



Smithsonian

Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage

Smithsonian Folklife Festival records

CFCH Staff

2017

Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections
Title:	Smithsonian Folklife Festival records
Identifier:	CFCH.SFF
Date:	1967-2016
Creator:	Smithsonian Institution. Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage
Extent:	1,948 Cubic feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The Festival of American Folklife, held annually since 1967 on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., was renamed the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 1998. This collection documents the planning, production, and execution of the annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival. These Festival records include administrative papers and the audiovisual documentation of annual Festivals (1967-ongoing). Finding aids are available here: Smithsonian Folklife Festival records .

Administrative Information

Related Archival Materials

Within the Rinzler Archives, related materials may be found in various collections such as the Ralph Rinzler papers and recordings, the Lily Spandorf drawings, the Diana Davies photographs, the Robert Yellin photographs, and the Curatorial Research, Programs, and Projects collection. Additional relevant materials may also be found in the Smithsonian Institution Archives concerning the Division of Performing Arts (1966-1983), Folklife Program (1977-1980), Office of Folklife Programs (1980-1991), Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies (1991-1999), Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (1999-present), and collaborating Smithsonian units, as well as in the administrative papers of key figures such as the Secretary and respective deputies. Users are encouraged to consult relevant finding aids and to contact Archives staff for further information.

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Folklife Festival records, Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Access by appointment only. Contact the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections at 202-633-7322 for additional information.

Access by appointment only. Where a listening copy or viewing copy has been created, this is indicated in the respective inventory; additional materials may be accessible with sufficient advance notice and, in some cases, payment of a processing fee. Older papers are housed at a remote location and may require a minimum of three weeks' advance notice and payment of a retrieval fee. Certain formats such as multi-track audio recordings and EIAJ-1 videoreels

(1/2 inch) may not be accessible. Contact the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections at 202-633-7322 or rinzlerarchives@si.edu for additional information.

Conditions Governing Use

Copyright restrictions apply. Contact archives staff for information.

Copyright and other restrictions may apply. Generally, materials created during a Festival are covered by a release signed by each participant permitting their use for personal and educational purposes; materials created as part of the fieldwork leading to a Festival may be more restricted. We permit and encourage such personal and educational use of those materials provided digitally here, without special permissions. Use of any materials for publication, commercial use, or distribution requires a license from the Archives; please submit this [form](#). Licensing fees may apply in addition to any processing fees.

Accruals

Further accruals are expected annually as each Festival is organized and its documentation is created. Additionally, ongoing digitization, preservation, and cataloguing efforts will allow additional materials from previous Festivals to become available on a retrospective basis.

Historical

The Festival of American Folklife, held annually since 1967 on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., was renamed the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 1998. It is produced by the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (1999-present) and by its predecessors: the Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies (1991-1999), Office of Folklife Programs (1979-1991), Folklife Program of the Office of American and Folklife Studies (1977-1979), and Division of Performing Arts (1967-1976). Beginning with the 1973 Festival, the National Park Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior became cosponsor of the Festival.

The Festival is organized to increase and diffuse knowledge about grassroots culture. It is a research-based, curated event, drawing on the efforts of Smithsonian staff, academic and lay scholars from the featured cultures, and people who know a great deal about their own cultures. The most distinctive feature of the Festival is its attempt to foreground the voices of tradition bearers as they demonstrate, discuss, and present their folklife and cultural heritage. Since its founding the Festival has always navigated between the various axes of art (as entertainment), cultural rights (as advocacy), education (as public service), and knowledge (as scholarship).

Since its founding, the Festival has featured exemplary tradition bearers from more than 50 nations, every region of the United States, scores of ethnic communities, more than 100 American Indian groups, and some 50 occupations. Each year's Festival typically includes several programs, each focusing on a state or region of the United States, a foreign country, an occupation, or a theme.

The Festival was born in 1967 during the tenure of Smithsonian Secretary S. Dillon Ripley, part of a larger effort to make the National Mall more accessible to the American public and to make the Smithsonian's programs more exciting and engaging. James Morris, director of Museum Services and then of the Division of Performing Arts, proposed that the Smithsonian host a folk festival as the centerpiece of the outdoors activities on the National Mall. Ralph C. Rinzler, then-director of field programs for the Newport Folk Festival, was engaged to help plan the 1967 Festival, serving as Festival Director from 1968-1982.

The Festival's growth and evolution over subsequent decades can be traced through introductory notes for each annual Festival. Those notes seek to provide an overview of that year's Festival and of each of its programs, as they were conceived by their organizers at the time. In certain cases, geographic names or other terms are retained that may not reflect current usage. Those notes also include detailed information on the institutional arrangements, key personnel, and major donors and partners for each annual Festival.

Scope and Contents

This collection documents the planning, production, and execution of the annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Materials include photographs, audio recordings, motion picture film and video recordings, notes, production drawings, contracts, memoranda, correspondence, informational materials, publications, and ephemera. In earlier years these materials were all created as paper records or analog media; ongoing retrospective digitization efforts aim to preserve those and make them more widely accessible. Increasingly, the Festival records are now born as digital media or electronic documents.

Staff and contractors of the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage collaborate with Smithsonian staff photographers to document the Festival in images. The Center's videographer, contract crews, volunteers, and interns video-record Festival performances and demonstrations. Volunteers trained by the Center's archivists record and log audiotapes at every Festival stage and discussion area. In recent years, the average documentation of a Festival may consist of some 10,000 images, several hundred audio recordings, and 5+ terabytes of video; this audiovisual documentation is complemented by thousands of pages of administrative and planning documents. In addition to the documentation of the Festival on the National Mall, the collection includes field research conducted by Smithsonian researchers or, increasingly, by researchers drawn from the community, state, or nation featured.

Festival papers

The Smithsonian Folklife Festival papers include the correspondence, memoranda, notes, planning documents, and various other records associated with the Festival as a whole or with one or more of its years or programs. This includes, among others, *administrative records* such as planning documents, contracts, agreements, and memoranda of understanding, correspondence, meeting materials, etc.; *programmatic records* pertaining to the development and curation of the Festival or one of its programs such as correspondence, reports, proposals, concepts, notes, other planning documents, etc.; *participant records* such as participant handbooks, participant invitation and contract letters, release/voucher forms, participant questionnaires, staffing and payment schedules, and related materials; and *artwork and graphic design files* used in publications, signage, and other media as well as associated release forms. It does not include such categories of papers as finance and administration records, personnel records, development records, publicity files, or technical project files.

For any given Festival, materials within the collection typically include:

Program books, publications, and ephemera

Program books were published from 1968 through 2011 and again in 2013, and typically included introductory essays and keynote essays on each program, as well as a list of Festival participants, schedule of activities, site map, and staff list. Occasionally, the schedule and lists were published separately from the essays. Beginning in 2012, a shorter guide provided an overview of each program, its participants, and schedule. Beginning in 2014, an annual review reported on the activities of the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, including the Festival. Digital versions of these materials, as well as site maps for each Festival except the first, are found as the first series within each annual collection. In addition, the Rinzler Archives houses one or more copies of the original printed versions of each publication. In later years, web resources were often published to enhance the Festival experience. Digitally archived copies of these resources are accessible through this finding aid.

For many Festivals, one or more posters were published. Cookbooks were occasionally published in connection with a Festival program, particularly in the case of a foreign country's participation. Materials aimed toward children or families, typically suggesting activities they could engage in during the Festival or before and after their visit, were published for many Festivals or programs. Original printed copies of such publications and ephemera are housed within the Rinzler Archives; as these are digitized over time they will be made available through this finding aid.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork may take the form of photographs, audio or video recordings, notes, transcripts, reports, correspondence, and other documents. Where these are clearly associated with a single Festival program, they are identified as such, housed discretely within the Rinzler Archive, and inventoried as part of that program. In some cases, fieldwork notes and reports may also be found among the Smithsonian Folklife Festival Papers, so the inventories within each program here may not always be comprehensive. As materials are processed over time, these inventories will be updated and enhanced.

Photographs

Photographs may include digital photographs, photographic prints, negatives, and slides, both black-and-white and color. These depict events and activities on the National Mall during the Festival, as well as informal activities of Festival participants at the hotel or while visiting Washington. Ongoing digitization efforts aim to preserve earlier analog photographs and make them more readily accessible. The Smithsonian's Digital Asset Management System (DAMS) stores all of the digital images, whether born digital (19XX-present) or digitized from analog originals. The present finding aid seeks to provide direct access to a sample of such photographs, although in most cases numerous other photographs also exist in the Rinzler Archives.

Audio

Throughout its history, the Festival has endeavored to create a comprehensive audio record of the performances, discussions, and other activities on all of its stages and performance venues, typically by taking a feed from that stage's sound reinforcement system. Occasionally, audio recordings also included interviews with craftspeople or Festival visitors who were not on stage, as well as evening rehearsals and informal interactions at the Festival hotel. Given the nature of the Festival as an outdoor event and the inevitable interference of airplanes flying overhead and traffic noises from adjacent streets, and given that the requirements of live sound reinforcement are not identical with those of audio recording, the resulting recordings are sometimes subject to interruption and technical shortcomings. In certain years, special arrangements were made for high-quality, multi-track recording, even if the vast majority of recordings are done at lower quality. At the time of recording, volunteers create logs or track sheets describing the content of each recording; in some cases these have been revised and corrected and in other cases the simultaneous logs have not been verified or revised. Retrospective digitization efforts aim to preserve older recordings and make them more widely accessible.

Video

Motion picture films and video recordings of Festival activities were created beginning in 1968 (for film) and 1973 (for video). In contrast with the audio recordings that sought to document primarily the activities on stage, the film and video efforts were typically both more inclusive (by covering crafts, occupational demonstrations, foodways, rehearsals, and non-stage events) and more selective (focusing on a sampling of each day's activities or on a single program, rather than beginning-to-end coverage of the entire Festival). As with the audio recordings, simultaneous written logs note what was recorded. Digital video is stored on the Smithsonian DAMS, with ongoing efforts to digitize older analog materials, whether born as motion picture film or as video.

Arrangement

The Smithsonian Folklife Festival records include one collection of papers and administrative documents and annual collections of the audiovisual documentation associated with each year's Festival.

Smithsonian Folklife Festival records:

- [Smithsonian Folklife Festival records: Papers](#)
- [1967 Festival of American Folklife records - \[Ongoing\]](#)

Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements note

The Rinzler Archives is continually engaged in digitization of archival materials to facilitate preservation and ready access by users. However, given the diversity of legacy formats of the originals, some older materials may not be available. Notably, certain older audio recordings cannot be played because of deterioration of the tape stock, and the Archives has no playback equipment for EIAJ-1 videoreels (1/2 inch) or multi-track audio recordings. Where listening or viewing copies are available, this is generally indicated for each item. Users are encouraged to contact Archives staff to verify that the materials of interest to them are already accessible, or to determine if they can be digitized as needed.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Folk art
- Folk festivals
- Folk music
- Folklore
- Food habits
- Language and languages
- Publications
- World music
- arts and crafts

Types of Materials:

- Audiocassettes
- Audiotapes
- Business records
- Contracts
- Correspondence
- Digital images
- Memorandums
- Negatives
- Notes
- Photographic prints
- Plans (drawings)
- Slides (photographs)
- Sound recordings
- Video recordings
- Videotapes

Names:

- Smithsonian Folklife Festival