in expert's salaries; and after some palaver he said grumpily I could come in, but he wanted me distinctly to understand he wasn't at all excited about what I might have to offer! and as an afterthought: "For God's sake, if you've got anything that will show in a tangible way what might be done, bring it in with you!" I went in at 3:45 and at 8p.m. we were still talking and had both missed dinner engagement -- me with the sister of Charles Michelson, which leaves me with a badly broken fence to mend. However, we outlined procedure for establishing the smallest possible WPA project which would allow me to collect in the field, and he left me with the remark: "Well, I'm certainly glad you came in. Maybe we can work something really worth while out of this; meanwhile, we'll certainly have some fun." Of course his belligerence is part of his job -- he was just making it clear that he required to be shown; and when he discovered I realized that and was amused by it, he stopped trying to scare me to death.

Now there are about a thousand things to be done before the project can be approved and set going. In order to justify a supervisor's salary (\$100-\$150 per month) I am going to have to keep 20 people busy. Only supervisors can travel, and the WPA provides practically no travel money now --- you know they are paring administrative costs to the bone. Therefore the sponsors will have to provide most, at least, of that, and also the cost of blanks which is not high.

The excitin thing, to me, is that the possibility of getting records made, and the necessity of that type of record of folk music, as more desirable than a written one, is understood and accepted. It looks as if it were going to be possible to include 2 the making of copies for/ any public agencies that will

supply blanks [?] [?] in a small way. Charles Lummis' collection of wax disks of the Spanish-California music of 20-45 years ago -- I was told the first ones were made in 1893, but I think that will turn out to be a mistake -- more likely to be 1903 -- anyhow, that collection is somewhere in the state, and Eleanor Hague has some, also, which we may be able to undertake to copy in a more permanent form. Of course that is going to depend upon proper technical assistance, but between my brother and Frank Duveneck and one or two people, it should be possible to solve.

I'm not sure I told you that I am getting a little "bump money" from the insurance co. and the propose turning that into a baby Presto machine which will record on either aluminum or acetate. Gerald Strang has one, and I saw it in operation and we made some extremely satisfactory dubs on it from my records. So that will solve the immediate field problem.

What stumps me, at the moment, is the prospect of thinking up enough simple chores to keep 20 people busy profitably. Dr. Sharp has very definite ideas about what constitutes profitable research for the WPA to engage in and what doesn't. That rather puts it up to me, as I had not realized that I'd have to manage so many -- I had thought of 4 or 5.

Anyhow, if I may fall back on you and on Henry and two or three other people, it can probably be done. I really had given up all hope of the WPA after talking to 2 or 3 people who it was impossible to work out a collecting project that would satisfy musicologists and at the same time fit the WPA picture, so I am awfully pleased that there seems even a faint possibility of working the thing out.

I know you'll agree with me that it can and should be done. If it can be successfully demonstrated here on a very small scale, the possibilities of a really comprehensive national project are increased enormously.

One thing I need right away, and that is a letter from you to Dr. James Sharp, Coordinator of Statistical Projects, Works Progress Administration, 49 Fourth St., San Francisco, California, identifying me as the person I claim to be, so to speak, and endorsing, if you feel you can, our proposed project. The description of the project is still in a state of flux, but it reads thus at present: Dr. S--'s summary of our conversation) 1) To collect ballads and popular folk music and songs found in northern California with alternative versions and airs; 2) To prepare an annotated bibliographical reference index of this material; (I showed him the Archives of Am F-S one) 3) To prepare historical notes relative to these collections. (I want to add 'genealogical notes' to this; Phillips Barry's book emphasizes the importance of this.) We can include a reasonably good music copyist, I am told, among the 20 ---Unfortunately northern and southern Calif. have administratively split into two separate states, so we have to omit southern Calif. But northern Calif. extends as far south as Bakersfield and the Arvin Migratory Labor camp! and with Gerald Strang and Eleanor Hague in

southern Calif. and interested, we can probably sneak anything across the arbitrary line that we particularly want to include.

We hope to persuade the music dept. of U.C. to act as chief sponsor, contributing space, office supplies, & etc., and that is going to mean that Albert Elkus will have to be asked to act as a chief adviser to the project -- which irks me in some ways but could be much worse. (This is confidential as yet, it's till unsettled.)

What kinds of publication, in addition to the above notes, occur to you as desirable? (Publication is in mimeographed form -- they do a very swell job indeed out here.) 100-150 copies of things are issued and put in the hands of public agencies; but more may be issued and a charge for cost made, a la Herbert Halpert's project.) I think item 2) should read: "Annotated bibliographical index of this and parallel material"....

Would you like to send us the KL collection for indexing and, perhaps, copying, transcribing and indexing for first lines? This, in case this has not already been done..... I'm going to need chores like that to do when we first start, until I can get material in from the field.

3

I think I had better extricate the things I would like your help on from the preceding pages, along with a number of questions that occur to me:

First, would you write Dr. Sharp, address above, saying that you applaud the prospect of establishing a record, on disks, of traditional songs and music, as performed in northern California in 1938, and that you are sure data of value to musicologists, anthropologists and historians will be made available thereby... (or something! I sound just like Miss Knott!) I told him I was your assistant ([?]) and made records in the Appalachians, the Ozarks and the upper Mississippi River States -- about 15 states in all; that I initiated and supervised the check-list of the Archives of American Folk Song, although I left Washington on another assignment before it was finished. That's all I can think of at the moment..... He will want to know whether I'm considered a good collector in the field, both as to experience and training and judgment in selecting material for recording, and as to resourcefulness in running it down... and so on.

I would very much appreciate, also, your saying that you can see a number of research problems that might be dealt with capably by such workers as this proposed project may expect to command (If it is set up in Berkeley or S.F. prospects of good calibre people are rather good, incidentally) -- if you do! and if you were willing to add something like this: "Mrs. Robertson has expressed the hope that I will make suggestions in this field from time to time (research) and I will be very glad

to do so," it would help reassure the people in Washington who will have to okeh this and who are always afraid the WPA is going to accomplish nothing but "busywork" which is of no use to serious scientists. Please don't use the term American traditional music because I am trying to keep the project description broad enough to include Henry's Koreans, Icelanders, etc., and our Basques. Local clubs sponsoring are not crazy about "foreigners", though, so I am leaving out the word "American" everywhere and hope not to get caught at it! Sharp was swell, when I said that of course it was difficult not to find an Iowan or an [?] Oklahoman every time you scratch a California singer; and that there were a number of difficulties of definition you get into as soon as you start arguing as to what is "American" folk music ... "What do we care?" he said... "All we're interested to know is that such and such a song was sung within the borders of northern California, Anno Domini 1938," -- Of course we'll have to play up "pioneers" and "Forty-Niners" at a great rate; but that will have to be done from books and contemporaneous diaries and letters for the most part. Henry urged that I get [Dene Denny to introduce me into the hinterlands of Siskiyou County, where she was brought up -- very primitive, practically no roads, and descendants of early settlers who still make music.....

Now, as to questions that occur to me at random: The prospect of copying for public agencies, like universities, etc., makes me wish the KL recording machine were at hand. What sort of understanding do you have with the Library about this? As WPA and RA operate from the same fund, or did when the recorder was bought, it ought not be hard to arrange a loan of such property -- and the Library really owns a lot of recording machines! and it is so easy to rig up an extra turn-table in connection with the Presto machines, for dubbing. The thing is, I'm going to want to keep my little Presto in the field at times without interrupting dubbing on the project. However, of course I quite understand you may have other understanding with the Library, etc., etc. My thought was that if we could borrow the Garwick machine for three or four months, in order to build up what we propose to do, it would be easier to get money for a machine from our sponsors -- clubs or whatever -- when it became necessary to return it.

Another thing is blanks. Sharp wants me to get endorsements or offers of sponsorship from at least 3 other Federal agencies. (An endorser is a co-sponsor; sponsors proper are material contributors.) I still have the 30 disks you sent via Packard. How about letting FSA provide these blanks, formally, as sponsor? I very much need a formal letter to that effect, signed by Walker or whoever, because I hope to inveigle the FSA people out here to let me travel with them to and from the camps, since I shall have to ingratiate myself gradually with the workers in the camps --- they've been too much in the public eye lately and I shall have to go slowly with them and make repeated trips. It would of course be understood that originals 4 would be returned to the KL collection in the AAFS and that they would only be used out here for dubs; and that, if you want to specify to that effect, the blanks supplied by FSA will be used only for recording of FSA clients. The thing is, WPA has to keep

its administrative expense down to 5% -- instead of 10% formerly required and more and more responsibility has to be thrown onto sponsors for supplying materials, travel expense, etc. etc.... all the items exclusive of labor, which is WPA's only legitimate contribution.

Next: (I promise this is the last imposition for the moment): Because they know the AAFS, the Deputy Administrator wants to know whether records made in the field by me would be acceptable there -- it's a question of standards of work which they want established, naturally enough, and whether it would be possible to arrange to deposit records there as well as at the University of California (assuming we do work through U.C., which we may not.) I don't know whether to write Alan, or JAL, or Spivacke, about this. I hate to bother Spivacke, because I am not sure that he ever heard any of the best records I made (from Missouri, Wis. and Minn.) and, of course, because we were as interested in retrieving songs as in making recordings by authentic singers, I recorded songs by people like McIntosh of Carbondale, Ill., who was anything but a folk singer this does not of course conform [?] to AAFS practice. (It occurs to me that this fact should be noted on the record envelopes--I noted it in my reports always; but of course those reports to the AAFS...) Anyhow, the point is, do you think I can request a letter from the AAFS saying that they would like to have a) Sample records of the most interesting material; or b) Copies of most or all of it; and that they would 1) Like to have us send them our originals to copy and return; or 2) Be able to provide us with blanks, we to make copies for them (only I would prefer to send them the originals and let the U. of Calif. have copies)

The point is, can we be of service to the AAFS, and if so, how? If they consider the Icelanders, Basques, Thaitans, Koreans, Polynesians, etc., that Henry Cowell wants me to get, important to add to the AAFS, it would help if they would say so, though this isn't necessary.

Would you advise me what you think I should do about this? I assume Alan has heard enough of the records I made so he will have an opinion about them.

It is amazing, the amount of energy it takes to get even a small project like this going! I am going to have to write letters and letters,.....

As I think of it, perhaps the quickest thing is for me to enclose a letter to Alan with this, for you to give him if after reading it you think it meets the situation. Perhaps I should write his father? ... only I think his father was retiring, you said, as Curator?

Nothing may come of this, of course, after all! because it has to be approved by so darned many people, and recording of folk songs seems definitely to have been given a black eye in Washington, on the WPA.

You really ought to be in on this somehow -- but I know you don't want to come all the way out here for so small an affair. It is not impossible that if this is an obvious success, within a few months it can be expanded to include more states in this WPA region, in which case projects of 20 people would be set up in several different places and in that case better administrative salaries would be provided and we could draft you as an indispensable specialist so little has been done out here, and there is so much to do. My love to you all ----

AA F-S 2850 - 19th Avenue San Francisco, California February 14, 1938

Alan Lomax, Esq. Assistant Curator Archives of American Folk Song Library of Congress Washington, D.C. Dear Alan:

I have been working recently to focus the interest of various individuals and groups here in folk music collecting on disks, and find it will be possible to provide sufficient material backing for a small WPA research project, if I can convince the WPA that such a project would be considered valuable by acknowledged authorities in the field. We propose to collect traditional songs and music in northern California, among the descendants of early California settlers in primitive, mountainous Siskiyou County, for example. And if there are any remnants of songs sung by and about the Forty Niners still alive, I am determined to find them. Then there are singing Basques and Icelanders, etc., whose music is of great interest. So far as is possible we want to make a representative collection of folk songs and instrumental music current or retrievable in men's memories now, in northern California.

Then we propose to make a card index and check list of this material, with historical and genealogical notes insofar as they are available; and later transcribe the texts where possible. I expect to provide for making copies of the disks, in a small way, since we cannot transcribe from originals safely. I am getting a small Presto recorder which makes superlative acetate records and good aluminum ones, and am going to try to use aluminum in the field, because it is so much cheaper, and then copy onto acetate the most interesting things. What do you think about this? Does it seem important to you to get everything onto acetate? Are acetate originals enough better to justify the expense?

Would you like to have copies of some, or all, of the records we get? If you feel that we are likely to get records that would constitute a valuable acquisition from your point of view, and will write me a letter to that effect, I will try to get such a proviso written into the project from the beginning. I would value, also, suggestions and criticism of the proposed basis of work.

I would particularly like to work out some way in which my little project can be of use to you, because such service extended to other Federal agencies is one of the best arguments, it seems, for such WPA projects. The WPA is increasingly unwilling to allow its workers to be kept at "busy work" which, however, attractive in itself at the moment, fails to meet established standards in its field.

In addition I have always felt very strongly that so effort should be spared to establish a [?] national collection of records at one point, and my pleasure in making the records will be much diminished unless I can feel that, however indirectly, I am contributing to that aim.

If you want to select what you want, we could undertake to send you the records to be copied in whole or in part and returned to us. If I can train a technician to make good dubs, as I have every reason to expect, and you can supply the blanks, we could make your copies here, selecting the material for you on whatever basis you care to lay down.

I'd like, also, to know what the Archives of American Folk Song considers sound practise on this point, which has always bothered me: When making records of traditional music, is it legitimate to record traditional songs sung by other than traditional singers? When I was working for Special Skills this problem frequently arose. Since we wanted material for our Song Sheets as well as examples of the various styles of singing, I sometimes recorded good songs for their own sake -- as in the case of Dr. McIntosh of Carbondale, Ill.

The last I heard of your activities, you were on your way to record the singing of a riverman somewhere near LaCrosse. I hope you found him and that he knew lots of songs. That is wonderful country for song collectors. I'll never forget the excitement of hearing my first lumberjack conclude his song in a rapid mumble, spoken instead of sung, as an indication he had come to the end. The Irish bards did this centuries ago, I'm told; and I'd read of it among sailors singing ballads in the fore-castle and among the lumberjacks -- but never hoped to record it. Providentially, relatives of my best lumberjack singers are working in lumber mills in Trinity Co., California, and I can hardly wait to get there. (This is the family of the uncle of the hired man of the undertaker Ask Charlie Seeger to tell you the story of my all-night ride in the hearse in pursuit of Child ballads!) With kindest regards to your father and yourself, I am Cordially yours, Sidney Robertson

A.A.F.S. February 18, 1938

Mrs. Sidney Robertson 2850 19th Avenue San Francisco, California
Dear Mrs. Robertson:



I have read your letter with much interest and I feel that your project in Northern California will be an important contribution to the study of American folksong. I have discussed the matter of our encouragement of this project with Dr. Spivacke, and I can assure you that the Library will be glad to endorse it if so requested.

Although it seems a little previous at this time to discuss the details of duplicating, collecting, and cataloging, there are a few things that might be said.

First; as to material: I strongly urge you to use acetate in the field and to use aluminum duplicates for purposes of transcription. Acetate is such superior in quality and aluminum seems to stand the wear and tear of much playing. I feel that the Archive should be the repository of the originals you make and I believe that, by the time the project is under way, we shall be able to duplicate your originals for you as you send them in. The details of this arrangement we can work out later.

Second, as to collecting: it is naturally preferable to record folksongs from folk-singers, but in lieu of folk-singers, folk songs are still important. I think you will agree with me that when one is face to face with the wealth of material in the field, one tends to be over-critical. I always try to record more than I feel is important to compensate for this false perspective, and the Library will want everything you take down.

Third, as to cataloging: perhaps we shall be able to furnish you with a standard card form for your cataloging which would save both of us much time; and we are planning a data form to be stamped in the record envelope which might be of some use to you.

I didn't know who told you I was on my way to "somewhere near LaCrosse", because the last time I heard of my activities, I was collecting in Eastern Kentucky. I appreciate your feeling of Mrs. Sidney Robertson's closeness to the Archive and your desires to cooperate with us. Thanks for your interesting letter. With my best wishes for the success of your project, I am
Sincerely,
AL:ed

2441 I St NW Washington DC [February 19, 1938]

Dear Sidney

Thanks so much for your very interesting letters I shall, of course, back you up to the limit. I am working at this end upon a national recording project and your working out there will be a great help. I'll tell you more about this when I write you next week and send you a copy of my letter to

Sharpe. I am afraid it will be necessary for you to get the 30 disks I sent you back here reasonably soon. If my plans go through I shall be using the machine. At any rate I need those blanks. Could not Packard get them through on a frank? I'd volunteer to pay the express myself but of course with nosalary checks coming through for the present we are absolutely up against it and have to economize.

Thanks especially for the information about Mills and Stanford. I am not going back into teaching if I can possibly help it unless I can get a position with relatively complete freedom for research. I am trying to get one job organising a department of fine arts: but that is an exceptional case and I would not by any manner of means want to keep on administering the show. If I could get someone to endow a chair of musicological research at Stanford I would take it. I have written to a friend who could do this if he wanted. But I hardly expect any results.

I think your general plan is excellent. If I were not up to the gills in work and pushing myself beyond endurance I would give you immediate reactions. But I cannot and shall have to ask you to wait until next week when perhaps I can find time..... I am all for the biographical data: and also for data on the community, if relevant. When a group of instruments plays get the whole thing as well as possible and then have a few verses or sections [with the mike before each player in turn?] so that, with the rest in the background, each part could be notated in a general way in a transcription. This applies to singing with accompaniment also. Before or after a performance involving an instrument in any way unusual, have performer play tuning into mike with appropriate remarks. Give also diagrams, notational representation also. I am getting more and more pleased with the idea of having the performer give the title in his own words: "This song is entitled to Risselty Rosselty hey bombosity....."(that's a grand song by the way - Alan has a lethargic version from Texas which is also good) We do miss you around here. Your dulcimer arrived in perfect shape. May I

Photograph it, measure it and describe it in an article I am writing? Full credit to you and maker, of course. Have we a record of music play upon such? I understand that Mann's was quite different. Am I right?

That the strings on his crossed [eachother?] to make an X?... Yes, yes, yes, I'll make you some copies if you'll let me know what you want -and if I have the facilities I still have here.... By the way, did you know AJD was working to get you into [?] program? Sh-sh, of course. Are you interested in that? I think your WPA project is better..... By the way, Take photographs of all your singers and performers. If you could take movies too, that is so much the better. We have made an irreparable fault in not having more photos of all KL work. Instruments too, front, side, end, back. Oh dear odear. I could go on but I've got to get back to work. My love to Henry when you see him. CS

2850 - 19th Avenue San Francisco, California February 21, 1938

Dr. Albert Elkus Department of Music University of California Berkeley, California Dear Dr. Elkus:

I have been discussing the possibility of setting up a folksong collecting project (in northern California, the research workers to be located in Berkeley) with Dr. James B. Sharp of the Works Progress Administration. As I see it, the problem is to coordinate the efforts and contributions of a number of groups interested in various aspects of such an undertaking.

Dr. Sharp is favorable to such a project if the Music Department of the University of California will sponsor it, providing guidance in research and publication and some material aid with respect to the non-labor items that WPA cannot cover.

The smallest project that will justify the employment of a supervisor authorized to travel in the field consists of twenty workers. These people will require: a) Space b) Office furniture -- c) Office supplies -- paper, carbon, cards for indexes. This is estimated at \$15 a mnth. d) Expense of publication in mimeograph form -- stencils, paper, and binding.

I own an adequate recording machine and expect to raise a little money for travel expense and for most of the blank disks needed, from other sponsors. If typewriters have to be rented, that is another item; and postage to and from the State Library will have to be provided. I hope to borrow some typewriters from another government agency.

Ordinarily the sponsor provides space for the work to be done, but I understand this constitutes an especially difficult problem at the University just now -- particularly with respect to placement of WPA workers in the various libraries. The latter problem could perhaps be simplified by withdrawing books for our use through your Department -- I understand there is precedent for this, and in the case of the average book we will need there would probably be no objection to this. I own around 20 of the standard collections of folk songs which we can use for reference. Research among old newspapers and unpublished early California material, such as I hope to include in our work, constitutes a special problem in handling of the source material; and this will have to be worked out when we come to it. It is not immediate, however.

Obviously such a project should be located as near the music buildings as possible, for your convenience. Mrs. Kristich, in charge of the Oakland-Berkeley area for the Women's and Professional Projects of the WPA, has expressed interest in the general idea as I outlined it to her, and suggests you discuss the problem of space with Mr. Pomeroy, who has been designated coordinator in charge

of WPA projects on the campus (on the University staff.) There would be no difficulty about finding space in Oakland, but that is rather awkward.

2

I enclose a copy of Dr. Sharp's letter to me, confirming our original conversation.

If the University is willing to provide guidance and the expense of office supplies and publication, will you write Dr. Sharp a letter to that effect? It is perfectly permissible for the University to make a small charge to cover the expense of materials involved in publishing reports, etc.

I expect to find co-sponsors willing to provide small amounts each, for the further expenses of the project, from among the following groups: California Society of Pioneers, State Historical Society, National Federation of Women's Clubs (folksong collecting is one of their national projects for this year), The California Club, The Bohemian Club, The National Broadcasting Company (Suggested by Oakland Public Schools), Mrs. Kristich

I haven't gone very far with these latter contacts chiefly because I've been housebound with bronchitis for over two weeks. If you have any further suggestions, I'd be very glad. Also, if you know what committee heads at the California and Bohemian Clubs are likely to be approachable, I'd be glad to know this In general I find the best approach is arrange a hearing of the records I already have, where this is feasible.

The New Music Society has already offered a minimum of 20 blanks for the recording of Oriental music, which is available so near at hand as to obviate travel expense.

The Library of Congress (Archives of American Folk Song) has indicated its willingness to endorse this project and cooperate in coordinating our methods of indexing and cataloguing with theirs. They also say they would like to have us deposit with them all the records I make in the field. A year and a half ago I initiated the first attempt to index the records in their collection, and we then established a tentative form for an index which I expect has since been revised and more or less finally established as effective practice. The problem was not simple, chiefly because of the high variability of titles in the folk music field. A great deal of cross-indexing is necessary.

I do not know whether the University of California has already established Archives of California Folk Music; but if not, the records I propose to make might constitute a beginning. I should be grateful for any help you are able to give in approaching organizations which might act as co-sponsors and contribute \$100-\$200 toward the expense of establishing such Archives at the University of California; and toward providing adequate representation for California in the Archives of American

Folk Song at the Library of Congress. The latter organization is functioning on almost no money, and though they may be able to send us a few blank disks, the representation from the Coast will probably not be adequate unless someone here is interested in increasing the number of disks available for this purpose.

Twelve-inch acetate blanks are the best available for field work, and can be hardened by treatment with a solution which lengthens their playing life indefinitely. However, they cost 72¢ each. Aluminum blanks of the same size are only 32¢ each, and while they do not reproduce tone quality with the fidelity 3 of the acetate, they are on the whole quite satisfactory. Their playing life is, however, somewhat limited, so that I feel field originals, when made on aluminum, should be used only for making further copies; and that transcribing should be done only from copies, to save the original.

Dr. Spivacke of the Library of Congress once told me that he had calculated that each record in the Archives there had cost somebody \$10 to make. This seems very high to me, since at a time when my salary, per diem and mileage expense averaged \$5 a day each record I made averaged \$6. (This was charging the entire expense of my travel to the records, which was not altogether fair as I conducted other business for Resettlement as I went.) It is not, however, necessary for expenses to mount up nearly as high as that. The nature of my assignment for Resettlement necessitated skimming the cream hastily [over?] a very large area, so that my travel expense was very high. I was sampling, in other words, rather than establishing material for thorough research from any one region. Here, on the other hand, a great deal of invaluable material is within reach in San Francisco and around the Bay, necessitating almost no travel expenditure. Moreover, there will be plenty of time for preliminary investigation by mail here, so that I need not risk following quite so many blind trails as become inevitable when one works under pressure in a strange area with no preliminary contact or local help.

I enclose a tentative outline of the proposed project and its organization. Except for the typological analysis of tunes, (Dr. Herzog's system) my aim is to establish an objective record of folk music. The disks, obviously, are of primary importance in this respect. Where historical accounts are concerned, it seems to me the only valid work we can do consists of collecting and collating contemporary accounts. Arguments, deductions and generalizations based on this material are for specialists to make later. Even Dr. Herzog's research is still in the statistical stage; and it is only the statistical work that WPA workers can be expected to do dependably. Check lists of songs, transcriptions of texts and, with Mr. Lawton's help, tunes, are within our grasp and will be serviceable to students and collectors all over the United States. Conclusions based on the data we collect, should, I feel, be made by specialists in the many fields such data may feed. Anthropologists, historians, sociologists,



composers, musicologists, linguists -- all have an interest in one facet or another of such material as this, so long as we insist upon its being recorded in the most objective fashion possible. Dr. James B. Sharp's address is: Coordinator of Statistical Projects, Works Progress Administration 49 Fourth Street, San Francisco, California

If you will write him, with any comments and suggestions you have to offer, and will send a copy of the letter to me, we can go on from there. Someone from Mrs. Kristich's office will probably see you within a few days, since the project, if and when established, will come under her jurisdiction. Cordially yours, S. R. (Mrs.) Sidney H. Robertson

Gerald Strang Managing Editor John J. Becker Associate Editor Wallingford Riegger Associate Editor Dene Denny Secretary - Treasurer NEW MUSIC EDITION Post Office Box 2888 Hollywood Station Los Angeles California February 21, 1938

Dear Sidney:

I enclose a copy of my letter to Sharp. I hope it covers the points you were most anxious to have covered. If there is anything else I can do, please let me know.

The blanks you mention are my own, but I'd be delighted to have you use them for collecting Calif. material -- any Calif. stuff, and whether or not the project goes through. I should kick at having someone fill my blanks for me without my even going to the trouble of dubbing!

Incidentally, did you get my postcard about the discount? I can get you 8 percent off on the machine if you promise to keep it absolutely under your hat. As you know, no discounts are allowed, but I can get this much.

We made some rather surprisingly good records at Buhlig's the other night -- two piano stuff. You know how hard it is to record one piano---

Take your 20 WPA workers. Some can be used for research, some for collecting and comparing texts, some for dubbing, etc. You'll need an office assistant, at least a couple of stenographers, a couple of bibliographers, a technician or two, at least five researchers into the historical, racial, and musical backgrounds of the communities in which you work; and after you begin to get the records coming in, several analysts to extract and classify the texts, the tunes, the instruments. Then these will have to be compared with available published material, and if possible with other collected material by

correspondence. If you can get yourself a good research director, he or she can keep the staff busy enough.

Give Henry our love when you see him again. Tell him not to worry about my 2 jobs -- they're just the teaching. NM is a third; Schoenberg and I are working on a composition book (4); and I am promoting a series of [?] radio programs (5). Also, I start a series of lectures soon. Add the recording (which is now up to 53 double sided blanks) and I find myself busy enough. But the paper is giving out.

Had a fine letter from Henry in the same mail with yours. He also is much interested in your project.

58291 Best Gerry

2850 - 19th Avenue San Francisco, California February 21, 1938

Dear Adrian:

A thousand thanks for your letters and various intercessions on my behalf. The Packards, too, have been swell --- gave a pleasant party so I could play some records and get a little acquainted with R.G.T., (who was as gracious as possible, and spoke with affection and pride of you and Margaret.) The Garsts and Taylors and Duvenecks were there, and a few others. I had a little conversation with Garst, not much, and was expecting to go in to talk to him in his office when bronchitis laid me low and I've not been good for anything since. I can still do that, but Mr. Packard, after talking to Garst, tol me Garst really did n't have any money. Garst had said to me that the only jobs open to women were as nurses and public health instructors. I had an idea of talking him into creating a job looking after the children's interests, either all through the camps, or the state, or the / region; and I may still try that. The difficulty has been that I'm still coughing my head off and it is completely exhausting to try to conduct any kind of conversation; besides which that would be a particularly trying job nervously and physically and I'm just not up to it, for two or three months to come, judging from previous sieges of this same sort. I can be energetic by fits and starts, for an hour or two; but to judge from my experience in Region Two, this business of working with a lot of cross and worried men who dislike [having?] a woman around or having to bother with her except In The Home requires steady nerves, a thick skin and a sense of humor that's only possible when you're feeling top-notch. There seems to have been considerable friendly discussion of the uses to which I might be put, and while it would certainly be better to push it throughnow, still there are 7-10 new camps planned, and there'll be a lot to do after July 1st ... and that looks like a good time for me to get on Garst's trail again.

I do hope you understand how this is, and how grateful I am for your care and consideration of your official family? I don't know if you've ever been around anyone with this absurd bronchitis, but it is really hell on wheels. You can't stick your nose out of doors when it's foggy or rainy or after it gets cool in the afternoon because, if you do you cough all night. The business of keeping warm, and talking as little as possible, and walking slowly and avoiding stairs, etc., qualifies you for an old lady's home any time certainly not for a migratory labor camp!

Meanwhile, I've been talking and playing records when and where I could and am on the verge of setting up a small WPA research project under the auspices of the University of California, (in Berkeley, where it's warmer than S.F.). This would run for about six months, under present plans, and would allow me to do as much recording as I can get blanks for, around northern California. I think I can probably arrange things so I won't be under such pressure as I should be in FSA, and I can do a great deal right around the Bay, with only one or two forays into remote country. I'm of course anxious to explore folk songs out here, and this seemed the most likely chance, considering everything. It has to be approved in about a dozen different places and by people with a dozen different ideas, including one nice lady who thought it would be so helpful for us to write a history of music telling what music was like "in the period 4000 B.C.!!!" My idea is that that we'll be doing well if we got back as far as 1849 with any assurance! But it's fun to work out, like a game of chess. And there is such extraordinary variety of material here, it can't help but be interesting. By picking time and weather for travelling, I think I could fit such a job to my present state of un-health; and as the thing gets into the research stage I can abandon it any time without disgracing myself or crippling the result. So I can tackle Garst again later, when, if and as the old fighting spirit returns. I am embarrassed to ask you to bother farther with my concerns, but I should like a little help from you on this present scheme, if you are able to give it.

WPA requires, for the setting up of a new project like this, sponsors and co-sponsors, to do two things; 1) Give assurance of the usefulness of the work proposed; 2) Provide funds or materials for the non-labor items. In this case the University of California is chief sponsor, providing office materials and guidance. They cannot provide space, as it happens, being already much over-crowded -- nor office furniture for the 20 WPA workers. (A non-resident, non-relief person can only be employed if he or she can keep 20 workers busy - on the famous 5% administrative cost theory. I'm trying to begin as small as possible in order to work out the ratio between field and office activity. The WPA, after their experience with Lomax, whom they paid a lot and who never did think up any work for WPA workers to do, which after all is the WPA aim! -- after that they are inclined to think it cannot be worked out. So, I propose to show them! However, the University will provide guidance and the expense of office supplies, and the other things can be arranged....

The other chief non-labor items is of course blank disks. I am hoping to persuade various women's clubs, etc., to provide some cash for these. They are going to want Calif. historical stuff chiefly. The New Music Society has promised 20-100 blanks depending on what I find, for Oriental music. That leaves the migratory workers out on a limb, at present. I have texts of 40 songs gathered by Tom Collins at Arvin in a single song round-up last year; and I'm sure there is a tremendous amount of good stuff there, and on the whole I'm in a good position to get it.

Would Major Walker, or somebody or other, on Washington FSA letterhead, write to Dr. James B. Sharp, Coordinator of Statistical Projects, WPA, 49 Fourth St., S.F. endorsing the idea of collecting and indexing this material, saying perhaps that such songs from rural California would be valuable to the Agri. Ext. program, or something? And, further, would FSA formally offer to place at our disposal a certain number of the left-over KL disks, say 50, for such research among the migratory works with which FSA is so closely concerned ---- these disks to be returned to the KL collection when filled, after copying here. I have written to Charlie about this but have had no answer. One reason I am particularly anxious to get some Washington FSA endorsement is that once I have that I may gently insinuate myself into a position where I can share travel with FSA people here and get really well acquainted with the camps and maybe can borrow some office furniture (from left-overs now in storage due to staff cuts.) If the recording program is not continuing under FSA in Washington, this seems a legitimate request, since not only is there a desirable tie-up with FSA clients but at the time the records and blanks were bought, RA and WPA were operating from the same fund and such transfer of property should be perfectly legal --- though it would be temporary. We plan to make a local deposit of records at the University of California and another at the Library of Congress.

I have in my possession 30 blanks sent via Walter Packard on which it was intended I should record some sea songs at a seamen's convention here. But the convention changed its plans and disbanded after 4 days instead of 3 weeks, so that by the time I got back from Los Angeles with a recording machine the men had dispersed. There are other singers on sea songs here, however... If it proves too complicated to arrange this loan of material formally, please allow me to keep `em informally if you can, will you? and I'll return them in a month or two after recording on them. A letter from FSA simply endorsing the idea will be sufficient.

There are two or three other things I'd like to ask FSA for! and if you can let me know the possibilities I'd appreciate it.

1) My own little recording machine isn't constructed ? for heavy and constant work, particularly with aluminum blanks, though it does good work. I understand the Library of Congress is using the KL machine at present for copying, and also that the Library has ordered some very fine machinery for

copying which should come through soon. When this happens, and assuming this project does go through out here, could we borrow the KL machine for two or three months, say perhaps May and June, as by that time we should have a lot of originals and will need to go in heavily for copying? If Charlie is still in Washington then and busy at recording, etc., the Library of Congress would certainly lend him one of their machines at any time; they have several, at least one of them very good indeed. Equally he would undoubtedly be able to make copies with the Library equipment at any time, so his undertakings need not be crippled. If FSA continues the recording program, of course that would be a different matter; but it seems to me that if it does not, WPA might legitimately have next claim on equipment...No?

2) What WPA has to offer is labor ---- in making copies, and particularly in cataloguing, transcribing texts, etc., etc. I understand this has not yet been done for the KL collection, and I would be very glad to have that to begin work on, so that the 20 people I have to keep busy can have something to do until I get California records for them to work on. We could probably pay the express charges one way if FSA would the other.

3) Would FSA like to have us pick up the song sheet idea and carry it on? I believe the photo-offset method (is n't that what KL used?) is too expensive in materials for WPA; but on the other hand I can get every sort of collaboration from Fed. Drama, Music and Art here in S.F. There are far more people needing to be set to work around here than there are ideas for keeping them busy, and if a demand were expressed for this material I'm sure it could be worked out.

Be careful about discussing this last with Charlie, won't you! I don't know whether the idea of issuing broadside reprints of folk songs was his, originally, or not; but in any case he is so extremely possessive about all this work that I hesitate doubly to suggest carrying on something that I had no particular share in myself originally. On the other hand he di dawdle so over those song sheets! and my chief feeling of loyalty is of course to the job I see to be done rather than to a person ... perhaps this is a mistake. I have not suggested that we do this, but I gave some song sheets to some Music Project people and the word got around, and now the Oakland Public Schools want to know whether we'll issue some songs for them. Ought I ask Charlie's permission to do this? It is n't an immediate problem. If I ask him formally to allow us to continue this, he will undoubtedly write back that he is planning to do this himself ---- thus tying things up -- and doing nothing --- indefinitely, as if there were not plenty to do for 16 people to get busy at. He really tried very hard to manoeuver me into a position of complete inaction and impotence where the records I made are concerned. By dint of being a trifle disagreeable about it, and laying myself open to the charge of being "possessive" myself, I have managed, I think, to make it clear that I am entitled to the ordinary courtesies extended a collector, among research workers; and I trust it is now understood that the

understanding I had with the people who sang and played for me is not open to interpretation by him according to changing circumstances, but must be referred back to me and to the performers. He implied, in answer to my long letter about this some months ago -- I sent you a copy, remember --- that what ailed me was that I expected to receive a per-page royalty on publications! Not at all, I've already been paid for doing this work. But we collected this material with very definite purposes in mind which did not include commercial publication or dubbing from the records by commercial companies, but only by the government. As things have turned out, this is perhaps too bad; but it does not change the understand under which I operated, as a government agent, and Charlie will really have to grasp the fact. I am not willing to tell these people one thing and do another. I enclose a copy of the notes of reservation of the records that I sent in recently.

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Charlie asked me for this, saying he needed release dates on the records. This aggravated me all over again because he knows perfectly well that it is not a question of length of time but of kind of reservation. He reminds me of the classic family story about myself. When I was about four I called up from downstairs to my mother to ask if I could have something or other. She said no and I asked again immediately. After this had been repeated two or three times she got annoyed and came to the head of the stairs and expressed her negative vote unmistakably. Silence. Then from me, mildly, "I can't hear you when you say no!" I wrote him -- probably at too great length for him to grasp the point -- about the impossibility of our allowing Lomax to publish material I had gathered; and he wrote back telling me not to worry, that I'd get a per-page royalty if anybody did!! and saying: "I'll tell Lomax, then, that he can have anything that is not under reserve." The point of my dissertation was what from the point of view of such publication as Lomax does, it was all under reserve. I told people over and over again that nobody makes any money out of this collection, and that publication was to be by the government. I don't see how we can get around that, do you? Well! there's not much point in getting entangled in that all over again.

To return to my mutttons: If it seems all right to you for FSA to include, in this suppositious letter of endorsement, a remark to the effect that it is to be hoped it will be possible to put this material into circulation for the benefit of the many who want to sing it, that may help, later on, in getting the WPA to let us? issue some broadside sheet -- if you think we should let this alone on the other hand, we will. My loyalties are divided, as between the job to be done and the person.

How're things? I had such a good letter from Grete the other day, and one from Margaret ---- you people all spoil me something fierce, and how I do like it! I even like getting admonitory letters from you saying, in more official language, "Where the HELL is that travel voucher?!!!"

It was missing, I noticed in E.R.'s "Day" something about a charming girl with a guitar who had sung at the White House at a supper party, and I sez to myself, I just bet that was Margaret -- without a reason in the world to think so --- when lo, a letter arrives from Margaret written in the afternoon saying you and she were going there that night, to "entertain"..... You should have heard Tugwell's tone, speaking of Margaret's singing.. a nostalgic reminiscence of beauty that expressed just what her singing does make one feel --- "O, let this moment last"

I told the Packards a story that the other night that he immediately said should have gone into my reports ... and I can't remember whether it did or not, or whether I ever wrote you about it. But you know, when I first went out to Region Two I was full of curiosity about everything from whittling to cooperative farms, and I asked thousands of questions continuously --- they must have stuck out all over me. Among other things I was stuck with my first real acquaintance with middle western farming, and with the difference in many occupations, as compared with California, which resulted from the complete change of climate twice a year. I kept discovering that in almost every field one's winter activity contrasted with one's summer one as much as the Minnesota winter and summer temperatures did. One hot evening I was chatting with a hardy specimen named Toughy Anderson who ran an outdoor chicken joint on the edge of Austin. He had been a sailor and roustabout -- and was an excellent cook. I inquired how late in the fall he could expect to keep open, and he said he expected he'd have to close up around September 20th, that was as late as anybody'd feel inclined to eat out of doors. I wondered what winter activity paired off with a summer chicken shack, and with an earnest desire for information I said: "Then what do you do during the winter?" "Well," said he matter-of-factly, "last winter, I done time!"

He'd been cooking for a bootlegger and they'd both got sent to Stillwater. Toughy said he could n't see a bit of sense in bootlegging. During Prohibition it was one thing; but now, when all you had to do to stay out of trouble was buy yourself a license once a year ---- he couldn't see that bootlegging was worth it!

Margaret seemed to feel that there war n't no Future In It, around there --- but that may have been a momentary low. Grete did n't seem quite her usual buoyant self, either! but that's probably partly over-work. I may be mistaken -- or probably it is because I can't quite visualize the breaking-up, [hving?] been away from Washington for very nearly a year, during which the more acute shrinking went on ---- But you know,[?] I have trouble believing that we won't all work together again, somehow and somewhere I don't really believe it! The idea behind KL, and our relationship to it, seems as permanent and as tangible as a brick. I don't see us all together in the Dept. of Agriculture again, I can tell you! but somehow, somewhere, it seems likely that we'll, most of us, be at it again. We were n't through, any of us. In general I believe absolutely that no sincere effort is ever lost, though

it often does n't come to fruition when and where expected, goodnessknows. But in this case my feeling is even stronger and more definite --- not only is our work not lost, but the KL organism seemed right to me somehow, despite all our many mistakes, and imbued with a life of its own that is not likely to stop. I just bet you this present low is just one way of "reculer pour mieux sauter" - a grand French phrase for which there is no English --- roughly, a drawing back in order to take a better jump ahead. I should be more mournful than I can say if I did n't somehow have a feeling that we'll all meet again at some time and place that is just around the corner with our sleeves rolled up, and the familiar fire in the eye! (And not with wings and harps, either! Or at least, mouth harps maybe, but definitely not wings sprouted, it would be too dull!)

Somebody wrote me that Dick Kenah is head of the D.C. Fed. Art. Project and I think that is quite something and very swell. Tell him so, will you, and that I send a friendly hail in his direction. I always thought Dick, besides being one of the best KL artists, promised more and higher general ability than any other of the field people, though I liked them all. You know just plain brains never did anybody any harm! and I'm coming to think more and more that people may be charming without any particular intellectual force, as witness Leonard Kirk -- and even Steff and Charlie Pollock --- but for wear, year in and year out, give me the people like Dick, and Nick Ray, and Olle Nordmark, and Ben Shahn and John Cunniggham. You might not want all of them around under foot continually! but at least [??] you'd never wear them out, they'd have something to contribute indefinitely. --- I've got the greatest respect for what Dick accomplished at Westmoreland --- and I remembered remember our hectic pursuit of Tink Queer, and the radio kid who came in, clicked his heels together (at Ligonier, Pa. a VERY small town) told me whatwas amiss with the recording machine, watched our proceedings a moment and then left. He could n't stay, he said, because he had to get back and finish writing a short story! It was all so vivid and so absurd, and we got so exhausted --- largely because this was my very first tackling of the recorder alone and I had everything yet to learn about recording in small towns. Dick was a grand companion-of-the-road and I'm still grateful. When I was there he was somewhat disturbed because he found he could not confine himself to teaching art for its own sake, but had to compromise continually, and it bothered him. I was sure the compromises were necessary and right, in the interests of the broder social aim ---- but I know now how he felt --- I thought of our conversation when I went out to Austin hoping to start a very swell chorus --- and started a baseball team instead!

I suppose I really might have written this to Dick direct pass it on, will you, Adrian?

I don't suppose I've mentioned that my sister married a young fellow who is now fighting with the Loyalists in Spain, in the Lincoln Battalion of the International Brigade. Some very funny stories have been coming back -- along with a lot of stories not quite so funny. It seems that during Hawks'

experience in artillery school, which was rather more highly organized than most of the places he's been -- more attempt to act like an army ---- some doctor ordered the men's food doctored with -- I can't remember the name of the chemical, but it's the stuff that is used in barracks all over the world as an -- well, I've forgotten that word too! anti-Aphrodisiac is all I can think of. It [?] makes the food taste horrible. The Americans fighting for Spain raised the most awful howl about it, not so much on the score of flavor as because they resented any loss of their power of self-determination and volunteers, fighting for freedom, should not have their liberty interfered with in any such way! They held a meeting at which it was pointed out that it made no possible difference in their lives but simply added unnecessary insult to injury, because all the Spanish [????????????] (I have it! Saltpetre!)

2850 - 19th Avenue San Francisco, California February 28, 1938

The Society of California Pioneers
456 McAllister Street San Francisco, California
Attention Mrs: Van Sicklen
Dear Mrs. Van Sicklen;

Since the day when I interrupted your labors, hanging pictures and maps, to inquire for old-timers who might know songs, I have been working to see whether a project to gather this material in an organized fashion could be established in California. Would the Pioneers' Society feel like helping with this?

Ordinarily the work is relatively expensive because it requires equipment, travel expense and clerical help in indexing, classifying, and so on. However, it seems to me that by combining the efforts of a number of organizations interested in the field, we can accomplish everything necessary without an undue burden anywhere.

You probably know that at the Library of Congress, in Washington, there is a large collection of disks deposited in the Archives of American Folk Song from various states in the union. On these disks have been recorded songs, fiddle tunes, dance bands from the 'Cajan country, and so on, constituting an invaluable record of traditional music sung or played, by country people for the most part, from many parts of the United States. As it happens, however, there are no records at all from California. No real efforts has ever been made, so far as I have been able to determine, to collect the songs sung by the lumbermen in the north, the seamen along the coast, the miners, and so on. I am perfectly sure that songs brought in by the pioneers in the Seventies and Eighties can be unearthed, with a little persistence. Recording on disks eliminates the inaccuracy resulting from the musical notation of this material by people not specially trained for it, and for this reason the Library of Congress and musicologists generally have been stressing collection on disks. In the course of a field survey that I did for the Resettlement Administration over a period of eighteen months or so,



I used a portable recording machine to make records in the southern Appalachians, in the Ozarks, and in the upper Mississippi River states. Now that I am in California I am anxious to get a project under way that will unearth the valuable material that I know is here.

The University of California, the Library of Congress and the New Music Society have endorsed what I am proposing to do and have offered some further help. I own a good portable recording machine, and the WPA will pay my salary and part of my travel expense, in return for supervision of folk music research for 20 of their 2 workers. Albert Elkus, head of the Music Department of the University of California, has said he will sponsor the project, and has agreed that whatever publications result from it (in the form of check-lists of songs, for example, which interest folk song collectors studying migration of music, for example,) will be issued by the University jointly with WPA and the other co-sponsors.

We can therefore go ahead, now, as soon as co-sponsors can be found willing to underwrite the small amount necessary to cover the non-labor items that WPA cannot undertake. This is estimated at \$400, to be distributed over a period of six months. It is to be spent chiefly for the necessary supply of blank records. When completed, duplicate sets of these records are to be placed at the University of California and in the Archives of American Folk Song of the Library of Congress, so that California may be represented adequately there. The remaining funds will go toward that part of my travel expense that the WPA cannot meet.

May I come in and discuss this with you? I really feel this is an opportunity to 'do a fascinating piece of work here, of national importance, which will be a source of great satisfaction to all of us. Cordially yours, (Mrs.) Sidney H. Robertson
Phone: Overland 6622

2850 - 19th Avenue San Francisco, California March 4, 1938

Leonard Austin, Esq. c/o Mrs. Phelps
220 Thirty-second Avenue San Francisco, California
Dear Mr. Austin:

Henry Cowell urged me to get in touch with you when I first returned to California three months ago, but I've been prevented, until now, by the effects of an auto crash I'm an old pupil and admirer of Henry's and have been acting as assistant to Charles Seeger, a friend of Henry's also and a distinguished musicologist, in the Resettlement Administration in Washington. My job took me into the Appalachians and Ozarks and northern Mississippi River states, making records of folk music on a portable recording instrument.



Of course I want to explore the material that is here, and Henry told me that you could keep me busy for weeks in San Francisco alone, going from group to group. He is extremely anxious to get a lot of things down on disks. In particular he spoke of some Koreans that you know

Would you get in touch with me at the above address, or by phone (below) so we can arrange to meet? After several abortive attempts to reach you Olive Cowell gave me Mrs. Kotto's address, and I talked to her mother yesterday. Mrs. Phelps said she thought she could get a letter to you within a few days.

Do you get over to see Henry? I'd be glad to drive you over if you have difficulty getting there. I have some Scotch singers in San Anselmo and San Rafael that I'm nursing along and can always spend some time with so it is not time lost for me. Let me know. Cordally, (Mrs.) Sidney H. Robertson

2850 - 19th Avenue San Francisco, California March 5, 1938

Dr. Harold Spivacke, Acting Chief Music Division Library of Congress Washington, D.C. Dear Dr. Spivacke:

My original intention was to write you when I wrote Alan Lomax a couple of weeks ago, but my cherished bronchitis insisted on my entire attention again. You will of course have seen my letter to him.

I would very much appreciate it if you would write the Coordinator of Statistical Projects, [Works Progress Administration?] Dr. James B. Sharp, at 49 Fourth Street, San Francisco, endorsing establishment of a project to collect folk music in northern California, and expressing interest in having the disks I make deposited in the Archives of American Folk Song.

Yes, the originals

As you doubtless know, the WPA is less and less able to contribute anything but labor to such an undertaking, and it is necessary to meet the cost of non-labor items in other ways. Could the Library undertake to supply us with some blank records and blank cards? (I seem to have been making this request at intervals for some time past! but under slightly different circumstances.) If so, will you indicate this in your letter to Dr. Sharp?

All or none

I have good prospects of persuading various historical societies and clubs here to provide part of the blanks we will need, and about 2/3 of my travel expense, which WPA cannot cover; and I have asked

the City and County Federation of Women's Clubs to give us \$150 to enable us to put duplicate sets of 100 records each at the University of California (which is our chief sponsor) and in the AAFS -- this material to be drawn from the various national groups in and around San Francisco, Iceladers, Basques, Portuguese, Armenian, etc. If this goes through it will of course be at no cost to the Library. However, you will doubtless want some of the other things, like chanties and lumbermen's songs and songs from the migratory workers, and if you would undertake to provide a moderate number of disks for your copies it would be a great help. The New Music Society has offered us a minimum of 20 aluminum blanks, (more if available material warrants it) for the recording of Oriental music exclusively.

We will supply all blanks Why do we want dups. when we can have the originals Give New Music Soc duplicates

With respect to blank library cards: Part of my job, and the most urgent from the point of view of the WPA, of course, is to keep 20 WPA workers occupied with profitable work. The records I make won't keep that number busy. We are going to do some research in melodic classification for Dr. Herzog, but that will require a few people with some musical training. We will undoubtedly have to accept a certain number of " Mr. Hendersons " besides, and I 2 wondered how the Music Division would like an index of songs, taken from the tables of contents of published volumns of American folk songs? By working from the notes of such a collection as the 2-vol "Eng. FS from the S. Appalachians" of Cecil Sharp, for example, we would glean a certain number of alternative titles for cross-references. It seems to me we could do a thoroughly useful job without demanding too much of the type of worker I have in mind. As I remember, the Music Division has already done this for volumes such as those collected by Lomax; but my impression is that is this one of the types of indexig that the Division has been too busy to keep up to date. If you could keep us supplied with cards, I don't see why we could n't do this for you, the cards to be deposited back in the Library when finished.

I want also to do a bibliographical index of song titles for California, using published material plus the records I make.

By a lucky accident I find a young woman who has just gone onto WPA here, who worked in New York under Herzog for a while doing an elaborate index of cowboy songs; she has had some training and experience as a librarian also, and I hope to use her as my assistant in charge of the project during my necessary absences in the field. So I am confident that we can do a good job.

The University of California has absorbed 900 WPA workers of one sort or another and is beginning to feel the congestion in the University library. That is the chief reason why we can expect to be of use to you despite the awkward distance involved. Could we arrange to get a certain number of volumes per month from your shelves, either directly or through the State or University librarians,



so that we may have the volumes at the workers' own desks, instead of placing workers in the University libraries? We'll pay postage one way if you will the other, and we'll take good care of them.

If such a song title index seems a good idea to you, will you say so to Dr. Sharp and indicate what you will be able to do toward covering the non-labor items: Blank cards, books to index, postage? It will also be necessary for you to state that such an index would be of value to students using the Library but that the latter cannot hope to undertake it, or something to that general effect.

Dr. Archer Taylor Chicago U., is doing on index. Ask her to collaborate with him.

If you have any suggestions about more useful and equally simple work that we could do, I'd be awfully glad to have you make them. Of course I'm counting on following forms established by you in any indexing we may do. With kindest regards to all the Music Division staff, I am Where are the kind regards to me?? Cordially yours, Sidney Robertson

[Illegible Page?]

2

[Illegible Page?]

Form R. A. Gen. 197-30-35

RESETTLEMENT ADMINISTRATION MEMORANDUM Dear Dr. Spivacke:

I hope the attached letter covers the necessary points without becoming too involved The writing up of this sort of project involves playing ring-around-a-rosy with entirely too many people! The original negotiations with the University of California were too funny for words: The Music Dept. was very interested but wanted a letter expressing interest from WPA on which to base its endorsement; and WPA wanted the University's endorsement before it committed itself in writing to any active interest... and so on. Finally that was settled; and now I am going through the same process with the dear ladies of the Calif. State Federation of Women's Clubs, which I am told has some money. The two historical societies seem to function more simply, thank God. Three musical societies here have n't deigned to answer my letters, which I thought was interesting. but expected I'm to get small pledges from a lot of groups to cover items like office expenses, travel, blanks... with the idea that if this works here, it will be possible to duplicate the set-up in another state or two later. I still have my eye on Wisconsin! The life of this project here is set at 6 months, though it can always be extended if there's more to be done..



You'll be interested to know that during the past few week I have seen or heard thirty-two folk or national nstruments play in and around San Francisco ---- a horribly inflated pig used as bagpipes by a Serb; an Assyrian Saz, Greek oude and cembalom and instruments that have been played in California now for two generations and more..... Arabian, Persian, Philippine, Portuguese instruments.. I was astonished. All but two or three are in active contemporary use here. One drinks a dozen varieties of coffee and wine in their pursuit, at the oddest hours and places, and in the oddest company. Very different from lumberjacks! Best regards Sidney Robertson

[?] [?]2850 - 19th AvenueSan Francisco, CaliforniaMarch 19, 1938

Dr. Harold Spivacke, Acting ChiefDivision of MusicLibrary of CongressWashington, D.C.Dear Dr. Spivacke:

Thank you for your recent letter outlining the policy of the A. A. F. S. The collection should grow now by leaps and bounds.

We need a formal letter from you or from the Librarian, endorsing the plan to record traditional music in California and indicating willingness to act as co-sponsor (with the University of California) of the project. Such letters are necessary in order to obtain approval of new types of WPA projects by the Washington office. A co-sponsor is usually an organization, Federal or other, which specializes in the field in which the proposed project lies and indicates by its endorsement its opinion of the scientific value of the project. Usually it makes some further contribution in the form of guidance, space, equipment, etc.In this instance, the Library's contribution might be as follows:1) Guidance in indexing material accumulated in the course of this collection.2) A minimum of 200 blank disks for recrding in the field, these disks to become the property of the A. A. F. S. when recording is completed. (Over a period of 3-6 months.) 3) "Publication" (i.e., duplication) of disks for distribution at cost to research workers in folk music.4) Blank catalog cards for card indexes, the completed index to be returned to the Library.

WPA, as you know, can pay for labor and supervision and some field work; but the non-labor items cannot be paid for out of WPA funds. That is the reason why I've asked for catalog cards, for example. The records must be indexed as they come in; and we may be able to do a folk-song title index of published collections for you. In this connection I wrote Dr. Archer Taylor some weeks ago but have had no answer. My informant believed he was doing a thorough piece of bibliographical research which will not be completed for years to come. I planned something much simpler. This will have to remain in abeyance until I hear from Dr. Taylor, however.

With respect to item no. 2, above, it is extremely difficult for me to estimate the number of records it will be desirable to make here until I have travelled more outside the San Francisco Bay region. If this number might could be approved now, we might perhaps be free to request more later when I am better able to judge just what is here. My machine makes better acetate records than it does aluminum ones; but the latter are perfectly perfectly satisfactory for ordinary field work so it doesn't greatly matter which you decide to send.

2

Material available here includes chanteys and other songs of the sea; a few miners' songs; a good many lively singers from the lumer camps; songs brought in by the migratory workers who have been 'droughted out of Oklahoma', 'dusted out of South Dakota' and 'tractored out of Texas'; a few old Scottish and English ballads; and a great mass of very beautiful and interesting material of European and Oriental base, in all stages of transmutation into native American music.

Am I correct in assuming that the A. A. F. S. is now able, or expects in the near future to be able, to duplicate records for distribution at cost to collectors and institutions in general? If so, this constitutes a sort of "publication" of American traditional material which is infinitely superior to the publication of transcriptions and I do hope you are actually doing this, for it is an important service.

I should perhaps explain that the statistical, survey and research projects of the WPA (among which my proposed project will come) are set up to do work considered desirable by scholars, and the intention is that such work should be available in the chief libraries of the country, when published. This applies equally to deposits of things like records and photographs which are too expensive to duplicate beyond a very few copies. The WPA has no central repository for all this material and only hopes to place it where it can be of most use.

The deposit of records in the A. A. F. S. fully meets this last requirement, and it would not be necessary for the Library to undertake to provide copies for WPA, which has no particular use for them. If the Federal Music Project here wants a demonstration set of half a dozen disks, the cost of the disks can be taken care of here by other co-sponsors, and I hope to be able to make duplicates, on a small scale, on the project.

So we'll hope we needn't trouble you for this.

Thank you so much for your interest and your expression of willingness to work out a satisfactory basis for cooperation. My regards to your staff and yourself. Cordially yours, Sidney Robertson

[?]MEMORANDUM TO THE LIBRARIAN OF CONGRESS FROM THE Division of Music March 28, 1938

Referring to Letter dated March 19 from Mrs. Sidney Robertson 2850 - 19th Avenue San Francisco, California

Attached is a letter from Mrs. Sidney Robertson, formerly of the Special Skills Division of the Resettlement Administration, in which she asks the Library of Congress to act as co-sponsor, with the University of California, of a project to collect folk-songs in California. If you approve, I shall write the letter of endorsement which Mrs. Robertson requests.

I recommend that, in accordance with Mrs. Robertson's request, the Library agree to aid this project in the following manner:

1. To guide the workers in indexing any material which they may accumulate.
2. To supply 200 acetate discs to be used in recording folk-songs. The finished records will become the property of the Library. (Should additional discs be required, they will have to be applied for separately)
3. To make these records available for duplication.
4. To supply blank catalog cards for indexes which when completed, will revert to the Library.

The four points outlined here differ somewhat from the four points in Mrs. Robertson's letter. To avoid any misunderstanding, I shall call Mrs. Robertson's attention to these differences. Harold Spivacke Acting-Chief, Division of Music APPROVED [PY?] LIBRARIAN

2850 - 19th Avenue San Francisco, California March 19, 1938

Mrs. H. P. Van Sicklen, Secretary The Society of California Pioneers 456 McAllister Street San Francisco, California
Dear Mrs. Van Sicklen:

Thank you for your letter. I should be delighted to explore the boxes of music you mention: They may contain little of interest but equally they may prove to be full of treasure! I am going to Los Angeles for a week, leaving the 21st, and I will telephone and arrange to come in to see you when I get back.



I sent letters, much like the one I addressed to you, to a number of groups that I hope to interest as co-sponsors of my collecting project, and I find, from the replies, that I do not seem to have made it clear that I do not expect any one organization to give us the entire amount we need, (\$400). I would much rather have several groups pledge \$15 or so a month for six months and give me, at the same time, cooperation in running down material and the moral support of their interest. Whether or not your Board of Directors are able to find a small amount of cash somewhere to contribute to the undertaking, their endorsement and interest would certainly be invaluable and I would much appreciate having it. Cordially yours, Sidney Robertson

Gerald Strang Managing Editor John J. Becker Associate Editor Wallingford Riegger Associate Editor Dene Denny Secretary - Treasurer NEW MUSIC EDITION Post Office Box 2888 Hollywood Station Los Angeles California March 27, 1938

Received from the NEW MUSIC SOCIETY OF CALIFORNIA twenty (20) 12 inch aluminum record disks for the use of a WPA project for the recording of folk music in California. It is understood that if the terms of the project permit, these blanks will be used in recording music of Oriental or non-European origin. It is further understood that the records so made, when the project has finished with them will be returned to the NEW [?] MUSIC SOCIETY [?] for its musicological collection. Copies of any records taken on these blanks may be made for any interested organization if this is within the terms under which the project is organized. -----

2850 - 19th Avenue San Francisco, California March 29, 1938

Isabel Morse Jones The Los Angeles Times Los Angeles, California Dear Mrs. Jones:

I am sorry to have been unable to get the data on folk song collecting to you earlier, but I should have known better than to think I could squeeze the time in while en route to San Francisco. I went from one appointment to another all the way, with scarcely time between to breathe, let alone write anything down. I had an appointment yesterday afternoon here, too, so I had no leeway anywhere.

I enclose the rough draft of a memorandum I drew up last year for presentation to the Rockefeller Foundation, in hopes of obtaining funds to be administered through the Library of Congress. The request was politely refused on the ground that the field seemed too broad and accomplishment in it too expensive for the foundations to support now. As a result, the next time I undertook to promote collecting, it seemed wise to begin at the other end of the problem. So instead of hoping

for large-scale centralized activity in the collecting field, I have been trying to organize the efforts of a number of clubs and organizations which have specific interests in various facets of the work the New Music Society, the Library of Congress, the University of California, and so on .. also the WPA, which will provide salary and some travel expense for a field worker in return for supervision in folk music research of 20 WPA workers. I have first to raise \$400 for six-months' period, to cover the necessary supply of blank disks, etc., and that is what I am doing now. This is just for your information, and is of no public interest at the moment of course, until the work gets under way.

I believe I mentioned that the National Federation of Women's Clubs announced last fall that folk song collecting was to be one of its national projects for 1938. This year's President of the National Federation lives in Richmond, Virginia, where John Powell's ardent research into traditional music has made the community thoroughly alive to its native musical resources. The President of the State Federation in Washington announced from Seattle, some months ago, her intention of promoting this project actively, and by this time the results there should begin to be extremely interesting.

In the course of my work with the Resettlement Administration, over a period of 18 months, I was sent into twenty states noting everything I could about native arts and crafts as I went. This came about because the Special Skills Division, where I was originally assistant to Charles Seeger, head of the Music Unit, was asked to advise and do some research with respect to the establishment of crafts and recreation based on the arts, in Resettlement communities. Such socially [?] cohesive activity seemed indispensable where large numbers of stranded workers were established in new communities where economic salvation depended upon individual capacity for cooperation and neighborliness. Adrian J. Dornbush, head of the 2 Special Skills Division of the Resettlement Administration, very wisely felt that knowledge of local cultural and recreational patterns should precede any attempt at encouragement in these fields by the government. I was chiefly concerned with traditional music and dancing, and carried a portable recording apparatus with me to gather the songs of lumberjacks, sharecroppers, mountain people in the Appalachians and Ozarks, miners in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, and farmers in the Great Plains. I served a brief apprenticeship in the use of the recording machine under the wing of Joh A. Lomax, veteran American song collector, in the western North Carolina mountains. He and I spent two weeks there at the invitation of Dr. Frank Brown of Duke University, recording old ballads among the mountain people. Under the guidance of these two distinguished collectors I was led to discover America, and I feel deeply indebted to them both for much kindness. Dr. Brown has undertaken a monumental study of songs and dance tunes in western North Carolina. Mr. Lomax is Curator of the Archives of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress, and the greater part of the collection of records there was made by him among the negroes throughout the South, from Texas to Florida. He took his recorder to road camps along the Mississippi levees, into state penitentiaries and prison camps, and to revival

meetings in a dozen states, to recover authentic versions of negro spirituals, blues and work songs. The first collection of American folk songs ever published was Mr. Lomax' "Cowboy Songs and Other Ballads", which appeared in 1910. Unhappily only a few tunes could be included; but among them was "Home on the Range", whose phenomenal popularity indicates the sure instinct America has for its own and the great desirability of retrieving as many such tunes as possible, while there is yet time. It is a curious fact that the development of the radio, which is fast break breaking down regional variations in our folk music (which resulted from the isolated and self-sufficient way of life in remote communities of widely varying backgrounds and histories) has at the same time resulted in the development of the first really practical method of [?] preserving these interesting local variations: the portable electric recording machine. In November, 1936, I started out alone with around 400 lbs. of recording machinery in four large cases, and went from Washington to Pennsylvania, then into West Virginia, Old Virginia, and westthrough Kentucky and Tennessee to Missouri and Arkansas. Everywhere my interest in "the old-time things" opened doors usually closed to "furriners" and I was treated with the most amazing kindness and helped along in ways I could never have expected. Because my speech was strange I leaned heavily on my Louisiana- and Missouri - born parents; and my Virginia auto license helped immensely. A youth in the Ozarks who recorded several songs for me and, with his wife, went to endless trouble to make contacts for me among his relatives in the remoter hills, turned out, I later learned, to be on parole from Leavenworth. He was a kind of contemporary Jesse James, well liked in the hills because he was careful to restrict the practise of his profession to distant parts and because he was generous, if somewhat uncertain-tempered, at home. He of course was delighted to cultivate the "gov'ment song woman" as evidence to the Federal agents, who kept an eye on him, of his entire respectability. On my way back to Washington in January I drove along levees in Illinois and Kentucky lined with flood refugees; and once late at night, looking for the one ferry that was still running across the Ohio, I was stopped by three men with search-lights who were backed up by three other men with machine guns trained on my car. Scared almost out of my wits, and feeling that the many friends who predicted I would come to no good end travelling around the country so much alone were about to be justified, I inquired in my best social manner for the ferry. They proved to be Federal guards watching for looters from Cinninnati and Cairo, and also looking, they said, for "hijackers from Chicago" who were expected to try crossing into Kentucky.

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Later, a number of songs we collected in the field were issued, under Mr. Seeger's direction, in the form of boadside sheets, for use in community singing; and the records themselves were used in training the young musicians placed by the Special Skills Division in Resettlement communities. Music eduction in this country has been so exclusively oriented toward Europe that it was with difficulty we convinced these young people that they had a rich musical heritage of their own whose

value in American community life far outweighs that of French and Russian folksongs, beautiful as the latter are. These recreational leaders were able so thoroughly to meet the needs of their communities that ultimately several of them were able to maintain themselves through community support where when the cut in appropriations necessitated termination of their government salaries. I left Washington again for 6 mos. in, Mich., Wis., Minn., Ill., Iowa.

I should perhaps explain that, since I no longer work for the Resettlement Administration, and since all statements to newspapers are given out only by authorized spokesmen for the various government departments anyway, I should not be quoted directly with reference to the work of the Special Skills Division, though there is no reason why you should n't use any of the above information that you find relevant. There is no secret about what we were doing, and all I have said has appeared in authorized interviews at one time or another; but while the work was going on we endeavored to prevent its being publicized without sufficient explanation of the reasons for our entering the field, since otherwise the Administration was likely to be embarrassed by unkind references to its enthusiasm for "resettling ballads!"

In California, we already know, from diaries and letters of the time, something of the texts of songs sung among the miners and the seamen of the early days. But for the most part we are ignorant of the tunes o which they were sung. Happily tunes are hard to kill, and there is every reason to believe that many are still remembered and retrievable. There are songs among the lumbermen in the extreme northern parts of the state which have travelled west from Maine and Michigan, and bear the imprint of their travels in the addition of local incidents to their texts. Around San Francisco Bay, seamen who served in sailing ships are still living who remember chanteys, many of which refer to the early days along the California coast. The culture of the Spanish-Californians is far from forgotten here; descendants of the aristocrats of the pre-Mexican era still preserve the old lore, songs and dances and stories. These make their reappearance now and then at fiestas, such as the annual one at San Juan Bautista, and in other California Mission towns. At Santa Barbara the other day, thanks to the courtesy of the Franciscans there, I was able to record three old Spanish chants, found originally among the manuscripts in the Santa Barbara Mission archives. These were sung by the choristers of St. Anthony's Seminary, under the direction of Father Bertrand Hobrecht. (This is the same group that sings for fifteen minutes on alternate Saturdays at 5 p. m. over the Columbia Blue Network.) One of the chants, a "praise" sung in Spanish, was recovered several years ago from the singing of Fernandito, one of the Santa Ynez Mission Indians. It is known to have been sung in the days of the Padres because it too was found among the manuscripts in the Santa Barbara archives. too

At Pescadero there is an annual Portuguese festival of thanks for the arrival of a vessel loaded with provisions which many years ago preserved the community from threatened famine. The

incident occurred in the Old Country, but the tradition of annual celebration, with a special mass, procession of figures of the saints, and special music, is still retained. At Monterey the fishermen -- Galicians, Portuguese, Mexicans -- make up songs from day to day and sing many old ones too. There are songs to be found among the vaqueros still; and the Basque sheep herders in the eastern valleys sing. The state is rich in Old-Country instrumental music; and as the meeting ground of Oriental and Occidental currents. California is a fertile source of material for musicological study. Occasionally it is possible to find old chants here which have almost died out in the country of their origin and which have remained surprisingly free, so nearly as it is possible to tell, from contamination by contemporary music. We have found over thirty folk instruments which are now being played in and around San Francisco today. Doubtless many can be found elsewhere in California . too. Among them are the Greek Oude and Cembalom, the Assyrian Saz, the Armenian Kemancha and the old type of Serbian bagpipes which are made of the inflated skin of a pig or a sheep.

Because California attracts so many of the older residents of states to the east and north of her, this has become an unusually fertile field for the collection of the old songs of the middle west, the northern central states and New England. Because almost anything can -- and does! -- turn up here, I receive requests for information almost daily from research students in the east. Conversely, songs of the Forty-Niners were found a few years ago to be current in the oral tradition in Maine and were, happily, collected there. I found some amusing songs in Missouri which recount the / trials and tribulations of the young men who went west during the Gold Rush. In one of these the singer tells over the tales of woe she has heard and warns her husband that "The stone that goes rolling will gather no moss," and so he stayed stays at home. There is an amusing song still sung in Arkansas and Missouri which belongs to the period when public lands were opened to homesteaders, just after the Civil War. It runs in part as follows:

"For we're bound to show the nations Uncle Sam is not a fool, For the old folks do the voting and the children go to school.

(Refrain: Come along, go along, make no delay; Come from every nation, come from every way. Our lands they are broad enough, so don't be alarmed, For Uncle Sam is rich enough to give us all a farm."

In a songster published in San Francisco in 1858 I found a long complaint about "Humbug Steamship Companies". Passages were sold to miners in the inland valleys on the promise of a "quick trip home for Christmas"; but ships sailed from San Francisco without reference to steamer connections up the east coast of America, so that travellers were not infrequently stranded for several months in Panama with no money and no way of getting away. This song, a note said, was sung to the tune



of "Uncle Sam's Farm", but the tune is not written out. Until I recorded it from the singing of Ben Rice in Springfield, Missouri, no one out here was able to sing it because the tune was forgotten. I could go on endlessly! but hope you will find sufficient material for whichever aspect of the subject you choose to treat, in the above. If you can publish a complete song, with its melody, I'd be glad to send you one or two especially beautiful or interesting ones. But I dislike extremely putting a song into print minus its melody, except occasional amusing fragments such as are to be found in the enclosed memo, and which you are free to use if you like. Cordially yours,