



Back issues of and single articles published in *New York Folklore Quarterly*, *New York Folklore*, and *Voices* are available for purchase. Check the tables of contents for availability and titles. To request an article for purchase, contact us at info@nyfolklore.org. Please be aware that some issues are sold out, but most articles are still available.

Copyright of NEW YORK FOLKLORE. Further reproduction prohibited without permission of copyright holder. This PDF or any part of its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv or website without the copyright holder's express permission. Users may print or download article for individual use.

NEW YORK FOLKLORE
129 Jay Street
Schenectady, NY 12305
518/346-7008
Fax 518/346-6617
Email: info@nyfolklore.org
<http://www.nyfolklore.org>

Dynamic yet Fragile:

Reconsidering the Archive of New York State Folklife

BY RYAN A. DONALDSON

I hope historical societies will continue to foster in various ways the publication of folkloristic materials, but I think we must be realistic and recognize the fact that the printed page is growing less and less important in our time. As this century proceeds, the word will more often be heard than read, and much of our most important teaching will be done with pictures rather than with the printed page. Education is rapidly becoming a visual matter, and in such a trend the museum at last comes into its own; but museums, if they are going to compete with and utilize radio and television and whatever else is ahead, must be dynamic.

—Louis C. Jones (1950)

Archives, historical societies, and museums today have inherited the task of caring for a swelling mass of audiovisual materials. A 2005 Heritage Health Index survey calculated a staggering 2,423,568 moving image collections and 2,189,992 audio collections safeguarded within the United States alone. Alarming, more than 40 percent of audio and video collections are maintained in unknown conditions. The same report concluded that many cultural institutions lack essential resources to care for these artifacts. These collections are in peril if left unattended, as over time the fragile plastic-coated tapes can deteriorate and fail to play.

In recognition of these developments, the United States Congress established the National Recording Registry in 2000 with the passage of Public Law 106-474. Under the law's provisions, the Library of Congress is responsible for annually selecting "culturally,

historically, or aesthetically significant" sound recordings to be placed on the registry. Between 2000 and 2007, 250 selections were placed on the registry. The 2007 additions spanned the sound spectrum. They included the first transatlantic broadcast (March 14, 1925); a Navajo shootingway ceremony field recording (1957–8); Fiorello LaGuardia reading the comics during a newspaper strike (1945); and Michael Jackson's *Thriller* (1982). The National Recording Registry preserves these significant media and raises public awareness. The law further mandates the Librarian of Congress and the National Recording Preservation Board to arrange public hearings addressing the troubling future for recorded sound collections.

The New York State Historical Association (NYSHA), a not-for-profit educational institution in Cooperstown, New York, is one of many organizations fitting the profile outlined by the survey. Founded in 1899, NYSHA operates the Fenimore Art Museum (opened in 1944) and the NYSHA Research Library (opened in 1969), both in Cooperstown. NYSHA also partners and shares facilities with the Farmers' Museum, across the street from the Fenimore Art Museum. In collaboration with the nearby State University of New York at Oneonta, NYSHA cosponsors the Cooperstown Graduate Program (CGP), a two-year master's program in history museum studies.

NYSHA's Archive of New York State Folklife (ANYSF) contains a rich media collection that may include future nominees for the national registry. From 1964 to 1983, CGP faculty and students in the programs for

American folk culture (no longer offered) and history museum studies contributed fieldwork projects and documentation to create this archive. Later supplemented by fieldwork projects from SUNY–Oneonta and Fulton-Montgomery Community College students, the collection has grown into an assemblage of 1,200 projects with 1,800 tapes in reel-to-reel, cassette, and several video formats. The ANYSF's holdings provide an exceptional view of the study of folklore and twentieth-century fieldwork techniques. Photographs, slides, reports, architectural drawings, and other artifacts supporting these media materials were all deposited in the archive. Visual materials related to the audio recordings, such as ANYSF's extensive photograph and slide collections, face their own future conservation obstacles. The dangers to the audio and video tapes, however, are more immediate; they are the subject of this article.

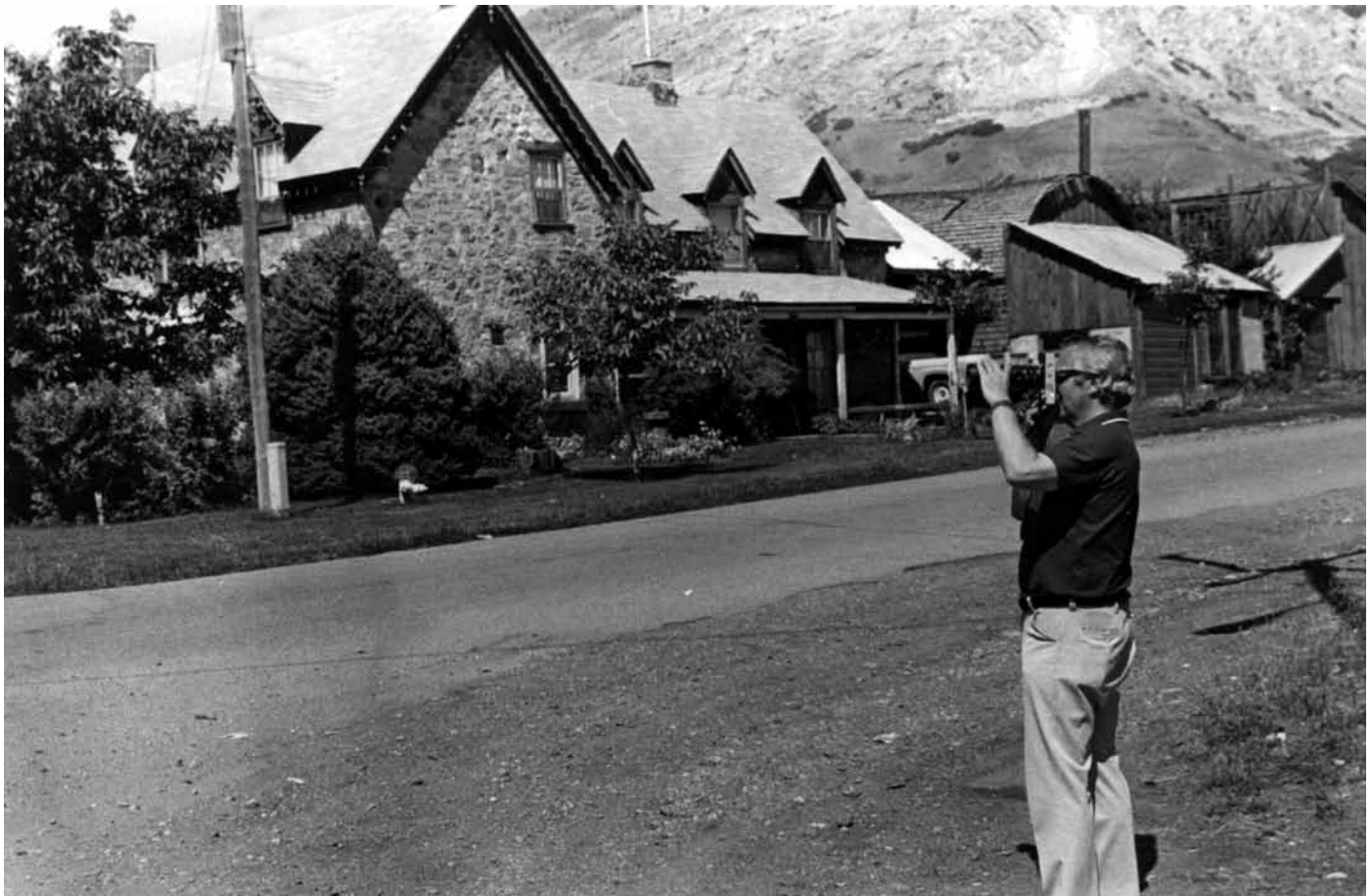
Some students recorded folk, blues, and country musicians, beginning with noted material culture folklorist and CGP alumni Henry Glassie's work with country music performer and hops picker Jessie Wells in 1964–5. Robert G. Atkinson also recorded multiple performances of folk singer Harry Siemsen, as well as the pianist Mana Siemsen, for his thesis work. Siemsen and Larry Older performed songs of the Catskills and the Adirondacks in February 1966. Children's songs and work songs were collected for comparative study. Several tapes in the ANYSF appear to be dubbed from varied musical sources and faculty record collections, including volumes of the syndicated *Folk Voice* radio show featuring Johnny and June Carter Cash.

Simon J. Bronner, now Distinguished Professor of American Studies and Folklore at Penn State University, recorded twenty-one reel-to-reel tapes with three cassette tapes of blues musician Eugene Powell in Mississippi for his thesis research project. Bronner went on to serve ANYSF as assistant director and director in the 1970s. Two of the most important video recordings in the collection document a March 14, 1971, concert at Cooperstown High School featuring Eddie “Son” House. A legendary African American blues performer, Son House influenced scores of musicians including Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters. Son House recorded with Alan Lomax of the Library of Congress in the 1940s and performed through the 1960s on festival tours. He retired only three years after his performance in Cooperstown, and the concert footage deepens our understanding of his later career. House performed that day with Lesley Riddle—an influence on the Carter Family—and local high school phenomenon Creighton Lindsay.

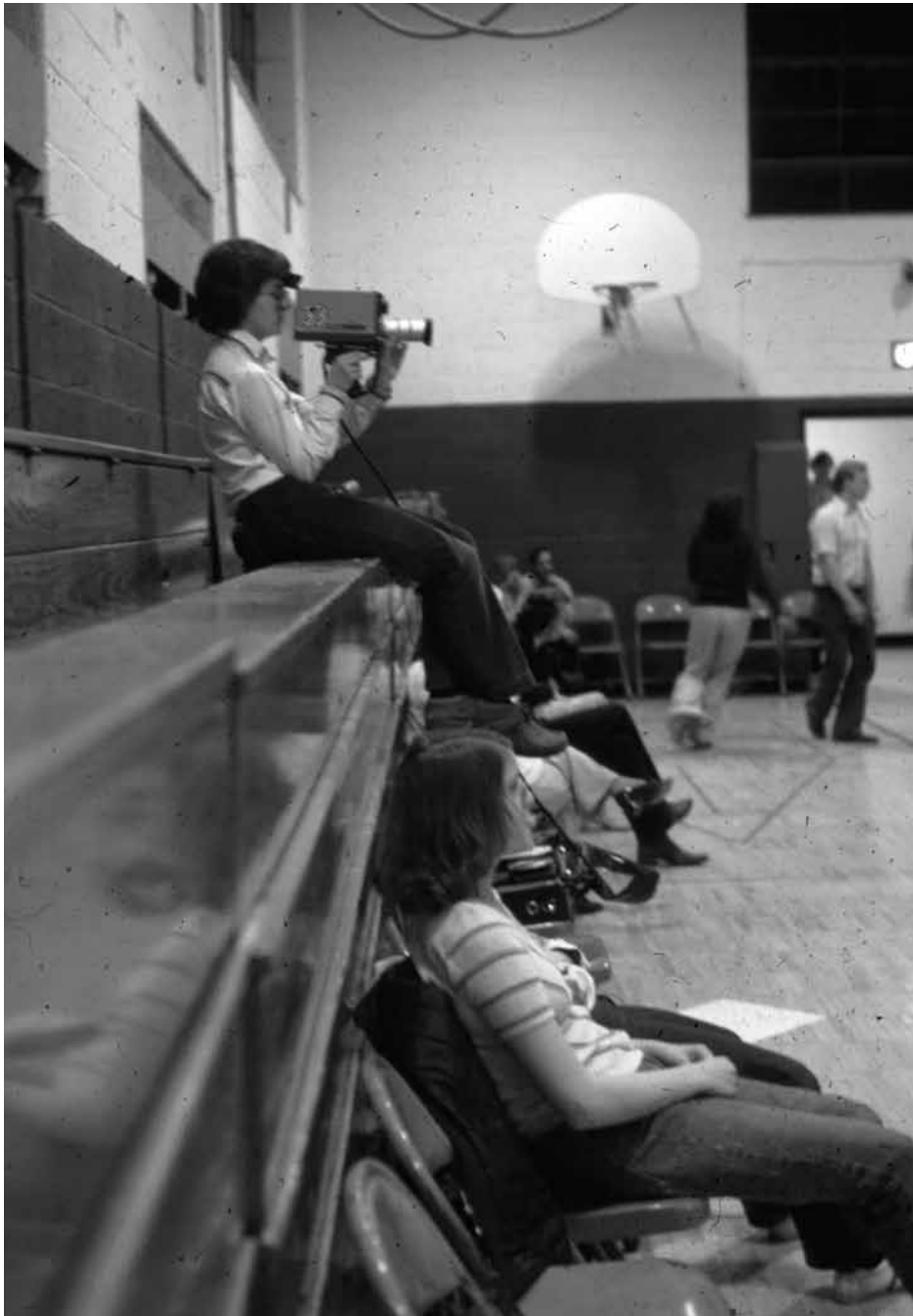
Festivals, birthdays, and other special occasions are themes of the ANYSF’s collection. A caravan of CGP American folk culture students documented a weekend folk music festival in Ferrum, Virginia, in 1976. ANYSF archivist Dorothy “Dew” Shonsey helmed a video camera for a square dancing festival with live music in Milford, New York, that same year. The students enrolled in folk technology courses documented crafts and rural occupations, not just within Otsego County, but throughout the United States. Marcia A. Starkey investigated lobstering in Massachusetts. Janson L. Cox interviewed James H. Kidd, an African American blacksmith living in Charleston, South Carolina, during Cox’s winter break in December 1965. Entire classes of field collectors extensively documented farming and other craft activities, such as hops manufacture, beekeeping, quilting, and even hog butchering. CGP alumni Douglas Preston fondly remembers his 1969 hog-butchering experience, describing the assignment as “one of the most

memorable experiences of my educational career” (2007).

The genesis of this media collection dates back to the 1940s. Folklore luminary Louis C. Jones, who first joined NYSHA as director in 1947, heavily promoted the development of folklore in the United States. Jones recognized what he termed the “dynamic” possibilities for audiovisual materials as teaching aids. Following exemplars in Europe, NYSHA sponsored the annual Seminars in American Culture. Joined by his wife Agnes Halsley Jones, Jones surveyed 112 European museums in 93 days and dictated his observations on 64 tapes, which were transcribed and now provide insight into his plans to establish CGP. The trip was ambitious and international in scope, as the Joneses drove and ferried from Germany to Sweden and Norway before ending their journey in England. Louis and Agnes Jones were most impressed by the Skansen (Open-Air) Museum and the Nordiska Museet (Nordic Museum), both in Stockholm, Sweden.



Bruce Buckley taking photographs at the Fife Folk Conference in Logan, Utah, 1978. Photo courtesy of Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.



Dew Shonsey filming square dancing in Milford, New York, 1976. Photo: Simon Bronner (scanned from slide). Cooperstown Graduate Program Slide Collection, Cooperstown Graduate Program Archives, Cooperstown, New York.

These two institutions combined interpretations of historic buildings and artifacts with innovative educational programs and diverse media resources, such as music recordings and View-Master photographs. Jones looked to the Skansen and Nordiska museums as models for his museums in Cooperstown.

Jones certainly did not fail to recognize the importance of printed publications. The New York Folklore Society (NYFS) was formed in 1944, the same year that

the Farmers' Museum opened. Conceived as replacement for the defunct Folk-Song Society of the Northeast, the initial planning group and first officers included Jones, then teaching at the New York State College for Teachers in Albany (now SUNY-Albany); Harold W. Thompson, Jones's mentor; and George Herzog, who assembled Columbia University's Archive of Primitive and Folk Music and later was an anthropology professor at Indiana University. Jones approached

Dixon Ryan Fox, then the NYSHA director, for sponsorship. Fox agreed, recognizing the opportunity to broaden the scope of NYSHA beyond its origins in military history to embrace social and local history. Jones even offered discounts to NYSHA members to encourage broader participation in NYFS. The newly minted NYFS released the inaugural *New York Folklore Quarterly* (NYFQ) issue in 1945. Jones described the quarterly as the "principal bond of the Society" (1945). NYFQ provided a wellspring of news relating to the folklore field, book reviews, and articles by Jones's students in Albany. Jones hoped NYFQ would actively "encourage people to go out and collect more in their own towns" (1946).

The final component to ANYSF, the field collectors, was realized with the Cooperstown Graduate Program and its students. Planned by Jones with NYSHA chairman Stephen C. Clark, CGP called attention to American cultural life through regional folk expressions. CGP's methodology was an American counterpart to the exciting developments the Joneses witnessed abroad. CGP offered two complementary programs in American folk culture and history museum studies. An art conservation concentration was later added, headed by conservation pioneers Caroline and Sheldon Keck, which lasted until 1983. An editorial in the June 1964 issue of the *New York Folklore Quarterly* announced the ambitious objectives of the American folk culture program:

The American Folk Culture program is designed to shed light on the all but nameless Americans whose lives were shaped by traditions, by folkways and customs, whose labors were with their hands, taught them by master craftsmen, whose politics and religion were minute segments of great forces which they seldom comprehended, whose songs and stories, games and frolics, taboos and compulsions derived from centuries of folk custom and belief rather than from the *scientia* of the learned or the *dicta* of the printed page. The program combines the techniques and the scholarship of the social and cultural historians, the literary historian, and the anthropologist, as well as the folklorist, to bring

a new understanding of the deepest roots of our culture. (“American Folk Culture,” 1964)

To help collect this fragile and increasingly obscured history, Jones selected Bruce Redfern Buckley to lead the American folk culture curriculum and direct the ANYSF. Buckley had earned his Ph.D. from the Indiana University folklore program in 1962. In the late 1950s, Buckley narrated, shot, and composed soundtracks for educational films produced by the school’s audiovisual center. Buckley also performed ballads and folk songs, releasing albums on the Folkways label. Buckley supplied the multimedia background for the experiment that Jones envisioned in Cooperstown. Jones assembled a stellar staff including Frederick L. Rath Jr., vice director of NYSHA and the first director of the National Trust for Historic Preservation; Frank Spinney, CGP’s Professor of History Museums and past president of Old Sturbridge Village; and Per Guldbeck, a popular professor previously employed by the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico, who taught conservation and folk technology at CGP. Milo Stewart, director of education at NYSHA, led courses and public programs in photography, film, and sound. Rounding out this dynamic staff was Roderick Roberts, a literature and folklore professor who, like Buckley, studied at Indiana University and shared a passion for documentation. Both men also collected songs and variations on narratives and guided students to gather these expressions. Later, Minor Wine Thomas, chief curator for the Farmers’ Museum and Fenimore Art Museum as well as a former NYSHA director (1975–82), joined this vibrant faculty.

These educators provided the foundation for CGP students to take weeklong surveys on the experiences of Cooperstown seventh graders, investigate the local foods and holiday meal traditions of Otsego County, and collect gravestone rubbings from the church cemeteries as part of life-cycle projects. Students also focused on chair splinting, maple sugaring, and water witching, among many other subjects. Some of these projects were collaborations with other initiatives, such

as the National Register of Historic Places. Later in the 1970s, students explored urban landscapes that questioned tenets of the folklore discipline.

With the dissolution of the American folk culture program in 1979, Buckley continued his own field research and public folklore projects, including teaching at SUNY–Oneonta, working with the college’s audiovisual media department, and documenting folk arts of upstate New York. Roberts taught in Oneonta with Buckley and also at Fulton-Montgomery Community College. A number of the tapes collected by students at these institutions were deposited into the ANYSF, expanding the archive’s scope of collectors and informants, while maintaining its primary focus on upstate New York.

Today, all ANYSF audiovisual materials are located on the second floor of the NYSHA Research Library in Cooperstown. The remainder of the collection includes original paper documents and photographic prints stored in about fifty cubic-foot boxes at the Iroquois Storage Facility, also in Cooperstown. In addition, two sets of card indices, along with microfilm copies of the documents, 20,000 photographs, 16,000 photographic slides, and one reference set of copies of the original papers are all maintained at the NYSHA library. The ANYSF collection features reel-to-reel, audio cassette, and several analog video formats. There are approximately 1,820 recordings, including about 700 reel-to-reel tapes in seven-inch, five-inch, and three-inch reels; 1,100 audio cassettes of various recording lengths; and twenty videotapes in beta, open-reel, VHS, and film formats. About 99 percent of the tapes were recorded from 1964 to 1983 with contemporary consumer tape stock, and almost all are original master recordings.

As an industry standard, reel-to-reel tapes were used exclusively by the Cooperstown Graduate Program for the first ten years of the archive. By 1975, cassette tapes had replaced the reel-to-reel tapes. About three-quarters of the reel-to-reel tapes are on seven-inch reels, with 21 percent on five-inch, and the balance on three-inch reels.

Condition reports completed by NYSHA library staff in the early 1990s indicate that 85 percent of the tapes are “full,” with recorded information filling the length of the reels. Audio cassettes are the most common format in the ANYSF, comprising about 1,100 tapes, or 60 percent of the total collection. Cassette tapes, combined with portable audio recorders, were easier for fieldwork researchers to use, compared to the more cumbersome reel-to-reel recorder models. The cassette tapes vary in length from 15 to 120 minutes.

Video recordings represent a small portion of the ANYSF collection. The videotapes document concerts, special events, and student projects. All formats are now considered obsolete, and even more than audiotapes, the videotapes may be liable to fail. As a result, any viewing should be combined with a preservation re-recording or digital reformatting session. This recommendation was put into action in October 2006. Four beta videotapes were couriered to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. Little information was available about these tapes, apart from accession records and the card catalog. The tapes included “The Ultimate Chicken Machine,” two tapes titled “The Frasure Adirondack Packbasket,” and a 1983 CGP student project, “Memories, Barn, and Images: The Hop Culture in Otsego County.” Benjamin Harry, media specialist at the National Baseball Hall of Fame, attempted to verify the recordings’ contents and preserve them through digital reformatting. After careful inspection, each tape was played using the available equipment. An intermediate copy in beta-sp format along with DVD and VHS reference copies were created. With the exception of “The Frasure Adirondack Packbasket,” all recordings were rendered successfully. The National Baseball Hall of Fame graciously donated all the materials. The NYSHA Research Library accessioned the DVD and VHS copies. The National Baseball Hall of Fame maintains the facilities to create new preservation and reference copies. It is strongly recommended that NYSHA continue to cultivate this relationship.

One key strength of the ANYSF is that it is an ethnographic collection of national significance. The collection's depth is local and regional, while its breadth is national. The audiovisual tapes, in concert with the accompanying materials for each project, offer a uniquely rich resource for scholars and researchers, many of whom are undoubtedly unaware of its presence. ANYSF recordings have the potential to serve as future educational resources—another of the collection's strengths. Incorporation into New York State school curriculum projects is one practical outcome for these tapes. In discussing folklore collections, Ellen McHale, then New York Folklore Society president, suggested, "Many of the materials are already appropriate to the Fourth and Seventh Grade curricula in local history, and teachers looking for ways to implement and bring to life the new mandate for multicultural education will find invaluable materials that bring the issues home to their own communities and regions" (1994). Such implementation can attract young patrons and schoolchildren to the ANYSF. Working with local schools can also dovetail with the demonstrated success of NYSHA's Yorker publications and annual History Day programs. A final strength of the ANYSF collection is its contribution to NYSHA's institutional history and the American folklore discipline. The Harold W. Thompson, Stith Thompson, and Louis C. Jones recordings capture an electrifying time in NYSHA's history, as the institution expanded to include Seminars on American Culture and the Cooperstown Graduate Program, both national models for advanced study in folklore. Establishing a plan for the ANYSF will help preserve NYSHA's institutional memory and relationship to American folklore in the twentieth century.

Keeping these strengths of the collection in mind, NYSHA must respond to the challenge of caring for the ANYSF's audiovisual materials. In terms of environment, the existing literature recommends maintaining a constant temperature in a range of 40 to 54 degrees Fahrenheit with a relative humidity of 30 to 50 percent. Fluctuations in temperature and relative humidity shorten the

lifespan of audiovisual recordings, so climate controls are essential for preservation. Audio and video tapes should be stored vertically, loosely shelved on metal shelving. Tapes should always be handled by the inside hub, rather than the outside tape layer flange. The tapes should be housed in nonacidic containers to prevent dust accumulation, and the storage area should be routinely cleaned. The tapes cannot be exposed to excessive light because of potential damage to the tape layers. In general, collections care for video is similar to audio, with significant differences in conservation and preservation re-recording practices. It is outside the scope of this article to address fully these complex issues. The Image Permanence Institute, a research department of the Rochester Institute of Technology, and the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) regularly publish helpful reports and guidelines on best practices.

All reel-to-reel tapes are composed of three parts: a base, binder, and layer of magnetic coating. The base was initially manufactured with cellulose acetate in the 1940s and 1950s, and then replaced by an improved polyester material in the 1960s. Tapes made of cellulose acetate are more brittle and break apart easily, whereas polyester tapes have a higher stretching capacity. In both types, the binder layer—typically made of polyurethane—adheres the magnetic coating to the base layer. The magnetic coating is commonly referred to as oxide and contains magnetic particles that relay the recorded information to the playback equipment. Many reel-to-reel tapes were manufactured with differing chemical compositions through the 1950s and into the 1960s. Some chemical recipes were kept as trade secrets by manufacturers and are today forgotten. Such uncertainties limit our ability to determine a tape's composition and age, but the playability of most reel-to-reel tape has been estimated at up to forty years.

Excessive dampness and humidity cause the tape to stretch and warp. Known as cupping, this phenomenon can be compounded by dirt, dust, and the aging process. When acetate reel-to-reel tape layers begin to stick

together, the problem is called blocking. High temperatures and excessive humidity accelerate blocking. Another threat to reel-to-reel audiotapes is sticky-shed syndrome. The syndrome results when a tape's binder oxide absorbs moisture from the air. When played, affected tapes can produce a squealing sound or may only be heard at low volumes. One dramatic solution involves heating the tapes carefully in a convection oven to absorb the moisture for better playback. Reformatting must occur one to two days after the heating, however, because the tape will suffer irreparable damage over time.

Since maintaining a proper storage environment to guard against these threats is key, my primary recommendation is to develop a plan for stabilization. Almost all the tapes are original copies that have not been maintained through routine playback and regular documentation. If creating an ideal environment is not a viable option, then priorities for reproduction must be established, taking into account a matrix of factors, including *condition and storage, content, preservation and reformatting, intellectual control, and future access.*

Condition and Storage

I recommend that the NYSHA library investigate long-term storage possibilities. The first step should be to install climate control equipment in the current storage location. The controls can be introduced gradually to avoid a rapid environmental fluctuation. Ideally, all original tape boxes would be removed, and the collection rehoused with nonacidic plastic sleeves. This approach would house the collection according to current best practices. A more drastic possibility would be to relocate the collection to a storage site that has an ideal environment. If further evidence and testing suggest that the most valuable tapes in the collection are in danger, they should be preserved in the original format as long as possible. There are regional repositories—both commercial and not-for-profit—that specialize in this type of collections storage.

If NYSHA is unable to support these options, then at a minimum, all tapes should be rehoused with Norelco archival boxes, metal

reels, and unslotted center hubs. Some tapes in the collection have factory sleeves that are acidic, a few are in potentially harmful containers such as paper envelopes, and a couple have no housing at all. Some reel-to-reel tape packs are uneven and warped from inadequate support by slotted hubs. For long-term storage, unslotted hubs on metal reels should replace the slotted hubs on plastic reels, as unslotted hubs distribute the tape pack more evenly, and metal reels have a neutral chemical effect on acetate. Acidic paper with tape summaries and indexes that are in the boxes may introduce a hazardous microenvironment. These objects should be removed and replaced by a photocopy on archival paper. All original documentation should be retained on microfilm or possibly scanned, depending on available resources.

The tape's composition and format are both key factors affecting condition. The reel-to-reel recordings in the Archive of New York State Folklife feature about 325 tapes composed of a cellulose acetate base, comprising 46 percent of all the reels. Although no documentation is available, some polyester tapes appear to have been transferred from the original acetate format. The older cellulose acetate reel-to-reel tapes that remain in the collection will only become more brittle over time.

Another consideration involves the smaller reels of acetate tape. The three-inch and five-inch reels generate more tension at the base of the reel. This mechanical action wears away the oxide layer and can also lead to damage at the tape's edges. To combat this danger, I advise that all three-inch and five-inch reels be examined. Several tapes have been transferred to seven-inch reels and need to be monitored and rewound to an appropriate-sized reel.

Likewise, long cassette tapes with more than 90 minutes of playing time have more tape that rest on the supply and take-up reels than 60-minute cassette tapes. The tape is also thinner to accommodate the added layers. Although a thinner tape layer allows a longer recording time, the added pressure and weight can cause stress to the tape reel and should be routinely monitored. These

tapes should take priority for reformatting.

Finally, all open-reel helical scan beta and video tapes must be further examined by a video specialist to determine if they can be successfully preserved. Although almost all the tapes in the demonstrative sample rendered well, conservation issues can only be noticed through attempting to play back each video recording. This video content—preserved with obsolete technologies—risks being lost forever if it is not migrated to another more durable format in the near future.

Content

Consideration of the tapes' condition and storage must be balanced by attention to their content. Not all tapes in the collection are unique, for instance, and better copies of some exist. These include a small number of commercial recordings, such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Ghost Stories for Young People*. Since they are available from a number of sources, they should assume a lower priority for preservation. Tapes that do not have labels or identifying information should be played to determine the content. It is possible that some may be devoid of information and can be removed from the collection. Overall, the strengths of the collection take precedence as the most valuable content.

Preservation and Reformatting

Preservation of the ANYSF tapes will require a long-term strategy. It may be impractical for every tape to be digitally reformatted. Allocating staff time and technical resources to create and maintain both analog and digital formats can also be expensive. In some cases, it may take three to four hours of studio engineering time for one hour of media content, depending on the condition of the tapes. The digital reformatting process should therefore be efficiently allocated. For instance, many audiotapes contain only recorded voices, with a smaller percentage containing music or some music with talking. Tapes of speaking voices do not require the same dynamic range as tapes featuring music. These tapes may not require the same attention to high fidelity and studio engineering

resources, and perhaps can be digitized in larger batches at a discount through a vendor, rather than individually.

It cannot be emphasized enough that the majority of the ANYSF recordings are the only copies known to exist in their original format. These tapes form an indispensable part of the project they accompanied. Current policy at the NYSHA Research Library allows patrons to have analog duplicates generated from these original tapes. Although the vast majority of the collection has rarely been played, it is imperative that the NYSHA library cease this practice and create modified access policies. I suggest NYSHA create and offer podcasts to appeal to a broader constituency. Podcasts offer a low-cost alternative that provides access to a sizeable audience. The Pew Internet and American Life Project conducted research in 2005, finding that twenty-two million people own an MP3 or iPod player, and that six million have downloaded a podcast. The resources needed to create podcasts are minimal: a computer with audio editing software and a microphone or digital recording device. Providing more access digitally and increasing awareness can only contribute to the collection's preservation.

Intellectual Control

Today, NYSHA does not have clear intellectual control over the collection. During the course of my research, I found no evidence indicating that authorization forms had been completed, despite the presence of informant biography data forms completed by informants. An e-mail query sent to the Cooperstown Graduate Program alumni Listserv did not yield a clear answer, although several respondents stated that they did not recall their informants signing consent forms. It seems that consent was conveyed orally during the interview process, as was typical of contemporary fieldwork practice at the time. It is unclear if this hypothesis is correct, because the majority of the tapes have not been heard for verification. The majority of folklore projects did not circulate or maintain release forms until the 1980s, when concerns were raised that informants

did not receive fair compensation and that the collector may profit from an informant's contribution. Hence, if a repository has not established clear policies for these older recordings, then the repository potentially faces moral and even legal issues if the recordings are cited or reproduced beyond the threshold of fair use.

Following best practices enacted by the American Folklife Center and the Alan Lomax Archive, NYSHA should make a good faith effort to contact both the student collector and the informant or the informant's family via registered letter. Such practices are desirable because they allow NYSHA to continue to be good stewards and enjoy the benefits of more fully incorporating the recordings into the library and NYSHA programming.

There are also added benefits to implementing this strategy. Many of the informants' heirs may not even know that the archive exists, and the recordings may provide them with an incredibly engaging personal document of a loved one. As the tapes are digitally reformatted, alumni of the Cooperstown Graduate Programs, State University of New York at Oneonta, and Fulton-Montgomery Community College should be provided with a copy of their fieldwork, since it was not a policy or common practice for student collectors to keep or receive copies. Many SUNY-Oneonta and Fulton-Montgomery students remain unaware that their work was deposited in the ANYSF. Recognizing their crucial role in the creation of these projects promotes sound ethics and widens the possibility for a future base of support.

Future Access

Audiovisual collections demand financial resources, technical equipment, and dedicated staff time. As budgets become increasingly stretched, many institutions have banded together to protect their collections and leverage their assets. I recommend NYSHA follow this collaborative course of action. As the collection is unpublished, there is only a dim awareness of the vibrant audiovisual archive NYSHA has to offer. If

NYSHA does not attend to publicizing the collection and collating holdings with other institutions, the ANYSF audiovisual collection's chances of preservation are diminished. As folk heritage and media archiving organizations increasingly band together, NYSHA must nurture professional contacts with groups such as the New York Folklore Society, New York State Council on the Arts, American Folklore Society, Association of Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC), and Association of Moving Image Archivists. These partnerships will help form a critical support base.

Just as the first Thompson tape was dubbed to an analog copy, NYSHA will need to consider how to set the larger stage for digitization as the tapes deteriorate. Beyond preserving these fragile materials, another major goal should be to increase access for a larger potential audience. A small sampling is currently available online through the CGP web site (www.oneonta.edu/academics/cgp/students/folklife.html), including excerpts from the Son House and Jessie Wells performances. The New York Folklore Society has also kindly awarded NYSHA a mentorship grant to move forward with the planning process. As funding for folk arts and folklore continues to be challenged, NYSHA should look to enact a conservation plan in stages. Focusing on batches of fifty recordings, NYSHA could stabilize and digitally reformat them for approximately four to eight thousand dollars, depending on the availability of resources and emergence of new partnerships. The newly digitized recordings can then raise awareness for those that remain.

NYSHA has the incredible opportunity to continue the educational experiment that Louis C. Jones foresaw over fifty years ago. In a 1975 interview deposited in the ANYSF, Jones described the strength of the tapes in the collection, since even the most accurately collected fieldwork reports could suffer from fallible memories and lost details. As the NYSHA library takes action to protect these delicate materials, the ANYSF has the chance to tell us once again—whether through exhibits, web presentations, or origi-

nal research—about these fragile histories that Jones and his CGP community worked so relentlessly to identify and protect. ▼

References

- A Public at Risk: The Heritage Health Index: Report on the State of America's Collections*. 2005. Washington, D.C.: Institute of Library and Museum Services.
- American Folk Culture: A Graduate College Program. 1964. *New York Folklore Quarterly* 20.2:131–2.
- Jones, Louis C. 1946. New York Folklore Society. *Journal of American Folklore* 59:491–3.
- . 1950. Folk Culture and the Historical Society. *Minnesota History* 31.50:1–7.
- . May 26, 1975. Interview by Ellen Fladger, Cooperstown, New York. Tape 76-0014 (transcription), Archive of New York State Folklife, NYSHA Research Library.
- McHale, Ellen. 1994. Fundamentals of Folklore. In *Working with Folk Materials in New York State: A Manual for Folklorists and Archivists*, 2.3. Ed. John W. Sutter. Schenectady: New York Folklore Society.
- Preston, Douglas. March 4, 2006. Re: CGP Tapes Follow-up. E-mail to Ryan A. Donaldson.

Ryan A. Donaldson completed the Cooperstown Graduate Program with a degree in history museum studies in 2007. He currently works as an archivist for the Durst Organization in New York, New York.

Although folklore belongs to everybody, the periodicals that discuss it mostly belong to specialists. *Voices* is the great exception—anybody can and everybody should read it.

—Lee Haring,
Professor Emeritus of English,
Brooklyn College, CUNY

Join or Renew your New York Folklore Membership to Receive *Voices* and other Member Benefits

For the General Public

Voices is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal, published twice annually. Join New York Folklore and become part of a community that will deepen your involvement with folklore, folklife, the traditional arts, and contemporary culture. As a member, you'll have early notice of Gallery special exhibits and NYF-sponsored key events. Members receive a discount on NYF Gallery items.

For Artists and Professionals

Become a member and learn about technical assistance programs that will get you the help you may need in your work:

Mentoring and Professional Development
Folk Artists Self-Management Project
Folk Archives Project
Consulting and Referral
Advocacy
A Public Voice

Membership Levels

Individual

| | |
|----------|-------------------------------------|
| \$ 50.00 | Basic Membership |
| \$100.00 | Harold W. Thompson Circle |
| \$150.00 | Edith Cutting Folklore in Education |

Organizations/Institutions

| | |
|----------|-------------------------------------|
| \$ 75.00 | Subscriber |
| \$100.00 | Partner |
| \$150.00 | Edith Cutting Folklore in Education |

Please add \$20.00 for non-US addresses.

For payment, choose the option that works best for you:

Use our website, www.nyfolklore.org

or mail a check to us at 129 Jay St., Schenectady NY 12305;

or call the NYF business office, 518-346-7008, to pay with a credit card over the phone.