

Treasures from Our Archives

Fifteen Years Ago

Bulletin 24.3 (Fall 1990). This issue included Barbara Kwiatkowski's article on the music of the Diegueño people of San Diego County, California (with several songs), and a profile of Songs Editor Howard Kaplan (again with several accompanying songs). I contributed a discussion of the *Bulletin's* review policy (nothing much has changed, 15 years later!). Ethnomusicology news on Native Counsellor Anton Kolstee and world music performances at York University completed the issue.

Ten Years Ago

Bulletin 29.3 (September 1995). The showpiece of the issue was Rod Olstad's article on fiddler Fred Lang, with three accompanying tunes. Also, Jim Hiscott told us about his composition "Spirit Reel". Several articles explored various aspects of the Winnipeg Folk Festival as an event, by Pauline Greenhill, Lisa Hagen-Smith, Danielle Carignan Svenne and Janet Macaulay. Alistair Brown contributed an obituary of David Parry, while Olaf Sveen remembered Toralf Tollefsen; Judith Cohen wrote an EthnoFolk Letter; reviewed items were recordings by Wendy Berner, Ian Robb, Roger Helfrick, The Irish Descendants, Mark Knickle and Sheela-Na-Gigh.

Five Years Ago

Bulletin 34.3 (September 2000). A slim issue, following the fat double issue which preceded it. George W. Lyon contributed an article on poet Isabella Valancy Crawford, focussing on her Western Canadian subject matter, and excerpts from 19th-century author Anna Brownell Jameson's writings on Native Canadian music. A song notated by Jameson, "Ojibway Quince", was included, as was "The Walker of the Snow", a poem/song composite recorded in 1929. The Festival Directory, a news column and A Peak in Darien made up the rest of the issue.

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Hilda Thomas

I'm sorry to report the recent death of Hilda Thomas. Hilda was one of the founders of the Vancouver Folk Song Circle, which became the Vancouver Folk Song Society. In the late fifties, Hilda, her husband Phil and Al Cox formed a singing group called The Highriggers, which performed at various places in Vancouver's lower mainland. In the summer of 1959, they arranged a concert at the Alma YMCA, and the response was so great that they decided to repeat it a fortnight later. Thus was the Vancouver Folk Song Circle formed. Initially, only the Highriggers sang, but they began to invite other singers, until they became one of a number of groups performing.

The Folk Song Circle has met every two weeks ever since. In 1975, it became a non-profit Society, and Hilda led us through the process of defining what we were and how we were going to organize ourselves. After the Highriggers stopped performing, Hilda continued to sing with Phil, often songs from the BC collection he was amassing. She also went with him on some of his collecting trips. She was a member in the British Columbia Folklore Society from its foundation in 1994.

Hilda took an active part in politics. At the municipal level, she was an early member of the NDP Vancouver Area Council, which ran candidates in Vancouver elections. She ran three times for the BC NDP in her home riding of Point Grey, and on each occasion increased the party share of the vote. She was a member of many anti-Vietnam war groups, a campaigner on environmental issues, a founding member and president of the Everywoman's Health Collective and a staunch supporter of the work of Dr. Henry Morgenthaler.

Hilda was a songmaker, whose creative abilities with 'zipper' songs (zip the old words out, zip the new ones in) enlivened many a picket line. But she made other songs, too, almost always dealing with some social issue or other, and most often with a wicked sense of humour.

Hilda was a passionate fighter for what she thought was right, and when the Vancouver Folk Song Society took a step she thought unjust, she characteristically threw herself into the struggle, culminating in her resigning her life membership in the Society, and helping to start another singing group, the Traditional Songs Singaround.

Hilda's profession was that of a university teacher, in which role she taught and inspired hundreds of students. She was a fine singer, an excellent organizer, and a role model to many. She will be missed greatly by those who knew her.

Jon Bartlett, New Westminster, British Columbia

A memorial service in honour of Hilda will be held at the Unitarian Church, 49th Ave. & Oak St., Vancouver, on Saturday 7th January 2006 at 2 pm.