



Smithsonian

National Museum of Natural History

Guide to the Frances Densmore papers, 1893-circa 1955

NAA Staff

2011

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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Anthropological Archives
Title:	MS 4250 Frances Densmore papers
Date:	1893-circa 1955
Identifier:	NAA.MS4250
Creator:	Densmore, Frances, 1867-1957
Extent:	2.71 Linear feet (4 boxes)
Language:	English .
Summary:	Papers include: diaries and extracts from diaries, account books, a scrapbook, letters received, lectures, reminiscences and brief manuscripts, field and work reports, notes on recording techniques and the preservation of Native American music, musical transcriptions, bibliographic notes, library items, tone photographs, a mouth organ (pitch pipe), and a slide rule.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Presented to the Bureau of American Ethnology (B.A.E.) by Frances Densmore at intervals, 1944-1955. Some materials received from the Densmore estate, circa 1962.

Separated Materials

Frances Densmore's song recordings were transferred to the Library of Congress.

The numerous ethnographic manuscripts submitted to the B.A.E. at intervals by Frances Densmore are individually catalogued under the following tribal or geographic headings: Acoma, Alaska, Alibamu, British Columbia, Chippewa, Choctaw, Cuna, Dakota, Iroquois, Menominee, Omaha, Papago, Quileute, Seminole, Winnebago, Yuman, and Zunu.

Five photographic portraits of Densmore (previously Item 1) have been separated out and added to the Portraits of anthropologists collection (Photo Lot 33).

The following three photographic albums, received from the Densmore estate, circa 1962, have been filed by tribe in the Source Prints Collection under B.A.E. No. 4250 (pt.):

(1) "Photographs taken among the Northern Ute by F. Densmore," on two trips, 1914 and 1916. Includes notation by Densmore as to nature of her work and list of captions for photographs. Album, 34 pp. (Several of the photographs were published in B.A.E. Bull. 75, "Northern Ute Music".) Frances Densmore appears in group photograph, p. 23(b).

(2) "Photographs and postcards of a western trip by F. Densmore," from two trips, 1923 and 1926, among the Indians at Neah Bay, Washington. (Results of two trips presented in Nootka and Quileute Music, B.A.E. Bull. 124.) Album, 70 pp. (See pp. 55 and 61 for photographs of Frances Densmore.)

(3) "Photographs taken at Neah Bay, Washington, and in hop-picking camp near Chilliwack, B.C., " 1926. Includes photographs taken by Frances Densmore, by C.A. Clay (a newspaper man from Seattle, Washington), and several by Asahel Curtis. Notation by Densmore on nature of her work and various captions supplied by Densmore. (Results of trip presented in B.A.E. Bull. 124, op. cit. and B.A.E. Bull. 136, No. 27, "Music of the Indians of British Columbia.") Album, 45 pp. See page 39 for photograph of Densmore's sister Margaret and Indians).

Processing Information

Inventory last updated by Anna M. Kerns, July 1998.

Finding aid encoded from a MARC collection-level record in 2009-2011. Revisions to the EAD were encoded by Katherine Madison in 2017.

Preferred Citation

Manuscript 4250 Frances Densmore papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution

Restrictions

The Frances Densmore papers are open for research.

Access to the Frances Densmore papers requires an appointment.

Conditions Governing Use

Contact the repository for terms of use.

Biographical Note

Frances Densmore was born on May 21, 1867 in Red Wing, Minnesota. Trained in piano, organ, and harmony at the Oberlin Conservatory and in counterpoint at Harvard University, Densmore began studying American Indian music in 1893 with the encouragement of Alice Fletcher. Under the auspices of the Bureau of American Ethnology (B.A.E.) from 1907 to 1933 and from 1939 until her death, Densmore traveled around the United States recording and studying the music of various tribes. Her publications include *Chippewa Music*, *Choctaw Music*, *Teton Sioux Music*, and *American Indians and their Music*. She passed away on June 5, 1957 in Red Wing, Minnesota.

Scope and Contents

The Frances Densmore papers, 1893-circa 1955 include: diaries and extracts from diaries, account books, a scrapbook, letters received, lectures, reminiscences and brief manuscripts, field and work reports, notes on recording techniques and the preservation of Native American music, musical transcriptions, bibliographic notes, library items, tone photographs, a mouth organ (pitch pipe), and a slide rule.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

American Indians -- Music
Ethnomusicology
Language and languages -- Documentation

Cultures:

American Indians -- Music

Types of Materials:

Diaries
Manuscripts

Container Listing

Box 1, Item 1	PORTRAITS of Frances Densmore, 1895-1955 Notes: Item separated and added to Photo Lot 33.
Box 1, Item 2	DIARIES, 1899, 1905-1950 46 Volumes (approx. 2 1/2" x 5 1/2")
Box 1, Item 3	EXTRACTS FROM DIARIES, 1944 1 Notebook (loose-leaf, approx. 200 pp.) Notes: "Chronology of the Study and Presentation of Indian Music from 1893 to 1944 by Frances Densmore." Presented to the B.A.E., June 28, 1944
Box 1, Item 4	ACCOUNT BOOK, 1907-1933
Box 4, Item 5	SCRAPBOOK, 1895-1957 Notes: Items dated 1953-1957 added at B.A.E.
Box 1, Item 6	LETTERS RECEIVED by Frances Densmore, 1953-1954 Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• From Mrs. L. W. Wells, Wellington, Texas, 1953 October 27• From Jim Howard, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1953 November 7• From Stephen Polyak, Chicago, Illinois, 1953 November 17• From Dave Franks, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1954 January 11
LECTURES by Frances Densmore:	
Box 2, Item 7	"Partial list of lectures, addresses and papers on Indian music and customs" presented by Frances Densmore, 1895-1945, undated Notes: See also newspaper clippings and speech programs in Frances Densmore's scrapbook, Item 5
Box 2, Item 8	"Abstract of paper on Resemblances between musical customs of the Indians of the Southwest and certain peoples of the Orient", undated 2 Pages (typed)
Box 2, Item 9	"Our Native American Music", undated 3 Pages (rough typed text)
Box 2, Item 10	"Lecture on the Music of the American Indians delivered at the Art Institute, Chicago, Ill., Feb. 21, 1899"; "Ms. used by Frances Densmore in giving lectures on Indian music about 1900, with typed script of opening portion. The songs in pencil, opposite the text, are from Miss [Alice Cunningham] Fletcher's book and were used as illustrations", circa 1900

	13 Pages (typed) 16 Pages (typed copy (less complete))
Box 2, Item 11	"Lecture on the Music of the American Indians before the Anthropological Society of Washington", 1909 April 26 18 Pages (typed)
Box 2, Item 12	"Text of lecture on Indian Music, given by Frances Densmore, for High School, Minot, North Dakota", 1935 April 23 6 Pages (typed carbon copy)
Box 2, Item 13	"Music and Its Relation to the Life of the American Indian"; paper prepared for the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association but not read as the author was unable to attend, 1950 December 20 Pages (typed) Notes: Contains 2 slightly different typescripts, 10 pp. each
Box 2, Item 14	"Music of the Indians in Our Western States." Abstract of paper delivered before Section H, AAAS, on Thursday, December 30, at 2 p.m., Room 123, Haviland Hall, 1954 December 30 16 Pages Notes: Contains 1 p. mimeographed and typed version of the abstract as prepared by F. Densmore, 3 pp. Also incomplete carbon copy of lecture, 12 pp.

REMINISCENCES AND BRIEF MANUSCRIPTS by Frances Densmore:

Box 2, Item 15	"[Auto]biography", undated; circa 1952-1955 4 Pages (typed)
Box 2, Item 16	"I Heard An Indian Drum", undated 32 Pages (typed carbon copy with few pencil notes) 9 Pages (typed incomplete variations on ms.)
Box 2, Item 17	"Personal Experiences at the St. Louis Exposition", 1904 21 Pages (original handwritten manuscript) 11 Pages (typed)
Box 2, Item 18	Chippewa notebook, 1905, 1907 14 Pages (typed) 1 Notebook (handwritten) Notes: Contains the following: trip to Grand Marais and Grand Portage, Minn., 1905, approx. 33 pp.; reading notes from Schoolcraft and others, approx. 24 pp. in middle of the notebook; story, "The Turtles Go to War," "probably related at White Earth in 1907," approx. 7 pp.; notes "evidently made at the fourteenth of June Celebration at White Earth, Minnesota, among the Chippewa, in 1907," approx. 6 pp.; and cash account of Grand Portage trip, 1 p.

Also contains "First Field Trip Among the Chippewa by Frances Densmore," typescript concerning Aug., 1905 trip, with map and pages from F.D.'s diary added, 11 pp.; and typed transcript of story "The Turtles Go To War," 3 pp.

See also photographs of Chippewa Indians, taken at Grand Marais and Grand Portage, Minn., 1905, 16 glossy prints, 5" x 7", B.A.E. Orig. Prints No. 4635

Box 2, Item 19	"The Development of Music as a Means of Expression", circa 1906 5 Pages (typed copy) 10 Pages (handwritten manuscript)
Box 2, Item 20	"Incidents in the Study of Ute Music [in 1914]", circa 1914 7 Pages (typed)
Box 2, Item 21	"Incidents in the Study of Indian Music at Neah Bay, Washington, and near Chilliwack, British Columbia", 1923, 1926 4 Pages (typed) Notes: See Separated Materials Note about photographic album relating to this trip
Box 2, Item 22	Discoveries and Observations on the songs, music and musical instruments of various Indian tribes, 1932 November-December; 1933 January-February 2 Pages (typed)
Box 2, Item 23	"Prelude to the Study of Indian Music in Minnesota" (published in the Minnesota Archeologist, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 27-31), 1944 8 Pages (typed)

FIELD AND WORK REPORTS:

Box 2, Item 24	"Report of work in the Section of Musical Instruments, Department of Anthropology, U.S. National Museum", 1924 February-April 7 Pages (typed carbon copy)
Box 2, Item 25	"Record of field work by Frances Densmore for the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1907-41, on the music and customs of the American Indians, with biography and personal memoranda", 1943 29 Pages (typed)
Box 2, Item 26	"Densmore Report for 1945-6", 1946 4 Pages (handwritten)

MUSIC RECORDING TECHNIQUES AND PRESERVATION OF INDIAN MUSIC:

Box 2, Item 27	"Photograph of a carbon copy of a test of my learning ability made by Dr. C.E. Seashore", 1914 July 31
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	2 Photographs (4 1/2" x 7 1/4")
Box 2, Item 28	"The Accuracy of Recording and Reproduction with the Densmore Portable Gramophone," signed by Harold Seashore, 1934 3 Pages (typed text and two figures of oscillogram and plot of pitch reproduction) Notes: Also includes a typescript copy submitted to the B.A.E., 1945.
Box 2, Item 29	"These blanks were used in analyses of Indian songs, F.D.", undated
Box 2, Item 30	"Information concerning the rise in pitch, received from H.G. Henderson, of the Library of Columbia University, New York", 1927 February 9 1 Page (typed)
Box 2, Item 31	"Extracts from letters from Miss Frances Densmore Relative to Preservation in Permanent Form of Records of Indian Music", 1939-1940 13 Pages (10 typed; 3 handwritten) Notes: Includes correspondence with the Library of Congress; Mr. and Mrs. Clovis (who furnished funds for Densmore's use in connection with her music manuscripts); Mr. Bradley of the National Archives; Mr. Archibald McLeish, L.C.; and others.
Box 2, Item 32	"Report of recording equipment used in recording Indian songs for the Bureau of American Ethnology", 1940 March 27 2 Pages Notes: Photostat copy of report attached to letter of March 28, 1940 to Mr. H.W. Dorsey, Admin. Assistant to the Secretary, Smithsonian Institution
Box 2, Item 33	List of "Material presented to the Music Division, Library of Congress, March 15, 1944, by Frances Densmore", circa 1944 Notes: Material included: 77 cylinder records of Indian songs; pamphlets in German regarding Indian music; 10 letters regarding Indian music; box of material (letters, book, photographs, etc.) received from Dr. Dayton C. Miller regarding his collection of flutes For catalog of Indian Music recorded by Frances Densmore for the B.A.E. and subsequently transferred to the Library of Congress, and for note concerning box of material received by L.C. from Densmore estate, see B.A.E. MS 4243
Box 2, Item 34	"Songs of the Choctaw and Seminole for L P 10, side A"; "Songs of the Seminole by Frances Densmore for use on L P 10, side B", 1951 November 26 Pages (typed)
Box 2, Item 35	Library of Congress Press Releases regarding long playing records of Indian music recorded by Frances Densmore, 1952-1953
Box 2, Item 36	"Fourteen Chippewa Songs" and "Fourteen Sioux Songs" presented by Frances Densmore at the Division of Music, University of Florida, 1954 March

MUSICAL TRANSCRIPTIONS:

Box 2, Item 37 "Boy Scouts Marching Songs: Words and melody by Frances Densmore, accompaniment by Carl Busch. Dedicated to Mr. Ernest Thompson Seton, Chief Scout, Boy Scouts of America", undated

Box 2, Item 38 "Geronimo's Song. [Published in] Indian School Journal", 1906 April

Box 2, Item 39 "Piano illustrations", 1913 October
Notes: May have been used to illustrate early lecture

Box 2, Item 40 BIBLIOGRAPHY of Frances Densmore
Notes: See also bibliography of F.D. (Anon.) published in *Ethno-Musicology*, Newsletter, No. 7, April 1956, pp. 13-29, and *Ethno-Musicology*, 2:3, 1958, pp. 131-132 with letter to the Editor by Frank Gillis with additions and corrections to published bibliography

- Most complete bibliography, 1901-1957, 10 pages
- 4 reprints of Frances Densmore's bibliography from *Journal of Musicology*, Vol. IV, Nos. 2 and 3, 1901-1945, circa 1945
- Various bibliographic lists prepared by Frances Densmore, 1901-1955, approx. 41 pages ; typed
- Approx. 120 3" x 5" bibliography cards

Box 3, Item 41 REPRINTS of articles by Frances Densmore, undated
Notes: Those present are marked on complete bibliography, Item 40

Box 3, Item 42 LIBRARY ITEMS, circa 1893-1922, undated
Notes:

- Bingham, W.V. "Five Years of Progress in Comparative Musical Science." Reprint from the *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. XI, No. 11, 1914 November 15
- Fillmore, John Comfort. "The Harmonic Structure of Indian Music," Reprint from *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 1, 1899 April
- Fletcher, Alice Cunningham. "A Study of Omaha Indian Music," from Archaeological and Ethnological Papers of the Peabody Museum, 1893 (notation by Densmore on inside cover regarding purchase of book, acquaintance with A.C. Fletcher, and work with John C. Fillmore)
- Gale, Albert. Chapter on Tinguian Music from Field Museum of Natural History, Publication 209 (*The Tinguian: Social Religious, and Economic Life of a Philippine Tribe* by Fay-Cooper Cole), Anthropological Series, Vol. XIV, No. 2, 1922 (signed copy to Frances Densmore)
- Powell, J.W. "Alphabet for use in Recording Indian Languages," undated

Box 3, Item 43 TONE PHOTOGRAPHS
5 Photographs (rolled)

Box 3, Item 44 MOUTH ORGAN (Pitch pipe)

Notes: "Used [by Frances Densmore] in adjusting the speed of the phonograph in field work. After the phonograph had been wound, a cylinder with the tone C was played and the speed of the phonograph adjusted until the pitch of the tone corresponded to that of the tone on the mouth organ"

Box 3, Item 45

SLIDE RULE used by Frances Densmore