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JEAN THOMAS' AMERICAN FOLK SONG FESTIVAL:
" BRITISH BALLADRY IN EASTERN KENTUCKY

By

Marshall A. Portnoy

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B.A., Yale University, 1966

M.S., Southern Connecticut State College, 1967

B. Mus., The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1971

Diploma of Hazzan, School of Sacred Music of
The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1971

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Music History
Division of Humanities
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

April 1978

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MARSHALL ALAN PORTNOY

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ABSTRACT

Serious musicological research initiated in the first decades of the twentieth century in America uncovered vast riches of British folk music that had been transplanted to these shores by early pioneers. In the mountains of Appalachia, traditional British ballads remained miraculously unspoiled, and distinguished researchers from Britain and America published many volumes of such songs. Jean Thomas, a legal stenographer born in eastern Kentucky in 1881, became fascinated with this phenomenon. She came to believe that an annual festival of mountain music would help ensure the survival of this art and, in 1930, she founded the American Folk Song Festival. With some interruptions, the Festival was held in eastern Kentucky on the second Sunday of every June through 1972. The festival provided a forum for British ballads as well as native American music. While the entire corpus of Jean Thomas' output is of mixed quality, an analysis of the British music she preserved reveals its value, dynamism and authenticity. In 1968, Jean Thomas presented many of her materials - tapes, letters, photographs, clippings, kinescopes and the like - to the University of Louisville. An exhaustive study of these treasures will yield rich fruit to the discriminating musicologist.

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INTRODUCTION

Jean Thomas, the Traipsin' Woman, was certainly not the first person to set about preserving the rich British musical traditions of the Kentucky mountains. For musical scholarship and sheer volume of collected materials, her work will stand little comparison to the immense contribution of England's Cecil Sharp (1859-1924) or of many others. It was Sharp who brought worldwide attention to the existence of British music in the Appalachian Mountains of America.

The inhabitants of the mountains, who are of British descent (English, Lowland-Scots and Scots Irish) were at that time living in self-contained communities. Owing to lack of roads they had little contact with the outside world. They built their own log cabins, grew their own food and made nearly all their clothing and utensils from the natural resources around them. They were mostly unlettered and their music, like their fine manners, was not derived from instruction and training, but was an inherited tradition. With a few exceptions, their songs were the traditional songs that their forefathers had brought with them from the British Isles, and such changes as had been wrought during the course of time and the melodies and texts owed little or nothing to extraneous influences, but were the result of oral transmission working within the community.¹

Sharp's passion for collecting and preserving indigenous British music brought him to the United States in 1916.

The result far exceeded his wildest imagination. Fifty years ago, folk music in England had gone underground, so to speak, and it was mainly from the memories of the old people that Cecil Sharp had to unearth the songs. In the

¹Maud Karpeles, Editor's Preface to English Folk Songs: Some Conclusions by Cecil J. Sharp, Third Edition, London, Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1954, p. viii.

Appalachian Mountains, there awaited him a folk-collector's paradise; for there nearly every one sang, old and young alike, and when they sang it was nearly always a folk song of English origin.¹

With Maud Karpeles, Sharp spent a total of fifty weeks between 1916 and 1918 in the southern Appalachians, collecting "traditional song bequeathed to the mountain singers by their immigrant British forefathers."² The results of their research is contained in a 1917 volume,³ and in the more substantial two-volume work published posthumously in 1932.⁴ The latter opus contains nearly one thousand mountain tunes.

The monumental task of collecting this folk music was also undertaken in the early part of this century by musically trained American folklorists.⁵ As early as January of 1914, the Bureau of Education in Washington had issued a bulletin "containing a list of the three hundred and five English

¹Maud Karpeles, Introduction to Eighty English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians, Collected by Cecil J. Sharp and Maud Karpeles (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1968), p. 9.

²Cecil James Sharp, American-English Folk Ballads (New York: G. Schirmer, 1918), p. i.

³Cecil James Sharp, English Folk Songs from the Appalachian Mountains (London: Oxford, 1917).

⁴Cecil James Sharp, English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians, ed. Maud Karpeles (London: Oxford, 1932)

⁵Josephine McGill, Folk Songs of the Kentucky Mountains, New York: Boosey & Co., Ltd., 1917; Loraine Wyman and Howard Brockway, Twenty Kentucky Mountain Songs, Boston: Oliver Ditson Company, 1919; John Harrington Cox, Folk Songs of the South, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925; John Jacob Niles, Seven Kentucky Mountain Songs, New York: G. Schirmer, 1929; John Jacob Niles, Songs of the Hill Folk, New York: G. Schirmer, 1934.

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and Scottish ballads and urged the teachers of the United States to form ballad societies in each state for the purpose of finding and thus rescuing these valuable folk-songs before it was too late."¹ That list was based upon the definitive collection of English and Scottish ballads undertaken in Europe by Harvard Professor Francis James Child from 1882 to 1898.² Mary Wheeler and Clara Gregory Bridge, who collaborated on an important early volume, Kentucky Mountain Folk Songs, wrote this illuminating preface to their collection:

The people of England and Scotland inherited a rich treasury of ballads which their descendants in America, as well as those in the British Isles, have loved and preserved. In certain mountainous sections of Kentucky, due to lack of good roads, the inhabitants have been little touched by modern influences. We find the people in such isolated regions singing - even today - songs brought from across the sea by their ancestors, generations ago.

These simple mountain folk not only love the old ballads, but in true medieval fashion, create new ones which are usually inspired by some peculiar event of local interest, or by news of some dramatic happening in the level land beyond. . . . To search for and find these tunes was a rare pleasure. . . . In their singing the collector had an opportunity to compare different versions of the same song and to note the changes in text as they are known in various localities, and to recognize that tunes and stories have an almost magic way of persisting in spite of the passing of time and the uncertainty of orally handing down songs from one generation to another. In fact, all of these ballad singers of Kentucky revealed the same characteristics of modesty and lack of self-consciousness which really enhanced the charm of their music.³

¹C. Alphonso Smith, "Ballads Surviving in the United States," The Musical Quarterly, Volume II (1916), p. 109.

²Francis James Child, The English and Scottish Popular Ballads (Boston: Boston Music Co., 1898).

³Mary Wheeler and Clara Gregory Bridge, Kentucky Mountain Folk Songs, Boston: Boston Music Co., 1918, p. vi.

But although she was neither the first nor the most thorough of the Kentucky mountain folklorists, Jean Thomas' contribution is unique. She herself put it this way:

I felt that research and printed journals were not sufficient in themselves. There should be a living, a vital presentation of the song of our fathers. I believed, too, that in an annual American Folk Song Festival only those mountain minstrels to whom the ballads had been handed down by word of mouth should participate. Only those untrained fiddlers and musicians who had learned their art from their forebears should take part.¹

It was Jean Thomas who breathed life into folklore scholarship by organizing a festival where people could hear mountain music presented in an authentic atmosphere. She did this by founding the American Folk Song Festival, an outgrowth of the traditional mountain "Singin' Gatherin'" occurring annually on the second Sunday in June. And in so doing, she also preserved and recorded on film and tape precious mountain traditions whose demise seems inevitable. A journalist who visited the 1938 Festival wrote this memorable report:

The good Queen Bess. . .was back in her grave today. Ashland, busy once more with its work-day routine of steel forging, had forgotten her. The hills were silent. . . But, for all that, there were some six or seven thousand people hereabouts - mostly folks from flatlands - who felt with good reason that they had known her and had held intimate converse with the ghosts of her time and people. They had looked upon what until yesterday only a few had ever had a chance to see. . .an unspoiled survival of the Elizabethan period - manners, customs, and language -

¹Jean Thomas, The Sun Shines Bright, New York: Prentice-Hall, 1940, pp. 180-1; Jean Thomas, personal communications to the author, October 21, 1974. The author visited with Miss Thomas in her Ashland home and tape-recorded a conversation in which she reiterated the substance of the above quotations.

not in England, where such a thing does not and could not exist, but in the hinterlands of Kentucky, where it is a continuous working miracle. . .The annual festival. . .will continue to be heard. . .until the last minstrel is dead and hard roads, the automobile and the radio have destroyed the isolation that kept alive in these hills a bit of England that no Englishman has known for nearly 300 years. People who for centuries have remained tucked away in the folds and hollows of the Cumberlands came out of the shadows where outlanders might meet them face to face and speak to them and marvel at the stewardship they kept over a strange culture. There has never been a show like it in America. There will never be another - for thousands of visitors, at least - so amazing in its effect.¹

Brooks Atkinson, who covered the 1942 Festival for the New York Times, echoed those sentiments:

Everyone knows that many Kentucky ballads come straight down from Elizabethan England and that many of the hymns are Gregorian chants, but no one can appreciate the human quality until he has heard them sung spontaneously under the trees by men, women and children who have learned them from having heard them sung.²

On May 27, 1968, Jean Thomas made a significant presentation to the University of Louisville - mountains of memorabilia of her career and the American Folk Song Festival. The materials include scrapbooks, films, kinescopes, tape recordings of the festivals, documents - even a "Traipsin' Woman" doll (See Appendix III). Jean Thomas' treasures are kept in the

¹Robert J. Casey, "Last Minstrel Sings Again in Kentucky's Old England," The Chicago Daily News, No. 138, June 13, 1938, p. 42.

²Brooks Atkinson, "01' Songs Resound in Kentucky Vale," New York Times, June 15, 1942, p. L 17.

Patterson Room of the University of Louisville Library, home of the school's rare books and most precious literary possessions. The library marks March 8, 1968, as the date of their acquisition.

The special ceremony marking her gift was held in the University's Jefferson Room. The festivities began with folksinger Annadeene Fraley who came with her husband, country fiddler J. P. Fraley, and her two daughters Danielle and Robin, then thirteen and five years of age respectively. Mrs. Fraley performed "Good Morning," a ballad selection frequently associated with her at the later festivals. Her husband then played three selections on the fiddle--"Wild Rose of the Mountain," "Fork and Deer," and "Hornpipe." The second selection was performed in tribute to Jilson Setters (James W. Day), the remarkable blind fiddler whom Jean Thomas had featured in many early festivals as well as on a European tour.

Since Jean Thomas is credited with keeping alive the tradition of playing the dulcimer, it was appropriate for the two Fraley daughters to perform "Go Tell Aunt Rhody" on that instrument. The musical portion of the program concluded with Annadeene Fraley's rendition of the "Warning Song," one of the most prominent British ballads transplanted to America and kept alive by Miss Thomas and other folklorists.

There followed remarks by the director of the University's libraries, Dr. Wayne Yenawine (See Appendix IV). Dr. Yenawine praised Miss Thomas for "a lifetime of devoted and indefatigable work, recording the stories, the ballads and the music - lest some of the rich cultural heritage of

Eastern Kentuckians be lost in its oral transmission from parents to children or from one generation to another - at 'gatherin's' and 'sings.'" He then introduced Miss Thomas for the purpose of making the presentation to University President Woodrow Strickler. Her remarks are worth quoting in full:

This is a great day for me. I've had a few great days in my eighty-seven years, but I believe this is the greatest - a joy to be here and to present to this wonderful - I would say - snug harbor for the treasures and things. . . my negatives, my manuscripts and many valuable pictures and things all through my first beginning days in the Kentucky mountains when I went there as a court stenographer. These things I am proud and honored to present to the University of Louisville Library. I am sure they'll be well taken care of and maybe many more people will enjoy and see the things that I have collected through the years. Not I alone. It's the wonderful mountain people who've sung for me and told me their stories and given me many treasures. They felt that they would be taken care of, so now they will be.

President Strickler accepted Miss Thomas' presentation, noting her "sense of history. . . a feeling of the times, and a feeling of the culture of a particular region" (See Appendix V).

It is the purpose of this paper to discuss Jean Thomas' gift to the University through an historical and musicological discussion of the rich store of primary materials she left. Her contribution cannot be understood unless her festival is. Therefore, the initial section will focus on the historical development of the American Folk Song Festival. A discussion of general artistic features which appear most significant in the music preserved by Jean Thomas will follow. Certain selections will be analyzed in depth from the standpoint of folklore as well as music. Finally, a concluding section will evaluate Jean Thomas' contribution to the American musical legacy. It will be seen that, while her output is of mixed quality, the discriminating music collector will unearth important

CHAPTER I

A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN FOLK SONG FESTIVAL

Jeanette Mary Francis de Assisi Aloysius Narcissus Garfield Bell Thomas is her full name, and she was born in Ashland, Kentucky, on November 14, 1881. The notation of her birth may still be seen in the Bell family Bible at her home in Ashland at 3201 Cogan Street (See Appendix VI D). Her father, William George Bell of Mason County, was a railroad engineer. Her mother, Kate Smith Bell, was a schoolteacher. She had three sisters and two brothers, one of whom, Dr. George Mefford Bell, became a prominent dentist and County Judge of Boyd County. Jean received a "Classical" Diploma from Ashland High School on June 5, 1899.. Later, as a court stenographer following lawyers and judges into the Kentucky hills, she acquired her nickname, the "Traipsin' Woman". It was on one particularly warm Sunday in June that, according to her memoirs, she was riding with a group of friends in a jolt wagon when she accidentally came upon a group of older mountain folk and children in the midst of a "Singin' Gatherin'".¹ With the portable typewriter that always accompanied her, she took down the lyrics to the songs she heard, fascinating the mountain singers with the "writin' contrapshun."

In 1913, Jean married New York accountant Albert Thomas. The couple settled in Logan, West Virginia, where Albert was a bookkeeper for his family's coal interests. The marriage was not successful and they were

¹Jean Thomas, The Traipsin' Woman, New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1933, pp. 13-21.

divorced within a year. There were no children. All this time, Jean Thomas continued to immerse herself in the musical folklore of the area. She reports that, because she was a stenographer, she always carried a typewriter with her. This enabled her to note down the words of the ballads she heard.

Jean Thomas traveled widely during the twenties, flitting between New York and Hollywood, evidently hoping for a career in the burgeoning entertainment industry. When Cecil B. DeMille produced The Ten Commandments, released in 1927, she was a script girl on the set. However, she never lost interest in mountain music and apparently came to feel that she would make her mark in that connection. In 1931, she published Devil's Ditties which was chosen as an Alternate Selection by the Book-of-the-Month Club.¹

In September of 1930, Jean Thomas was in Kentucky hosting Dorothy Gordon, who later achieved distinction as moderator of NBC Radio's Youth Forum. At the time, Miss Gordon was herself preparing material on American folklore, and Miss Thomas staged a makeshift musical presentation for her, featuring the blind fiddler Jilson Setters, who fascinated audiences from Kentucky to New York and to London's Royal Albert Hall with his ambidextrous fiddling and phenomenal recall of nearly a thousand mountain ballads. Also in attendance at that first festival, a private affair at Miss Thomas' home, was Mrs. Susan Steele Sampson, wife of the Governor of Kentucky, along with a houseful of other notables, including the editor of Ashland's

¹Jean Thomas, Devil's Ditties: Being Stories of the Kentucky Mountain People Told by Jean Thomas with the Songs They Sing, Chicago; W. Wilbur Hatfield, 1931.

only daily paper, the Ashland Daily Independent.¹

The presentation was evidently well-received, and that caused her to think:

If I argued, seventy-five or a hundred people from my home town will turn out on a cold September day to see and hear an old mountain minstrel. . .perhaps, if I selected a warm June day and a place "nigher the county seat," more people would come. Why not try it then on the next second Sunday in June?

Then, too, I reasoned that these old minstrels were fast passing. There would be no one to take their place. The children in the valleys, in the foothills, and in the mountains should be given the opportunity of hearing the ballads of their forbears, as the old minstrels, like Jilson Setters, sing them; the jig and frolic tunes of Elizabeth's time, as he plays them on his ancient fiddle.

It was high time that our nation had an organization to preserve our folk music and songs, and folklorists everywhere agreed. England had had a similar organization since 1878. Of course, there was the American Folklore Society, founded in 1888, the outgrowth of the work of Professor Child of Harvard; but I felt that research and printed journals were not sufficient in themselves. There should be a living, a vital presentation of the song of our fathers. I believed, too, that in an annual American Folk Song Festival only those mountain minstrels to whom the ballads had been handed down by word of mouth should participate. Only those untrained fiddlers and musicians who had learned their art from their forbears should take part.²

It was not until August of 1931, nearly a year later, that Thomas presented her plan at the Governor's mansion. Mrs. Sampson again proved receptive, and Articles of Incorporation were drawn, with Susan Steele Sampson, Helen C. Sampson, and Jean Thomas as the incorporators. The

¹Thomas, Sun Shines Bright, p. 179.

²Ibid., p. 180.

American Folk Song Society was officially born.¹ Included on the National Advisory Board were Dr. Ernest Schelling, Irvin Cobb, Sigmund Spaeth, Dorothy Scarborough, William Allen White, Ida M. Tarbell, Carl Sandburg, John Erskine, and Stephen Vincent Benet. The second American Folk Song Festival - and the first open to the public at large - took place on the second Sunday of the following June, the twelfth, in 1932.

It is ironic that many of the problems which led to the disintegration of the Festival in 1972 were already present in the very first public Festival held on June 12 in 1932. The Ashland Daily Independent on that morning reported that the Festival "is expected to draw one of the largest crowds ever assembled in the county".² Yet the article was buried in the middle of the second column on the third to last page of the paper, right before the obituaries!

Jean Thomas herself acknowledged the problem, in a chapter of her autobiography with the revealing - and accurate - title "Organization Without Consideration."

It had never occurred to me or to any of us incorporators to ask local people or the local editor to become members of the non-profit organization.³

Thomas' lack of diplomacy in failing to enlist local support was a serious error. She envisioned a festival of national scope, but did little to engender enthusiasm right in her own home town.

¹Ibid., p. 181.

²"Folk Festival is to be Held This Afternoon," Ashland Daily Independent, June 12, 1932, p. 18.

³Thomas, Sun Shines Bright, p. 182.

Still, it seems incongruous that the newspaper should not have given more extensive coverage to an event which would, in its own estimation, "draw one of the largest crowds ever assembled in the county." The almost non-existent local coverage between 1932-42 is all the harder to understand when one reads clipping after clipping of huge illustrated feature articles in the national press, from New York to St. Louis, from Chicago to Los Angeles.¹ A current editor of the Ashland Daily Independent reveals that the publisher of the paper "was Jean's neighbor and didn't like her."²

Whatever the case, it may be argued that the Festival would have enjoyed a longer - or at least more continuous - existence had Jean Thomas encouraged more economic and civic support on the local level.³

¹Cf. especially Dorothy Thomas, "She's to Blame for Mount'n Music," The Baltimore Sun, November 12, 1933, pp. 8-9; "A Song Inherited from the First Settlers is Sung at the Fourth Annual American Folk Song Festival," The New York Times, June 24, 1934; "Singin' Gatherin'": A Folk Song Festival," The New York Times, June 20, 1934; "Mountaineer Song Festival," The New York Times, June 22, 1935; "Voices of the Hills: Traipsin' Woman is Rallying Kentucky Minstrels Again," Newsweek, June 6, 1938; "Singfest in the Mountains," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, July 17, 1938, p. 16; "Singin' Gatherin'", Time, June 22, 1942, p. 41.

²Regional Editor, Ashland Daily Independent, interview, November 18, 1974.

³F. A. Behymer, "They Want to Cut In on Big Singin' Gatherin'", St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 5, 1941, p. 441.

She said many times, "I have to absolutely control my festival"¹ but, when it was not possible to hold the festival in the years 1943-47 despite her repeated attempts to revive it, there is no record of any of the illustrious names on the Society letterhead coming to her aid. The Festival's rebirth in 1948 was largely due to increased cooperation with local media, as well as to the good offices of the local American Legion chapter, Kiwanis Club, and the Grayson Rotary.²

The Ashland Daily Independent again offered little encouragement when the Festival was repeated on June 11, 1933. To add insult to injury, the newspaper - in addition to scant coverage of the festival - expressed grave doubts that Governor Laffoon would attend.³ And a laudatory proclamation by Ashland mayor Edgar B. Hagar "was chopped into bits, with a bit here and a bit there, wedged in between want ads, real estate sales, bankruptcy proceedings and deaths."⁴ Thomas had the last laugh, however. The Governor came and "stayed to the very end."⁵

The rental of a larger site in 1934, which allowed for an expanded program, was made possible by the first outside financial help. It must be emphasized that the Festival always existed as a volunteer effort

¹Shirley Williams, "A-Singin' and A-Dancin' and A-Playin'," The Courier-Journal Magazine, Louisville, Kentucky, July 29, 1962, p. 15.

²"Thousands to Attend Folk Song Festival," Ashland Daily Independent, Volume LII, No. 130, June 13, 1948, p. 1.

³Festival to be Held Today," Ashland Daily Independent, June 11, 1933, p. 1

⁴Thomas, Sun Shines Bright, op. cit., pp. 197-8.

⁵Ibid., p. 200.

and depended upon the energies of Miss Thomas assisted by kind-hearted service groups. No admission was charged until 1961. Voluntary contributions and parking fees were donated to the American Legion, Crippled Children's Fund, and the Damon Runyon Cancer Society. Dozens of letters from these organizations attest to the Festival's generosity in this regard.¹

In 1934, however, Thomas ran into difficulty with another local - her landlord. According to her, the landowner felt that the proceeds from the Festival were such that he should be getting a larger rental.

Just a week before the Festival, which had been publicized far and wide, the irate landowner refused point-blank to permit the festival to be held on his ground. . . I had to find a site somewhere on Mayo Trail. Every news story I had sent out and all tourist guides in magazines carried directions that led to Traipsin' Woman cabin on Four Mile Fork of Garner, just off the Mayo Trail.²

Desperate, Miss Thomas looked for another site on the Mayo Trail, and was fortunate enough to find a meadow offered by a local farmer. But money was needed almost overnight to move the windowless log cabin and the heavy stage properties and sound equipment to the new site - really to build a new outdoor theatre. And then an answer came to one

¹The Jean Thomas Correspondence, Patterson Room, University of Louisville Library. Cf. especially 1962 correspondence with John H. Teeter, Executive Director, Damon Runyon Memorial Fund for Cancer Research, 730 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y.

²Thomas, Sun Shines Bright, op. cit., p. 203.

of her urgent telegrams. "Find the site, and if there isn't a windowless log cabin on the place, get one and put it there". Thus, the 1934 Festival was rescued in the nick of time.¹

One of the most poignant of the hundreds of news photos to emerge from the Festivals shows Mrs. Ruby Laifoon, wife of Kentucky's Governor, unveiling a bronze tablet in front of the windowless log cabin that had been hastily erected on the meadow at Four Mile Fork of Gardner.² As she drew aside the silken flag on the tablet, these words were revealed:

American Folk Song Society
 Founded A.D. 1930 by
 Jean Thomas
 The Traipsin' Woman
 Cabin and site donated
 In Memory of
 MARIA LOUISE CROSS

In the front row sat Captain B. Franklin Cross. It was he who had promised the money to Jean Thomas as a memorial to his late sister. The 1935 Festival, held on June 9, and all the succeeding Festivals through 1949, took place on this site, about eighteen miles south of Ashland, just off Route 3, then called the Mayo Trail.

Those first few years, from 1930 to 1935, may be regarded as the first of four "periods" in the history of the Festival. The main accomplishment of this period was the acquisition of a Festival site off the Mayo

¹Jean Thomas, "We Sing America," The American Legion Magazine, January 1943, pp. 18-19.

²"Singin' Gatherin'": A Folk Song Festival," The New York Times, Volume XXXIX. No. 20, June 30, 1934, p. 60.

Trail. There was little overhead at this time, since the artists always performed gratis and the physical setup was handled by Jean Thomas and volunteer service groups. Funds which were needed came from private donations and from royalties from Thomas' books and stories.

But the period of 1936 to 1942, the second phase of the Festival, saw it gain national prominence through wide coverage in the press, and the blossoming of the American Folk Song Festival, despite economic and political odds, must be seen as all the more remarkable, occurring as it did after the worst depression in American history. Mountain people, of course, were among the most severely affected. Yet there is account after account of Legionnaires and others taking off from work to paint signs, transport stage properties, and otherwise assist in preparing for an upcoming Festival.¹

Recognition of the role of the arts in American life was a unique feature of legislation during the New Deal. In August of 1935, the largest appropriation up to that time in American history - \$4,880,000 - was approved by Congress. Of this sum, known as the Emergency Relief

¹For an account of early American Legion Participation, Cf. Jean Thomas, "We Sing America," The American Legion Magazine, January 1943, pp. 19, 48-9.

Appropriation (ERA), \$1,500,000, the largest single block, went to the newly-formed Works Progress Administration (WPA) in order to develop work programs for the unemployed.¹ Four arts projects received \$27 million divided among them. These were the Federal Writers' Project, the Federal Theatre Project, the Federal Art Project, and the Federal Music Project.

Hiring for all projects began immediately, and in six months a peak figure of forty thousand persons was already on the rolls - almost 16,000 in Music, over 12,000 in Theatre, 6,500 in Writers' and 5,330 in Art itself. Approximately 75 per cent of these were rated as professionals, while two-thirds were "certified as eligible for employment," a polite way of saying they were on relief or were destitute.²

The director of the Federal Music Project was Nikolai Sokoloff, who had achieved distinction by organizing one of the world's great orchestras, The Cleveland Symphony. He received high marks for his administration of the project. "Homogeneous in its personnel, easily administered, and enjoying popular appeal, the Music Project. . . was able to carry through a varied nationwide program."³ In addition to staging thousands of concerts, operas, and radio programs, "special attention was given to folk music and the works of American composers".⁴

Among the folk music programs recognized by the Federal Music Project was the American Folk Song Festival.⁵ This consisted primarily of providing employment for people to assist in setting up the Festival and

¹Paul K. Conkin, The New Deal, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967, p. 58.

²Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr., Ideologies and Utopias: The Impact of the New Deal on American Thought, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969, p. 152.

³Ibid., p. 166

⁴Ibid.

⁵Jean Thomas, "The American Folk Song Festival," The Register of the Tucky Historical Society, Volume LXV (January 1967) pp. 20-27.

striking the set. But what was most important to the Festival was its recognition by the federal government, which really gave it national scope.

On May 25, 1936, Dr. Sokoloff wrote and signed a document which was included as the Foreword to the 1936 American Folk Song Festival:

When the full and vital story of the American people comes to be written the cultural historian must absorb deeply from the records and manuscripts of the songs and the tunes that we are to hear in Ashland on this June day. Both in history and as legend the vernacular music of these people of the Kentucky hills in whom the Anglo Saxon strain has retained its purest line, resides the record of a culture that is indigenous and eloquent. This American Folk Song Festival at Ashland -- the "Singin' Gatherin'" -- does more than bring these native musicians together for the joy and the solace and the pride that echoes within their own music. Already the festival is vested with a fine tradition. The day will come when these lyrics and these melodies will find themselves in the libraries of the world beside the folk-lore of the French, the Germans, the Scandinavian and the Russian peoples. Many of these songs, perhaps most of them, are the heritage from the sturdy, courageous, restless men and women, "the horizon seekers", who captured and tamed the wilderness of the Cumberlands, the Blue and the Pine Mountains and the Great Rockies. They took with them over the Wilderness Trail the dance tunes and the ballads that once had been heard in the taverns and on the greens of Old England from which they or their forebears came. These ancient, living songs and these rollicking, bounding tunes are to be preserved in reproducing records and manuscripts as a part of the nation's cultural treasure house in the Congressional Library at Washington. They are to be permanent documents. More than one hundred examples have been recorded to date, comprising ballads, hymn melodies, songs, dulcimer, fiddle and banjo tunes. Most of them have never appeared in a published collection. The copying unit of the Federal Music Project in Louisville and an expert composer working with it, have made simple and artistic accompaniments to the best of the best of the songs.

So this "Singin' Gatherin'" here in the Hills of Kentucky on this second Sunday in June, presented under the auspices of the American Folk Song Society with the cooperation of the Federal Music Project of the Works Progress Administration, pertains this year of a significant importance.¹

¹Dr. Nikolai Sokoloff, Foreword for Program at the American Folk Festival Near Ashland, Kentucky, on June 14, May 25, 1935.

A grant from the Rockefeller Foundation enabled the completion of the early Festival recordings, which now reside in the Historical Sound Recordings Department, Division of Music, Library of Congress.¹ Also in the possession of the Library of Congress, in the Exchange and Gift Division, are six scrapbooks of clippings and memorabilia pertaining to the festivals. Letters and receipts from the Library of Congress for these materials are in the possession of the Patterson Room, University of Louisville Library.

In 1940, a hardbound volume appeared in which the music of the Festivals was notated, harmonized, and annotated.² Joining Miss Thomas in the authorship of the volume was Joseph A. Leeder, Professor of Music Education at Ohio State University. The harmonization of the melodies was accomplished by Walter Kob, instructor in Music Theory at Ohio State. An outstanding feature of this volume are the photographs by John Jacumski, who took pictures of the early Festivals for the Cincinnati Enquirer.

The national recognition which the American Folk Song Festival had achieved by 1940 brought about renewed efforts on the part of Ashland locals to connect up with the Festival. On January 5, 1941, this headline appeared in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch: "They Want to Cut In On Big

¹F. A. Behymer, "They Want to Cut In on Big Singin' Gatherin'", St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 5, 1941.

²Jean Thomas and Joseph A. Leeder, The Singin' Gatherin': Tunes from the Southern Appalachians, New York: Silver Burdett Company, 1939.

Singin' Gatherin': Chamber of Commerce at Ashland, Ky. Would Like to Harmonize with Originator of Annual Festival, But She - The Traipsin' Woman - Continues to Say No."¹ The article goes on to report that members of the Ashland Chamber of Commerce want to "get in on the show but have been kept out. For that reason, Ashland, the nearby city, has never taken the Singin' Gatherin' to its bosom and has joined only grudgingly in the annual big doin's out in the hills."² Miss Thomas also rebuffed efforts by the editor of the Ashland Daily Independent to bring the Festival to Ashland as a two-day affair, sponsored by local merchants. There were evidently some discussions, but Miss Thomas decided to "carry on alone, as long as I live."³

Whatever the reasons for these local clashes, Thomas' singleminded determination did not stand her in good stead when wartime rationing threatened the existence of the Festival. She could not have known on June 15, 1942, that she was presiding over the last Festival to take place for another six years. The war was already having its effect as the Cincinnati Enquirer reported:

The weather and war-imposed restrictions on rubber combined today to reduce the crowd. . .but they dimmed neither the appreciation of a small crowd nor the enthusiasm of the cast of approximately 60.⁴

¹St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 5, 1971, p. 16.

²Ibid.

³F. A. Behymer, op. cit., p. 441.

⁴Famed Song Festival Opens; Audience Reduced by War," Cincinnati Enquirer, June 15, 1942, p. 12.

A Festival was announced for 1943 featuring Bradley Kincaid as master-of-ceremonies, with this proviso:

Because of existing transportation difficulties, folksong enthusiasts will make the pilgrimage in jolt wagons over the picturesque Mayo Trail.¹

The Philadelphia Inquirer reported that "Jean has rounded up all the 'jolt wagons', buggies, and other horsedrawn vehicles in the county."² Despite the valiant effort, the 1943 Festival never took place.

The years 1948-52 may be thought of as the third phase of the Festival. The empty years since 1942 caused the Festival to lose the national prominence it had enjoyed before the war. On the other hand, there gradually developed increased cooperation on the local level, a factor notably lacking in previous years. The removal of the Festival to Ashland in 1950 was an important step in insuring its continuity.

Attempts to revive the Festival had proved fruitless until 1948³ when the Ashland Daily Independent announced it, in typical fashion, with one short article on the morning of the Festival.⁴ The article

¹Olin Downes, "Folksong Festival," The New York Times, June 6, 1943, p. 28.

²Dorothy Thomas, "Singin' Gatherin'", The Philadelphia Inquirer, June 6, 1943, p. 16.

³Claudia Cassidy, "On the Aisle," Chicago Tribune, June 16, 1946, p. 23.

⁴"Thousands to Attend Folk Song Festival," Ashland Daily Independent. Volume LII, No. 180, June 13, 1948, p. 1.

does not mention Thomas' name until the second paragraph but rather concentrates on balladeer Kenny Roberts, a local radio singer who appeared in the 1948 Festival. Bradley Kincaid served again as master-of-ceremonies.

Finally, in 1950, Thomas did move the Festival to Ashland and it is at this point that increased local coverage becomes apparent, not only in the Ashland Daily Independent, but in the West Virginia newspapers, particularly the Huntington Herald Dispatch. The new site for the Festival was in fact the woodland adjoining Thomas' residence at 3201 Cogan Street in Ashland. The attractive site featured a stage in front of a McGuffey School House, and elevated facilities for television equipment.

The final phase in the history of the festival was from 1955 to 1972. During these years, the names of the performers changed most radically, as many of the "old-timers" who had participated since the thirties had died or become too old or sick to continue performing. Jean Thomas herself talked of finding a successor but no such transition ever took place. Instead, the site of the festival was removed in 1966 from the woodland adjoining her Ashland home to Carter Caves State Resort Park, where it became the Sunday afternoon segment of a much broader arts and crafts weekend.

These years also marked renewed interest by the media in the Festival. Virtually every Festival was recorded and telecast. In 1955, a camera crew from the Today Show, hosted by Dave Garroway on the NBC television network, filmed portions of the festival. In fact, Thomas and some of the singers went to New York to appear on the Garroway program. From 1955, the Festival was televised in its entirety by WSAZ Television in Ashland, and edited for presentation the following evening. A local master-of-ceremonies

was featured each year since 1955, when WSAZ' Sterrett Neale filled the role. In 1960, excerpts from the Festival were recorded and released by Folkways Records. During these years, Thomas took to selling post cards, books and souvenirs to her audiences. She proved to be an indefatigable pitchwoman. She also insisted on dating the festivals from 1931, referring, for example, to the 1959 Festival as the "29th". However, since 1932 was actually the first public Festival and since seven years had seen no festival, 1959 in fact represented only the 21st American Folk Song Festival.

Miss Thomas' home served as the festival site through 1965 except for 1964, when the Festival was invited to open the new amphitheatre at Jenny Wiley State Resort Park in Prestonsburg. Staging the Festival at her home proved convenient for Miss Thomas and also offered easy access to visitors, as it was located just off Federal Route 60. Miss Thomas' museum home, known as Wee House in the Wood, contains mementoes of all the Festivals, and was in fact featured on official maps of Ashland by the American Automobile Association.¹



On Sunday, June 11, 1972, Jean Thomas appeared for the last time at an American Folk Song Festival. Forty-two of her ninety-one years had been devoted to her Festival, and the hundreds of spectators sprawled across the lawn at the Cascade Cavern Section of Carter Caves State Park

¹Reverse of Map #317, "Lexington Blue Grass Area, Ky." American Automobile Association, 1970.

greeted her with a standing ovation as she walked onto the stage around 6:15 P.M. She responded with a few words of welcome, speaking of the "beauty of the mountains and talent of the mountain people."

In 1973, a weekend-long Kentucky Folk Song Festival replaced Thomas' Festival. Directed by Hubert Rogers from Grayson, Kentucky, that Festival moved in 1976 from Carter Caves State Park to Grayson Lake. Mr. Rogers had performed throughout the sixties at the earlier festival, and still features many who sang originally with Jean Thomas.

Jean Thomas continued to live at Wee House in the Wood until the end of 1975. There she would welcome visitors who came almost weekly to meet her and see the artifacts in her home, including hundreds of photos, dozens of scrapbooks, authentic musical instruments in the Elizabethan tradition, and a rifle that was owned by Devil Anse Hatfield. On New Year's Day, 1976, Jean Thomas moved to the Wurtland Manor Nursing Home, Wurtland, Greenup County, Kentucky. She celebrated her ninety-sixth birthday on November 14, 1977, and regards the American Folk Song Festival as the most important accomplishment of her long life.

CHAPTER II

BRITISH BALLADS AT THE AMERICAN FOLK SONG FESTIVAL

The format of the American Folk Song Festival expanded rapidly and dramatically. The first public festival, June 12, 1932, contained eighteen selections largely of Elizabethan character. By 1938, a forty-two item program had emerged complete with costumes and dances, the dramatic entrance of a covered wagon, friendly Indians, and a wide range of songs, dances and games. Its character had thus changed from that of an outdoor folk concert to that of a pageant cum variety show. A master-of-ceremonies became a staple of the Festival in 1938, when Cincinnati radio personality Bradley Kincaid performed the role.

Every festival began with a loud series of blasts on a fox horn that had been the property of Devil Anse Hatfield of the famous feuding family.² At that point, a covered wagon would emerge from behind a hill with a man, his wife, and two children, representing the early settlers of the Kentucky mountains. They would be welcomed by a female performer dressed as a Cherokee Indian. An old English country dance would then be performed by a dozen children and a piper. An historical prologue was spoken by a costumed lady attended by eighteen or more ladies-in-waiting attired similarly in long black Elizabethan gowns complete with white ruffles at the neck

¹"Singin' Gatherin': A Folk Song Festival," The New York Times, June 30, 1934, p. 43.

²Volna Fraley blew the fox horn at every festival from 1932 through 1957. In 1958, he was hospitalized and the quarter-century tradition was continued by his nephew George Davidson. Fraley died on May 9, 1959, at Veterans Administration Hospital, Huntington, West Virginia. He was the father of J.P. Fraley, the well-known country fiddler who accompanied Jean Thomas to the University of Louisville.

and sleeves. Here follows the text of the prologue as transcribed from the 1952 Festival, the first to be professionally tape-recorded:

Long centuries ago, when Queen Elizabeth sat upon the throne of England, attended by courtiers and ladies-in-waiting here today, wandering minstrels roamed the countryside, and to the strum of dulcimer and note of flute, sang old tales, woven to old, old melodies, tales of lords and ladies, knights and squires, castles and kings, towers and princesses, of brown girl and gypsy lady. At the close of the Elizabethan era, a spirit of unrest swept over English, Scots, and Scotch-Irish alike. They wearied of the tyranny of their kings, and spurred by undaunted courage and love of independence, they braved the perils of uncharted seas to seek freedom in a new world. Happily they brought with them, not these virtues alone, but a priceless treasure in unwritten song. Some tarried in the colonies; they tilled the soil, bartered and traded. But they of bolder and more venture-some spirit pressed on. The wilderness beckoned. The wilderness - with hunting, trapping, exploring. Some of humble birth, some of gentle blood: Huguenot, Quaker, Puritan. Deep into the Appalachians climbed these sturdy Anglo-Saxons, with hope in their hearts and song on their lips, and there they locked their offspring, generation after generation right down to the present, in mountain fastnesses that have barred the world. So it is - in the mountains of Kentucky today there survives in its primitive charm and beauty the balladry of Elizabethan days. Here, too, survive the quaint ancestral customs of an almost forgotten past. Fancy the windowless cabin of Ephraim and Drusilla on a winter's night. A log fire burns brightly on the hearth, and neighbor folk have gathered in from far and near to make merry at the Infare-wedding of Ephraim and Drusilla. The wedding feast is over, the chairs and tables have been cleared away, and the flock ticks tied in coverlids have been shoved back into the corners so that the dancing and frolic may begin.¹

Stripped of the flowery language and pseudo-historical commentary, the Prologue succeeds in exposing Thomas' fundamental point of departure, confirmed by every researcher who has investigated the music of the Kentucky mountains, e.g. that Elizabethan balladry had indeed been

¹American Folk Song Festival, June 8, 1952, Jean Thomas Tape Collection, Patterson Room, University of Louisville Library.

miraculously preserved in Appalachian "mountain fastnesses that have barred the world." Of the 305 English and Scottish ballads recorded by Child, for example, well over one hundred have also been discovered in the United States.¹

To Cecil Sharp, whose life's work was the collection of English folksong, the Appalachian mountains were a treasure trove of music. Sharp realized that:

One or other of those English communities that lie scattered in various parts of the world might provide as good a field for the collector as England itself, and yield as bountiful and rich a harvest. . . One such community does in fact exist in the Southern Appalachian Mountains of North America. The region is an extensive one, covering some 110,000 square miles, and . . . includes about one-third of the total area of the states of North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Kentucky, Alabama, and Georgia.²

Other researchers have exclaimed at this phenomenon,³ noting the durability of songs that survived not only a traumatic geographical uprooting, but the far more difficult test of time, continuing to exist and develop as a vital folk expression in the southern highlands centuries after their earlier development in the British Isles. These folk songs are living proof

¹ Cecil Sharp, "Folk Music: U.S.A.," in Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Fifth Edition, 1954, edited by Eric Blom, Volume III, p. 390.

² Cecil James Sharp, 1932, op. cit., p. xxi.

³ C. Alphonso Smith, "Ballads Surviving in the United States," MQ II (1916), p. 109; Evelyn Kendrick Wells, The Ballad Tree (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1950), pp. 260-308; Bruno Nettl, An Introduction to Folk Music in the United States (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1960), pp. 3 ff.; George Malcolm Laws, Jr., Native American Balladry (Philadelphia: The American Folklore Society, 1950) pp. 102 ff.

of Gerson-Kiwi's simple but profound observation, "When men wander, they carry their melodies with them."¹

The inhabitants of these mountains are of British descent--English, Scots and Scots Irish--their ancestors having left their native shores about two hundred years or so ago. They transported little from the Old Country in the way of material goods, but they brought with them the priceless possession of their traditional songs which they carried not in books but in their hearts and minds; and these songs have been treasured and have been handed down by word of mouth through the successive generations.²

For purposes of clarification, it may be well at this point to define as precisely as possible the term "folk ballad."

In this paper, the author is guided by Cecil Sharp's admirable summary:

The distinction between the ballad and the song is more or less arbitrary and is not easy to define with precision. Broadly speaking, however, the ballad is a narrative song, romantic in character and, above all, impersonal, that is to say, the singer is merely the narrator of events with which he personally has no connection and for which he has no responsibility. The song, on the other hand, is a far more emotional and passionate utterance, and is usually the record of a personal experience--very frequently of an oratory nature. . . The ballad air is necessarily of a straightforward type, as it is sung indifferently to verses often varying very widely in emotional character. . . The song melodies differ in many respects from those of the ballads. Structurally, many of them are built upon larger and more elaborate lines, while emotionally. . . they are far more intense and more heavily charged with sentiment.³

¹Dr. Edith Gerson-Kiwi, personal communication, University of Louisville, February 10, 1974.

²Maud Karpeles, Introduction to Eighty English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians collected by Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1968), p. 8.

³Cecil James Sharp, 1932, op. cit. pp. xxviii-xxx.

To this may be added Law's helpful and concise definition of the ballad--
 "a narrative folksong which dramatizes a memorable event."¹

Sharp's major criterion for the ballad is the objective impersonal point of view of the singer, that which Attwater has termed "absence of expression."² As Karpeles points out, however, the word "impersonal" must not be construed as "disinterested." On the contrary: "He is intent on the story he is telling, and because it is to him a true and familiar story he tells it straightforwardly and without dramatic embellishment."³ Bronson offers a powerful explanation for this trait in authentic folk music:

The lack of flexibility--or, to put it positively, the formal gravity of the ballads, which lends characteristic dignity and an effect of ceremonial behavior to even the most trivial, violent, or abandoned expression of emotion--is mainly music's bequest: the result of pouring everything in turn into a small, arbitrary mold of sound, with regular divisions, each of which holds so much and no more, and which must be successively refilled at the same temporal pace. . . Psychological implication, innuendo, irony cannot be heard in the straight rendition of a genuine folk-singer. . . officious nods and becks, theatrical hints of a sub-surface understanding shared between singer and hearer, are an offense to that powerful impersonality which makes good folk-singing so uniquely impressive. . . This has meant that the persons of balladry should also maintain a directness and simplicity of character incapable of sophistication.⁴

¹George Malcolm Laws, Jr. Native American Ballads (Philadelphia: The American Folklore Society, 1950), p. 2.

²Donald Attwater, "English Folk-Song," Music and Letters, IX (1928), p. 137.

³Maud Karpeles, Introduction to Eighty English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians collected by Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1968), p. 8.

⁴Bertrand Bronson, The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads, Lume I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. x.

The vitality of the British ballads preserved in Thomas' festival may readily be observed in the first major portion of the event, known as The Infare. The word "Infare" itself shows an intimate connection between Kentucky mountain culture and its English ancestry. It meant an "entryway" in Old and Middle English, but came to have a particular interpretation in northern Scotland--"A feast or entertainment given on entering a new home, esp. at the reception of a bride at her new home."¹ This specific meaning had currency in the pioneer places of the New World. The use of the word by Kentucky highlanders is a charming example of their cultural ties to the Old.

In the American Folk Song Festival, the Infare was a short dramatic presentation concerning the wedding of a young pioneer couple, Ephraim and Drusilla. In its fifteen or twenty minutes are recorded a poignant mixture of British balladry, mountain dialect and quaint folk customs. At one point, the slightly deaf grandmother becomes angry because the bride and groom set their feet "contrarious to the cracks of the floor. Hit'll bring haynts and sorry luck. They've got a-bound to stand the way the floor legs is a runnin'."² But, most important, this type of presentation allowed the music to be presented in an appealing narrative context which proved attractive to performer and audience alike. Thus, the "theatrical" format of the musical presentation would appear to have been a significant factor in assuring its continuity of over four decades.

Three selections were presented in The Infare—"The Two Sisters," "Prince Charlie," and "The Chimney Sweeper". Melodically they are perhaps

¹The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 1427.

²American Folk Song Festival, June 14, 1959, Jean Thomas Tape Collection, Patterson Room, University of Louisville Library.

not as appealing as the beautiful selections to be discussed in the following chapter. However, since the festival opened with these songs, they may serve as a convenient point of departure for a discussion of British balladry at the Festival. All three have their antecedents in an earlier time in Europe. All three demonstrate regular periods of four measures, simple lyrics, multiple stanzas, strophic settings, and the tantalizing sensation of modality that typifies the British ballad.

The phenomenon of modality in secular song of the British Isles is a topic ripe for scholarly investigation and well beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, a brief detour is now necessary before the music of the Infare may be discussed in order to determine Thomas' understanding of modality and how she translated it into the presentation of ballads at the Festival. In general, it may be stated that--despite her concern with "show business" and an apparently limited understanding of modality--it is to her everlasting credit that the ballads at her festival were performed monophonically or with very sparse unsophisticated accompaniment, thus retaining their authentic character. In addition, when she sought to publish the songs she featured at her Festival, she turned for help to trained musicologists like Walter Kob of Ohio State University, who prepared the piano accompaniment and introductory material on modes in both The Singin' Gatherin' and Ballad Making in the Mountains of Kentucky.

Many scholars have written about the modal scales that typify many British ballads and songs.¹ As Bronson has written, "The understanding of folksong. . . depends in part upon a clear perception of modal functions."² As early as 1907, Cecil Sharp undertook a detailed analysis of modal frequency in English folk melodies.³ However, even a cursory glance at the literature reveals the verity of Sharp's observation that "to trace the history of this particular scale is to venture upon controversial ground."⁴ In general, it may be asserted that secular song in England developed its modal character, sometimes independent of, sometimes influenced by, the music of the Church. Usually referred to by their liturgical names, the modes are often convenient style prints which may help in the identification and comparison of folksongs.

The subject is a complex one. It should first be noted that many of the ballads extant in the United States exhibit a "gapped," or incomplete scale of five (pentatonic) or six (hexatonic) notes instead of the modern

¹For a delightful discussion of the relationship of early English song to the church liturgy, see J. B. Trend, "The First English Songs," Music and Letters, IX, No. 2 (April 1928) pp. 111-28. See also Evelyn Kendrick Wells, The Ballad Tree (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1950), pp. 275 ff; Maud Karpeles, "Folk Music: English," Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Fifth Edition, Volume III, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1954), p. 231; Bertrand H. Bronson, "Folksong and the Modes," The Musical Quarterly, Volume XXXII, No. 1 (January 1946), pp. 37-49; Cecil James Sharp, 1932, op. cit., pp. xxx-xxxiv.

²Bertrand H. Bronson, "Folksong and the Modes," The Musical Quarterly, Volume XXXII, No. 1 (January 1946), p. 37.

³Cecil James Sharp, English Folk Song: Some Conclusions, Third Edition, London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1954, pp. 36-72.

⁴Cecil James Sharp, 1932, op. cit., p. xxxi.

heptatonic arrangement. The majority of the more than 1,600 tunes collected by Cecil Sharp are pentatonic.¹ So are eight of the seventeen songs which exhibit modality in Jean Thomas' The Singin' Gatherin'. Cecil Sharp ventures the assertion that the gapped scale "was the first form of scale evolved by the folk which was in any way comparable with our modern major or minor scale." Sharp assumes that song began as monotone, "varied by occasional excursions to the sounds immediately above or below his single tone, or by a leap to the fourth below." He believed that the folk eventually added more notes but were quite satisfied with a five- or six-note scale.

Indeed, there are many nations at the present day which have not yet advanced beyond the two-gapped or pentatonic scale, such as, for instance, the Gaels of Highland Scotland; and, when we realize the almost infinite melodic possibilities of the 5-note scale, as exemplified in Celtic folk-music and, for that matter, in the tunes printed in this volume, we can readily understand that singers felt no urgent necessity to increase the number of notes in the octave.²

Sharp would thus appear to subscribe to the concept of "seepage" (abgesunkenes Kulturgut) discussed by Apel.³ From that point, he constructs a system of modal classification, using the familiar liturgical nomenclature, in which hexatonic and heptatonic scales are derived from the pentatonic by the addition of notes which "fill in" the "gaps". For example, in analyzing

¹Maud Karpeles in Groves, Volume III, p. 231.

²Sharp, 1932, op. cit., xxxi.

³"Folk Music," The Harvard Dictionary of Music, Second Edition, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969, p. 324.

the very first selection of the 1932 collection, "The Elfin Knight," he notes a pentatonic scale with no fourth step and no seventh step. In Sharp's system, this is mode 3. The piece is thus prefixed with the following headnote: "Pentatonic. Mode 3 (Tonic G)." The next piece, "The False Knight Upon the Road," is a six-note-scale piece with no sixth. It falls into Sharp's Category of "Hexatonic, Mode 4, b."

In contrast to Sharp's presentation, Jean Thomas--or rather, her arranger Walter Kob--refers to the gapped scales, but provides no more than the one-sentence elucidation: "In them one or more scale tones is missing."¹ He headnotes each selection with proper mode or scale title. Perhaps Thomas felt that she could add nothing more to the understanding of gapped scales. Whatever the case, this author could find no other discussion of this essential folk phenomenon in the entire body of written and oral materials she left to the University of Louisville.

It is clear from the research of the last century that many English folksongs were directly inspired by the Gregorian Chant of the Church itself. To be convinced, one need look no further than the first of the Child ballads, "Riddles Wisely Expounded." Bronson's arresting analysis of the famous song reveals explicitly what the listener feels intuitively:

D'urfey's tune, with its hint of Dorian modality, its narrow compass, and its almost complete avoidance of intervals wider than a single step of the scale, suggests an antiquity

¹Jean Thomas, The Singin' Gatherin': Tunes from the Southern Appalachians, (New York: Silver Burdett Company, 1939), p. ix.

far higher than that of the accompanying verbal text. . . We can assert. . . that the tune is rooted in a common idiom with Gregorian Chant. And if specific parallels be demanded, they can be found in so familiar an example as the Benedictus qui venit from the Sanctus of the mass Orbis Factor (eleventh century). Note-for-note comparison is revealing. . . or we may compare the Agnus Dei from the mass Kyrie Magnae Deus Potentiae; or, again, the ad libitum Kyrie Salve, with cadences not greatly dissimilar to the more famous ones from Dies Irae.¹

Thomas often refers to the Gregorian ancestry of mountain music, and furthermore credits herself with making that discovery. In her Ballad Makin' in the Mountains of Kentucky, she relates how, as a child "not yet old enough to go to school," she sang a sad mountain church hymn to a Franciscan nun. Amazed, the nun exclaimed, "Child! . . . That is Gregorian Chant! . . . My child. . . you--you--have made a strange discovery for the rest of us who have spent long years in the study of the Gregorian chant! Some day the world will know of your remarkable findings."² By the time Thomas did publish her "discovery,"³ the world had long been aware of the intimate connection between the mountains and the modes. As early as 1916, Cecil Sharp had notated hymns in the mountains of

¹Bernard Harris Bronson, The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads, Volume 1, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 3.

²Jean Thomas, Ballad Makin' in the Mountains of Kentucky (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1939), p. xiii.

³Ibid. Cf. also Kentucky School Journal XVI, no. 5 (January 1938), p. 17.

North Carolina as descendants of English Folk Song.¹ In fact, had he still been alive in 1939, Cecil Sharp would doubtless have been surprised to learn that "through the Singin' Gatherin'. . .I had the opportunity to bring first to public attention the similarity between the hymn singing of Kentucky mountain folk and the ancient Gregorian Chant of the Sixth Century." More than four decades prior, when Jean Thomas had just begun her serious involvement with folksong, Sharp had authored a text that is still consulted for authoritative guidance, his English Folk Song: Some Conclusions, published in 1907. As early as that, Sharp had asserted "the scales, upon which many English folk-tunes are constructed, are not the same as those with which we are familiar in modern music. . . . The fact. . .that a large number of our folktunes are cast in the modes has awakened a new interest in these ancient scales. . .For, here are scores of melodies, cast. . .in the old. . .modes, yet throbbing with the pulse of life, beautiful, attractive, expressive, and making, withal, a powerful appeal to modern taste and feeling."²

Among the materials given by Jean Thomas to the University of Louisville is a tape recorded interview undertaken by two unidentified students in October of 1968 at the Wee House in the Wood. Thomas' remarks on Gregorian Chant are extremely interesting:

The Chant was the first liturgical music ever to be set down and the people naturally--God's children--were singing some kind of tunes from the time of the world. And so together the two have survived, you see. The things set down by Pope Gregory. . .

¹Sharp, 1932, op. cit., 294-5.

²Cecil James Sharp, English Folk Song: Some Conclusions, Third Edition, London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1954, p. 36.

set down there just by little marks, not notes like you'd see now, little neumes they called it--little breath marks they were--and then the people of the mountains, the early people, they didn't have any symbol for music, and there's a lot of things in the quality of their voice that you can't capture with a pencil and paper. You can hear it in the voice but there's no way to express that. . . I couldn't find any note on any scale anywhere to get that down on paper. . . You can't get that little echo. . . on paper. . . With these early breath marks, these neumes, little symbols of breathing--that's what that is, that little echo--and--but there's no fixed note, no way that you could do it.¹

Thomas then illustrated the characteristic "catch" in the voice of a mountain performer. It must be realized that Thomas was nearly eighty-eight at the time of this interview, but her remarks would still appear to indicate a vague understanding of the relationship between chant and secular song and, incidentally, a mistaken understanding of the function of neumes. It must also be observed that, nowhere in the Thomas legacy does there exist any comparative musicological study or serious analysis that would support her claims.

In her autobiography, Jean Thomas says that she devised a method for musical dictation through the use of the letters and symbols on the typewriter keyboard.

¹Interview with Jean Thomas, October, 1968. The Jean Thomas Tape Collection, Patterson Room, University of Louisville Library.

I have been asked how I recognized the notes quickly enough to get them down on the typewriter. The stenographer's ear is trained to catch sound and transform it instantly into a symbol or character. When a ballad singer sings a note, it is a simple matter for a stenographer, with only a slight knowledge of voice and piano, to transform the note sung into the corresponding letter of the scale.¹

She calls it a "simple matter," yet Thomas' method would seem to be inaccessible to any but those with exceptional training and absolute pitch, and such persons would have little need of it. The most helpful part of her system was the use of certain typewriter keys to indicate peculiarities in performance practice - what Thomas calls the "echo" or "lilt" of the mountaineer's voice. Even in this area, however, far more sophisticated systems had already been developed.²

Happily, although not a scholar, Jean Thomas was an inspired collector and exhibitor of the art she cherished. The extent of that inspiration may be perceived in an analysis of Thomas' treatment of "The Twa Sisters," one of the most prolifically documented ballads in all variants including Jean Thomas'. Brewster's incredible study examines nearly 350.³

¹Jean Thomas, The Sun Shines Bright (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1940), p. 87.

²Bruno Nettl, Theory and Method in Ethnomusicology (London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), pp. 98-111; Frances Densmore, Teton Sioux Music (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1918); Curt Sachs, The Well-springs of Music (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1962), pp. 20-33; George Herzog, "Speech-Melody and Primitive Music," Musical Quarterly, Volume XX (1934), pp. 452-66.

³Brewster, Paul G., The Two Sisters (Folklore Fellows Communication, No. 147) Helsinki, 1953.

The roots of this ballad go far back into pre-Christian Scandinavia, when the folk believed in magical retribution--in the bones of the dead rising to accuse their murderer. In its primitive form the ballad tells of a girl murdered out of spite by her jealous elder sister; a musical instrument is contrived out of her bones, her golden hair strung to the frame; by chance this human harp or fiddle is played at the wedding feast of the murderess and the dear girl's betrothed. There the strings of the instrument begin to sing, and sing on and on about the crime of the jealous sister until she is seized by her father, put to the torture and executed.¹

The ballad was sung at the "Infare" to a dance for six couples who act out the story as it is being sung. At some festivals, certain dancers actually sang stanzas solo and those who were being "sung about" were silent. The 1951 rendition, however, was performed in unison. (Appendix I, A6). It may parenthetically be noted that Thomas' treatment of the ballad in the dance context reveals a keen sensitivity to the dance tradition associated with it, "attested by the words of the refrain prevalent where the 'play-party game' tradition has been strong, as well as by external evidence."²

¹Alan Lomax, The Folk Songs of North America (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1960), p. 172.

²Bronson, Volume I, op. cit., p. 143; Cf. also, Nettl, op. cit., p. 40; Kendrick, op. cit., p. 96.

Of the ninety-seven variants Bronson includes in his 1959 volume, sixty-two were collected in the United States. These are plotted in Table One, according to year and State in which the variant was actually heard. They represent the efforts of about two dozen collectors; Cecil Sharp alone is responsible for eighteen variants, and Winston Wilkinson¹ for seven. Of the six variants collected in Kentucky, five are from Cecil Sharp, one from Jean Thomas. With a few exceptions--one recorded by Alan Lomax in 1937 at Martin's Creek, Clay County,² and another by John Jacob Niles made in Pikeville five years earlier³--Jean Thomas' inclusion of the song in her festival thus represents one of the few Kentucky documentations since 1917.

¹Winston Wilkinson MSS, 1935-1936, 1936-1937, University of Virginia, cited in Bronson, Volume IV, 1972, p. 524.

²Music Division, The Library of Congress, Check-list of Recorded Songs in the English Language in the Archive of American Folk Song to July, 1940, Volume II, Washington, D.C., 1942, p. 412.

³John Jacob Niles, The Ballad Book of John Jacob Niles, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961) p. 51.

TABLE ONE. CHRONOLOGICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE SIXTY-TWO TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN VARIANTS OF "THE TWO SISTERS", 1900-49, ANNOTATED BY BERTRAND BRONSON (1959).
The numeral plotted is the number of the variant which appears in Bronson's text.

	ARK	DC	FLA	IND	KY	ME	MICH	MISS	MO	NC	OHIO	TENN	TX	VER	VA	WA
1949		23														
1948																
1947																
1946																
1945																
1944																
1943																
1942		77														
1941		94							51, 70							
1940																
1939											73				50, 57	
1938												24				
1937			37													
1936			38							53				35		
1935				44											23, 35 36, 37 56, 57 58	72, 35
1934							22									
1933		32														
1932													74			
1931				43			37		42				54			3
1930		56						75				32				
1929										52					54	
1928						58										
1927																
1926																
1925															43	59
1924															71	
1923																
1922																
1921																
1920																
1919																35
1918									30	34, 53 74, 75					29, 50 53	
1917					41, 45 47, 50 73											
1916										91					27, 39 53	
1915										31						
1914															40	
1913																
1912																
1911																
1910																
1909																
1908																
1907																
1906																
1905																
1904																
1903									38, 40							
1902																
1901																
1900																
No. of Variants	4	1	2	1	6	1	2	1	6	3	1	2	1	2	20	4
No. of different dialects represented	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	3	1	1	2	1	1	5	3

Many variants of "The Two Sisters" reveal the familiar textual structure of a refrain of three parts, each part initiated by repetition of the very first line. This may be seen in three variants collected in Kentucky. The first two were notated by Cecil Sharp in Berea within nine days of one another in May of 1917. The third was published by Jean Thomas, first in 1931,¹ and then again in 1939,² with identical music but with a somewhat altered text which will be discussed below.

(1)	(2)	(3)
Sung by Miss Violet Henry	Sung by Mrs. Jenny L. Combs	As sung by Rosie Hall
O sister, O sister, there swims a swan, Bowee down, O sister, O sister, there swims a swan Bow and balance to me, O sister, O sister, there swims a swan, O no, it's not, it's some fair one. I'll be true to my love, If my love'll be true to me.	He gave to her a beaver hat, Bow down, He gave to her a beaver hat These vows were sent to me, He gave to her a beaver hat, The oldest she thought much of that. I'll be true, true to my love, If my love will be true to me.	There lived an old lord by the northern sea, Bowee down, There lived an old lord by the northern sea Bow and balance to me. There lived an old lord by the northern sea And he had daughters one, two, three. I'll be true to my love If my love will be true to me.

This familiar textual pattern has been traced to the sixteenth century³ and is a staple of dozens of folk songs.⁴ The refrain "bowee down. . .bow

¹Jean Thomas, Devil's Ditties, 1931, pp. 70-3.

²Jean Thomas, The Singin' Gatherin', 1939, pp. 76-78.

³Bronson, op. cit., p. 143.

⁴Cf. "The Three Ravens," Child 26; "Sir Egleman," Child 18; "A Frog He Went A-Courtin'", Sharp 220C; "The Friar in the Well," Child 276.

and balance to me" naturally links this song with folkdance. Indeed, the song was performed as a dance. However, it will be noted that the ballad, with its rather murky story, is not a type that normally lends itself to dance but rather to solo performance. The vigorous group Song-Dance heard on the tape (Appendix I, IF) can only be ascribed to authentic folk evolution. Appalachian mountaineers had by and large forsaken the European refrains-- "Binorie O and Binorie" (Bronson 13) or "low down derry down dee" etc. (Bronson 26), and selected out the "bow down" version.¹

Thomas' version not only retains an authentic link with the past, but revitalizes the performance of the song by recasting it quite authentically as an American "play-game song."² As such, the American Folk Song Festival provided a living embodiment of the inseparable nature of folksong and folkdance, as well as a spirited translation of a folk expression in the American idiom.

¹Even here, many versions exist, including "bow down. . .the bough has bent to me" (Bronson 35) a quizzical play on words; or the meaningless "bow bough it's been to me" (Bronson 37); or the even more outlandish "There was an old lady lived in the North, Bow down/ There was an old lady lived in the North, They both were bent to me" (Bronson p. 168). This strange version, sung by a Virginian in 1935, also speaks of three daughters yet recounts the usual story of two. At its conclusion, the poor miller is hung despite his efforts to save "poor sister Kate."

²Bronson I, op. cit., p. 143; Cf., also Benjamin Botkin, American Play Party Song, Lincoln, 1937, p. 59; Alan Lomax, op. cit., p. 184.

in the Kentucky mountains, the formerly serious ballad had become largely a rhythmical vehicle for dance.

It is very clear that the participants here are not anxious to tell a tragic story, whether of the supernatural or the natural. Their minds are on the immediate social scene, to which they have compelled an old and familiar ballad to do submission. They have found a spacious and subservient lilting tune, customarily in 6/8 time, with plenty of repeated lines so as neither to overcharge the memory nor to end too soon; and the social orientation, irrelevant to the narrative, is carried home in the concluding phrases of each stanza.¹

While there is certainly a measure of truth in this assertion, it must be recognized that the song also continues to retain a purely narrative identity in the Kentucky mountains. A 1946 performance by Jean Ritchie of Viper is included in the appended tape and amply demonstrates this (Appendix I, A8).

1. There lived an old lord by the Northern Sea
Bow down
There lived an old lord by the Northern Sea
Bow your bend to me
There lived an old lord by the Northern Sea
And he had daughters, one, two, three
I'll be true to my love
If my love will be true to me.

2. A young man came a-courting there,
Bow down
A young man came a-courting there,
Bow your bend to me
A young man came a-courting there,
And he took choice of the youngest fair,
I'll be true to my love
If my love will be true to me.

¹ Ibid.

3. He gave the youngest a gay gold ring,
Bow down
He gave the youngest a gay gold ring,
Bow your bend to me
He gave the youngest a gay gold ring,
The oldest not a single thing,
I'll be true to my love
If my love will be true to me.
4. O sister, o sister, let us walk out,
Bow down
O sister, o sister, let us walk out,
Bow your bend to me
O sister, o sister, let us walk out,
To where the ships go sailing about,
I'll be true to my love
If my love will be true to me.
5. As they walked by the salty brim,
Bow down
As they walked by the salty brim
Bow your bend to me
As they walked by the salty brim,
The oldest pushed the youngest in,
I'll be true to my love
If my love will be true to me.
6. O sister, o sister, lend me your hand
Bow down
O sister, o sister, lend me your hand
Bow your bend to me
O sister, o sister, lend me your hand,
And I will give you my house and land,
I'll be true to my love
If my love will be true to me.
7. I'll neither lend you hand nor glove,
Bow down
I'll neither lend you hand nor glove,
Bow your bend to me
I'll neither lend you hand nor glove
But I will have your own true love,
I'll be true to my love
If my love will be true to me.
8. Down she sank and away she swam,
Bow down
Down she sank and away she swam,
Bow your bend to me
O, down she sank and away she swam,
Into the miller's pond she ran,
I'll be true to my love

3. He gave the youngest a gay gold ring,
Bow down
He gave the youngest a gay gold ring,
Bow your bend to me
He gave the youngest a gay gold ring,
The oldest not a single thing,
I'll be true to my love
If my love will be true to me.
4. O sister, o sister, let us walk out,
Bow down
O sister, o sister, let us walk out,
Bow your bend to me
O sister, o sister, let us walk out,
To where the ships go sailing about,
I'll be true to my love
If my love will be true to me.
5. As they walked by the salty brim,
Bow down
As they walked by the salty brim
Bow your bend to me
As they walked by the salty brim,
The oldest pushed the youngest in,
I'll be true to my love
If my love will be true to me.
6. O sister, o sister, lend me your hand
Bow down
O sister, o sister, lend me your hand
Bow your bend to me
O sister, o sister, lend me your hand,
And I will give you my house and land,
I'll be true to my love
If my love will be true to me.
7. I'll neither lend you hand nor glove,
Bow down
I'll neither lend you hand nor glove,
Bow your bend to me
I'll neither lend you hand nor glove
But I will have your own true love,
I'll be true to my love
If my love will be true to me.
8. Down she sank and away she swam,
Bow down
Down she sank and away she swam,
Bow your bend to me
O, down she sank and away she swam,
Into the miller's pond she ran,
I'll be true to my love
If my love will be true to me.

9. O miller, o miller, go draw your dam,
Bow down
O miller, o miller, go draw your dam,
Bow your bend to me
O miller, o miller, go draw your dam,
Here's either a mermaid or a swan,
I'll be true to my love
If my love will be true to me.
10. He robbed her of her gay gold ring,
Bow down
He robbed her of her gay gold ring,
Bow your bend to me
He robbed her of her gay gold ring,
And then he pushed her in again,
I'll be true to my love
If my love will be true to me.

At the festivals, Jean Thomas also presented the song without dance, as will be demonstrated below.

One of the Child variants of the story of the ballad (W) concerns a sister's jealousy of her younger sibling because of the attentions of a knight. She lures her sister to the river and pushes her in, deaf to her pleas. A miller's daughter reports the sight to her father, who retrieves the dead girl and fashions harp strings from her hair. The first tune played by the harp tells of the older sister's foul deed. The story, transposed to Kentucky, features marvelous variations. One becomes an innocent play-song with a "Johnny" instead of a "Knight".

Two little sisters side by side
Sing dow down, Sing dow dee,
Two little sisters side by side
The bay's all bound for me.

Two little sisters side by side
 Johnny chose the youngest to be his bride,
 So I'll be kind to my true love
 Because he's kind to me.

(Sharp 5F)¹

The single-versed ditty sung by Mrs. Henry (see 1 above, p. 42) makes little sense from a literal point of view. The reference to the swan harkens back to a European version in which the miller's daughter sees the dead damsel and exclaims--as in this version from 1882--

"O father, father draw your dam!
 There's either a mermaid or a milk-white swan."²

Mrs. Jenny Combs' reference to a "beaver hat" (see 2 above) belies a charming selectivity from those gifts mentioned in European versions. In Scotland or England it might have been marvelous to be given a "broach and ring,"³ or "diamonds and rings,"⁴ but what could be more natural in America than a "beaver hat"? In fact, whereas only one of Bronson's European variants mentions a beaver hat (26), twenty-seven American variants favor a beaver hat. One sung to Belden⁵ in Missouri insists upon a "beaver

¹Bronson I, p. 143; Benjamin Botkin, American Play Party Song, Lincoln 1937, p. 59; Alan Lomax, op. cit., p. 184.

²John Collingwood Brull and John Stokoe, Northumbrian Minstrelsy, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1882, pp. 61-63, cited in Bronson, Volume I, p. 146.

³William Christie, Traditional Ballad Airs, Volume I, Edinburgh, 1876-1881, p. 42.

⁴Child, I, p. 495.

⁵Henry Belden and Arthur Palmer Hudson, Folk Ballads from North Carolina (The Frank C. Bran Collection of North Carolina Folklore II), Durham 1952, pp. 17 (A)-18.

cape" even though the rhyme is consequently lost.*

As to the identity of the father/mother of the two sisters, he/she has been an "old lord in the North Countree" (Virginia), "an old woman lived on the seashore" (Tennessee), "an old man lived in the west" (Missouri), "an old man by the Northern Sea" (Arkansas), "an old woman in Northern 'try" (Virginia), "a farmer there lived in the north country" (Scotland), "an old farmer lived out in the West" (West Virginia), and even a "Lord Mayor" (Virginia).

There are colorful differences in the narrative during the variants. In some, the miller is portrayed as a sympathetic onlooker who respectfully retrieves the girl's corpse. In others, he sadistically removes the dead girl's jewelry and throws her back into the water. Sometimes the miller and the older sister are punished, sometimes they are not. In one variant, the miller "brought her safe and sound" but was hanged anyway, with the older sister "hung close by." A very few variants reveal a happy ending, but this is rare indeed.

*The "beaver hat" provided Arthur Taylor with one important piece of evidence for his persuasive argument that American representation of the song is based on English rather than Scottish variants. His article, "The English, Scottish and American Versions of the 'Two Sisters,'" Journal of American Folklore, XLII, No. 164 (April-June, 1929), pp. 238-246, demonstrates the way in which such local modifications may help the scholar in determining the origins of folksongs. Another important study which traces the geographical roots of this song is Harbison Parker, "'The Two Sisters'-Going Which Way?", Journal of American Folklore, LXIV (1951), pp. 347-60.

Although it is certainly true that "the threads of one tradition are hopelessly tangled,"¹ these "discrepancies" among the variants are actually the heart and soul of folk music.

Both Barry and Sharp emphasized the principle that folksong does not exist in a single authoritative version, as do typical composed songs in the popular and fine art idioms, but rather in a multitude of versions, each of which may be found in many variants. . . Many types of British provenance have survived almost note for note in the U.S.A., even when associated with American Themes and words showing typical American lexical and grammatical variations.²

Attwater echoes this important point:

A folk-song (or dance) is at any given moment the result of continuous growth and in its natural and proper form is based upon and evolved through oral tradition alone. The conservatism of the common people protects it from the corruption of mere fashion, but does not preclude modification; individuals introduce changes which may remain local or may become co-extensive with the area of distribution of the song. In this way folk-song is an art, not of individuals, but of a whole community, an expression of common ideas and impulses.

As a song became popular and distributed over a wider area, different variants were adopted by different communities; as a song got older, it became altered, in different ways in different places, by faulty transmission, misunderstanding or deliberate changes in words or tune. It was still organically the same song, or it may be regarded as a stirps, with descendants.³

¹Laws, op. cit. p. 104.

²Charles Seeger, "Folk Music: U.S.A.," in Groves, Volume III, 1954, p. 392.

³Donald Attwater, op. cit., p. 132.

Nettl adds:

Singers tend to change songs for three reasons. One is forgetfulness. Another is individual creativity, the desire to improve a song, to change it according to one's personal taste. A third is the tendency for a song to change in order for it to conform to the style of other songs in its environment. This is especially important when a song is passed from one country, culture, or ethnic group to another.¹

A comparison of the two variants published by Thomas, in 1931² and 1939³ respectively, reveals some interesting textual variations.

1931 (as sung by Rosie Hall for Jean Thomas)

1. There lived an old lord by the northern sea, Bowee down
There lived an old lord by the northern sea, Bow and balance to me,
There lived an old lord by the northern sea and he had daughters
one, two, three,
I'll be true to my love if my love will be true to me.
2. The youngest one she had a beau, Bowee down
The youngest one she had a beau, Bow and balance to me
The youngest one she had a beau, The oldest one she did not have one.
I will be true to my love, My love will be true to me.
3. Her beau he bought her a beaver hat, Bowee down
Her beau he bought her a beaver hat, Bow and balance to me.
Her beau he bought her a beaver hat, The oldest one she did not
like that.
I will be true to my love, My love will be true to me.

¹Bruno Nettl, An Introduction to Folk Music in the United States (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1960), p. 6.

²Jean Thomas, Devil's Ditties, op. cit., pp. 70-3.

³Jean Thomas, The Singin' Gatherin', op. cit., p. 76-8.

4. O sister, O sister, let's walk the sea shore, Bowee down
 O sister, O sister, let's walk the sea shore
 Bow and balance to me
 O sister, O sister, let's walk the sea shore, To see the ships
 a-sailing o'er
 I will be true to my love, My love will be true to me.
5. As they were walking along the sea shore, Bowee down
 As they were walking along the sea shore
 Bow and balance to me
 As they were walking along the sea shore, The oldest pushed
 the youngest one o'er
 I will be true to my love, My love will be true to me.
6. O sister, O sister, please lend me your hand, Bowee down
 O sister, O sister, please lend me your hand
 Bow and balance to me
 O sister, O sister, please lend me your hand, And I will bring
 you to dry land
 I will be true to my love, My love will be true to me.
7. I neither will lend you my hand nor my glove, Bowee down
 I neither will lend you my hand nor my glove
 Bow and balance to me
 I neither will lend you my hand nor my glove, For all you
 want is my own true love
 I will be true to my love, My love will be true to me.
8. She bowed her head and away she swam, Bowee down
 She bowed her head and away she swam
 Bow and balance to me
 She bowed her head and away she swam, She swam till she came
 to the miller's dam
 I will be true to my love, My love will be true to me.
9. The miller threw out his drifting hook, Bowee down
 The miller threw out his drifting hook
 Bow and balance to me
 The miller threw out his drifting hook, He drew this maiden
 to the brook
 I will be true to my love, My love will be true to me.
10. The miller was hung at his own mill door, Bowee down
 The miller was hung at his own mill door
 Bow and balance to me
 The miller was hung at his own mill door, For bringing this
 maiden to the shore
 I will be true to my love, My love will be true to me.

11. Her sister was hung at her own yard gate, Bowee down
 Her sister was hung at her own yard gate
 Bow and balance to me
 Her sister was hung at her own yard gate, For drowning of
 her sister Kate
 I will be true to my love, My love will be true to me.

1939 (As sung by Rosie Hall)

1. There lived an old lord by the northern sea, Bowee down,
 There lived an old lord by the northern sea, Bow and balance to me;
 There lived an old lord by the northern sea, and he had daughters,
 one, two, three,
 I'll be true to my love, if my love will be true to me.
2. A young man came a-courting there, Bowee down,
 A young man came a-courting there, Bow and balance to me;
 A young man came a-courting there, and he made choice of the youngest
 fair.
 I'll be true to my love, if my love will be true to me.
3. Her true love he bought her a beaver hat, Bowee down,
 Her true love he bought her a beaver hat, Bow and balance to me;
 Her true love he bought her a beaver hat, the eldest one did not
 like that.
 I'll be true to my love, if my love will be true to me.
4. O sister, O sister, let's walk the seashore, Bowee down,
 O sister, O sister, let's walk the seashore, Bow and balance to me;
 O sister, O sister, let's walk the seashore, and see the ships
 a-sailing o'er.
 I'll be true to my love, if my love will be true to me.
5. As they were walking along the seashore, Bowee down,
 As they were walking along the seashore, Bow and balance to me;
 As they were walking along the seashore, the eldest pushed the
 youngest o'er.
 I'll be true to my love, if my love will be true to me.
6. O sister, O sister, please lend me your hand. Bowee down.
 O sister; O sister, please lend me your hand. Bow and balance
 to me;
 O sister, O sister, please lend me your hand and I will bring
 you to dry land.
 I'll be true to my love, if my love will be true to me.
7. I neither will lend you my right hand. Bowee down,
 I neither will lend you my right hand, Bow and balance to me;
 I neither will lend you hand nor glove, for all you want is
 my true love.
 I'll be true to my love, if my love will be true to me.

8. She bowed her head and away she swam. Bowee down,
 She bowed her head and away she swam. Bow and balance to me;
 She bowed her head and away she swam, she swam till she came
 to the miller's dam.
 I'll be true to my love, if my love will be true to me.
9. The miller threw out his drifting hook, Bowee down.
 The miller threw out his drifting hook, Bow and balance to me;
 The miller threw out his drifting hook, he drew this maiden to
 the brook.
 I'll be true to my love, if my love will be true to me.
10. And off her fingers took five gold rings, Bowee down,
 And off her fingers took five gold rings, Bow and balance to me;
 And off her fingers took five gold rings, then into the water
 he plunged her again.
 I'll be true to my love, if my love will be true to me.
11. The miller was hung at his own mill door, Bowee down,
 The miller was hung at his own mill door, Bow and balance to me;
 The miller was hung at his own mill door, for bringing this
 maiden to the shore
 I'll be true to my love, if my love will be true to me.
12. The sister was hung at her own yard gate, Bowee down,
 The sister was hung at her own yard gate. Bow and balance to me;
 The sister was hung at her own yard gate, for drowning of her
 sister Kate.
 I'll be true to my love, if my love will be true to me.

It will immediately be noticed that the 1931 variant contains eleven verses, the 1939 variant twelve. Curiously, it is a key verse, the 10th, that is missing. Without it the miller would appear to have rescued the poor maiden's body and been punished anyway! The inclusion of the missing lines, of course, solves the problem. He is punished because of the dastardly deeds recounted in that verse. It must be added, however, that several other variants omit this verse, thus maintaining the unconnected narrative, e.g. :

The miller he put out his hook
 And caught her by the petticoat.
 The miller he was hung for her sake, etc.

(Northeast Harbor, Maine, 1928)¹

The miller threwed out his hook and line,
 Most gently,
 The miller throwed out his hook and line
 And caught her in the dress so fine,
 Oh dear me.

The miller was hung in his own mill gate
 Most gently, etc.

(Walnut Shade, Missouri, 1941)²

It is therefore not remarkable that Thomas should have been responsible for disparate variants. Nor is it remarkable that the second verse of each variant should be so different, as both variants have their antecedents in other variants. What is remarkable is Thomas' ascription of both variants to one singer--Rosie Hall. This is quite troublesome, in that it would be highly unlikely for a true folksinger to perform two such distinctive variants. The ascription, of course, is hedged--"As sung by Rosie Hall" and there is no date or place provided. This trait of vagueness unfortunately cuts through much of Thomas' printed and oral output, and has exasperated more than one folklorist:

Many of the attributions of authorship are made on purely folk authority and can be given only limited credence. . . . We would not easily discover their singers, for the songs are set against a background that is highly colored. A number of informants are referred to by invented titles. . . . One can only hope the songs are more authentic than the background.³

¹Phillips Barry, Fannie H. Eckstrom, and Mary W. Smyth, British Ballads from Maine, New Haven, 1929, p. 42.

²Vance Randolph, Ozark Folksongs, Volume I, Columbia, Missouri, 1946, pp. 57 (E)-58.

³D. K. Wilgus, Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898, Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1959, p. 205.

A comparison of the two variants reveals further interesting differences. The "lived/liv'd" and "I will/I'll" changes are not significant, sounding the same in actual performance. They do point, however, to an effort to "folklorize" the later version, at the same time punctuating the published text in conformity with more standard poetic grammar (use of commas, semi-colons, "Seashore" becomes "sea shore", "oldest" becomes "eldest", etc.). It will be noted that the "tag" of each verse in the later variant contains the word "if," absent from all but the first verse of the 1931 variant. Both types were collected in Kentucky by Cecil Sharp (See 5G and 5L). One charming alternative to both was sung in 1917 in Knox County--"I'll be kind to my true love because he's kind to me." A few other differences remain to be pointed out, all well within traditional limits. The word "beau" is retained in the third verse in the earlier version but, in the 1939 variant, the "young man" has already become a "true love." In verse six, there are some differences in repetition of "hand" and "glove." In the final verse, "Her sister" becomes, more impersonally, "The sister."

As has been mentioned, these differences are fundamental to true folksong. Cecil Sharp believed, in fact, that it is the variants themselves which point toward the continued evolution of the folk idiom.

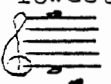




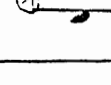
In these minute differences lie the germs of development; that the changes made by individual singers are akin to the 'sports' in the flower or animal worlds, which, if perpetuated, lead to further ideal development and, perhaps, ultimately to the birth of new varieties and species.¹

¹Sharp, 1932, op. cit., p. xxviii.

The transmission of the two texts in the Thomas collection provides a living embodiment of the regeneration which Sharp envisioned.

If the words provide an interesting study, an examination of Thomas' music will bear even greater fruit. A comparison between Thomas' melody and those collected in Kentucky twenty-five years earlier by Cecil Sharp is most revealing and rewarding.

TABLE TWO. MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SIX VARIANTS OF "THE TWO SISTERS" COLLECTED IN KENTUCKY, 1917, 1931.

Variant and Year	Mode/Scale	Meter	Ambitus (transposed to D as lowest note)
(a) Sharp and Karpeles I, p. 34(L) (1917)	Ionian/Mixolydian hexatonic	Triple	
(b) Sharp and Karpeles I, p. 31(F) (1917)	Pentatonic (no 4th or 7th)	Duple	
(c) Sharp and Karpeles I, p. 31(G) (1917)	Ionian/Lydian hexatonic	Triple	
(d) Sharp and Karpeles I, p. 35(H) (1917)	Mixolydian heptatonic	Triple	
(e) Sharp and Karpeles I, p. 33(I) (1917)	Pentatonic (no 4th or 7th)	Duple	
(f) Jean Thomas, The Singin' Gatherin', p. 76 (1931)	Ionian/Lydian hexatonic	Triple	

A glance at Table Two immediately reveals the rich variation that flourished in the melody of "The Twa Sisters." Sharp and Karpeles noted variants generally possessing gapped pentatonic or hexatonic scales, and verging towards a major tonality. One variant exhibiting a full heptatonic scale was in the pure mixolydian mode. The Kentucky variants reflect the rhythmical divergence exhibited by the entire population of variants,

ranging from slow stately duple to sprightly triple meter, and all possess eight phrases to the verse. The tape recording accompanying this paper presents one verse of each variant collected by Sharp and Karpeles; the Thomas variant is transcribed in its entirety from a live recording of the 1951 American Folk Song Festival (Appendix I, A1-6).

Harmonically, Jean Thomas' version (f) is most akin to (c) above, a variant which Sharp notated in Berea, Kentucky, on May 21, 1917. The mode is the same, but the 1917 variant ends on the sixth below the final, thus giving it a minor cast; Thomas' variant cadences most definitely in the Ionian mode.

EXHIBIT ONE. PHRASE COMPARISON OF SHARP'S 1917 BEREVA VARIANT (G) AND THOMAS' 1931 VARIANT OF "THE TWA SISTERS."

Sharp (1917) (Berea)

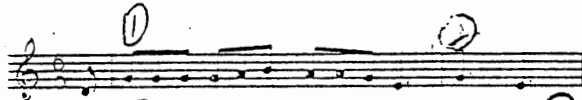

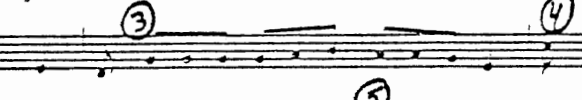

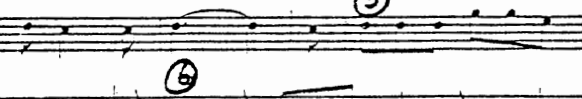
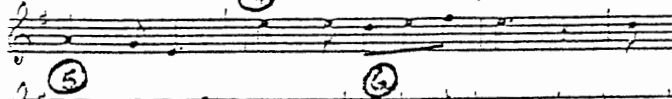


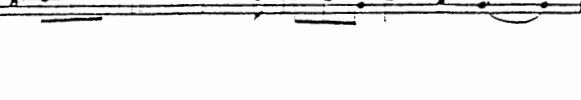
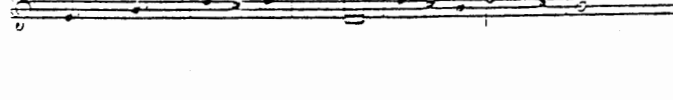




Thomas (1931) (American Folk Song Festival)

The image displays two columns of musical notation, each consisting of five staves. The left column is labeled 'Sharp (1917) (Berea)' and the right column is labeled 'Thomas (1931) (American Folk Song Festival)'. Both columns use a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes various rhythmic values and phrasing marks. Circled numbers 1 through 8 are placed above specific notes in both columns to facilitate phrase comparison. The first staff in each column begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The second staff in each column has a circled '2' above the first note. The third staff in each column has a circled '4' above the first note. The fourth staff in each column has a circled '6' above the first note. The fifth staff in each column has a circled '8' above the first note. The notation shows differences in phrasing and cadence between the two variants, particularly in the final phrase.

The first phase of Thomas' variant implies a final of G while the Berea version seems to insist upon E. It maintains this insistence, while Thomas alternates rather systematically in phrases 1-4 between an Ionian/Lydian scale on G and its relative minor. In phrases 5-7, Thomas appears to have settled on a minor scale with final E. However, the charming final phrase bounces off the lowered leading tone sixteenths to a major-like cadence. The Berea version, an equally charming solution, offers no such surprises. Thomas' variant gains interest as well for its refusal to state the high G in phrase 5.

Jean Thomas' version also bears a strong relationship to one collected by Sharp in Barbourville, located in Southeastern Kentucky (a above, p. 56). It was sung to Sharp by a Mrs. Franklin who said she had learned it in Ohio. The variants diverge dramatically in Phrase 4 and come together once more at the conclusion of phrase 7.

EXHIBIT TWO. PHRASE COMPARISON OF SHARP'S 1917 BARBOURVILLE VARIANT (L) AND THOMAS' 1931 VARIANT OF "THE TWA SISTERS."

Sharp (1917) (Barbourville)	Thomas (1931) (American Folk Song Festival)
	
	
	
	
	
	
	

Having compared Thomas' variant to two collected by Cecil Sharp, one must acknowledge that her version has a life of its own. Its clear narrative and graceful modal alternation lend it great charm. It will be noted as well, how felicitously her variant seems to combine the melodic implication of the other two. For example, Thomas' first phrase strongly resembles the Barbourville version. Phrase 2, however, eschews the rather monotonous dotted quarter notes, and quotes Phrase 4 of the Berea version, clearly the most engaging. Phrase 5 is highlighted by a descending minor seventh and is unique among Kentucky variants, although the phrase does exist outside Kentucky.¹ It is clear that Jean Thomas' variant evolved into her festival from the lips of singers who learned the song in the most authentic folk circumstances.

Not only learned--but taught. The following remarkable example demonstrates categorically that Thomas' Festival gave an impetus for the old to transmit their art to the young. In the 1961 Festival the granddaughter of Lula Curry, a beloved ballad singer who had been a thirty-year fixture in the Festival, sang her version of "The Twa Sisters." It is markedly different in mode and meter, with charming textual variation. The word "squire" is most interesting. The only other variant "squire" this author found was sung in England around 1904 and recorded by Frank Kidson. The singer, one Miss Carr Moseley, said she had learned it from a woman born around 1800 who had learned it from her mother!² How the

¹ Cf. Randolph, I, 1946, pp. 60-62 for a 1941 variant collected in Springfield, Missouri.

² Frank Kidson, Journal of the Folk-Song Society, Volume I (1904), p. 253, cited in Bronson, op. cit., Volume I, p. 164.

"squire" traveled for 150 years to the hills of Kentucky is a matter of conjecture. It is an authentic American realization of a European ballad sung with a child's inimitable freedom and freshness.

The image shows two staves of handwritten musical notation. The top staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 3/4 time signature. The melody is written on a five-line staff with various note values and rests. The lyrics are written below the staff, with some words underlined. The word 'faster' is written above the end of the first staff. The bottom staff continues the melody and lyrics. The lyrics are: 'There was an old squire in the country, Bowers bend to me; There was an old squire in the country, he had daughters one, two, three. True to my love, my love be true to me.'

1. There was an old squire in the country,
Bowers bend to me;
There was an old squire in the country,
He had daughters one, two three.
True to my love, my love be true to me.
2. There was a young lord come a-courting there,
Bowers bend to me;
There was a young lord come a-courting there,
Courting for the youngest fair
True to my love, my love be true to me.
3. He bought the youngest beaver's hat
Bowers bend to me;
He bought the young beaver's hat
Of course the oldest didn't like that
True to my love, my love be true to me.
4. "Sister, sister, let's walk out,"
Bowers bend to me;
"Sister, sister, let's walk out,
See the ships a-sailing about."
True to my love, my love be true to me.

5. As they were walking round the bend
Bowers bend to me;
As they were walking round the bend
The older shoved the younger in.
True to my love, my love be true to me.
6. "Sister, sister, lend me your hand,"
Bowers bend to me;
"Sister, sister, lend me your hand,
I'll give to you my houses and land,"
True to my love, my love be true to me.
7. "I'll neither lend you hand nor glove,"
Bowers bend to me;
"I'll neither lend you hand nor glove
Take from you your own true love,"
True to my love, my love be true to me.

EXAMPLE ONE. "The Squire's Daughter" sung by Lackawanna Bannister, June 11, 1961, as taught to her by Lula M. Curry.

One thus discovers that Jean Thomas was responsible for the preservation and transmission of several unique and significant versions of an important folk ballad. Her own published variant, performed annually in the Festival, is based on a gapped hexatonic scale lacking the fourth. Its contours reveal an authentic relationship to other recorded variants, and it is unique in its charming alternation between major and minor modalities. Coupled with the textual analysis offered earlier, this musical discussion shows how much poorer our ballad tradition would have been without Thomas' festival. An examination of other ballads reveals the same enriching preservation and development of the folk tradition.

CHAPTER III

BALLAD PERFORMANCE AT THE AMERICAN FOLK SONG FESTIVAL

Jean Thomas' severest critics--and many were quite severe--all acknowledge her important role in keeping alive an Appalachian ballad tradition which might otherwise have perished much earlier. But it is clear that she, or her festival, accomplished even more. By offering an attractive forum for serious performers, she created a 'repository, perhaps unwittingly, for previously unclassified or undocumented ballads. The very words "document" and "ballad" are no doubt baneful antipathies to the folk purist. Wells speaks for many respected folklorists when she declares that "a ballad in print is a ballad already dying."¹ Yet, without such documentation--either in written or oral form--the beauty of balladry would soon cease to exist for the purist or for anyone else. The forces of industry and urbanization may account for a generally increased standard of living, but the ethnomusicologist is forced to conclude that they may also account for a diminished quality of life. Thus, songs sung as recently as twenty years ago are heard no more except in the artificial settings of the university or scholarly colloquium. Karpelas' observations made a quarter-century ago are even more valid today:

The decline in the traditional practice of folk song. . . is to be found in most parts of the world: in fact, wherever primary education, industry and mechanical music have permeated. These and other factors of our modern civilization have all to a greater or lesser degree had a disruptive effect on the lives and outlook of those homogeneous communities which have in the past been dependent upon their own resources for their musical pursuits, i.e., the people whom they may, in fact, call

¹Evelyn Kendrick Wells, The Ballad Tree, New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1950, p. 6.

the "folk." The immediate effect of their coming into contact with new ways of life is a tendency to reject many things which are associated with the past: folk song as well as other home-made products.¹

It is therefore profoundly exciting to discover, through the tape recordings and other materials bequeathed by Miss Thomas to the University of Louisville, ballads of merit that appear to be recorded for the first time, or unique performances of well-known folksongs. By and large, the ballads were performed with little or no accompaniment and sung in their entirety. Dance often accompanied the singing, and many of the songs were "dramatized." Many of Thomas' singers were old, thus replicating Cecil Sharp's observation:

The quality of the voice of the average folksinger is, of course, thin and poor, but that is because he is an old man. You cannot expect a man of eighty years of age, or upwards, to sing with the resonant voice of youth; the wonder is that he can sing at all. The folk-singer is, however, no mean vocalist. He is a past master in the art of welding together words and tune, i.e., in enunciating his syllables with great clearness, while maintaining an unbroken stream of melody. He sings, too, as a rule, with very pure intonation. . .²

Examples of such performances by seasoned folksingers abound in the recordings. An excellent illustration is Rosie Day's rendition of the famous ballad "The House Carpenter." This widely-known ballad was collected by all the great folklorists--Child, Sharp, Barry, Belden and a host of others. The familiar story of the reappearance of a long-lost lover seducing a young mother away from domestic security was a favorite of women through-

¹Maud Karpeles, Editor's Preface to English Folk Songs: Some Conclusions by Cecil J. Sharp, Third Edition, London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1954, p. x.

²Cecil James Sharp, English Folk Song: Some Conclusions, Third Edition (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1954), p. 107.

out the New World.¹ Typically, the supernatural elements of the European variants are discarded; the New World story is the simpler one of all-too-human temptation and betrayal.²

The value of the tape recordings given to the University of Louisville is immediately apparent from listening to Rosie Day's incomparable rendering of this old ballad. The seventy-five year-old singer misses not a word. The lines she sings from memory are to be found in dozens of variants collected for nearly a century, but she brings many versions together in a wonderful amalgam.

Consider, for example, this stanza:

If I was t' forsake my house carpenter
 And go along with thee
 What have you got to maintain me upon,
 For to keep me from slavery?

If one considers only the twenty-two variants collected by Cecil Sharp, one encounters line 1 of the stanza in two of them--a 1916 variant from Allegheny, North Carolina (D) and a 1917 Tennessee variant (L). Line 2 exists only in the North Carolina variant. Line 3 is the first line of a stanza Sharp heard in Kentucky in 1909 (C). The only other line close to it was heard in Burnsville, North Carolina in 1918--"Have you anything to support me on?" (M). That version continues with the fascinating

¹Cf. especially Alan Lomax' most interesting discussion of "natural folk selection" as it applies to the survival of this ballad, in Alan Lomax, The Folk Songs of North America (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1960), p. 169.

²Roger D. Abrahams and George Foss, Anglo-American Folksong Styles (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 25.

reference to slavery. Here is the entire stanza:

Have you anything to support me on
To keep me from slavery?
Have you anything to supply my wants
To keep me from slavery?

Remarkably, the "slavery" reference is also found only in (D) and in (L) referred to above! In a sense, then, one is able to "pedigree" Rosie Day's stanza, tracing it to earlier recorded variants hundreds of miles away. John Jacob Niles also includes the "slavery" reference in his collection, heard in 1933 from the lips of a woman from Lexington, Kentucky:

If I forsake my fine house carpenter
And go to sea with thee,
Oh how, oh how will you keep me then
From shame and slavery?¹

Rosie Day's 1951 rendition of "The House Carpenter" is nothing less than intriguing. Its most prominent features are the characteristic "catch" or upward scoop at the ends of phrases, and a tantalizing modal ambiguity. In the written transcription this author has notated sharps and flats above the staff to indicate slight tonal inflections by the singer. Ascending and descending curves indicate slides before or after the note. Characteristically, these vocal nuances are repeated at exactly the same point in almost every verse.

One of the most remarkable features of Rosie Day's performance is her inclusion of several variants of the song within the same performance.

¹John Jacob Niles, The Ballad Book of John Jacob Niles, op. cit., pp. 296-99.

Verse three alludes to "the banks of the sweet Reede," a variant this author encountered nowhere else in the literature. Verse four repeats the entire verse verbatim with the exception of the last word, "Willie". "The banks of Willie" is featured in dozens of variants of this song. Rosie Day evidently felt that her versions should be included and, in fact, her charming doubling serves to make the lovers' urging even more seductive. Day does a similar thing in the sixth verse, but this is even more interesting in that she actually adds a two-line "tag" rather than a complete new verse. By doing this, she is able to include both "at your right" and "at your command". It will be noted that this addition also strengthens the case for the well-spoken lover, and therefore heightens the inevitable tragedy. The tape of Rosie Day's performance reveals some forgetting of the text after the first line of the second verse. The performer unself-consciously and quite remarkably transfers the melody of the forgotten lines onto the text of the first two lines of the next verse, and the performance glides on without interruption. It is impossible to conjecture the exact text which Rosie Day left out, but the entire stanza probably was intended as follows:

I might have married the king's daughter
(I'm sure she'd a married me
But I refused her crowns of gold)
I'd forsake them all for thee.

EXAMPLE TWO: "THE HOUSE CARPENTER: ROSIE DAY, JUNE 10, 1951.

"Well met, well met, my own true love; well met, well met," said he. "I've
just returned from the salt salt sea, And it's all for the sake of thee."

1. "Well met, well met, my own true love;
Well met, well met," said he.
"I've just returned from the salt, salt sea,
And it's all for the sake of thee."
2. "I might have married the king's daughter fair
I'd forsake them all for thee."
3. "If you could have married the king's daughter fair
I'm sure you are to blame.
For I am married to a house carpenter
And I think he's a nice young man."
4. "If you forsake your house carpenter
And go along with me.
I'll take you where the grass grows green
On the banks of sweet Reede." "
5. "If you'll forsake your house carpenter
And go along with me,
I'll take you where the grass grows green
On the banks of sweet Willie."
6. "If I was t' forsake my house carpenter
And go along with thee,
What have you got to maintain me upon
For to keep me from slavery?"

7. "I have seven new ships on the sea
And they're a-sail for shore
There is one hundred and twenty s'bold sea men
That shall be at your right hand
There is one hundred and twenty s'bold sea-men
That shall be at your command."
8. She pickèd up her pretty little babe
And kisses she gave it three
Said, "Stay at home with your papee, dear,
And keep him company."
9. Oh, had not been on sea two weeks
I'm sure it was not three
Until she began for to weep
And she wept most bitterly.
10. "If there you're weeping for my gold," he said,
"Or you're weeping for my store,
Or are you weeping for the house carpenter
That you left behind on shore?"
11. "It's I'm not a-weeping for your gold," she said,
"Nor I'm not a-weeping for your store.
It's I'm weeping for my pretty little babe
That I never shall see anymore."
12. Oh, she had not been on ship three weeks
I'm sure it was not four,
Until that ship, it spranged a leak,
And it sank to rise no more.
13. Saying, "Cursed be all seamen," she said,
"And curse the sailor's life.
They've robbed me of my house carpenter
And deprived me of my life."

In his magnum opus, Bronson collected 145 variants of this ballad. "The tune-variants," he says, "are nearly always attractive, often remarkably so: indeed, probably none of the ballads. . . gives a richer impression of the American melodic tradition". The vast majority of Bronson's variants are cast in a minor modality, generally Dorian. Rosie Day's version, it will be noticed, verges between Ionian and Lydian with IV final. As such, it is a wholly unique variant of the ballad. It obviously has common roots with the variant which Sharp collected in Allanstand, North Carolina, but the resemblance is sporadic.

EXHIBIT THREE: PHRASE COMPARISON OF SHARP'S NORTH CAROLINA VARIANT (F) AND ROSIE DAY'S 1951 PERFORMANCE OF "THE HOUSE CARPENTER"

Sharp (1916) (North Carolina)

Rosie Day (1961) (American Folk Song Festival)

The musical score consists of four pairs of staves, each pair representing a comparison between two variants. The first pair is labeled with a circled '1', the second with a circled '2', the third with a circled '3', and the fourth with a circled '4'. Each pair of staves shows the melodic line in a treble clef and the bass line in a bass clef, with various note values and rests.

Rosie Day's performance of "The House Carpenter" represents a unique and important American folk statement. Had Jean Thomas left us only this, she would deserve at least an honored footnote in the volume of America's folk legacy. But she did something even more important. Not only did she gather older established singers together on the second Sunday in June, but she brought this heritage to the very young as well. It is to her eternal credit that she brought this music to schoolchildren throughout Eastern Kentucky, and her festival afforded them an attractive and natural outlet for ballad performance. Purists tend to chide Thomas for bringing her 'Mountain children'. . .hailed by station wagon from the industrial city of Ashland!"¹ A valid criticism, no doubt, but what of the years Thomas spent in painstaking work with these children, at a time when nobody else was interested? Many of the performers who first sang with Jean Thomas, like the Fraleys and Hubert Rogers, have gone on to found festivals and folk symposiums of their own.

One of the most outstanding ballad performances among the festival recordings was sung in 1951 by a fifteen-year-old named Johnelle Craft, a girl who had no inkling of this music when she began learning the tradition at the Thomas home on Saturday afternoons. Now Mrs. Johnelle Lakin of Ashland, she recently wrote this author about her early experiences with Thomas:

¹D. K. Wilgus, Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1959) p. 206.

She would have us children come every Saturday to her home and rehearse the songs. This was the highlight of our week. She would have cookies and something to drink for us, so being from very modest means at home this was really a treat. I loved the ballads from the very beginning, and always sang my heart out for her praise. . . I am very proud of my Kentucky heritage, and the songs I have learned I will never forget.

Mrs. Lakin started the weekly visits to the Thomas house in 1944 when she was eight. The lessons would start at 2, and Miss Thomas taught by means of typewritten lyrics affixed to a board. Mrs. Lakin's association with Miss Thomas lasted until around 1956. The year before, she and Miss Thomas appeared on the NBC show Today with Dave Garroway. It is clear that Thomas' objectives in training these young people were not entirely selfless. Through them, she hoped for national fame as a kind of folk impressario, and that she never attained. But whatever her personal motives, one cannot argue with the results. The 1951 performance of "Lord Lovel" by Johnelle Craft is truly engaging—pure, beautiful, thoroughly authentic in its phrasing, intonation and style.

Folklorists have often remarked upon the apparent inconsistency between melody and text in this ballad.¹ The tripping triple meter and pleasant major tonalities have seemed incongruous with the tragic but somewhat stereotyped text.² In fact, the song has often been the butt of folk satirists.³ Craft's performance, however, appears somehow to

¹Bronson, op. cit., III, p. 189; Tristram Potter Coffin, The British Traditional Ballad in North America (Philadelphia: The American Folklore Society, 1963), p. 73.

²Coffin, op. cit., p. 73.

³H. M. Belden, Missouri Folk Songs, (Univ. of Missouri Studies XV). 1940, p. 54; Arthur K. Davis, Traditional Ballads of Virginia (Cambridge, 1929), pp. 240, 258.

blend melody and text with great success. It is sung with utter seriousness, ingenuousness, and devotion; the rich Appalachian twang and unerring tonality somehow transplant the British ballad to America with consummate ease. The major mode contributes to the naturalness of it, heightening the realism of the narrative. As the song unfolds, with no accompaniment whatsoever, the story becomes utterly believable. And the author could not find this particular variant elsewhere in the literature. Of all the versions examined, it appeared to represent the most perfect marriage of melody and text.

EXAMPLE THREE. "LORD LOVELL," JOHNELLE CRAFT, JUNE 10, 1951

Lord Lovell he stood at his castle gate, A-combing his milk white steed; - When up stepped Lady Nancy Bell, A-wishing her lover good speed, good speed, A-wishing her lover good speed.

1. Lord Lovell he stood at his castle gate,
A-combing his milk white steed;--
When up stepped Lady Nancy Bell,
A-wishing her lover good speed, good speed,
A-wishing her lover good speed.
2. "Where are you going, Lord Lovell?" she said,
"Where are you going?" said she.
"I'm going to ride my milk-white steed
Some foreign country to see, to see,
Some foreign country to see."
3. "How long will you be gone, Lord Lovell?" she said,
"How long will you be gone?" said she.
"One year, or two, or two or three,
Then return to my Lady Nancy, Nancy,
Then return to my Lady Nancy."

4. He had not been gone twelve months and a day,
Strange thoughts rolled through his mind
That Lady Nancy he would see;
A-fearing that she was dead, was dead,
A-fearing that she was dead.
 5. And so he mounted his milk-white steed,
And rode to London town;
And there he heard the death-bells ring
And the people a-mourning all round, all round,
And the people a-mourning all round.
 6. "Who is dead?" Lord Lovell he said, he said,
"Who is dead?" says he, says he.
"Miss Nancy Bell from London town
Who you call your Lady Nancy, Nancy,
That you call your Lady Nancy."
 7. He ordered the coffin to be opened wide,
And the shroud he turned down;
And there he kissed her cold-clay lips
Till the tears came trickling down, down, down,
Till the tears came trickling down.
-

What is most incredible is how different Craft's version is from that published just two decades before by Jean Thomas herself! The uniqueness of Craft's variant is in the elusive key definition. The piece appears to begin on the 5th degree of the scale, then leaps to the tonic. Actually, however, the initial note is the final and the F-centered material is quite temporary. In Thomas' 1932 variant, ascribed to Jilson Setters, there is no such ambiguity. The piece never leaves the tonic area. Structurally, and rhythmically, it resembles Craft's rendition, but the stepwise melody is comparatively lifeless.

EXHIBIT FOUR. PHRASE COMPARISON OF THOMAS' 1931 VARIANT AND JOHNELLE CRAFT'S 1951 PERFORMANCE OF "LORD LOVELL"

Thomas (1932)

Craft (1951) (American Folk
Song Festival)

The musical score is presented in five systems, each with two staves. The left staff of each system represents Thomas's 1932 version, and the right staff represents Craft's 1951 version. The systems are numbered 1 through 5. The notation is in treble clef with a 3/8 time signature. The Craft version shows a variation in the second measure of the first system compared to the Thomas version.

It will be remarked that, in the first verse of the 1951 version, Craft sings the second measure differently than in subsequent verses, appearing to define the relative minor of the subdominant. Why she changes in subsequent verses to the ordinary tonic triad is not clear. Incredibly enough, when this author asked Mrs. Lakin to sing the ballad again more than twenty-five years later, she did exactly the same thing (Appendix I, C2)!

There are some additional points of interest in Mrs. Lakin's 1977 recording. Nearly forty-one at the time, Mrs. Lakin had lost not only her strong, bright, regional accent, but also the irresistibly spontaneous rhythm and pace of her youthful performance. She paused at the conclusion of nearly every phrase, averaging three seconds more per stanza, and left out the third and seventh verses of the ballad. There appeared to be much more effort at singing in 1977 with uncharacteristic scoops and slides, and the pure force of the ballad was considerably diluted. The performance lacked its earlier authenticity. Her intonation was as good as ever, however. As a fifteen year-old, she began and ended the song in the key of C. Twenty-five years later, her deeper voice was more comfortable in Ab, and her intonation was flawless.

It will be seen in this example as well that Jean Thomas preserved and transmitted a unique variant of an important and well-known folksong. Not only that, but her interest in education fostered the preservation of this music in the performance of gifted young singers, and her festival provided an unparalleled forum for such performance.

CHAPTER IV

JEAN THOMAS' LEGACY: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

The present study has limited itself musically to an intensive consideration of several British ballads as recorded in Jean Thomas' American Folk Song Festival. It was felt that the initial treatment of these materials should attempt to place them within a context of available scholarship and within their proper historical framework. It has been demonstrated through such a discussion that Thomas' songs--at least the British ballads--fall well within a tradition that hundreds of researchers have investigated in the Kentucky mountains. More than that, the examples analyzed in the preceding chapter demonstrate that the American Folk Song Festival was the locus of a rich and important development of what was sincerely regarded as a living mountain tradition.

In addition to British balladry, two other important folk traditions prevailed at the Festivals. The first was native American song production, and the second was the corpus of religious songs which were an important feature of the Festivals. Unfortunately, it was impossible to document many of the selections in these two categories as deriving from authentic folk sources, and the better part of valor appeared to be largely to exclude them from the present study. Whereas her treatment of British ballads is authoritative, even-handed, authentic, her mountain music presentations are incredible potpourris of cowboy songs, evangelical hymns, spurious European love ballads, Bluegrass banjo-picking, and original compositions of varying quality. Consider, for example, one Roger Lewis' 1951 performance of something called "Preachin' Bear".

EXAMPLE FOUR. "PREACHIN' BEAR," ROGER LEWIS, JUNE 10, 1951.

Well now the preacher went out a-runnin' was on a Sun-day morn. 'gumms' is a variation of 'gums' and 'squeak' is a variation of 'squeak'.
 Killed him. self some more of 'em and one big mess. ly sure and on his way a-burnin' some better wuzt by a rize ly bear.

This was too much even for Miss Thomas who stopped the performance in the middle (Appendix I, D).

It may be easily discerned that separating the wheat from the chaff in ballad and hymn song may not be entirely possible. However, the notation and analysis of the material may yield some attractive and important results. The following song is a most interesting example.

EXAMPLE FIVE. "THE NIGHTINGALE," DAVID VARNEY, JUNE 11, 1961

Do you hap-pen to know of a la-dy in need of a sweet-heart? Here's one who is anx. ious to please; It's a shame that a hand-some young fel-low like me should be left while the night-in-gale sings in the tree; It's a shame that a hand-some young fel-low like me should be left while the night-in-gale sings in the tree.

1. Do you happen to know of a lady in need
Of a sweetheart? Here's one who is anxious to please;
It's a shame that a handsome young fellow like me
Should be left while the nightingale sings in the tree.
2. Through field and o'er meadow, beneath the bright moon,
Every lad and his lass makes the most of the June;
The world's gone a-wooing excepting of me
And the nightingale sings to his mate in the tree.
3. The time it is short, there is none I can spare,
For the nightingale's song will soon die in the air;
Don't you think, dearest, dearest, you'd better agree
To make love while the nightingale sings in the tree.

This song was performed at the 1961 Festival by David Varney.

(Appendix I, E). Mr. Varney now resides in Huntington, West Virginia, and teaches a fifth grade elementary school class. He became interested in folksong in the early fifties, studied song books, and attended summer folk festivals in North Carolina. He came to Thomas' attention after he sang on a Huntington children's television program in 1956. He performed annually in the American Folk Song Festival until its termination in 1972.

Varney recalls¹ learning the song from a phonograph recording made by Burl Ives in 1953.² Yet his performance already demonstrates the marvelous changes that foster the ongoing dynamic development of the folksong. "Maiden" becomes "lady"; "Phyllis" becomes "dearest"; "wood" becomes "field." Despite Jean Thomas' irresponsible introduction of it as a "sixteenth century song" (Appendix I E), Varney's performance is living proof of the statement that a recorded version, far from curtailing the natural evolution of a song, may foster its continuity and folk life.

¹David Varney, personal communication to the author, January, 1978.

²Burl Ives, The Return of the Wayfaring Stranger, phonograph recording, Columbia long-playing record (L6058, side LP 1161, Band 3).

The cycle of the transmission process would not be complete without noting the actual influence of print on repertoire. . . There is a constant exchange of materials on the levels of folk, popular and sophisticated culture. This can mean that certain pieces are written and purveyed in recorded form. . . which strike the fancy of the traditional singer and therefore enter into oral circulation.¹

The next example illustrates the problem in this research. It purports to be an authentic mountain ballad which grew up from the mountain feud between the Hatfields and McCoys. Entitled, "The Death Song of Little Randall McCoy", it was performed on June 11, 1961, by Roger Daskins. The doomed McCoy's last words are to his sister, enjoining her not to marry a Hatfield, and celebrating the courage of their family.

EXAMPLE SIX. "THE DEATH SONG OF LITTLE RANDALL MCCOY, ROGER DASKINS,
JUNE 11, 1961.

1. The Hatfields have found me, O woe is the day;
A word to Rosanna, my sister, I'll say.
With Femar and Tolbert I'm tied to this tree;
I know that 'tis certain but never a plea.
2. We know we had trouble and Ellison's dead
A sad day if you and Johnse Hatfield should wed
For brave and defiant we look in the eye
We'll never bow down though we know we must die.
3. For Sarah our mother we'll silently pray
Old Randall our father will soon make them pay
And Devil Anse Hatfield he'll never let win
And poor old Livisey will mourn her own kin.

¹ Roger D. Abrahams and George Foss, Anglo-American Folksong Style, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 35.

4. Our case it is hopeless and sorry our plight
 We've proved to the Hatfields how well we can fight
 Their rifles are level, there's death in their eye
 We'll show them the way the McCoy men can die.
-

There could hardly be a more embarrassing confirmation of Cratis William's devastating attack which is discussed below. Not one line of music or text breathes a wisp of sensitivity to this unfortunate and bloody feud. The music could not be more childish, the words could not be more vapid. When heard together, the rollicking triple meter, insipid triadic tune and pseudo-serious text sound ridiculous, like a parody.

And yet, a short time later at the same festival, an important hymn was presented with great beauty and sensitivity. It is sung by Lula Curry and entitled "When Jesus Christ Was Here Below".

EXAMPLE SEVEN. WHEN JESUS CHRIST WAS HERE BELOW, LULA M. CURRY, JUNE 11, 1961.

When Je. sus Christ was here be. low he taught his peo. ple what to do; And
 if you must his pre. cepts keep, you must des- cend to wash- ing feet.

1. When Jesus Christ was here below
 He taught his people what to do;
 And if you must his precepts keep,
 You must descend to washing feet.

2. 'Twas on the night he was betrayed
He for us a pattern made;
Soon as he suffered he did eat
He arose and washed the brethrens feet.
 3. The Lord by whom all things were made
Arose and by his garments laid;
He washed them all so they could see
How equal they the law should be.
 4. He washed them all, the scriptures say,
Yet Judas did his Lord betray;
May none of us that's here today
Go sell our Lord and go to hell.
 5. Peter said, "Lord, it shall not be
You shall not descend to washing me."
"O my command and precepts keep
And show your love by washing feet."
 6. "You call me Lord, and master too,
Then do the things I bid you to.
You shall be happy if you know
And do the things by faith below."
 7. "Then I will serve you till you die
And then remove you up on high."
-

Thomas introduces the above as a "foot-washin' hymn." It is incredibly powerful in its utter simplicity, and the modal melody and Biblically-inspired text could not be better suited. Within the festival were presented many such mountain hymns--for "foot-washin'", "funeralizin'", "hymn linin'" and the like--which are not only valuable and authentic songs, but which document typical mountain customs. Many of Thomas' hymns will doubtless yield rich fruit to the discriminating investigator of religious mountain music.

One further area of investigation suggested by Jean Thomas' gift to the University is in the area of native musical instrument production. The photographs and kinescopes listed in Appendix III are especially helpful in this regard. It will be noticed that the instruments used in the first performance--the dulcimer, fiddle, guitar, banjo, accordion, recorder and mouth harp--remained the basic instrumental group represented throughout the life of the Festival. The flute was occasionally used at later Festivals.

Thomas describes the dulcimer as a "home-made instrument and is made by both young and old folk in the mountains." She traces it back to the third chapter of the Book of Daniel, and provides detailed instructions for constructing the popular three-stringed instruments.¹ She remarks, "More dulcimers have come out of the mountains than went into them."

She also tells about mountain music instruments that were fashioned especially for children. This generally began with a corn stock fiddle, a primitive bowing contraption, and a banjo made from a long-necked gourd. Eventually, the child may graduate to a white oak banjo with a coon-hide or cat-hide sounding board. Other childrens' instruments included maple whistles about six inches long.

Thomas credits the fiddle with being the most popular mountain instrument, and even tells of "courtin'" and "preachin'" with this instrument.

¹Thomas, The Singin' Gatherin', op. cit., pp. 54-57.

In pioneer days, mountain folk shared each other's work as well as their pleasures, and each event, such as hog killin', corn hoein', bean stringin', apple peelin'. . . All such occasions were concluded with play games, a frolic, singing, dancing.¹

If Thomas' musical output seems contradictory, it is possibly because Jean Thomas herself is so, and it is essential to discuss some of the paradoxes that impede scholarly investigation of her output.

These paradoxes are immediately apparent in the literature. George Malcolm Laws of the University of Pennsylvania wrote--on the same page of his landmark Native American Balladry--these two sentences:

Jean Thomas' Ballad Makin' in The Mountains of Kentucky is the only long study yet published which gives much insight into the creation and circulation of new native balladry.²

Some of Mrs. Thomas's ballads have been excluded. . . because I have been unable to find evidence that they are traditional.³

Laws' discussion centers largely around the ballad output of the blind fiddler Jilson Setters.

In a more vehement and devastating article, Cratis D. Williams attacks Jean Thomas' exploitation of the blind balladeer with unbridled sarcasm:

¹Ibid, p. 57.

²George Malcolm Laws, Native American Balladry (Philadelphia: The American Folklore Society, 1950), p. 49.

³Ibid.

Because Jean Thomas had produced Jilson Setters (her name for a blind ballad maker and fiddler, James Day, who sat about the courthouse square with his hat turned up for charity as he played and sang in a cracked voice), it seemed to the critical world that her next novel, The Singin' Fiddler of Lost Hope Hollow (1938), was biography, for the book is copiously illustrated with photographs of Setters, whom Jean Thomas had selected to represent the minstrel tradition in America at the Festival of the English Folk Song and Dance Society held in Royal Albert Hall in London, England. That her book about "the singin' fiddler" is largely fiction, however, is apparent to one only casually acquainted with the geography and the history of Eastern Kentucky and well known to those who were life-long acquaintances of Day himself.

As she had done in The Traipsin' Woman, Thomas established an incontrovertible tie between Jilson Setters and the King's court of England, for Jilson's great-grandfather is represented as having been a musician within the shadow of the King's palace, whose fiddle was the very one Jilson had inherited from his Grandsire Dils, whose account of his own memories of the King's riding forth on a white horse and smiling at him remained fresh in Jilson's mind.

Williams is uncompromising in his criticism of Thomas' claims to scholarship:

Perhaps the most nostalgic interpreter of mountain life during the era of the Depression was Jean Thomas of Kentucky. Mrs. Thomas, founder of the American Folk Song Festival, held annually at the Traipsin' Woman Cabin in the lower Big Sandy Valley near Ashland, Kentucky, had become interested in collecting traditional ballads and native songs while she was a court stenographer for a criminal lawyer during the early years of this century. . . . To establish her claim as the easy familiar of members of the feud families, she selected and arranged in convenient pocket-size her own geography of Eastern Kentucky and West Virginia in such a fashion that Christy Creek in Rowan County, actually a hundred rough mountain miles from Blackberry Creek in Pike County, appeared to be both over the hill from Tug River and just across the ridge from Troublesome Creek, a hundred miles in another direction. She did this simply by creating Lost Hope

Hollow, a mobile mountain community of her own, which, at times, was only a stone's throw from Ashland, Kentucky, on the "big waters" of the Ohio River. . . On the cultural side Thomas related the primitive hymns of the mountaineers to the Gregorian chant, claiming priority in the discovery of the relationship.

Because of Jean Thomas' successful showmanship she did much to focus attention upon the quaintness of the Eastern Kentuckian, but she was unwilling to see him in his struggles with poverty and the forces of contemporary civilization crowding in upon him. As she presented the Eastern Kentuckian in her fiction and in her fictionalized accounts of how she came into the possession of the local ballads and songs (many of which she appears to have composed herself) in Ballad 'Makin' in the Mountains of Kentucky (1939), as well as in her fictionally twisted studies of the region in The Big Sandy and Blue Ridge Country, Mrs. Thomas's mountaineer is a hybrid who fails to resemble the mountaineer either as a folk character or as a hillbilly flirting with Marxism while he is catching up with history in a mill or in a coal mine. To Jean Thomas it would seem that the Eastern Kentuckian is simply a contemporary Elizabethan whose pa's grandsire knew Shakespeare personally, did he.¹

Williams' evaluation is confirmed by that of D. K. Wilgus, not only a folklorist, but a noted musicologist:

Many of the attributions of authorship are made on purely folk authority and can be given only limited credence. The texts and tunes included may be authentic, although we could not easily discover their singers, for the songs are set against a background that is highly colored. A number of informants are referred to by invented titles. James W. Day, a blind street singer, is built into the romantic figure of Jilson Setters, the mountain minstrel. . . Had she not been interested in charming the "furriners" and creating a picture she thought they would buy, her work might have been of great value.²

¹Cratis D. Williams, "The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction", Appalachian Journal, Volume 3, No. 4, Summer, 1976, p. 361.

²D. K. Wilgus, op. cit., p. 205.

Williams and Wilgus' remarks delineate the scholar's problems in discussing Jean Thomas' American ballads and hymns, and point to this author's reasons for concentrating on her treatment of documented British ballads. Examination of Jean Thomas' bequest yields a curious dual portrait of Jean Thomas the British folklorist and Jean Thomas the mountain music promoter. It was doubtless a need to commercialize her festival that led Thomas to select a mixed quality of song which, with some exceptions, generally diluted the value of all but her British ballads.

Jean Thomas never hid her affection for glamor and glitter. Her statement to this author that "my life is show business" (October 21, 1974) has been said over and over. Consider, for example, this bit of show-womanship from the 1960 Festival:

Thank you all, and God bless you for coming. And I want first of all to thank WCMI Radio, the hometown radio, for the first time in thirty years has recognized the American Folk Song Festival, given us fine coverage. . . I want to thank WPHL, WSAZ-TV, WCHS, and just everybody, and the press and particularly the Huntington Publishing Company. . . We just love them. Now who else do I have to thank? I say thank God again for a wonderful day and a wonderful patient audience. (Searching the stage) I hope it's goin' in something. Which is really my mouth-piece besides this? Where's the man? Which is mine? I dunno! Oh, law! I can. . . Oh! Listen, I been outa place all this time--don't tell me I wasted all that breath (laughter). I guess I don't need a microphone. We gotta great show--just stand by!

At the 1961 festival, she praises George Davidson as "the greatest harmonica player outside of Broadway."

Jean Thomas has been criticized not only because of the "show" element that was so much a part of her Festivals, but also on account of the commercialism prevalent particularly at the later festivals. In conversations this author conducted with folksinger Jean Ritchie and her husband, photographer George Pickow, the couple roundly criticized the atmosphere which, they felt, marred her festival. While admiring Thomas' contribution to the preservation of American folklore, Ritchie says, "We thought she exaggerated the quaintness of the people. . . She played up the linsey-woolsey costumes and her facts just weren't right."¹

One particularly blatant example of such commercialism is transcribed from the Festival of 1959. Shortly before the music began, the announcer subjected the audience to a sales pitch which lasted no less than eight minutes. Here are some excerpts:

So many of you in former years have asked--"Don't you have some sort of a token--don't you have some sort of remembrance that we can take with us?"--that this year we are prepared with three items. You may have your choice, but you'll have to act fast because we have only a few. . .The first thing we have for you is a set of colored postcards. . .now these cards can be yours at 15¢ or two for a quarter. You may say, "That's a little high for a postcard," but these are cards that you won't find at the sales counters of drug stores, gift shops and card shops. These are the authentic and the authorized pictures of the . . .American Folk Song Festival. . . We have fifty copies of the song that Jean Thomas, the Traipsin' Woman, wrote. . .they have all been personally autographed. They're yours at less than the price of sheet music at a song shop, they're 50¢ a copy.

¹Jean Ritchie, telephone communication to the author, November, 1977.

Now you aren't going to have to get up from your seats and leave. We have three young ladies. . .who will be out there circulating. . .Now for those of you who do really want a memento, we have one hundred copies of The Singin' Gatherin'. . .Now don't expect to find the words and music to "Hound Dog" in here because they're not here. . .These books in bookstores are priced at \$2.80. . . you may have them this afternoon at two dollars and a half a copy. . .If you will bring your book to the house, the Traipsin' Woman, Jean Thomas, will inscribe a personal message to you. This--this will be a collector's item in years to come.

The reasons for Jean Thomas' framing a potentially valuable folk forum in such a commercial context are complex. The following excerpted transcription from an extended conversation with this author indicates that she always desired to be associated with popular entertainment. What appears to emerge is the story of an Eastern Kentucky woman, raised in a small town, who hoped for a more glamorous career in the "industry", as she puts it.

. . .I wanted show business, and I was very honest with 'em. . .I was just born in this hick town. I love to call it a hick town--it is and it always will be in my estimation! . . .And God's been good to me, to let me see and get contacts, and work with the great people in the industry. I worked with nobody but top people!. . .I told my mother and I'm still doin' penance for it, I said, "Mumsie, you don't understand children." I said, "I could never stay here and take in sewin'." I could see my hands--my aunt's hands under the lamp light, and maybe she'd make \$2.00 for a week. I said, "I won't stay here. I want to be somebody, and meet people who are somebody and it'll help me." And God answered my prayer just as if it'd been open. Some people can't believe it. They think I built that up. No, I didn't build anything, I didn't have to. . .I'd never have any life at all if I hadn't gone to New York--You can see. . . I didn't approach Mr. DeMille, Mr. DeMille approached me, and how he knew me was through the great Mary Margaret McBride

backed by the Rockefellers. . . I'll tackle anything because my mother would want me to. . . I stopped three network cameramen down there. I said, "Right offa my stage right now. I own this show, operate it, and my people." . . Raymond Burr-- I worked with him for years and years. (Showing a picture) And this is myself and Mr. DeMille I worked with him in Ten Commandments, altogether I worked with Mr. DeMille about seventeen years. In The Ten Commandments, I'm a script girl and stand where he tells me with my heels together. . . There's only one person I like to imitate some things she does and that is the Duchess [of Windsor] . I met them up in New York before [my Festival] because my people were in top show business there. . . I've had the good fortune to meet the great.¹

Much of what Thomas said was impossible to confirm. She may have been a script girl (at the age of 45) on the set of the movie, but could not possibly have worked in Hollywood for seventeen years, since the Ten Commandments was released in 1927 and Thomas was back in Ashland permanently by 1930 and probably considerably before that. Miss Thomas' niece, Sarah Crawford of Ashland, informed this author that the only contact Thomas had with the Duke and Duchess of Windsor was when the famous couple stopped in Ashland on a train and Thomas organized a group of women to present a homemade quilt to them.

The above is offered in order to confirm what other researchers have also noted--that Jean Thomas' objectives were not always the most scholarly and her sense of history was often unreliable. This unfortunately affected her festivals and much of the American music presented in them.

¹Jean Thomas, interview by the author, October 21, 1974.

And yet, withal--Jean Thomas did organize a living forum for American music and American musicians. The previous chapters have demonstrated the depth and importance of her work. Had she concentrated her considerable energies and acumen solely in serious folklore scholarship, her contribution might have been enormous. How then is one to evaluate this complex woman and her mixed legacy? George Woolford of the Ashland Daily Independent may have summed up Thomas' legacy most accurately:

Is it plastic?

It's about as real as anything you find. I think, from her standpoint, that she may have been plastic but she was good at it when no one else was, and she was in this many years ago when really no one else was doing it. She probably kept it alive and popular, so that other people could get a hold of it when the time came. If it hadn't been for someone like her, an awful lot I think would have gotten away. I think she was probably overly all-inclusive in her reaching out. For instance, I can remember, to my amazement, that she had a folk song about the power plant on the Big Sandy River. . .But by doing these things she has accumulated and perpetuated a lot of things that might have died otherwise.¹

Jean Thomas is an important personality in the Kentucky folk heritage principally because she followed naturally the lead of Cecil Sharp and other scholars who had notated British balladry in the Kentucky Hills. Thomas made their scholarship live for thousands of people who came annually to her Festival. The songs which they collected and analyzed she caused to be heard. Her concept of an annual folk festival may seem commonplace in our day when such events occur frequently at universities, civic institutions and state parks. Yet no such large-

¹George Woolford, personal communication, October 2, 1974, Ashland, Kentucky.

scale annual performance of folk music appears to have occurred until the American Folk Song Festival, and several modern Kentucky festivals grew directly out of her work.

The events of Thomas' long life may appear to possess aspects of latterday "women's liberation" and it is instructive to recall equally "liberated" aspects of her festival in light of contemporary societal goals. "Senior citizens", as older people are now called, were respected dignified upholders of a rich tradition, and they mixed freely with children as young as three or four. Young and old interacted together--fashioning costumes, moving furniture, setting and striking a stage, dancing and singing together in celebration of a common birthright. The thousands that performed in or witnessed this celebration took part in something unique and important, for it was Jean Thomas' contribution to remind her singers and her audiences of the one indispensable element in folk art--the folk themselves, as participants in the dynamic development of their musical tradition.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I. TAPE RECORDING

A. The Twa Sisters

1. Sharp and Karpeles I, p. 34 (L) Barbourville (May 7, 1917)
(Exhibit Two)
2. " " " p. 31 (F) (Barbourville, May 16, 1917)
3. " " " p. 31 (G) (Berea, May 21, 1917) (Exhibit One)
4. " " " p. 35 (N) (Berea, May 30, 1917)
5. " " " p. 33 (I) (Hindman School, September 20, 1917)

(Above selections recorded by author, April 1978).

6. American Folk Song Festival performers, June 10, 1951 (Exhibits One and Two).
7. Lackawanna Bannister, AFSF, June 11, 1961 ("The Squire's Daughter")
(Example One)
8. Jean Ritchie, Viper, Kentucky, 1946.

B. The House Carpenter

1. Rosie Day, AFSF, June 10, 1951 (Example Two)
2. Sharp (1916) (North Carolina), (April 1978) (author) (Exhibit Three).

C. Lord Lovell

1. Johnelle Craft, AFSF, June 10, 1951 (Example Three)
2. Johnelle Craft Lakin, Ashland, January 13, 1977
3. Jean Thomas, 1932, (April, 1978) (recorded by author) (Exhibit Four)

D. Preachin' Bear, Roger Lewis, AFSF, June 11, 1961 (Example Four)

E. The Nightingale, David Varney, AFSF, June 11, 1961 (Example Five)

F. The Death Song of Little Randall McCoy, Roger Daskins, AFSF, June 11, 1961 (Example Six)

G. When Jesus Christ Was Here Below, Lula M. Curry, AFSF, June 11, 1961, (Example Seven)

APPENDIX II. DATE AND LOCATION OF THE AMERICAN FOLK SONG FESTIVALS

1932	June 12	Bolts Fork Mayo Trail
1933	June 11	North Fork of Garner, Mayo Trail
1934	June 10	Four Mile Fork of Garner, Mayo Trail
1935	June 9	" " " " " " "
1936	June 14	" " " " " " "
1937	June 13	" " " " " " "
1938	June 12	" " " " " " "
1939	June 11	" " " " " " "
1940	June 9	" " " " " " "
1941	June 8	" " " " " " "
1942	June 14	" " " " " " "
1948	June 13	" " " " " " "
1949	June 12	" " " " " " "
1950	June 11	3201 Cogan Street, Ashland
1951	June 10	" " " " " " "
1952	June 8	" " " " " " "
1955	June 12	" " " " " " "
1956	June 10	" " " " " " "
1957	June 9	" " " " " " "
1958	June 8	" " " " " " "
1959	June 14	" " " " " " "
1960	June 12	" " " " " " "
1961	June 11	" " " " " " "
1962	June 10	" " " " " " "
1963	June 9	" " " " " " "
1964	June 14	Jenny Wiley State Resort Park, Prestonsburg
1965	June 13	3201 Cogan Street, Ashland
1966	June 12	Carter Caves State Resort Park, Olive Hill
1967	June 11	" " " " " " "
1968	June 9	" " " " " " "
1969	June 8	" " " " " " "
1970	June 12	" " " " " " "
1971	June 13	" " " " " " "
1972	June 11	" " " " " " "

APPENDIX III. JEAN THOMAS' GIFT TO THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

A. BOOKS BY JEAN THOMAS

1. Ballad Makin' in the Mountains of Kentucky, with music arranged by Walter Kob, New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1939.
2. Big Sandy, New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1940.
3. Blue Ridge Country, New York: Duell, Sloan and Co., 1942.
4. Devil's Ditties, Being Stories of the Kentucky Mountain people told by Jean Thomas with the Songs they Sing, Chicago: W. Wilbur Hatfield, 1931.
5. The Shining Tree and Other Christmas Stories, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940.
6. The Singin' Fiddler of Lost Hope Hollow, New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1938.
7. The Singin' Gatherin: Tunes from the Southern Appalachians, (with Joseph A. Leeder), New York: Silver Burdett Company, 1939.
8. The Sun Shines Bright, New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1940.
9. The Traipsin' Woman, New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1933.

B. TYPED MANUSCRIPTS BY JEAN THOMAS

1. The Traipsin' Woman, 314 pages, with three photocopies.
2. Singin' Johnse Hatfield, 247 pages, with two photocopies.

C. KINESCOPIES

1. Columbia Broadcasting System, "Jean Thomas Talks to George Lewis," June 4, 1977.
2. United States Information Service, "Thai Washington Report #66," undated.
3. WSAZ Television, Huntington, West Virginia, "A Conversation with Jean Thomas," undated.

4. WSAZ Television, Huntington, West Virginia, "Jean Thomas Presents the Buena Vista Story," Audio Tape with six typed pages entitled "Buena Vista Story".

D. RECORDINGS ON MAGNETIC TAPE

1. 4 reels recorded in 1951. The third is titled "Murplick Waters." The fourth is dated Sunday, April 29, 1951, 7:30 P.M. (7", Scotch).
2. 2 reels, dated 1957, entitled "Ford Art Exhibit," Master of Ceremonies is Bert Shimp, Volna Fraley is a performer. Accompanying the tapes are two copies of a brochure entitled "Private Showing of Travelling Exhibition from the Ford Times Collection of American Art," and dated November 17, 1957. (7", Sonoramic).
3. 5 reels, returned in November 1960 by Folkways Records, which were used in development of the Folkways Long Playing Record of the Festival. These tapes were recorded at the 1958 American Folk Song Festival. (7", Irish).
4. 1 reel, undated, entitled "Aunt Dora Harmon," returned by Folkways Records after record was made. (3").
5. 2 reels dated November 16, 1958, recorded at a 77th Birthday Program for Jean Thomas (7", Irish)
6. 1 reel dated June 11, 1961, of the 1961 Festival (7").
7. 1 reel, dated March 2, 1962, of a performance of "The Lonesome Dove." (7", Scotch).
8. 3 reels, dated Fall, 1964, recorded at the Jean Thomas Museum Home. (7", Knight).
9. 1 reel, dated November 15, 1964, of a celebration of Jean Thomas' 83rd Birthday. (7").
10. 1 reel, dated June 6, 1965, entitled "Jean Thomas Presents the Buena Vista Story." The tape is accompanied by six typed pages on the Buena Vista Story. (7", WSAZ-TV audio tape).
11. 1 reel, dated June, 1967, of the 1967 Festival held at Carter Caves State Park. (7", Stereophonic).
12. 1 reel, undated, entitled "Singin' Gatherin'".

13. 1 reel, undated, from the Renfro Valley Tape Club which includes material on hymn "lining" by Reverend Varney. (7")
14. 1 reel, undated, entitled Greenup County Roundup, (7", Encore).
15. Missing reel, container dated June 29, 1961, entitled "Joan Rothermel accompanying self with antique autoharp and mandolin-zither."
16. 2 reels, dated June 14, 1959, of the 1959 Festival.
17. 1 reel, undated, Hubert Rogers performs "The Fox Chase," "Fill My Way with Love," and "When the roll is called up yonder." (4", Audiotape).
18. 1 reel, undated, Journeymen's Quartet (7").
19. 1 reel, dated February 2, 1967, Annadeene Fraley Sings "Traipsin' Woman" (3", Audiotape)
20. 1 reel, undated, Donna Williams and Donna Slone sing "High Lee" and "Schnitzel Back" (3", Sunset).
21. 1 reel, undated, "Singin' Gatherin'" (6½").
22. 1 reel, dated 1969, Interview with Jean Thomas by Dr. Wayne Yenawine and Don Anderson of the University of Louisville (3", Scotch).
23. 1 reel, Presentation by Jean Thomas of her gift to the University of Louisville, May 27, 1968 (7", Mylar Concert).

E. PHONOGRAPH RECORDINGS

1. Folkways Records, FA 2358, long playing record with four-page pamphlet. Copyright, 1960 (12", 33 1/3 rpm).
2. Jean Thomas "The Traipsin' Woman" Records, 21128, Annadeene and J. P. Fraley performing "Traipsin' Woman" and "Jean Thomas 'The Traipsin' Woman' Museum" on Side One, and "One Morning in May" on Side 2. (7", 45 rpm).

F. ARTICLES AND STORIES IN PERIODICALS

1. Anonymous, "Music in the Hills; There's Still a Bit of Merry Old England Left Over in the Songs of the Kentucky Mountains," "Ladies Home Companion II", No. 8, July 1964, pp. 96-107.
2. Field, Richard, "A bit of Olde England; the Traipsin' Woman Presents Another Singin' Festival at Ashland," Louisville Courier-Journal Magazine, July 17, 1960, pp. 10-15.
3. Finch, Edwin, "The Traipsin' Woman," in Kentucky All Over, Louisville-Courier-Journal Magazine, May 9, 1948, 8-9.
4. Thomas, Jean, "The American Folk Song Festival", by Jean Thomas, The Traipsin' Woman. Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort. Register 65, No. 1: Jan. 1967, 20-27.
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10. _____, "Christmas remembered": The Sunday Herald-Advertiser, Huntington, W. Va., Dec. 26, 1965, p. 1-2.
11. _____, "Feuds Die Out But Feud Tales Persist; Among Southern Mountain Folk Many of the Old Rancors Live Only in Memory." The New York Times Magazine, November 26, 1933, p. 11, 23.
12. _____, "In the Kentucky Mountains", The Classmate, . . . Cincinnati, Ohio, Vol. XL, No. 48, December 2, 1933, p. 1, 2. (Part One).
13. _____, Vol. XL, No. 49, December 9, 1933, p. 5, 6. (Part Two).

14. _____, "Make Believe." The Classmate, . . ., Cincinnati, Ohio, Vol. XLI, No. 50, December 15, 1934, p. 2, 3. (Part One).
15. _____, _____, Vol. XLI, No. 51, December 22, 1934, p. 7, 8 (Part Two).
16. _____, _____, Vol. XLI, No. 52, December 29, 1934, p. 3, 5, 6. (Part Three).
- (Notice of the above story, "Make Believe." The Classmate, Vol. XLI, No. 48, p. 2.)
17. _____, "On Lonesome Creek," The Classmate, . . ., Vol. XLI, No. 18, May 5, 1934, p. 5, 6.
18. _____, Review of THE TRAIPTIN' WOMAN, by Jean Thomas. The Classmate, . . . Vol. XL No. 49, December 9, 1933, p. 8.
19. _____, "School Days," The Classmate, . . . Vol. XLV, No. 19, May 17, 1938, p. 1, 2, 6.
20. _____, "A Stowaway in a Covered Wagon," The Classmate, . . . Vol. XLI, No. 6, February 10, 1934, p. 1, 7. (First published in Ashland Daily Independent, June 8, 1930.)
21. _____, "The sun shines bright", by Jean Thomas. The Michigan Librarian 16, No. 3; October 1950, 15-16, 20-22.
22. _____, "Wimmin's Place," Classmate, Vol. LI, No. 48, November 1944, Part 4 for November 26, p. 1, 2, 4, 10, 14.
23. Williams, Shirley, "A-Singin' and a-dancin' and a-playin', Jean Thomas's singing meet has been so successful that Ashland plans to use it next year as a starter for a week-long festival." Courier-Journal Magazine, July 29, 1962, p. 15-19.

G. CORRESPONDENCE

1. Correspondence between Dr. and Mrs. George Mefford Bell and Jean Thomas from October 9, 1967 through July 23, 1969. 45 letters and one Christmas card are included.
2. Correspondence concerning the old Mefford House and Mefford Fort from 1955 through 1966. Contents include 36 letters, one postcard, and miscellaneous notes, clippings and photographs.

3. 14 letters of Jean Thomas' ancestors from January 12, 1873 through October 25, 1874.
4. Correspondence between Jean Thomas and William Hull, Executive Director of the Kentucky Arts Commission, and other officials of the Commission, from August 1967 through February 1968.
5. Correspondence between Jean Thomas and Brooks Atkinson, and Annual Report of the New York State Council on the Arts. February 2 and 6, 1967.
6. Letter to Mrs. John Oswald of the Kentucky Arts Commission from the director of the Springfield, Missouri Art Museum, October 16, 1967.

H. PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Jean Thomas by W. Archibald.
2. Jean Thomas' home and McGuffey Cabin by Donald R. Anderson, Curator of Photographic Archives, University Louisville Library, April 23, 1968.
3. Jean Thomas at her desk by Jack Jacumski, 1939.
4. Jean Thomas and performers at the 1951 Festival, Chicago Tribune, 1951.

I. MISCELLANNEY

1. Scrapbook with pictures, photographs and clippings, chiefly of Jean Thomas' family.
2. 1 scrapbook of letters from friends, writers and celebrities.
3. Framed photostat of the foreword to the 1936 American Folk Song Festival by Dr. Nickolai Sokoloff.
4. References to Jean Thomas' work in the periodical Museum Echoes 16, No. 6, June 1943, p. 47.
5. Paragraph on the creation of the Kentucky Arts Commission in the periodical Cultural Affairs, No. 1, p. 45.

6. Article and photograph, Ashland Daily Independent, on the World Book Encyclopedia treatment of the American Folk Song Festival, April 27, 1968.
7. Program Listing in the Arts and Cinema Program of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, October 5, 1960.
8. Advertisements for Jean Thomas' book Blue Ridge Country in American Folkways, edited by Erskire Caldwell.
9. Announcement folder for the 1968 Festival at Carter Caves State Park, and a poster on the festival.
10. Road map, 1961, Standard Oil.
11. Traipsin' Woman Doll on a wooden base with glass cover.
12. Postcard of Jean Thomas and child, entitled "A Little Child Shall Lead Them."
13. 5 scrapbooks of newspaper clippings dated 1944-58; 1956-62; 1956-62; 1963-4; 1965-6.
14. 1 black woman's handbag, embroidered in yellow with the words "The Traipsin' Woman."
15. Folders and photographs of the Mefford and Bell family histories, including genealogy of George Mefford (1764-1814).
16. Pamphlets on the history of the First Presbyterian Church in Ashland, and on Buena Vista, California.
17. Advertisements from Dover Publications.

APPENDIX IV. REMARKS OF DR. WAYNE YENAWINE, DIRECTOR OF THE UNVIERSITY OF LOUISVILLE LIBRARIES, MAY 27, 1968.

Jean Thomas - The Traipsin' Woman, The Fraley Family and Friends - We are here today because a Great Lady has made a decision important to her, the University of Louisville, the State of Kentucky and the scholarly world at large.

The Great Lady is Jean Thomas - The Traipsin' Woman.

You will note that I refer to our guest of honor as Jean Thomas - The Traipsin' Woman and to the surprise of some of you, no doubt, this is her correct name, legalized by recent action of the court. Usually, such colorful names are in legend, but we are fortunate to have a very alive legend with us. Jean Thomas, The Traipsin' Woman is truly an amazing woman who is widely admired and respected for capturing and preserving the folk lore and folk music of Eastern Kentuckians. She is the author of eight books and has finished two manuscripts--an autobiography and an account of the Hatfield-McCoy feud. She is directing on June 7, 8, & 9, the 38th Annual Festival of Art, Crafts and Folk Music. National and local radio and television studios have supplemented the taping of the talent of musicians and singers she has discovered in the mountains and brought out for the world to enjoy.

In a very real sense, the University of Louisville will today dedicate a memorial to Jean Thomas, The Traipsin' Woman for a lifetime of devoted and indefatigable work recording the stories, the ballads and the music lest some of the rich cultural heritage of Eastern Kentuckians be lost in its oral transmission from parents to children or from one generation to another at "gatherin's" and "sings".

On behalf of your many friends here at the University of Louisville, many of whom have had an opportunity only recently to balance the giving which characterizes friendship, we welcome you to our fine campus with a warmth and sincerity we reserve for a distinguished Alumna, which, from this day on, you will be to all of us.

I am happy to introduce to you Jean Thomas, The Traipsin' Woman who has a presentation to make to President Woodrow Strickler.

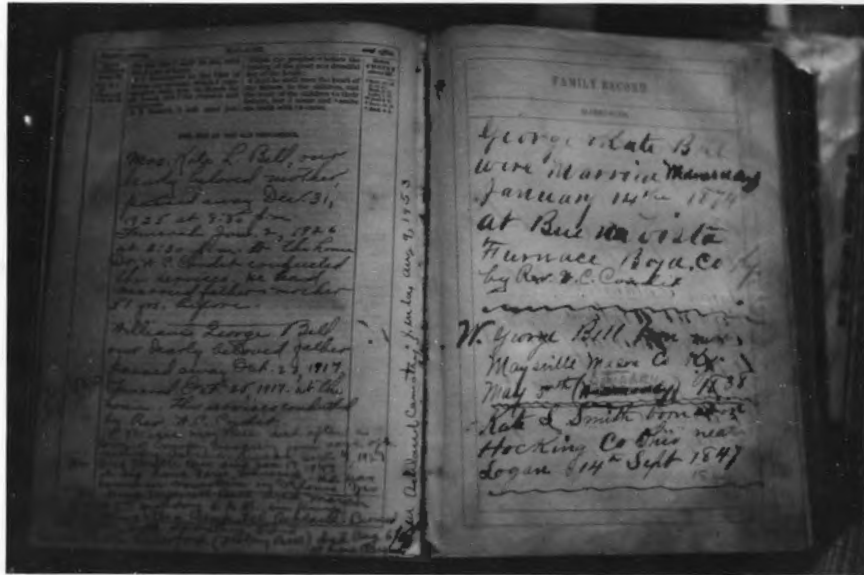
APPENDIX VI. PHOTOGRAPHS PERTAINING TO JEAN THOMAS, MADE BY THE AUTHOR IN OCTOBER, 1974.



A. Jean Thomas, the Traipsin' Woman



B. The McGuffey log school house, site of the festivals from 1950-63



C. Bell Family Bible, January 14th, 1874, notice of marriage of Jean Thomas' Parents



D. Bell Family Bible, November 14, 1881, notice of birth of Jean



E. Jean Thomas' Museum Home, 3201 Cogan Street, Ashland



F. Living Room, 3201 Cogan Street

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VI. PERSONAL COMMUNICATION (Listed Chronologically)

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David Varney, January 15, 1978.

Jean Ritchie and George Pickow, January 15, 1978.

VII. MAGNETIC TAPE RECORDINGS (Listed Chronologically)

- June 10, 1951, The 1951 American Folk Song Festival.
- June 8, 1952, The 1952 American Folk Song Festival
- November 17, 1957, Bert Shimp and Volna Fraley with the Ford Times Collection of American Art at the Wee House in the Wood.
- November 16, 1958, Jean Thomas 77th Birthday Program.
- June 14, 1959, The 1959 American Folk Song Festival.
- June 12, 1960, The 1960 American Folk Song Festival.
- June 11, 1961, The 1961 American Folk Song Festival.
- November 15, 1964, Jean Thomas 83rd Birthday Program.
- February 2, 1967, Annadeene Fraley Sings "Traipsin' Woman."

VIII. PHONOGRAPH RECORDINGS

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VITA

The author, Marshall A. Portnoy, is the son of Mrs. Ethel Portnoy of New Haven, Connecticut, and the late Irving Portnoy. He was born on November 6, 1944, in New Haven, Connecticut.

His elementary education was obtained in the public schools of New Haven, and secondary education at the James Hillhouse High School, New Haven, from which he was graduated in 1962.

In September, 1962, he entered Yale University and, in 1966, received the degree of Bachelor of Arts with a major in English and a minor in music. While at Yale, he represented the United States as a soloist at the International Choral Festival in Lincoln Center after touring nine countries, including Japan and the Soviet Union, as a soloist with the Yale Glee Club.

In 1966, he received a grant from the Office of Economic Opportunity for studies in education for the culturally disadvantaged. In that connection, he received a Master of Science degree in June, 1967, from Southern Connecticut State College.

In 1967, Marshall Portnoy entered the Cantors Institute-School of Sacred Music of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York City. In 1971, he received the degree of Bachelor of Music and ordination as Hazzan (Cantor). While at the Seminary, he was elected President of the student body, and was the sole student representative on a special committee to study seminary plans and policies. In 1971, he was awarded the Arthur Einstein Memorial Prize in Composition in New York City.

For seven years, the Hazzan has served Congregation Adath Jeshurun in Louisville, Kentucky, and was appointed Educational Director in 1976. He is a Graduate Teaching Assistant at the University of Louisville in the Department of Music History, and is the program annotator of the Louisville Orchestra and its First Edition Records. The cantor has been active with the Louisville Bicentennial Commission and its Heritage Weekends, and was recently appointed to the Executive Board of the Yale Club of Kentucky. He is listed in Who's Who in Religion. The Hazzan is a full member of both the Cantors Assembly and the American Conference of Cantors. He is the author of "Language Teaching," an article which appeared in the University of Wisconsin's Education Magazine, and also of "Towards a Meaningful Bar Mitzva," published in the proceedings of the 27th Annual Convention of the Cantors Assembly of America. He is on the Editorial Board of The Journal of Synagogue Music, and other Jewish music publications. He is married to Dr. Jane Portnoy.