

LEE HAYS COLLECTION FINDING AID

Prepared by Amulya Mandava, August 2008, based on a preliminary inventory by Lori Elaine Taylor.

Collection Summary

Creator: Hays, Lee, 1914-1981

Title: Lee Hays Collection

Dates: 1923-1981.

Abstract: The Lee Hays Collection of papers and recordings measures 6.25 linear feet and dates from 1923 to 1981. The collection includes original writings, correspondence, and miscellaneous projects by Lee Hays; business records, interviews and features related to Lee Hays; and clippings saved by Lee Hays.

Extent: Six record boxes (6.25 linear feet).

Provenance

The Smithsonian Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections acquired the "Lee Hays Archives" in 1992 as a donation from Harold C. Leventhal and Doris Kaplan, who acquired the collection upon Lee Hays' death in 1981. The donation included materials produced by Lee Hays, as well as materials of interest to him that were found in his possession. The Archive is a collection of papers that includes items relating to Hays' songs, non-fiction, fiction, miscellaneous projects, correspondence and business, as well as interviews with him, features about him, and clippings that he collected.

Restrictions

Restrictions may apply concerning the use, duplication, or publication of items in these collections. Consult the archivists for additional information.

Scope and Content Note

The collection is divided into seven series according to type of material: Correspondence, Business, Interviews, Features on Lee Hays, Projects and Writings, Clippings, and Audio Recordings. Within these series are various texts, fiction, non-fiction, and scripts; miscellaneous project and idea materials; business documents; personal and business correspondence; and items created by or relating to Lee Hays. These materials are in the form of both typescript and handwritten papers and audio recordings: sheet music, notes, letters, published works, etc.

Biographical Note

Lee Hays (1914-1981) was an influential American folk-singer, songwriter, author, and activist. His legacy, both literary and musical, emphasizes the dynamic relationship between folk culture and contemporary events and issues. As is clear from his essay "The Folk Song Bridge", Hays conceived of folk music as a living, breathing "process". Born in Arkansas to a Methodist preacher, Hays' first experiences with music revolved around the church. His political awakening came later, when he returned to Arkansas from Ohio in 1934. Under the

wing of mentors such as Claude Williams and Zilphia Johnson, Hays began to fight for the cause of sharecroppers and union workers. His musical ability and passion for social justice came together as he used music to represent the voice of labor, replacing the religious motifs of folk and gospel songs with pro-union themes.

Upon moving to the north in 1940, Hays met Pete Seeger, another folk musician. Hays and Seeger shared the common goal of spreading political folk songs, and their collaborations with Woody Guthrie and Millard Lampell led to the creation of the Almanac Singers the same year. Later, the four band members, along with other folk musicians such as Burl Ives and Sis Cunningham, established the *People's Songs* organization and publication to create and distribute labor songs. However, conflict with Seeger led to Hays' pressured resignation from both of these endeavors. He moved in with his mentor, Howard Lowenfels, and began to focus more and more on his writing. Though Hays was a prolific writer whose work spanned articles, essays, short stories, poetry, and songs, he is rarely recognized for his literary achievement. His writing often centered on the social and political themes for which he is best known—labor rights, racism, poverty and inequality—and used folk culture and folk narrative to address those problems.

Seeger and Hays eventually made amends, and in 1948 they had formed The Weavers with Fred Hellerman and Ronnie Gilbert, bringing folk music to a national audience. However, as the political climate in America began to shift in the 1950's with the onset of the red scare, the Weavers were blacklisted and ultimately had to disband. Though he was under investigation by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and had no steady income, Hays continued to write both fiction and non-fiction during the three year blacklisting. In 1955, the Weavers finally reunited for a highly successful revival under manager Harold C. Leventhal, but as years passed, the group split up again, and Hays began to focus on various other projects. It was at this time that he produced the bulk of his memoirs, began a project on Cisco Houston, and recorded folk music for children with his group The Baby Sitters. In 1980, the Weavers reunited for a concert in Carnegie Hall, and Hays' last performance with them was in 1981. Hays died in 1981 as a result of diabetic cardiovascular disease.

Processing Notes and Arrangement

An original, basic processing of the Lee Hays Collection was done by Lori Elaine Taylor following its donation. In 2008, the collection was analyzed and re-organized to group like materials together in series and subseries in chronological order. No new items have been added to the collection.

Container List:

Six record boxes (6.25 linear feet).

Box 1: Correspondence

Box 2: Correspondence (cont.), Business papers, Interviews, Features.

Box 3: Songs, Non-Fiction.

Box 4: Non-Fiction (cont.), Fiction, Musical Productions.

Box 5: Radio Scripts, Cisco Houston Project, Miscellaneous Projects, Clippings.

Box 6: Audio Recordings.

Major Subject and Name Authority Terms

Almanac Singers

Baby Sitters (Musical group)

Folk music—United States

Folk songs—United States

Gilbert, Ronnie

Guthrie, Woody, 1912-1967

Hays, Lee, 1914-1981

Houston, Cisco

Lampell, Millard, 1919-1997

Leventhal, Harold

Political ballads and songs—United States

Popular music—20th century—United States

Seeger, Pete, 1919-

Topical songs—United States

United States. Congress. House. Committee on Un-American Activities

Weavers (Musical group)

Series Description

Series 1: Correspondence

Description: Subseries 1 contains personal correspondence, most notably: correspondence with Pete and Toshi Seeger, correspondence with Harold Leventhal, letters from President Lyndon Johnson and other politicians, correspondence with Sue Hays and Minnie Frank Hays Moseley, correspondence with Joe Thompson, correspondence with various individuals regarding the Weavers, correspondence about Woody Guthrie and Cisco Houston, and fan mail. Subseries 2 contains miscellaneous correspondence and correspondence that relates explicitly to Lee Hays' business, musical projects, research, and writing, including correspondence about the Weavers and Baby Sitters and exchanges with editors, researchers, and Vanguard. Subseries 1 is in alphabetical order by last name, with letters from fans at the end. Total 112 Folders in Box 1 and Box 2.

Subseries 1: Personal Correspondence. Total 97 Folders in Box 1 and Box 2.

Subseries 2: Miscellaneous, Business and Research. Total 15 Folders in Box 2.

Series 2: Business Papers

Description: This series contains items such as stock certificates, contracts, school transcripts, and Lee Hays' last will and testament. Total 12 Folders in Box 2

Series 3: Interviews

Description: This series contains various interviews with Lee Hays. Total 7 Folders in Box 2.

Series 4: Features on Lee Hays

Description: This series includes articles about Lee Hays and his work, photographs of Hays, tributes, obituaries, a story about him written by Ellen Hays, and a drawing of Hays as "Caesar" by Woody Guthrie. Total 9 Folders in Box 2.

Series 5: Projects and Writings

Description: This series contains papers from Lee Hays' various projects, including songs, fiction, non-fiction, musical productions, radio scripts, materials from the Cisco Houston project, and a collection of miscellaneous projects and ideas. Total 157 Folders in Box 3, Box 4, and Box 5.

Subseries 1: Songs

Contains various materials— lyrics, sheet music, notes—relating to songs written by Lee Hays and songs of interest to him. The folders are organized in alphabetical order by song title, with two Baby Sitters' materials folders at the beginning of this subseries, and song idea folders at the end of the subseries. Songs include "If I Had a Hammer", "Kisses Sweeter Than Wine", and "Tomorrow is a Highway". Total 42 Folders in Box 3.

Subseries 2: Non-Fiction

Contains Lee Hays' non-fictional work, including articles and essays such as "The Folk Bridge" and "People's Songs", commercials, Hays' work on the Weavers and the Almanac Singers, excerpts from his memoirs. Total 15 Folders in Box 3.

Subseries 3: Fiction

Contains Hays' fictional work—primarily short stories and poetry, and the notes that accompany them. This subseries contains both published stories and drafts, among them: "A Banquet and a Half" (in English, Spanish, and Italian as published), "On the Banks of the Ohio", the Little Sam and Opal stories, and a few fictional works from Hays' childhood. Poetry includes "How to Become a Folksinger" and "Deadbuggy". Total 49 Folders in Box 4.

Subseries 4: Musical Productions

Contains scripts, lyrics and notes for various musical productions created and written or co-written by Hays, including "A Patchwork Ballad", "Corey" and "Space Cantata". Total 6 Folders in Box 4.

Subseries 5: Radio Scripts

Contains handwritten and typed outlines and scripts from Lee Hays' radio program. Topics include the Weavers, the Baby Sitters, and folk music in general (Roland Hayes, Martha Schlamme, Songs of Poland and Russia, Tony Schwartz, etc). Total 8 Folders in Box 5.

Subseries 6: Cisco Houston Project

Contains transcripts of interviews with Cisco Houston, correspondence with and about Cisco Houston, a discography, and miscellaneous notes. Total 21 Folders in Box 5.

Subseries 7: Miscellaneous Projects

Contains miscellaneous projects and their materials. Materials in this subseries include Hays' work on the Weavers Reunion in 1980, the Sharecroppers Film, the Baby Sitters, the Almanac Singers, various album notes, pieces written by others and edited by Hays, and pieces whose authorship is in question. The subseries also includes two folders of notes and ideas that correspond to Hays' fiction and non fiction. Total 16 Folders in Box 5.

Series 6: Clippings

Description: Contains newspaper articles, programs, reviews, and correspondence that were collected by Lee Hays. Subseries 1 includes clippings related to the Weavers and the Baby Sitters. Subseries 2 contains clippings related to miscellaneous subjects, among them folklore. Total 16 folders in Box 5.

Subseries 1: The Weavers and Baby Sitters. Total 5 Folders in Box 5.

Subseries 2: Miscellaneous. Total 11 Folders in Box 5.

Series 7: Audio Recordings

Description: A collection of miscellaneous audio tapes and wire recordings created by Lee Hays. Includes musical recordings and recorded interviews with Cisco Houston. Total 45 tapes and one box of wire recordings in Box 6.