

In Memoriam

Herbert Halpert

I'm sorry to pass on the sad news of the death of Herbert Halpert, who died peacefully at home on Friday night. With his passing, North American folkloristics loses one of its truly legendary figures. Trained as an anthropologist (Columbia) and a folklorist (Indiana), Dr. Halpert had been a key player in the field since the 1930s. In the late 1960s, he founded the Department of Folklore at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Though perhaps best known for his work on folktales, he was a prolific folksong and ballad collector, both in the US and Canada. His work as a WPA song collector in the South is recalled in a JAF article from 1992.

Dr. Halpert was emeritus (I don't think he ever "retired") by the time I entered the Memorial program so I never had him as a teacher, but he remained a forceful presence in the department. He was a larger than life character; gruff in a curmudgeonly kind of way, but never irascible. The breadth of his knowledge of the discipline was awe-inspiring, and he was unfailingly generous in sharing that knowledge and his personal library with any student who sought his advice. He will be sorely missed.

Jamie Moreira

I was sorry to learn of the death of Herbert Halpert, a friend, a generous scholar, and a fair critic. (I use the word "friend" advisedly, in that I met him only once, in Carlinville, Illinois, where he was living with his wife, Violet [a folklorist in her own right, by the way]. Ah, but what a two-day session, fondly remembered these 40-plus years later.)

He talked to this neophyte of collecting in New Jersey's Piney Woods, of sponsoring Bela Bartok as an immigrant to the US during World War II, of Bartok writing the second piano concerto for his pianist wife so she would have a "meal ticket" to play with orchestras when the ailing Bartok died, of the WPA years, and the politics surrounding the collection of folklore in the hard years of the Depression.

He gave me some off-prints, including a copy of the "Appendix and Parallels" to Richard Chase's pioneering *The Jack Tales* upon which he inscribed: "Ed: This is nearly the last copy. It's one of my better jobs (I think). Herbert" It was, until the monumental two volumes of Newfoundland folktales.

In his memory, I am going to take from my files the incomplete study he suggested I undertake of "Little Brown Dog," the seemingly silly children's song recorded for the Library of Congress, adapted by Ruth Seeger for her *Animal Folk Songs for Children* and first recorded by her daughter Peggy so many years ago. It was Herbert's argument that this was really a redaction of "Jack the Giant Killer."

It was Herbert's contention that there was no study of folksong, or tale, or popular belief, but only the study of folklore.

Completing this work would affirm his argument.

Indeed, as Jamie said, Herbert will be sorely missed.

Ed Cray