

In Memoriam: Bill Sarjeant (1935-2002)

William (Bill) Anthony Swithin Sarjeant of Saskatoon died on July 8th, 2002, after a short struggle with liver cancer. He is survived by his wife Peggy; daughters Nicola, Rachel, and Juliet and their families; and many friends around the world. Bill had been an enthusiast for folk music for much of his life, active as a collector, broadcaster, and performer, with festivals, folk clubs and singarounds. He joined what is now the Canadian Society for Traditional Music in the mid 1970s, and served as Vice-president (1985-6) and President (1986-9). As the Society's archivist, Bill contributed many photographs and reviews to its publications. He was the subject of a special issue of *Canadian Folk Music Bulletin* in 2000.

Bill was born in Sheffield, in England, on St Swithin's day (July 15th) in 1935. He became interested in folk music during the skiffle era, while studying geology at the University of Sheffield. He began collecting books and recordings, and tried out various instruments, including guitar and piano, eventually settling down as an unaccompanied singer and occasional harmonica and percussion player. While Bill was teaching at the University of Nottingham in the sixties, the English folk revival gained strength, and he was active with the Nottingham Folk Club. He (and after 1966 his wife Peggy) hosted numerous singers from Britain and America, including such well known names as Martin Carthy, Shirley Collins, and Phil Ochs.

His musical interests were strengthened during a year in Oklahoma, and gained a new focus on Canadian folk music when the growing family moved to Saskatoon in 1972, where Bill took up the position as Professor of Geology he still held at his death. Their large house at 674 University Drive became a base for extensive folk music activities. Visiting singers were hosted, and informal singer's circles happened on any excuse. Bill developed a fine folk music library, and built up his remarkable collection of tape recordings from passing singers, supplemented by hundreds of folk recordings, largely (but not exclusively) from Britain and North America. Between 1977 and 1988 these resources were the basis for several series of programs he wrote and narrated for the university radio, which have been credited with turning on numerous listeners to the field. Bill was active with the Saskatoon folk club, and also sparked the formation of a Saskatoon Folk group, the Prairie Higglers, one of Canada's longest continuing groups, which has

continued for more than two decades with a varying personnel, performing extensively particularly in Saskatoon and Regina. Bill produced a CD of the group in 2000 in memory of former singer and colleague, Hugh Hendry. He was working on another at his death.

Always ready to work in support of his hobbies, Bill played an active role in the Canadian Folk Music Society and its successors. He attended meetings, served on its board and as its vice-president and president, contributed many reviews and other articles to its publications, took many photographs of singers and speakers for the record and publication, and served as its archivist. Bill's collection of folk music books and recordings is being deposited in the CSTM archive at the University of Calgary library.

Folk music was not Bill's only passion. His academic work on such diverse topics as microfossils, dinosaur tracks, and the history of earth sciences led to extensive international travel and recognition. He held a D.Sc from Nottingham University, received many medals and other awards for this work, and became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1995. His library on the history of earth sciences was one of the most comprehensive private collections in this field in the world, and was the basis for his ten-volume bibliography of the subject. Bill was an enthusiastic member of the Saskatoon Heritage Society, writing and editing extensively in this field. His collection of detective stories was also of great extent, and he published many articles in this field too, as well as (with Alan Bradley, formerly of Saskatoon) a book *Ms Holmes of Baker Street*, advancing the thesis that Sherlock Holmes was a woman. Bill also created a series of epic fantasy novels, of which the first four were published by HarperCollins.

But folk music was central to his life. He was perhaps happiest when singing with a small group of friends, a mug of beer on hand, and his huge repertoire refreshed from time to time from the old diaries in which he wrote his words. He would embark on long ballads, comic songs from the music hall tradition, and prairie folk material from his collection. It is appropriate that his funeral was followed by a gathering of friends on the lawn behind his house, who carried out one more of the many singarounds that have taken place there under Bill's leadership.

David Spalding (with information from Peggy Sarjeant)