

TENNESSEE STATE PARKS FOLKLIFE PROJECT RECORDS RECORD GROUP 59

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Tennessee State Parks Folklife Project was begun in 1979 by Tennessee's Division of Parks and Recreation to preserve the unique qualities of local cultural groups. Supported by a National Endowment for the Arts grant, and using equipment loaned from the American Folklife Center, three professionally trained folklorists were hired to:

1. establish a contact with local musicians, craftsmen, storytellers, etc. in communities around six state parks
2. present programs in the parks using those local people
3. document on film and audio tape the folk art and folklore of the area
4. organize and present one larger community folk arts festival within a state park

To carry out the Folklife Project the state was divided into three regions, East, Middle, and West, with one folklorist assigned to each. Two state parks in each region were then identified as target areas, and served as the base from which the folklorist worked. In 1979, these were the Cumberland Mountain and Pickett State Parks in East Tennessee; Montgomery Bell and Cedars of Lebanon State Parks in Middle Tennessee; and Natchez Trace and Meeman Shelby State Parks in West Tennessee. In 1980, the target areas included Cove Lake and Norris Dam in East Tennessee; Fall Creek Falls and Rock Island in Middle Tennessee; and Chickasaw and Pickwick Landing in West Tennessee.

Using state parks as a base, folklorists associated with the project surveyed the surrounding areas, taping and photographing people and events representative of the area's folk tradition. Weekly programs were held in each of the "home" parks, with larger mini-festivals held in each region at the end of the summer.

The Tennessee State Parks Folklife Project produced more than 500 hours of audio tape, 9600 slides, and 2200 black and white negatives, including duplicates of scores of historic photographs which had been cached for years by their owners. The folklorists presented forty-one programs, inviting local people as program leaders. Exhibits of folk art and old photographs of park and local history were displayed in the park inns and interpretive centers.

The records of the Tennessee State Parks Folklife Project consist of the Administrative Papers, including grant information, correspondence, interview sheets, recording logs, and news articles, for 1979 and 1980; audio recordings, both original reel-

to-reel, and cassette duplicates, of interviews and programs; and black and white negatives, contact prints, and slides.

Also accompanying the records produced by the official staff of the project are records which have been donated by interested folklorists outside the project, and which either utilize materials from the official Folklife Project materials or were produced by people outside the Project using the Folklife Project's format. These include audio tapes and accompanying documentation from Warrior's Path State Park, Kingsport, Tennessee, a series of "Toasts" done by Nelson Wilson of Memphis, Tennessee, and a collection of audio tapes produced by the Big South Fork National Project.

Due to the nature of the material collected, this collection is a valuable resource for anyone studying the early life and ways of the settlers of Tennessee. The interviews include material on early history and settlement, early industries, educational practices, and such folk arts as quilting, spinning and weaving, molasses making, whittling, herbal medicines, farming techniques, and of course, music.

The material in this record group will also be useful to students of contemporary life of the many inhabitants of Tennessee's smaller communities. For many citizens of Tennessee, life has changed little in the past 50 years. Many of the people interviewed by the Folklife Project are living examples of a way of life commonly assumed to have passed.

The collection is divided primarily into basic record types. Series I consists of the official written records generated by the project staff, and those written records of other projects which have been donated to accompany and enrich the Folklife Project Collection. Series II is made up of the audio recordings which were produced by the Folklife Project, and those other projects which are subsumed under its title. Series III consists of photographic records, both negatives and slides which were produced for the Tennessee State Parks Folklife Project.

PROCESSED: 1984

ACCESS: Email reference.tsla@tn.gov or call (615) 741-2764. Paper finding aid available in the repository, organized first by year, then state park name, then event (interview, performance, etc.).

RESEARCH FACILITIES: Audio equipment available for listening, copies can be made on CD, duplication of photographs and slides may be arranged. Photocopies of documents can be made with some restrictions.

SIZE AND FORMAT: Includes approximately 1,300 unpublished tape recordings, 1,000 photo prints, 2,200 photo negatives, 9,600 slides, and reference books and journals in the library collection.

KEY TOPICS: Folklore collection concentrates on all phases of Tennessee folklife and culture; music includes blues, bluegrass, country, old-time, ballads, shape note singing. Images include photographs of folk art, quilts, informants, and programs associated with the project.