

# The Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive

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[www.mun.ca/folklore/munfla.htm](http://www.mun.ca/folklore/munfla.htm)

The Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) is Canada's leading repository for recorded and collected items of Newfoundland and Labrador folklore, folklife, language, oral history and popular culture. Founded in 1968, the Archive, under the direction of Herbert Halpert (b. Manhattan, 1911-d. St. John's, 2000), began building on the course assignments and materials from fieldwork expeditions collected during his previous six years as a university faculty member. The Archive has since amassed 600 fonds, 40,000 audio recordings, 800 video recordings, 16,000 manuscripts, 20,000 photographs, 1,500 printed documents, 500 oversized documents, 4,000 commercial discs, 50 course collections, and numerous cultural artifacts and other media.

Described as Herbert Halpert's "crowning achievement,"<sup>1</sup> MUNFLA stands as testimony to the distinguished folklorist's singular vision and profound influence on students, faculty and archivists through the years. A visit to pre-Confederation Newfoundland while serving in the U.S. military during World War II spurred Halpert's interest in the area. In 1987, he explained to Memorial's graduating class what he discovered then and later in his career when he was invited to teach at Memorial University:

... the people of Newfoundland have been settled in a comparatively isolated area for a long period of time and have developed a unique cultural response to their environment. We have in this province one of the last areas in the English-speaking world where customs and practises [*sic*] survived long after they died out elsewhere. The folklorist can still learn from people who observed these customs, how they were performed and what they meant.<sup>2</sup>

Halpert, who had already done groundbreaking folklore fieldwork and scholarship in the United States, embarked on a series of summer expeditions with his fellow faculty member, the linguist John D.A. Widdowson, and others. They travelled to various parts of the island collecting and recording songs, tales, sayings and other forms of folklore. As folklore classes were introduced at Memorial, Halpert encouraged his students to examine closely the

context and function of folklore in the field (often in their home communities) and in analytical assignments. These materials, which form the foundation of MUNFLA, are of great interest and importance to scholars, educators, heritage groups, the media, members of the arts community, and private citizens. Thanks to Halpert's foresight and effort, a culture was documented that was swiftly changing with the implementation of Newfoundland Premier Joseph R. Smallwood's resettlement program and the advance of global communications. Halpert himself stressed the fact that culture is constantly changing. That, along with the evolving discipline of folklore, has certainly affected the nature of the ethnographic materials deposited since Halpert's early days in Newfoundland and Labrador. It will continue to do so. MUNFLA's mandate ensures that at least these changes, once documented, will be preserved for future generations.

A substantial portion of the collection relates to song and music. There are 1,100 assignments from courses in folk song, Newfoundland folklore, folklore and popular culture, special topics in folklore, introduction to folklore, and the traditional culture of French Newfoundlanders. The subject matter is wide ranging and the focus in-depth. Hundreds of manuscripts examine individuals from all parts of Newfoundland and Labrador who are recognized within their communities or families as musicians, composers, singers or songwriters. Accompanying tape-recorded interviews often feature song and music performances and personal narratives. The studies usually present detailed biographical information and community histories, and many offer analyses of song and tune function, composition, history and style, performer/audience roles, performance contexts, and repertoire. The assignments explore musical genres such as traditional, ethnic, religious, country and western, bluegrass, rock and roll, blues and heavy metal.

The course-collection songs include ballads (of murder, marine disaster, love lost and betrayed), lullabies, parodies, occupational songs (lumbering, mining, trapping, military, and sea shanties), hymns,

carols, macaronic, alphabet, bawdy, humorous and locally composed songs, children's game songs, and school cheers. Folk festivals, "times" and other parties, dances, Christmas, St. Patrick's Day and community concerts, political demonstrations, weddings, strikes and many other performance contexts are analysed as are musical traditions of church camps, university residences and groups such as Brownie packs and Kinsmen clubs. The Archive also has several graduate-level thesis collections comprising field notes, taped interviews, textual and musical transcriptions, printed documents and photographs.

Among the hundreds of *fonds*, there are a significant number relating to music and song. The *MacEdward Leach Fonds*, donated in 1970 by the estate of American folklorist MacEdward Leach, comprises more than 100 audio tapes of field recordings from Newfoundland, Labrador and Nova Scotia in 1949-51 and 1960, textual and musical transcriptions, notes on singers and songs, tape tables of contents, 89 photographic negatives, printed documents, and photocopies of correspondence.

The *Kenneth Peacock Fonds* consists of two series. The first is a set of copies of 150 tapes of field recordings with accompanying indexes made by musicologist Kenneth Peacock during trips to Newfoundland and Labrador in 1951-52 and 1958-61. His fieldwork was published in three volumes as *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports*. There are 18 audio cassettes of French and Gaelic songs and instrumental music in the second series. The materials were donated by the Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies at the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

Field diaries, textual and musical transcriptions, and correspondence by English folklorist Maud Karpeles during her folk song collecting expeditions to Newfoundland in 1929-30 comprise the *Maud Karpeles Fonds*, donated by Ursula Vaughan Williams in 1978. Ninety of these songs were published as *Folk Songs from Newfoundland* (London: Faber, 1971).

The *Elisabeth Greenleaf Fonds* consists of field notes, textual and musical transcription, correspondence, book reviews, an unpublished magazine article, and other materials from Elisabeth Greenleaf's and Grace Yarrow Mansfield's folk song collecting trips to Newfoundland in the 1920s. This song collection was published by Harvard University Press in 1933 as *Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland*. Maritime historian Robert Madison

of the Mystic Seaport Museum in Connecticut deposited the materials in 1983.

The *Kenneth S. Goldstein Fonds* comprises over 300 audio recordings from collecting trips made throughout Newfoundland and Labrador from 1978-90, and assorted sound recordings used or created by Goldstein for teaching, research and public lectures. It also contains photographic negatives, copies of pocket songsters, broadcast materials, a manuscript, and correspondence. Publication of a finding aid to the 3,400 songs from the fonds is forthcoming. Goldstein formerly headed the Department of Folklore at the University.

Other *fonds* of interest are the *Lorne H. Russwurm Fonds*, which includes photographs, 4,000 commercial long-play records of country, bluegrass and traditional music artists from Canada, the U.S., Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand dating from the 1920s-80s and textual materials including song folios and periodicals. The *Manual Prenner Fonds* consists of a scrapbook of newspaper clippings, articles, and photographs on the American folk song revival of the 1940s and 50s.

More than 12,500 audio recordings spanning a wide range of regional radio and television programs broadcast from the 1930s-90s comprise the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Fonds. The musical series include Ryan's Fancy, All Around the Circle, Wonderful Grand Band, A Few of the Best, Going Solo, Weekend A.M., Red, Hot and Blue, and Blues and Bluegrass. Videotapes, film scores, notes, scripts and rundowns are also on deposit.

The *Halpert and Widdowson Fonds* date from the early 1960s, and are among MUNFLA's earliest acquisitions. They include songs and music collected by folklorists Herbert Halpert and John Widdowson during field trips to Newfoundland's Trinity Bay, Bonavista Bay and the Great Northern Peninsula. In the 1990s, the holdings of the Centre d'études franco-terreneuviennes, collected by folklorist Gerald Thomas and others, were transferred to MUNFLA. Hundreds of audio tapes and manuscripts and a number of video recordings and indexes comprise CEFT's rich collection of cultural materials from the francophone region of the province's west coast.

Audio and visual materials related to the history of the performing arts in Newfoundland and Labrador from the Newfoundland Performing Arts Archive Project are also housed at MUNFLA. The Archive collaborates with Memorial University's Centre for Newfoundland Studies on this endeavour. In recent

years, MUNFLA has acquired several sizeable donations of commercial music including the Malcolm Lane collection of country music and the Public Resource Library Newfoundland Music Collection.

*The Miscellaneous Folklore Bibliographies File* features 60 mostly unpublished bibliographies on topics ranging from folk song revival to childlore. *The Miscellaneous Discography File* brings together 25 compilations of citations to commercial recordings. *Questionnaire Responses* on such subjects as popular music, carolling traditions, bar music, church bells, and community concerts are also available.

Individuals and groups outside the university community have also deposited rare and esoteric items in the Archive, including independent commercial recordings, home recordings, 78-rpm discs, personal songbooks, and letters to *The Barrelman*, a popular local radio series of the mid-1940s. Items from special projects include a ballad onomasticon based on Newfoundland materials by David Buchan and Cheryl Brauner, and the Newfoundland Popular Music Project by I. Sheldon Posen and Michael Taft.

Although MUNFLA is known primarily as a regional archive, it does house materials which are national and international in their scope. Included are studies of Prince Edward Island and Cape Breton fiddlers, programmes and recordings from Toronto's Mariposa Folk Festival and the former Yugoslavia's Lake Ohrid Folk Festival, field recordings from New Zealand, and commercial recordings from around the world. There are also many items related to folkloristics, from recordings of a lecture and colloquium by visiting scholars D.J. Wilgus and Edward D. Ives to photographs of folklorists Peacock and Karpeles.

Much of the research conducted reflects the Archive's integration with the Department of Folklore. Fieldwork is a strong component of the discipline, and the Archive loans tape recorders, microphones, cameras and other equipment to support this endeavour. Customized tape cards, contracts for deposits, release forms for interviews and biographical data sheets are provided to those who wish to donate their materials. A guide to interviewing techniques, a style sheet for assignments, demonstration tapes and other instructional material are also available. The Archive also houses books, theses, periodicals and photocopied articles. Hundreds of undergraduate

students and a handful of graduate students and faculty are received each semester for assignment research and equipment loans. In-house visits are also made by scholars from other disciplines at Memorial and elsewhere, workers in the provincial cultural sector, and private researchers. In addition, the Archive handles a steady stream of e-mail, conventional mail and telephone requests.

Memorial University has the only Ph.D. program in folklore in English-speaking Canada. At present, there seems to be a turn away from the older, more traditional forms of folklore research by graduate students. Like students in other disciplines, they are eager instead to establish new fields of inquiry in urban and electronic culture. Current research undertaken by the faculty is described on the MUN Faculty of Arts Web page:

[www.mun.ca/arts/research\\_folklore.shtml](http://www.mun.ca/arts/research_folklore.shtml).

Special projects at MUNFLA include investigations of contemporary health crisis legends (Diane Goldstein), mummering practices/comparative Irish-Newfoundland (Paul Smith and graduate student Caoimhe Ní Shúilleabháin), and a linguistic atlas (Philip Hiscock and others). In the planning stages are research into England-Newfoundland cultural transfer (Martin Lovelace), a Bonavista Bay song-maker (Philip Hiscock), and publication of a compact disc recording and revised songbook based on MUNFLA materials (Neil V. Rosenberg). An unpublished list of masters' and doctoral theses is available from the department's main office.

This past year, the Archive's holdings have been utilized for new courses in traditional fiddling and traditional singing offered by the University's School of Music. Further intensive collaboration with the School's newly appointed Chair in Traditional Music of Newfoundland and Labrador will develop the Archive's extensive musical resources through ethnomusicological study, field research and dissemination of materials in the form of a series of CDs of original field recordings. In the meantime, a much anticipated compact disc of songs and tunes from MUNFLA's collection is scheduled for release by the Department of Folklore in the near future. A number of graduate students have worked on this project under the supervision of Peter Narváez.

Recent grants from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation have enabled MUNFLA to reformat more than 1,500 broadcast tapes to CD and enter all of its holdings on the Corporation's Prolog database. In addition, the Archive has digitized 270 of its

earliest field tapes to preserve and make available these valuable resources.

Many of the fundamental cataloguing systems were established by MUNFLA's former Director, Neil V. Rosenberg, who came to Memorial from Indiana University in 1968 to be the first archivist as well as a teacher of folklore. Significant contributions were also made by Violetta Halpert, David J. Hufford, Peter Narváez, Paul Mercer, Laurel Doucette and Philip Hiscock; the latter served as Archivist for 20 years. At present the Archive is run by Director Martin Lovelace and myself, with the assistance of a transcriber, secretaries, contractual employees, and student assistants.

Over the years, MUNFLA staff members and student assistants have compiled a number of specialized card indexes for collections, including 7,000 song titles, 3,300 commercial songs, 2,800 commercial records, 1,200 songs published in *The Newfoundlander*, and a range of instruments. Indexes to printed and oversized documents are organized by subject and offer detailed descriptions of songbooks and posters, magazine and newspaper articles, pamphlets and programmes of music festivals, concerts, performers, instrument makers and distribution companies. Hundreds of inventories and other finding aids have also been prepared.

Since 1968, MUNFLA's cataloguing system has been based on the one formerly used at the Archive of Traditional Music at Indiana University. Individual deposits, termed collections, were given two-part accession numbers: the first for the year of deposit, the second for the serial number of the deposit within the overall number for the year. In addition, all media, excluding manuscripts, were given individual shelf list numbers for the purposes of citation and practical storage. Cataloguing descriptions for one-quarter of the MUNFLA collection were entered online in the early 1990s and are currently accessible at the website of the University's Queen Elizabeth II Library ([www.mun.ca/library/qehome.html](http://www.mun.ca/library/qehome.html)).

In January 2001, MUNFLA implemented the Rules for Archival Description (RAD) system for its holdings to standardize their arrangement and description. This was made possible through the joint efforts of the Association of Newfoundland and Labrador Archives and the Canadian Council of Archives. Archivist and folklorist Anita Best was hired to assess the RAD-compliance of provincial oral history collections and their readiness for mounting on the Canadian Archival Information Network-Newfoundland database. Fifteen fonds

descriptions were compiled and a plan was adopted for digitization. It is expected that researchers will have access to this database within the next five years.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Taft, "Herbert Halpert: Folklorist-Fieldworker (August 23, 1911 to December 29, 2000)," *Folklife Center News*, 23: 2 (Spring 2001): 20-21.

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