

THE RANDALL V. MILLS MEMORIAL ARCHIVE
OF NORTHWEST FOLKLORE

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The Special Collections Division of the University of Oregon Library, under its able and indefatigable curator, Martin Schmitt, has long been engaged in the collection of materials pertinent to the settlement of the Northwest and to the culture and lives of early inhabitants. Until some ten or twelve years ago, however, little attempt was made to separate the strictly historical from the traditional in all the varied and extensive collections housed here. In the late 1940's and early 1950's Randall V. Mills, Professor of English at the University and first president of the Oregon Folklore Society, began to augment the holdings of Special Collections with the fruits of his own collecting in the Pacific Northwest and California. Though his untimely death in 1952 caused a serious decline in many folklore undertakings then in progress, his collections served thereafter as the nucleus for a modest but continually growing body of traditional Northwest materials presently being archived at the University of Oregon.

Now, with the recent revival of the Oregon Folklore Society, there is in Oregon a rather direct scholarly interest in the collection and preservation of Northwest traditions for their own sake. In order to supply a sense of unity to this effort, the Oregon Folklore Society and the University of Oregon Library have created a special Archive for Northwest Folklore, to be named in honor of Professor Mills, and to be directed by Mr. Schmitt. It will preserve new collections of folklore now being given to the University and will begin the arduous task of listing separately the items concerned with folklore contained in the other collections. Our present lack of a specially trained folklorist will, regrettably, tend to make the latter a slow process, but there is some hope that a graduate assistantship will be made available in the future to a part-time archivist.

At present, the Randall V. Mills Memorial Archive of Northwest Folklore can list the following items and collections:¹

1) The Robert Winslow Gordon Collection of Folksong: A gift from his daughter, Mrs. Roberta Gordon Nye, the Gordon Collection constitutes the bulk of Gordon's papers, manuscripts, and personal library that was concerned with folklore. In particular, there are more than one thousand folksongs and their variants, including American variants of the English-Scottish ballads, which Gordon collected himself or received in the mail. There is also a complete set of his contributions to Adventure magazine, containing the texts of many songs and his comments on them.²

2) The Randall V. Mills Collection: Testifying to the diversity of Mills' interests, this material includes notebooks, papers, published and unpublished MSS, card files, scrapbooks, and letters concerning Northwest folklore. Among the genres represented are proverbs, superstitions and popular beliefs, ballads and songs (including several voyageur songs taken from early diaries), Northwest dialects and linguistic

patterns, and folklore of railroading, plus many more topics that belong to the province of history rather than folklore.

3) The John "Watermelon" Redington Papers: These are primarily scrapbooks, loose papers, and correspondence of Redington, who was once an Indian scout, later a newspaper editor and natural humorist. He passed along a large body of frontier lore, mixing it on occasion with some of his own manufacture.

4) The Audio-Visual Department Collection of tape-recorded singers and speakers: Much of this material is used for analysis of local dialects by the English and Speech Departments. Under the directorship of Mr. Donald Hunter, the Audio-Visual Department has also recorded many professional folk singers, mostly in concert. The collection has been augmented continually by the field recordings made by Professor E. A. Cykler of elderly singers around the state, of Basque dances and songs, and the like. Recent field recordings done by J. B. Toelken and students are currently being processed for addition to this collection.

5) The Library Manuscript Collection: In this group the library has about one hundred diaries and over one hundred thousand letters, many of which contain words and music of ballads and songs, folk remedies, beliefs, and myriad references to traditional material. Many of the letters have already been filed chronologically so that all the early uses of words, slang expressions, proverbs, profanity, and localisms, as well as references to music, medicine, entertainment, and superstitions may be pointed out.

6) The Library Collection of photographs: The Library has a collection of over 80,000 photographic negatives, many of which will be of use to folklorists: old epitaphs, covered bridges, fairs, local customs are depicted.

Soon to become regular parts of the Mills Archive are the following:

1) Card files and papers related to the Society's projected Dictionary of Oregon Popular Belief and Superstition.

2) Contributions of traditional material to Oregon Folklore Bulletin, published and unpublished.

3) Collectanea of J. B. Toelken, students, and staff.

4) The Verne Bright Collection of Northwest Folklore. Recently offered to the University by poet Verne Bright (Mountain Man), this material is primarily traditional lore of all descriptions collected over a period of thirty years toward publication of a book which was to have been titled Webfoots and Bunchgrassers.

Most of the printed material in the Archive can be duplicated for scholarly purposes at the usual nominal charge for Xerox copying, although some segments of larger collections may have legal restrictions which will prevent use in publication. The intricacies of this problem are being explored at present with the basic assumption that all material in the Archive will eventually be available to qualified scholars. Further, to make the clearly traditional matter more generally accessible, the Oregon Folklore Bulletin plans to undertake the eventual publication of many items listed above.

1. The author is indebted to Martin Schmitt for his help in compiling this list. See also his "Folklore Sources in the University of Oregon Library," Western Folklore, X (1951), 325-328.

2. For a more complete survey of the Gordon Collection, see Arthur G. Brodeur, "The Robert Winslow Gordon Collection of American Folksong," Oregon Folklore Bulletin, I:4 (Spring, 1962), 1-2.

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