FOLKSONG QUESTIONNAIRE

Joint Committee on Folk Arts, W.P.A.

March 15, 1939
GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

1. This questionnaire has been prepared for use in conjunction with the Manual for Folklore Studies of the Federal Writers' Project. (See especially Section 6, "Instructions to Field Workers," for methods of locating sources and making contacts with informants, interviewing, and recording and submitting data.)

2. It has been suggested that the interviewer interview himself according to Part I, and that his life history be used as a means of evaluating his material.

3. The questions in Parts III and IV should be phrased in your own way. Be sure to submit the rephrased questions together with the answers. These will not only serve as a check on the answers but will make an interesting study in themselves. Additional questions are also welcome.

4. As far as possible, in Parts III and IV, take down the answers in the exact words of the informant. Do not, however, write down more than is absolutely necessary in the presence of the informant, unless you have first gained his confidence and consent. A remark like the following will often prove helpful in breaking down prejudice against note-taking: "What you say is so good that I want to get it down just as you say it."

5. Folksong collectors should ask their informants for all kinds of musical and oral material, including game and dance songs and folk tales, to be recorded on discs, and have informants speak as much as possible of the accompanying information for recording. Group materials, such as sermons and conversations, should also be recorded.

6. The questions in Parts III and IV should be adapted for types of folklore material other than folksongs.

7. The questions in Part IV are optional but important for the study of the psychological and aesthetic factors of folk singing (mood, tone, style, taste, appreciation) and should be answered wherever possible.

8. Each sheet should bear the name and address of the collector.
PART I

Case History of the Informant

1. Full name
2. Complete address (street or RFD, town, county, state)
3. Place and date of birth
4. Family history
   a. Father's name, birthplace and ancestry
   b. Mother's name, birthplace and ancestry
   (The family history should be carried back as far as possible.)
5. Places of residence and travel, with their approximate time
6. Education
7. Extent and nature of reading
8. Church membership and activity
9. Memberships and activities in other organizations
10. Other social and cultural contacts and general social and cultural standing
11. Occupational history, with place and approximate time of employment
12. Family (wife, children, grandchildren)
13. Names and addresses of close friends and acquaintances (to be used for additional information and as additional informants)
14. Population and geographic situation of community
15. Ethnic and industrial composition of community
16. Historical, antiquarian and folklore societies, library and educational facilities, in or near the community
17. Description and character sketch (and if possible, photographs) of informant,
    (Pictures of informants, in both working and "best" clothes, are valuable data
    for the history of American costume.)
PART II
Circumstances of Interview

1. Date and time of interview
2. Place of interview
3. Source of information (name and address of person leading to contact)
4. Intermediary (name and address of person arranging interview)
5. Name and address of person accompanying interviewer
6. Description (and, if possible, photographs) of room, house, surroundings, etc.
7. Description (and, if possible, photographs) of folk or unusual musical instruments played or owned by informant. (See Some Notes Upon the Recording of Folk Music.)
8. Comment (preferably in narrative form) on other circumstances of the interview, especially details which contribute to our understanding of the method of handling informants, the technique of questioning, the informant's attitudes and reactions, etc.
PART III
Case History of the Song

1. How was the song collected — from dictation or singing or both? (If possible get the song from the singer first by dictation, after hearing it sung once; then, after the singer has approved the written text, get him to sing it again and indicate the variations made in the singing. Check every text by reading it back.)

2. By what title or name is the song known to the singer? Has he ever heard it by any other name?

3. When, where, and from whom did the singer learn it, and when, where and from whom did that person learn it?

4. How did he learn it? Actually taught? Heard at regular intervals, on such occasions as parties, work? Heard under unusual circumstances? At what age? How long did it take to learn?

5. Why did he learn it? What quality in the song (melody, interest of story, words, truthfulness to life) attracted him?

6. Has he changed it from the way he learned it? If so, how?

7. Did the singer ever see it written down or printed or hear it on a record? If so, where? Did he learn it from that source? Is the recorded version like his?

8. When and how frequently does the singer sing it?

9. How is the song sung? (Solo? Ever sung in a group and if so, how? What instrument used for accompaniment?)

10. What kind of song is it? (Try to get the singer's own classification. Do not suggest classifications unless the singer fails to understand, and then preferably by indirection; e.g., If the song is a sad one, you might say, "You wouldn't call this a comic song?")

11. How good does he think the song is, and why? (This may be a comparative question; that is, after ten songs have been recorded you may ask: "Which do you like better, and why?")

12. Does he know whether the song deals with an actual happening? If so, when and where did it take place? If not, what does he think about the truth of the song, and why?

13. Give the singer's explanation of peculiar and obsolete words and phrases.

14. Is the song widely known in its present form, or is it known to comparatively few?

15. Does he know other tunes to the same or similar words or other words to the same tune?

16. If the singer has a manuscript of the song, ask permission to copy it. Copy it exactly, but do not use it as the collected text. (In singing, singers frequently vary a text.)
PART IV  
Aesthetic and Psychological Factors  

1. When did he first really like songs?  
2. When did he first like to sing?  
3. How did he feel when he first began to sing, especially publicly?  
4. Did he ever sing in school?  
5. Has the singer performed at festivals, in competitions, upon platforms, or for radio or sound-recording?  
6. Does he sing differently (e.g., more or less loudly) under different conditions or circumstances?  
7. Does he drink when he sings?  
8. What has his reputation as a singer been, and why?  
9. What is his style of singing and repertoire (clarity, expression, loudness; completeness of memory; number of songs; kind of songs)?  
10. What effect do his songs have on the rest of his life and on the lives of the people who listen to them?  
11. Do women specialize in certain types of songs? When do they sing?  
12. Where and when do people sing most? At night? At parties?  
13. Why, when, and where does he like to sing?  
14. Do certain songs go with certain moods? What are they?  
15. What kind of songs does he like best?  
16. What kind of songs does he like and dislike on phonograph or radio?  
17. What kind of singing does he like and dislike on phonograph or radio?  
18. Why did people like to sing in the old days?  
19. What kind of songs did they like, and why?