

**THE CENTER FOR POPULAR MUSIC, MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY,
MURFREESBORO, TN**

**WORK, JOHN WESLEY III (d. 1967)
SOUND RECORDINGS AND PAPERS**

93-004

Creator:

Type of Material:

Physical Description:

.75 l.f. including 23 audio discs, 1 audio tape, 6 monographs,
3 serials and 3 photographs.

Dates:

1935-1956 (bulk: 1941-1947)

Abstract (Descriptive Summary):

Provenance and Acquisition Information:

These materials were deposited in the Center in 1993 by the estate of Edith M. Work (Mrs. John W. Work III) by her son John Wesley Work IV. The sound recordings were made by John W. Work III, ca. 1937-1942. The photographic and typed copies of materials owned by the Work family were made in 1988 by Center audio specialist Bruce Nemerov and represent only a portion of the Work family papers. Duplicates of some of this material are also available on microfilm at Fisk University, Nashville Tennessee.

Subject/Index Terms:

Agency History/Biographical Sketch:

John Wesley Work III (d. 1967), son of John Work II, a professor of music at Fisk University and leader of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, received his musical training at Fisk, Columbia and Yale universities.

From 1935 to 1942 Work, by then a professor of music at Fisk himself, collected black American secular and sacred folk music in a variety of styles in Tennessee, Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama and Mississippi. In his collecting work he emphasized performance styles and musicianship.

For additional information on Work see Bruce Nemerov "John Wesley Work III: Field Recordings of Southern Black Folk Music, 1935-1942" in Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin, LIII:3 (Fall, 1987) on which the above is based.

Scope and Content:

This group consists of correspondence; writings and course syllabi; field notes and recording lists;

manuscript and published research materials; and field recordings of John Wesley Work III. Some of this material relates to the development and implementation of Work's research projects in Natchez and Coahoma county Mississippi, 1941-1942, the latter undertaken in conjunction with personnel from the Library of Congress Archive of American Folk Song, and to the organization, transcription and publication of the results of these projects. The principal correspondents are Thomas E. Jones, president of Fisk University where Work served on the faculty, and Alan Lomax of the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress.

This material is arranged in five series: correspondence; writings and course syllabi; manuscript field notes and research materials; printed research materials; and field recordings. Several tributes to Dr. Work are filed at the beginning of Series I and a published score by Work is filed in series IV.

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Series Description:

Series I. Correspondence. Folders 1-3.

Incoming and outgoing correspondence between Work and folklorists with whom he collaborated on projects in Tennessee, Georgia and Coahoma county Mississippi including Alan Lomax and B.A. Botkin of the Library of Congress Archive of Folk Song; colleagues at Fisk University, especially President Thomas E. Jones, Jackson Davis of the General Education Board, and A[ngela?] Lockhart. This correspondence relates primarily to field recording projects undertaken by Work in Tennessee in 1941 and in Georgia and Mississippi in 1942 and recounts the purpose and nature of the projects; the selection and maintenance of recording equipment; raising money for expenses; and publication of the materials from the projects, especially the Coahoma recordings.

Of particular interest are letters from Work to President Jones 18 August and 21 November 1942 describing in detail the scholarly work necessary to prepare a publication based on his field recordings; letters in 1943 and 1945 from B.A. Botkin of the Archive of Folk Song explaining the delays in publication of Work's manuscript; and several 1947 letters from Alan Lomax requesting copies of the Fisk recordings for use in his own book.

Filed among these papers are scattered typescripts of the correspondence made by Center audio specialist Bruce Nemerov while using these materials in preparation of "Roots of American Popular Music" (q.v.).

Series II. Writings and syllabi. Folders 4-6.

Materials in this series document the evolution of the Coahoma project and Work's own scholarship on Negro folk music. Included are a report of the music group of the 1939 Fisk summer training school for high school teachers which Work led; duplicates of correspondence concerning the Coahoma project which are filed in series I; an article "Plantation Meistersinger" by Work published in the Musical Quarterly January 1941; manuscript and typed copies of an address given by Work at the Negro folk music program held as part of Fisk's 75th anniversary celebration and an agenda for the program; an undated typescript "Negro Folk Music"; a schedule, report to Dr. Jones, numerous typed and manuscript writings based on the Coahoma recordings which describe and analyze the music recorded by Work and a classified list of the songs included in the project; and a letter 13 October 1942 to Work from Lewis W. Jones concerning the Fisk Folk Culture seminar for which Work was a consultant and a detailed course syllabus

including summaries of each topic to be covered and a list of faculty responsible for each session.

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Series Description: (continued)

Series III. Manuscript field notes and research materials. Folders 7-9.

This series and the one which follows consist of materials gathered and consulted by Work to support his scholarship in Negro folk music. Included are lists of field recordings given by John W. Work III to Alan Lomax, 1941 and 1942; an undated list of [field?] recordings in Work's hand and a copy of a holograph list of mostly commercial recordings from the Work's record case; lists of performers and notes and transcriptions of Negro folk music collected by Work, some identified by location or source; slight, scattered magazine and newspaper clippings; copies of titles pages and occasional tables of contents of publications; two flyers from the Festival of Old Time Music, Fort Valley Georgia 6-8 March 1942; and a 5x7 black and white 1942 photograph of "Son" Sims and Muddy Water[s] labelled in Work's hand. (Copies of this photographs are filed in the Center photograph file.)

Series IV. Printed research materials. Folders 10-12.

Included are six monographs and scores (In Arcadia, A Musical Play in Two Acts, by David Stevens, Songs of Stephen Foster, Ten American Songs by Gladys Pitcher, Songs of All Time by Olive Dame Campbell, Songs With A Message No. 1 by Thomas A. Dorsey, and Asher Sizemore and Little Jimmie's Songs of the Soil) and three serials (Tones and Overtones, fall and summer 1954, and Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin, September 1955). Filed following these materials is a score, Appalachia: Three Fiddle and Game Tunes, by John W. Work.

Series V. Sound recordings. 10 10" instantaneous discs. 13 12" instantaneous discs. 1200' audio tape. Commercial 78 rpm album set.

These instantenous discs include recordings of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a Pulaski TN church service, the Golden Gate and Fairfield Four gospel quartets, and several blues singers. Digital and analog tape copies of these discs made by Center audio specialist Bruce Nemerov in 1989 and 1990 are filed as Series I in the JOHN W. WORK III COLLECTION; Nemerov's audio logs listing songs and performers are filed with the inventory of that collection. Commercial 78 rpm album set Chain Gang (Columbia C-22) by Joshua White.

Collection Contents (Folder/Box List):

Materials Cataloged Separately:

Arrangement:

Location:

Series I-IV are filed by accession number with other manuscript groups. Series V is filed with other manuscript sound discs. The two 8x10 glossy publicity photographs of Thomas A. Dorsey are filed by name in the photographic file.

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Related Materials:

Two sets of Work materials were assembled by Center director Paul Wells and audio specialist Bruce Nemerov in 1988/89 for a half-hour radio program "Roots of American Popular Music" which featured research and recordings by Work. The JOHN WESLEY WORK III COLLECTION includes copies of recordings given by Work to the Library of Congress Archive of American Folk Song listed by Work in series III above and tape copies of the discs described in Series V. Series I in the "ROOTS OF AMERICAN POPULAR MUSIC" RECORDS includes audio tapes of interviews with Work's colleagues and informants, copies of articles by/about Work and an audio tape and sheet music of a composition by Work.

MARC:

EAD: