Berea College Appalachian Sound Archives Fellowship
Final Project Report
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We have finished the formal time-commitment for our 3-month research fellowship in the Berea College Special Collections and Sound Archives, and we offer this final report as follow-up to our previous update on our overall fellowship goals and accomplishments. As with our mid-point report, this final reflection also follows the same general categories of project implementation as our proposed research timeline. Rather than repeat our previous findings and activities, this report includes only brief summaries of past work and more detail about recent outcomes. In addition to the narrative summary of our activities, this report also includes extensive supporting documentation reflecting our actual work product.

1. New Research and Documentation:

As previously noted, we conducted supplemental research on Frances and John Reedy in the John Lair, Reuben Powell, and Ed Ward collections.

John Lair’s business correspondence offered some promising clues about the Reedys’ possible inclusion in some of the Renfro Valley “units” of performers who traveled to various venues such as schools, civic clubs, and communities in the region. Harry Rice cautioned that the transcripts would likely only include the stars who regularly appeared in the radio programming. So it was no surprise that a complete review of the Renfro Valley Barn Dance transcripts from 1938—December 1961; Monday Night at Renfro Valley, August 1940-- April 1941; Renfro Valley Morning Shows, October 1944--December 1950; and the Renfro Valley Country Store, January—December 1951 resulted in no explicit or implied documentation of the Reedys, even in the occasional references to guest musicians or “extras” in addition to the regular cast of Renfro Valley stars.

Because of the substantial volume of transcripts, we only began to review the transcripts for the Sunday morning Gatherin’ program, which is more promising because the Reedys were mostly recognized as a gospel bluegrass band. Therefore, we plan to return to Special Collections beyond our formal fellowship period and continue examining the complete set of transcripts. Likewise, we will explore additional boxes of “miscellaneous” materials in the Reuben Powell collection in our extended research at the library. And as noted previously, the cassette dubs of “Oh Death” and “Prayer is Worth More than Silver or Gold” from the Ed Ward collection were helpful dubs from Side A of a 45 record (Starday SEP 166) that we did not have in our existing collection. We would still like to acquire digital copies of several versions of “Somebody Touched Me” by various artists in the Sound Archives. Altogether, we reviewed over 33 boxes worth of material over the 3-month research period. (See Appendix 1: Outline of Archive Collections Reviewed.)

Based on additional miscellaneous memorabilia from Frances that we discovered and donated, we were able to update the family timeline with further detail about the Reedys’ whereabouts at certain time periods. Previously, it appeared that they migrated full-time to Dayton, Ohio, coming home on the weekends, between the early 1950’s and mid-1960’s.
However, postmarked envelopes, school records, etc. indicate that the Reedys' migration during that period was also broken into alternating 5—6 month residencies in Ohio and Kentucky. Thus, the Reedys never completely migrated away from their native home even while they worked in Dayton for more than a decade. (See Appendix 2: Reedy Family Timeline.)

2. Processing and Digitizing New Materials:
We organized, digitized, and processed an inspiring amount of donated materials from Frances' music and manuscript collection for incorporation into Special Collections and Sound Archives. The commercial recordings by the Reedys that we donated include:

- First 78 rpm recording “Somebody Touched Me”
- 14 of 18 known 45 rpm records
- Tragic Songs of Death and Sorrow LP
- Hymns from the Hills of Harlan County LP
- Early Days of Bluegrass, Vol. 1 LP
- On My Way to Heaven 8-Track

Homemade recordings that we donated, almost all of which are archived in their original formats, include:

- 15 Reel-to-Reel Tapes
- More than 20 Cassette Tapes
- 1980 Christmas Home Video (DVD converted from original VHS)
- 1996 Oral History Interviews: Bluegrass Music & Forest (VHS & Audio Cassettes)

John Bondurant, Sound Sound Preservation and Access Assistant, digitized all of the reel-to-reel tapes and about half of the cassette tapes for us. So we get to keep a copy of the original material that is being archived, and the library will have a digital back-up as well. Timi's stepmother converted the Christmas video from the original VHS to DVD, and we had the original oral history VHS converted to DVD, both of which we copied for the archive. In addition to the digital video, we further exported both as audio files, including separate song tracks for the Christmas set list, and archived CD's of these as well.

Throughout the three-month fellowship, we've scanned more than 400 images, including more than 40 labels from 45's and LP's, about 40 musician photos (of the Reedys as well as other musicians, including an autographed photo of Bill Monroe), and over almost 200 family photos. In addition to scanning, other important archival material from our mid-point update (such as newspaper clippings, liner notes, and a radio station brochure), we scanned other memorabilia that we discovered Frances kept (such as correspondence, post-marked envelopes, school records, and obituaries). All of this new information enabled us to update the timeline of their lives and musical careers.

All of the original memorabilia and most of the original photographs that were scanned will also be archived along with the recordings. At this point, the manuscript materials are sorted by category, most of them protected by archival sleeves as necessary. There are some remaining images that are in the correct folder but need to be sorted and sleeved, but otherwise the Reedy manuscript collection is almost complete. Given the time constraints of the fellowship and the priority of the Reedys, we decided to forego digitizing all of the vinyl...
recordings by other artists that will remain in the Sound Archives. Rather, we selectively
digitized the recordings we wanted to keep copies of; we also decided not to scan the labels
of commercial recordings by other musicians. We still need to make a list of folder titles and
contents, which we hope to complete before we resume archival research by the end of the
month. As discussed with Harry, the Reedy collection will remain “open” for a time as we will
continue to unearth photos, song lyrics, and other memorabilia as we sort through additional
boxes of materials at home.

3. Comprehensive Inventory and Finding Aid:

Through the creation and revision of the master discography (including track lists, record
labels, approximate recording dates, etc.), we made substantial progress toward developing
a comprehensive finding aid of Reedy materials in Special Collections. (See Appendix 3:
Master Discography.) The spreadsheet includes individual pages with track lists for all known
commercial recordings; all homemade reel-to-reel recordings; all cassette recordings (that
have been digitized to date); and audio converted from video footage. We anticipated
accomplishing more on completing this particular phase of the project (i.e., comprehensive
photo logs for all of the photographs that we have scanned and are donating to Special
Collections). However, we are still committed to developing a useful and cohesive finding aid
to assist other researchers. We have a substantial amount of narrative about the Reedys’
history from our fellowship proposal, reports, and blog, so we plan to complete a draft by the
end of the month.

Final Fellowship Reflections:

Another major accomplishment over the course of the fall semester was our graduation from
the Community Scholar program sponsored by the Kentucky Folklife Program and the
Kentucky Historical Society. Among our project requirements was conducting an oral history,
so we chose to interview Berea College Sound Archivist Harry Rice. He was an extremely
gracious participant and had many interesting stories to tell about his background and his
work at the library. We enjoyed getting to know him better and gained an even greater
appreciation for his depth of knowledge. (See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9virtUD7AqpE.)

We had planned to complete another oral history project with David Lundy, owner of Lundy
Studio in Barbourville, Kentucky where the Reedys recorded multiple 45’s, an LP, and
presumably the 8-track. Harry was also interested in meeting Mr. Lundy to find out more
about his work and the extent of his own collection of recordings. We scheduled a day for the
interview, but unfortunately we both got really sick for almost a week. We have attempted to
contact Mr. Lundy again, but have yet to reschedule. As the next major phase for the
documentary will be beginning to conduct interviews and gather footage, we plan to make Mr.
Lundy the first on our list and to include Harry on our visit.

Much of our energy near the end of the fellowship was spending as much time in the archives
as possible and preparing for the final public presentation that we shared with fellow Meredith
Doster on Friday, December 18, 2009. We edited an abbreviated oral history video with
historical images that were scanned, and developed PowerPoint slides summarizing the
materials we archived and the research we gathered. We also created a “mash-up” of two
songs, each by Frances and John to one another, so that each song sang a verse in turn.
(See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RfHy87ebIGw, Appendix 4: Presentation Slides, and
http://yourlisten.com/channel/content/29202/Tiny_Bitty_Pieces_Knockin_On_Your_Door.)
The presentation was immensely helpful in terms of quantifying the amount of materials that we sorted through, digitized, identified, organized, and donated. It was also a catalyst to incorporate various forms of media into a creative product that would be accessible to a broad audience. With more than 20 people at the presentation, the experience was also socially informative and affirmed that the Reedys’ stories are worthy of preserving and telling.

The fellowship presentation was a wonderful experience, but as many of our audience members agreed, time seemed too short. We shared an hour-long slot with another fellow, but we neither got a full half hour out of it. So it was very challenging to share the breadth of the material we had to work with or to savor the unique and abundant variety of recorded documentation that the Reedys created. We are very pleased and proud to be reprising our research presentation at the upcoming Appalachian Studies Conference in March. We will have a 70-minute timeslot for our multi-media presentation, so we are excited about incorporating more of the original material with what we've already done.

A final ongoing and significant project throughout the fellowship has been our blog, “Remembering the Reedys: Appalachian Music, Migration, and Memory” (http://remembreedy.blogspot.com). To date, we have posted 17 blog updates since August 2009, and the posting of this report will make 18. We have used the blog to share our fellowship proposal and reports, selected images, unusual findings, a discography, the family timeline, videos, a detailed reflection on our presentation, and more. Now that the fellowship is officially over, we plan to continue using the blog as an interactive format to share updates about our ongoing documentary project. (See Appendix 5: Screenshot of Reedy Blog.)

We still have plans to develop a radio program, and hope to collaborate with a relevant media organization like Appalshop. We also began an account on BlogTalkRadio.com, which is a free online hosting service for creating and streaming homemade podcasts. This is another avenue for media-sharing that we plan to explore. Finally, we ultimately want to remaster and release a compilation CD of Reedy recordings, both commercial and home-spun, and to produce a feature-length documentary film about the phenomenal lives and legacies of Frances and John Reedy.

Before the fellowship even began, our friend and Berea College Archivist Jaime Bradley commented on the ambitiousness of our proposed activities. We knew that what we aspired to accomplish was breath-taking in its scope and potential, which is why we so are so passionately committed to do what we said we would do, even after the formal fellowship has ended. Overall, we documented more than 240 hours of fellowship-related activity in the archives and occasionally at home. (See Appendix 6: Fellowship Log.) However, this is a modest representation of our total time spent on this project as we did not formally document the numerous hours spent locating and sorting through stored photographs and memorabilia or listening to and identifying CD's of the reel-to-reel material in the car or at home.

We are humbly indebted to the Anne Ray Charitable Trust for making the Appalachian Sound Archives Fellowship possible in the first place. Their generosity supports not only our particular project, but the work of a diverse range of researchers who are making necessary and important contributions to Appalachian scholarship. We are also forever grateful to all of the amazing staff at the Berea College Special Collections and Archives for their friendly, consistent, and valuable assistance throughout the fall.