

# Woody Guthrie Manuscript Collection

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American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

Washington, D.C.

2002

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Finding aid URL: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.afc/eadafc.af001001>

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## Collection Summary

**Collection Number:** AFC 1940/004

**Title:** Woody Guthrie Manuscript Collection

**Span Dates:** 1935-1951

**Repository:** Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**Extent (original):** 3 boxes; 6.5 linear feet

**Creator:** Guthrie, Woody, 1912-1967

**Creator:** Archive of American Folk Song

**Language:** English

**Abstract:** Includes correspondence, essays, drawings and doodles, and song lyrics by Woody Guthrie. Many of these materials date to the early 1940s, when Guthrie was in correspondence with several Library of Congress staff members, primarily folklorist Alan Lomax. Included in these predominantly unpublished materials are letters between Guthrie and Lomax, letters from Library of Congress staff sent to or concerning Guthrie, and lyrics and essays that Guthrie sent to Lomax. Many of the documents portray Guthrie's opinions of the political and social conflicts of the time. The majority of the songs are ballads with topical or protest content, frequently consisting of new lyrics written to popular and traditional tunes.

## Scope and Content Note

Woody Guthrie was a prolific artist known for his achievements as a singer-songwriter and as an author. Guthrie toured and performed for a period of approximately twenty-five years, exhibiting a life-long dedication to social activism by playing his politically charged music for audiences around the nation. His output included nearly three thousand songs, several novels, and other writings in the form of articles, essays, poems, and letters. In addition, Guthrie also painted, drew cartoons, and often illustrated his writings.

From 1940 to 1950, Guthrie corresponded with staff at the Library of Congress. The most significant and frequent correspondence occurred between 1940 and 1942, when Guthrie wrote regularly to the Assistant in Charge of the Archive of American Folk Song, Alan Lomax. Their correspondence explores political issues, current events, career and recording issues, and includes personal exchanges. In addition, Guthrie sent Lomax prose pieces and other creative writings, some of which are reminiscent of journal or diary entries in their stream-of-consciousness nature. Some pieces are written on paper bags and tissue paper, some include doodles or sketches. In addition, Guthrie sent lyrics of his songs in several formats, including one large hand-bound set, smaller unbound sets, and single pages enclosed in letters. Most of these songs are ballads that used familiar melodies but addressed contemporary situations. Some of the manuscripts were written prior to 1940 and were subsequently sent to Lomax during their correspondence. In some cases Guthrie reworked or annotated old manuscripts before sending them.

## Biographical History and Administrative History

Woody Guthrie, born in Okemah, Oklahoma in 1912 and raised in Texas, moved to California during the Depression, where he met actor and activist Will Geer and toured migrant labor camps documenting conditions and injustices in the camps for *The Light* newspaper. He also performed on Los Angeles radio KFVD-LA, singing old-time ballads, some of which he updated with lyrics about contemporary issues. Alan Lomax, assistant in charge of the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress, first heard Woody Guthrie at a concert in New York City in March of 1940, shortly after Guthrie had relocated there.

Alan Lomax arranged for Guthrie to travel to Washington, D.C. to record an oral life history that included traditional and original songs, and encouraged him to write his autobiography. Guthrie performed on several "Folk Music of America" radio shows hosted by Alan Lomax on CBS's American School of the Air. In New York, Woody Guthrie joined Lomax's sister, Bess Lomax Hawes, Pete Seeger, and others in a singing group, the Almanac Singers, for which Guthrie wrote protest ballads and songs. More information on Woody Guthrie's life and career can be found through the Woody Guthrie Foundation and Archives at <http://www.woodyguthrie.org/>.

The Archive of American Folk Song was founded in 1928 at the Library of Congress to collect and preserve American folksongs. During the years when the earliest Guthrie collections were acquired, from 1940 to 1950, the Archive was directed

by: John A. Lomax (1932-1942), Alan Lomax (assistant in charge, 1937-1942), Benjamin Botkin (1942-1945), and Duncan Emrich (1946-1954). It was through Alan Lomax's recording projects and his personal friendship with Woody Guthrie that these early materials were added to the Archive. When Alan Lomax's entire collection of papers and recordings was acquired by the American Folklife Center in 2004, additional Woody Guthrie manuscripts were included, which add to the Archive's Guthrie holdings. To reflect its broader mission and collections the Archive was re-named the Archive of Folk Culture in 1981 and is now a part of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress.

## Subjects

Almanac Singers  
Ballads, English--United States  
Folk music--United States  
Folk songs, English--United States  
Folk singers--United States--Biography  
Guthrie, Woody, 1912-1967  
Lomax, Alan, 1915-2002  
Musicians--Correspondence, reminiscences, etc.  
Political ballads and songs--United States  
Popular music--United States--1931-1940  
Popular music--United States--1941-1950  
Protest songs--United States  
Radio broadcasting--1940-1950  
Songbooks--United States  
Working class--United States--Songs and music  
World War, 1939-1945--United States--Songs and music

## Administrative Information

### Arrangement

In 1987, archivist Marsha Maguire and Archive head Joseph C. Hickerson processed and summarized the materials, based in part on an earlier list compiled by researcher Richard A. Reuss. The manuscripts are organized in the following order: administrative, song lyrics, writings, correspondence, and oversize material.

### Access

Materials are located in the Archive of Folk Culture. Viewing access to the materials is unrestricted, though restrictions apply concerning the use, duplication, or publication of items. Consult a reference librarian in the Folklife Reading Room for specific information. Selected letters and manuscript materials are available online through the American Memory web presentation "Woody Guthrie and the Archive of American Folk Song: Correspondence, 1940-1950" at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wghtml/wghtml.html>.

### Acquisition

The materials were acquired through Woody Guthrie's correspondence and personal acquaintance with Alan Lomax, who was assistant in charge of the Archive of American Folk Song from 1937-1942. The majority of the materials, mostly Guthrie's writings dating from 1935 to 1951, entered the Archive between 1940 and 1951.

### Preferred Citation

Woody Guthrie Manuscript Collection, Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

### Related Material - Woody Guthrie Manuscript Collections at the American Folklife Center

*Ken Lindsay Collection of Woody Guthrie Correspondence*

AFC 2005/006. Ken Lindsay (1923-2001) was a founding partner of the Challenge Jazz Club in London, England, and worked for the International Bookshop, London, at the time of this correspondence, 1952 to 1953, in which he encouraged Guthrie's writing projects and invited him to consider touring in Europe; 29 items.

#### *Alan Lomax Collection*

AFC 2004/004. Woody Guthrie correspondence within the Alan Lomax Collection dates from 1940 to 1953, most written by Woody Guthrie to Alan Lomax, whose friendship with Guthrie continued after Lomax left the Library of Congress in 1942. Also included are collections of songs, essays, clippings, a birth announcement for Arlo Guthrie, and issues of the *Woody Guthrie Newsletter*, 1960-1966, which documents Guthrie's activities and failing health up to the time of his death in 1967; circa ten linear inches in 3 boxes, including oversize.

#### **Related Material - Woody Guthrie Sound Recordings at the American Folklife Center**

##### *Alan Lomax Collection of Woody Guthrie Recordings, 1940*

AFS 3407-3423. Preservation copy LWO 4872, reels 225A-227A; recorded March 21, 22 and 27, 1940, at Radio Broadcasting Division of the Department of Interior, Washington, D.C. Seventeen 12-inch discs: 4 hours, 27 minutes duration. Conversation, songs, stories, and life story or autobiography as told by Woody Guthrie to Alan and Elizabeth Lomax. Recorded by Nev. Rumble.

##### *Alan Lomax CBS Radio Series Collection*

AFC 1939/002, AFS 4507. Preservation copy LWO 5111 reel 442; American School of the Air radio broadcast aired April 2, 1940, from New York, Columbia Broadcasting System. One 16-inch disc: 14 minutes duration (5 minutes feature Guthrie). Part I of the 22nd American School of the Air "Folk Music of America" series segment, "Poor Farmer Songs." Features Alan Lomax, the Golden Gate Quartet, and Woody Guthrie.

##### *Alan Lomax CBS Radio Series Collection*

AFC 1939/002, AFS 4508. Preservation copy LWO 4872 reel 314; American School of the Air radio broadcast aired April 2, 1940, from New York, Columbia Broadcasting System. One 16-inch disc: 15 minutes duration (13 minutes feature Guthrie). Part II of the 22nd American School of the Air "Folk Music of America" series segment, "Poor Farmer Songs." Features Alan Lomax, the Golden Gate Quartet, and Woody Guthrie.

##### *Alan Lomax CBS Radio Series Collection*

AFC 1939/002, AFS 13498-99. Preservation copy LWO 5111 reel 428A; American School of the Air radio broadcast aired April 23, 1940, from New York, Columbia Broadcasting System. One 16-inch disc: 27 minutes duration (3 minutes feature Guthrie). The final broadcast of "Folk Music in America" for the 1939-1940 season, featuring Alan Lomax with the Golden Gate Quartet, Woody Guthrie, and Leadbelly.

##### *Leadbelly Radio Audition Collection*

AFC 1991/018. One 16-inch disc: 15 minutes duration. Leadbelly performs for NBC radio on June 9, 1940, with narration by Woody Guthrie.

##### *Alan Lomax CBS Radio Series Collection*

AFC 1939/002, AFS 4510. Preservation copy LWO 4872 reel 315; aired August 19, 1940, from New York, Columbia Broadcasting System. One 16-inch disc: 30 minutes duration (12 minutes feature Guthrie). The pilot broadcast of "Back Where I Come From," on the topic of "Weather," featuring Clifton (Kip) Fadiman, host; Len Doyle, "The Expert"; the Golden Gate Quartet, Woody Guthrie, Burl Ives, Willie Johnson, and Josh White.

##### *Mike Seeger Collection*

AFC 1995/004 and dub numbers 14A5-14A9; recorded circa 1940 in New York. One 7-inch reel copied from a disc recording: 10 minutes duration. Woody Guthrie performs with Pete Seeger.

##### *Songs by Woody Guthrie*

AFS 4491. Preservation copy LWO 4872 reel 311A; recorded January 4, 1941, in the Recording Laboratory at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. One 16-inch disc: 28 minutes duration. Seven songs performed by Woody Guthrie; each song includes spoken introduction. Recorded by Alan Lomax and John Langenegger.

##### *Almanac Singers Recording*

AFS 6100-6105. Preservation copy LWO 3493 reels 40B and 41A; recorded January 1942 in New York. Two 10-inch, four 12-inch discs: 18 minutes duration. The Almanac Singers and Alan Lomax, John A. Lomax, and Earl Robinson.

*Woody Guthrie Concert and Conversation, April 14, 1951*

AFC 1991/003; recorded April 14, 1951, at St. John's College, Annapolis, Maryland. Cassette copy of a wire spool recording: 24 minutes duration. Guthrie performs in concert at St. John's College. There are very few recordings of Guthrie concerts; this recording is the last known recorded concert performance.

**Related Collections and Resources at the American Folklife Center**

*Joe Broadman Collection of Bob Dylan Studio Sessions*

AFC 1992/004. A tape recording of twenty-five songs performed in May 1961 in Minneapolis by Bob Dylan. Twenty-three of the songs are traditional folksongs or Woody Guthrie compositions.

*Barbara Dane Collection*

AFC 1980/001, RWC 6408/ SR 30. "Sing-Out with Barbara Dane" tribute to Woody Guthrie. Radio program hosted by Barbara Dane and Irwin Silber. Brief performance by Irwin Silber. Guthrie recordings played include "Dust Bowl Refugee," "Gypsy Davy," "Pretty Boy Floyd" and many others. Recorded/aired circa 1965.

*Les Gilliam Collection*

AFC 1999/009. Two promotional videos of narratives and songs performed by Les Gilliam, the "Oklahoma Balladeer." "Oklahoma Pride" includes songs of Woody Guthrie.

*Sound Portraits American Talker Collection*

AFC 2000/012. This is an open collection of radio programs based on American Folklife Center spoken word recordings. More will be added as received. Includes Woody Guthrie narratives.

*Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC), Washington Chapter, Archive of Folk Culture Researchers Panel, March 29, 2001*

AFC 2001/005. Panel discussion including Mark Jackson speaking about Woody Guthrie performances and recordings. Topics include "This Land Is Your Land" and "Jolly Banker"; Guthrie's contributions to a radio play broadcast about syphilis and VD; and Guthrie's interactions with Alan Lomax.

*Artifact*

Letter from Ellis Paul attached to a stone from the foundation of Guthrie's home in Okemah, Oklahoma. August 1998.

*Vertical files*

An ever-growing collection of print material on Woody Guthrie, including articles, bibliographies, discographies, inventories, liner notes, programs, and promotional material from record companies. Currently there are 9 linear inches of material regarding Woody Guthrie, 1940 to the present. An additional ¾ inch pertains to the Guthrie family. Materials are located in the Folklife Reading Room, Library of Congress.

**Related Materials at the Library of Congress**

Other divisions of the Library of Congress have additional archival materials pertaining to Woody Guthrie. The Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division holds 12 hours of sound recordings and one 20-minute film; the Music Division holds microfilmed manuscript material; and the Prints and Photographs Division holds 33 items in the form of photographic prints and printed materials.

For further details on the materials in these divisions, visit:

Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division at <http://www.loc.gov/rr/mopic/>

Music Division at <http://www.loc.gov/rr/perform/>

Prints and Photographs Division at <http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/>

**Collection Concordance by Format**

Quantity	Physical Extent (original)	Location	Item Numbers
1	manuscript box	AFC	Box 1

<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Physical Extent (original)</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Item Numbers</b>
2	oversize boxes	AFC	Boxes 2-3

## Description of Series

*Container*

*Series*

**Series I: Manuscript Materials**

Correspondence, essays, prose, doodles, and song lyrics written by Woody Guthrie between 1935 and 1951.

# Collection Inventory

## Container

## Contents

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### Series I: Manuscript Materials

Correspondence, essays, prose, doodles, and song lyrics written by Woody Guthrie between 1935 and 1951.

#### BOX 1

FOLDER 1	Collection Finding Aid
FOLDER 2	Inventories and Case File
FOLDER 3	Correspondence: Letters (mostly to Alan Lomax, Duncan Emrich), 1940-50 and undated
FOLDER 4	Correspondence: Letters of Permission, 1942-48
FOLDER 5	Correspondence: Post Cards, 1941
FOLDER 6	Correspondence: Letters to Record Companies, 1940, and circa June 1942
FOLDER 7	Correspondence: Library of Congress to Guthrie, 1940-50 and undated
FOLDER 8	Correspondence: Library of Congress concerning Guthrie, 1940-42 and undated
FOLDER 9	Lyrics: "Alonzo M. Zilch's Own Collection of Original Songs and Ballads," 1935
FOLDER 10	Lyrics: "Farther Along," March 1941
FOLDER 11	Lyrics: "The Final Call," April 1941
FOLDER 12	Lyrics: Old Time Hill Country Songs, undated
FOLDER 13	Lyrics: <i>Songs of Woody Guthrie</i> , songbook, undated Carbon copy. For original, see Box 2 of 3.
FOLDER 14	Lyrics: "Ten of Woody Guthrie's Songs: Book One," April 1945
FOLDER 15	Lyrics: Wartime Songs, 1940-42 and undated
FOLDER 16	Writings: "No Title," undated
FOLDER 17	Writings: "The Railroad Cricket," 1941
FOLDER 18	Writings: Undated essay on 8" x 12" envelope, circa Fall 1940
FOLDER 19	Writings: Three essays written between September and November 1940

Reference photocopy of oversize materials. For originals, see Box 3 of 3.

#### BOX 2

Lyrics: *Songs of Woody Guthrie*, songbook, undated

Original

#### BOX 3

Writings: Three essays written between September and November 1940

Original